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Les aspects d'ambivalence dans les récits de voyage britanniques du XIXe et du début du XXe siècles: Tunis en tant qu'étude de cas

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In loving memory of my grandma Roukaya

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ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Through a critical analysis of twenty-eight primary sources, this dissertation investigates the ambivalent representations of Tunis in British travel narratives from the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. At that time, British travellers commonly referred to both the capital city and the wider territory of present-day Tunisia simply as "Tunis," a convention that this study maintains in accordance with the terminology of the primary sources. Within this framework, the dissertation analyses how both male and female travellers depicted the country's landscapes, culture, inhabitants, and women, in ways that combine fascination with denigration, admiration with disparagement, andattraction with repulsion. Adopting a qualitative and interpretive approach, the study employs a hermeneutic lens to examine how British travellers represented the country and its people. Grounded in postcolonial theories, the research is primarily inductive, deriving meaning from close textual analysis of recurring patterns and symbolic representations. The methodologyis both analytic and descriptive, combining detailed textual readings of primary sources—original travel accounts by British travellers to Tunis—with insights from secondary sources, including postcolonial and travel literature scholarship. The theoretical framework draws on Edward Said's Orientalism, Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence, and Michel Foucault's notions of knowledge as power and the panopticon, which together illuminate the contradictory dynamics of imperial discourse.

The findings reveal that British representations of Tunis were far from being homogeneous or uniform. The landscape was at once alluring and repulsive, cultural traditions were admired and ridiculed, Tunisians were represented as both civilized and backward, and Tunisian women as refined and coarse. A gendered dimension also emerges: female travellers frequently offered perspectives largely in line with those of their male counterparts.

By exposing these tensions, the dissertation demonstrates that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travel writing on Tunis functioned as a site of negotiation rather than a simple projection of colonial authority. This research contributes to a richer understanding of Anglo-Tunisian encounters and to broader debates on representation, gender, and colonial discourse in travel literature.

Keywords: British travel writing; Tunis; Orientalism; ambivalence; representation; gender; colonial discourse; nineteenth century; twentieth century.

FRENCH ABSTRACT

Cette thèse explore les représentations ambivalentes de Tunis dans les récits de voyage britanniques du XIXe et du début du XXe siècle, en effectuant une analyse critique de vingt-huit sources primaires. À l'époque, les voyageurs britanniques désignaient fréquemment aussi bien la capitale que l'ensemble du territoire correspondant à l'actuelle Tunisie simplement sous le nom de "Tunis", une convention que cette recherche adopte en accord avec la terminologie des sources primaires examinées. Dans ce cadre, l'étude examine la manière dont les voyageurs, hommes et femmes, ont représenté le paysage tunisien, sa culture, ses habitants et en particulier les femmes tunisiennes, de manière à combiner fascination et dénigrement, admiration et dédain, attirance et répulsion.

En adoptant une approche qualitative et interprétative, l'étude utilise une lentille herméneutique pour examiner comment les voyageurs britanniques représentaient Tunis et son peuple. S'appuyant sur les théories postcoloniales, la recherche est principalement inductive, déduisant du sens d'une analyse textuelle approfondie des motifs récurrents et des représentations symboliques. La méthodologie employée est à la fois analytique et descriptive, combinant des lectures approfondies des sources primaires— des récits de voyage originaux rédigés par des voyageurs britanniques de Tunis— avec des perspectives issues de sources secondaires, notamment des travaux sur la littérature de voyage et le postcolonialisme. Le cadre théorique est basé sur l'orientalisme d'Edward Said, le concept d'ambivalence de Homi Bhabha et les notions de savoir-pouvoir et de panoptique de Michel Foucault, qui éclairent conjointement les dynamiques contradictoires du discours impérial. Les résultats montrent que les représentations britanniques de Tunis étaient loin d'être homogènes ou uniformes. Le paysage était à la fois séduisant et repoussant, les traditions culturelles étaient admirées et ridiculisées, les habitants de Tunis étaient perçus à la fois comme civilisés et rétrogrades, tandis que les femmes tunisiennes comme raffinées et grossières. Une dimension genrée émerge également : les voyageuses offraient souvent des perspectives largement conformes à celles de leurs homologues masculins. En révélant ces tensions, cette thèse démontre que l'écriture de voyage sur Tunis fonctionnait comme un lieu de négociation plutôt qu'une simple projection de l'autorité coloniale. L'étude contribue à une compréhension plus riche des rencontres anglo-tunisiennes et aux débats plus larges sur la représentation, le genre et le discours colonial dans la littérature de voyage.

Mots-clés : Récits de voyage britanniques; Tunis; Orientalisme; ambivalence; représentation; genre; discours colonial; XIXe siècle; XXe siècle.

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INTRODUCTION

"Il s'agi tde voyager dans les récits de voyage et

de déchiffrer leur lignes d'horizon"

Viviès 2002

Travel has long held shifting meanings across historical periods and among academic critics. For Bruce Chatwin, travel is akin "to the French travail" (Chatwin, as cited in Borthwick 1991: 78), involving a form of "work, intellectual, physical, and spiritual" (Borthwick 1991: 78). Paul Fussell similarly argues that, prior to the rise of mass tourism, "travel was conceived to be like study" (Fussel, as cited in Borthwick 1991: 78). In a similar vein, Eric Leed traces a historical evolution in the perception of travel: for "ancients, it was seen as a suffering, even a penance; for moderns, it is a pleasure and a means to pleasure" (Leed, as cited in Lee 2007: 3). This transformation supports the view that travel "[…] lie[s] on a historical continuum from exploration to travel to tourism" (Blunt 1992: 15). In this regard, Paul Fussell identifies a tripartite distinction: "the explorer who seeks the undiscovered"; the traveller who engages with "that which has been discovered by the mind working in history", and the tourist who encounters "that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity." (Fussell 1980: 38).These categories, he argues, correspond to three different historical epochs: "exploration to the Renaissance, travel to the bourgeois age, tourism to our own proletarian moment" (Fussell 1980: 38). Crucially, by anchoring travel in the era of imperial expansion, Fussell "[…] implicitly posits the travelling subject as a white, European middle-class male." (Fussell, as cited in Lee 2007: 1). Interestingly, these distinctions are key to understanding the cultural and ideological underpinnings of travel literature as a genre.

Although travel literature is one of the oldest literary forms—"the roots of which date back to antiquity" (Englert & Vlasta 2020: 8)—its academic study emerged only in the late twentieth century. This delayed critical recognition is attributed to its marginal literary status—due to "its generic proximity to autobiography and reportage" (Lee 2007:10-11)—and to its "dauntingly heterogeneous character" (Kowalewski 1992: 7). This resulted in "scanty criticism of modem travel writing" (Kowalewski 1992: 1).

However, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed what James Duncan and Derek Gregory aptly call an "explosion of interest in travel writing" (Duncan & Gregory 1999: 1). Much of this resurgence can be linked to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which has catalysed renewed scholarly interest in travel writing. Prior to Said's work, travel writing—was widely dismissed as "popular or commercial literature" (Clark 1999: 1). But thanks to Said's contribution, this literary genre has been conceived as a site of ideological production and power, foregrounding how Western representations of the East were shaped by imperial interests. Following Said, critics like Sara Mills (1991) began to distinguish between "politically uncritical readings and those engaged in analyzing travel texts as colonial discourse" (Mills 1991: 2). Today, travel writing has become "the most socially important of all literary genres." (Youngs, as cited in Matos 2018: 1).

Despite its prominence, defining travel literature remains challenging.Tim Youngs and Peter Hulme (2002) highlight its multifaceted nature, describing it as an "ever-shifting genre" (Hulme 2002: 10). Youngs (2013) provides a more structured definition, characterising travel literature as "factual, first-person prose accounts of journeys undertaken by the author, encompassing subgenres such as memoirs, ethnographies, and war reporting" (Youngs, as cited in Matos 2018: 16).

Within this diverse and evolving genre, travel literature about the Orient occupies a particularly prominent position, given the region's long-standing construction as a "coveted destination and a collective passion" (Castro 2016: 253). But interest in the Orient intensified following Napoleon Bonaparte's 1798 expedition to Egypt, which introduced detailed visual representations of Alexandria that "quickly captured the attention of all Europe" (Mckenzie, as cited in McDaniel 2014: 4). As such, starting from the eighteenth-century onwards, the idea of "the voyage en Orient" gained popularity, especially among French writers such as François de Chateaubriand (*Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*,1811), Alphonse de Lamartine (*Voyage en Orient*, 1835), Maxime Du Du Camp who travelled to Egypt in 1844, initially alone and later accompanied by Gustave Flaubert in 1849—a journey that culminated in Flaubert's

significant publication *Flaubert in Egypt* (1851). Pierre Loti further reinforced Orientalist tropes in his travel writing, notably in *Au Maroc* (1890). Even authors who had never visited the region, such as Victor Hugo (*Les Orientales*, 1829) and Charles Baudelaire (*Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1857), participated in constructing the Orient as a site of sensuality and mystery. John McKenzie highlights that this literary tendency of the "imagined Orient" could be considered as "the first phase of Orientalist Art and history" (McKenzie, as cited in McDaniel 2014: 4). This phase of representation consisted of "imagined images of Orientals created in the eighteenth-century by those who had seldom, if ever, seenthe real thing." (McKenzie, as cited in McDaniel 2014: 4). This European literary fascination with the Orient was not limited to France. British writers of the same period also contributed significantly to the formation of Orientalist discourse. Of particular interest was the Barbary State of Tunis (both terms are defined in a glossary at the end of this thesis),which emerged in British travel writing as a site of imperial imagination and representational complexity. To fully understand these literary representations, it is essential to briefly examine the boarder historical contexts of both Tunis and Britain during the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, as well as the nature of their evolving political relations.

Prior to French colonization of Tunis, this period was commonly referred to as the Pre-Protectorate era. Tunis was part of the Ottoman Empire but operated with considerable independence as an Ottoman beylicate[1]. From 1782 to 1814, under the Husseininite dynasty led by Hamouda Pacha, the region experienced relative political stability. In contrast, the subsequent decade (1820–1830) was marked by financial difficulties and "the gradual interference of foreign capital together with the split of the state and the civil elites." (Manai 2007: 2). This turbulent period also witnessed remarkable social, political, and economic reforms introduced "under Ahmed Bey, Mohamed Bey, and Mohamed Sadok Bey". (Manai 2007: 2). While modernizing in intent, these reforms ultimately contributed to increasing "foreign financial tutelage leading eventually to the Protectorate in 1881." (Manai 2007: 3).

In the nineteenth century, Great Britain experienced major transformationsdomestically and globally. Rapid industrialization brought economic growth, social change, and political development, hence contributing to national pride and the rise of a prosperous middle-class. This period—often called "the bourgeois century" (Stearnes 2007: 1)—was marked by technological innovation and urban expansion. At the same time, colonization became central

[1]A territory governed by a Bey, particularly under the Ottoman administrative system. In the case of Tunis, the beylicate was a semi-autonomous province ruled by a local dynasty under nominal Ottoman suzerainty.

to Britain's global power, shaping not only political and economic dominance but also "[…] cultural discourse about what is called the Third World." (Mohanty 1984: 333). Imperial expansion fostered a growing sense of superiority and national identity, which was reflected in "[…] various literary forms and discursive practices." (Simour 2020: 3). By the late nineteenth century, the idea of Britishness was firmly established, and Britain was celebrated as "as a Land of Hope and Glory." (Stearnes 2007: 1).

As far as Anglo-Tunisian relations are concerned, they can be traced back as early as the sixteenth century, with "Thomas Windham Lewis visiting Tunis in 1551" (Leyden 1887: 209), followed by "the famous Lithgow about one century later." (Manai 2007: 8). However, meaningful engagement between the two regions began in 1579 when "Queen Elizabeth and Sultan Murat III exchanged letters" (Kantarbaeva-Bill 2017: 17) to facilitate English trade under Ottoman protection. This opened Mediterranean trade route not only enabled the importation of luxurious goods—such as silk, olive oil, and carpets—to Britain but also sparked British cultural interest in the Ottoman world.

Although British travel to Tunis remained limited for several centuries, things changed in the early nineteenth century due to growing commercial interests, increasing historical, and cultural curiosity, and a more favorable political climate. Following the Napoleonic Wars—especially after the Battle of Waterloo in1815—British attention turned increasingly to North Africa, leading to a rise in travel to Tunis and a corresponding increase in the production of British travel narratives.

It is within this historical period, and more precisely during the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, that the present thesis situates itself with a special focus on Tunis and its people. First, the term "Tunis" will be used throughout this study, reflecting the terminologyof the period (see glossary). Second, while numerous studies have analyzed British travel narratives through the lens of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, few have thoroughly examined aspects of ambivalence inherent in these texts. Even less attention has been paid to the representation of Tunis in these travel narratives. This project, however, draws critical attention to these overlooked ambiguities by integrating Homi Bhabha’s concept of ambivalence, which reveals how travellers' representations are marked not only by repulsion but also by attraction. In doing so, it offers a more nuanced reading of British travel narratives and challenges the reductive binaries that have long dominated academic researches. To fully

grasp the significance of this interpretive shift, it is essential to first define the concept of ambivalence as articulated by Homi Bhabha.

The concept of ambivalence was first elaborated in the psychoanalytic realm "to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. In other terms, it conveys "a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action." (Young 1995: 161). Being influenced by the psychoanalytic analysis, the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha integrated this concept into the colonial discourse which he essentially views as driven by an inherent contradiction. In this regard, he argues that "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha 1994: 107). This is what explains the complex interplay between "attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized" (Prasad 2003: 10). Seen from this perspective, the colonial discourse appears to be neither homogenous nor monolithic, but rather full of "ambivalence, fissure, and contradictions" (Bhabha, as cited in Prasad 2003: 20). To further consolidate this claim, Bhabha highlights the different contradictory aspects of the colonial discourse. For instance, while the West perceives the non-West as a potential threat that should be doomedto containment, it also views its existence as essential for the West's self-definition. Besides, the West claims that it has a mission to bring civilization to the non-West, but the latter is always perceived as changeless and unable to progress. This is mainly because that the Western colonial discourse "posits savagery to be a fixed, biological condition, incapable of being changed" (Prasad 2003: 20). This idea is summed up by Bhabha as follows:

> The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces (Bhabha 1994: 82).

From the above quote, it is obvious that the colonial discourse relies on ambivalence in the process of constructing and representing the colonized subject (in this case the Black person). Two major points could be deduced from this assumption. The first point is that ambivalence "occurs in the process of constructing authority through the representation of colonized subjects" (Hernandez, as cited in Farahbakhsh & Sheykhani 2018: 860). The second

one is that the colonized subject is built upon a duality: He is at once "an object of desire" (Bhabha 1994: 67): "the most obedient and dignified of servants", and "derision" (Bhabha 1994: 67): "mystical, primitive, simple-minded". After reading Bhabha's works, we have come to the conclusion that ambivalence is one the most useful concepts for analyzing the "necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" (Bhabha 1994:112). Applying this to the general context of this thesis, it could be argued that Bhabha's notion emerges to be invaluable for studying British travelogues about Tunis because it acknowledges that travel writers can undermine the denigrative traditions of Orientalism. It also helps reveal not only patterns of domination but also moments of attraction, identification, and complexity in the portrayal of Tunis, its landscape, culture, and people.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to explore the following central question: How do British male and female travel narratives of the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries articulate ambivalence in their representations of Tunis? By foregrounding the concept of ambivalence, this thesis seeks, first, to challenge reductive and conventional readings of British travel narratives, and second to uncover the complex and unstable dynamics underpinning the Orientalist discourse.

The study of travel literature has attracted substantial scholarly interest over the past decades, with researchers from various disciplines investigating its historical development, thematic concerns, and its emergence as adistinct literarygenre. Foundational studies such as those by Barbara Korte and Jean Viviès have examined the evolution of travel writing, particularly emphasizing its literary dimensions and its connections to the Grand Tour narratives. Concurrently, critics like Sara Mills and Mary Louise Pratt have explored the ideological underpinnings of travel narratives, particularly their entanglement with imperial discourse. More specifically, Mills focuses on British accounts concerning India and Africa, while Pratt analyzes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific expeditions and colonial narratives. In particular, Pratt introduces critical concepts that are central to our study such as the "contact zone" and "the monarch-of-all-I-survey" trope, which illuminate how travel writing helped produce and define the non-Western world from a Eurocentric perspective. Although Pratt's corpus extends beyond British travel writers and spans a broader time frame than that of the present study, her theoretical framework remains pertinent for examining the intersections between travel literature and empire.

Moreover, research to date has largely focused on British travel writing with general references to the Mediterranean regions like for instance John Pemble's book *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (1987) which deals with Edwardian and Victorian travel writing on the Mediterranean. Jamil Al- Asmar's *Victorian images of the Arabs and their Sources* (1994) also contributes to our understanding of how Arab identity was constructed in Victorian travel narratives. Other scholars have focused more narrowly on Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, and Algeria. Notable examples include John Dixon's book (1991) *Representations of the East in English and French Travel Writing with particular reference to Egypt*, or Marie Burks's thesis (2006) *The Problem of Representation in European and American Travel Writing on Morocco, 1880-1940*. Other non-Western contributions include Ahmad Gholi's article *The Image of Oriental Turkmen FemaleTravelees in Nineteenth Century Western Travel Writing* (2017), and Mohamed Chamekh' analysis of *Algeria in British travel writing* (2018). Similarly, Sadia Seddiki (2019) and Karima Zerouali (2017) have also examined the portrayal of Algeria and Algerian women in British and American texts. Also Lhoussain Simour (2020) and Mohamed Laamiri have focused on representations of Morocco. All these studies collectively demonstrate how travel literature often relied on stereotypical portrayals of the Oriental 'Other', reinforcing broader colonial ideologies. However, most of the existing literature has focused on regions like Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco, leaving Tunis comparatively underexamined.

This is not to say, nonetheless, that no academic work has dealt with the representation of Tunis in British travel literature. There are for instance scholars like Adel Manai (2007), Imene Gannouni Khemiri (2021), and Amina Marzouk Chouchene (2019) who examined this topic in their academic studies. Starting with Manai, he provides a history of the representations of Tunis in his seminal book *British travelers in Tunisia, 1800-1930: A history of encounters and representations* (2007). Building on this foundation, Khemiri's doctoral thesis explores *The construction of otherness in British travel narratives with Tunis as a case study* (1815–1910). In addition, her article "Pretty as a Picture" (2021) investigates the aesthetics of the picturesque in travel representations of Tunis. Chouchene further expands this line of inquiry by focusing on British female travel narratives about Tunis during the period between 1850-1930. While these studies make important contributions to the field of travel literature, they remain largely grounded in Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, which foregrounds the imperialist impulses embedded in Western representations of the East.

This study builds upon and moves beyond these foundational works by highlighting that British depictions of Tunis and its people is much more intricate and ambivalent than other studies might suggest. This has incited us to move beyond the conventional lens of Edward Said's Orientalist theory, which—while used for the analysis of many views in this research—is counterbalanced, in other instances, by Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence. This perspective is reflected in the very title of this thesis, which opts for ambivalence as one of its central concepts, aiming to uncover the tensions at the heart of British representations of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Tunis. Significantly, the intersection of these two theoretical frameworks allows for a more nuanced reading of British travel narratives, one that highlights not only to the mechanisms of imperial power but also the subtle contradictions that reveal the instability of the imperial discourse itself.

In parallel, female travel writing has received considerable scholarly attention in recent decades from various literary disciplines, with attention given to the gendered dimensions of travel narratives. This has led scholars to ask whether women recorded their experiences in ways distinct from their male counterparts. Historians such as Jane Robinson and Mary Morris argue for clear gendered differences. Robinson, in her introduction to *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers* (2021), asserts that "men's travel accounts are to do with the What and Where, and women's with How and Why." (Robinson 2021: xiv). Similarly, Morris, in *The Virago Book of Women Travellers* (2007), claims that "women move through the world differently than men" (Morris 2007: 9), and their writings share distinct 'feminine' qualities that distinguish them from their male counterparts. Accordingto her, these female writers are more concerned with the "inner landscape" and their own "inner workings" than male travellers. (Morris 2007: 9).

Building on this, critics such as Sara Mills (1991), Billie Melman (1992), Casey Blanton (1997), and Jane Haggis (1990), to cite but a few, argue that female writers are more engaged with the domestic landscape and local habits in their writings, showing no interest in the imperial project as their male counterparts do. Melman, for instance, argues that British women who visited the East during imperial zeal "developed a discourse about the region that differed significantly from the dominant view of male Orientalists." (Melman, as cited in Simour 2020: 4-5). Likewise, Mills suggests that British female writers do not follow the imperial path of their male counterparts because they "were unable to adopt the imperialist voice with the ease with which male writers did" (Mills 1991: 3). As such, their views and descriptions were far less authoritative and aggressive than male depictions, and therefore

"not straightforwardly Orientalist in the way Said has described it" (Mills 1991: 61). In accordance with Mills, Casey Blanton (1997) avers that "women travel writers may have found a way to subvert the messages of racism, colonialism [by extension Orientalism] through kind of cultural relativism and honest sympathy with native people" (Blanton 1997: 48). Jane Haggis makes a similar point regarding female travellers' role in colonial societies, claiming that their works "[…] tend to concentrate on aspects of women's lives rather than analysing their role within the colonial system." (Haggis, as cited in Lee 2007: 39-40)

However, this study endeavours to prove that female travellers are also implied in the imperial discourse exactly like their male counterparts. This line of thought is supported by many critics such as Reina Lewis (1996), Katie Wernecke (2013), McKenzie Stearnes (2007), and Inderpal Grewal (1996). Grewal, for example, contends that British female writers were not "exempt from the imperial habitus" (Grewal 1996: 81). According to her, they were driven by the lure of the empire, the civilizing mission because "it gave them as sense of racial superiority (Grewal 1996: 66). Reina Lewis builds further on this idea by highlighting that these female writers saw themselves as "beneficiaries of a structure of systemic differences that […] placed them as superior in the West/East divide of colonialism" (Lewis 1996: 4-5). Likewise, Stearnes acknowledges that female travel accounts are far from being "de facto autobiographies or glorious advertisements for the New Woman" (Stearnes 2007: 10), since they have proven to be a supporting tool for a Western constructed Orientalism. Also, Wernecke finds out that most female travelogues are largely "instilled with the same sense of superiority and racial difference that male imperial decision-makers used to justify the need to colonize less-developed cultures" (Wernecke 2013: 27). As such, one of the aims of this research is to "provide new insight into the roles of men and women within the Empire" (Wernecke 2013: 21-22).

Building on these critical insights, the next section turns to the selected corpus and the rationale behind its selection in order to better frame the study's contribution to the field of travel literature.

Our choice to focus specifically on British travel narratives during the period of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries is underpinned by two principal reasons: historical and literary. From a historical perspective, the selected travel texts date from the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries—a period widely recognized as the era of "high imperialism" (Mills1991:1). This epoch was marked by the consolidation of imperial power and the

widespread dissemination of ethnocentric ideologies that profoundlyinfluenced the dynamics between European and non-European societies. As Mills observes, "formal conquest, annexation and administration" were by no means "the most common relation." (Mills 1991: 1). This imperial spirit was commonly expressed in literary works, rendering the historical period under study particularly relevant for examining how imperial ideologies were encoded in British travel writings. Besides, the period between 1800 and 1930 witnessed an explosive increase in the number of travellers exploring the North African territories as well as the number of narratives produced. As Rana Kabbani highlights, "nineteenth-century Britain produced a growing mass of travel literature, in a frenzied attempt to forge the imperial representation of the world." (Kabbani, as cited in Simour 2020: 2). It is crucial to note that in very few exceptions, it was necessary to step outside these dates in order to quickly examine earlier relevant works, or analyze this study from the lens of more recent western theoretical approaches to the East.

With regards to British travels to Tunis, this period of time is particularly significant due to the tenacity and frequency of such visits. In fact, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century imposed restrictions on British people and prevented them from visiting the European continent. These conflicts also impeded commercial activities, particularly with France—a central attraction for British travellers and a key economic partner for British merchants and entrepreneurs. As a result,the British gaze increasingly turned toward alternative destinations, and the Barbary States of North Africa, especially Tunis—despite being the smallest of the three—benefited from this redirection of interest. In more specific terms, the relative stability and security that characterized much of nineteenth-century Tunis—apart from "periods of social trouble like in 1817, 1825, or 1840s" (Manai2007: 8)—served as a significant incentive for British travellers to explore this country. As Manai notes, there were "very few years between 1800 and 1930 when British voyagers did not journey in Tunisia." (Manai 2007: 11). British travellers, thus, made recurrent visits to Tunis like for example Alexander Graham who visited Tunis thrice between 1883-1885. In other instances, there were periods when more than one traveller visited Tunis like: "Magill and William Hurd 1811, Blunt, Summer and Cooke Stafford 1853 and Playfair and Graham 1857" (Manai 2007: 11). According to Manai, "even the 1863 revolt and the social unrest […] did not prevent travelers from visiting the country during the 1860's." (Manai 2007: 11). As a consequence, a great number of travel books was published during the period between 1800-1930; further "testifying to the growing popularity of the

Tunisian tour among British travellers." (Manai 2007: 12). Besides, there were many references toTunis in "the bulletins of theRoyal Geographical Societyand the Royal Institute of British Architects sesessional papers." (Manai 2007: 12). Due to their popularity, some of these travel accounts were edited more than once. For example, Francis Miltoun's *In the Land of Mosques and Minarets* (1908) "was reissued the same year under the title of *The Spell of Algeria and Tunisia*." (Manai 2007: 12). Similarly, Sir Robert Lambert Playfair's *A Handbook for travellers in Algeria and Tunisia* (1887) "was edited three times, revised and new parts were added." (Manai 2007: 12). Other travel books were so popular that they were translated into other languages, like for instance; Thomas Maggill's *An account of Tunis* which was "published in 1811 and translated into French in1815 under the title *Nouveau Voyage en Tunisie*." (Manai 2007: 12).

It is crucial to mention that "this Tunisian tour" was "undertaken as part of a much wider tour" (Manai 2007: 14) since it was visited along with the other North African countries of Algeria and Morocco being packaged as one single destination as was the case of Temple, Nesbitt, Windham and Fraser. This fact is reflected in the titles of these travellers' books such as Frances Nesbitt's account: *Algeria and Tunis: Painted and described* (1906) and John Fraser's travelogue *The land of veiled women: some wanderings in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco* (1911). For other travellers like Temple, Tunis was "included in a Mediterranean tour which would include Malta and sometimes Greece and Spain" (Manai 2007: 14). Concerning the journey itself, it has been found that nearly all travellers followed the same itinerary: London-France-Algeria and Tunis, and as such all these trips seem to be isomorphic. These trips were "in an English steamer and occasionally a warship" because "sea routes were generally safe and the British navy established an uncontested preponderance over the Mediterranean." (Manai 2007: 14). Besides, it has been noticed that all travellers begin at the Goleta port; then they head to Tunis and Carthage before finishing their trip with a visit to the interior regions like Kairouan, the oasis, and the desert; often finishing their journey at the same port of Goletta and occasionally Bizerta.

From a literary perspective, British travel books are particularly chosen as the foundation of this research due to Britain’s prominent tradition of travel writing. As Viviès notes, "the Englishman had a reputation for being a great traveller" (Viviès 1999: 40: my translation), and it was widely recognized that "they had published the most abundant travel literature in the world." (Hazard, as cited in Viviès 1999: 37: my translation). This tradition not only reflects the British cultural investment in exploration but also positions British travel

writing as a rich site for academic inquiry. Accordingly, the present research focuses on a selection of primary texts based on the prominence of their authors who rank among the most distinguished travel writers of the period. Their works are considered as highly influential since they played a pivotal role in "putting Tunis on the map" (Manai 2007: 1), thus underscoring their relevance to this research. Having outlined the selection criteria of the corpus, it is now pertinent to turn to the individual figures whose writings form the basis of this study.

Many scholars such as Manai (2007) and Chouchene (2019) advocate that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, "the Tunisian Tour was a gentlemanly privilege in the first place" (Manai 2007: 10). Most of these British travellers were "younger or middle-aged male from the higher echelons of British society" (Chouchene 2019: 30) including diplomatic, political, and missionary figures. One can cite for example Sir Robert Playfair and Richard Wood who were Consul Generals to Tunis, Major Temple, Thomas Reade, and Captain Kennedy were army officers, and Thomas Shaw was a missionary figure. (Manai 2007: 113). Thanks to their political missions, these travellers profited from a lengthy staying in Tunis, and hence acquired a deeper knowledge of the country and its people.

As travel became more popular and easier by the end of the nineteenth century thanks to a revolution in the means of transports, a new wave of British travellers swept over the country including both male and female figures who were "well-educated people with high university degrees" seeking not only to discover a foreign land, but also "to have access to much higher circles among the upper classes." (Manai 2007: 9). For example, Wemyss Reid held a Master of Arts degree, while Alexander Graham was both "an archaeologist and an architect, as well as a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects." (Manai 2007: 10). Similarly, Graham Petrie and Francis Nesbitt, both professional painters, exemplify the presence of artists whose journeys combined aesthetic, intellectual, and social motivations.

It is worth noting that consuls were the first people British travellers met when they came to Tunis. They often hosted travellers in their residences and provided them withvarious forms of assistance during their stays. For example, Edward Rae expressed high praise for Richard Wood, noting that the consul "offered him all the help he could, including a letter and an escort from the Bey." (Rae 1877:114). It is necessaryto add that "no reference is made of British travellers resorting to the consuls of other nations for the acquisition of information." (Manai2007: 17). This idea can be understood within the broader context of

nineteenth-century geopolitical tensions, particularly among France, Britain, and Italy, whose competing imperial ambitions in Tunis often gave rise to diplomatic hostilities. British travel narratives frequently "dealt with these rivalries and gave special focus to the Anglo-French ones." (Manai 2007: 17). It was not surprising, then, that strong nationalist and anti-French feelings emerge in the writings of several travellers, notably Magill, Reid, and Herbert. Another point that has to be mentioned is that a servant was a must to the traveller. With the help of the interpreter, they played a key role in mediating cultural encounters by providing travellers with first-hand knowledge and facilitating communication. In many cases, good relationships were established between travellers and their servants or interprets, as the one developed by Norma Lorimer with her interpreter Bechir.

Following this introduction of the major travel writers, it is pertinent to examine the primarymotivations that compelled them to journeyto Tunis. These diverse motivations may be broadly categorized under five main headings: commercial, political, antiquarian or scientific, romantic, and personal. Before turning to a detailed analysis of these categories, it is important to acknowledge that the overarching aim of manyof these travel accounts was to enlarge Western readers' knowledge about "a little- visited country" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: p.ii). Likewise, Herbert Vivian, in the preface to his 1899 travel account, claims that one of his principal objectives was to provide "an indispensable companion to travellers." (Vivian 1899: viii). With this broader context in mind, we turn now to a more detailed examination of the distinct motivations underpinning these travel narratives. Starting with the commercial motivation, Thomas MacGill's *An Account of Tunis* (1811) provides a notably explicit articulation of this interest. In the preface, he dedicates his work to His Majesty, asserting:

> My object was commerce, and not pleasure when I left Malta for Tunis but finding the business I went upon, detain me much longer than I expected, I endeavored to make the best use of my time, in gathering such information both commercial and political […] My first wish is to be useful to my country. (MacGill 1811: preface).

MacGill's account thus exemplifies how commercial imperatives were often intertwined with patriotic concerns, highlighting the utilitarian and strategic dimensions of travel writing during this period.

With regards to political motivations, travellers such as Sir Robert Lambert Playfair and Sir Greneville Temple clearly expressed imperial ambitions in their writings. In the case of Playfair, his diplomatic roles in North Africa informed his strategic vision of the region: "in 1860, he was consul in Algeria; in 1885, he was made consul-general for Algeria and Tunis, and in 1889, consul-general for the territory of Algeria and the northern coast of Africa." (Gannouni 2021: 96-97). This strategic position offered him direct access to the geopolitical dynamics of these North African countries, leading him to view the region as significant to British imperial interests. For instance, he describes the town of Badja as ideally suited for British settlement, stating that "it is hardly possible to conceive one better for colonisation" (Playfair 1877: 244). Likewise, he emphasizes the strategic potential of Bizerta and its lake, Tinja, remarking that "in the hands of a European power might become one of the most strategical positions in the Mediterranean" (Playfair 1877: 144). His perception of Susa is framed in equally strategic terms: "[…] its possession was generally the key to supreme power" (Playfair 1877: 150). This imperial perspective persists in his later publication, A Handbook for Travellers in Algeria and Tunis (1887), where he argues that "[…] it is hardly possible to conceive one better suited for colonization" (Playfair 1887: 244). Similarly, Temple's *Excursions in the Mediterranean* (1835) advocates for the colonization of Jerbeh, emphasizing that the island: "would make a very nice little colony for us" (Temple 1835: 163). Significantly, both writers exemplify the entanglement of travel writing with British imperial discourse in the nineteenth century.

Turning to antiquarian motivations, many British travellers were drawn to Tunis out of a deep interest in the vestiges of ancient civilizations, particularly the Roman and Carthaginian legacies. Early figures like Thomas Shaw visited Tunis in the eighteenth century to study its antiquities and geography for the benefit of the University of Oxford, setting a precedent for subsequent travellers. Likewise, Salden Douglas and Sir Grenville Temple expressed admiration for ancient ruins, with Temple's account reflecting what Gannouni describes as "classical erudition and antiquarian interest" (Gannouni 2021: 93). *The Monthly Review* praised Temple for producing valuable classical knowledge about a country not very familiar to British readers. Similarly, Alexander Graham and Henry Aschbee reinforced the value of Tunis as "a wide field of study to the historian, the geologist, the geographer, and above all

the archaeologist" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 1). Besides, Henry Spencer Aschbee argues that "none is of a greater interest, historical or archeological than the Beylik of Tunis." (Aschbee 1889: preface). Even politically motivated figures—such as Sir Robert Lambert Playfair—also exhibited antiquarian motivations, describing his journey as a continuation of James Bruce'sexploratoryand geographical mission (Playfair 1877: 1). This antiquarian interest was also shared by British consuls such as Thomas Reade who "[…] used to collect Punic and Roman antiquities and offered many to the London Zoological society." (Kennedy 1845: 40). This further reinforcing the extent to which scientific and historical curiosity permeated British interest in Tunis.

As far as the romantic motivation is concerned, it emerges as a pervasive theme in both male and female travel accounts, often serving as a form of escapism from the constraints of industrialized European life. Evelyn Waugh describes as fulfilling "the longing, romantic reasonless, which lies deep in the hearts of most Englishmen." (Waugh as cited in Borthwick 1991: 79). Writers such as Norman Douglas and Graham Petrie sought sensual freedom and aesthetic pleasure in Tunisian landscapes and Islamic architecture, while Lewis Wingfiled depicted his trip to Tunis as a personal quest for the picturesque and the unfamiliar, noting that it was "untied by time, unshackled by extraneous circumstances" (Wingfield 1868: viii), and thus motivated by a desire to escape the constraints of everyday life.

Female travellers such as Norma Lorimer and Mrs. Greville-Nugent were similarly drawn to the Orientalist allure of Tunis. In the preface of her account *By the Waters of Carthage* (1906), Lorimer states that her trip was motivated by an interest in "Mohamedan countries" and aims to describe all aspects of life "in the most Oriental city which can be visited" (Lorimer 1906: viii), highlighting that "Tunis is avery good place to see these things." (Lorimer 1906: 213). Similarly, Mrs. Greville-Nugent's writing expresses a desire to escape "smoky London" (Greville 1894: 2) for the exotic East where "[…] the skies are blue and the roofs of cities white and flat" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 2) So, in both male and female narratives, the romantic motivation is omnipresent, reflecting a shared quest for an unspoiled authenticity—a quality presumed to be absent in the increasingly Industrial world.

Finally, the personal motivations also played a significant role in shaping British travels to Tunis. For some travellers, the journey was undertaken for therapeutic purposes, aligning with what Chouchene (2020) describes as "part of a well-established practice of British travel for health" (Chouchene 2020: 282). A notable example is the Baroness Mary Herbert, who,

following her 1871 visit to Algeria, "visited Tunis to cure her rheumatism" (Herbert 1871:3). Herbert explains that her trip was ignited by a desire "to test the efficacy of certain warm springs, which had been strongly recommended to [her] by a Paris doctor for rheumatism" (Herbert 1871: 3). Frances E Nesbitt also recounts her experience of wintering in Tunis aspart of fashionable travel trends for health. Beyond therapeutic needs, personal aspirations for social recognition and literary fame also served as significant incentives. For another group of travellers, "visiting a foreign land would later provide them with the opportunity to publish their travel accounts in local if not national newspapers which was then the vogue." (Manai 2007: 9). Writers such as Thomas Wemyss Reid and John Fraser exemplify this category of travellers, whose journeys were partly motivated by the prospect of elevating their social and professional standing.

Together, these motivations reflect the multifaceted nature of British engagement with Tunis, where individual experiences were deeply embedded in the cultural, political, and ideological frameworks of the time.

Although this thesis primarily focuses on British travel narratives, brief references are made to works by American travel writers, such as Francis Miltoun's *In the Land of Mosques and Minarets* (1908). Occasional mentionof *Tunis: The Land and the People* (1882) by Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg, an Austrian-American author, is sometimes highlighted. Our aim behind including these works is to highlight the convergence between British representations and broader Western perspectives on Tunis during the period under cover,underscoring the shared discursive patterns that shaped Western travel writing at that time.

Having outlined the corpus and the rationale behind its selection, it is now essential to turn to the theoretical framework that underpins this study. Establishing this theoretical framework is crucial not only for analytical precision, but also for situating this research within broader scholarly works on travel writing.

Throughout thisstudy, several keyconcepts—such astravel writing, imperial discourse, Barbary States, Regency of Tunis, Tunis, East/Orient, travellers/tourists, and encounter—will be frequently used to frame the analysis of British representations of Tunis. While these concepts are only briefly referenced here, a detailed explanation of each term is provided in the glossary to clarify their theoretical significance within this research.

Equally foundational to this research is Edward Said's ground breaking theory of Orientalism, which serves as a critical framework for analyzing the Orientalist tropes embedded in British travellers' discourse. This theory is crucial in postcolonial studies because it was the first to link travel writing to the colonial project, hence enabling scholars to critically examine the discursive construction of the relationship between East and West. In his seminal work *Orientalism* (1979), Said defines this concept as "a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and Occident" (Said: 1979: 2) used for "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over it." (Said 1979: 3). Said further characterizes Orientalism as "a closed, static, totalizing, and coherent system that does not accommodate openness and receptivity towards the Orient." (Said 1979: 222).

Before delving deeper into the analysis of Said'stheory, going back to the etymology of the terms Orient and Occident seems to be crucial to this study. In her *Travel Narratives and Orientalism* (1991), Lisa Lowe notes that the term Orient originates from the Latin word *oriens*, meaning "rising sun" or "east," whereas the term Occident derives from the Latin *occidens*, meaning "quarter of the setting sun", "to fall down, to set" (Lowe 1991: 31). From these definitions, it is obvious that the initial distinction between the Orient and the Occident was fundamentally geographical. Over time, however, the Orient turns out to be more a factual idea than a concrete place. In other words, the Orient emerged as a Western construction—an imagined space characterized by myth, exoticism, and otherness, serving as the antithesis of Western identity. This idea is further reinforced by David Spurr (1993) who asserts that "the orient has been used as a space against which the west defines itself" (Spurr as cited in Burks 2006: 8). Consequently, Orientalism can be understood as a Western discourse designed to "filter the Orient into the Western consciousness." (Marandi & Ensieh 2015: 23). More than that, it has become "an integral part of European material civilization and culture–an instrument of Western imperialism." (Marandi & Ensieh 2015: 23).

To fully understand this theory, it is useful to distinguish between two dimensions of Orientalism: the technical and the discursive. Beginning with its technical dimension, Orientalism—as a concept—emerges to be profoundly multi-layered. According to Palayibik's analysis (2010), Orientalism is structured around a specific object of study: the Orient. For Said, the Orient primarily denotes "the region of the Near Orient, comprising the Arab and Islamic countries, rather than the Far Orient of India, Japan and China." (Said 1977: 1). The main agents involved are Western intellectuals and politicians, while its central focus is the representation of Orientals. However, the temporal boundaries of Orientalism remain

somewhat ambiguous. Palayibik (2010) suggests that the phenomenon can be traced back to the eighteenth century, marking the beginning of sustained Western engagement with the Orient through academic, political, and cultural discourses.

As far as the discursive level is concerned, Said identifies three interrelated meanings of Orientalism. The first defines it as "an academic discipline" (Said 1977: 2), intrinsically linked to Western literature that has made the Orient the fulcrum of its inquiry. The second meaning conceptualizes Orientalism as "a Western style of thought" (Said 1977: 2), predicated on a fundamental distinction between the Orient and the Occident. This demarcation has ultimately served "to shore up the superiority and strength of European identity at the expense of non-European peoples and cultures." (Lindsay, as cited inThompson 2016:26). Eventually, the third meaning seems to be shaped by Said's engagement with Michel Foucault's concept of discourse and power (1972) and Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony (1971). Drawing first on Foucault, Said conceptualizes Orientalism as a discourse: "a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient" (Said 1977: 3)—operating through practices such as "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it." (Said 1977: 3). Notably, this mode of engagement illustrates the inextricable relationship between discourse and power. In parallel, Gramsci's theory of hegemony informs Said's analysis of how "the idea of the European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (Said 1977: 7) underpinned the production of a dominant Western discourse about the Orient. According to Said, this process resulted in the construction of rigid, essentialized representations of the Orient, designed to affirm and maintain "European superiority over Oriental backwardness." (Said 1977: 7).

After presenting these three distinct yet interconnected definitions, Said clearly privileges the third, asserting that "without examining Orientalism as a discourse, one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which the European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically […] ideologically […] and imaginatively." (Said 1977: 3)

As a whole, what unites all these varying interpretations is the understanding of Orientalismas "a wayofmakingsense" (Melman, as cited in Hulme & Youngs 2002: 107) of the East, grounded in an imagined geography that dichotomizes the world into two hierarchically structured realms: the Occident and the Orient. More significantly, this

geographical dichotomy gives rise to a broader epistemological framework, one that reproduces a persistent series of binary oppositions: a civilized West versus a backward East, a rationaland enlightened Occident versus an irrationaland decadent Orient,a Christian West versus a pagan East. These oppositions have essentialized the East, reducing it to a static, repetitive, and ahistorical entity, often approached through a fixed and one-dimensional lens. Consequently, Orientalism operates not merely as an instrument of Western domination, but also as "a maneuver that constructs and strengthens the West's self image as a superior civilization" (Prasad 2003:129). Or in the words of Anouar Abdel-Malek, it is fundamentally "an instrument of imperialism designed to secure colonization and enslavement of the Third World." (as cited in Palayibik 2010: 23-24).

It is, indeed, within the broader framework of Orientalism as a discourse that the role of travel writing emerges as particularly significant. This centrality stems from the fact that Western travellers were among the earliest agents to mediate knowledge of distant lands and unfamiliar peoples to a wider readership, thereby shaping perceptions of the East and facilitating comparative constructions between Eastern and Western identities.

Has Orientalism played a central role in offering a more nuanced interpretation of the travel writing genre? The answer is provided by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (2002), who assert that "Orientalism was the first work of contemporary criticism to take travel writing as a major part of its corpus." (Hulme & Youngs 2007: 8). In the wake ofthis new academic discipline, "scholars have begun to scrutinize relationships of culture and power found in the settings, encounters, and representations of travel texts" (Hulme & Youngs 2007: 8).Viewed from this lens, Orientalism—as a theoretical paradigm—and travel writing—as a literary genre—have become mutually reinforcing constructs. These travel narratives were "central to the Orientalist enterprise […] given that they were often the principal accounts of other places and peoples to be circulated to an audience back home." (Hulme & Youngs 2007: 8). Barbara Korte extends this analysis, arguing that the relationship between Orientalism and travel writing gave rise to "a seminal instrument of control which produced and reproduced an object-oriented description of the manners and customs of the inhabitants of the lands that had been travelled through." (Korte 2000: 89-90). The result is an ever-increasing divide between the Orient and Occident, which has continuously served to feed the Orientalist discourse.

It is true that Said has bequeathed a central theory to the literary discipline which has proved to be essential for the understanding and analysis of Western travel narratives.

However, one cannot " […] blindly accept his view as critical torchlight to assess all travel books." (Gholi 202: 238). In fact,not only does Ahmad Gholi adopt this view regarding Said's theory, Ali Behdad also adds a corrective to Said's Orientalism. Unlike Said, Behdad argues that Orientalism is not " […] monologic and closed; instead, it is an open discourse that can incorporate the discordant voices and subversive elements [counter-orientalism] within its architecture" (Behdad as cited in Gholi 2023: 241). He also introduces the idea of "the desire for the Orient" (Behdad 1999:21) by which he suggests that the traveller could also challenge dominant stereotypes and demonstrate sympathy towards the Orient. Significantly, this acknowledgment of affective engagement complicates the traditional view of Orientalism as a solely hegemonic and monolithic discourse, inciting us to examine travel narratives through a dual framework that considers both Said's Orientalism and Bhabha's notion of ambivalence. This dual perspective allows for a more nuanced reading of travel narratives, revealing how British travellers often responded to their experiences in a nuanced way that resisted simplistic binaries.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the following section outlines the methodological approach adopted in this research to analyze the selected travel narratives. Adopting a qualitative and interpretive approach, this thesis employs a hermeneutic lens to understand how British travellers represented Tunis and its people in their works. Grounded in postcolonial theories, the research is primarily inductive, aiming to derive meaning through a minute interpretation of recurring textual patterns and symbolic representations. Based on this qualitative orientation, the research employs specific methods that align with the study's aim to uncover nuanced representations embedded in British travel narratives. Therefore, the adopted methodology is analytic and descriptive, combining close textual analysis with broader theoretical reflection by using two types of sources: primary and secondary. The former comprise original travel narratives authored by British writers who visited Tunis. These texts are examined through close textual analysis to identify recurring patterns of ambivalence, modes of observation, and rhetorical strategies that shape British perceptions of Tunis. Secondary sources include critical works on travel literature. For example, foundational texts such as Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and Bhaha's work on ambivalence, along with subsequent scholarship in postcolonial and travel studies, provide the theoretical framework within which the primary texts are critically assessed.

Emerging from this adopted methodology, the following research questions have been formulated to structure the analysis and guide the inquiry into the ambivalent representations

found within British travel narratives on Tunis. Specifically, this study asks: How did male and female British travel accounts represent Tunis for European readership? How does gender shape the ambivalent portrayals of Tunis, including its culture, people, landscape, and women? In what ways do British travel writers both reinforce and challenge imperial ideologies in their depictions of Tunis?

In response to these guiding questions, the present thesis sets out to achieve several interrelated objectives. First, it aims to enrich travel literature studies by uncovering the nuances and internal contradictions within travellers' discourse—dimensions that cannot be fully accounted for through the exclusive lens of Said's Orientalist framework, which has predominantly shaped previous researches in the field. While acknowledging the foundational significance of Said's theory, this research contends that it remains insufficient when employed in isolation. Instead, it argues for the inclusion of Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence as an essential theoretical lens through which to apprehend the complexity and heterogeneity of colonial discourse in travel narratives.

Second, this thesis endeavours to challenge Edward Said's monolithic approach of Orientalism which he strictly defines as "an exclusively male province"; failing hence, "to account for the diversity of travellers' representational strategies" (Seddiki 2019: 4). In response, this research examines both male and female perspectives on Tunis, highlighting the extent to which female representations align with or diverge from those of their male counterparts in relation to the central themes explored in this study. It further argues against the claims of critics such as Sara Mills (1991) and Casey Blanton (1997), demonstrating that British women travellers were active participants in imperial discourse.

Third, this thesis addresses a significant gap in the literature. While considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to British travel narratives concerning regions such as Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria, the representation of Tunis remains relatively underexplored. Moreover, while the French interactions with Tunis are well documented and examined, British ones often took rear seats. As Manai observes, "British travel accounts on Tunis remained on the shelves in both Tunisian and British libraries, and socio-cultural questions were not deeply scrutinized." (Manai 2007: 2). This research thus undertakes to fill this gap by offering new insights into British travellers' perceptions of Tunis. In doing so, it moves beyond the prevailing focus on the construction of otherness to foreground ambivalence as a

more generative and nuanced analytical category for exploring the tensions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities that characterize these narratives.

To effectively pursue these objectives and respond to the questions outlined above, this thesis follows a structured plan, organizing the analysis into four interrelated chapters, each centered on a distinct form of encounter: the landscape, culture, people, and Tunisian women. As such, the first chapter, **"An Encounter with the Landscape"**, sets the general framework of the travel experience by examining how the Tunisian landscape is represented in British travel narratives. This chapter will be analysed primarily through the lens of Romanticism and the notion of the sublime, with particular attention to the aesthetic and emotional responses elicited bythe natural environment. Its aim is to highlight how the Tunisian landscape is both admired and denigrated in British travel books. The second chapter,**"The Cultural Encounter"**, shifts from a broader view of the landscape to a more focused exploration of cultural exchanges. It investigates how British travellers simultaneously interpreted and misinterpreted Tunisian customs, rituals, and daily practices. This chapter will be guided by the theoretical framework of the East/West dichotomy to interrogate the binaries of civilisation/barbarism, reason/mysticism…that underpin many of these cross-cultural representations. The third chapter, **"An Encounter with Tunisian people"**, delves into the interpersonal relationships between travellers/ travellees, studying the attitudes and perceptions that emerge from these interactions. This chapter engages with the conceptual framework of Self/ Other, examining how the Tunisian is sometimes viewed as other. Issues of power and stereotyping are central to this analysis, as are questions surrounding racial, religious, and cultural perceptions. The final chapter, **"An Encounter with Tunisian Women"**, concentrates on the representation of these women in travel narratives through the lens of both male and female British writers. Drawing from Laura Mulvey's theory of the gaze, this chapter interrogates how the figure of the Tunisian woman becomes a site of both fascination and control— constructed, observed, and narrated within a framework of attraction and repulsion. Interestingly, Tunisian women are treated in a separate chapter in order to examine more closely how they are depicted by both British male and female travellers, whose representations often reflect gendered assumptions, orientalist tropes, and cultural ideologies distinct from those shaping broader portrayals of Tunisian people.

It crucial to note that while each chapter is structured around a central theoretical axis, other critical concepts and approaches—including representation (Hall), stereotyping, the panopticon (Foucault)—will also be employed where relevant. Besides, structuring the

chapters following this thematic progression offers a fluid and nuanced examination of the various dimensions of ambivalence, beginning with the general theme of the Tunisian landscape and culminating in a more specific exploration of the figure of the Tunisian woman. It enables the weaving together of different levels of analysis, revealing the tensions and contradictions inherent in these representations. To better analyze these ambivalent representations, this research adopts a thematic structure that distinguishes between positive and negative representations of Tunis, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century views, as well as between male and female perspectives in British travel narratives. Significantly, there are sometimes instances where both perspectives are considered together, particularly when the limited availability of relevant quotations from individual works makes it impractical to devote separate sections to each gender. While this may at first suggest a binary framework, the objective is not to impose a rigid dichotomy but to employ a logically grounded method that facilitates a clearer and more systematic analysis. This structure serves as a productive analytical tool, allowing for the identification of ambivalent elements that might otherwise remain obscured. More Importantly, this methodological choice helps reinforce the central argument of the thesis: that British travel narratives on Tunis are not monolithic but are instead characterized by internal inconsistencies and profound ambivalence—particularly when considered through the lenses of gender, the historical contexts of the nineteenth and early-twentieth-centuries, and the simultaneous interplay of positive and negative representations concerning the same described subject. By foregrounding these complexities, the study aims to broaden existing understanding of Orientalist discourse and open new avenues for interpreting British travel writing on Tunis.

This research is a small contribution to such desirable aim.

CHAPTER ONE
LANDSCAPE ENCOUNTER: THE AMBIVALENT REPRESENTATION OF THE TUNISIAN LANDSCAPE

"It is in the Orient that we must search for the highest Romanticism"

Schlegel,as cited in Hoeveler & Cass 2006: 46

1. General background

In her article "Through the Leaves to the Trunk: Emily Carr's Invention of Nature", Biancamaria Rizzardi highlights the fact that the link between literature and nature is "as ancient as humanity" (Rizzardi 2019: 70). Indeed, the early drawings of our ancestors "depict natural subjects, such as the stylized animals in the cave paintings of Chauvet, Altamira, or Lascaux" (Rizzardi 2019: 70) [2]. From Rizzardi's perspective, "the scenes represented on the walls […] imitate and at the same time invent nature" (Rizzardi 2019: 70). Starting from these early stages until now, literature, alongside other forms of art, has vigorously endeavoured to explore the vital role of nature in human beings' experiences, openly announcing "a shifting of emphasis from man to non-man" (Jeffers 1948: xxi).

As human curiosity about the natural world deepened, so did the desire to explore distant lands and document these encounters, giving rise to a rich tradition of travel writing. From the nineteenth-century onwards, this impulse was reinforced by an increasing interest in geography, archeology, and geology. Such scholarly and artistic attention fostered a closer

[2] The cave paintings of Chauvet (France), Altamira (Spain), and Lascaux (France) are among the most famous paintings of prehistoric art. See Jean Clottes, *Chauvet Cave: The Art of Earliest Times*, Trans. Paul Bahn . (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003); and Norbert Aujoulat, *The Splendour of Lascaux: Rediscovering the Greatest Treasure of Prehistoric Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).

connection with the natural world, a tendency most clearly reflected in the expanding body of literature that associates these disciplines with the " […] fashionable eighteenth-century pleasure: the natural landscape" (Philips, as cited in Burke 1757: x-xi). This "fashionable pleasure", rooted in Romantic sensibilities, "contributes to a redefinition of the aims of travel, which came to include that of beauty, of finding oneself, […] that became crucial for writers and readers" (Brothers & Gergits 1997: xvii). Seen from this perspective, nature emerged as a compelling paradigm within British travel literature, serving "as an antidote to the ills and excesses of human civilization" (Slovic & Hart 2004: 3). This turn towards the natural world, therefore, marked a broader cultural reorientation, wherein the landscape assumed a symbolic, epistemological, and even therapeutic value.

This evolving fascination with landscapes and the natural world found expression not only in European settings but also in other non-Western places. Among the most compelling destinations for British travellers were the North African Barbary States—Tunis, Algeria, and Morocco—renowned for their attractive landscapes. While travel to these regions was predominantly undertaken by men—a trend that dates back to the eighteenth century—a notable number of female travellers also ventured there, meticulously recording their experiences and perceptions.

Significantly, this chapter is contextuallysituated within the era James Morris describes as the period of "high imperialism" (Morris 1979: 23), spanning the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. At its core, it seeks to investigate how British male and female travel writers represented the Tunisian landscape in their narratives. At the heart of this focus lies a central question: to what extent do these representations reflect a complex and ambivalent vision of Tunisian landscape, and how are such tensions inflected by both gendered perspectives and historical context? In approaching this question, the chapter aims not onlyto explore how nature is perceived and described, but also to uncover the ambivalent attitudes and deeper ideological mechanisms embedded within the broader framework of Orientalist discourse.

The choice to focus on landscape as a site of analysis stems from its frequent deployment in British travel writing as a medium through which broader cultural and emotional meanings are conveyed. The presence of ambivalence—instances of fascination, or denigration—suggests that these representations are more heterogeneous and unstable than previously assumed. This chapter, therefore, considers how the natural world, particularly the

Tunisian landscape, becomes a site where such ambivalences are reflected and negotiated. Such a perspective yields substantial analytical foundations for rethinking the intricate interplay between travel experiences, gendered perspectives and Orientalist ideologies.

To develop this argument, the chapter follows a progressive critical trajectory. It begins by situating the travel writers' aesthetic sensibilities within the broader intellectual legacy of Romanticism—a movement that profoundly shaped European engagements with nature—and then proceeds to discuss the concept of the sublime as a key aesthetic concept. This theoretical framework allows us to understand how the natural world was imbued with symbolic and emotional significance, becoming both an object of scientific curiosity and asite of personal and spiritual reflection.

Building on this foundation, the chapter then turns to a more interpretative approach, focusing on the representation of the Tunisian landscape by British male and female travellers. This part is organized according to three main criteria. The first one is based on descriptive analysis: focusing initially on positive representations followed by negative ones. Interestingly, this establishes a first layer of ambivalence in travellers' discourse. The second one examines how these representations differ according to the gender of the writer, thereby offering insights into how male and female voices engage differently—or sometimes similarly—with the landscape. The third criterion is mainly chronological, tracing the evolution of these representations from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

Taken together, this threefold progression—from the aesthetic roots of landscape representation, to gendered voices and then to chronological shifts—aims to demonstrate that British travel writing on Tunis is far from monolithic. Instead, it is marked by moments of ambivalence that destabilize the binary oppositions so central to Orientalist thought, especially as it pertains to the natural world.

2.Pinning down the theoretical sphere

2.1. The Romantic Movement

Several factors contributed to making the Mediterranean tour particularly attractive to British and European travellers alike. Among these, Romanticism stands out as the most significant, as it has been often regarded as a reaction against industrialization and the rationalism of the Enlightenment. That is why this section endeavours to analyze the principles and development of the Romantic movement. The aim is not to provide a purely historical overview, but rather to establish a critical framework for understanding afterwards the richlyambivalent ways in which British travel writers representedthe Tunisian landscape.

In his definition of Romanticism, Charles Baudelaire asserts that the movement "[…] is precisely situated neither in choice of subject nor in exact truth, but in a way of feeling" (Baudelaire 1846, as cited in Galitz 2004: para.7). So, it is around feelings and nature that the movement started to build most of its basic tenets.

As a concept, Romanticism refers to an intellectual and artistic endeavour which gained momentum in Europe between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century. The German poet Friedrich Schlegel "was credited for using the term 'romantic' to describe literature" by relating it with the emotional depiction of things in an imaginative way (Cuddon 1991: para.2). That very imagination entails the celebration of the principles of "freedom, spontaneity, devotion to beauty, and worship of nature" (Cuddon 1991: para.2).

Approached from this angle, Romanticism was hailed as a reaction against the precepts of rationality, order, and reason that typified the Neoclassical Era (Britannica: n.d). To bemore precise, it should be noted that Neoclassicism was "a dominant literary movement in England and Europe during the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century". It was characterized by "emotional restraint […] clarity, dignity, and decorum […] It prized wit over imagination" (Cuddon 1991: para.3).[3] According to Romantics, nature represented asubstitute for the disillusionment from the didacticism of Neoclassicism and the side effects of the Industrial Revolution that had swiftly transformed the world.

Scholars, notably Galitz 2004, Gorodeisky 2016, and Kohoe n.d, advocate that Romanticism could be considered as "a break from theprinciples of the Enlightenment which

[3] See (Crowe 1995; Abrams 1999).

established reason as the foundation of all knowledge" (Kehoe n.d.: para.1). Similarly, Kathryn Galitz (2004) highlights the fact that this literary movement emerged as a response to the "disillusionment with the Enlightenment values of reason and order in the aftermath of the French Revolution of 1789" (Galitz 2004: para.1). As such, many romantic writers and artists revolted against rigid rationalism and physical materialism which were the overwhelming principles of that time. Following this line of thought, Romantics replaced "the Enlightenment's faith in the sovereignty of reason with a belief in the sovereignty of art" (Gorodeisky 2016: para.2.1).

Consequently, nature appeared as the best viable tool to deal with the newly skeptical religious, social, epistemological, and political assumptions. For Steve Clark, nature was even "an uncommodifiable space outside capitalism" (Clark 1999: 175). This obvious—yet complex shift in attitudes away from pre-ordered assumptions—was at its height by the mid nineteenth century and continued to exert a remarkable influence long after that.

In her article entitled "Nineteenth-Century Romantic Aesthetics" (2016), Keren Gorodeisky avers that one of the key tenets of Romanticism was "to re-enchant nature in the face of what they regarded as a threat from modern science" (Gorodeisky 2016: para.5). According to her, modern science together with technological advancement "alienated (rational and free) human beings from nature" (Gorodeisky 2016: para.5). So, the best solution was to go back to human roots and regenerate our faith in nature. The overall characteristic, eo ipso, was "a new emotionalism" (Tate n.d: para.2.) that deeply stressed an appreciation of the beauty and mystery of nature, "a general exaltation of emotion over reason and of the senses over intellect […] and a predilection for the exotic, the remote, the mysterious" (Britannica n.d: para.2). Such a specific reading would suggest that "the idea that unites everyone [is] the idea of beauty" (Hölderlin, as cited in Bernstein 2003: 186).

As such, it could be safely inferred that nature with its infinite powers invite us to transform our epistemological, teleological, and metaphysical assumptions in favour of spontaneous feelings and harmonization with the ideal of beauty.

Having provided a general overview of Romanticism, we can now delve into the origins of this movement in Britain, exploring how its foundational ideas and influences began to take root.This historical background is essential to our analysis, as Romanticism profoundly shaped the aesthetic and ideological frameworks through which British travel writers perceived and represented theTunisian landscape—often oscillating between idealization and denigration, thus reinforcing the ambivalent nature of their accounts.

2.1.1.The seeds of Romanticism in Britain

Many critics claim that "it was in Britain that the Romantic movement really started" (Cuddon 1991: para.4). With the publication of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798)[4], we can discern a definite shift from human-centered concerns and urban life toward a renewed attention to the natural world and its emotional and spiritual significance. In fact, "Wordsworth's Preface to the second edition (1800) of *Lyrical Ballads*, in which he described poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, became the manifesto of the English Romantic movement" (Britannica nd: para.4). Although with less intensity, this romantic spirit was also present in many English works which were in striking contrast with the rigid reasoning of the enlightenment. Instead, there was an obvious tendency to celebrate "emotional sensitivity and reverence for nature" (Kohoe n.d: para.3).

This trend is also noticed in a growing body of travel narratives that articulated to varying degrees an obvious interconnectedness with natural landscapes. Rather than simply triggering readers' interest in travel or informing them about new distant places, travel writers opted for incorporating a minute description of nature full of vivid adjectives. Hence, these travelogues offered "a seemingly natural vehicle", using Claire Lindsay's expression (Lindsay 2015: 33), to adjust to a new phenomenon which is that of Art for Art's sake.

For a better explanation, it is recommended to go back to Barbara Brothers and Julia Gergits's analysis of the late Victorian era. According to both of them, the Aesthetic movement started "to gain momentum" in the late Victorian period, which coincided with the climax of the travel narrative as a literary genre. This is what accounts for travel literature's "increased interest in creating an effect purely for the sake of art" (Brothers & Gergits 1997: xvii). That very view allows the critic to start reading travel books under a new fresh paradigm which is that of the romantic world and the natural landscape. Brothers and Gergits underscore the fact that the incorporation of the Aesthetic movement into travel literature "contributes to a redefinition of the aims of travel, which came to include that of beauty, of finding oneself" (Brothers & Gergits 1997: xvii). These aesthetic and personal objectives "became crucial for writers and readers as the twentieth century progressed" (Brothers & Gergits 1997: xvii).

[4] It is widely regarded as the foundational work of English Romantic poetry, emphasizing emotion, nature, and imagination.

Building on the above, the legacy of Romanticism will serve as a critical lens through which we can analyze British travellers' representations of the Tunisian landscape. However, any discussion of Romantic aesthetics would be incomplete without addressing the concept of the sublime, one of its central and most influential notions. The sublime, as a key category of Romantic thought, deepens our understanding of how travellers experienced and expressed aspects of the landscape in their works.

2.1.2.The notion of the sublime

Edmund Burke's ground-breaking concept of the sublime is crucial since it plays a vital role in both the understanding and the articulation of this literary and artistic movement known as Romanticism. In fact, this theory established new conventions in nature writing where notions of pleasing and magnificent pictorial landscapes became pervasive motifs in many pieces of literature. According to Burke, the sublime as a notion can only be analyzed in relationship with the concept of beauty and the beautiful. Even though he finds out that "there isa remarkable contrast between the two" (Burke 1757:113), he admits that one should expect to find a combination of both concepts in the works of art. According to him, the reason behind such a contrast is that "sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; […] Beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate, the great should be solid and even massive" (Burke 1757: 113). But as far as art is concerned, both the sublime and the beautiful are "productive of delight" (Philips, as cited in Burke 1757: xxiii) to become "the outlaws of rational enquiry" (Philips, as cited in Burke 1757: xxiii). The sublime, with its capacity to involve "admiration and greatness, "and the beautiful, with its capability to entail "positive pleasure," become both the emblems of "irresistibility and seduction" (Philips, as cited in Burke 1757: xxiii). Suggestive as it may seem, Burke's concept of the sublime has had a great influence on Gothic and Romantic writers since they relied on it "in their treatment of landscape" in order to emphasize "the magnificent, the dramatic, and the visually striking" (Andras 2006: para.12).

It could be argued, then, that the sublime experience—in its both forms "terrifying and exhilarating" using Carman Andras words—is truly unique as it represented "one of the most important challenges to the rationalism of the Enlightenment thought" (Andras 2006: para.12).

This experience is also unique due to its ornamented style that has an aesthetic effect on readers, capable of eliciting their admiration and raising their awe. Significantly, one of the concrete effects of the notion of the sublime is that writers as well as painters focused their attention on "landscape painting"[5] (Rigal-Cellard 2019: 86: my translation). At the beginning, they started "contemplating the paintings of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain[6] (seventeenth century), then those of their contemporaries from the Barbizon School who celebrated the countryside" and afterwards "those of the Düsseldorf School (1830-40)"[7] (Rigal-Cellard 2019: 86-87). Gradually, landscape description has developed in Europe as well as in the United States making the natural space appear not only as anaesthetic construction but also as a shared space that could be found and read in all artistic works.

Within the context of this chapter, the sublime is not discussed in isolation, rather it serves as a key to understanding how travel narratives negotiate conflicting emotions and reveal ideological tensions, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the Orientalist discourse. The sublime, in this sense, becomes a critical lens through which we can decode the interplay between aesthetic response and imperial perception in the texts under study. In what follows, the Romantic movement and its foundational concept of the sublime will be used as critical frameworks for the analysis of British representations of the Tunisian landscape.

[5]"Peinture du paysage".

[6] Their paintings were celebrated for their idealized landscapes, harmoniously blending classical architecture, nature, and light to evoke a sense of beauty and contemplation.

[7]"En contemplant tout d'abord les tableaux de Poussain et de Lorrain (dix-septième siècle) puis ceux de leurs contemporains de l'Ecole Barbizon quicélébrait la campagne au moment ousonterritoire se réduisait peu apeu, et ceux de l'Ecole de Düsseldorf (1830-40)".

3. The positive representation of theTunisian landscape

The second major part of this chapter focuses on analyzing passages that exhibit aestheticized representations of the Tunisian landscape. Drawing upon David Spurr's perspective where writers tend "to exploit realityfor [their] own sensibility" (Spurr 1993: 59), this part delves deeper into how both male and female writers have depicted the sceneries they encountered as exceptionally beautiful. By employing various literary techniques, these writers transform the Tunisian landscape into a series of picturesque scenes.

Having mentioned that, it is necessary to further elaborate on the concept of the picturesque and its evolution over time. Etymologically speaking, the term picturesque is "derived from the Italian *pittoresco*: from a picture" (Gannouni 2021: 92). Theoretically speaking, "it was introduced by the Reverend William Gilpin […] in 1770" (Buzard, as cited in Peter and Hulme 2002: 45) and it was taken to mean "an object or view worthy of inclusion in a picture" (Gannouni 2021: 92). Over time, the meaning has changed from "subjects suitable for painting" to "a form of aesthetics" (Gannouni 2021: 92). In the field of travel literature, Gilpin argues that the object of picturesque travel was "beauty of every kind, which either art, or nature can produce [...] but chiefly that species of beauty, which we have endeavoured to characterize under the name of picturesque" (Gannouni 2021: 92).

Taken from that particular angle, it is noticeable that the picturesque, in various travel accounts, is pursued primarily through natural landscapes including mountains, plains, hills, valleys, lakes, seas, oases, and bays. These broader settings are often enriched by smaller-scale natural details —flowers, trees, birds, and rocks—which add texture and visual variety to the overall scene, hence contributing to its aesthetic quality. The upcoming analysis, indeed, seeks to understand how the aesthetics of the picturesque not only serve to enhance the sensory appeal of the landscape, but also contribute to the construction of a positive representation of the country's flora and fauna.

3.1.The landscape from a male perspective

3.1.1.Nineteenth-century views

Nineteenth-century writers sought to enhance the allure of their narratives by incorporating appealing portrayals of the Tunisian landscape. Based on our analysis of their travel accounts, we have come up with the idea that nearly all of them employed what Mathew Edney calls "the geographical gaze" (Edney 1997: 54). This concept includes two different but complementary gazes: "the aesthetic picturesque gaze" and "the scientific gaze" (Edney 1997: 54). In other occasions, an "imperial gaze" is revealed whereby "the Tunisian landscape was an object of a future imperial project" (Gannouni 2021: 93). Before analyzing travellers' views from the perspective of these different gazes, we will start with highlighting some of their overarching observations.

Michael Russel (1835) praises Tunis as a touristic destination, describing its climate as "one of the finest in the world" (Russel, as cited in Manai 2007: 25). Here, the use of the superlative "the finest" is suggestive in itself since it creates an appealing image of Tunis. Expanding upon Russel's view, Edward Blaquiere contends that "with respect to its natural beauty, few places can be compared to Tunis" (Blaquiere 1813:135). Obviousasit may seem, Blaquiere's quote operates at two main levels. The first one suggests that Tunis offers a landscape which is remarkably rich in its scenic qualities that attract the aesthetic sensibilities of the traveller. The second level exhibits that the exceptional beauty of the Tunisian landscape makes it distinctive or even extraordinary when compared to other locations.

Likewise, Ralli Stenning in his work entitled *Tunis* (1881) highlights the fact that the beauty of the Tunisian landscape surpasses that of any other country:

> Among the many circling shores of the Mediterranean there is none more entirely beautiful than the great bay on which rose ancient Carthage, and this beauty is peculiarly noticeable when the traveller steams from the open sea into its lake- like splendor" (Stenning, as cited in Manai 2007: 25).

In this quote, the writer transforms the Tunisian bay "into an object loved for its beauty" (Spurr 1993: 57) by using specific expressions like "peculiarly noticeable", "entirely beautiful" that further enhance a strong sense of appreciation and a specific emphasis on its exceptional

beauty. Additionally, the comparison of the bay to "a lake- like splendor" encapsulates a picturesque quality, augmenting its aesthetic appeal. In a similar vein, Edward Rae depicts Tunis to his reader as an aesthetic object " loved for its beauty". In the arrival scene, he communicates the following portrayal to his readers:

> We could see Tunis, the City of Verdure — a mass of picturesque cream-colored buildings and minarets, surmounted by the Kasbah— sloping gently up a background of purple and green. No smoke rose to soil or obscure the city. Round it stretched the mountains which make of the Gulf of Tunis so lovely a panorama. (Rae 1877: 113)

At a visual level, the writer's reliance on different vivid colours like "purple", "green" contributes in building an attractive imagery to be conveyed to readers. Also, the inclusion of descriptions such as "picturesque cream-colored buildings and minarets" alongside the prominence of the Kasbah atop of the cityscape not only highlights the richness of the Tunisian cultural heritage but also sheds light upon its architectural elegance. The writer's insistence on the absence of smoke implies a clean and unpolluted atmosphere which stands in a direct opposition with the context of industrialized cities. This aspect, in conjunction with the other mentioned elements, renders the Tunisian landscape "a lovely panorama". Similarly, Herbert Vivian finds out that Tunis is "delightfully picturesque" (Vivian 1899: 170). This description, indeed, speaks to the allure of the picturesque aesthetic by evoking a scene that is not only visually attractive but also tainted with a sense of charm and pleasure.

Turning to more specific views, our inquiry will begin with an analysis of "the geographical gaze" followed by a subsequent examination of "the imperial gaze". "The scientific gaze"—a central element in Edney's framework of "the geographical gaze"—primarily focuses on "a wide array of plants, animals, rock outcroppings, whole vistas, and cultural arte-facts" (Edney 1997: 54). One of the examples of this gaze is found in Rae's description of the following vista:

> We sat by the great fountain ofthe waters of Zaghwan and Ain Djugar, surrounded by a pretty garden full of wallflowers, roses, geraniums, strawberries, violets, and bananas, and looking over the snowy city's roofs and palms. Beyond were the olive-clad hills, the lovely panorama of the lake, the gulf, the sea, and the purple lead mountain — Djebel Resass. (Rae 1877: 131)

This quote aligns with Edney's "scientific gaze" since it includes a meticulous examination of the natural elements encompassed within this geographical setting. In fact, the

writer sheds light on a wide range of botanical specimens including "wallflowers", "roses", "geraniums", "strawberries", "violets", and "bananas". Besides the botanical elements, the writer's attention is also directed towards the broader landscape including " the snowy city's roofs", "palm trees", " olive-clad hills", and panoramic views of gulf, lake and sea. This focus on the panoramic view along with the other botanical details show how microscopic details mingle with macroscopic vistas to encapsulate "the scientific gaze".

Similar to Rae, Graham and Aschbee offer some landscape descriptions that embody Edney's notion of "scientific gaze". One of those observations about the town of Gabes reads as follows:

> The real charm of Gabes, however, is in its gardens, coveringan area of some forty-eight square kilometres, and extending along the winding banks of the river, whose waters irrigate and fertilize in a marvellous degree this strikingly beautiful oasis. Under theshade of lofty and graceful date-palms entwined by clinging vines, one wanders among orange, citron, almond, fig, and pomegranate trees, or madder and hennah bushes, springing out of a soil producing cereals and vegetables of every kind, and in boundless profusion. The whole oasis is divided into gardens by hedges of impenetrable cactus, or by small artificial water-ways, over which one has frequently to leap in order to passfrom one garden to another. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 99)

Graham and Aschbee's quote vividly captures the essence of "the scientific gaze" as viewed from the context of the beautiful gardens of the town of Gabes. Clearly, the description presents a vivid illustration of the lush vegetation, the rich and diverse plant life,as well as the irrigation system in these gardens. First of all, the authors attempt to categorize the diverse botanical specimen present in the gardens, including "date-palms", "vines", "orange", "citron", "almond", "fig", "pomegranate trees", "madder",and "hennah bushes". They also highlight the important role of the river in irrigating and fertilizing the gardens of Gabes which underscores an appreciation for the geological features that shape the landscape. Besides, their mention of the way the oasis is divided by "hedges of impenetrable cactus"; or "by small artificial water-ways" aligns with "the scientific gaze's" interest in understanding the structure and organization of geographical features. Chiefly, this quote goes in tune with "the scientific gaze" since it combines botanical features as well as geological elements in order to draw an all-encompassing picture of the "marvelous" gardens of Gabes.

Proceeding to the second pivotal term in Edney's framework of "the geographical gaze" which is that of "the aesthetic picturesque gaze", it seems that travel writers demonstrate a profound engagement with the aesthetic attributes of the Tunisian landscape. This interest potentially underlies the extensive and elaborate illustrations provided in their narratives. Upon their arrival in Tunis, Temple, Playfair, as well as Graham and Aschbee relied on the picturesque concept to depict the landscape from the vantage point of a ship or an eminence. This idea closely aligns with one of Pratt's central concepts which is that of the "the monarch-of-all-I-survey" (Pratt 1992: 198). In the "the monarch-of-all-I-survey", the speaker stands up on a high place and describes the scene below, transforming, hence, the "passive experience of seeing into an active act of discovery" [8] (Pratt 1992: 198). This line of thought is echoed in the in the following words of Temple:

> At the landingplace, I therefore contend myself with gazing on the surrounding objects which formed a very beautiful panoramic view, comprising Carthage, the Goletta fort, the lake with the town of Tunis, [...] the hills above Hammam' L'Enf, backed by the bold rocky masses of the Lead Mountain, then covered with a lovely purple tint. (Temple 1835: 89)

Relying on this excerpt, it is obvious that Temple positions himself as the observer who is content to survey and appreciate the beauty of the scene laid out before him. At a textual level, Temple's description of the landscape is basically defined by its pictorial qualities. In fact it encompasses various elements characteristic of the picturesque concept: "the rugged hills", "the fortifications of Goletta", "the lake". Each of these natural and architecturalfeatures contribute to form "a very beautiful panoramic view" that captivates the speaker'seye. In another instance,Temple also adopts a hillside vantage point to delineate the attractive landscape below him:

> From the summit of this hill [...] is obtained a most beautiful and extensive panoramic view of the whole surrounding country, embracing Porto Farina, Utica, the Majerdah,

[8] A similar dynamic is illustrated in E.M. Forster's *novel A Room with a View* (1908), in which the travellers Lucy Honey church and her companions become obsessed with discovering the exact vantage point that the painter Alessandro Baldovinetti might have used to paint the landscape.

> several ranges of mountains, the salt lake called Sibhaherrooan, immediately at your feet, the rich and cultivated plains, Tunis and its forts, the lake and island, the lofty peak of Jebel Zaghwan, the Goletta and the shipping, Jebel erroosas, Hammam lEnf, The coast of the Dakhul, the bay, the site of Carthage, the Mediterranean, the isle of Zowamoor, and the rich plantations [....] Nothing, in short, can exceed its beauty, especially if viewed during the spring, when the picture is enlivened by the rich and varied verdure of the new leaves and the waving tints of the young corn. (Temple 1835: 118–119)

Interestingly, seeing from the vantage point of a particular position is typical of nineteenth-century travel writing which offers the "traveller a bird's eye-view of the exquisite panorama" (Gannouni 2021: 94-95) below him/her. In fact, this high vantage point enables the writer to meticulously depict the landscape, hence performing "the role of the voiced seer who diffuses the beauty of the landscape to the reader" (Lamrani 2021: p.8). Such a beauty is diffused through the use of rich and vivid descriptions like "the most beautiful", "the most extensive panoramic view of the whole surrounding country", the use of hyperbole "nothing can exceed its beauty", as well as a reliance on overmodification "rich", "cultivated", "lofty", "varied", "new", "young". These devices are used to achieve what Pratt calls "the density of meaning [...] material and semantic substance" (Pratt 1985: 25).

In a similar vein, Palyfair also chooses to position himself at the top of a hill to depict the landscape below him: "a magnificent view is obtained by mounting the hill immediately south of the town, crossing the valley watered by the Ain Ayat" (Palyfair 1877: 139). In another instance, he claims: "another beautiful view of the town is from the hill called by the Europeans Belvedere, to the northward of the city. The panorama of the city sloping upwards towards the Kasba, and of the lake and surrounding country, is veryfine" (Palyfair 1877:288).

By ascending the hill, the traveller/observer gains a broader outlook over the towns and its surroundings, allowing for an inclusive appreciation of the overall features of the landscape. The evocative language used, particularly phrases like "magnificent view" and "very fine panorama" along with the description of the town "sloping upwards towards the Kasba"with the presence of "a lake"adds not onlydepth and dimension to the scene, but also reflects a sensibility attuned to the picturesque.

Similarly to Temple and Playfair, Graham and Aschbee adopt a hillside point of view to describe the scene below:

> From the city, spread out like a sheet, the eye wanders seawards over the shallow lake Borghaz, or el-Bahira, the little sea [...] to the right, the village of Radès, pleasantly situated on an olive-clad hill; to the left, the rising ground that marks the site of ancient Carthage [...] Turning inland, the salt marsh of Sedjoumi skirts the southern walls of Tunis, and framing the horizon is one long succession of mountains and hills, vying with each other in beauty of outline culminating in the rugged peak of Zaghouan [...] All this, when viewed through the lucid atmosphere and touched with the gorgeous colouring of this favoured clime, combines to make a fairy picture difficult to rival, never to be forgotten. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 14–15)

Graham and Aschbee started by claiming that the landscape was "spread out like a sheet", as if it were apainting, which setsthe stage for the panoramic view. Then, theyguided their readers' gaze in different directions: first towards the sea, then rightwards "olive-clad hill", leftwards "to the site of ancient Carthage, and below "the salt marsh of Sedjoumi". Afterwards, they encompassed the entire scene with "a succession of mountains and hills" leading to the peak of Zaghouan. This visual exploration of the landscape reflects an emphasis on the picturesque gaze by scanning and absorbing the details of the scene and appreciating its depth and breadth. Besides, the authors evoke a sense of beauty and sublimity characteristic of the picturesque aesthetics. First, the passage is filled with vivid imagery like "gorgeous colouring", "rugged peak", and "fairy picture". At the same time, the sense of the sublime is echoed in the towering mountains and the vastness of the horizon. Both senses are mingled to evoke pleasure and awe in the reader.

In fact, this is not the only instance where Graham and Aschbee view one of the scenes from an eminence. In another example, they command the landscape that came under their gaze in the following way:

> The panoramic view from this elevated region is most extensive, and the scenery picturesque. Below lies the pretty little village of that name, with its white-domed koubbas nestled in olive-groves, and framed by the long range of Numidian mountains […] The wild grandeur of the scenery at this high altitude is very striking (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 189-190)

Undeniably, these examples are consistent with Pratt's device of "the monarch-of-all-I-survey" and Spurr's concept of "the commanding view" (Pratt 1993: 15) where Graham and Aschbee stand at a high point to describe the scene below: "The panoramic view from this elevated region", "the scenery at this high altitude". By adopting this position, they succeeded in transforming the "passive experience of seeing into an active act of discovery" (Pratt 1992: 198) where the described scene falls within the aesthetics of the picturesque: "the pretty little village", " the panoramic view", "the scenery is picturesque".

So far, it can be inferred that travellers' descriptions of diverse sceneries from elevated vantage points allowed them to communicate the beauty of the landscape to their readers by spreading it out like a picturesque painting. Actually, there is no observable tendency to assert domination or mastery over the landscape. Instead, there is an inclination "to constitute [it] verbally as a worthy prize to their readers" (Pratt1992: 217). This goes largely in tune with Said's view, which posits that travellers' aim is "to attract the reader through the aesthetic characteristics of their writings" (Said 1978-2003: 77).

However, not all the descriptions of the natural landscape are made from an elevated vantage point. Some illustrations are produced while those travellers are on their way to discover new towns in the interior or while being attracted to the beauty of the surrounding scenery. For example, Graham and Aschbee attempt to "produce the land as a landscape" (Pratt 1992: 64) by illustrating it in the following way: " [...] the scenery is very grand. The mountains [...] are well covered with green shrubs, and the passes are abrupt, startling, and most picturesque" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 166). In another instance, they declare that "the contemplation of the landscape, the beauty of the heather, and the gorgeous colouring of the wild flowers that dotted the plain, drove away all thoughts" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 193). According to them, this is what makes the Tunisian landscape "a pleasant resting place […] a spot to charm the eye of poet or painter " (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 184). In each of these quotes, there is a discernible emphasis on the exceptional beauty of the Tunisian landscape, as indicated by the use of adjectives like " very grand", "startling", "most picturesque", and "gorgeous". In other cases, they focus on the beauty of some Tunisian towns in order to stress their "inhuman beauty" (Said 1978-2003: 167). For example, in reference to Gabès, they wrote: "The real charm of Gabès [...] is [...] its gardens [...] extending along the winding banks of the river whose waters irrigate and fertilise this strikingly beautiful oasis" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 99). A similar portrayal is caught in their description of Subeitila and Oudena respectively: "this spot [...] has much to charm the eye and quicken the imagination (Graham

& Aschbee 1887: 140-141); "this is a pleasant drive through a beautiful undulating country, covered with olive-groves, and presenting charming views of mountain scenery" (Graham & Aschbee1887:42). Clearly enough, the aesthetic appreciation of the landscape emanates from its profusion of elements such as "gardens", "oasis", "mountains" which collectively contribute to its perceived "charm" and beauty.

In a manner akin to Graham and Ashbee, Playfair and Temple also provide many interesting depictions of various natural sceneries which are in tune with "the aesthetic picturesque gaze". One of the first sights' of attraction for Playfair is "the smiling hills of the Tell" and "the magnificent mountains of Nefsa and the Khomair" (Playfair 1887: 247).

This observation leads him to assert that "each day's ride was more picturesque than the one before it" (Playfair 1887: 247). In more specific descriptions, Playfair flatters the beauty of some Tunisian towns like Mukther by referring to it as "a perfect paradise" (Playfair 1887: 194). He also asserts that the situation of Teboursuk "is naturally most beautiful, being built on the slope of a hill which commands a valley of singular fertility" (Playfair 1887: 215). In another instance, he finds out that the situation of Bizerta is "extremely picturesque, being built on each side of the canal which connects the lake with the sea" (Playfair 1887: 307). Likewise, Playfair describes Susa as: "situated on a gentle slope rising from the sea" that "presents the most picturesque appearance from a vessel in the harbour" (Playfair 1887:150). The same interest in Susa is reflected in Temple's following description: "Susa [...] presents from the sea a very gay and pretty aspect" (Temple 1835: 122). According to Playfair and Temple, the aesthetic appreciation of the landscape is often viewed in terms of "hill", "lake", "sea", and "harbour". This is what leads them to associate the beauty of the towns with their locations "on the slope of a hill", "on each side of the canal which connects the lake with the sea", "on a gentle slope rising from the sea", "presents from the sea a pretty aspect".

Since the picturesque is characterized by variety, all the above descriptions reflect a detailed composition of the diversity of the landscape: the location, the shapes, the colours,the presence of different elements: lake, sea, hill, harbour.

More detailed illustrations are also discerned, significantly aligning with the aesthetics of the picturesque gaze. For instance, in reference to the town of Zaghwan, Temple postulates the following:

> We strolled about the lovely environs of Zaghwan, which are eminently picturesque, combining the bold with the softer features of nature.The town itself is

> delightfully situated [...] and is surrounded on all sides with beautiful gardens filled with the most luxuriant fruit trees and vegetation. Numerous little clear rills, rushing down the mountain sides, unite and flow through fragments of rocks at the bottom of a deep ravine [...] On one side is seen a rich plain, stretching far away in the distance, to the base of the blue mountains of the Ussalas, and, in another direction, bounded by ranges of nearer and wood-covered hills [...] and towering high over the whole scene, rise the bold and perpendicular masses of the Jebel Zaghwan. (Temple 1835: 291–292).

A similar positive illustration is found in Playfair's passage about Tabarka:

> If a poet or a painter wished to depict a valley ‘sacred to sweet peace’, he could do no better than take his model that of the Oulad Sidera. It is admirably cultivatedthroughout, and from every direction beautiful sparkling streams join the river, which flows alongthe bottom.The pasturage is rich and succulent, and the brilliant carmine of some of the clovers contrasted with the bright yellow of other species, nestling in a carpet of green, still fresh and wet with the late rains, added a richness to the landscape, which can nowhere be seen in a more northern country. (Playfair 1877: 245).

From these two quotes, we can deduce that the picturesque arises not from a flat land— which Playfair in another instance deems as "uninteresting" (Playfair 1877: 274)— but from the existence of various irregular forms within the described landscape like: "valley", "river", "hills", "mountain", "plain", "rocks". The picturesque is also characterized by the diversity of colors "blue", "yellow", "green", which is reflected in the proliferation of adjectives used: "lovely", "picturesque", "beautiful", "sweet", "soft", "clear", "deep"; "rich", "luxuriant", "sparkling", "brilliant", "succulent", "bright", "fresh". The function of all this, according to Imen Gannouni, is "to cajole the reader into a painter/ viewer relationship" (Gannouni 2021: 94).

As previously indicated in the introductory part of this section, travellers' views, as regards to the Tunisian landscape, not only adhere to Edney's concept of "the geographical gaze". Their narratives also articulate what Gannouni calls "the imperial gaze" (Gannouni 2021:93), wherein the Tunisian landscape is construed as an object of a future imperial

project. As one of the suggestive examples,Temple reveals in his travel account that "Jerbeh would make a very nice little colony for us, being extremely productive in itself, and commanding not only the commerce between the Barbary States, but that to the interior; and would prove an excellent debouche for our manufactures" (Temple 1835:163).

In this passage, Temple "treats the landscape as a body, an object to be possessed by the gaze" of the traveller, a strategy that "has been grounded in a discourse of ownership" (Ashcroft: 2008: 231). While seemingly straightforward, the quote encapsulates the imperial ambitions prevalent in the nineteenth-century, a period when colonies were seen assources of raw materials and markets for finished products. The phrase "an excellent debouche for our manufactures" succinctly reflects the commercial motivations underpinning imperial expansion. Furthermore, the passage presentsthe landscapeas"an object of desire" (Ashcroft: 2008: 231), interweaving the aesthetics of the picturesque—described as "nice", "extremely productive"—with the features of the discourse of domination. This is notably evidenced by the explicit desire of the writer to make Jerbeh "a very nice little colony for us".

In a manner akin to Temple, Playfair adeptly incorporates elements of the picturesque aesthetic alongside the imperial gaze, as exemplified in *Travels in the Footsteps of Bruce in Algeria and Tunis* (1877) and *Handbook for Travelers in Algeria and Tunis* (1887). Notably, Playfair overtly articulates his imperial ambitions towards the town of Badja by asserting that "it is hardly possible to conceive one better for colonisation, or a locality which could more easily be a centre of agricultural and industrial prosperity" (Playfair 1877: 244). Undeniably, the quote underscores the perceived suitability of the town of Badja for colonization. This suitability is further accentuated by the writer's emphasis on its exceptional potential for fostering agricultural and industrial prosperity which aligns with nineteenth-century colonialist aspirations. The same view endures a decade later in Playfair's subsequent travel account, wherein he reiterates this sentiment using analogous language: "The valley in which it flows is unsurpassed for fertility and beauty; it is hardly possible to conceive one better suited for colonization" (Playfair 1887: 244). As previously noted, Playfair mingles the aesthetic picturesque gaze with the imperial one by emphasizing the exceptional fertility and the aesthetic appeal of this Tunisian town, while asserting its suitability for colonization. Furthermore, Playfair explicitly posits that Bizerta and its lake Tinja "in the hands of a European power might become one of the finest harbours and one of the most strategical positions in the Mediterranean" (Playfair1877: 144). He also views Susa in similar terms:

"The importance of Susa as a strategic post so great that its possession was generally the key to supreme power" (Playfair 1877: 150). In both instances, Playfair emphasizes the strategic importance of Susa and Bizerta as well as their potential economic value which suggests that gaining control over these territories could confer significant advantages or projection of power in the Mediterranean region.

To provide a broader perspective on the issue under discussion, it is important to note that the aesthetic picturesque gaze, as theorized by Edney, was not exclusively employed by British travellers. Our readings of other travel books published during the same period reveal that similar aesthetic strategies were adopted by European and American travellers alike. A notable example is the American travel writer Ernest Wartegg, whose narrative *Tunis: the Land and the People* (1882) offers a highly aesthetic portrayal of the Tunisian landscape. Beginning with general observations, Wartegg observes that:

> Throughout the whole length of the northern coast of the Dark Continent there is scarcely a grander or more beautiful gulf than the one on whose shores lie the ruins of Carthage [...] and a chain of picturesque mountains surrounds the dark-blue surface of the water towards the East. (Wartegg 1882: 1)

In the above quote, Wartegg describes Tunis as possessing the most beautiful gulf along the northern coast of Africa, emphasizing its grandeur and visual harmony. He also highlights the "picturesque mountains" and the "dark-blue surface of the water," in order to suggest a carefully composed scene, evoking the balance and harmony typical of picturesque landscapes. More importantly, his reference to "the ruins of Carthage," not only hints at the romantic trope of the ruin, but also adds historical depth to the aesthetic experience. Significantly, Wartegg's account consistently offers a highly aestheticized representation of the Tunisian landscape, shaped through the lens of the picturesque gaze. In one of the instances, he describes the coast-line as endowed with "incomparable beauty." (Wartegg 1882: 2). Indeed, this emphasis on superlative beauty aligns with the European tradition of seeking picturesque scenes in Oriental countries. Similarly, Wartegg’s depiction of the Tunisian plain reflects this aesthetic sensibility. In this regard, he writes: "the colouring of the plain in front of us was beyond description" (Wartegg 1882: 228). Obvious as it may seem, Wartegg suggests that the beauty of the landscape surpasses the expressive capacity of language,which

is a classic motif in picturesque travel writing where visual experience is elevated above verbal representation. Echoing the views of his British counterparts, Wartegg extends his admiration beyond the coast and plains to the southern regions, where he flatters the oasis of Gabes, describing it as "an oasis in the truest sense of the word, a splendid palm-forest." (Wartegg 1882: 281). His attraction to the physical beauty of the oasis leads him to characterize it as "a tropical paradise" (Wartegg 1882: 288) that can "scarcely be surpassed in beauty." (Wartegg 1882: 282). Through such descriptions, Wartegg positions the Tunisian landscape as an aesthetic ideal, a landscape that fulfils and exceeds travellers' expectations.

When grouped together, the remarkable feature that emerges from travellers' depictions is their tendency to "ignore any human figures, showing them as truly blank spaces that await the colonizer" (Grewal 1996: 44). This act of visual and narrative dislocation reflects abroader colonial logic, wherein the land is stripped of its indigenous context and rendered as an empty, available space—one that invites possession, intervention, and control. As such, "the landscape is separated out from the culture that it nourishes" (Grewal 1996: 44), hence reinforcing the ideological underpinnings of the imperial discourse. Having analyzed nineteenth century male representations of the Tunisian landscape mainly through "the aesthetic picturesque gaze" and "the scientific gaze", the following section turns to travel accounts from the twentieth century, in order to examine how these representations evolved over time.

3.1.2.Twentieth-century views

Comparable parallels can be discerned between the views of nineteenth-century travellers and those of the twentieth century, which largely focus on "the aesthetic picturesque gaze", and to a lesser degree on "the scientific gaze". Indeed, these diverse perspectives serve to reflect the multifaceted nature of travel experiences and the various ways through which travellers engage with the landscapes surrounding them. Starting with Thomas Cook and his *Guidebook to Travels in Algeria and Tunis* (1904), a remarkable swing between both gazes is noticed in his introductory words:

> The climate of Algeria and Tunisia is unique, and eminently adapted to the comfort of those who suffer; the picturesque aspect of Arab life, of the white cities with their narrow streets; the historical souvenirs of these lands that from time to time have been subject to the Kings of Numida, to the Roman Emperors, to Arab, Spanish, and Turkish conquerors, all this offers to the learned and enquiring traveller a study of past civilisations, and the ordinary tourist the enjoyment of picturesque and beautiful country. (Cook 1904: iii)

Obvious as it may seem, Cook includes elements of "the scientific gaze" by focusing on "a wide array of vistas and cultural arte-facts" (Edney 1997: 54) while simultaneously hinting at aspects of the picturesque. First, the description of the Tunisian climate as "unique", the countryas "beautiful", and Arab life as "picturesque", with "white cities"and "narrowstreets", appealsto the observer's aesthetic sensibilities. Besides, the mention of"historical souvenirs" and the wide array of conquerors enhance the aesthetic allure by hinting at the rich tapestry and culture present in the region. When the scientific and the aesthetic are fused together, the country becomes both a rich source for "the enquiring traveller" and an appealing destination for "the ordinary tourist".

On another occasion, Cook resonates with Edney's notion of "the scientific gaze" by focusing on "a wide array of plants, animals, rock outcroppings" (Edney 1997: 54). He notes that:

> Both big and small game afforded good sports in various districts of both the North and the South, including partridges, bustards, herons, pelicans, cornorants (sic), and other birds of prey; plovers, wild duck, woodcock, snipe, grebes, flamingoes, quail, wild pigeons, and other varieties of small birds according to the season. (Cook 1926: 242).

Here, the interest is mainly oriented towards the abundance of animals found in Tunis. This attention is evident in his enumeration of different species of game birds "both big and small" found in many Tunisian regions. By listing specific examples such as "partridges, bustards, herons, pelicans…", Cook's gaze emerges to be purely scientific, hence reflecting his meticulous observation of the fauna he encounters.

Distant from Edney's "scientific gaze", other twentieth-century travel writers like Sladen, Miltoun, Graham, etc… reflect a perspective more aligned with "the aesthetic picturesque gaze" in order to capture the beauty of the Tunisian landscape. Consequently, a common pattern is discerned: "the picturesque is pursued through natural scenery like trees, rocks, broken-grounds, woods, rivers, lakes, plains, valleys, mountains, and distances" (Gannouni 2021: 92). This idea finds one of its best articulations in the view of George Edward Woodberry, who asserts in his travel narrative *North Africa and the Desert* (1914) that:

> The scenery was varied and colorful, richly wooded mountains and valleys, with fertile plains, lakes and rivers in the Northern regions, lower hills and picturesque, undulating park-lake country predominating in the central region, while southward extend vastsemi desert plains luxuriant and beautiful oases (Woodberry 1914: 45).

The richness and beautyof the landscape leads him to declare, at the end, that "the land held" him "in its spell" (Woodberry 1914: 45). Obvious as it may seem, the above excerpt resonates with Gannouni's point of view since the writer seeks the picturesque in the variety and abundance of natural sceneries surrounding him: "mountains", "valleys", "plains", "rivers", 'lakes", "hills". Besides, the use of words such as "rich", "varied", "colorful", "fertile", "luxuriant","beautiful" evokes a sense of aesthetic appreciation for the natural environment.

Similarly, the picturesque for Lord Leigh is caught in lush and bountiful landscapes:

> The road was most picturesque, winding round the side of the mountain range, through the forest of trees that spread their branches in every direction. A constant panorama of far green distances unfolded itself before our eyes […] The forest stretches over many miles and is full of splendid cork trees (Lord Leigh, as cited in Ward 1920: 187-188)

Exactly like Woodberry, the picturesque aspect of the landscape stems from its variety: "mountain", "forest", "trees", "far green distances". This aspect is further accentuated by the mention of "a constant panorama" which conveys a sense of openness and vastness characteristic of picturesque sceneries.

Interestingly, the favorable perceptions of theTunisian landscape appear to underpin the overarching appraisals made by other writers concerning the country in general. Sladen, for instance, declares that Tunis "is perhaps unrivalled" (Sladen 1906: 611). It is "a fantastic land endowed with natural beauty" (Sladen 1906: 611). Likewise, Miltoun describes Tunis as "a wonderful African Mediterranean setting", "a patent attraction", and "very lovely" (Miltoun 1908: 1); while Graham maintains that the panoramic vista of the whole country is "delightful" (Graham 1908: 111) attributing it to a pervasive "[...] classical charm" (Graham 1908: 111). When grouped together, these quotes exemplify an appreciation of the Tunisian landscape as visually pleasing and artistically attractive. Through the use of superlative language "perhaps unrivalled" as well as the employment of emotive and vivid expressions like "very lovely", "delightful" not only reinforces the aesthetic quality of the landscape but also suggests its capacity to enchant and captivate the observer. This idea is further accentuated by Graham who invokes a sense of timeless beauty through the use of the expression "classical charm" which blends natural beauty with cultural significance.

As a conclusion, throughout this part we have endeavoured to highlight how male writers relied on the aesthetics of the picturesque to construct a positive image of theTunisian landscape. Even though they oscillated between three different gazes, the same literary techniques are followed by nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers, and this led them to come up with the same aestheticized representation of the object under scrutiny. In the

following section, we are going to investigate whether female writers followed the same literary tropes as their male counterparts while portraying the Tunisian landscape.

3.2. The landscape from a female perspective

This part has a bipartite structure. The first one adopts a theoretical approach, aiming to elucidate the broader social context that facilitated the proliferation of female works. It also offers a brief introduction of the travelogues written about Tunis, accompanied by general observations regarding their female writers. It is important to clarify from the outset that this historical background is not addressed for its own sake, but rather because it helps us understand how these factors shaped female writers' literary engagement with the country they visited. In fact, the ideological constraints of Victorian domesticity and the gradual emergence of feminist consciousness—thanks to the legacies of the feminist movement— significantly shaped women's access to travel and modes of expression. As such, understanding this context is essential to grasp how their representations are shaped by a negotiation between inherited gender roles and new forms of expression. So rather than a digression, this contextual framework provides the foundation for analyzing how specific issues discussed in women's travel writing become a space of both aesthetic contemplation and subtle resistance to patriarchal norms.

The second part of this section endeavours to analyze how the Tunisian landscape is positively represented in British female accounts. In fact, the rationale for focusing on women's texts is twofold. First, these literary texts are the product of a very sensitive era which deserves a minute attention. Second, while the existing literature has intensively discussed the texts of male travellers as well the general context surrounding them, female travel accounts have received comparatively scant scholarly attention. This relative gap underscores the need for focusing on female works, hence aiming to contribute to a more balanced understanding of British travel narratives.

3.2.1. Understanding "the angel in the house"/ deconstructing "the angel in the house"

3.2.1.1. Understanding "the angel in the house"

To better situate female travel accounts within their wider social and political context, Sara Mills goes back in history to the fourteenth century to suggest that from this period onwards "western women have written accounts of their travels. Much of this writing, although widely read at the time, has been neglected, and has not been reprinted" (Mills 1991: 127). Accordingly, "history has been traditionally written as "his-story" (Gondal 2018: 20) leaving female writers out. Historical accounts written from male perspectives, "have overlooked the important contributions of women in all fields." (Gondal 2018: 20). This is what led, according to Mills, to an overwhelming tradition of "reading women's writing as trivial or as marginal to the mainstream" (Mills 1991: 61). Joanne Lee shares the same point of view with Mills and Gondal as she argues that "the archetypal traveller within the Western canon has consistently been portrayed as a male figure: a daring and heroic figure who overcomes daunting perils and obstacles with skill, ingenuity and courage." (Lee 2007: 22-23). She finds out that in literary accounts, more often than not, "it is the male who leaves the familiar environment of the home and moves out in search of the exotic and unfamiliar." (Lee 2007: 22-23). The female figure, however, is usually represented as "being confined to the familiar and domestic sphere where she waits patientlyfor the man to return." (Lee 2007: 22-23) Karen Lawrence in *Penelope Voyages* (1994) further reinforces this claim by contending that "women in narratives serve as the symbolic embodiment of home, as in the case of Penelope." (Lawrence, as cited in Lee 2007: 22-23). Likewise, Virginia Woolf sheds light on to the position of women in early nineteenth-century England, asserting that "it was impossible for a woman to go about alone. She never travelled; she never drove through London in an omnibus or had luncheon in a shop by herself." (Woolf, as cited in Lee 2007: 22-23).

Actually, the rigidity of the Victorian society not only contributed in fuelling this tradition, but also increased the restrictions on women's movements and freedom of expression. One of the prevailing ideologies that dominated the eighteenth century and persisted into the nineteenth century was that of domesticity. To a large extent, "a Victorian woman was required to obey patriarchal imperatives and to avoid expressing her own mind" (Woolf 2008: 357). This is what drives many scholars to describe the Victorian society as

patriarchal per se, built upon phallocentric rules, viz, the separate spheres' ideology of gender roles. That very ideology implies that men and women are exclusively confined to two separate spheres: the public sphere for men and the private realm for women. Carl Thompson explains further this idea by suggesting that "the public world of politics, the market and the workplace was the location of […] male activities, while the private world of home andfamily encapsulated the Christian virtues and the morality of personal relationships" (Thompson 1989: 8).

Relying on this gendered separation, women were supposed to content themselves with the private sphere of home and domesticity, hence a sole role was attributed to them, which was that of the "Angel[s] in the House" (Woolf 2008: 357). According to Virginia Woolf, the "angel in the house" was not "expected to be intellectually, socially, or economically independent". Instead, she had to "sympathize with the minds or wishes of others" (Woolf 2008: 357). Indeed, many Victorian widely-known public figures were ardent supporters of the ideology of separate spheres and the image of the "Angel in the house". For instance, the Victorian writers, John Ruskin and Coventry Patmore, promote in their writings "a sweet, genuine, submissive, supportive ideal of Victorian womanhood" (Ruskin & Patmore, as cited in Stearnes 2007: 3). Such a popular and dominant ideology prompted Walter Houghton to discuss in his work, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, the Victorian construction of the "ideal woman". According to the overwhelming view, she should be the "submissive wife, whose purpose in existing was to love, honour, obey, and amuse—her lord and master—to manage his household and bring up his children" (Houghton 1957: 348). Yet, this image of the "Angel in the house" was challenged thanks to a wave of social and political changes.

3.2.1.2. Deconstructing "the angel in the house"

Sweeping political changes started to take place worldwide persistently asking for women's equal rights as men. In the US, for example, the 1840's was very significant because of the emergence of the women rights' movement. In fact, both the "Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 and the resulting Declaration of Sentiments claimed for women the principles of liberty and equality expounded in the American Declaration of Independence" (Freedman 2001: 2). In Britain, also, the 1840's witnessed "the emergence of women's suffrage movement" (Freedman 2001: 2). But even before that, Jane freedman argues that "women had been writing about the inequalities and injustices in women's social condition and campaigningto change it" (Freedman 2001: 2). To a large extent, they were influenced by the legacies of the 1789 French Revolution which is often considered as "the arena in which the first concerted demands for women's rights were made" (Freedman 2001: 2).

This had a remarkable impact on the British philosopher and writer Mary Wollstonecraft who is widely considered as one of the leading advocates of women's rights. The publication of her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 is "widely recognized as the first substantial and systematic feminist treatise" (Freedman 2001: 2). Gradually, and thanks to all these revolutionary events, British women started to gain more and more public recognition especially after the passage of "the 1918 Representation of the People Act, granting the vote to women over the age of 30 who owned houses" (Pande 2018: 2). A decade later, "it was extended to all women over eighteen" (Pande 2018: 2).

These unprecedented changes in women's status were taken by many historians to be the embodiment of the first wave of feminism. In general terms, feminism, as a critical theory, comprises a whole range of social, political, and cultural movements, that address gender inequalities, stress the importance of rendering women visible to the world scene, and advocate equal rights for women. Rekha Pande argues that "any basic definition of Feminism or Feminisms can start with the assertion that at the center of feminism is the concerns for women's subordinate status in society and with the discrimination encountered by women because of their sex" (Pande 2018: 2). Amanullah Gondal shares the same point of view with Pande, asserting that "[…] a broad understanding of feminism includes the acting, speaking, writing, and advocating on behalf of women's issues and rights and identifying injustice to females in the social status quo (Gondal 2018: 55). He goes on to add that "feminism is both

an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms" (Gondal 2018: 120).

If we go back to the roots of the term feminism, Pande finds out that the women's movement is a much earlier phenomenon, whereas the term feminism is considered as a modern one. According to him, feminism seems "to have been first used in 1871 in a French medical text to describe a cessationin development of the sexual organs and characteristics in male patients who are perceived as suffering from feminization of their bodies" (Pande 2018: 2). The term was then used by the French writer Alexandre Dumas "to describe women who behaved in a supposedly masculine way" (Pande 2018: 2). In England, "the Oxford English Dictionary lists 1894 for the first appearance of "feminist" and 1895 for "feminism" (Gondal 2018: 55).

If taken away from the above-mentioned medical realm, feminism in "political terms was first used to describe a civilization of women" (Fraisse, as cited in Gondal 2018: 54). Within this political context, feminism as a movement is recognized for having three different waves.

"The first wave took place mainly in Britain and the USA and occurred during the1880s and the 1920s" (Gondal 2018: 58). As previously expounded, the seeds of this wave trace their origins to the eighteenth-century, thanks to the legacies of the French Revolution which paved the way for the emergence of this first wave of feminism.

The second wave of feminism—which started in the 1960's and 1970's—was not only interested in promoting the rights of women in the political realm but also in the in the "areas of family, sexuality and work" (Pande 2018: 2). One of its main objectives was to secure social equality regardless of sex. According to Pande, this second wave of feminism "has existed continuously since then, and continues to coexist with what is termed third-wave Feminism" (Pande 2018: 2).

The third wave of feminism began in the 1990's and according to many scholars (Pande 2018) and (Gondal 2018), it continues up to the present. One of its goals is "to challenge or avoid what it deems the second-wave's 'essentialist' definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasized the experiences of upper middle class white women" (Pande 2018: 3).

Going back to the late eighteenth and early twentieth century Britain, it was not surprising, then, that the ideal of "the angel in the house" started to be replaced by its antithesis: the image of the "New Woman." Houghton defines it as "a liberated woman who

sought her own career, her own rights, and a public presence separate from her roles within the home as wife and mother" (Houghton 1957: 348). In fact, the emergence of this new image by the mid-nineteenth century was facilitated by political changes and improved transportation. Indeed, the late eighteenth and early twentieth-centuries witnessed a kind of "political stability following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars" (Chouchene 2020: 279).

Besides, in the nineteenth century, the British empire reached its zenith. As such, both men and women had the opportunity to travel and contribute in enhancing the British imperial objectives in their own ways. It also coincided with "the advent of new means of transport such as railway travel and steamships" (Chouchene 2019: 32) as well as the flourishing of tourism thanks to Cook's well-organized trips. In this regard, Jennifer Speake acknowledges that "by providing escorted and lower-cost journeys, and taking care of all the mundane and intimidating details of travel, Cook made large strides towards the democratization of travel" (Speake 2003: 279). Consequently, these changes facilitated to a large extent the movement of women to different parts of the world and ultimately "fuelled up the Victorian gender revolution" (Simour 2020: 3). This means that the New Woman of this century "no longer contented herself with the domestic life"; but rather "she engaged in adventure and exploration" (Simour 2020: 3), which helped in constructing a new British female self.

Joanne Lee advances a comparable argument, noting that with the British Empire reaching its zenith in the nineteenth century, opportunities for travel expanded significantly for both men and women. "Women travelled as wives of diplomats and soldiers, others as independent travellers, as tourists, explorers and scientists." (Lee 2007: 23-24). In a similar vein, Mary Morris, in her article On Women and Journeys, reflects on these changing social and political realities that have made travel more accessible to women. The starting point of her reflection is John Gardner's view that "there are only two plots in literature: you go on a journey or the stranger comes to town." (Gardner, as cited in Lee 2007: 22-23). According to Morris, for many years "women were consigned to a position of powerlessness in which the journey was denied them." (Gardner, as cited in Lee 2007: 22-23). As such, their only option was to wait for the stranger to come. But thanks to the unprecedented changes in women's status, "the other half of the plot is open to women: we can go on a journey or we can be the stranger who comes to town." (Gardner, as cited in Lee 2007: 22-23). This transformation

which disrupted traditional views paved the ground for the construction of the British female self.

3.2.1.3. Constructing the British female self

In order to transcend the domestically imposed status of the "inferior Other", women turned to travel and travel writing as powerful instruments of self-assertion. On the one hand, this served as a means to escape the rigidity of Victorian society; on the other, it contributed to shaping the image of the new liberated woman. Ultimately, this led to the emergence of a substantial body of women's travel writing, demonstrating that a significant number of women not only challenged entrenched social conventions but also overcame numerous obstacles. Casey Blanton comments on this issue, highlighting that "many of these women spent their youths dutifully caring for husbands or ailing parents. But when the gates of the enclosed garden are thrown open, a desire for wild travel commands the rest of their lives" (Blanton 1997: 45). Thanks to travel and writing, then, these women travellers transgressed "spatial boundaries of gender, power, and patriarchy in the colonies that would have seemed impossible in the metropolitan centres (Lorcin, as cited in Simour 2020: 3). As such, they gained "more social power as they entered the male-dominated sphere of colonial travel and exploration." (Simour 2020: 3).

Crucial to note that the ideology of nineteenth century travel became synonymous with political as well as personal freedom. In reference to the former, Inderpal Grewal, in her book *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (1996), argues that travel meant political freedom "because its romantic discourse enabled them to label their escape from some domestic gender constraints: freedom" (Grewal 1996: 79). With regards to personal freedom, the very fact of travelling and writing about travel enabled women to establish "a discourse that lies counter to male definitions of women's roles as household angels confined in the domestic space and deprived of power", thereby succeeding "to carve her place in the public sphere of knowledge and power" (Siber 2019: 63). If grouped together, it could be argued that "travel represented an opportunity to escape traditional gender boundaries: she has the time to reflect…to understand herself more fully and perhaps even to experience a new-found freedom" (Korte, as cited in Matos 2018: 43).

As a consequence, by the mid-nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, many British women travellers not only deconstructed the ideal of the "angel in the house" but

also "broke out of the Victorian domestic sphere in order to venture into the wider world as self-acknowledged travellers" (Worley 1986: 40). Hence, it could be argued that "travel literature and empire provided the impetus necessary for a Victorian sexual revolution"out of which emerged the image of "The New Woman" (Stearnes 2007: 8-9). The latter "no longer contented herself with the home and hearth; but she longed for adventure and excitement" (Stearnes 2007: 8-9) with an obvious defiance of patriarchal rules and traditions.

What is worth mentioning is that most of these women travellers were well-educated and came from a wealthy and aristocratic background; hence they were capable of funding their own trips. In spite of that, they could hardly travel on their own because it was considered "as a dangerous and probably licentious endeavour for women to undertake" (Blanton 1997: 44-45). That is why they were often accompanied by a male chaperon, viz, their husbands, relatives, or a group of tourists. In this way, it could be inferred that these women travellers "conformed to Victorian gender ideals while enjoying their freedom of movement" (Seddiki 2019: 110). More importantly, their travel narratives were considered as "a tool of self-expression and as a way of constructing and negotiating their gendered identities" (Seddiki 2019: 110).

Read in conjunction with what has been highlighted, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women travel writers succeeded not only in gaining fame and popularity, but also in "inspir[ing] young women to be daring […] by writing of the dangerous pleasures they experienced while abroad" (Stearnes 2007: iii). Whether they indented it or not, "women travel writers" not only "reshaped England's image of womanhood" (Stearnes 2007: iii); but also "inspired women to escape the tradition-bound domestic sphere in order to actively participate in empire building" (Stearnes 2007: 18). For a concrete articulation of this stream of thought, the following part will provide general introductory notes on British female travellers as well as their published accounts about nineteenth-and early twentieth-century Tunis.

3.2.2. The general background of females' literary corpus about Tunis

The works of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century female writers serve as evidence of their destruction of the ideal of "the angel in the house" and their success in overcoming the prejudices related to this prescribed social convention. Actually, the Orient provided these women with the opportunity to move beyond their traditional roles since in the Oriental setting the lines between the public and private spheres were blurred and destroyed. Despite this unprecedented "freedom", these women were somewhat restrained since they were under the obligation of travelling with a husband or a male relative because travelling solo was largely frowned upon at that time. For instance, Emily Ward was accompanied by her brother Lord Leigh and another friend, and Lady Warren came to Tunis in 1922 with her husband.

In her 2019 article British Women Travellers in Tunisia: Representations of the Land and the People (1850-1930), Amina Marzouk Chouchene explains that "these British female travellers were triggered by various reasons for travelling to Tunis" (Chouchene 2019: 31). Some travelled for health reasons, others to discover what is typically Oriental, and another group was determined to escape the gloomy atmosphere of London.

Starting with the first group, many British women came to Tunis for therapeutic reasons as "part of a well-established practice of British travel for health" (Chouchene 2020: 282). Indeed, it was a common practice among nineteenth-century British physicians "to recommend travel to foreign climates to patients suffering from physiological or nervous ailments" (Chouchene 2020: 282). Lara Marks and Michael Worboys elucidate this idea more effectively by acknowledging that

> The notion that the body was influenced by its environment was commonplace in medicine and wider Western culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It followed that a change of air or travel to a different area were ways to improve health, and doctors tried to match a person’s constitution and illness with potential healing environments (Marks & Worboys 1997: 8).

In light of the above quote, the Mediterranean turns out to be "a popular destination for many Victorians seeking health and repose" (Chouchene 2020: 283). Similarly, Vladimir Jankovic echoes Chouchene's perspective, arguing that British women visited Mediterranean

countries "in quest of physical health, mental diversion, and rejuvenation of sprits and stamina" (Jankovic 2006: 271). This was exactlythe case of the Baroness Mary Herbert who, after her 1871 trip to Algeria, "visited Tunisia to cure her rheumatism" (Herbert 1871: 3). In this regard, Herbert postulates that her trip was ignited by a desire "to test the efficacy of certain warm springs, which had been strongly recommended to [her] by a Paris doctor for rheumatism" (Herbert 1871: 3). It is in this context that Adel Manai points out that "by thelate nineteenth century there was a common belief that Tunisia would be a popular winter health resort" (Manai, as cited in Chouchene 2020: 286).

Conversely, Norma Lorimer and Mrs. Greville-Nugent came to Tunis in order to experience the Orientalist aspect of Eastern countries. In the preface of her travel account *By the Waters of Carthage* (1906), Lorimer declares that her trip was motivated byan interest in "Mohamedan countries" and her travelogue endeavors to describe all aspects of life "in the most Orientalcitywhich can be visited" (Lorimer 1906: viii). Likewise, Mrs. Greville-Nugent openly expresses her attraction to the Oriental architecture where "here and there", there is "a round cupola marking the grave of some Moslem saint, or a minaret whence the mueddin proclaims the Allah il Allah" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 2). She was also allured by "the strange monotonous music [that] strikes the ear and the wealth of wondrously harmonized color [that] delights the eye" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 2).

The third reason for which British female travellers visited Tunis was a romantic one: to escape the murky atmosphere of an industrial context and enjoy a lost authenticity. Chouchene (2019) finds out that writers like Mrs. Greville-Nugent visited Tunis in order "to leave the gloomy atmosphere of England in search of other places where there was sun, fantastic scenery, a fine climate, and an impressive natural beauty" (Chouchene 2019: 32). This idea is evident in Greville-Nugent's quote, where she expresses a desire "to soar over the chimney tops of smoky London till she found herself far South where the skies are blue and the roofs of cities white and flat" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 2). Besides, Chouchene (2020) recognizes that Greville-Nugent came also to Tunis in order to "enjoy the beauty and authenticity of times past" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 283). In line with this perspective, the female traveller observes:

> I can, if you will take my hand, lead you through these cities where the women walk veiled and trousered […] Pluck a few flowers with me from the soil of this marvelous Africa, that so, amid the mirk of dire December days in England, you may yet know that beauty and la joie de vivre are not wholly things of the past (Greville-Nugent 1894: 2).

All the above quotes serve to illustrate the various reasons why British women travelled to North African States in general and Tunis in particular. In the period between the nineteenth- and earlytwentieth-centuries, it could be argued that Tunis represented one of the ideal destinations for those who were seeking to enjoy the mild and warm weather as well as experiencing the charms of the East. In the case of female travellers, it was also an opportunity to dismantle the pejorative stereotypes attributed to them.

What is noticeable is that even though most of them journeyed with a male relative, they recurrently focused on their own capability to overcome the rough conditions of the journey. According to Mouloud Siber, "this is meant to undercut the prejudice of moral (emotional) and physical weakness attributed to women" (Siber 2019: 67). That is why many female writers—intentionally—narrate the difficulties that confronted them while travelling to the Barbary States. In a similar vein, Inderpal Grewal (1996) claims that since "English women who travelled to the colonies were perceived as intrepid pioneers", their travel accounts "revealed the dangers and discomforts they had to undergo" (Grewal 1996:61). Seen from this perspective, Nesbitt recurrently expresses her obvious uneasiness with her travel conditions. In her book *Algeria and Tunis: Painted and Described* (1906), she asserts that "the railway carriages with their narrow seats and hard cushions" are but a proof of "sheer discomfort", "the unfrequented route and the dearth of travellers", the "wide open or shut windows" (Nesbitt 1906: 193) made the journey difficult and the travelling conditions appalling. Despite that, she manages to visit the interior regions of Tunis and to offer her readers with a detailed account of her trip.

Sara Mills (1991) concurs with this point, emphasizing that although there are "frequent allusion to the hardships of the journey, there are repeated references to the narrator's ability to overcome them" (Mills 1991: 141). Similarly, F.D. Bridges in her *Journal of a Lady's Travels Round the World* (1883) recounts the difficulties she faced while travelling to the East like for instance "fever attacks […] the unsatisfactory condition of roads, and the alternation of hot and cold weather" (Bridges, as cited in Siber 2019: 67). Interestingly, however, "she

always manages to get over them because she has been endowed with moral power and physical endurance" (Bridges, as cited in Siber 2019: 67).

It is note worthy that the emphasis on travel hardships serves two distinct objectives.The first one has to do with credibility and authenticity. In this regard, Mills contends that it has become a common feature in female travel accounts "to describe the physical difficulties of the journey because they might run the risk of not being believed" (Mills 1991: 141).

The second one is related to self-fulfillment since female writers endeavored to deconstruct the blatant Victorian stereotype of the "angel in the house" and construct instead "an image of herself beyond the conventional domestic sphere, physically and morally disposed to cope with adversity in foreign—and often hostile—lands, and knowledgeable enough to educate her readers on different cultures" (Siber 2019: 69). Besides, this was done intentionally to prove that they are able—like their male counterparts—"to withstand the rigors of life" in a different, challenging context (Grewal 1996: 61). A similar view is shared by Floriane Reviron (2009) who argues that the female traveller, through her travel accounts, vied "for recognition as man's equal and to reassert her femininity" (Reviron 2009: 72). So, by taking these extended trips and writing about them, female writers proved to be more intrepid in a male dominated-realm. For a concrete articulation of these different ideas, the subsequent section aims at analyzing how female writers positively described and represented the Tunisian landscape in their works.

3.2.2.1. Nineteenth-century views

Female writers sought to find a refuge in natural landscapes still unspoiled by the effects of the industrial Revolution. This is what explains their use of "the aesthetic picturesque gaze" (Edney 1997: 54) while describing the Tunisian landscape.

Upon their arrival to Tunis, their primary focus is directed towards the natural vistas surrounding them. For example, as soon as as she arrived to Tunis, Lady Herbert delineates the panoramic vista as follows: "the view from thence of the whole line of coast, with the range of mountains beyond, and the sparkling Mediterranean, was wonderfully beautiful" (Herbert 1872: 259). Clear as it may seem, Herbert's description reflects not only "the aesthetic picturesque gaze" but also indicates a deep connection to the natural world. As far as the latter is concerned, Herbert seems to be attentive to the natural details around her: "the whole line of coast", "the range of mountains", "the Mediterranean". With regards to "the aesthetic picturesque gaze", her use of specific adjectives like "sparkling", "wonderfully beautiful"conveys a profound appreciation for the described scenery. Her focus on "the whole line of coast" and "the range of mountains" as well as her mention of "the sparkling Mediterranean" suggests a picturesque view that encompasses dynamism, depth, and vitality. This unparalleled beauty of the landscape leads her not only to describe Tunis as "a land of beautiful colours" (Herbert 1872: 264), but also to recommend it as one of the best touristic destinations: "I can conceive no more enjoyable spot in the summer-time than this sea shore with its big shady rocks, beautiful sands, lovely shells and glorious blue sky" (Herbert 1872: 258-259). It goes without saying, then, that such a vivid description, especially with the author's specific choice of words like "beautiful", "lovely", "glorious", enhances the appeal of Tunis as a location for leisure and relaxation.

Similar to Herbert, Mrs. Greville-Nugent resorted to the natural world in order to mitigate the feelings of alienation experienced in the modern industrialized world. This iswhat explains her aspiration "to soar over the chimney tops of smoky London" till she found herself far South "where the skies are blue […] and where a wealth of wondrously harmonized color delights the eye" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 2).

On the one hand, it is obvious from this passage that the writer wants to escape the smog and gloom of London in favor of a place where the sky is blue and the colours are vibrant[9]. On the other hand, the quote captures an explicit opposition between two different environments: the polluted city scape of London and the "wonderful" land of Tunis. From this opposition, we can infer that the author, weary of the oppressive aspects of urban life, longs instead for freedom, liberation, and elevation. Peter Whitfield, in *Travel Writing: A Literary History* (2011), argues that travellers' urgent need to get away from this modern life could be explained by the fact that "Europeans have created a complex, pressurized, dehumanized society in which the need to escape has been endemic" (Whitfield 2011: 282). As such, nature emerges as the only refuge capable of curing the unhappiness experienced by those living amid the bitterness of urban life.

What is also important to mention is that the experience of open, limitless, and infinite landscape "offered the woman traveller a rare chance to enjoy pure being" (Andras 2006: para.13). For Carmen Andras, "this sense of new being" was concretely felt "in their encounter with mountains and water in its most dramatic forms" (Andras 2006: para.13). One of the clearest expressions of this idea is found in Greville's description:

> The scenery as one casts along from Bizerta to Tunis is magnificent: bold cliffs with mountains in the background and occasionally a rocky islet upstanding in the blue sea. Nestling in the shadow of the hills lies the town of Suleiman, which appears, as seen from the distance, completely Arab, with its high walls and minarets; a perfect little gem. (Greville 1894: 139).

Interestingly, Greville-Nugent's quote captures the majesty of the landscape by involving key themes associated with the Romantic Movement, namely the notion of the sublime and the picturesque. First of all, the qualification of the scenery from Bizerta to Tunis as "magnificent" evokes the Romantic notion of finding pleasure and aspiration in the natural realm. Besides, the reference to "bold cliffs" and "mountains in the background" suggests a deep sense of grandeur and sublimitywhich are both keyelements in the Romantic field. The notion of the sublime is also caught in the expression "a rocky islet upstanding in the blue sea" which invites the reader to scrutinize the awe-inspiring majesty of the natural landscape. In

[9] This longing for escape recalls Charles Dickens's description of Coketown in *Hard Times (1854)*, where he evokes the pollution and grey atmosphere of industrial English towns.

fact, the contrast made between the vastness of the open sea and the smallness of the solitary rocky islet intensifies the sense of the sublime by highlighting the overwhelming power of nature. In a similar vein, the reference to the town of Suleiman as "completely Arab" with "high walls and minarets" sheds light on one the central elements in Romanticism which is the idealization of exotic settings, as they are viewed as more genuine and authentic than the industrialized urbancities. Lastly, the expression "perfect little gem" embodies the picturesque aesthetic by suggesting a scene of extreme beauty and attractiveness.

To conclude this part, it could be advocated that the common thread that unites British female views during the nineteenth-century is their deep affinity for virgin and unspoiled natural landscapes.The latter turn out to be not only pleasurable sights for female viewers, but also a refuge from the encroachments of industrialization. By relying on their vivid descriptions, these writers epitomize a sense of aesthetic pleasure while simultaneously elucidating a longing for a sense of renewal and existential fulfillment. In the subsequent section, the emphasis is going to be directed towards a thorough examination of the perspectives embraced by twentieth-century female writers regarding the Tunisian landscape to evaluate the extent to which they conform with or diverge from those views articulated in the nineteenth-century.

3.2.2.2. Twentieth-century views

Relying on our examination of various twentieth-century female travel accounts, it has been noticed that most of these writers focused also on Edney's concept of the "aesthetic picturesque gaze" in order to accentuate the beauty of the Tunisian landscape.

Starting with overarching observations, Lady Warren, upon her arrival, claims that "Tunis and its bay in front of us was a cheering sight" (Warren 1923: 114). Likewise, Stewart Erskine offers her readers a description loaded with flattering expressions: "as the train steams slowly on towards Tunis- the beauty and fertility of the country was striking" (Erskine 1925: 12). In another instance, she embellishes her account with an appealing description of the Tunisian landscape: "We took the train for Tunis: the landscape seen from the window was painted in tender shades of lavender and pale blue as regards to the distant range of mountains, with a foreground of young green corn amongst which were masses of wild flowers" (Erskine 1925: 11). Even though this illustration has its origin in an observation from the window of the train, Erskine succeeds in transforming the beauty of the surrounding landscape into vivid verbal descriptions, thereby demonstrating her awareness of her role as an artist "to collect moments of epiphany and thus reveal the light shining through the quotidian" (Meillon 2019: 130). At a textual level, her description creates a visually pleasing image that aligns with the aesthetic of the picturesque. For example, the reference to "a foreground of young green corn" interspersed with "masses of wild flowers" adds depth and richness to the described scene. Besides, the writer’s focus on pleasant visual elements suchas "flowers", "mountains", and delightful colors: like "tender shades of lavender", "pale blue" conveys softness and delicacy which appeals to the readers' senses and imagination. Analytically speaking, this quote operates at two main levels. The first one is related to the writer's focus on pleasant details which Edmund Burke explains by the intimate relationship between beauty and smoothness. According to him, "smoothness is a quality so essential to beauty. […] In trees and flowers, smooth leaves are beautiful; smooth slopes of earth in gardens; smooth streams in the landscape" (Burke 1757: 104). The second level suggests that female travellers have an intimate relationship with the natural landscape which is discernible from "their valorization of the detail" (Gilroy, as cited in Andras 2006: para.12). Undeniably, then, Erskine’s illustration emerges to be polyphonic and mellifluous as it echoes the sounds and images of nature giving the impression to readers that "nature speaks" (Starhawk 2004: 19). Enthralled by the aesthetic allure of the country, Erskine openly invites "lovers of

beautiful scenery" to come and visit Tunis as "they can find joys without end in this oasis" (Erskine 1925: 207).

Interestingly, although the writers mentioned above included minute descriptions of the Tunisian landscape, Frances Nesbitt and Emily Ward stand out as particularly notable for their meticulous and thorough depictions of the country's natural sceneries.

Starting with Nesbitt, she is impressed by the exceptional beauty of Tunisian lakes, bays, and lagoons. For instance, she describes the tiny lakes as "calm as glass and almost more definitely blue than the Mediterranean" (Nesbitt 1906: 183). Additionally, she contends that "the view over the sunny terraces to the wondrous blue of the bay and the soft green ofthe olives is beautiful" (Nesbitt 1906: 196). But the most detailed illustration is discerned in her description of the lagoon of the Bahira:

> The water shimmers in the sunshine and the town of La Goulette gleans likewise and so do the houses scattered alongthe coast. The slopes of the hilland the whole of the plain towards the sea are covered as it ware with cloth scarlet and gold and green, poppies and marigolds and a waving corn, in masses such as can rarely be found elsewhere. (Nesbitt 1906: 196).

Based on the above quotes, one of the overarching observations that could be immediately deduced is that Nesbitt succeeds in transforming "sites into sights", using the expression of Derek Gregory (Gregory 1998: 117). This was principally achieved through the use of vivid imageryto describe for example the smoothness of lakes "calmas glass"or to stress their blue color which is found to be more striking and intense than the Mediterranean itself. Similarly, Nesbitt employs sensory imagery: "sunny terraces", "the water shimmers in the sunshine" to emphasize the brightness and vibrancy of the overall atmosphere. She also uses expressions like "wondrous blue of the bay", "soft green of the olives" to evoke a sense of aesthetic appreciationfor the harmonious composition of the natural environment around her. Added to the sensory imagery, Nesbitt relies on the visual imagery when she mentions "poppies", "marigolds", and "waving corn" to paint a scene of natural beauty, abundance, and fertility. Obvious as it may seem, Nesbitt blends various elements and imagery in order to paint a vivid picture of the Tunisian landscape.This not only conveys her keen observational skills, but

also shows her ability to communicate the beauty of the landscape through rich descriptive language, thus invitingher readers to visualize and appreciate the depicted scenes around her.

Attracted by the beauty of "the smiling landscape" (Nesbitt 1906: 120), Nesbitt also seizes the opportunity of illustrating the natural scenes while travelling through the interior parts of Tunis. On her way to Sousse, she claims that: "The route is pretty. The line skirts the edge of the bay, passing through […] places full of sunshine and flowers […] The plains are flooded with glory" (Nesbitt 1906: 194). Similarly, on her way to Sfax, she asserts that: "Nothing is visible but a wide plain, literally carpeted with wild flowers, mostly common ones, but exquisite from pure abundance of colour" (Nesbitt 1906: 198). In another related instance, she avers that:

> The uplands are covered by a cloud of grey-green olives, some of them age-old trees, whose gnarled and twisted trunks look silvery against the deeper tones of the leaves, the bright green of the long grass, and the purple and blue of the mountains beyond, under the trees the flowers of the asphodel shine starlike. (Nesbitt 1906: 119-120)

Obvious as it may seem, theses quotes capture a specific aesthetic experience along a scenic route.They include harmonious and visually pleasant imagery like "the route is pretty", "places full of sunshine and flowers", "literally carpeted with wild flowers", "the uplands are covered by a cloud of grey-green olives". The use of such expressions serves to portray the landscape as adorned with a profusion of colorful blooms. Besides, in the first quote, Nesbitt's reference to the line "skirt[ing] the edge of the bay" evokes not only a sense of proximity to nature's majesty, but also conjures images of coastal beauty and serenity. In the second one, Nesbitt further emphasizes the primacy of the natural environment in her field of vision by stating that "nothing is visible but a wide plain". Additionally, the characterization of "wild flowers" as "mostly common ones" highlights the recognition of beauty in the ordinary, evoking that even apparently mundane aspects of the landscape can possess an aesthetic appeal when observed with a discerning eye.This aspect aligns with "the aesthetic picturesque gaze" which often celebrates the charm of everyday scenes. In the third passage, Nesbitt evokes a sensory experience through the mention of "gnarled and twisted trunks" of the olive trees and the "starlike shine" of the flowers. This multisensory approach—mingling visual elements with sensory perceptions—not only enhances the immersive nature of the aesthetic

picturesque gaze, but also encourages readers' engagement with the depicted landscape. Overall, it could be claimed that Nesbitt's depictions operate at three different but inter-related levels. First, they foreground the visual allure of the landscape. Second, they demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to the aesthetic qualities of the natural environment. Third, they echo the emotional resonance elicited by its contemplation.

To further enhance her physical and emotional entanglement with the surrounding natural landscape, Nesbitt engages in describing the beauty of some Tunisian towns like Sidi Bou Saied and Sousse. Starting with the former, she claims that:

> The small town is piled up on the highest point of the hill in true Oriental fashion, and front the light house on the summit the view is superb, with the Mediterranean almost surrounding the cape, The whole site of the ancient city is visible, from the rocky headlands in front to the distant town of La Goulette on the promontory that separates the open sea from the lake; a wide sweep of plain, the many low hills, the Byrsa marked by the whiteness of the new Cathëdral, the whole circle of mountains, the summet villages gleaming at their feet, Tunis, the villas and gardens of La Marsa, the site of Utica, now more desolate than Carthage itself, the beautiful line of cliffs towards Bizerta-all combine to give some idea of the possibilities and beauties of ancient Carthage. (Nesbitt 1906: 189)

In this excerpt, Nesbitt offers a detailed description that combines both the aesthetic aspects of the city along its historical significance. First of all, the depiction of the town as "piled up on the highest point of the hill in true Oriental fashion" not only gives it a sense of cultural authenticity but also a touch of grandeur and exoticism which further enhances its aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, the reference to "the light house on the summit" offering a "superb" view as well as "the Mediterranean almost surrounding the cape"emphasizes, on the one hand, the visual splendor of the landscape; and on the other, conjures images of expansive horizons and natural beauty. Of equal importance, the detailed enumeration of various landmarks from "the ancient city" to "the distant towns and villages" provides an inclusive panoramic image of the landscape.This panoramic vista encompasses various visual elements such as "rocky headlands","low hills", "mountains" and architectural structures that add a

sense of depth and complexity to the aesthetic experience. Nesbitt also highlights how the beauty of natural elements—"the beautiful line of cliffs", "the whole circle of mountains"—together with other surrounding sites like La Goulette, La Marsa are mingled to add a layer of aesthetic appreciation and cultural richness to the described scene. With regards to her description of the city of Sousse, she declares that:

> The old town stands on a gentle rise beside the waters of the Mediterranean, a complete survival from the Middle Ages. Not grey and time worn like our northern strong holds, but radiant in the sunshine, a mass of glittering white, crowned and girdled by gold-towers and bastions and crenellated walls, The reflection of these old-world defenses in the calm waters below is almost as brilliant as the reality (Nesbitt 1906: 194).

Then she goes on noting that "from every side Sousse presents a striking picture, and from the towers of the Casbah the view over the sunny terraces to the wondrous blue of the bay and the soft green of the olives is beautiful" (Nesbitt 1906: 196). Clear as it may seem, from the standpoint of its Mediterranean position, Sousse is aesthetically portrayed by Nesbitt with an emphasis on its historical significance as well as its visual allure. First, there is a hint to its historical richness, "a complete survival from the Middle Ages". Second, both quotes reflect a subjective perspective with the narrator expressing personal appreciation for the beauty of Sousse. This is evident in her use of adjectives like "striking", "beautiful", "soft", "radiant", "brilliant", and "wondrous" which mingle with other spatial elements to render the object under description as panoramic as possible. All these positive depictions are summed up in her concluding statement regarding the innate splendor of Tunis: "Tunis certainly might be a diamond in an emerald frame" (Nesbitt 1906: 173). From this assertion, we can confirm that Nesbitt portrays Tunis as a gem of rare beauty: "diamond", "emerald" set amidst a stunning and exceptional natural backdrop.

Building upon the preceding, three elements could be deduced. The first one is visual wherein the analyzed quotes represent a pictorial landscape vividly characterized by vibrant and colourful sceneries and backdrops. The second element is textual. In fact, through these quotes, Nesbitt has succeeded in transforming the natural sight into a polyphonic and hybrid space where "hills", "mountains', "cliffs", "sea', "lake" mingle in the shape of a colourful epiphany that transforms nature into "an audible song forever in the making" (Meillon 2019:

133).Thanks to this polyphonic space, the reader experiences "a physical relationship with the text that connects" (Meillon 2019: 128) his mind to the natural world. Lastly, a personal element is articulated positing that Nesbitt displays an intimate relationship with the natural landscape and this reflects her "corporal psychic entanglements within the Earth" (Meillon 2019: 114).

As far as Ward's views are concerned, we might contend that her reliance on the aesthetics of the picturesque serves mainly to transform Tunis into "a picturesque dreamscape" (Burks 2006: 18-19). This is discernible in her descriptions which are filled with compliments and admiration for the unspoiled Tunisian landscape. As a starting point, she declares that "our journey led us among a wonderful and varied scenery" (Ward 1920: v-vi). Then, she adds

> It was sunny and pleasant; we skimmed along by the side of large lakes, bordered by bold hills […] we were driving through smiling uplands and green valleys. We had a picnic half-way, among flocks of nice black goats, whose musical bells were tinkling different notes as they wandered about (Ward 1920: 184).

Both passages exhibit elements characteristic of the picturesque aesthetic. Initially, Ward demonstrates a tendency to imbue the landscape under scrutiny with elaborate descriptions in order "to convey its material and symbolic richness" (Spurr 1993: 18). These descriptions include vivid adjectives such as: "wonderful", "varied", "pleasant", "smiling" which not only allude to the apparent beauty of the scenery but also to its abundance and richness. Furthermore, her depiction of the weather as "sunny and pleasant" sets a positive tone, emblematic of the ideal conditions of picturesque scenes. Similarly, the inclusion of "smiling uplands and green valleys" serves to portray a serene and inviting scene. This is further enhanced by the presence of "flocks of nice black goats" and their "musical bells", which not only adds a pastoral element tothe scene, but also paints a visually harmonious and pleasing landscape that evokes an emotional response from the observer. This aligns with the view that female writers portray the natural scenery "not according to its physical characteristics, but according to its evocative power"[10] (Bardet 2019: 154: my translation).

[10] [...] non d'après ses caractéristiques physiques, mais selon son pouvoir évocateur.

That is why the described landscape emerges to be "a reflection of the soul" more than a depiction of "a concrete reality"[11] (Bardet 2019: 154: my translation).

Interestingly, two other fascinating views captured the attention of Ward. The first oneis related to "the sea front" with its "row of majestic palms which always look delightful with the beautiful blue of the sea beyond, and the bright sun shining on the sandy ground" (Ward 19020: 130). The second one refers to a coastal scenery with "a fresh view of perfect beauty" (Ward 1920: 200). According to Ward, this scene epitomizes "a magnificent bit of coast scenery on the grandest scale […] the colour of the rocks, the richness of the vegetation, together with the spring green, made it a drive to be remembered" (Ward 1920: 200). Noteworthy, the above passages pulse with vivid and evocative adjectives such as "magnificent", "majestic", "delightful", "beautiful", "bright ", "perfect", "fresh" that make nature appear as a biotic organism nurturing life through its different components. These descriptions also suggest that the landscape transcends its ordinary beauty to attain a level of "majesty" and "grandeur", which not only inspires profound admiration but also leaves a lasting impression on the observer, which endures beyond the immediate moment: "a drive to be remembered".

Approached from another perspective, the Tunisian landscape also offers an opportunity to experience the picturesque where poetical and dream-like sights mingle to profoundly affect the female traveller. To expand upon this idea, two passages are selected to illustrate how both morning and evening scenes evoke potent emotional responses in the observer:

> At seven in the morning the surrounding mountains looked mysterious in the mist, and the colours were very soft. The drive was interesting as well as beautiful : we noticed quantities of iris stylosa growing wild along the roadside, and wild white clematis in full flower, hanging in rich festoons over the cactus hedges. (Ward 1920: 128)

> The beauty of the scene that evening was wonderful. The lights and shadows, as darkness came on, transformed the lake to fairyland. The sky assumed most glorious colours, seen through the sedges which formed a lace-work across it in the gathering darkness (Ward 1920: 193)

[11] […] L'espace parcouru, plus qu'uneréalité concrète, devient reflet de l'âme.

The first passage elicits simultaneous feelings of awe through the description of the mist-shrouded mountains and appreciation through the narrator's attentive focus on soft colours. The presence of mist shrouding the surrounding mountains creates a sense of "mystery", awe, and wonder. Besides, the characterization of colours as "soft" suggests a quiet atmosphere, entailing feelings of calmness and serenity. Also, the enumeration of various floral species such as "iris stylosa", "wild white clematis", coupled with the portrayal of the drive as "interesting and beautiful" not only attests to the writer's profound affinity with the described landscape, but also underscores the powerful impact nature has on the writer's psyche.

The second quote, however, adopts a more poetic tone, featuring evocative expressions like: "wonderful", "glorious", "fairyland". Besides, the interplay between "lights and shadows" mingle with this poetic language to offer the reader a dream-like sight: "transformed the lake to fairyland". Interestingly, such a dream-like sight has a significant effect on us as readers since it echoes the voice of nature speaking to us through its "numinous light" and "glorious energy" (Meillon 2019: 128).

In other instances, Ward articulates the beauty of the natural landscapes by using the aesthetic vocabulary of the sublime: "the colouring throughout the day was a dream of loveliness […] we drove along the African Corniche, and by the shores of the Mediterranean the beauty of the scenery can only be suggested by one word: superb" (Ward 1920: 199-200). In this quote, the vocabulary of the sublime is evidenced in words like "coloring", "dream", "loveliness", "beauty". Indeed, it should be highlighted that "the sublime moment in a text for the woman traveller is one where the focus is both on the landscape and the emotions which it evokes in the narrator" (Mills, as cited in Andras 2006: para.12). In this case, the sublime moment is reached when Ward uses the word "superb" to wrap up her experience. This also suggests that the evocative power of female travellers' writings resides primarily in the following duality: "the hidden visible and the obvious visible"[12], to borrow René Magritte's phrase. (Magritte, as cited in Besson 2019: 369). By "the obvious visible", Magritte means the concrete physical landscape that surrounds the spectator; and by "the hidden visible "he

[12]"Le visible cache et le visible apparent" (René Magritte,2000,as cited in Besson, 2019: 369): My translation.

targets the intense feelings that the landscape evokes in the spectator. (Magritte, as cited in Besson 2019: 369). Analyzing Ward's quote under this light, it seems that "the obvious visible" is conveyed through the description of the physical landscape as "a dream of loveliness", where as "the hidden visible" is conveyed through the word "superb". As such, the traveller experiences a magical moment of fusion with the natural world that evokes in her both enchantment and delight. In regards to this fusion, the environment and the individual merge into one and create what Jon Rodiek (2003) calls a "mindscape"[13] (Rodiek, as cited in Bardet 2019: 159). And a as a result, this "mindscape" becomes "inseparable from the human perception"[14] (Rodiek, as cited in Bardet 2019: 159: my translation).

To sum up the section about female views, two key ideas could be deduced. The first one pertains to the general pattern that emerges from their texts: female travellers consistently depict the Tunisian landscape as pleasant and attractive. Through a succession of positive portrayals, the natural scenery turns out to be "a picturesque dreamscape" (Burks 2006: 18-19), an image that sharply contrasts with common stereotypical tropes, thereby highlighting the nuanced nature of Orientalist discourse.

Notably, these positive portrayals simultaneously conform to, and diverge from, the views of their male counterparts. First, they align with male depictions because both of them offer an aestheticized representation of the Tunisian landscape. Second, female views differ from male ones in their sole reliance on "the aesthetic picturesque gaze", whereas male travellers not only use the concept of "the scientific gaze" but also exhibit a tendency toward mastery and domination through their employment of "the imperial gaze".

The second idea relates to the emotional and sensory engagement of female travellers with the Tunisian landscape. As Hobsbawm notes, their escape "from the twilit or lamp-lit cocoon of the bourgeois interior into open air is significant" (Hobsbawn 1987: 205). That is why while in Tunis, all of them are principally in search of new picturesque places where amazing sceneries, attractive natural beauty, and a fine climate are the norm. As such, they are mainly attracted to the beauty of the "seaside, plains, mountains, flowers of all kinds, oasis" which make them feel delighted in this "magnificent scenery" where "the sky is blue" and "the

[13] "Un paysage mental" (JonRodiek, as cited in Bardet, 2019:159).

[14] […] Il devient inséparable de la perception humaine. (Jon Rodiek, as cited in Bardet, 2019: 159).

bright sun is shining". They also feel thrilled to be in direct contact with the beauty of the landscape where trees, flowers and birds were surrounding them. This reflects the extent to which female travellers let themselves get transported by the charms of nature. It also conveys their ability to establish a fine thread between what is felt and what is touched, making their narratives abound with vivid and glowing descriptions of the natural scenery. Such glowing descriptions are not but a proof of female writers' capability for vividly "paint[ing] pictures with words, populating the reader's imagination with particular visions of space" (Burks 2006: 19-20).

Taken from a critical angle, such an experience is an opportunity for these travellers to feel liberated from the rigid rules of the Victorian society since even the right to travel is not allowed unless they are accompanied by a husband or a brother. As such, the open, infinite, and limitless natural space offered the woman traveller "a rare chance to enjoy pure being, as well as a means ofself-discovery and self-testing"(Andras 2006: para.13). Hence, places such as mountains, plains and the seaside have "the most emblematic impact" (Andras 2006: para.13) thanks to their spiritual transcending powers. As a consequence, a simple entertaining trip turns out to be a transcendental experience where a new liberated self is tested and discovered thanks to an immediate immersion with natural sceneries.

Turning now to a brief summary of this first part about the positive representation of the Tunisian landscape in British travel accounts, three main elements could be brought to light. First, with the wave of industrialization and urbanization sweeping across Europe, both female and male writers voiced a discontent with this new industrial life. This disillusionment is articulated in their works where they explicitly voiced their desire to escape the murky atmosphere of an industrial context and enjoyed a lost authenticity. Paul Fussel consolidates this idea by asserting that since the Industrial Age, "the travellers' escape […] has been from the ugliness and racket of Western cities, and from factories, parking lots, boring turnpikes, and roadside squalor" (Fussel 1987: 13). Instead, nature emerges to be "an antidote to the ills and excesses of human civilization" (Slovic & Hart 2004: 3). From this emanates their aesthetic representation of the Tunisian landscape and their valorization of virgin places still unaffected by the evils of industrialization. This not only reflects travellers' apprehension of the cityand their yearning for an imagined past where human life was more harmonious. But it also highlights their lamentation of "the desolation of rural life and ethos by the nascent

Industrial Revolution in England and the ruthless urbanization that came in its wake" (Osundare 2019: 42).

As far as the second element is concerned, while comparing male views to their female counterparts, a discernible pattern emerges. First of all, both genders articulated a main focus on "the aesthetic picturesque gaze" by valorizing the beauty and charm of the Tunisian landscape. However, the main distinction between them is caught in their orientation towards the landscape. Whereas female writers exhibit an acute interest in the valorization of every single natural detail surrounding them motivated by a desire for liberation from the evils of industrialization, the portrayals of their male counterparts were also imbued with an "imperial gaze" which is characterized by a tendency to possess and colonize. This might suggest that women's engagement with nature is mainly for nature's sake, whereas males' descriptions are sometimes motivated by colonial purposes, a stream of thought particularly characteristic of the nineteenth-century imperial discourse.

With regards to the last element, it could be inferred that male and female positive representations are entirely opposed to common stereotypes, thus challenging the prevailing view that the Oriental landscape uniformly embodies bareness and unattractiveness.[15] Moreover, it underscores the travellers' departure from conventional colonial tropes in order to celebrate the beauty of the landscape instead of denigrating it. Sonia Lamrani argues that similar descriptions "demonstrate the non-homogeneity of the Orientalist discourse" which conveys "a fragmented perpetuation of the colonial and imperialist stereotypes about the Orient" (Lamrani2019).

In the next section, however, the same first-hand accounts betray a contrasting perspective, revealing a more ambivalent discourse through travellers' simultaneous portrayal of the Tunisian landscape as barren, unattractive, and wild.

[15] See T. E Lawrence *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1935), in which he depicts the Orient, particularly Jidda as lifeless. For example he writes: "The atmosphere was oppressive, deadly. There seemed no life in it."(73).

4. The negative representation of theTunisian landscape

4.1. The landscape from a male perspective

The other major feature that appears in British travel narratives is the debasement ofthe Tunisian landscape. This negative portrayal echoes, in fact, a discourse typically related to common stereotypes and imperialist convictions prevalent during that era. In other words, and in convergence with the aims of this thesis, this discourse underscores a notable ambivalence within these narratives, thereby illustrating the non-homogeneous nature of Orientalist discourse. In order to discern aspects of ambivalence within travellers'discourse, the analysis will once again be structured according to a chronological framework and the gender of the authors.

4.1.1. Nineteenth-century male views

In their travel accounts, male authors both denigrate and debase the Tunisian landscape, hence corroborating a discernible ambiguity and contradiction in their discourse when compared to their previous views. One of the suggestive examples is articulated by Graham and Aschbee who describe the general landscape as follows: "there is nothing in the aspect of the spot to charm the eye, nor is there anything in its surroundings to excite the imagination or to kindle enthusiasm" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 33). In another instance, both authors flattered the beauty of Tunisian sceneries referring to them as "very grand and most picturesque" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 166). In this case, however, there is a total denial of anything delightful in the landscape and this is deduced from their use of negation "nothing", "anything", "nor". This not only implies that the spot lacks visual appeal, but also conveys a sense of disappointment or disenchantment on the travellers' part with the location: "nothing to charm the eye" or "to excite the imagination". According to Imen Gannouni, this kind of disappointment is often expressed when travellers "noted aesthetic deficiencies in the landscape" (Gannouni 2021: 100-101).

Similarly, Reid and Wingfield condemned the Tunisian landscape by focusing on its "unpicturesque" side. For example, the former describes the scenery as typically "wild" (Reid 1882: 88), whereas the latter declares that "there remains now nothing but the dreary plain, the arid sand, the gloomy olives, and the eternal sea splashing forever on its rocks" (Wingfiled 1868: 300). Here, the described landscape seems to be devoid of life or vitality as evidenced

in words like "dreary plain", "the arid sand". Moreover, even the way natural elements are highlighted evokes a sense of sadness and melancholy: "gloomy olives", "eternal sea". Obvious as it may seem, the vibrant and picturesque landscape depicted by the same authors in the preceding section turns out to be a source of wilderness, desolation, and gloominess; thereby substantiating their adoption of contradictory views.

In other more specific occasions, Graham and Aschbee along with Wingfield convey antagonistic reactions toward the landscapes within interior Tunisian cities, making them function as a sign of a "topographic other" (Borthwick 1991: 148). Taken from a specific perspective, we use this expression to highlight how the physical attributes of particular landscapes like mountains, cities, hills, plains, are often depicted in a way that accentuates their otherness and strangeness. For example, Wingfield delineates one of the interior scenes as follows:

> [...] a dreary, desolate plain, divided into ill-ploughed fields, which looked as though they could produce nothing but stones, spreading, undulating brown wastes [...] Here and there a stunted olive or scraggy palm rose struggling through the sod, only to make the pervading bareness all the more impressive (Wingfield 1868: 291).

More than a decade later, Graham and Aschbee echo the same line of thought as Wingfield, articulating a hostile reaction regarding one of the encountered sceneries:

> [...] Scenery of the interior is, as a rule, unlovely, consisting of vast plains — treeless, waterless, uncultivated — without even a habitation to relieve the monotony of the landscape. The hills which intersect these enormous plateaus are usually rugged, bare, unwooded (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 3)

Using a similar language, they refer to the scenery on their way from Sousse to Kairouan as follows: [...] the road traverses vast plains, flat or slightly undulating, waterless, treeless, and almost devoid of cultivation (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 108). Likewise, they characterize thenatural vistas in Kairouan as "dull and depressing"; and as "absolute flat,

Devoid of cultivation, traversed by occasional marshes, and dotted with low bushes and scrub" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 132).

Grouped together, all these quotes reflect hostile or indifferent reactions towards the Tunisian landscape, which turns out to be an object of derision. This idea is principally conveyed through the use of adjectives like "dreary", "desolate", "unlovely", "dull", "depressing", "waterless", "treeless". It is further accentuated by phrases such as "scraggy palm rose struggling through the sod", "without even a habitation to relieve the monotony of the landscape". Indeed, the writers' recourse to such pejorative imagery not only emphasizes the bareness of the landscape but also accentuates its infertility and bleakness. According to John Pemble, such responses "occurred when landscapes failed to match preconceptions derived from literature or art" (Pemble 1987: 27). This suggests that travel writers seek to establish mastery over the landscape by imposing their own preconceptions on what they observe. If realityfails to align with their theoretical expectations, the land becomes characterized as dull and suffused with "melancholy" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 132). And as a consequence, the whole scene becomes qualified as "unpicturesque" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 77).

From the perspective of Graham and Aschbee, Tunisians are mainly responsible for having converted a wealthy country into wilderness:

> In the course of centuries, they [in reference to Tunisians] have slaughtered and driven out more people than at present inhabited, they have neglected the rivers and water works, chocked up and befouled the cisterns and wells, cut down the forests without replanting, allowed roads to disappear and bridges to decay…permitted the soil to goout of cultivation (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 7)

Evidently, the overall scene is marked by a stark absence of vegetation as well as aesthetic appeal, as indicated by phrases like "driven out more people", "neglected the rivers", "cut down the forests without replanting". These phrases not only signify environmental degradation, but also serve to underscore the failure of the human enterprise which neglected and transformed the once fertile land into a barren one. Pratt contends that, for travellers, "neglect became the touchstone of a negative esthetic"; thereby serving to "legitimate European interventionism" (Pratt 1992: 146).

For a more balanced analysis, emphasis in the next section is going to be put on twentieth-century male views.

4.1.2. Twentieth-century male views

Douglas expresses a view similar to that of Graham and Aschbee, asserting that Tunisians " […] with their roving and pastoral habits, who have done the mischief, changing arable land into pasture, which grows ever poorer, and finally desert" (Douglas 1912: 60). Here, the landscape fails to align with the picturesque aesthetics since it is depicted as "growing ever poorer and finally a desert". In this case, the conversion of a productive land into barren desert is seen as a manifestation of neglect which is used as a justification tool for "European interventionism".

Douglas also uses the same pejorative language in reference to some interior regions. For instance, he characterizes Gafsa as "a stricken region, tree-less and water-less, with gaunt brown hills receding into the background" (Douglas 1912: 3). Similarly, Graham depicts Carthage as devoid from any aesthetic appeal:

> She is indeed a barren wilderness. Some fine distant mountains and a few wild flowers are all that she can give him. For the rest, she is nothing but a bare, dusty, shadeless, unattractive mound, surmounted by an ugly modern Gothic cathedral and an equally hideous monastery, while here and there a squalid restaurant or a modern villa arrests attention by its aggressive whiteness. (Graham 1908: 113)

At a general level, both quotes serve as tangible illustrations of landscape condemnation with an obvious inclination to recreate stereotypical tropes. More specifically, they offer a picture totally different from the one conveyed in the preceding section where Carthage and other Tunisian towns stand out as emblems of historical richness and aesthetic appeal: "among the many circling shores of the Mediterranean there is none more entirely beautiful than the great bayon which rose ancient Carthage" (Stenning, as cited in Manai 2007: 25). This view, among many others, further conveys the omnipresence of ambiguity and contradiction in travellers' discourse. Actually, the reader may notice this contradiction not only between passages, but also at a textual level, where the same place is described through conflicting lenses. For instance, Gafsa is described as "treeless and waterless" with sparse brown hills. Likewise, Carthage, once lauded as an alluring destination—"entirely beautiful" (Stenning, as cited in Manai 2007: 25)—is now reduced to "a barren wilderness". This is further intensified

by the use of descriptors like "shadeless", "unattractive", "hideous" to paint a picture of an arid landscape deficient in natural endowments.

Such oscillations cannot be treated as factual and straightforward depictions of a geographical reality; rather, they reveal the subjective nature of travel writing. What is deemed in one account as "bare", "dusty, may in another become a site of fascination and admiration. These contradictions underscore the fact that the discourse is not a transparent reflection of the physical landscape but a construction shaped by the travellers' shifting impressions, cultural expectations, and literary strategies.

The upcoming section will examine the extent to which this female writers follow or diverge from this line of thought.

4.2. The landscape from a female perspective

From our readings of various travel narratives, we could argue that even female writers participated in the process of denigrating the Tunisian landscape. This is evident in various quotes that illustrate the landscape in a negative way. Starting with Lorimer, her work *By the Waters of Carthage* (1906) presents a recurring theme of depicting the landscape under that very light. In one of the passages, she conveys a deep sense of disappointment regarding her expectations of the bay of Tunis versus the reality she encountered: "I had to satisfy my hunger of expectancy with the parched and barren rather than with the grand or picturesque, for the Bay of Tunis is not imposing from the entrance" (Lorimer 1906: 10). In this quote, Lorimer contrasts her "hunger of expectancy" for something "grand or picturesque" with "the parched and barren" landscape she actually encountered. Her mention of the phrase "parched and barren" emphasizes the lack of vitality and aesthetic appeal in the surrounding scenery.As such, her reliance on this juxtaposition reflects the stark contrast between the idealized image she has in mind and the harsh reality of the landscape; leading, hence, to her disillusionment. This, in fact, recalls Pemble's idea that such reactions arise when the reality of the landscape does not align with the author's expectations derived from literature or art.

In a similar vein, Lorimer uses pejorative adjectives to paint a bleak picture of Africa (as embodied in the country of Tunis) describing it in the following way: "I see ancient and yellow Africa spreading itself out before me. It is ugly, and burnt and treeless" (Lorimer1906: 78). Clearly enough, Lorimer's quote carries undertones of colonial perspectives that often describe Oriental landscapes as inferior and desolate. This could be easily deduced from her

subjective perception which negatively portrays Tunis as "ugly" and devoid of aesthetic allure: "treeless and burnt". Lorimer's view extends, afterwards, to the portrayal of Carthage itself. In this regard, she writes: "the first thing that strikes you when you stand on the actual soil of Carthage is the unexpected nothingness of everything" (Lorimer 1906: 263). This quote could be interpreted at two main levels. The first one echoes the same line of thought as her male counterparts, since Lorimer depicts Carthage as devoid of any historical or natural richness and this is evident in her phrase "nothingness of everything". The second level exhibits the extent to which Lorimer's discourse is nuanced and contradictory because in another occasion she refers to Carthage as "rather splendid" (Lorimer 1906: 253).

In close alignment with Lorimer, Erskine also stresses the ugliness and primitiveness of one of the Tunisian sceneries by focusing on the "Eastern note" which manifests itself in "a hedge of cactus and a procession of dark-skinned, white-robed men astride their small native donkeys" (Erskine 1925: 12). Clearly, the mention of "a hedge of cactus" immediately conjures up links with desolate environments since "cactus" is the symbol of harshness and barrenness, contributing to the portrayal of the landscape an unattractive. Furthermore, the mention of "dark-skinned, white-robed men astride their small native donkeys" adds a sense of primitiveness and cultural difference usually associated with Eastern landscapes. The expression "dark-skinned" evokes stereotypes and preconceptions of exoticism, while the image of men on their small donkeys suggests a mode of simplistic transportation which reinforces the idea of a primitive setting. Again, it could be argued that even Erskine's views are as contradictory and ambivalent as her male and female counterparts since herdescriptions fluctuate between aestheticization: "the beauty and fertility of the country was striking" (Erskine 1925: 12) and denigration "the Easter note manifested in the hedge of cactus" (Erskine 1925: 12).

What is also worth mentioning is that writers' views when compared to each other are contradictory even when dealing with the same described object. As noted earlier, Lorimer portrays Africa as "ugly, burnt, and treeless" (Lorimer 1906:78); while Erskine avers that the richness and fertility of the landscape made them think that they "had, by mistake dropped into some fertile districtin the Western Highlands of Scotland" (Erskine 1925:11). Evidently, Erskine's different aesthetic treatment of Africa (as embodied in the country of Tunis) contradicts Lorimer's example mentioned earlier and this stands as a proof of the nuanced representation of the Tunisian landscape in British travel books.

In brief, two primary ideas could be drawn from this section: one is general and theother one is specific. First, the general idea concerns the negative representation of the Tunisian landscape by male and female writers, which makes it function as a "topographic other" (Borthwick 1991: 148). This process of othering the landscape allows travellers to impose mastery and domination over it, primarily through the imposition of the preconceptions that they derived from art and literature. When the landscape fails to alignwith these presupposed ideas, it becomes synonymous with bleakness and barrenness.

The second more specific idea operates at two different levels. The first one pertains to the mutual influence among travellers' perspectives. For example, Wingfield's denigrating portrayal of the Tunisian scenery is echoed by Graham and Aschbee a decade later, and subsequently by Douglas in the twentieth-century. This illustrates a shared, enduring view among these writers.

The second level reflects the ambivalence that characterizes writers' views which is observable both within writers themselves (intra-level) and among different writers (inter-level). At the intra-level, travellers display two contradictory views concerning the same issue. For instance, Graham and Aschbee depict the Tunisian landscape as both attractive and repulsive, sometimes praising its picturesque qualities while at other times denouncing them. A Similar view could be applied on female writers like Lorimer who sometimes talks about the "grandness" of Carthage and in otheroccasions refers to its "nothingness". Concerning the inter-level, the nuanced representation of the Tunisian landscape is evident in different depictions of the same place. For example, while Wingfield describes sceneries in the interior as "drearyand desolate', Temple portrays the environs of Zaghwan as "lovely"and "eminently picturesque".

In a nutshell, the denigrating treatment of the landscape in this section contradicts the previously analyzed views, highlighting a form of duality in British travellers' representations of the Tunisian landscape.This duality underscores their nuanced and ambivalent engagement with Orientalist discourse, resonating with Bhabha's view of "the splitting of colonial discourse" (Bhabha 2004: 130) while challenging Said's assertion of the homogeneity of Orientalist discourse.

5. General concluding remarks

Over the course of this chapter, we have tried to offer a different reading of the Tunisian landscape based on a wide spectrum of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century first-hand accounts. To achieve this aim, we have endeavoured to analyze the way male and female travellers represented the Tunisian landscape in their works. As a starting point, we highlighted how the Romantic movement, with its open call for a harmonious interconnectedness with nature, had a remarkable influence on travel writers and on the way they conceived the natural world around them. In their travelogues, British male and female travellers showed a paradigm shift from "man to non-man" (Jeffers 1948: xxi); hence proving that the Romantic movement has accentuated their connection with the natural world. Consequently, nature turns emerges to be not only a mere tool used to embellish literary accounts with glowing and attractive descriptions. It also becomes a "refuge" from the great upheavals, deep skepticism, and negative industrialization outcomes that characterized the European scene during that epoch. In tune with this line of thought, Manai in his book *British Travelers in Tunisia, 1800-1930: A History of Encounters and Representations* (2007) assumes that British travel writers, while focusing on the Tunisian landscape, are "mourning the death of their rural agrarian England" (Manai 2007: 87).

Relying on their representations, we have come up with the following conclusions. In the first part, Tunis is read as "an attractive landscape" (Cherry 2000: 77). It is described as a site for visual pleasure, sensory delight and spiritual refreshment. In this case, the traditional colonial image of conquest is replaced by "an image of desire" (Lawrence 1994: 164) where the traveller openly expressed his desire for a direct immersion with nature. That is why, it was found that the views of female and male writers converge to a large degree since they both flattered the fertility and beauty of the Tunisian country finding it as a "refuge" from the hectic life in modern industrialized Europe.

The second part displays a clear difference from the previous one as it highlights significant paradoxes in travellers'portrayals of the Tunisianlandscape. The latter, which was in the previous part endowed with beautiful sceneries and picturesque details, is now depicted as devoid of life and fertility. This shift applies to both male and female views who depicted the Tunisian landscape as an object of derision by highlighting its aesthetic deficiencies. Indeed, these contradictory views suggest that travellers "lived in a dilemma, that of

celebrating the workshop of the world or mourning the death of rural England" (Manai 2007: 86).

The fragmentation observed within British travel narratives opens up the possibility of reconsidering the applicability of Said's theory of Orientalism in this specific context. However, this is not to suggest that Said's framework is entirely invalidated; such a claim would oversimplify the complexities at stake and render the present analysis methodologically unbalanced. Rather, what is proposed here is a nuanced reading of British narratives that acknowledges the limits of viewing Orientalism as a uniform and monolithic discourse. Following Ali Behdad's line of thought, it becomes evident that Orientalism should be understood as a "diffused and fluid" discourse; one that incorporates a "plurality of subject and ideological positions." (Behdad 1999: 17). In this light, the British traveller emerges not merely as a detached observer perpetuating only imperial perceptions, but as a subjectivity whose relationship with the immediate context is often marked by "involvement and indulgence, a kind of giving oneselfover to theexperience ofthe Oriental journey [as well as participation] in the immediate reality" of the Oriental world." (Behdad 1999: 21). This shift from strict detachment to forms of affective engagement and experiential participation complicates the traditional power dynamics often associated with Orientalist representations.

Such complexity calls for the integration of Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence, which, in alignment with the objectives of this chapter, provides a more fitting theoreticallens. In fact, Bhabha conceptualizes the European discourse as being "curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and preserve, an articulation of multiple belief" (Bhabha 1994: 118). His perception thus allows for an understanding of British representations of the Tunisian landscape as unstable, contradictory, and deeply implicated in both attraction and repulsion. Actually, this "split" and "mixed" characteristic of the European discourse will be further accentuated in the next chapter, where the cultural encounter gives rise to a new series of ambivalent views. Through an in-depth analysis of these encounters, the second chapter will illustrate how British travellers' interactions with Tunisian culture produce a complex web of multifaceted, yet contradictory views. These ambivalent representations underscore the intricate dynamics of travellers' discourse, revealing the nuanced and often paradoxical nature of their perceptions and depictions of the "Other".

CHAPTER TWO: THE CULTURAL ENCOUNTER: THE AMBIVALENT REPRESENTATION OF TUNISIAN CULTURE

1. General Background

This chapter highlights the way Tunisian culture is paradoxically viewed and represented by British travellers. The centrality of the concept of culture to this study calls for a precise definition of this term. Broadly speaking, culture is a multifaceted and evolving concept, with definitions that have shifted over time. One of the earliest and most frequently cited definitions was proposed by the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in 1871. He describes culture as a "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, as cited in Benhima & Khatib 2019: 306). In the vein of this view, culture can be understood as a whole way of life containing a vast range of societal activities. Likewise, the anthropologist Kathy Irving defines culture as "the shared and learned information people use to generate meaning and order within a social system" (Irving 1984:138). Drawing from these various definitions, Zeiny suggests that culture comprises "the shared practices of a community, society or a group through which meaning is created from the textual, aural and visual world of representations" (Zeiny 2017: 77). Addressing the issue from the perspective of cross-cultural representations in literary accounts, the theorist Homi Bhabha asserts that itis precisely in reading between the borderlines of a particular culture "that we can see how people **[and their culture]** come to be constructed within a range of discourses" (Bhabha 1990: 297: emphasis added).

The selection of this particular paradigm prompts a preliminary question: why has the cultural domain been specifically chosen to explore how Tunis is represented in British travel narratives? The answer is found in the words of the American traveller Ernst Wartegg who argues that "in no respect does the East show such a contrast to Europe as in regard to social life in Tunis" (Wartegg1882: 68).This stark contrast underscores the significance of the

cultural sphere as a lens through which representations of Tunis can be critically examined. It also opens up the possibility of reading Tunis as "a complex cultural concept" (Cherry 2000: 77) where the cultural encounter between the East and the West becomes apparent and concrete.

After a thorough examination of the British literary corpus, it has been found that these cultural encounters are dealt with paradoxically. In some instances, they are admired and eulogized, and in other occasions theyare criticized and rejected. This could only suggest the inherent ambivalence in travellers' discourse, hence revealing the underlying tension in how the West, particularly Britain, viewed and represented the non-Western world.

To deeply understand travellers' dual perspective, this chapter will have a bipartite structure. The first one will mainly focus on the way British travellers constructed a negative representation of the Tunisian culture. This type of representation permits to place these narratives within the body of Orientalist literature, reflecting Said’s main tenet about the Orient and Orientalism as "a system of representation that serves the West's colonial policies and objectives" (Said, as cited in Agli 2015: 41). Relying on that particular point, we have opted for analyzing the views of the first part according to an East-West dichotomy. Due to its significance as a key analytical tool, this concept will be subjected to further in-depth examination.

2. Key points in the East/ West demarcation

The roots of this literary notion could be traced back to a late fourth-century travel narrative entitled *Peregrinatio ad Terram Sanctam* written by Egeria[16]. This early work- devoted entirelyto travel beyond Europe- has remarkably influenced the way "we have come to see ourselves as the West: a world apart from, and opposed to another world called the East" (Campbell, as cited in Borthwick 1991: 141). Following this line of thought, the West has started defining itself in a strike opposition to an Eastern other which is viewed as "separable from any purely geographical area: essentially elsewhere" (Campbell, as cited in Borthwick 1991: 141-142). As a consequence, the world has ever since been viewed in terms of two controversial terms: the center and the periphery. Europe is taken to be the main center "in a geography at least as metaphysical as physical" (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 32). What it is found outside the limits of this center is by definition "the margin or the periphery of culture, power and civilization" (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 32).

But the real articulation of the East/ West dichotomy took place in the Medieval period when "Western scientists, theologians and philosophers" came into contact with "the Islamic culture during the long Arabian domination of the Iberian Peninsula" (Palabyik 2010: 30). What really triggered the Western concern was not the Islamic culture per se, but a desire "to know more about theadversaries of Christianity" (Palabyik 2010: 30). This suggests that one of the very early forms of alterity is reified through the opposition of the Christian West to the Islamic East. It could be inferred, hence, that up to that period the main substrata of the Western academic perception of the East was religion.

Yet, starting from the eighteenth century onwards, the religious criterion took rear seats to give rise to the scientific one. In fact, Europe's economic expansion in other parts of the non-Western sphere was stimulated by "a presumed technological superiority, which actively contributed to the Western's sense of supremacy over the East" (Palabyik 2010: 35).

The turning point, however,—as considered by various scholars such as Edward Said (1977), David Spurr (1993), Marie Burks (2006) to name but a few—was the nineteenth-century since all the above-mentioned topos evanesced in favor of theideological one. During that period, theEuropean empire was at its climax since "nine-tenths of the entire land surface of the globe was controlled by European, or European derived powers" (Young 2003: 2). As a

[16]A Hispano-Roman poet and writer who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land around 382-384 and wrote about it in a long letter that was to be entitled *Itinerarium Egeriae* (*The Itinerary of Egeria*).

result of this unprecedented expansion, "the division between the rest and the West was made fairly absolute" (Young 2003: 2). Alongside the colonial mission, Westerners also believed that they were endowed with "a divine mission" to bring civilization to other parts of the world. Accordingly, Europeans started to believe that "their civilization was perceived as the only modern civilization, which the others had to emulate" (Clarke 1994:15). Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney sums up this issue by acknowledging that the East-West dichotomy "is a paradigm rising out of the nineteenth-century Eurocentric view of the world, on the one hand, and of the structure and event paradigm in history and anthropology, on the other" (Tierney 2006: 16). Similarly, Julie Reeves, in her seminal work *Culture and International Relations* (2004), acknowledges that this ideological belief, besides the technological and the economic ones, "consolidated the inherent ontological distinctionbetweenthe Orientand Occident to a degree unseen before" (Reeves 2004: 16).

Obvious as it mayseem, the East and West emerge to be two "binomial entities", or two polar opposites, and "their inhabitants are eternally unequal" (Said 1977: 227). Such a view invites us to think about the East-West relation in terms of a dualistic vision or a binary opposition. This brings to the surface an important concept to be analyzed, which is that of binarism.

The term binarism flourished with the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who argues that "signs have meaning not by a simple reference to real objects, but by their opposition to other signs" (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 18). Relying on this opposition, binarism has started to be used in the field of postcolonial critical theories with an aim to show how this concept is based upon a dialectical opposition between two poles. In the words of Ashcroft et.al, this oppositionentails "a violent hierarchy in which one term of the oppositionis always dominant […] and that the binary opposition itself exists to confirm that dominance" (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 19). As for Said, he acknowledges that the relationship between these two poles "[…] is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 1977: 5). To a large extent, this relationship is often displayed ideologically, highlighting a Manichean opposition between a civilized and dynamic West Vs an inferior and indolent East. One of the outcomes of this opposition, as deduced from the annals of Western studies, is the production of "an elaborate fiction of a system of hierarchical binary oppositions such as active/passive, center/periphery,civilized/savage, developed/undeveloped, scientific/superstitious, and so on" (Prasad 2003: 12). What could be

noticed from these foregoing binaries is that they are strictly hierarchical with "the first termin each […] was the privileged term, and was considered superior to, and more desirable than, the second term" (Prasad 2003: 12).

In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha seems to be more skeptical about the mere creation of this set of binaries leading him to reformulate his thought under the guise of the following question: Why is an East/ West demarcation created? For Bhabha, it is not only about the creation of an abyss between a civilized nation and an uncivilized one. Rather, "it is obviously a designation of institutional power and ideological Eurocentricity" (Bhabha 1994: 45).

To sum up, the first part of this chapter will be mainly analyzed under the light of this dichotomy, aiming to prove finally that Western representations of the Orient have always been part of:

> […] A damaging discourse. Wittingly or unwittingly, they have always been complicit with the workings of Western power […] a substantial number of them─cannot overcome their Eurocentric perspective and have unintentionally contributed to Western domination. So instead of the disinterested objectivity in the service of the higher goal of true knowledge that Western scholarship has traditionally claimed for itself, we find invariably false representations that have effectively paved the way for military domination, cultural displacement, and economic exploitation. (Hans Bertens, as cited in Marandi & Ensieh 2015: 23).

As far as the second part is concerned, it could be claimed that it stands in a strike opposition to the first one since it will deal with the positive portrayal of Tunisian culture in travel narratives. These portrayals will be analyzed under the light of Bhabha's notion of ambivalence which suggests that the Western discourse aboutthe Orient is morecomplex and contradictory than hitherto acknowledged. More importantly, this ambivalence undermines the authority of British narratives, revealing the instability and contradictions within the Western discourse. This will ultimately lead, at the end, to a kind of narrative tension where travel writers are both repelled by and drawn to the Tunisian culture. Such a view confirms Ali Behdad's perspective (1999) that "Orientalism is neither binaric nor monologic and closed; instead, it is an open discourse that can incorporate discordant voices and subversive

elements" (Behdad, as cited in Gholi 2023: 241). These discordant voices, as displayed by British travellers, transcend the conventional reductive and stereotyping views, hence destabilizing the authority of the Western discourse and exposing the fragility of the distinctions it seeks to uphold.

3. The negative representation of Tunisian culture in British travelogues

The first part of this chapter aims at investigating how British travel narratives reproduce the conventional Orientalist strategies in their depiction of Tunisian culture. To fulfill this task, Said's mode of reading, which he calls "contrapuntal" (1993), is going to be adopted. In practical terms, this contrapuntal reading allows the critic to penetrate beneath the surface of a text in order to elaborate thepresence of Orientalist aspects in travel narratives. It also facilitates the task of revealing the extent to which these texts " […] are deeply implicated in the process of imperialism and colonialism" (Marandi 2005: 171). By following this approach, we will be able to prove by the end ofthis part that culture is no longer deemed as an object of empirical knowledge, but rather as a hegemonic tool that accentuates cultural differences. Accordingly, all the extracts that will be put under scrutiny in this part will be "analyzed as an ensemble of textual practices that can be made to disclose the characteristic gestures of imperial stylistics" (Gregory 1999: 3).

To analyze these "imperial stylistics", this part is going to be divided into three main sections. The first one sheds light on travellers' negative impressions about their trip to Tunis. Then, the focus is narrowed in the second section to examine how Tunisian culture is viewed under a negative light. Finally, the third sub-part will deal with how the exotic is used as an othering tool to legitimize the portrayal of Eastern cultures as fundamentally different from, and by implication inferior to, Western norms.

3.1. A trip to Tunis as a negative experience

3.1.1. Nineteenth-century views

The negative representation of Tunis, its culture, and its infrastructure begins with overarching observations that depict the journey as an uncomfortable experience. Starting with nineteenth-century male views, Playfair cautions his readers that travelling to the East is fraught with constant challenges. This idea is illustrated in the following quote, where he highlights that: "There were a thousand dangers and difficulties to be overcome—dangers from clouds of fine penetrating dust, dangers from the tendency that our baggage always had to slip off in the middle of a river, too much light on one occasion, not enough on another" (Playfair 1877: 127). At first glance, it is obvious that the quote immediately sets a tone of peril and adversity through the repetition of the word "danger". The specific choice of the number "thousand" reflects a hyperbolic tone which suggests an inhospitable and hazardous environment. Moreover, the reference to "the tendency that our baggage always had to slip off in the middle of a river" reinforces the perceived difficulty of transport and logistics in the East. Playfair's complaint about "too much light on one occasion, not enough on another" suggests an environment that is unpredictable and uncontrollable contributing to the notion that the East is a place where conditions are not only unfavourable but also unreliable. In a nutshell, through this pejorative description, Playfair constructs a narrative of the East as a region fraught with environmental and logistical challenges. This portrayal aligns with Orientalist perspectives that emphasize the difficulties and discomforts faced by Westerners in Eastern lands. In a similar vein, Clark Kennedy expresses his dissatisfaction with the general atmosphere as soon as he reaches the shores of Tunis:

> At the landing place, there was the usual amount of noise and confusion, half-naked Arab boys and dirty Jews wrangling for our baggage, and only for an instantinterrupting their mutual torrent of Arabic abuse, to recommend themselves in a broken French to our notice. (Kennedy 1846: 5).

To begin with, the setting is characterized by "noise and confusion," suggesting a chaotic and disordered environment. This negative portrayal can be interpreted as an implicit criticism of the cultural structures in the East, contrasting it with the perceived orderliness and

sophistication of the West. Second, the mention of "half-naked" and "dirty" implies a lack of civility and cleanliness in contrast with Western norms of dress and hygiene. Besides, the phrase "mutual torrent of Arabic abuse" frames the locals' communication as aggressive and incomprehensible, furthering the notion of cultural and linguistic otherness. To check whether this spirit of thought endures in later periods, evidence is going to be sought in twentieth-century travel narratives.

3.1.2. Twentieth-century views

3.1.3. Male perceptions of a trip to Tunis

Francis Miltoun, the early twentieth-century American writer, argues that a trip to the Barbary States prevents him from enjoying the luxurious lifestyle he was accustomed to. Inhis account *In the Land of Mosques and Minarets* (1908), he openly declares that a traveller cannot get "neither home comfort nor luxurious appointments in North Africa" (Miltoun 1908: 1). Through this assertion, Miltoun attempts to "to fix cultural difference in a containable, visible object" (Bhabha 1994: 72) by setting a tone of general dissatisfaction and unfulfilled expectations. This dissatisfaction reflects a common theme in Western travel accounts, where the East is depicted as lacking the amenities and standards of the West. Miltoun then goes on to note that "the railways of North Africa are poor, uncomfortable things, and excruciatingly slow" (Miltoun 1908: 1). He also mentions that "the steamships between Marseilles or Genoa and the African littoral are either uncomfortably crowded or wobbly, slow-going tubes, and there are many discomforts of travel" (Miltoun 1908: 1). Obviously, the characterization of the "railways of North Africa" as "poor, uncomfortable things, and excruciatingly slow" criticizes the region's infrastructure. This not only portrays the East as underdeveloped but also reinforces the stereotype of backwardness compared to Western standards. Moreover, the statement about "many discomforts of travel" further generalizes the negative experience, implying that such discomforts are an unavoidable part of travelling in the East. In brief, the general tone of the passage suggests a sense of Western superiority, where the standards of comfort and luxury found in the West are the criteria by which other regions are judged. Bryan Turner sums up this issue by acknowledging that the Western discourse has always defined "the Orient by what the Occident has and what the Orient lacks" ; and this resulted in the definition of the latter by "a series of lacunae" (Turner 2000:4). Interestingly, similar

views are articulated by British female writers, on which the next sub-part will essentially focus.

3.1.4. Female perceptions of a trip to Tunis

Female views of their trip to Tunis and their impressions of the country as a whole conform to a large extent with their male counterparts. Indeed, many female travellers voiced their dissatisfaction with the general conditions, but the most noticeable ones are LadyWarren (1923), Norma Lorimer (1906), and Frances Nesbitt (1906). Starting with Warren, in one of the passages she describes the general setting as follows: "The road really was verybad, crowded with camels, donkeys, sheep, goats, and people, and full of holes—also very dusty" (Warren 1923: 114). In this short quote, the image conveyed is that of lack of order and control. The statement:"the road really was very bad" emphasizes the substandard quality of the infrastructure. This idea is reinforced by the description of the road as "full of holes"which suggests a lack of proper maintenance and development in the region. The addition of "crowded with camels, donkeys, sheep, goats, and people" as well as "very dusty" not only reflects chaos and overcrowding, but also underscores the unpleasant and unclean conditions.

As far as Lorimer is concerned, her first impression of Tunis is voiced in a pejorative manner:

> The Orient had burst so suddenlyupon us […] what an introductionto the Orient ! That mass of mahogany- toned black guards […] It seemed to me that the ship would be stormed and everyone of us devoured by the army of gesticulating, yelling, brown-skinned Orientals, who were hailing our approach with glittering eyes and black outstretched arms (Lorimer 1906: 8).

In the above passage, a sense of shock is conveyed through the use of the phrase "the Orient had burst so suddenly upon us". This suggests that the East is abrupt and chaotic in contrast with the controlled and organized West. Besides, the use of the terms "mahogany-toned black guards" is both derogatory and dehumanizing implying criminality and untrustworthiness which further intensifies the otherness of the East. This idea was once again repeated as Lorimer refers afterwards to an "army of gesticulating, yelling, brown-skinned Orientals" with "glittering eyes and black outstretched arms". This portrayal dehumanizes the

local people by equating them to a threatening, almost monstrous force. This sense of threat is further intensified by her hyperbolic expression: "it seemed to me that the ship would be stormed and everyone of us devoured". This statement conveys a deep sense of fear and imminent danger which implicitlysuggests that the local people are hostile and violent, ready to attack and consume Westerners. Interestingly, this language plays into racist stereotypes that portray the East as dangerous and uncivilized. Here, the "us versus them" dichotomy creates a clear division between British travellers (us) and Tunisians (them). This contributes in the portrayal of the locals as a collective, menacing force, just the exact antithesis of the Westerners who are superior and civilized.

With regard to Nesbitt, it has been found that her criticism of the country and its infrastructure is more pervasive than that of her contemporaries. Indeed, she provides extensive details regarding her dissatisfaction with the general atmosphere, aiming to bring to light how a journey to the East could be perceived as a negative experience. As a starting point, Nesbitt begins with openly declaring that "travel in this part of North Africa is tedious and uncomfortable" (Nesbitt 1906: 139). Such a negative impression is reinforced in another passage where Nesbitt avers that "Tunis is neither artistic nor Oriental, but rather a mingling of bustle and glare with much noise" (Nesbitt 1906: 139). Nesbitt's description of Tunis as "neither artistic nor Oriental" undermines any potential cultural or aesthetic value the city might have. Also, the phrase "a mingling of bustle and glare with much noise" creates an image of an unpleasant environment. "Bustle" suggests an overcrowding activity, while"much noise" further adds to the negative sensory experience, depicting Tunis as a stressful and uncomfortable place. In another instance, she equates Tunis with dullness and monotony: "There is not much to see.There are fatiguing sights, no amusements whatever only a tranquil country" (Nesbitt 1906: 119). From that very quote, one could easily notice the persistent use of negations: "not much to see", "no amusements" as well as pejorative vocabulary: "fatiguing", "tranquil". The assertion that "there is not much to see" implies that Tunis lacks significant sights, which first diminishes its cultural and historical value, and second makes it appear as an uninspiring destination. Describing the sights as "fatiguing" and stating there are "no amusements whatever" paints Tunis as a boring and tiresome place, unworthy of visitors' time and effort. The final phrase, "only a tranquil country", is meant to be dismissive. While tranquility can be a positive attribute, in this context, it suggests lack of vibrancy and excitement. After spending some time in Tunis, Nesbitt makes the following judgment concerning the general conditions:

> The standard of comfort is not high […] much of the country cannot be visited by ladies at all without a camp-a rare luxury. Even men, accustomed to really roughing it, suffer more than theycare for from bad food in the French villages, and from noise and dirt in the native Fonduks. (Nesbitt 1906: 126)

First of all, the statement "the standard of comfort is not high" sets a tone of inadequacy and suggests that the region lacks the sophistication and development found in the West. Second, the specific reference to "bad food," "noise," and "dirt" in local accommodations reinforces negative stereotypes about the East as a place of poor living conditions and lack of cleanliness. Moreover, the clause "even men, accustomed to really roughing it" suggests that the East is harsh and unwelcoming even for those who are used to rough conditions. Briefly, by highlighting the discomfort experienced by Western travellers, Nesbitt aims to argue that the East is backward and uncivilized compared to the West, which is implicitly seen as the standard of comfort and refinement.This idea is reinforced in other instances where the travel writer tries to highlight the poor transportation system in Tunis. For example, in one of the passages, Nesbitt declares that: "the railway carriages with their narrow seats and hard cushions proclaim by sheer discomfort, the unfrequented route and the dearth of travellers, the windows are either wide open or shut" (Nesbitt 1906: 193). In another instance, she criticizes one of the means of transports available:"the vehicle was a rattling old shandrydan of a waggonette, roofed after the fashion of the country, and with leather curtains, which could be buttoned together closely to keep off the sun or rain" (Nesbitt 1906: 127). Obviously, both quotes seek to highlight the deficiencies in the transportation system in Tunis conveying a sense of cultural and technological inferiority. More specifically, Nesbitt focuses, in the first quote, on physical discomfort ("narrow seats and hard cushions"), the isolation of the region ("the unfrequented route and the dearth of travellers") as well as the lack of proper functionality or adjustment in the railway carriages: "the windows are either wide open or shut". Similarly, in the second quote, Nesbitt highlights the inferiority of Tunis as perceivedin its outdated technology and harsh environment. This idea is caught in her statement: "the rattling old shandrydan of a waggonette" which implies a sense of decay and poor maintenance. Likewise, the expression "roofed after the fashion of the country" with "leather

curtains," reflects a primitive and unconventional design. Besides, the need to "button together closelyto keep off the sun or rain" suggests that the region's transportation solutions are backward and inconvenient. As a whole, the overall tone of both quotes conveys a sense of cultural and technological inferiority. The detailed criticism of the railway carriages highlight a perceived gap between Eastern and Western standards, suggesting that the East lags behind in terms of comfort and modern amenities.

As a concluding remark, all these views serve to confirm a shared sentiment of dissatisfaction and criticism. Despite the different time periods, the gender of travellers, and their personal backgrounds, their accounts converge on several key points. First of all, both genders emphasize the challenges and discomforts of travel, the inadequacies of the infrastructure, and the perceived chaos of the general atmosphere. Starting with male travellers like Playfair, Kennedy, and Miltoun, they stress the environmental hazards and logistical difficulties. Similarly, female travellers focus on the lack of comfort, the disorderly atmosphere, and the technological shortcomings. Hence, both male and female views constitute a clear instance of "historic panopticism" (Sheridan 2016: 3) where their gaze is "very physical and tangible" (Sheridan 2016: 3). In fact, this gaze serves to construct a narrative that intensifies the aesthetic separation between the East and West. This separation will become more apparent in the next part, where the focus will be on how British travellers portrayed Tunisian customs and traditions in a negative light.

3.2. The Tunisian culture under a negative light

3.2.1. Nineteenth-century perceptions

Although our primary focus is on nineteenth and early twentieth-century perspectives, our readings of various travel accounts have led us to begin with highlighting certain eighteenth-century perceptions. These earlier representations exerted a profound influence on subsequent writers, shaping their portrayals of Tunisian society, its customs, and its artistic traditions. This influence underscores the intertextual nature of travel writing, wherein later accounts frequently echo earlier narratives, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of the same dominant discourse on the Orient.

Taken from a theoretical perspective, intertextuality is a literary device used to highlight "the relationship between literary texts, or more specifically, when a text engages with one or more of its literary predecessors" (Aatkar 2019: 49-50). This attests to the fact that, literary works in general and the writing process in particular, are influenced by their predecessors.To substantiate this claim, Julia Kristeva contends that "every text is a mosaic of references to other texts, genres and discourses" (Kristeva, as cited in Almahady 2019: 43). In reference to travel literature, Faraz Anjum highlights that "most travellers before or during their travels study and keep with them journals of other travellers" (Anjum 2014: 198). That is why it has been found that "much material was borrowed from their predecessors" (Anjum 2014: 198). In the case of the Orient, Said acknowledges that "texts "[…] frequently refer to each other" (Said 1978: 31). According to him, "every writer on the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies" (Said, as cited in Belhiah 2021: 44). This explicitly suggests that "each work on the Orient affiliates itself with other works" (Said, as cited in Belhiah 2021: 44). Consequently, Timothy Mitchell (1991) contends that what is represented is not a real place but a "set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these" (Mitchell, as cited in McDaniel 2014: 10).

From a different, yet related perspective, Betty Hagglund, in her work *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies* (2019), explains that writers use intertextuality because it makes them appear "trustworthy" (Hagglund, as cited in Aatkar 2019: 49-50). She goes on noting that it

can "establish the travel writer as an authoritative figure, one who has done his research before leaving home and whose information can be trusted" (Hagglund, as cited in Aatkar 2019: 49-50).

Analyzing this theoretical approach from the perspective of British travel accounts, it has been found that Thomas Shaw's eighteenth-century work contributes to a broader intertextual network in which subsequent travel narratives reference, build upon, and perpetuate earlier depictions of Tunis. In the dedication of his travel account *Travels or Observations Relating to Several Parts of Barbary and the Levant* (1738), Shaw reflects his perception of Tunis as "remote and barbarous" (Shaw 1738: 372). Then, he illustrates this view by detailing the traditional greeting practices of the Tunisians as follows:

> Upon meeting one another, theystill use the primitive salutation (Salem Alekum:peace be unto you) […] of the inferiors out of respect, kiss the feet, knees or garments of their superiors […] At great solemnities, the wife compliments her husband by kissing his hand. (Shaw 1738: 301).

Obvious as it may seem, the above quote is loaded with stereotypical connotations. First of all, the use of the adjective "primitive" to describe the greeting "Salem Alekum" suggests that the Eastern way of life is outdated or uncivilized. In fact, the way Tunisians salute each other is cultural. However, Shaw is intolerant of this cultural practice as he describes it as "primitive". Second, the quote mentions that "inferiors" show respect by kissing the feet, knees, or garments of their "superiors." This language reinforces a stereotype of the East as a hierarchical society with rigid social structures where people are subservient. Third, the description of a wife kissing her husband's hand at solemn events suggests a patriarchal society where women are subservient to men. This can be seen as a critism of gender relations in the East, portraying them as regressive and oppressive. Ironically enough, the status of British women at that time was not better than their Tunisian counterparts as they were subordinated to men. By highlighting this aspect, Shaw sets up a contrast with Western norms, creating a polemical confrontation. He positions the West as superior while depicting the East as inferior and backward. Another aspect that was criticized by Shaw is the state of arts and sciences in the Tunisian society. In one of the passages he argues that "Arts and sciences continue to be, as they have been for many ages, in a low state and condition among

the Mohamedeans" (Shaw 1738:261). Obvious as it may seem, the phrase "continue to be, as they have been for manyages" implies that there has been no progress in the arts and sciences among Tunisians; thus suggesting a static and stagnant society. This largely confirms with Said's perception that the Eastis "a locale about which one can make statements regarding the past in exactly the same form (and with the same content) that one makes them regarding the present" (Said 1978-2003: 235). Moreover, the description of arts and sciences as being in a "low state and condition" paints a picture of decay and inadequacy. This pejorative language denies the achievements of Muslim societies to global knowledge and culture, ignoring historical evidence of their advancements in various fields during the Islamic Golden Age[17]. By dismissing their achievements, the quote perpetuates a skewed and biased view of history. To sum up, the quote reflects a colonial mindset,where European travel writers often depicted non-European societies as inferior, thus justifying colonial domination.

Turning to nineteenth-century travellers' views, it could be claimed that they largely followed the footsteps of Shaw either in terms of the heavy criticism of Tunisian culture orthe stereotypical language used. These views can be categorized into two main parts: the first one addresses overarching observations regarding the countryas a whole, and the second one delves deeper to highlight more specific perceptions.

[17] It generally refers to the period between the eighth and fourteenth-centuries, during which the Islamic world experienced remarkable developments in science, medicine, mathematics, literature, philosophy, and the arts. See: Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 145-147

3.2.1.1. Framing the country: overarching views of Tunis

In his work, Edward Blaquiere describes Tunis as a land of "ignorance and barbarism" (Blaquiere 1813: 193). Similarly, Lewis Wingfield declares that the whole nation is "one of robbers from the Bey downwards" (Wingfield 1868: 243). Obviously, both writers use a stereotypical language to describe Tunis. Blaquiere for example associates the land with "ignorance and barbarism" which implies that the inhabitants are uncivilized and lacking in knowledge. Also, the term "barbarism" dehumanizes the people of Tunis, portraying them as savage and uncultured. This reinforces, on the one hand, a dichotomy between the "civilized" West and the "barbaric" East. On the other hand, these broad generalizations dismiss any cultural, intellectual, or societal specificities of Tunis and its people. As far as Wingfield is concerned, his assertion that the entire nation is "one of robbers from the Bey downwards" paints Tunisian society as inherently criminal and corrupt. This sweeping accusation implies that corruption permeates all levels of society, from the topdown. Besides,the use of the term "robbers" is extremely pejorative as it suggests a lack of moral and legal order, further entrenching the idea of the East as lawless and morally deficient. This idea goes largely in tune with Cohn's view that the East has often been seen as a "land of oriental despotism", characterized by "cycles of strongbut lawless rules […] leading to anarchy and chaos" (Cohn, as cited in Anjum 2014: 201).

Taken from another perspective, the depiction of Tunis as a land of "ignorance and barbarism" or a "nation of robbers" supports the idea that Western intervention is necessary to bring order and civilization. Under the light of this view, Said argues that the recurrence of denigrating images about the East is used to justify the European colonial rule over the whole region. For him, Orientalist writers intend to insert in their literary accounts what sustains "the voice of a European ambition for rule over the Orient" (Said 1978-2002: 196).

Regarding the civilizational aspects of the country, Wingfield comments as follows: "the best way to obtain an idea of Europe in the fifteenth century would be to travel through the Regency of Tunis" (Wingfield 1868: 315). In another instance, he claims: "Tunis is a thousand years behind all its neighbours in progress and civilization" (Wingfield 1868: 233). First, the notion of being "a thousand years behind" suggests that Tunis is stuck in time, incapable of progress or improvement. This reinforces a static and unchanging image of Eastern societies, contrasting with the dynamic and progressive West. Such a statement emphasizes a perceived lack of development and modernitysince it portrays Tunis as lagging

and elevates neighboring regions as more advanced. Second, Wingfield equates nineteenth-century Tunis with fifteenth century Europe. Indeed, fifteenth century Europe is associated with medieval conditions, including less advanced technology, medicine, and social structures. The fact of equating Tunis with this period denigrates its current state and reduces its complexity to a single, outdated image.This simplification ignores the rich cultural, social, and technological diversity present in the region during this period. The quote also fails to recognize the specificity of the country as it imposes a Western-centric view on the real life in Tunis. In this regard, Bernard S. Cohn argues that these travel accounts mainly "established an enduring structural relationship" between the East and the West which considered Europe as "progressive and changing", while the East as "static". For Europeans, the East was "a kind of living fossil bed of the European past, a museum which was to provide Europeans for the next two hundred years a vast field on which to impose their own visions of history." (Cohn, as cited in Anjum 2014: 201).

The backwardness of the East is further reinforced by the view of Graham and Ashbee who aver that Tunis has "not a single work of literature worth recording, no new development of science or industry, nor any great monument of art or utility will be handed down to future generations as evidence of a nation possessing either culture or progress" (Graham & Ashbee 1887: 8). The first impression that comes out of this quote is the excessive use of negation: ("not a single work"), ("no new development"), ("nor any great monument of art "). This series of negations ignores the literary heritage of Tunisian culture, denies ongoing contributions, and dismisses the architectural and artistic legacy of Eastern cultures. This is what drives them to assert, in another instance, that:

> Education, as understood amongst European nations, is unknown to these unprogressive people, and consequently ignorance and fanaticism, bred in such establishments as these, go hand in hand in upholding the tenets and superstitions of an unprogressive creed. (Graham and Ashbee 1887: 126)

In general terms, Graham and Aschbee's quote reflects a negative representation of Tunis by criticizing its educational system associating it with "ignorance", "fanaticism", and an "unprogressive creed". More specifically, this quote operates at three main levels. The first

one reflects a Western-centric view that judges other educational practices based on European standards, suggesting that the Eastern education system is inadequate or non-progressive. The second level suggests the idea that Tunisian people are ignorant, superstitious, and fanatic. Finally, the overall impression that this quote aims to communicate is that Tunis, and by extension the East, is "unprogressive" suggesting that it has not advanced or evolved in terms of knowledge, science, or modern practices. This portrayal reinforces the stereotype that Eastern societies are stagnant and resistant to progress. Explained in another way, by describing Tunis as a country untainted by modernity, Graham and Aschbee reproduce a specific picture of the Orient that serves imperial interests. As such, Orientalism emerges as "an ultimate political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, us) and the strange (the Orient, the East, them)" (Said, as cited in Belhiah 2012: 53).

3.2.1.2. Closer look at Tunisian cultural markers

With regards to the second part, British travel writers emphasize the backwardness of Tunisian culture by enumerating specific instances that would confirm their perceptions. This backwardness is mainly observed in cultural markers such as the official language and religion, Tunisian lifestyle, as well as the architectural and general appearance of some Tunisian towns.

3.2.1.3. Language and Religionas Signs of Backwardness

In reference to the official language, Playfair, in his travelogue *A Handbook for Travellers in Algeria and Tunis* (1887), describes Arabic as "corrupt, vulgar, and contaminated" (Playfair1887: 12). This deliberate choice of three pejorative adjectives connotes that Arabic is unrefined, morally-degraded, and lacking in sophistication and dynamism. Similarly, Blaquiere asserts the following in reference to Islam: "the main religion isof course Mohametanism, but attended by that bigotry and irrational prejudice ofwhich it is susceptible" (Blaquiere 1813: 135). The negative depiction of Islam as bigoted and irrational exemplifies an Orientalist discourse that seeks to represent Tunisian religion and culture in a pejorative manner. This perspective frequently employs sweeping generalizations and moralistic judgments to perpetuate stereotypes of Eastern societies as inferior, intolerant, and

irrational. Such a representation aligns with Edward Said's assertion that Islam "had been fundamentally misrepresented in the West" (Said 1991: 36)

3.2.1.4. Denigrating Tunisian daily life

As far as Tunisian lifestyle is concerned, Blaquiere negatively portrays some practices bynoting "Mohametans sit, eat and sleep on the ground: glasses, plates, knives, forks, spoons and all the other apparatus of a European table are unknown amongst them; they eat with their fingers" (Blaquiere 1813: 192). This description sets a clear comparison between Eastern and Western practices highlighting a gap in cultural practices between the two. In fact, byfocusing on the practice of "sitting, eating and sleeping on the ground", Blaquiere seeks to emphasize that these practices are primitive or less civilized compared to Western customs. Furthermore, the comparison with European tableware, "glasses, plates, knives, forks, spoons and all the other apparatus of a European table are unknown", serves to emphasize the perceived inferiority of Tunisian dining practices. By stating that these items are "unknown" among Eastern people, Blaquiere suggests that Eastern customs are lacking in sophistication and refinement. What could be advocated is that this type of description is ethnocentric as it aims to undermine the value and significance of Tunisian customs and contributes to abroader narrative of cultural inferiority. This cultural practice might have been observed in certain interior regions, but Blaquiere's description suggests that it was a widespread, official practice throughout the whole country which was not accurate. Other travel writers who visited some Tunisian well-known families highlighted the extent to which their lifestyle is sophisticated and refined.

3.2.1.5. Architecture as a marker of cultural inferiority

Ending up with travellers' perceptions regarding the architecture of Tunisian cities, it could be claimed that the common theme that unites them is the lack of aesthetic charm and architectural interest. In fact, Graham and Aschbee are among the writers who commented extensively on this issue in their work. In a way that conveys dullness and uniformity, they write:

> An Arab town of these parts may be described in few words:—low, brick-built,white washed houses, consisting generally of one storey, with arched doorways more or

> less pretentious, and barred windows, planned externally without any attempt at symmetry—turning their backs, as it were, on narrow, tortuous, ill-paved streets, in which all kinds of ordure and objectionable matter are deposited. In the midst is a mosque ofone uniform pattern,differingonlyin size and extent from that of some other town. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 4)

As explicitly stated, the excerpt reinforces a stereotype of Eastern towns as poorly planned and maintained compared toWestern cities. In fact, the description of houses as "low, brick-built, whitewashed", of mosques as following "one uniform pattern" differing only in size and extent, and of streets as "narrow, tortuous, and poorly paved" not only implies a lack of order and sophistication but also suggests a lack of architectural creativity and diversity. Thomas McGill joins Graham and Aschbee on that particular point when he describes Tunisian streets in this pejorative way: "the streets of Tunis are narrow, dirty, and unpaved; the bazaars or shops, are of the poorest appearance […] The inhabitants, who crowd these miserable alleys, present the picture of poverty and oppression" (McGill 1811: 57). Here, McGill emphasizes the perceived poverty, disorder, and lack of architectural development by referring to streets as "dirty" and to shops as "poorly" built. Interestingly, however, both views are contradicted in other instances where Oriental architecture is found to be admired and eulogized.

Graham and Aschbee continue to highlight this lack of aesthetic and architectural interest by claiming that both private and public buildings offer little attraction:

> Most of the towns of Tunis offer little attraction,either on account of their generalplan, the arrangement of their streets, or the architecture of their buildings, whether public or private. A certain sameness prevails everywhere. A village resembles a city, except that it is less well built and maintained; or rather, a city is nothing more than an over grown village. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 3-4)

The authors in the above passage diminish the architectural heritage of Tunis either on the basis of its "general plan" or the arrangement of its streets. Besides, the observation that "a certain sameness prevails everywhere" portrays Tunisian towns as monotonous and lacking in variety. But more importantly, the comparison between villages and cities, stating that a city

is just an "overgrown village,"undermines the distinction and significance of urban centers in Tunis. It also simplifies the complex and varied urban landscapes of Tunis into a single, negative image, ignoring any positive aspects or historical and cultural significance. Accordingly, by criticizing the physical and aesthetic qualities of Tunisian towns, the authors implicitly support the idea that Western standards are the benchmark for progress and civilization. This largely aligns with Thisaranie Herath's view that "Western Orientalist artists and writers, either implicitly or explicitly, shaped colonial and imperial discourse by producing works that placed the East in a position of inferiority in relation to the West" (Herath 2015: 32).

In more specific instances, Graham and Aschbee also undermine the beauty of certain Tunisian towns denying its societal and cultural development. For example, Gabes is not even considered as a proper town: " […] not a city, nor even a town, but one of those heterogeneous places where civilization is in its infancy" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 96). Similarly, despite its Roman historical remnants, it offers little or no attraction: "like all Arab towns, it is dirty and ill-paved, and except for its situation and some remains of the older Roman town of Sicca Veneria, with the materials of which it has been built, it has no special interest" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 190-191). They continue noting:

> El- Kef has six mosques, of poor appearance externally, neither remarkable for grace of outline nor for anyof that delicacyof ornamentation so frequently found in Arab work. […] There is an absence of prosperity in the town; many of the houses are unoccupied, and some of them deserted and unroofed. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 191)

The first quote starts with a general assumption suggesting that all Arab towns share the same negative characteristics. It perpetuates a stereotype of Arab towns as uniformly dirty and poorly maintained, ignoring the diversity and individuality of each town. The only point of interest mentioned is the remains of the Roman town. This implies that the town's current culture and society are not valuable or interesting; only its ancient past is.

In the second quote, the authors highlight a deficiency in aesthetic and architectural value by describing the mosque of El-Kef as having "poor appearance" and lacking "grace of outline" or "delicacy of ornamentation". The mention "so frequently found in Arab work" implies that El-Kef's architecture falls short of an idealized standard.This reflects an

Orientalist tendency to judge Eastern art and architecture based on Western romanticized criteria. Based on such observations, Graham and Aschbee make the following conclusion regarding Tunisian towns:

> Such is the ordinary Tunisian town, almost devoid of architectural pretensions, if we except the Roman shafts of marble or stone that are conspicuous at corners of thestreets, the support and mainstay of ill-constructed buildings. Nor are the inhabitants more interesting or less uniform than their dwelling-place (Graham & Aschbee 1887:4).

Clearly, the above quote reproduces the same earlier views by using pejorative terms like "almost devoid of architectural pretensions", "ill-constructed buildings" or by relying on the negative form: "nor are the inhabitants more interesting or less uniform than their dwelling-place". The suggestion, bythe end of the quote, that the inhabitants are as "uniform" and unremarkable as their town reflects a broader Orientalist tendency to depict Eastern societies as lacking unique cultural aspects or individual attributes.

Considering British travellers' persistent emphasis on the primitive aspect of Tunisian culture and customs, it can be posited that their primary objective is to set "the West as the norm and define the rest as inferior, different, deviant, and subordinate" (Torgovnick 1990: 21). To check whether the same stereotypical spirit persists into the twentieth-century, the following section will examine evidence from male and female travel accounts.

3.2.2. Twentieth-century perceptions

3.2.2.1. Analyzing male views

Upon thorough analysis of twentieth-century travel narratives, it becomes evident that the same racist attitudes are perpetuated in the works under examination. Starting with male views, our readings led us to conclude that Douglas Sladen (1906), John Fraser (1911), and Douglas Norman (1912) are most influenced by the perceptions of their nineteenth-century counterparts. Their observations could be, in fact, divided into two main parts. The first one is concerned with overarching perceptions while the second one offers more specific criticisms about Tunisian culture and customs.

3.2.2.1.1. General impressions

Sladen communicates his first perceptions of Tunis in a very negative light by arguing that "the whole thing was disgusting starting with the Arabs themselves" (Sladen 1906: 486). This extract is a stark example of the blatant negative representation of the East and its people in the early twentieth-century. The phrase "the whole thing was disgusting" immediately sets a tone of contempt. Such a strong negative language reflects a deep-seated bias against Tunis and its inhabitants. By labeling the Arabs and their surroundings as "disgusting," Sladen implies a sense of cultural superiority, positioning his own culture as more civilized. In the same vein, Fraser comments on life in Tunis as such: "it is noticeable how little civilization has touched the lives of these people" (Fraser 1911: 32-33). Such an observation reduces the Eastern way of life to something less evolved or incomplete compared to the West. By stating that civilization has had a little impact on those people's lives, Fraser reinforces stereotypes of the East as backward, static, and in need of Western intervention. In brief, both quotes stand as clear examples of how travel literature of the time often portrayed Tunis, and by extension the East, in a highly negative and derogatory manner. The use of a demeaning language,broad generalizations, and a lack of cultural empathy all serve to confirm that the East is inferior and undesirable.This view aligns with MarianaTorgovnick's assertion that Easterners are often perceived as "primitives, in tune with nature […] They exist at the lowest cultural level, but we, we occupy the highest" (Torgovnick 1990: 41: emphasis added).

3.2.2.1.2. A closer look at Tunisian daily life

Regarding specific details about life in Tunis, Fraser remarks that "[…] life is primitive and savage" (Fraser 1911: 249). By describing life in Tunis as "primitive and savage," Fraser suggests that it is inferior to the supposedly more advanced and civilized Western wayof life. This type of language reinforces long-standing stereotypes of the East as uncivilized and barbaric; perpetuating, hence,a simplistic and monolithic view of Eastern cultures. By relying on such ethnocentric views, British travel writers have succeeded in transforming their knowledge about the local culture into "European national and continental knowledges ... and relations of power" (Pratt 1992: 201–202).

Likewise Douglas criticizes the spiritual life in Tunis as wellas people's intellectualand physical capacities: "no wonder their spiritual life is apathetic, unfruitful, since the digits that explore and design, following up the vagrant fancies of the imagination, are practically atrophied" (Douglas 1912: 9). This quote includes pejorative terms "apathetic", "unfruitful",

"atrophied", suggesting not only a sense of cultural inferiority, but also implies the physical and intellectual incapacity of Tunisian people: "digits that explore and design are practically atrophied". Besides, the specific choice of words "no wonder" suggests that the author sees the perceived deficiencies as an inevitable consequence of some inherent cultural or racial traits. This bias perpetuates the idea that Tunisians are naturally less capable of spiritual and creative pursuits. Douglas avers that this deficiency and backwardness is due to two main reasons: one is general and the other one is specific. The general one refers to the fact that Tunisians, and by extension Orientals, "have not enjoyed our advantages" that is why "they are not civilized" (Douglas 1912: 23). The second reason postulates that the educational system relies heavily on "Koran schools" where children are required "to repeat texts like parrots" (Douglas 1912: 548). This system, according to Douglas, is one of the principal reasons behind the absence of creative spiritual and mental pursuits. Interestingly, these instances from twentieth-century male travel texts show how the imperial and colonial hegemony is implicated in discursiveand textual productions. Within this textual production, "the West's representation of the East works within the framework of a conscious and determined effort at subordination" (Marandi & Ensieh 2015: 23).

To reinforce our assumption that twentieth-century views are stereotypical, our focus in the next sub-part will be devoted to female observations regarding the same issue.

3.2.2.2. Female writers' perceptions

Our analysis revolves mainly around the works of Norma Lorimer (1906), Emily Ward (1920), and Stewart Erskine (1925) since these accounts conspicuously depict a negative portrayal of Tunis and its culture. In her travel account *By the Waters of Carthage* (1906), Lorimer offers sweeping, albeit stereotypical observations about life in Tunis. She posits that "from the first glance, everything appears to be topsy-turvy to the European mind" (Lorimer 1906: 29). In another instance, she reflects on her experiences with the assertion: "it all means nothing to me, but a feast of color and mystery" (Lorimer 1906:10). Obvious as it may seem, there is a striking contrast between the familiar, orderlyWest and the unfamiliar, chaotic East as reflected in the statement "everything appears to be topsy-turvy to the European mind". Through a female voice, the first quote presents Tunisian culture as confusing and irrational. In the second quote, the description of life in Tunis as "a feast of color and mystery" reduces the complex cultural realities to mere visual and sensory experiences. This reduction to aesthetics overlooks the depth and richness of Tunisian culture, making it function as a

superficial spectacle for Western consumption. The phrase "it all means nothing to me" reveals the author's lack of effort to understand the cultural significance behind what is being observed. It also indicates that the traveller is not interested in the object perse; as reflected in her phrase: "it all means nothing to me". Rather, she is "consumed with [her] own anxieties which are inevitably intermixed with desire" ("feast of color and mystery") (Kaplen 1997: xviii).

More specific perceptions are found in the works of Erskine and Ward. In reference to the Tunisian way of life—which she finds completely at odds with the European one—Erskine offers the following description:

> Two camels laden with palanquins, inside the closelydrawn curtains of which were the principal women of the tribe, a party of men walked after […] women in dusky blue carrying tiny babies, and children of all ages straggling along with an escort of yellow dogs that completed the party (Erskine 1925: 130).

A scene which she later describes as a […] "curious survival of a happy primitive state […] looking at them, one seems to see pictures of the past" (Erskine 1925: 138).

In these quotes, the perspective from which the author describes the scene is that of an outsider who observes and documents what is around him/ her with a sense of superiority or detachment. This sense of superiority makes the observer feel entitled to criticize and categorize the lives of Tunisian people. First, the imagery of "women in dusky blue carrying tiny babies" and "children of all ages straggling along" suggests a sense of poverty and disarray. Second, the inclusion of an "escort of yellow dogs" further adds to the sense of disorganization and primitivism. Third, the phrase "curious survival of a happy primitive state" explicitly labels this scene as primitive. Besides, the idea that "one seems to see pictures of the past"suggests that Eastern societies are timeless and unchanging. This portrayal makes the whole region appear as a kind of static abstraction. It also conveys the idea that the Tunisian society, and by extension Eastern ones, are "unchangeable places which do not cope with the development of the world—particularly the Western world" (Lamranni 2021: 10-11). This view fits within Said's line of thought that most of the Orientalists' literary works attempt "to show the Orient as a stable, unchangeable, and ahistoric place" (Said 1978-2003: 136).

In a similar vein,Ward depicts the appearance of one of theTunisian cities in a negative light: "[…] We drove under a great Moorish arch […] We walked over paving stones, up one of the streets of Old Tunis (a narrow, curving street with small shops on either side and roofs of uneven height) […] entirely Oriental" (Ward 1920: 141). In this quote, Ward creates a reductive image of "Old Tunis" full of negative descriptions: "narrow, curving street", "small shops", "roofs of uneven height". By highlighting the "uneven height" of roofs and the narrowness of the streets, Ward implicitly contrasts these features with the perceived orderliness and uniformity of European cities. The choice of the term "Oriental" in "entirely Oriental" is a key indicator of the prevalence of the Orientalist perspective in Ward's work. By labeling the city as "entirely Oriental," she reinforces a binary opposition between the West and the East, presenting Tunis as a place that is intriguing yet inherently alien and inferior. This kind of representation reduces the complexity and diversity of Tunisian culture to a simplistic and monolithic image, which is more reflective of Western fantasies and prejudices than of the reality of Tunisian life.

To further depict the Tunisian culture in a pejorative way, Erskine focuses on Tunisian music, characterizing it in a highly negative light. This idea is reflected in the following quote:

> The Arabic music, even the oneof a higher caliber is monotonous, and so is the strange, barbaric, syncopated rhythm of the accompanying drum [...] in what to Western ears is a dissonance […] if we listen to a party of Arabic musicians in any café or street in a native quarter, even if we hear those of a higher caliber in a concert hall, we are almost sure to do so in a hostile spirit (Erskine 1925: 175).

The above portrayal fits within an Orientalist framework that perpetuates stereotypes of Eastern cultures as inferior. Erskine conveys this inferiority in the realm of music which she depicts in a derogatory manner. This assumption is evident in her choice of words like "monotonous", "strange", barbaric", which imply that Tunisian music is dull or uninteresting; reinforcing a sense of Western superiority in musical taste and sophistication. The claim that Arabic music is perceived as a "dissonance" by Western ears reinforces the idea that this music is dissonant and discordant compared to the harmonious qualities of Western music. This description dismisses the unique aesthetic and structural elements of Arabic music,

depicting them as inferior. Finally, the statement that listeners are "almost sure to do so in a hostile spirit" suggests that Western audiences approach Eastern music with a predetermined negative attitude, reinforcing a narrative of cultural otherness and hostility.

Another realm that was heavily criticized by these writers is that of religion. Notably, those of English Roman Catholic background appear particular devoted to their faith. For instance, Lorimer declaresthat "we Christians always think that the religion of Islam is one of sensuality and selfishness (Lorimer 1906: 321). Unquestionably, the quote sets a clear dichotomy between "Christians" and "the religion of Islam". This dichotomy positions Christianity as the normative, superior standard against which Islam is negatively contrasted. Such a binary thinking simplifies complex interfaith dynamics, reinforcing misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims. Besides, the association of Islam with "sensuality" often carries connotations of indulgence in physical pleasures, implying a moral deficiency or lack of spiritual depth. This stereotype largely conforms with Orientalist depictions of the East as overly indulgent and decadent.

In conclusion, these female writers collectively concurred on the perceived inferiority of Tunisian culture, which underpinned all their derogatory portrayals. From this perspective emanates Lorimer's conclusion that "it is hard to realize thatthis narrow yellow peninsula was once the world's nursery for learning, for art, for science, and for commerce" (Lorimer 1906: 264). By taking into consideration all the above quotes, it could be safely claimed that nothing seems to have changed from the nineteenth to the twentieth century since the Orient still functions as "a career, an endlessly repeated simulacrum", using Benjamin Disraeli's expression (Disraeli, as cited in Castro 2016: 152). This idea will be made more apparent in the next part showing how travellers exoticized Tunis in their works, hence continuing to perpetuate a distorted and oversimplified understanding of the East.

3.3. Reading exoticism/ analyzing exoticism

3.1.1. The Orient as the locus of the exotic

"The Orient had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting [...] landscapes" (Said 1977: 1). According to Said's view, the process of exoticization has often played a crucial role in shaping a dichotomous view between the East (seen as exotic and mysterious) and the West (perceived as rational and superior). It has also functioned as an othering tool legitimizing the depiction of Eastern cultures as fundamentally different from the familiar Western norms. More than that, it has been found that the tendency to exoticize is deeply embedded within the imperial mechanics of the European expansion. As David Spurr acknowledges, it is not surprising that: "the idealization of the savage from the beginning has always accompanied the process of Western imperial expansion, for this idealization simply constitutes one more use that can be made of the savage in the realm of Western cultural production" (Spurr 1993: 128). This paradigm thought elucidates our decision to include this part within the analysis of the Tunisian culture from a negative perspective. Before delving deeper into this analysis, some crucial notions are going to be highlighted namely exoticism and the exotic.

According to Bill Ashcroft, the term exoticism "was first used in 1599 to represent the idea of alien, someone who is other not indigenous or a foreign" (Ashcroft, as citedin Neelam 2022: 7). Over time, it has been used to refer to "the pleasure of a sensation […] excited by novelty" (Victor Segalen, as cited in Staszak 2008: 6). Staszak goes on to note in his own words that "exoticism consists more of showing enthusiasm for what has already been marked elsewhere as picturesque and been reproduced as such" (Staszak 2008: 6). Starting from the nineteenth-century onwards, the term has got new specific connotations clearly "lend[ing] itself to collusion with political imperialism" (Jennifer Yee 2015:151). Following this line of thought, exoticism in art and literature becomes a form of representation that "carries pejorative connotations of Eurocentric, simplistic attitudes to non-western cultures […] a set of preconceived ideas about non-European lands and peoples (Yee 2015: 151). This is what drives Staszak to conclude that exoticism is "less the pleasure of confronting otherness than the pleasure of having the satisfaction of experiencing the sight of a reassuring version of this

confrontation, true to our fantasies, that comforts us in our identity and superiority" (Staszak 2008: 6).

The second main term in this discussion is that of the exotic. Etymologically speaking, this concept "derives from the Greek *exotikos*, via the Latin *exoticus*, which have the near-neutrality of the English word foreign" (Yee, 2015: 151). According to Staszak, the exotic is equated with " belonging to a faraway, foreign country or civilization and thus demarcated from the norms established in and by the West" (Staszak 2008: 1).

Seen from this perspective, Jennifer Speake (2003) argues that "geographical entities—real or imagined—with enticing names like Arabia, El Dorado, Samarkand […] have been conjuring up images of mystery, romance, and adventure" (Speake 2003: 31). This interest was intensified in the early eighteenth-century by the publication of the famous book *The Arabian Nights* which was first introduced to the Western audience in 1704. In fact, "Antoine Galland translated these stories in an attempt to produce narrative accounts which would represent an imaginary geographical space that encapsulated the thousand and one fanciesand reveries" (Agliz 2015: 30). The same appeal remained intact during the nineteenth and twentieth-century since the East was still looked at through "the prism of the strange and the exotic" (Chamekh 2018: 274). Mark Mazower better explains this idea by asserting that:

> Tourists […] were seeing very much what they had come to see. Their own culturally determined appetites demanded to be satisfied […] The concrete realities and economic possibilities of the place no longer really interested them […] Instead the East was now an aesthetic construct (Mazower 2005: 173-191).

Mazower's quote suggests that tourists are driven by the lure of the exotic rather than being interested in the actual realities of the visited place. The allusion to the East as "an aesthetic construct" reflects that tourists depict the place from a stereotypical perspective in a way that fulfils their preconceived ideas and aligns with their cultural expectations instead of deeply understanding the authentic essence of the visited place. This line of thought is made clearer in the following quote which shows how the Western tourist is ina search for absolute exoticism defined by its difference from the familiar: "We wanted something thoroughly and uncompromisingly foreign-foreign from top to bottom-foreign from center to circumference-foreign inside and outside and all around nothing any where around it to dilute its foreignness"

(Mckeithan, as cited in Agliz 2015: 36-37). This above quote reflects an obvious willingness to long for an absolute foreignness of a new destination. The striking repetition of the word "foreign" underscores the readiness of the American tourist to explore new places totally different from his own familiar and mundane context. The quote also confirms how "tourists see the world beyond their national borders as other" (Agliz 2015: 37) with the image of the new destination as totally alien yet mysterious and romanticized. Even though not mentioned explicitly, it is obvious that the writer is referringback to the East because the latter is always taken to be "the most attractive place in the world for imagination due to its mystery" (Martha Conant, as cited in Almahad 2019 :7). Bell Hooks explains the reason behind this yearning for the exotic, the mysterious, and the romantic by the fact that Westerns are experiencing "a dilemma […] that has led the white West to sustain a romantic fantasy of the primitive and the concrete search for a real primitive paradise" (Hooks 1992: 27). To consolidate his claim, he gives the example of the Western thinker Michel Foucault who, even though speaking from a personal perspective, voices Westerners' need to escape from the gloomy realities of the industrial world to experience something new and pleasurable instead:

> I think that pleasure is a very difficult behavior. It's not as simple as that to enjoy one's self. And I must say that's my dream. I would like and I hope I die of an overdose of pleasure of any kind. Because I think it's really difficult and I always have the feeling that I do not feel the pleasure, the complete total pleasure and, for me, it's related to death. Because I think that the kind of pleasure would consider as the real pleasure, would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive it. I would die. (Foucault, as cited in Hooks 1992: 26-27)

What could be deduced, so far, is that the East has often been treated as the locus of the picturesque and the exotic. What further consolidates this assumption is the presence of awide range of travel books that convey a tendency to treat it as "a region of the visionary imagination, a series of dreamlike sensations" (Spurr 1993: 142).

Starting with very obvious examples, many titles emphasize the allure of the exotic and a fascination with the culturally unfamiliar. For instance, Mrs. Greville-Nugent and Francis Miltoun are both attracted by the distinctiveness of the Eastern culture and architecture; hence the titles of their travelogues, *A Land of Mosques and Marabouts* (1894), and *In the Land of Mosques and Minarets* (1908), respectively. Similarly, John Foster Fraser shows an explicit

attraction to the veiled women of the East and this zeal is deduced from the title of his book *The Land of Veiled Women* (1911). Similarly, Norman Douglas suggests by his title, *Fountains in the Sand* (1912), an exploration of picturesque sites that transcend conventional expectations. Such titles offer the Western reader, from the very beginning, an Orientalist aesthetic that revolves mainly around the exoticization of the East, reflecting simultaneously its unfamiliarity and eccentricity.

Regarding the substance of the content, numerous instances articulate this line of thought. As one of the suggestive examples from French travel literature, François de Chateaubriand in his famous book *Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem* (1811)[18], depicts an Orient " […] still steeped in myth, legend and obsession" (Chateaubriand, as cited in Castro 2016: 153). Another example is found in Fraser's description of the East which reads as follows: "the wistfulness of the East, its quietness, its glorious sunlight, its fantastic Oriental architecture, its mystery, the garb of the people, the seclusion of the women" (Fraser 1911: 97), the mere feeling that it was "the land of romance captivated the soul" (Fraser 1911: 97) of all travel writers. Other travel writers are influenced by the spirit of the Arabian Nights and, thereby, described the Oriental countries they visited under this light. For instance, Lady Warren finds that " […] Algiers looks like a cityof the Arabian Nights" (Warren 1922:14). In a similar vein, Edith Wharton refers to Algeria as "a magic land" (Wharton 1920: 41). In her description of Morocco, she claims the following: "to touch the past with one's hands is realized only in dreams; and in Morocco the dream feeling envelopes one at every step" (Wharton 1920: 53). In another instance, she refers to a Moroccan quarter as follows: "onecan't take two steps in the native quarter […] without feeling one's self in an unexpurgated page of the Arabian Nights!" (Wharton 1920: 318). The outcome of such assumptions, as evinced by Derek Gregory (1995), was the construction of "imagined geographies" where the Orient is depicted with a limited allusion to real life there. It has even become a "flittering phantasmagoria, half illusion, half reality" (Palayibik 2010: 4).

Notably, nearly all travelogues of the colonial era are full of shrewd observations and in tune with a racy and ethnocentric Western point of view. It has been advocated by postcolonial critics that the representation of cultural differences as exotic is "[…] appropriative, since it tended to construct the dichotomy of self/other in such a way as to justify colonial interventions in other countries" (Ghaderi 2013: iii). That very assumption is further consolidated by Graham Huggan who opines that "exoticism is a kind of

[18] Originally published in French as *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811).

epistemological imperialism. It produces knowledge that legitimizes the imperial project that helps in accompanying power relations" (Huggan, as cited in Neelam 2022: 5). Likewise, Victor Segalen, in his essay entitled *"Essay on Exoticism"*, describes exoticism "as a product of imperialism which is utilized to uncover the cultural otherness" (Segalen, as cited in Neelam 2022: 7). Similarly, Claudine Moïse acknowledges that "exoticism is the mirror of ethnocentrism, which can both, beyond any process of identity building, and from radical view points, also generate ideas of exclusion, which are hence racist" (Moïse 2019: 5). She even equates exoticism with"relativism" because "what is valued […] is a country or a culture defined exclusively through their relation to the observer" (Moïse 2019: 5).

Interestingly, these aesthetics of representation go largely in tune with the imperialist thinking because it depicts the East through a traditional vision of an exotic and picturesque foreign place. This idea falls within Bhabha's thought which argues that"the predominant strategic function" of the colonial discourse "is the creation of a space for a subject people through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/ unpleasure *(sic)* is incited" (Bhabha 1983: 23). Henceforth, the East is transformed into a desirable object described through the lens of the exotic in order to confirm its eternal difference from the West. The first step to do this is to "[…] keep the distance and difference between the exotic other and western self" (Said, as cited Neelam 2022: 5). This eventually leads, according to Said, to an Oriantalist representation of the Orient as "a theatrical stage or an exhibition, maintaining the East in a separate sphere from the West, while at the same time offering it up to contemplation, scholarly study or enjoyment by the West" (Said 1995: 58). To better understand how the Orient is represented as "a theatrical stage", the focus is going to be put onTunis and how it is viewed and represented as typically exotic by British travellers.

3.2.2. Tunis as the locus of th exotic

British travel writers, like their Western counterparts, expressed a notable fascination with the exotic facets of Tunis, a destination elucidated by some travel writers as "the land of wonders" (Greville-Nugent 1894:186). The roots of this interest date back to the beginning of the eighteenth-century when the English version of the famous book *The Arabian Nights* was published in 1712. During the Victorian period, the book "was translated by both Lane and Burton" (Al-Asmar 1994: 76). Soon after, it became considered "as the main source of the Victorian image of the Arabs" (Al-Asmar 1994: 76). It even became "a synonym for the magical, the miraculous, for tales to which one listened wide-eyed, open-mouthed" (Brent 1977: 97). Approached from this perspective, the publication of *The Arabian Nights* in England, whether consciously or unconsciously, laid the basis for "a literary Arabia: a place full of minarets, domes and moonlight," and of "white sands and sighing maidens, of gleaming palaces" (Brent 1977: 97). This is what drives Jamal Al-Asmar to conclude that "the eighteenth century was the century of the Arabian Nights in Britain" as "it reinforced the exotic observations of the travellers" (Al-Asmar 1994: 81).

The same spirit continued to have a great influence on British travellers and their perceptions during the nineteenth and twentieth-century. One of the nineteenth-century eminent examples is explicitly articulated in the opening pages of Mrs. Greville-Nugent's account *A Land of Mosques and Marabouts* (1894):

> The thoughts of veiled Houris, swatched in Oriental brocades and gauzes and tinkling with sequins, entice you to a nearer view? [...] Then reader, fly with me in the travelling trunk of fancy. Let us close the lid, pronounce the magic word, and soar over the chimney tops of smoky London till we find ourselves far South where the skies are blue [...] I can, if you take my hand, lead you through these cities where the women walk veiled and trousered (Greville-Nugent 1894: 1-2).

Greville-Nugent presents a vivid description to create the fantasy of this Oriental place. In fact, the images and allusions used in the above quote resemble to a great extent the world

of the Arabian Nights[19] where there are "veiled Houris", "Oriental brocades", "gauzes tinkling with sequins", "veiled and trousered women". Besides, the idea of flying in a travelling trunk of fancy adds a kind of mystery and fantasy to this magical land. As clearly evidenced in her words, Greville-Nugent invites her readers to move southward in order to escape from the gloomy atmosphere of London. This idea is, in fact, inspired by her readings of other Orientalist writers and namely Flaubert. In his famous book about Egypt entitled *Salamboo* (1862), Flaubert seems to be "in search for a visionary alternative" (Said, as cited in Borthwic 1991: 155). He was undeniably seeking for the following oppositions: "gorgeous color (instead of the greys of the French provincial landscape), exciting spectacle (instead of humdrum routine) and the perennially mysterious (instead of the all too-familiar)" (Borthwick 1991: 155). Based on the above, it could be inferred that the paramount concern for Orientalist writers is to embellish their accounts with exotic imagery, a strategic endeavour to capture the attention of their readers. As a result, Tunis, and by extension the Orient, become "an exemplary study in the constitution of the exotic" (Borthwick 1991: 155). Or as further elaborated by Said, Eastern countries are regarded as "a place full of possibilities which is exploited through an imaginative process of aestheticisation" (Said, as cited in Lamrani 2021: 4). David Spurr concurs with Said's perspective positing that Western writers rely on these exotic images with the intention to "make reading a pleasurable and aesthetic experience" (Spurr, as cited in Lamrani 2021: 4).

Examined through this perspective, male travellers depicted Tunis as the quintessential place where the exotic could be both experienced and felt. Indeed, many twentieth-century examples attest to this fact. For Miltoun, the American traveller,Tunis is "the veritable gate of Eastern life […] The most interesting tourist resort of North Africa with its souks and its Orientalism"(Miltoun 1908: 97). He further expounds that "there is nothing as Oriental as old Tunis. The Tunis of the souks, of the mosques, and minarets" (Miltoun 1908: 97). The same spirit of thought is caught in the works of British writers of the same period. Fraser, for instance, describes Tunis as "dreamy and luscious, and fantastic and Eastern" (Fraser 1911: 205). Likewise, Graham asserts that the whole context "[…] make[s] one wonder if that which seems to be before one's eyes is reality, or some wondrous mirage of an enchanted dreamland" (Graham1908: 7-8).While analyzing these male views, a common theme is

[19] *The Arabian Nights* is the title used in the eighteenth-century English translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which is a collection of tales from the Middle East written in the Arabic language during the Islamic Golden Age (mid-eighth-century to mid-twelfth-century.

discerned: all of them depict Tunis not as a complex and dynamic society, but rather as a romanticized and mystical destination. For example, Miltoun's view reduces the essence of the city to a mere "Oriental" experience. In his quotes, he highlights elements like "souks, minarets, and mosques" which narrow the rich cultural and social Tunisian landscape to few stereotypical features that align with Western fantasies of the East. This exoticization is further underscored by Fraser's depiction of Tunis as "dreamy" and "fantastic" as well as Graham's transformation of the city into a "mirage" and "an enchanted dreamland". Such descriptions strip Tunis from its authenticity and deny it real and vibrant aspect. It also confirms Said's view that Orientalism is "premised upon exteriority, that is,on the fact that the orientalist scholar makes the Orient speak, describesthe Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the west" (Said 1979: 41).

The same mindset is reflected by female travellers of the twentieth century. Forinstance, Frances Nesbitt argues that in Tunis "the fascination of the East is strongly felt" (Nesbitt 1906: 203). Stewart Erskine aligns with a similar perspective, asserting that in Tunis, there are "new and fascinating things that beguile the most jaded mind" (Erskine 1925: 19). As for Lorimer, Tunis is "one of the most pleasant towns you can imagine" (Lorimer 1906: 38). Relying on these perceptions, we could posit that female travellers of the early twentieth- century, like their male counterparts, contributed to the exoticization of Tunis. For example, Nesbitt's statement that in Tunis "the fascination of the East is strongly felt" reinforces Orientalist tropes of the East as a place of inherent fascination and intrinsic mystery. Similarly, Erskine's idea that Tunis can "beguile the most jaded mind" reflects an exoticization of the city as a place of perpetual novelty and charm crafted to satisfy Western desires. Finally, Lorimer's description of Tunis as "one of the most pleasant towns you can imagine" further contributes to this exoticizing narrative reducing the city only to a place of comfortand pleasure. Yet, the most illustrative instance that highlights the way Tunis is deeply exoticized in travel books is found in the following words by Agnes Leigh:

> Farewell, poetic and romantic land! If never more beneath thy Eastern skies We see, amidst the waving palms, arise dream-cities circled round with golden sand—As if some magic wand had placed them there, And they must vanish when we venturenear— Still, tho' on distant shores, we love thee well. And in these pages we attempt to tell the secret of the charm that weaves the spell (Leigh, as cited in Ward 1920: 222).

This passage is one of the best examples that conveys the exoticization of the East by representing it as a mystical, enchanting, and almost unreal place. In fact, the description of Tunis as a "poetic and romantic land" with "dream-cities circled round with golden sand" conjures up a fantasy-like image, reminiscent of the Arabian Nights and other Orientalist works that depict the East as a place of wonder and magic, disconnected from the reality of everyday life.

Interestingly, all these views could be encapsulated in the following words by Graham Petrie who contends that Tunis offers "arich and varied menu to those who felt the glamour of the East" (Petrie 1908: 1). Tunis, described as "a menu" of exotic experiences, becomes objectified and commodified in Western travel narratives, and transformed into a selection of consumable delights.

To better understand how Tunis is exoticized in British travel books, we have opted for organizing this "varied menu" according to two main themes, namely:exotic places and exotic customs which are chosen on the basis of their frequency and popularity in British travelogues. Starting with the theme of exotic places, it could be argued that British travellers are essentially attracted to Tunisian souks or bazaars, the holy city of Kairouan, the architecture of mosques and minarets, as well as the Tunisian harem. The second theme of exotic customs will be analyzedin a separate section. To further examine this dimension of exoticism, a subsequent section will be dedicated to analyzing the exoticization of Tunis through visual representations, particularly in photography.

3.3.2.1. Exotic places

3.3.2.1.1. Exoticizing Tunisian Souks

Our choice to analyze Tunisian souks as one of the main exotic tropes could be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that "markets provide a primarily visual definition" (Haddad 2006: 78) of the exotic other. On the other hand, it could be bolstered by the pronounced enthusiasm exhibited by travellers toward Oriental Souks. This idea is echoed in the following words by the Austrian American traveller Ernst Wartegg who suggests that "throughout the whole Orient, nothing is more interesting for the European traveller than the Bazaars" which are "the heart and soul of town life" (Wartegg 1882: 97).

In the case of Tunis, nineteenth-century writers, namely Graham and Ashbee (1887) and Edward Rae (1877), as well as prominent female authors such as Greville-Nugent (1894) and Mary Herbert (1872) highlight the importance of Tunisian souks in enhancing the exotic aspect of the country. According to Rae, he asserts that the heart of the bazaars " […] is a moving panorama of freshness and picturesqueness of which one never tires (Rae 1877:136). The same words are articulated, a decade later by Graham and Ashbee who describe the souks as "the life of Tunis […] the heart of Tunis" (Graham & Ashbee 1887:1). Accordingto them, they are "so attractive that the traveller returns to them again and again without satiety" (Graham & Ashbee 1887: 20). Here, both Rae and Graham and Ashbee emphasize the inexhaustible nature of the exotic souks. In fact, Rae mentions that "one never tires" of the scene, while Graham and Ashbee voice a similar thought by mentioning that "the traveller returns to them again and again without satiety". But more importantly, the language used by both writers: "the heart of Tunis", "a moving panorama", is romantic and idealized since it portrays the souks as places of pure "picturesqueness" and fascination. This romantic tone is a common feature of the Orientalist discourse where the exotic East is often depicted as "[…] a place of romance and exotic beings" (Said 1977:1). Even though apparently appreciative, this perspective simplifies the culture it describes and reduces it to a series of exotic images instead of a complex and multifaceted reality.

A similar thought can be found in the works of nineteenth-century female writers. For instance, Greville-Nugent (1894) argues the way the souks are designed as "long, obscure, tunnel-like streets, whose arched roofs save for here and there a sky light, shutting out the

glaring sun", (Greville-Nugent 1894: 143) makes them appear as both attractive and picturesque. This picturesqueness is furthered by "the busy hum of voices" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 143) which overwhelms the whole place, hence attributing a distinctly Oriental quality to these marketplaces. Obviously, the description of the souks as "long, obscure, tunnel-like streets" evokes a sense of mystery and enclosure which is a common trope in exoticism. Moreover, by attributing a "distinctly Oriental quality" to the market places, Greville-Nugent reinforces the idea that these spaces are quintessentially Eastern and therefore inherently different from Western spaces.

Other female writers shifted their attention towards what James Buzzard calls "tokens of authenticity" (Buzzard 1993: 6). The latter are exemplified by the type of Oriental commodities sold in these souks. This idea is echoed by Herbert who talks about "the multitude of men embroidering the most beautiful stuffs, haiks, burnouses […] which are not to be found or matched in any cityof Europe" (Herbert 1872: 246). Based on Herbert's view, it could be argued that the Tunisian market has no longer its traditional function as a market place. From the standpoint of the Western traveller, however, it turns out to be "an exhibition […] the items for sale have neither use value nor exchange value, but only visual value" (Haddad 2006: 78).

The same spirit is reiterated in the writings of twentieth-century travel writers who think that the exotic aspect of Tunis is found in its marketplaces. Graham acknowledges that "the most characteristic and delightful feature of Arab Tunis is undoubtedly the souk, or covered bazaar. Practical as well as picturesque, cool in summer and warm in winter, it affords such perfect protection from the unkind freaks of the elements" (Graham 1908: 67). In this quote, the phrase "the most characteristic and delightful feature of Arab Tunis" immediatelyidentifies the souk as the quintessential aspect of the country's identity. The use of the adjectives "delightful" and "picturesque" conveys a sense of enchantment and pleasure for those who experience it. This aligns with the exoticizing tendencywhich focuses on elements of foreign cultures that are perceived as charming and fascinating to the Western seer.

Along similar lines, female authors such as Erskine, Lorimer and Ward emphasize the fact that Tunisian souks are pleasant places to see and visit. In this regard, Erskine claims that "the suq (sic) is worth many a visit for […] the whole Eastern flavor makes it a thing of joy" (Erskine 1925: 221). For her, it is a place where "the charm begins to work" (Erskine 1925: 200). Here, Erskine highlights the emotional and sensory appeal of Tunisian bazaars by

describing them as possessing an "Eastern flavor," which suggests a unique sensory experience that is distinctly different from what might be found in the West. Also, the mention of the phrase "a thing of joy" reflects the emotional experience one might experience when visiting them. Significantly enough, the emphasis on the "Eastern flavor" and the "charm" of the souk implicitly contrasts it with the familiar, everyday environments of the West. This idea further emphasizes the exotic aspect of the souks as a place where the ordinary turns out to be extraordinary.

Likewise, Lorimer begins by describing the souks as "roofed over with dark wood, but not so closely as to keep out all light and air, yet just close enough to give that sense of mystery" (Lorimer 1906: 27). This design, she suggests, accounts for the "relief to step out of the glaring intensity of the white city into the stillness and checkered light and shade of the bazaars" (Lorimer 1906: 27). Such an architectural arrangement leads her to conclude that "everything was a blaze of light and colour. [...] The merchants of the souks had spared neither labour nor money in converting these sombre streets into a very fairyland of Eastern beauty" (Lorimer1906:32). In these instances, Lorimer emphasizes the exotic qualities of the souks through a focus on their architecture as well as atmosphere. First, the fact of attributing "a sense of mystery" to this place conveys its exotic aspect. But the latter is enhanced by the contrast between "glaring intensity of the white city" and the "stillness and checkered lightand shade of the bazaars". Moreover, her observation "everything was a blaze of light and colour," emphasizes the sensory richness of the souks, suggesting that they are not only visually striking but also emotionally and aesthetically overwhelming. Then, Lorimer's description culminates in her phrase: "a very fairyland of Eastern beauty". This implies thatthe souks are not merely functional spaces but have been transformed into something magical and enchanting. Significantly, the comparison to a "fairyland" invokes a sense of fantasy, further exoticizing the souks as places that are almost unreal in their beauty.

Ending up with Ward, she also echoes the same views as her counterparts. First, she highlights that the exotic aspect of the souks lies in theirarchitecture:"narrow, curvingstreets with small shops on either side and roofs of uneven height" (Ward 1920: 141). Then, this exoticism is furthered by their atmosphere: "crowded, full of movement and entirely Oriental" (Ward 1920: 141). This is what leads her to conclude that "all this fuss and bustle and noise made us feel that we were in the hub of a very funny universe" (Ward 1920: 146). In another instance, and following the steps of Lorimer, she argues that while in the souks,"we felt

ourselves back in the days of the Arabian nights, or again amongst the relics of a remote past" (Ward 1920: vi). Obvious as it may seem, Ward focuses on the architectural features of the souks by referring to the "narrow, curving streets". This reinforces the idea of the souks as mysterious and difficult to navigate—an aspect often associated with the exotic. Then, Ward further emphasizes the exotic nature of the souks by describing them as "crowded, full of movement and entirely Oriental". Indeed, the phrase "entirely Oriental" encapsulates the exoticism of the space, suggesting that everything about the souks—their sights, sounds, and activities—is imbued with an "Oriental" essence. Her conclusion that "all this fuss and bustle and noise made us feel that we were in the hub of a veryfunny universe" indicates a sense of novelty. Such novelty implies that the bazaars offer a world which is fundamentally different from that of the visitor. This sense of being in an alternate universe contributes to the exotic depiction of the souks as places where the ordinary is suspended and the visitor is transported into a different reality. Finally, Ward's reference to feeling "back in the days of the Arabian nights, or again amongst the relics of a remote past" further cements the exotic nature of the souks. By doing so, Ward places the souks within a narrative of fantasy, magic, and timelessness. What is worthy to mention is that this connection to a "remote past" is a common feature in exotic portrayals, where non-Western cultures are often depicted as timeless and unchanging, in contrast to the modern, developed, and evolving West.

In light of the above depictions, it is obvious that travellers' descriptions turn out to be panoramic reflecting their writers' attraction to all that is deemed as distant, exotic, and different. Interestingly, all these descriptions are "conventionally Orientalist" (Haddad 2006: 81) since they rely on the discourse of aesthetic representation. Accordingly, Tunisian souks are explored in relation to the picturesque and the exotic as they provide a wide array of Oriental scenes. This explains the writers' use of descriptive expressions like "attractive", "picturesque", "sense of mystery", "pleasant places", "grander and more beautiful", which not only enhances the exotic dimension of the souk but also satisfies the thrust of their audience. What is crucial to mention about these descriptions is that they are structured in a way that simultaneously exoticizes and distances the foreign: "a very fairyland of Eastern beauty" (Lorimer 1906: 32).

Approached critically, this dual form of exoticizing and distancing is viewed as "[…] a reduction of the hard physical reality of the town and its human dimension to a mere enjoyable fairytale; it is a form of literary appropriation of otherness as cultural space"

(Laamiri n.d.: 12). Significantly, just as Tunisian souks are often depicted as exotic spaces brimming with sensory and cultural mystique, the portrayal of the city of Kairouan follows a similar pattern. The next part will focus on how this city is exoticized in order to fulfill Western fantasies of the East.

3.3.2.1.2. Exoticizing the holy city of Kairouan

The sacred city of Kairouan emerges as a subject of extreme significance for British travellers. Twentieth-century narratives, indeed, attest to this fact. Beginning with the perspectives of male writers, Fraser finds out that Kairouan possesses an inherently exotic character in both its appearance and appeal. That is why he describes it as "a dreamy, drowsy city" (Fraser 1911: 216). By characterizing the city as "dreamy" and "drowsy," Fraser emphasizes a sense of timelessness, reinforcing the notion of Kairouan as a place detached from modernity and reality. This depiction aligns with the Orientalist perspective that often romanticizes Eastern locations, describing them not as vibrant and dynamic, but rather as staticand mythical places that invite Western fascination and fantasy. In close alignment with Fraser, Graham echoes the same spirit of thought because he thinks that Kairouan predominantly "retains so much of her Oriental character" (Graham1908:1). In this quote,the exotic dimension is underscored through the use of the expression "Oriental character". The particular choice of the verb "retain" suggests the writer's adherence to prevalent colonialist and Orientalist perspectivesof the era, wherein writers sought to project preconceived notions on Eastern places. Consequently, the author's emphasis on the preservation of Kairouan's "Oriental character" not only reinforces the portrayal of the city as exotic, but also conveys a specific cultural gaze that seeks to freeze the city by depicting it as a repository of ancient traditions resistant tothe dynamics of themodern world. In another instance, he builds further on this idea by asserting that:

> Kairouan, unlike nearly all the other cities of Tunisia, has no classical associations. In this wonderful country [...] Kairouan is undoubtedly the most interesting city in Tunisia; glowing with colour, scintillating with light, and teeming with Oriental life, it seems to realize all one's dreams of an Eastern town. (Graham 1908: 180)

Suggestive as it may seem, Graham's depiction of Kairouan is a quintessential example of how Orientalist narratives construct and reinforce exoticized images of the East. His characterization of the city as the "most interesting city in Tunisia" highlights the allure it holds for Western travellers. In his quote, Kairouan is presented as a vivid spectacle: "glowing with colour, scintillating with light". Such descriptions embody the stereotypical attributes of the Orient as a place of sensuality and mystery. Besides, the phrase "teeming with Oriental life" encapsulates the exoticized view of the East prevalent in Western literature of the early twentieth-century. Furthermore, Graham's assertion that Kairouan "seems to realize all one's dreams of an Eastern town "reveals the extent to which his perception of the cityis shaped by preconceived notions and fantasies about the Orient. The city is not depicted as it is but rather as a fulfillment of Western desires for the exotic. This idea finds a concrete articulation in the words of Richard Philips who acknowledges that travel writers "project European geographical fantasies onto non-European geographies" (Philips 1997: preface). This process has allowed them not only to "un-map and destabilize identities" (Philips 1997: preface) but also to construct a monolithic European identity.

As far as female writings are concerned, they largely follow the path of their male counterparts. One of the illustrative examples is found in Stewart Erskine's account, wherein she declares that "in Kairouan, we are definitely in the East" (Erskine 1925: 150). She builds further on this idea by describing this city as one of "the most fascinating cities in North Africa. It is unique in being entirely a native city" (Erskine 1925: 149). Obvious as it may seem, the exotic features in Erskine's quotes operate at multiple levels. First, her use of the term "definitely" implies that Kairouan displays characteristics that are unequivocally associated with the East, thereby enhancing its exotic allure. Second, her use of thesuperlative "the most fascinating", the deliberate selection of the adverb "entirely", and the deployment of the adjective "native" collectively underscore the authenticity of this city, concurrently heightening its exotic appeal. Upon further exploration of the city, Erskine discerns that the distinctiveness of Kairouan stems from its unique architecture being "four- squared, walled, with minarets and domes and towers, like a thing in a dream" (Erskine 1925: 149). Indeed, this evocative portrayal transforms the tangible city of Kairouan into a captivating space that elicits fascination and intrigue. This dreamy image recalls Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia. In his 1967 article "Of other Places", he focuses on those places which bear "a strange relation to other places" (cultural reader 2017: para.3). Seen from that particular angle, Kairouan, and by extension Tunis, could be considered as a heterotopia

since they "separate" travellers from "the usual time" (cultural reader 2017: para.5). This also applies to other travellers who visited other Barbary states like Pierre Loti whose description of Fez suggests that this city could be also considered as a heterotopia: "Fez, our destination, lies far away beneath the consuming sun, deep-buried in the bosom of the inanimate, close-walled country, where life is now the same as it was a thousand years ago" (Loti 1890: 19). In this passage, Loti describes Fez as timeless and unchanging, a familiar trope in Orientalist discourse. The quote evokes an imagery of death: "deep-buried"; stagnation: "life is now the same as it was a thousand years ago"; and absence of life "inanimate". In sum, Loti's portrayal situates Fez not only as geographically remote but also as temporally distant, constructing a mythic East that exists in a perpetual past.[20]

Relying on these quotes, it could be argued that this aesthetic mode of the exotic is definitely committed to construct the Orient as fixed, static, remote and more importantly, as situated outside the temporalities of the modern world. This view aligns with Said's conceptual framework, wherein he argues that most Orientalist literary endeavours seek "to show the Orient as a stable, unchangeable, and ahistoric place" (Said 1978-2003: 136). In a nutshell, the exoticization of Kairouan as a city steeped in Oriental allure extends afterwards to the exoticization of architectural landmarks such as mosques and minarets. Interestingly, the next part will shed light on how these landmarks are often portrayed as emblematic symbols of an enchanting and mysterious East.

[20] Similar descriptions can be found in EdithWharton's travel account *In Morocco* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920).

3.3.2.1.3. Exoticizing Tunisian mosques and minarets

This sub-part lays emphasis on the representation of Tunisian architecture in travel narratives. Predominantly, there is a pronounced focus on mosques and minarets, attributed to their potential to offer an unparalleled exotic vista of the country. Consequently, extensive parts about this Oriental distinctiveness are incorporated in various British narratives in order to reveal —first- what it is found as picturesque to the Western gaze and—second to create a world of the exotic for the Western reader.This conceptual trajectory finds concrete articulations in the works by twentieth-century authors, namely Francis Miltoun (1908) and Lord Leigh (as cited in Ward 1920). The latter explicitly explains his fascination with the architecture of the Great Mosque by asserting that "the Great Mosque is very fine ; it has three hundred marble columns inside and three hundred outside. The inlaid doors are magnificent. From the minaret a fine view is obtained over the whole city" (Leigh as cited in Ward 1920: 170). In this instance, Lord Leigh reflects a tendency to highlight exoticism by focusing on the grandeur of the mosque as well as its panoramic views. First, the mention of "three hundred marble columns inside and three hundred outside" underscores the impressive scale and intricate craftsmanship of the mosque. Second, the description of the "inlaid doors" as "magnificent" further contributes to the exotic portrayal creating an image of the mosque as a masterpiece of decorative art. Third, Lord Leigh's reference to the "fine view" from the minaret over the entire city adds another layer of exoticism. It suggests that the mosque not only serves as a religious and architectural landmark but also offers a vantage point that reveals the city's beauty and scope.

This lure for the exotic is also encapsulated in the title of Francis Miltoun's travelogue *In the Land of Mosques and Minarets* (1908). In his work, the American writer argues that "Saracen, Assyrian, Persian, and Byzantine architectural details are all of them beautiful, but the Mohammedan architecture of the Moors outranks them all for sheer appeal" (Miltoun 1908: 27). In practical terms, this aesthetic appeal is remarkably discerned in the mosque of Kairouan, which Miltoun contends to be "even more interesting than the palace corridors of Alhambra itself" (Miltoun 1908: 27). Delving deeper into his descriptive analysis, he includes the Ez-Zitouna and Kasba minarets, asserting that they stand out as "amongst the most beautiful minarets of the Moghreb" (Miltoun 1908: 30). This discernment, he says, is rooted in "the exquisite delicacy of design, a remarkable warmth of colour and an elegant piquant suggestion of daintiness" (Miltoun1908:30). At an individual level, by alluding to diverse

cultures such as "Saracen, Assyrian, Persian, and Byzantine" the author seeks to demonstrate a deep cultural knowledge. Furthermore, his deliberate use of the strategic comparison between the mosque of Kairouan and "the palace corridors of Alhambra" serves the purpose of illustrating the breadth of his worldly experiences and travels. It might be also an allusion to the Arab influence on European architecture and art when Spain was occupied for several centuries by the Arabs. Analytically speaking, Miltoun's aforementioned descriptions bear many hallmarks of an aesthetic representation as theydepict a "ready-made picture" (Timothy Mitchell 1994: 30) of an exotic East. By including hyperbolic expressions like: "exquisite delicacy", "elegant", "daintiness", "warmth of colour", "the most beautiful", Miltoun endeavors to offer not only a cohesiveness in his depiction of mosques and minarets, but also imparts a panoramic hue to the city's overall imagery through such an aesthetic attitude.

From a critical perspective, the excessive aestheticization of a particular place or object is deemed precarious for several reasons. First, it is problematic because it often leads to a form of romanticisation that detaches the subject from its historical, social, and political realities. More precisely, it reduces complex cultural artifacts to mere objects of visual pleasure and reinforces a passive, consumable image of the non-European world. In doing so, it helps reinforce power dynamics where the viewer (often Western) remains in control, and the viewed (the East) is rendered static and passive.

This interpretation is supported by Alison Byerly who advocates that "[b]y framing a scene, or even a person or event, as picturesque, the author separates it from realistic considerations" (Byerly 1997: 16). Similarly Barbara Franchi and Elvan Mutlu contend that the very fact of " [...] writing about places unfamiliar to Europe"—like mosques, the harem, bazaars—and describing them as "[...] dreamy, mystical, exotic, and sublime, were rather Orientalist clichés of describing the Other" (Franchi & Mutlu 2018: 74). Emily Ward illustrates this idea in her juxtaposition of the Tunisian and French quarters: "towards the end of the town was the silent mosque with its white dome; and in sharp contrast comes theFrench quarter which gives one the sensation of awakening from a dream" (Ward 1920: 183- 184). Such comparisons subtly reinforce hierarchical worldviews, suggesting that progress and order are inherently Western qualities.

It goes without saying, hence, that a conspicuous inclination is observed among most travellers to romantically depict the Eastern context as a dreamscape standing in sharp

contrast with the modern Western world. This line of thought is made clearer in the next part in whichwe will show that the harem seems to embody the most exotic aspect of Oriental life.

3.3.2.1.4. Exoticizing theTunisian harem

The term harem is etymologically derived from the Arabic word pronounced as "haram," denoting the concepts of "forbidden or sacred" (Ma 2012: 15). Further clarification is provided by the Encyclopaedia of Islam, which defines the harem as "a term applied to those parts of the household to which access is forbidden, and hence more particularly the women's quarters" (McDaniel 2014: 5). In light of the accessibility of this Oriental space solely to females and male relatives, European male authors encountered impediments in gaining entry, resulting in a dearth of first-hand narratives about the harem from their perspective. In instances where male authors have contributed, it could be argued that their accounts are essentially "more reflective of European sexual fantasies of Oriental women than of domestic realities" (Ma 2012: 15) pertaining to this Oriental setting. So, upon close examination of the corpus authored by British female writers, we could notice that their writings are imbued with an Orientalist perspective, marked by a profound sense offascination with the exotic harem. Their focus could be explained by the fact that in nineteenth-century Britain, the harem constituted a topic of extreme interest since it evoked fantasies of exaggerated mysteries and seduction. It is important to note that not all female travellers reproduced these fantasized visions. A significant exception is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who travelled tothe Ottoman Empire in the early eighteenth centuryand had access to private female spaces, including harems. Far from indulging in exoticised depictions, her letters offer realistic portrayals of Ottoman women’s lives. Her close contact with them allowed her to represent the harem notas a space of fantasy, but as a site of femalesociability and autonomy, hence challenging Western misconceptions. Her work thus is foundational in British women's travel writing in the Orient—one that combines empirical observation with cross-cultural insight.

Going back to British works about Tunis, most of female writers endeavoured to produce a minute description of this typically Oriental sphere in order to satisfy the thrust of their British audience: "[my aim is to provide delight and pleasure] to those who have not been able to see for themselves an old thing filtered through a new medium" (Greville-Nugent 1894:3). For instance, nineteenth-century writers like LadyTemple (as cited in Sir Grenville

Temple 1835) as well as twentieth-century writers like Lorimer (1906) talked about the Tunisian harem and life inside it.

Beginning with nineteenth-century views, Sir Grenville Temple, being unable to enter the private space of the harem, refers to Lady Temple who had the opportunityto visit it with her sisters. In this regard, she initiates her description as follows: "We passed through a patio, paved with white marble, covered with a silk awning, and surrounded by arcades, in their turn supported by fluted pillars, likewise of white marble" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 196). This quote illustrates a visual imagery of the exotic by combining luxurious materials with classical architectural features. For example, the reference to "white marble", "silk awning", and "fluted pillars" conveys a sense of sophistication, richness, and opulence. Besides, the allusion to "fluted pillars", reminiscent of ancient grand civilizations like the Greek and the Roman, adds a classical and exotic architectural touch. As a whole, the writer's focus on the delineation of the setting, coupled with a minute attention to sensory details, contributes in creating a conspicuously refined and exotic representation for the readership. Still with general portrayals, Lady Temple went across "a little square garden into a large vaulted gallery" which she found "delightfully cool, with a fountain playing in the centre, full of gold fish" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 203). Here, allusions to "a square garden", "fountain in the centre", and "gold fish" create an appealing exotic picture offering the reader the impression of a "delightfully cool" environment. In another instance, she goes on detailing the overarching embellishments that characterize the harem. Under this light, her portrayal is articulated as follows: "In each corner was a beautiful vase-shaped fountain to cool the air in this delightful spot, which nothingcould be more Oriental, carrying one's imagination completely into those scenes described in the Arabian Nights" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 196-197). This quote pays a meticulous attention to aesthetic and sensory details in the harem. The reference to "beautiful vase-shaped fountain" suggests a pleasing and attractive setting. The use of the phrase "delightful spot" emphasizes the aesthetic appeal of the described place. Besides, Temple’s insistence on the fact that "nothing could be more Oriental" and her reference to "the scenes described in the Arabian Nights" conjures up a sense of exoticism on one hand, and intensifies the imaginative quality on the other. Overall, Temple's portrayal introduces an additional layer of glamour with the aim of heightening the exoticism already intrinsic to the setting.

In terms of detailed delineations, Lady Temple guides her readers to the inner side ofthe harem through a sequential progression from its exterior to the interior secrets of the Bey's room:

> She led me by the hand through the patio into a long room, divided in the centre by an arch-way; one half of this room was surrounded by a low divan; on each side of the door-way; which had been covered until our approach by a silk curtain of brilliant colours [...] a low round table was laid out in the first half of the room, with a silk table cloth (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 200).

Obvious as it may seem, Lady Temple's description pays attention to cultural details suchas "an arch-way"; "alow-divan", which are associated with Eastern cultures, as well as to luxurious materials like "silk curtain". Such references contribute to creating an image that evokes a sense of appreciation for the exotic. To paint a more precise picture, she goes on describing the ceiling of the Bey's room:

> The ceiling was vaulted, and painted and gilt in the usual Moorish style, than which nothing could be more beautiful, around the room were all kinds of boxes from Stambool, in mother-of-pearl; above the entrance door was some of the open stucco-work with coloured glass, which has such a remarkably pretty effect (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 202).

Here, the exotic elements are not only captured within the architectural style of "the vaulted ceiling" or "the stucco work with coloured glass" but further heightened by the mention of "boxes from Stambool in mother-of-pearl" to transport the reader to a culturally different but rich environment. To enhance the exotic aspect, Lady Temple shifts her focus to the Bey's arms which she finds "splendid" but, for her, "the most beautiful was one called a topuz the whole of which was of fretted gold, completely studded with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies: it was the most magnificent thing in the way of arms I ever beheld" (LadyTemple, as cited in Temple 1835: 202-203). Undeniably, terms like "splendid", "the most beautiful" as well as the reference to precious materials such as "diamonds", "emeralds", and "rubies" transforms the object described from a military weapon to a luxurious piece of art.

It is also crucial to mention that parallel interest is evident within a section of Greville-Nugent's travel account wherein she describes the twin beds of the Bey and the Beyess as follows: "each in their tiled alcove, which exemplify what an Arabian bed seated really is […] Nowonder the tales of the Thousandand One Nights were invented in bed,with such a bed to promote soft imaginings" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 167). This quote is, in fact, a clear instance of travellers' fascination with the exotic and the transformation of the setting into an unreal place out of space and time which makesthis representation akin to fairy tales. That very idea takes us backagain to Foucault's notion of heterotopia that separates travellers from the actual time and takes them to the space and time of fairy tales.

The same line of thought is also found in Norma Lorimer's twentieth-century travel account. During her visit to the harem of Monsieur Amour, a prosperous Tunisian perfumer, she overtly expresses her appreciation for the "charming black and white colonnaded courtyard" (Lorimer 1906: 59) and the centrally positioned "sunken fountain" (Lorimer 1906: 59). She also showed her admiration for Monsieur Amour's bedroom which "was shaped like the letter T, with a rather gorgeously curtained and counterpane bed in the alcove end, which was formed by the bar" (Lorimer 1906: 63). As clearly mentioned, Lorimer's quote refers toan ornamented bedroom with a distinctive T-shaped architecture and with luxurious furnishings "gorgeously curtained and counterpane bed". This description suggests a shiftfrom conventional aesthetics to a more luxurious and sophisticated one which contributes to creating an exotic ambiance.

In light of the above quotes, it could be asserted that, akin to their male counterparts, women travel writers "wrote about distant lands within an Orientalist vision encompassing a sense of wonderment about exotic spaces and people" (Simour 2020: 3). Hence, whether in nineteenth or twentieth-centuries, these authors exhibit a propensity for the allure of the exotic; and the latter has undeniably impacted the thematic underpinnings of their narratives. As a consequence, by tainting their travelogues with this exotic dimension, travellers appear to be removed physically from the actual social context and their work becomes "an unreal experience" (laamiri n.d: 12). David Spurr avers that this strategy of exoticizing the other—either in reference to a person or a place—constitutes one of the controlling modes of authority used by Western literary discourse, which he designates as "seeing as in a dream" (Spurr1993). In brief, the exoticization of theTunisian harem often intertwines with the

broader exoticization of Tunisian customs, which will constitute the focus of the following section.

3.3.2.2. Exotic customs

British male and female travel writers, such as Lady Herbert (1872), Norma Lorimer (1906), and Douglas Sladen (1906), titillate their readers' attention by emphasizing the Oriental spirit in Tunisian customs; a notion reinforced by Sladen's explicit claim that the travellers' aim is "a quest of the Arabian Nights" (Sladen 1906: 426). To start with, the nineteenth-century traveller, Lady Herbert, contends that the spirit of the Arabian Nights pervades all Tunisian ceremonies. Fascinated by the distinctly Eastern character pervading a Tunisian wedding, she remarks that this cultural specificity "must have been like a scene in the Arabian Nights" (Herbert 1872: 262). Indeed, by likening the Tunisian wedding ceremony to scenes from the Arabian Nights, Lady Herbert projects a Westernized, stereotypical image of the East that is rooted in fantasy rather than reality. This kind of exoticization diminishes the authenticity and complexity of the Tunisian culture by presenting it within the confines of pre-existing, Western-imagined category of "Eastern" spectacle.

As for twentieth-century writers, the exotic aspect of Tunisian customs is caught in other local ceremonies such as the women's ceremony in Mannouba as well as the prophet's birthday. Beginning with the former, Sladen argues that one of the best examples of the Easterness of the East is embodied in the Mannouba ceremony[21]. In one of his account's sections, he overtly claims that women are "glad to go out to Mannouba for the ceremony of the women offering candles at the Saint grave. It was such a typical bit of the Orient" (Sladen 1906: 552). Notably, Sladen's quote illustrates the exoticization of Tunis by reducing a specific cultural practice to a stereotypical image of the "Orient". This idea is echoed in his statement "such a typical bit of the Orient" which reveals a superficial understanding of the ceremony, depicting it as an exotic custom rather than acknowledging its deeper cultural significance. Also, the use of the term "typical" implies that the author views this ceremony not as a unique event but as an expected aspect of "Oriental" life, hence reinforcing a monolithic view of Eastern cultures. This line of thought aligns with the Orientalist discourse,

[21] It was a religious ritual practiced inTunis during the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, involving a visit to the shrine of *Saida Mannoubiya* in order to seek blessings, especially related to fertility and marriage. For more information, see the article *Saida Mannoubiya: the story of a Tunisian feminist icon*, published in Carthage Magazine: https://carthagemagazine.com/saida-manoubiya/

which often depicts Eastern societies as uniform and static, essentially defined by a set of exotic practices.

The other cultural practice that appears tobe the embodiment of the exotic is that of the prophet's birthday. In this regard, Lorimer expresses her joy to be part of this religious Oriental ceremony. In an eager tone, she describes Tunisians as follows: "they were all dressed like the resplendent heroes of the Arabian Nights" (Lorimer 1906: 13). The first impression that comes out of this quote is that Tunisians are depicted as unreal characters who are part of a fantastic and imaginary world. Then, she goes on adding: that is why, "Jack and I felt as though we had suddenly stepped into one of the thousand and one night" (Lorimer 1906: 26). Indeed, what is striking in Lorimer'squote is the recurrent allusion to the Arabian Nights. Pamela D. Toler comments on this literary tendency by asserting that the Arabian Nights "set a standard against which direct experience of the Orient was measured in the Victorian period" (Toler, as cited in Svendsen 2018: 64). This recalls Said's notion of "textual attitude" (Said 2003: 93) which conveys that "when a human being confronts at close quarters something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant" (Said 2003: 93), he/she tries to apply his literary knowledge from books on this given reality. Muireann O'Cinneide joins Said on that particular point by highlighting that this kind of generalization is adopted in order to "fit what [writers] see into a literary, not factual, discourse" (O'Cinneide, as cited in Svendsen 2018: 64).

Undeniably, British travel writers stand at this very position, since their encounters with the locals and their customs are filtered through literary knowledge—here, the Arabian Nights—allowing them to depict reality while constructing a stereotypical image of the country they visit. According to O'Cinneide, this literary practice "accommodate[s] a classic model of Orientalism where Europeans contextualise and ascribe certain characteristics to the natives through the literary and cultural conventions of the West" (O'Cinneide, as cited in Svendsen 2018: 64). In a similar vein, the very fact of associating a culture-specific custom with fiction and romance recalls Bhabha's illuminating thought which suggests that the colonial discourse expresses "two attitudes towards external reality" (Bhabha 1994: 130). The first one "takes reality into consideration" and in this case it is about the description of a Tunisian ceremony; whereas the other "disavows it and replaces it by a product of desire" (Bhabha 1994:130). The second attitude relates the tendency to transform the ceremony into a fictional scene taken from literary accounts of the Arabian Nights.

From the quotes discussed in this section, two main ideas could be deduced. The first one is concerned with textual strategies and the second one is critical in essence. Regarding the first one, it is obvious that travel writers blend two writing styles together: narration and description. Casey Blanton underscores this point in her book *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (1997), noting that the traveller—who is also the narrator—relies on "a narrative style that borrows from fiction in its use of rising and falling action, character, and setting" (Blanton 1997: 5). The narrator also uses a descriptive style in order to show "a conscious commitment to represent the strange and exotic in ways that both familiarize and distance the foreign" (Blanton 1997: 5). Such an obsession with the Easterness of the East led Henri Michaux to assert that "travellers are unified by a common denominator: an Orient to Orientalize" (Michaux, as cited in Castro 2016: 155).

Going back to the second idea, the exotic features highlighted not onlyhave a charming function, but also prove to be a mode of authority and mastery. That very idea is better explained by Roger Benjamin (2003) who notes that "the commanding view, the panoramic vista […] offers aesthetic pleasure on one hand, information and authority on the other" (Benjamin, as cited in Burks 2006: 15). This pleasure found in "the commanding view" attributes a special role to travel writing, which David Spurr describes as "a sense of mastery over the unknown and over what is often perceived by the western writer as strange and bizarre" (Spurr 1993: 15). In a similar vein, Graham Huggan asserts that "exoticism is a way of making people and things ‘other’ by creating otherness" (Huggan, as citedin Neelam 2022: 5). Carl Thomson goes even further by suggesting that the European discourse is "engaged in a process that is now sometimes called othering" (Thomson 2011: 133) and it operates on two different levels. In general terms, "othering simply denotes the process by which the members of one culture identify and highlight the differences between themselves and the members of another culture" (Thomson 2011: 133). In a stronger sense, however, "it has come to refer more specificallyto the processes and strategies bywhich one cultures depicts another culture as not only different but also inferior to itself" (Thomson 2011: 133).

To put it in a nutshell, the exoticization of Tunisian places and customs is further enhanced by the way British travel writers depicted Tunis in photographs, framing both the culture and the city through the lens of a romanticized Orientalism.

3.3.2.3. Exoticizing Tunis in photographs

In various travel accounts, the incorporation of visual representations plays a crucial role, strategically contributing to a multidimensional experience that blends the verbal with the visual. Historically speaking, the visual representation of the world around us is far from being a new phenomenon, rather "it could be traced back to 40,000 years ago through the earliest cave painting" (Zeiny 2017: 75). Ever since, this kind of representation has gained notable significance in our lives, which Martin Jay describes as "ocularcentrism" (Jay, as cited in Zeiny 2017: 75).This implies that visual representation helps people understand and make sense of the world around them.

Within the realm of literature, these visual representations, whether in the form of illustrations, photographs, or engravings possess the capacity "to quickly influence readers both cognitively and emotionally" gradually establishing "a desired method of reading and viewing" (Zeiny 2017: 76). Focusing on the Western representation of the East, Esmaeil Zeiny finds out that it "began during the colonisation era when the East turned into a major preoccupation of nineteenth-century painting for Western male painters" (Zeiny 2017: 76). According to him, "these visual representations could construct a fixed set of meaning for certain issues, perspectives, cultures, and groups of people" (Zeiny 2017: 76). In the context of the East, this "fixed set of meaning" is achieved either through the excessive eroticization of the East or through its pronounced exoticization. Drawing upon the latter, most travel writers incorporated various photographs, paintings, or engravings into their narratives to underscore the Easterness of the East. These visual materials, accompanied by attractive captions, are not randomly included; rather they resonate with Friedrich Schlegel assertion that "it is in the Orient that we have to seek the ultimate romanticism" (Schlegel, as cited in Castro 2016: 153: my translation).[22]

Building on this broader tradition, the representation of Tunis in photographs emerges as a particularly illustrative case. The photographs included in various travel accounts do not merely paint the city; instead, they reproduce and reinforce a repertoire of recurring Orientalist icons. Analytically speaking, these photographs elucidate a set of visual tropes that include Oriental architecture, cafés, bazaars, women, the desert landscape, as well as mules

[22] "C'est en Orient que nous devons chercher le romantisme suprême" (as cited in Castro, 2016: 153).

and camels—elements that collectively construct Tunis as a quintessentially "Eastern" space in the Western imagination.

Starting with examples from the nineteenth-century, Alexander Graham and Henry Ashbee in their book *Travels in Tunisia* (1887) underscore the exotic aspect of Tunis by focusing on the Tunisian primitive way of life as well as Tunisian architecture. One of their photographs (Fig.1) shows a group of men dressed in traditional outfits, seated in front of their tents in the desert, surrounded by camels. On the surface, this photograph seems ethnographic, depictingTunisian customs.Yet analytically, it inscribes Tunisian men within a timeless, static order: the desert operates as a void, erasing signs of modern life, while camels function as an iconic marker of the Orient. This visual representation situates Tunisians outside historical progress, reinforcing the Western binary of civilised/ uncivilised. From Said's perspective, these representations are far from being neutral, rather they serve as the production of knowledge about the Orient as inherently unchanging.

With regards to Tunisian architecture, Graham and Ashbee also include a photograph of a Tunisian entrance door (Fig.2), foregrounding its ornamental design as a sign of Oriental difference. In fact, doors symbolise thresholds: their depiction thus functions as an invitation to Western readers to enter an imagined Orient, at once mysterious and exotic. Graham and Aschbee also focus on the renowned *Hand of Fatima* [23] (Fig.3), appropriating it as a visual emblem of exoticism. In doing so, they simplify the complexity and richness of an entire culture, turning it into an exotic, decorative symbol for Western consumption. These visual representations perform two interrelated functions. First, they reduce Tunis to a catalogue of symbols easily consumed by the Western gaze. Second, they reinforce a fixed, timeless, and static perception of the region, in accordance with Orientalist conventions.

[23] *The Hand of Fatima*, also known as the "*khomsa*", is an amulet widely used in North African and Middle Eastern cultures. It is largely used as a protection against the evil eye and carries a significant cultural meaning.

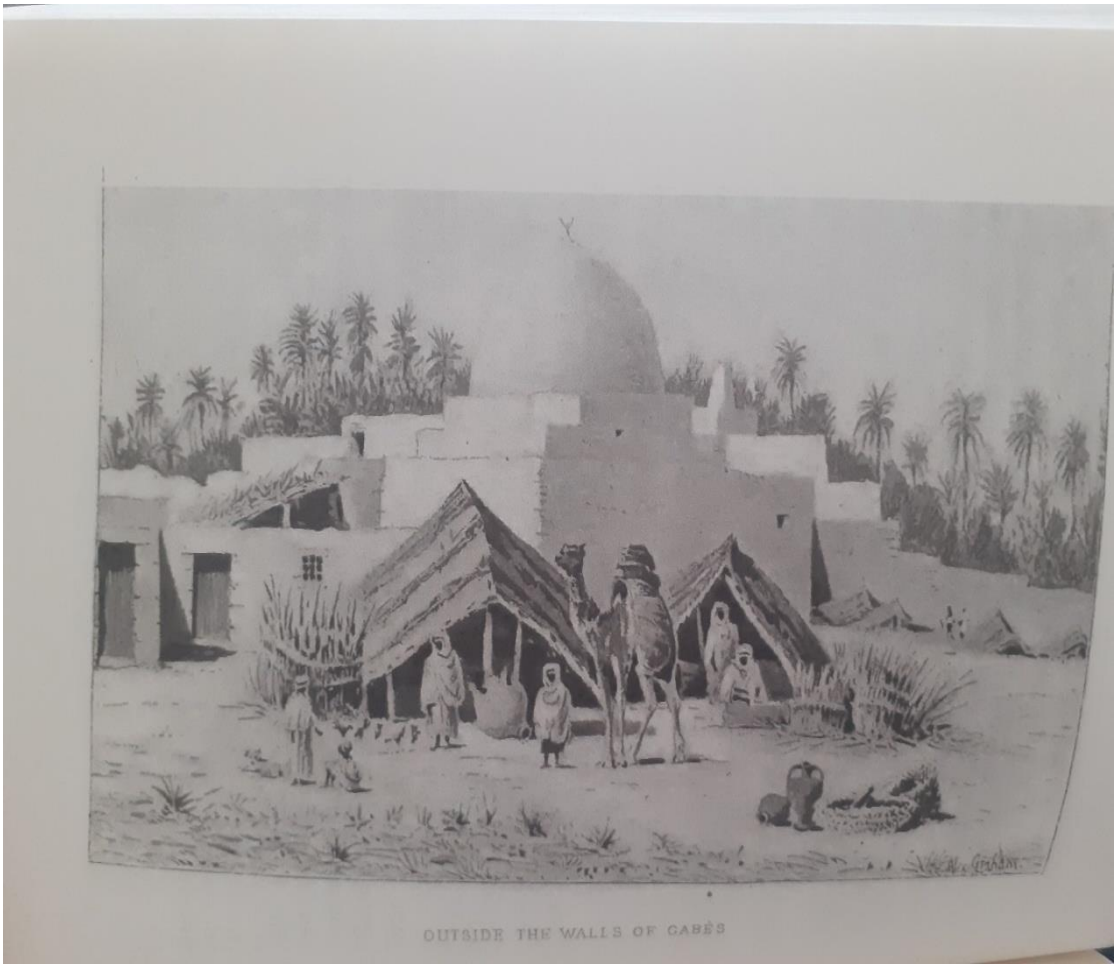


Figure1: A photograph depicting Tunisian men, tents, and camels in a stereotypical Orientalist manner (Graham and Ashbee, *Travels in Tunisia*, 1887)

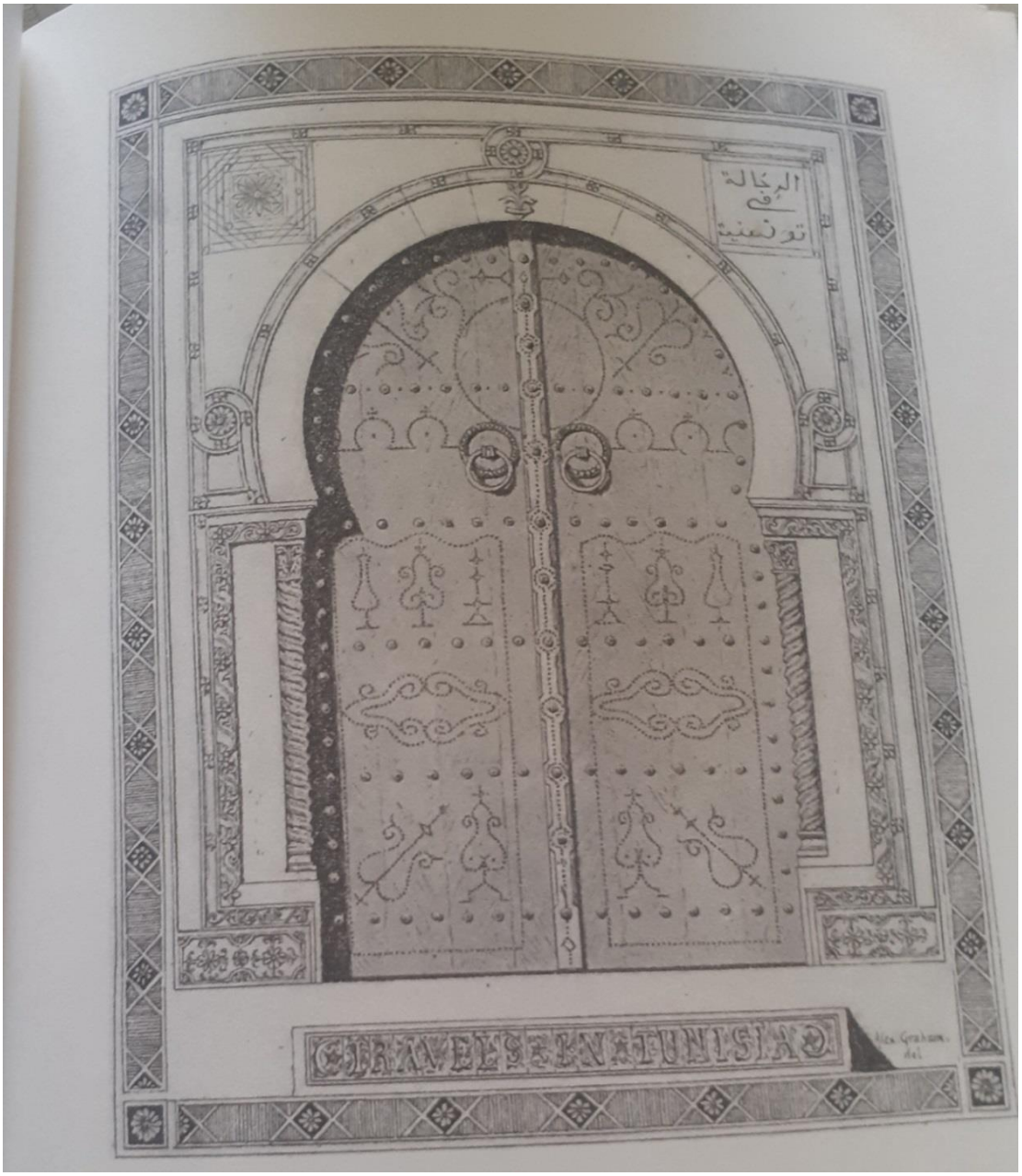
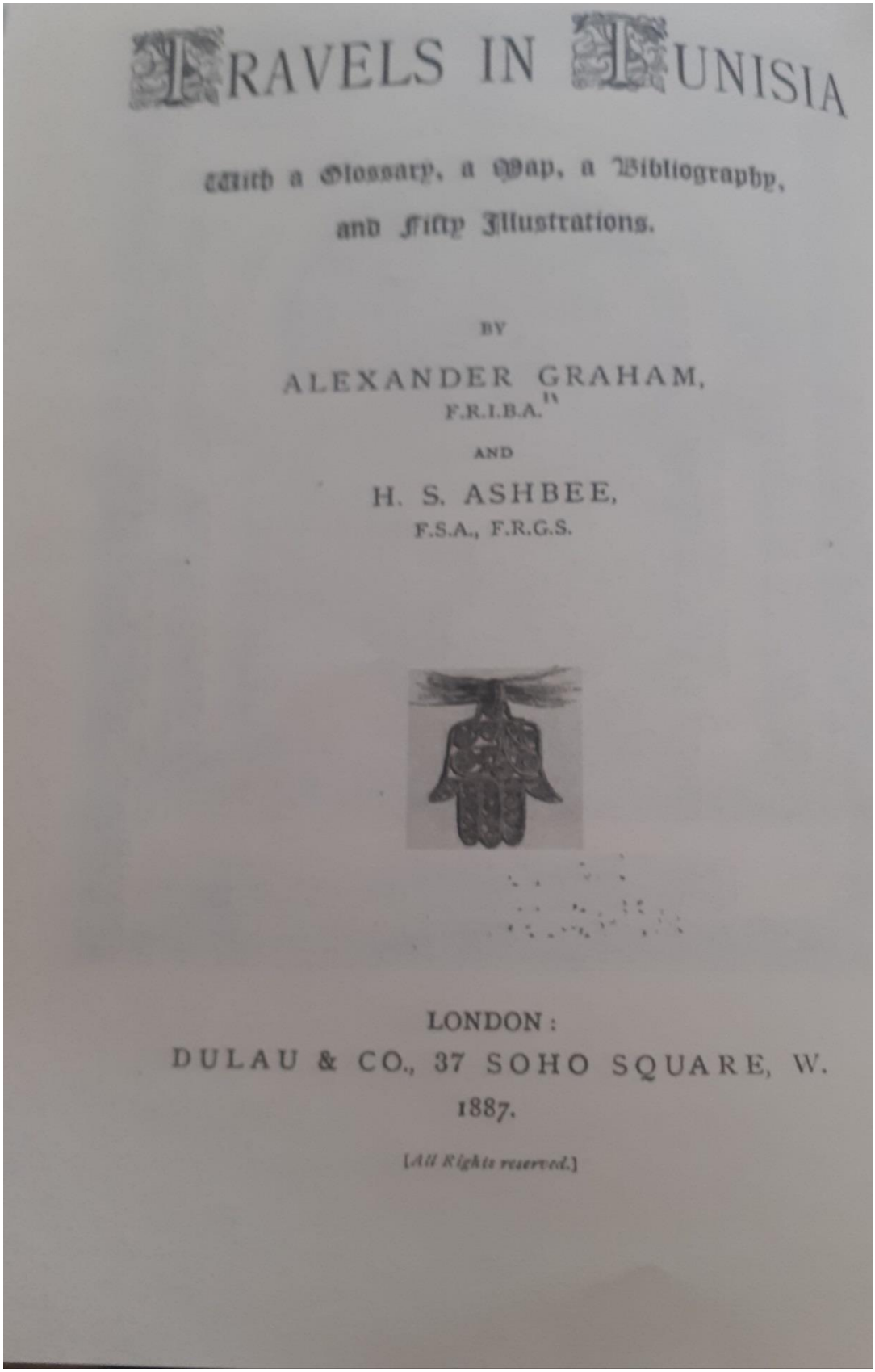


Figure2: A photograph of a traditional Tunisian entrance door, highlighting the Oriental essence of Tunis in Graham and Ashbee's *Travels in Tunisia* (1887)


TRAVELS IN TUNISIA

With a Glossary, a Map, a Bibliography, and Fifty Illustrations.

BY

ALEXANDER GRAHAM, F.R.I.B.A.

AND

H. S. ASHBEE, F.S.A., F.R.G.S.

LONDON:
DULAU & CO., 37 SOHO SQUARE, W.
1887.

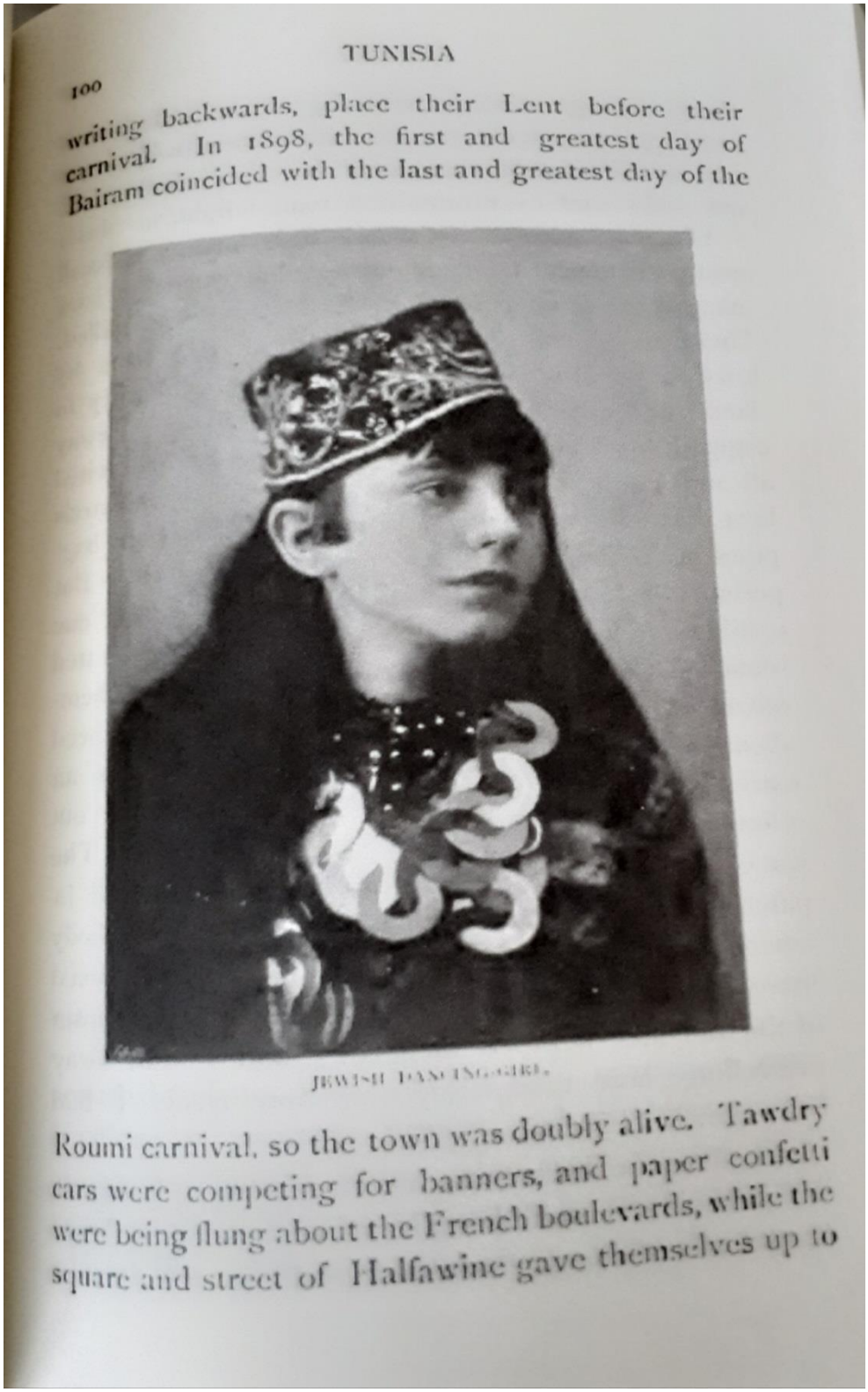
[*All Rights reserved.*]

Figure3:Title page of *Travels in Tunisia* (Graham and Ashbee, 1887), a photograph featuring the Hand of Fatima as an emblem of exoticism

This idea becomes particularly striking in Herbert Vivian's *Tunisia and the Modern Barbary Pirates* (1899). Vivian incorporates nine photographs of Tunisian women, ranging from Tunisian Bedouins to Tunisian Jews, transforming women's bodies and clothing into objects of ethnographic categorization. In one of his photographs (Fig.4), the Bedouin woman is standing in a somewhat static manner typical of early ethnographic photographs that aimed at classifying and cataloguing people. The main focus is on her clothing and jewelry—layered necklaces, a head covering, and a robe-like garment—which are not only characteristic of a traditional Bedouin attire, but also indicative of a foreign exotic culture. Another photograph (Fig.5) portrays a young Jewish girl in her traditional festive outfit, including a decorated cap and richly embroidered clothing. By taking both photographs into consideration, it maybe argued that the Bedouin woman and the Jewish girl are depicted not as individuals but as representatives of a cultural type. The very act of photographing them in their traditional outfits underscores a sense of fixity: both Jewish and Bedouin identities are represented as static, timeless, and outside modernity. This representation resonates with the dynamics of exoticism, which often portrays foreign cultures as visually intriguing while transforming their subjects into objects of aesthetic fascination.



Figure 4: A photograph of a Tunisian Bedouin woman, as depicted in Herbert Vivian's *Tunisia and the Modern Barbary Pirates* (1899).



TUNISIA

100

writing backwards, place their Lent before their carnival. In 1898, the first and greatest day of Bairam coincided with the last and greatest day of the

JEWISH DANCING-GIRL.

Roumi carnival, so the town was doubly alive. Tawdry cars were competing for banners, and paper confetti were being flung about the French boulevards, while the square and street of Halfawine gave themselves up to

Figure 5: A photograph of a Jewish girl, with a particular focus on her traditional outfit, as portrayed in HerbertVivian's *Tunisia and the Modern Barbary Pirates* (1899)

A clear continuity can be discerned in the twentieth-century, wherein the spirit reminiscent of the nineteenth-century pervades this era. This is particularly evident in the persistent tendency to highlight the exotic aspects of Tunis. Graham Petrie adeptly exemplifies this perspective through the inclusion of forty-eight paintings that underscore the exotic facets inherent in both Tunisian lifestyle and landscape. His painting of the archway scene (Fig.6) evokes a quintessentially Oriental cityscape with silhouettes disappearing under the arch, producing an atmosphere of mystery and intrigue. The framing the group by the arch, together with the rough walls, conveys the idea of a picturesque enclosed setting that aligns with the Orientalist aesthetic. The presence of Tunisians in traditional attire—long robes, turbans, a donkey laden with goods—immediately mark cultural difference. The following painting (Fig.7) depicting a pastoral landscape with trees and tents, reinforces the dichotomy between "a primitive East" and"a civilized West", which is a central trope in Orientalist discourse. First, the open landscape intensifies the exoticised vision, offering a picturesque setting that transforms the inhabitants into almost folkloric figures rather than modern subjects. The focus on tents, with inhabitants sitting either insideor outside, suggests a nomadic lifestyle associated with primitivism. For a Western readership accustomed to industrial progress, this scene reinforces the perception of Tunis as exotic and static, locked in an earlier stage of civilisation.

To further emphasize the exotic aspect of Tunis, Douglas Sladen shifts his focus to Tunisian architecture, particularly mosques and minarets. His travelogue *Carthage and Tunis* (1906) opens with a photograph (Fig.8) featuring a Tunisian mosque prominently situated at the very heart of one of the bazaars. First, the caption—"A Mosque in the Bazar of Tunis"—combines two stereotypical Oriental images: the mosque and the bazaar. Together, they immediately transport the Western reader to what they imagine as the heart of Oriental life. What is also striking is that the mosque and the minaret largely dominate the scene, emphasizing their role as both landmarks and cultural symbols of difference. Within the Western imagination, Islamic architecture often epitomized the "Oriental Other": mysterious, spiritual, and visually distinct from European churches. Besides, the shadowy alleyway, marked by sharp contrasts of light and darkness, suggests secrecy and hiddenness—qualities often associated with Orientalist depictions of North African *medinas*. Moreover, Sladen's depiction of human figures as indistinct reduces the local inhabitants to mere elements of the exotic setting, rather than recognizing them as individual subjects. The overall scene seems to betimeless, with no signs of modern life or colonial presence, even though Tunis was under

French protectorate at that time. This intentional framing depicts Tunis as exotic, static, and outside historical time, which is a common Orientalist strategy.



Figure 6:Tunisians using donkeys as ameans of transport, a painting from Graham Petrie's T*unis, Kairouan, and Carthage* (1908)



Figure 7: A painting depicting Tunisians as inhabiting primitive dwellings, exemplified here by tents, from GrahamPetrie's *Tunis, Kairouan, and Carthage* (1908).

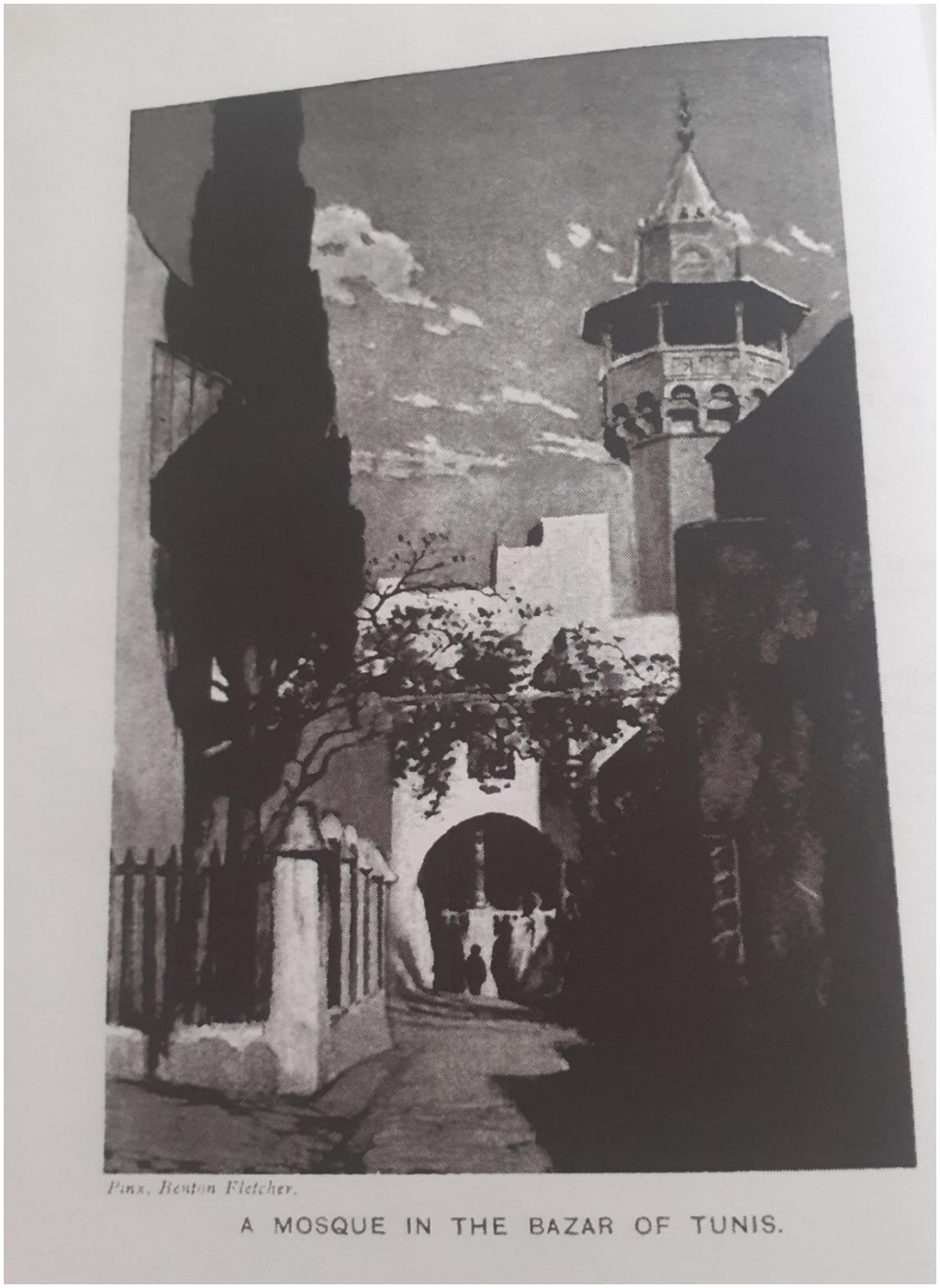


Figure 8: A photograph of aTunisian mosque, taken by Douglas Sladen in *Carthage and Tunis* (1906), exemplifying local architecture.

To sum up, these nineteenth and early twentieth-century photographs illustrate the degree to which visual representations reinforced Orientalist discourse. By foregrounding stereotypical tropes—such as tents, camels, ornate doorways, women in traditional attire—these photographs fix Tunis as timelessly exotic. In fact, they do not show the historical complexityof the country, rather they reproduce avision of the the Orient asthe West wanted to see it.

From a critical standpoint, these illustrations, which mainly foreground the exotic facets of Tunis, confirm Bryan Turner's assertion that "the Orient has existed within a literary and visual tradition which is both romantic and fantastic" (Turner 2000:1). More precisely, Zeiny characterizes this "visual tradition" as a form of "visual imperialism" (Zeiny 2017: 76), defined primarily as "the colonization of the world mind through the use of selective imagery that acts as a representation of a dominant ideology" (Kuehnast, as cited Zeiny 2017: 76). The use of such "selective imagery" constitutes a fundamental mechanism that produces misrepresentation, which in turn forms a cornerstone of "visual imperialism".

Indeed, the deliberate depiction of the East as exotic serves as a suggestive example of such misrepresentation, thereby contributing to the framing of the region in a manner that reinforces cultural stereotypes and fosters an imbalanced power dynamics. Often rooted in Orientalist perspectives, the misrepresentation of the East through the pervasive practice of excessive exoticizationnot only denies the cultural intricacies inherent in the region but also encourages imperialist intentions of ruling over it. Significantly, this interplay between visual representation, exoticism, and imperial endeavours is evidence of the entanglement of travel literature within this politicized realm. This confirms Marandi and Ensieh's view about "the complicity of Western writing with imperial power" (Marandi & Ensieh 2015: 26-27). To summarize this part, many important points should be highlighted. At a general level, all the above views insist on the foreignness of the Tunisian culture by depicting it as having different—and, by implication, less civilized—traditions from those of the British society. In more precise terms, two remarks could be deduced. The first one acknowledges the fact that all these travel writers seem to be typically "traditional" (Blanton 1997: 109) as they remain "wholly centered within the narrative and positionally capable of the imperialist and othering tropes that are part of the genre's heritage" (Blanton 1997: 109). Second, the travellers' gaze also opens up the possibility of surveying the foreign culture in order to materialize the so-called hierarchical power structure. Ideologically speaking, these stereotypical views reflect a long-standing tradition ofstigmatization and inferiorization. More importantly, they suggest

the freezing of a whole region, with its inhabitants and culture, in a distant past and a changeless situation. This idea is echoed in Fanon's suggestive thought which contends that the described culture "is both present and mummified" (Fanon 1967: 4). Its members are "defined in fact without appeal" (Fanon 1967: 4). Accordingly, the travel account—which is supposed to narrate the encounter between two nations—is transformed into a cultural document that replicates issues of power, knowledge, and alterity. Such a perception entails that the journey is not "so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of thing" (Said 1978: 58-59). In a nutshell, although these writers explicitly emphasize a negative portrayal of the Tunisian culture, depicting it as backward and inferior, they presented within the same narratives a positive representation of this culture, hence revealing a more nuanced and ambivalent perspective. For a clear articulation of this line of thought, the next part will mainly focus on the representation of the Tunisian culture under a positive light.

4. The positive representation of Tunisian culture

British travellers endorsed more than one idea and developed more than one attitude towards Tunisian culture. The manifestation of these ambivalent views is caught in travellers' oscillation between a negative portrayal and its opposite. This ambivalence allows the possibility to challenge Said's theory of Orientalism which suggests "the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient" (Said 1977: 5). Explained differently, Said asserts in his book that Orientalist writers produced constant and fixed negative Oriental stereotypes and argues that all representations are solely derogatory constructions. Ziauddin Sardar highlights the gap in Said's work and blames him for " […] presenting Orientalism as an unchanging, monolithic discourse" (Sardar, as cited in Keramatfar 2018: 54). Likewise, Leela Gandhi identifies a similar lapse of judgment in Said's analysis, asserting that the presumption that the Orientalist discourse produces fixed stereotypes fails to consider that "cultural stereotypes are considerably more ambivalent and dynamic" (Gandhi, as cited in Keramatfar 2018: 54). To confirm these two views, this part will essentially focus on the positive representation of the Tunisian culture which stands in a striking opposition to its negative counterpart. Accordingly, such an approach demonstrates a high level of nuance in British travel accounts and announces a departure from the normative Saidian paradigm. For a more comprehensive understanding of travellers' perspectives, the next two sections will first examine specific observations from the nineteenth-century, followed then by an emphasis on the twentieth century.

4.1. Perceptions of the Tunisian culture in the nineteenth-century

In alignment with the previous part, which began with references to the eighteenth-century views as evidenced in the work of Shaw, a similar pattern will be followed here. In his work *Travels or observations relating to several parts of Barbary and the Levant* (1738), Shaw presents ambivalent observations. On the one hand, he describes Tunis as "the most civilized nation in Barbary" (Shaw 1738: 171), yet on another occasion he contradicts this view, characterizing it as "remote and barbarous" (Shaw 1738: 372). This ambivalent attitude persists into the nineteenth-century, where travellers increasingly highlight this contradiction.

4.1.1. A refined Orient: Overarching British views on Tunisian Culture

Writers such as Graham and Ashbee (1887), Wingfield (1886), Rae (1877), and Greville-Nugent (1894) positively represented Tunis and its culture in their works. Starting with Graham and Ashbee, they highlighted the technological improvements, which according to them had transformed travel to the region: "The coast towns of Tunis are now accessible owing to an excellent line of steamers like the *Companie Translantique* whose magnificent fleet of built steamers sweep the coast of North Africa from Oran to Algiers, Algiers to Tunis and Tunis to Djerba" (Graham and Ashbee 1887: ii–2).

The above quote paints a picture of Tunis as modern and accessible thanks to the presence of an excellent steamship service. The description of the line of steamers as "excellent" sheds light on the country's advanced infrastructure implying progress and modernization. It also suggests a sense of stability and security in the region which reassures potential travellers of a safe and reliable travel experience. Such a view stands in a strike opposition to earliest perceptions, which posit that travel to the Orient is fraught with thousands of "dangers and difficulties" (Playfair 1877: 127).

Wingfield and Rae, however, highlight other aspects of modernity in the country. For instance, Wingfield describes Tunis as "the advanced guard of North African civilization" (Wingfield, as cited in Manai 2007: 88); while Rae states that "Tunis is much Europeanized and the inhabitants are relatively enlightened and liberal" (Rae 1877: 285). In another passage, he refers to a Tunisian road as follows:" The road is one evidence of the career Tunis has entered upon- one of progress" (Rae 1877: 322). To sum it up, by describing Tunis as "the advanced guard of North African civilization", Wingfield emphasizes that Tunis is at the fore front of cultural and social development. Unquestionably, this portrayal counters any

stereotype of the region being uncivilized and primitive. Astonishingly enough, by adopting this stance, Wingfield clearly contradicts himself since he refers to Tunis in another passage as being "a thousand years behind all its neighbours in progress and civilization". This is another obvious proof that travellers' views are ambivalent and contradictory.

As far as Rae is concerned, he illustrates the influence of Europeanization and the enlightenment and liberalism of the inhabitants of Tunis. The specific choice of terms like "enlightened" and "liberal" indicates a high level of cultural and intellectual development.This also challenges stereotypes of Eastern people as backward or conservative. Besides, his intentional description of the road as "evidence" of Tunis's career of progress not only suggests a tangible proof of modernization, but also counters negative stereotypes of the Orient as stagnant.

Similarly, Greville-Nugent confirms the development and modernity of Tunis by asserting that: "one's first exclamation is: another modern town? How very disappointing! " (Greville-Nugent 1894: 141). Undeniably, Greville-Nugent's exclamation reveals a surprise at the modernity of Tunisian towns. The expectation was to see something ancient and different from the West, but the traveller is confronted with a modernity that resembles European cities. This reflects a broader Western preconception where the Orient is expected to remain static, serving as a contrast to the dynamic and modern West. Hence, when the Orient shows signs of modernization, it disrupts this binary and causes disappointment.

4.1.2. Delving deeper: British accounts of Tunisian cultural richness

The British engagement with Tunisian culture could be grouped under three main headings: rich history, beautiful and tolerant country, as well as refined customs.

4.1.2.1. Rich history

In his work *Excursions in the Mediterranean: Algiers and Tunis* (1835), Temple highlights in many occasions the historical depth and the cultural significance of Tunis. In one of the examples, he postulates: "how full of deep interest and historical souvenirs are the environs of Tunis! There is not a plain, a mountain, a river, a bay, or a headland, which is not connected with the deeds of once powerful and gallant nations" (Temple 1835: 300). Obviously, the quote suggests that every geographical feature holds historical value, connecting the land to notable events and civilizations of the past. This connection to history elevates the status of Tunis, portraying it as a repository of human achievement. Moreover, the use of terms like "deep interest" and "historical souvenirs" not only suggests the country's rich historical heritage, but also illustrates it as a place steeped in history. In a similar vein, Temple valorizes in another passage the diverse historical influences that swept over the country:

> Africans, Phonecians, Grecians, Romans, and Numidienas, The Goth, the Vandal, the Arab, the Spaniard, and the Turk, have all in turn here held their sway in the full pride of power. What a long array of bright names present themselves in a rapid succession before our mind's eye, as entranced we gaze at the scene around us; for was it not once animated with the presence of Dido, of Annibal, Amilcar and Asdrubal; of Hanno and Mago, of Agathocles, Regulus, Syphax, and Jugurtha; of Scipio, Julius, and Belisarius, and in later days, of Charles and of ST. Louis? In short are we not standing on the ruins of Carthage! And does not that one word itself embrace the history of ages, and explain the feelings and thoughts of the contemplative traveller? (Temple 1835: 300-301).

This detailed extract begins by listing a multitude of civilizations that have ruled over the region including Africans, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Numidians, Goths, Vandals, Arabs, Spaniards, and Turks. On the one hand, this enumeration underscores the rich and

varied cultural tapestry of Tunis. On the other hand, this diverse legacy is presented as a source of pride and fascination as evidenced in the phrase "held their sway in the full pride of power". Besides, the rich history of Tunis is further accentuated by the inclusion of a host of prominent historical figures associated with the region, such as Dido, Hannibal, Hamilcar… In a striking opposition to other views, Temple suggests that the current landscape still holds the essence and memory of these historical figures and events: "as entranced we gaze at the scene around us". This continuity of history is portrayed as enchanting and appealing, unlike other travellers who portrayed the country's current landscape as devoid of interest and attraction. More importantly, the mention of "feelings and thoughts of the contemplative traveller" indicates that experiencing the Orient involves not just seeing its physical remnants but also connecting emotionally and intellectually with its historical heritage. This counters the approach of other travellers who superficially engage with the country and its culture.

4.1.2.2. Beautiful country

Turning to the second heading, both male and female writers shed light on the beauty of Tunis and its towns; thereby fostering a cultural encounter that is authentic and inclusive, rather than repulsive and exclusionary. For instance, Graham and Ashbee highlight the unique architectural features of Tunis by claiming that:

> Tunis, with its labyrinth of streets, its flying arches from house to house across the narrow thoroughfares, its arched doorways with their delicate carvings in stone or marble, its wilderness of shops, their wooden columns painted with spiral bands in gaudy colours of blue, and red, and green, has much to charm the eye (Graham & Ashbee 1887: 26).

Here, the detailed and evocative description of the city's streets, arches, doorways, and shops highlights the unique charm and cultural richness of Tunis. Beginning the description with the phrase "labyrinth of streets" suggests a complex and intriguing urban layout that invites exploration and discovery. Also, the special mention of "flying arches from house to house across the narrow thorough fares" not only conveys a sense of architectural charm, but

also portrays the cityscape as visually captivating and distinct. This is further accentuated by the use of the adjective "delicate" which suggests an appreciation for the fine and intricate work that characterizes these carvings. Besides, the phrase "wilderness of shops" is striking in its apparent oxymoron, merging the natural and the urban in a single, vivid image. The term "wilderness" typically evokes ideas of untamed nature; whereas "shops" belong to the realm of civilization and trade. Through the merging of these opposed semantic fields, the author creates a sense of dynamic liveliness, suggesting that the commercial heart of Tunis is as vibrant and captivating as a natural landscape. It also implies that the overwhelming variety of the souks is not only enchanting but also hailed as a distinctive feature of Tunisian culture. The concluding statement "has much to charm the eye" directly states the overall effect of Tunis on the traveller. This indicates a strong positive impression, suggesting that the city's visual and cultural elements are captivating and delightful.

In another more specific passage, the authors highlight the attractiveness of one of the Tunisian cities. In reference to Teboursouk, they said: "Teboursouk appeared to us a tolerably clean and lively town. […] The main street at any rate is animated, fairly-well paved, and […] decently kept" (Graham & Ashbee 1887: 175). Here, the authors emphasize the cleanliness, liveliness, and good infrastructure of thisTunisian town. Suggestive as it may seem, the quote is full of vivid terms such as "animated", "well-paved", and "decently kept" which present a vibrant and dynamic image of the town.

In a similar vein, Vivian also emphasized the beauty of Tunisian architecture and the richness of its culture. In one of the passages, he argues that: "The silvery whiteness of the houses, the exquisitely soft tints of the men's raiment, the harmonies of the native handicrafts, and the brilliancy of the contrasts at every street corner are a constant delight" (Vivian 1899: 184). In this quote, the writer focuses on the visual beauty of Tunis as exemplified in "the silvery whiteness of the houses" as well as the rich cultural heritage embodied in "the exquisitely soft tints of the men's raiment". Moreover, the choice of the adjective "brilliant to describe the appearance of Tunisian streets serves to emphasize the vibrancy and dynamism of the country, which largely counters any claims about the dullness of life in the Orient. This positive depiction is summed up by the phrase "constant delight" which suggests that Tunis is a place of perpetual enjoyment and fascination. From a critical perspective, the authors' insistence on the beauty of the country points to the fact that the Orient is not a passive

object to "survey and remain unchanged through its travel experiences" (Thompson 2011: 127). Instead, the aesthetic and architectural beauty of Tunis exerts influence over these writers, hence creating authentic moments of cultural reciprocation.

Meanwhile, other travel writers find out that the beauty of the country is caught in its religious tolerance. In this regard, Playfair (1887) asserts that "there is no place in Barbary where the priests and those connected with the church are more free, and where the Christian religion is more tolerated than in Tunis" (Playfair, as cited in Manai 2007: 90). Here, Playfair depicts Tunis as a welcoming and inclusive country where diverse religious practices are accepted and respected especially in comparison to other places in Barbary. Such a comparative praise not only suggests that Tunis stands out as an exemplary country in terms of religious tolerance, but also counters other views that describe it as a country full of bigotry and "fanaticism" (Graham & Ashbee 1887: 126).

4.1.2.3. Refined customs

Ending up with the third and last heading, the mid-nineteenth-century work of Kennedy sheds light on the excessive politeness among Tunisians, in particular their salutations and greetings:

First embracing by kissing each other's shoulder, then touching hands, and each kissing his own, laying it upon one's heart with a graceful inclination of the body and the usual pious form of salutation, then commencing a string of enquiries about the health of the friends, the family. (Kennedy 1845: 181)

Kennedy's quote provides a positive representation of Tunisian customs by showcasing the warmth, respect, and attentiveness inherent in traditional greetings. His detailed description begins with highlighting the gesture of "embracing by kissing each other's shoulder". This act of physical contact signifies warmth and closeness among individuals. Then, the sequence continues with "touching hands, and each kissing his own, laying it upon one's heart with a graceful inclination of the body". This greeting ritual implies grace and respect and demonstrates a high level of consideration for the other person. Also, the mention of the "graceful inclination of the body" serves to add a layer of courtesy and elegance to the interaction. After this sequence of physical gestures, the greetingmoves on to "commencing a string of enquiries about the health of the friends, the family" which not only suggests a genuine care for the well-being of others, but also implies a sense of community and

interconnectedness. Through this detailed description, Kennedy shows a genuine understanding and respect for the social and cultural practices in Tunis. Simultaneously, he challenges the negative stereotypes perpetuated by other travel writers, such as Shaw, who dismissively characterizes Tunisian greeting customs as "primitive" (Shaw 1738: 301).

Interestingly, the aforementioned positive views serve to confirm that ambivalence challenges the prevailing stereotypes and reveals the inherent uncertainties and contradictions within the narratives of many travel writers.This ambivalence is found to be also omnipresent in the twentieth-century, when both male and female writers conveyed positive portrayals of Tunis and its culture, a theme that will be further explored in the subsequent section.

4.2. Perceptions of Tunisian culture in the twentieth-century

4.2.1. Tunis as endowed with historical richness

For some travellers, the positive aspect of Tunisian culture lies in its rich history; whereas for others it lies in its urban beauty. For the first group, the amphitheatre of El-Jemm stands out as one of the significant landmarks of the magnificence of the Tunisian history. In this regard, Warren advocates that:

The amphitheatre growing as we approached until its full magnificence was apparent about five kilometers away. Against the cold, silver sky its warm yellow-grey walls rear up three stories of archways. It takes your breath away with its grandeur (Warren 1923: 129).

Obviously, Warren's description suggests the architectural grandeur of the amphitheatre which serves as a testament to the rich cultural heritage and historical significance of Tunis. First, the use of the expressions "growing as we approached" and "full magnificence" sheds light on the impressive and imposing structure that commands attention even from a distance. Second, the contrast of "warm yellow-grey walls" with the "cold, silver sky" enhances the visual appeal of the amphitheatre and highlights its majestic qualities. Finally, Warren states that the sight of the amphitheatre "takes your breath away with its grandeur." This reaction reinforces the idea that the region offers unique and unparalleled encounters with history and beauty. In another instance, Warren elaborates this view by highlighting that: "its wonderful position of solitary grandeur gives it anadvantage over any similar edifice, onlyto be realized by those who are fortunate enough to have seen it" (Warren 1923: 129). Here, Warren claims that the position of the amphitheatre gives it "an advantage over any similar edifice". This

comparison suggests that El Jemm's amphitheatre surpasses other structures of its kind in terms of its impact and visual appeal. Such a view is further intensified by the use of terms like "wonderful", "solitary grandeur". More importantly, the phrase "only to be realized by those who are fortunate enough to have seen it" enhances the allure of the amphitheatre, making it a coveted destination for travellers and emphasizing the unique value of experiencing it firsthand.

4.2.1. Tunis as endowed with urban beauty

For another group of travellers, the significance of Tunis lies in its urban beauty. For example, Fraser depicts Sousse and Sfax as "delightful and clean" (Fraser 1911: 226). Interestingly, these appealing terms suggest that these Tunisian towns are pleasant and enjoyable towns to visit. Besides, the emphasis on the cleanliness of these towns represents them as well-maintained and orderly, countering any other negative stereotypes of disorganization and dirtiness of Tunisian towns. In a similar vein, the female traveller, Ward, expresses her admiration for the scenic charm of Bizerta by asserting that: "Bizerta the most northerly town in Africa (and it seemed to us to be full of life and progress), with a fine harbor and breakwater, many ships at anchor, and a row of palms near the sea" (Ward 1920: 180). In this instance, Bizerta is represented in a positive light that emphasizes its vitality, progress and scenic beauty. The phrase "full of life and progress" immediately suggests a lively place. This characterization, however, challenges any preconceived notions of Eastern towns as stagnant or backward. The alternation between depicting the Orient as both developed and backward suggests that travellers grapple with multiple, sometimes conflicting, perceptions of the Orient demonstrating a more dynamic and fluid engagement with the region. Moreover, Ward's reference to a "row of palms near the sea" enhances the town's aesthetic appeal making it an attractive destination both in terms of its functionality—"fine harbor", "many ships—and visual appeal. What is worthy to mention is that Ward contradicts herself in another passage where she represents Tunisian towns as devoid of any aesthetic appeal. In one of the instances, she refers to Tunisian streets as "[…] narrow, curving with small shops on either side and roofs of uneven height" (Ward 1920: 141). If both quotes are taken into consideration, it could be claimed that Ward experiences mixed feelings when encountering new places. The first quote shows a fascination with the scenic beauty and infrastructural development of Bizerta, while the second one highlights a disordered urban environment where streets are not designed with modern, grid-like precision. This

ambivalence reflects acommon tension intravel writing where the novelty of a place can lead to both attraction and repulsion. Gheeta Chandran and RavishandranVengadasamy highlight this tension, arguing that " the theme of discovery and exploration in travel writing often underlines an ambivalent narrative between the speaker's discomfort, alienation and displacement and their subsequent desire to experience the visual spectacle of the exotic land and its people." (Chandran & Vengadasamy 2018: 16). Building on this perception of the country's urban beauty, travellers also identify aspects of Tunisian culture itself as possessing notable positive qualities, which form the focus of the next section.

4.2.3. Tunisian culture as endowed with positive attributes

Some other twentieth-century writers promoted Tunisian culture by focusing on its religious tolerance, the refined tastes of its inhabitants, as well as their hospitality. Starting with religion, Warren offers the following positive view:

> The entire absence of a priesthood, with attendant evils for arrogation of power; the almost entire absence of rituals, are advantages which have kept Islam's spiritual power pure. Its refusal to recognize adventitious distinction of colour, class, or race, with its democratic principles are important elements in its success and progress… Intolerance, fatalism, and sensual indulgence are the three qualities inaccurately attributed by his enemies to Mohamed (Warren 1922: 148-149)

Obvious as it may seem, "the entire absence of a priesthood" and "the almost entire absence of rituals" are described as an advantage that contributes to the purity of Islam's spiritual power. Besides, Warren praises Islam for "its refusal to recognize adventitious distinction of color, class, or race". By highlighting these democratic values, she presents Islam as a progressive and egalitarian religion valuingits role in fostering social cohesion and justice. By the end of the quote, the author directly challenges negative stereotypes about the Islamic religion such as "intolerance, fatalism, and sensual indulgence", suggesting that such criticism is misinformed. This view could be analyzed at two levels. The first one contradicts other views such as the one advocated by Lorimer: "We Christians always think that the religion of Islam is one of sensuality and selfishness" (Lorimer 1906: 321). This nuanced stance conveys that Orientalist representations are not uniform or consistent,but rather

characterized by a multiplicity of attitudes and interpretations. The second one highlights a more nuanced view of Islam showing how some writers promoted its true principles while others negatively represented it.

From another, yet still related perspective, Erskine expressed her admiration for the refined tastes of Tunisians. In this context, she highlights "the merits of the Tunisians as a music-loving nation" (Erskine 1925: 176). Miltoun, however, valorised what he referred to as the proverbial hospitality among Tunisians. This quality, with which the Tunisians weregifted is, according to him, "a compulsory tenet of their creed" (Miltoun 1908: 150). He further explains that, whether in the remote island of Djerba, in the Southern regions, or in Northern areas, food and accommodation are offered to travellers. So, by presenting hospitality as "a compulsory tenet of their creed", Miltoun emphasizes that this quality is not merely a social custom, but a deeply-held value fundamentally ingrained in Tunisian culture. Such a positive portrayal reflects an admiration for Tunisian customs and values, enhancing the image of Tunis as a place for cultural warmth and integrity.

This favourable representation of Tunisian culture, traits, and customs prompted Ward to draw the following positive conclusions: "The French have found a land of promise in colonising Algeria and Tunisia […] and we, the travellers, have found a land of fascination—more than a mere holiday-land of beauty" (Ward 1920: 221). In another occasion, she avers that "We feel happyin the thought that we are bringing back with us such a treasury of sunny memories" (Ward 1920: 222). First, Ward begins by describing Algeria and Tunis as "a land of promise" implying that these regions hold significant potentials and opportunities for development and prosperity. As far as travellers are concerned, these regions are described as "a land of fascination" suggesting that they offer visitors unique sights and compelling experiences. This dual perspective, seeing the Orient as beneficial for colonizers and enchanting for travellers, paints a well-rounded, positive image of these regions. More importantly, the phrase "more than a mere holiday-land of beauty" implies that while these places are undoubtedly beautiful, their appeal extends beyond superficial aesthetics. This means that Tunis and Algeria offer more than just scenic beauty, they also provide cultural, historical, and natural richness that make them fascinating to explore.

In the second quote,Ward sheds light on the uplifting experiences gained from travel. In fact, the use of the statement "bringing back with us such a treasury of sunny memories" conveys the lasting impact and joy associated with the journey. Such a portrayal makes the

Orient appear as a place of enriching experiences, encouraging readers to view it as a rewarding destination.

Based on the aforementioned observations, it may be contented that these travellers neither perpetuate a discourse of exclusion nor denigrate Tunisian culture. Rather, their perspectives can be aligned with receptivity towards, sympathy with, and respect for the encountered culture. This is concretely manifested in their admiration for the modernity of the country, its rich history, urban beauty, religious tolerance, as well as refined customs. To express this admiration, British travellers engaged in cultural relativism by representing the country from the lens of the local culture rather than European cultural biases. They also relied on an emic approach in order to defamiliarize the widespread Orientalist image ofTunis and emphasize instead its cultural richness.

Such positive views illustrate a more nuanced and dynamic engagement with Tunisian culture. Accordingly, we can conclude that British travellers did not adhere to a single, consistent narrative about Tunis and its culture. Instead, they oscillated between negative and positive representations, creating a dual image that reflects both attraction and repulsion. In fact, this dual image is evident in the way travellers like Shaw, Wingfield, and Rae alternated between depicting Tunis as barbarous and remote, and simultaneously as a modern, civilized region with advanced infrastructure and aesthetic appeal. A more suggestive example is found in the words of Michael Shoemaker which bluntly articulate this ambivalence: Tunis is "a paradox: It is charming and shocking, picturesque and horrible, beautiful in its panorama yet discordant in its voices and music" (Shoemaker 1910: iii). In critical terms, the omnipresence of such ambivalence drives Mariana Torgovnick to conclude that the East is oscillating between the fact of being "a nightmare or a pleasant dream" (Torgovnick 1990: 246). Significantly, this duality or nuanced stance recalls Bhabha's explanation about "the splitting of colonial discourse" (Bhabha 1994: 130) when "two attitudes towards external reality persist" (Bhabha 1994: 130). It also challenges Said's claim in his Orientalism that "every European, in what he can say about the Orient, is consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric" (Said 1979: 204).

So, by acknowledging this ambivalence, we can open up a space for a more nuanced understanding of cross-cultural encounters, one that recognizes the possibility of both attraction and repulsion coexisting within the same discourse. It also serves to confirm the inherent uncertainties and contradictions in the Western engagement with the Orient. More importantly, these nuanced perceptions destabilize the idea that the Western gaze is solely one

of domination and denigration. Instead, the encounter between the East and the West emerges to be marked by a range of emotions andperceptions, from fascination andrespectto fearand disdain, creating a richer, more dynamic, and more layered portrayal of the Orient in the eyes of British travellers. This assumption validates Hannigan's perspective that "travel writing can be an attempt at understanding and sympathy and [it can be written] from the position of humility" (Hannigan 2021: 65).

5. General concluding remarks

Over the course of this chapter, we have endeavoured to highlight the extent to which British travellers'views about Tunis and its culture are inherently ambivalent. Suggestive as it may seem, the first part is typically traditional as it perpetuates the conventional views about the Orient by depicting Tunis as "one of Europe's deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said 1977: 1). For Said, there are no objective representations of Oriental people and loci, but rather these narratives collude with Orientalism to justify colonialism and imperialism. Rana Kabbani in her book *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (1994) agrees with Said, because for her

> There exists a predetermined discourse regarding the Orient; that Western travel writers, inescapably subservient to that discourse, were deeply implicated in the imperialist project; and that Western culture was itself to some extent shaped by distorted representations of the East (the Orient, the other, the opposite, the enemy, the foil). European travel writers created a series of self-confirming stereotypical images of the East –as alien, timeless, jealous, irrational, cruel, lethargic and lascivious – designed to codify, comprehend and ultimately rule over the Orient. (Kabbani, as cited in Marandi & Ensieh 2015: 23-24).

Nonetheless, the second part of this chapter challenges Said's and Kabbani's views by showing how British travel writers transcended conventional Western stereotypes and offered a counter narrative to Said's Orientalism. In more concrete terms, these authors exhibit their counter-Orientalist perspectives in three ways: by celebrating the beauty of Tunis, highlighting its historical richness, and showing the refinement of its customs. In doing so, British travel writers constructed an unstereotypical narrative of Tunis, undermining hence the denigrative traditions of Orientalism.

This ambivalent stance will be further explored in the following chapter, which will shed light on the representation of Tunisian people themselves. By focusing on these personal encounters, the third chapter will explore how these British authors grapple with their perceptions of the local population, often oscillating between empathy and stereotyping, humanizing and distancing. Accordingly, the next chapter will reveal how both culture and people were subject to the same ambivalent lens, shaped by the travellers' own cultural preconceptions and biases.

CHAPTER THREE
THE HUMAN ENCOUNTER: THE AMBIVALENT REPRESENTATION OF TUNISIAN PEOPLE

"They cannot represent themselves;

they must be represented"

Karl Marx, as cited in Marandi & Ensieh 2015: 22

1. General background

This chapter builds on the preceding analysis of the ambivalent representation of the Tunisian culture in British travel literature by shifting the focus to the depiction of the Tunisian people within these narratives. At this stage, a pertinent question arises: why have the Tunisian people been specifically selected as the focus of this chapter, and what justifies this shift in emphasis? The answer can be found in the work of Caroline B. Brettell, who compellingly argues that "travel accounts are fundamentally about situations of contact and it is perhaps the point of intersection between observer and those observed which should receive the most attention." (Brettell, as cited in Borthwick 1991: 35). Notably, it is this "situation of contact" that lies at the heart of Mary Louise Pratt's theoretical framework, where the human encounter between the Tunisian and the British takes place within a "contact zone"—a space of interactions where peoples "previously separated by geography and history are co-present" (Pratt 1992: 8). Within this space of co-presence, "a contact perspective" emerges, wherein "subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other" (Pratt 1992: 8). This interactional framework generates what Pratt describes as "a borderline experience" between travellers and travellees, thereby fostering the development of "a dialectical and historicized approach" (Pratt 1992: 8) to the study of the travel writing genre.

In the case of the Tunisian-British encounter, this "borderline experience" turns out to be a fraught space of representation, defined as much by expressions of demonization as by

instances of admiration. This ambivalence, as will be clearly highlighted, reflects the traveller's simultaneous impulse to engage with and dominate the Other, resulting in portrayals that are at once empathetic and reductive, admiring and disparaging.

To better understand these ambivalent representations, a detailed scrutiny of the historical underpinnings of the Self-Other concept seems to be of utmost necessity.

2. Understanding the Other

In his seminal work *Phenomenology of the Mind* (1807), Friedrich Hegel introduces the concepts of the "other", "othering", and "otherness" while discussing his "master-slave dialectic". These notions have exerted a remarkable influence on literary disciplines such as postcolonial studies, psychological analysis, and travel writing. Being influenced by Hegel, Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), talks about the notion of the "other" as a construction opposing and simultaneously constructing the self. Similarly, Jean-Francois Staszak in his 2008 article entitled "Other/ Otherness" gives a clear definition of the concept of the other by situating it within two key notions: the "in- group" and the "out-group." For him, the "in- group" refers to "a group to which the speaker belongs", whereas the "out-group" denotes "a group to which the speaker does not belong" (Staszak 2008: 1). Accordingly, the concept of the "other" refers to "a member of an out-group, whose identity is considered lacking nd who maybe subject to discrimination by the in- group" (Staszak 2008: 1). As for otherness, it is often used interchangeably with the concept of alterity which is derived from the Latin *alteritas*, meaning "the state of being other or different" (Prasad 2003: 9). In *Cultural Geography* (1998), Mike Grang sheds light on the notion of othering, defining it as "a process [...] through which identities are set up in an unequal relationship" (Grang 1998: 61). This means that the process of "othering"' establishes a kind of a superior self defined in sharp contrast to an inferior other, therefore implying a hierarchical classificationof individuals into "Us versus Them". In fact, the notions of'we and they, to split humanity into two parts, was introduced by Sapiens. What is **Us** is what looks like us and **Them** is all what is different" (Harari, as cited in Almahady 2019: 17: emphasis added).

Approaching this issue from a Postcolonial critical perspective, Spivak conceptualizes othering as "the process by which the imperial discourse creates its others and produces its subjects" (Spivak, as cited in Ashcroft et al. 2000: 156). She further contends that the Other is "the excluded or mastered subject created by the discourse of power" (Spivak, as cited in

Ashcroft et al. 2000: 156). Consequently, the mere fact of depicting the Other as less powerful "justifies the supremacy of Ours and legitimizes its propensity to dominate them" (Staszak 2008: 4).

Astonishingly enough, even though the other is perceived as less powerful, it is still regarded as essential for a group's self-definition. It is even "as fundamental as consciousness itself" (De Beauvoir 1949: 18). Echoing de Beauvoir, Susan Sontag, in her essay "On Levi-Strauss, the Anthropologist as Hero" (1963), postulates that "the modern thought is pledged to a kind of applied Hegelianism: seeking its Self in its Other. Europe seeks itself in the exotic– in Asia, in the Middle East, among pre-literate peoples…The Other is experienced as a harsh purification of the Self." (Sontag, as cited in Borthwick 1991: 80-81).

Commenting on the indispensability of the other for the process of self definition, Lawrence Cahoone, in his book *Introduction, from Modernism to Postmodernism: an anthology* (2003), explains that a person is able to maintain his/her identity in "semiotic systems onlyif other units are represented as foreign or other through a hierarchal dualism in which the first is privileged while the other is deprivileged" (Cahoone 2003:11). It should be highlighted, however, that the birth of such hierarchical dualism owes its origins not to modern times but ratherto Ancient Greece. It all started whenthe idea of the inferiorityof the other explicitly slipped into a sharp opposition of the human and the non-human. Such opposition bears witness to "a geographical form of otherness" which opposed "Greek-speakers to Barbarians" (Staszak 2008: 3). In Ancient Greece, the term Barbarian refers to "a person who did not speak Greek and thus had not mastered the logos and was not familiar with democracy" (Staszak 2008: 3). As such, his culture lacks the Greek criterion of civilization and, by implication, is inferior. It appears, hence, that the construction of the notion of otherness at that time exclusively relied on a hierarchy of civilizations where the Greek one was deemed the highest. That is why, it sets the criteria of "language and political systems" to differentiate the civilized from the uncivilized" (Staszak 2008: 3). Significantly, both formulae continued to play this role "until the advent of Christianity and Islam" which were used insteadto "oppose Us, believers, to Them, non-believers" (Staszak 2008: 3).

Yet, with the discovery of new countries, especially the New World, the religious criterion was no longer able to fulfill its classificatory role; thereby urging critics and scholars alike to search for new applicable means. Accordingly, the idea of "universal progress" was put in the fore-front allowing "societies to be organized into a hierarchy from the most

primitive: Hottentots, Kanaks, Bushmen, Pygmies, etc.; to the most civilized: Europeans" (Staszak 2008: 4). Starting from the mid eighteenth century onwards, this universal classificatory system has turned out to be more scientific. This new scientific paradigm appeared first in the work of Linnaeus[24], *Systema Naturae* (1735) (The System of Nature), where he divides "the human species into four subtypes based on color– white, black, red, and yellow" (Linnaeus, as cited in Eller 2009: 123-124). Relying on this system, Western societies seized the opportunity "to develop their racial thinkingin the context of political and cultural domination over non-Western societies" (Linnaeus, as cited in Eller 2009: 126). Even though this new categorization seems to be scientific in nature, in reality it has further accentuated what was considered as the Western superiority over other nations. Thereby, Western societies have attempted to impose the image of the civilized White Man which stands in sharp contradiction with the image of the Man of Color. Accordingly, the "White Man" occupies the superior phase of humanity while the "Man of Color" is stigmatized as an inferior other. This inferior Other is often occupied by "une idée fixe" pejoratively connotedas "despot, barbarian, chaos, violence" (Bhabha 1994: 143). By stigmatizing him as backward, savage, or simply as Other (usually a distorted version of the Self), Westerners "[…] relegate the peoples that they could dominate or exterminate to the margin of humanity" (Staszak 2008: 1). Such an exclusivist ideology implies the superiority of the Self vis-à-vis the Other and even becomes "a very good strategy through which to disempower others" (Rapport & Overing 2000: 13).

Read under that light, the West has historically sought to define its categories of otherness through mechanisms such as "religion and science" or forcibly "[…] through colonization" (Staszak 2008: 3). In this context, Gayatri Spivak argues that the West's representation of the East was ideologically driven to "constitute the colonial subject as Other" (Spivak 1988: 76). This binary framework of Western thought has, in turn, extended its influence "[…] far beyond the boundaries of the West" (Staszak 2008: 3), a phenomenon particularly evident in the literary genre of travel literature.

[24] A Swedish naturalist (1707–1778) who is widely regarded as the father of modern taxonomy. He developed a revolutionary system for classifying and naming all living species.

3. The Self-Other dichotomy in the field of travel literature

Scholars such as Mary Louis Pratt (1992), Jennifer Speake (2003), Barbara Korte (1996), Tim Youngs (2002) among others, have extensively argued that travel literature "has built into its very existence a notion of otherness" (Speake 2003: xi). As Speake notes, travel narratives inherently functionas "vehicles whose main purpose is to introduce us to the Other" (Speake 2003: xi). Barbara Korte, in *Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations* (1996), further underscores this notion by asserting that these accounts are the medium through which the Other is introduced and perpetuated. For her, "the literature of travel has been pre-eminent in the European construction of the other" since its main purpose is to represent and describe "a wide range of encounters with the foreign" (Korte 1996: 20).

Therefore, this genre is intrinsically shaped by binary oppositions such as home and elsewhere, self and other, here and there, rendering it "marked by distance and alterity" (Loredane Polezzi, as cited in Aatkar 2019: 44). In a similar vein, Denis Porter, in her book *Haunted Journeys* (1991), emphasizes that travel accounts are "always concerned with […] situating oneself once and for all vis-à-vis an Other or others" (Porter 1991: 20) in order to promote the development of the Self. Echoing this perspective, Hagen Schulz- Forberg argues that "difference enhances identity" (Forberg, as cited in Aatkar 2019: 161), highlighting the reciprocal relationship between the construction of the Other and the development of the Self. In this sense, "travel writing creates a literary contact zone as the readers have a removed encounter with their racial and cultural Other through the travel text, and consequently create an image of themselves in relation to what they are not:the foreign, peculiar Other" (Forberg, as cited in Aatkar 2019: 161).

Bhabha also agrees with Forberg when he postulates that the Other is essential for the construction of the Self because "identity has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself" (Bhabha 1991: 21). Likewise, Simon Clark contends that when "we define ourselves in them, […] in relation to a cultural Other" (Clark 2008: 511), our main point of reference is always the "us". According to him, this "us" is the main cause of "racism, hatred, and exclusion" (Clark 2008: 511).

So, if we try to understand the underlying motive for such representations of the Other in the context of Orientalist writings, we are inevitably led to Said's assertion that "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or theWest)" (Said 1978:1).This process of self-definition, as

postcolonial critics have argued, relies on a strategy often referred to as "Manichaeism or binarism" (Oumoussa 2021: 111).

At its core, binarism refers to the creation of binary opposites such as East vs. West, civilized vs. uncivilized, refined vs. savage; where the identity of one group is constructed in direct contrast to the other. This echoes De Saussure's assumption that "no single thing can have a full sense of existence without the existence of its opposite" (De Saussure, as cited in Oumoussa 2021: 111). More critically, this binary relationship is not neutral; as Jacques Derrida argues, "there is a power relation between any two opposites, and thus each oppositeis in a constant attempt to weaken the Other in order to attain power" (Derrida, as cited in Oumoussa 2021: 111).

Manichaeism, on the other hand, highlights "the necessity of the creation of an inferior Other for the construction of the superior identity of the Self" (Oumoussa 2021: 111). According to Ashcroft, Tiffin, and Griffiths (2013), Manichaeism is "the process by which imperial discourse polarizes the society, culture and very being of the colonizer and colonized into the Manichean categories of good and evil" (Ashcroft et al. 2013: 149-150).

This theoretical framework of binary oppositions and the necessity of constructing the Other to solidify the Self provides a critical lens through which to examine the ambivalent representations of the Tunisian in British travel literature. As we shall see, this chapter will draw on postcolonial critics such as Said, Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Pratt, Ahmad Gholi, Ali Behdad, to contextualize these ambivalent representations. Significantly, the latter reflect both the Manichean impulse to dehumanize and dominate the Other, and the contradictory moments of fascination, admiration, and humanization that further complicate these human encounters. This dynamic aligns with Pratt’s assertion that "European subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (Pratt 1992: 8).

Accordingly, the first part will deal with the negative representation of the native people in male and female travel accounts. In broad terms, the East has often been seen as one of the West's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said 1977: 2), a construct that has helped Europe to define itself in opposition. Taken from this perspective, the dichotomy between the Self and the Other seem to be negotiated and constituted " [. . .] often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Pratt 1992: 8). This asymmetry is further underscored by Pratt’s notion of "the seeing man: the admittedly unfriendly label for

the white male subject whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess" (Pratt 1992:9). At this point, it is important to underscore that the "admittedly unfriendly label" Pratt attributes to the male subject is not exclusively applicable to men. An examination of the corpus of travel literature reveals that female travellers, much like their male counterparts, often perpetuated the same racist and stereotypical representations of the Other. Their depictions align with the broader imperial discourse, demonstrating that the imperial gaze was not confined to a single gender but was a product of the pervasive ideologies of the time.

As the first part of this chapter will demonstrate, the native Tunisian is systematically reduced to a series of pejorative stereotypes, which can be categorized under four thematic headings: physical degradation, behavioral deficiencies, intellectual and cultural impoverishment, and moral inferiority. These depictions frequently portray Tunisians as filthy, lazy, illiterate, and superstitious—characterizations that reduce them to what Pratt describes as "body-scapes" (Pratt 1992: 64). *In Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Pratt uses this term to describe how travel writers often represented indigenous people not as complex individuals with agency, but rather as part of the physical landscape—objectified and dehumanized. Such portrayals reduce the indigenous subject to a collection of observable physical traits, rendering them passive and consumable objects, thereby allowing travellers to assert control over them. Significantly, Pratt's view of the reduction of the indigenous people to "body-scapes" echoes the insights of Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, whose works illuminate the mechanisms through which colonial representations, rooted in racial and cultural stereotyping, construct and perpetuate the notion of the inferior Other. Indeed, both writers extensively dealt with the idea of what it means to be a black person within the framework of the European colonial discourse. Bhabha, for instance, emphasizes how racial and cultural stereotypes are instilled from an early age, shaping the psyche to produce a demonized vision of the black individual. In both fictional narratives and colonial discourses "white heroes and black demons are proffered as points of ideological and psychical identification" (Bhabha 1994: 108). It is not astonishing, then, that we come across depictions of the black person as "an animal […] bad […] mean […] ugly" (Fanon 1991: 80). Such representations render the black individual "physically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic" (Bhabha 1994: 339) with his race becoming "the ineradicable sign of negative difference in colonial discourses" (Bhabha 1994: 108).

The second part of this chapter, however, contends that British travel narratives are not monolithic in their portrayals of the Tunisian people. Alongside dehumanizing depictions, moments of admiration and fascination emerge, adding complexity to the analysis of travellers'discourse. In fact, these positive portrayals carry two significant implications. First, the humanization of the natives suggests what Behdad describes as a "desire for the Orient", a desire that fosters "involvement and indulgence, a kind of giving oneself over to the experience of the Oriental journey [as well as participation] in the immediate reality of the Oriental culture" (Behdad 1999: 21). Second, such involvement implies that British travellers demonstrate the capacity to transcend the rigid norms of Orientalism, presenting elements of what Gholi (2023) terms "counter Orientalism" (Gholi, 2023) in their positive portrayals.

As will be explored, these favorable depictions center around three primary themes: first the physical beautyof Tunisians; second their aesthetic cultural traits such as their refinement and the elegance of their dress; and third their moral qualities namely their religiosity and tolerance. It goes without saying, then, that these depictions disrupt the fixity of Orientalist binaries and offer glimpses of a more nuanced understanding of the Other. By analyzing these moments of ambivalence, this chapter seeks to highlight how travellers' narratives are destabilized by their own internal contradictions, thereby exposing the tensions inherent in imperial discourse.

As a whole, this chapter endeavours to scrutinize the conflicting depictions of the Tunisian in male and female British travel accounts. By simultaneously elevating and diminishing the Tunisian, British travel writers attempt to reconcile their experiences of the Other with the ideological imperatives of empire. This tension lies at the heart of the ambivalent human encounter, a dynamic that reflects deeper anxieties within British imperial identity.

Through close readings of selected travel narratives, this chapter seeks to illuminatehow British representations of the Tunisian highlight the complex interplay of domination, fascination, and cultural negotiation that characterizes imperial encounters.

4. Demonizing the natives:The Tunisian under a negative light

The first part of this chapter will rely on the concept of the stereotype to highlight its role as a discursive mechanism in constructing and perpetuating the ideologically charged depictions of Tunisian people, while also drawing on ethnography as an analytical approach to further examine how these negative views are conveyed within the context of cross-cultural representation.

Starting with the ethnographic approach, it has been found that "the description of peoples, their nature, customs, religion, […] is so embedded in the travel writing produced in Europe after the sixteenth century that one assumes ethnography to be essential to the genre" (Rubiés, as cited in Hulme & Youngs 2002: 242). Etymologically, the prefix *ethnos* refers to a Greek term and refers to "a people,a race or cultural group" (A. D. Smith 1989:13-18).When combined with graphic forming, hence, the concept ethnographic, it refers to "the science devoted to describing ways of life of humankind" (Vidich & Lyman 1994: 25).

Historically, ethnography was first used to report the life and customs of people who were "geographically or culturally distant from the West but seen as different from the normative European cultures" (Aschcroft et al. 2000: 79). Actually, it all started with the emergence of anthropology "in the late 1700's and early 1800's, during the era of colonialism and early modern science" (Eller 2015: 5). During that period, anthropology was concerned with the study of "the peoples encountered along the frontiers of European expansion. It is thus the term for the broad discipline in which ethnographyis located" (Aschcroft et al. 2000: 79). Being that subfield of anthropological research, ethnography tends to be "the basic methodology" used by cultural anthropologists consisting of "direct observation and reporting on a people's way of life" (Aschcroft et al. 2000: 79). This is what accounts for its operation on two main levels. The first one is "fieldwork" and refers to "the process of observing and recording data" (Aschcroft et al. 2000: 79). The second stage is known as "reportage" and means "the production of a written description and analysis of the subject under study" (Aschcroft et al. 2000: 79).

Anshuman Prasad (2003) talks about "the ethnographic imagination" (Prasad 2003:149). This concept refers to "a mindset that anticipated and enjoyed encounters with native cultures to fulfill a sense of adventure, as an intellectual pursuit, and for erotic and aesthetic stimulation" (Prasad 2003: 154). According to him, "the ethnographic imagination" is one of

the core products of two overlapping discourses namely primitivism and Orientalism. Concerning the former, it is concerned with forging a dichotomous view of a developed and civilized Western culture, and an underdeveloped and savage non-Western one; while Orientalism stresses the eternal differences between the Western andEastern worlds. Grouped together, both discourses have actively contributed in forming this ethnographic imagination by "carving out identities of the Western self and the non-Western Other, and by delineating relationships between them through a series of hierarchical oppositional categories" (Prasad 2003: 155). Interestingly, the main engine of this ethnographic imagination is the ethnographer. Prasad describes the ethnographer as "an archetypical colonial persona with a commitment to gathering information about native cultures" (Prasad 2003: 153). This gathered information is invaluable to the Western colonial apparatus in the home country.

Barbara Korte suggests that the obvious link between travel literature and ethnography led to the production of "a seminal instrument of control or an imperialist ideology, which produced and reproduced an object-oriented description of the manners and customs of the inhabitants of the lands that had been travelled through" (Korte 1996: 89-90). In a way or another, the writer detaches himself from the described people and the result is that "the text constructs an 'other' with whom the European traveller does not establish a genuine interpersonal relationship" (Korte 1996: 92). That is why ethnographic accounts have been heavily criticized in post-colonial texts as one of the Western tools to construct inferior others and thereby justify the establishment of a hierarchy of cultures. This is what leads Prasad to conclude that ethnography is "one of the arguably scholarly by-products of the West's era of high imperialism" (Prasad 2003: 149). This critical view of ethnography as a colonial instrument of representation paves the way for a deeper examination of the concept of the stereotype, another mechanism through which Western discourses have historically essentialized and marginalized non-Western peoples.

Stereotype as a concept was first introduced into social sciences in 1922, when the American critic, Walter Lippman, used it "to describe the typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group" (Lippman, as cited in Mambrol 2017: para.1). From then on, various conceptualizations of this concept have emerged in various disciplines. The most basic one associates a stereotype with an over-generalized and over simplified representation of a group of people. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a stereotype is a "widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or

thing" (Oxford English Dictionary, as cited in Bordalo et al. 2015: 1). It could be inferred, hence, that a stereotype is more about a static, fixed, and highly generalized picture that reduces the stereotyped to a ready-made set of characteristics and features. Edward Quinn (2006) reinforces this idea by asserting that a stereotype isa "highly generalized idea, situation, or character […] More commonly, it refers to the reliance on generalizations about racial, national, or sexual groups in the depiction of certain characters (Quinn, as cited in Benhima & Khatib 2019: 307).

In the field of Postcolonial studies, Homi Bhabha discusses in depth the concept of stereotype with the aim to unveil the mechanisms by which the imperial discourse functions. According to him, the stereotype is "a complex and ambivalent mode of representation" (Bhabha 1994: 107). First, the stereotype is ambivalent because it is "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha 1983: 18). Second, the stereotype is complex because it is "a fixated form of representation that denies the play of difference" (Bhabha 1994: 107) and contributes to "set[ting] up a discursive form of racial and cultural opposition in terms of which colonial power is exercised" (Bhabha 1994: 112). One significant outcome of this form of cultural opposition is the creation of "a false image" to become "the scapegoat of discriminatory practices" (Bhabha 1994: 117). Pedro Bordalo et.al (2015) support Bhabha's perspective by asserting that stereotypes are "fundamentally incorrect and derogatory generalizations of group traits, reflective of the stereotyper's underlying prejudices or other internal motivations" (Bordalo et.al 2015: 1). As a result, the stereotype emerges as the primary "discursive strategy" (Bhabha 1994: 18) used by the imperial discourse to produce fixed images about non-Western people. Michael Pickering refers to these fixed images as "stereotyping knowledge", emphasizing that it operates as a "distancing mechanism, radically separating those stereotyped from those among whom the stereotypes circulate and are reproduced" (Pickering 2015: 1).

In the context of travel literature, this "stereotyping knowledge" plays a crucial role in shaping narratives and influencing readers' perceptions. Western literature about the Orient, for instance, frequently " […] contain[s] distortions, stereotyping and misrepresentations" where the Oriental other is often depicted as "[…] barbaric, uncivilized, and backward" (Benhima & Khatib 2019: 307). This aligns with Bhabha's assertion that "the stereotype impedes the circulation and articulation of the signifier of race as anything other than its fixity

as racism" (Bhabha 1994: 108). From this perspective, stereotypes constrain understandings of race, reducing it to rigid and reductive frameworks rooted in racism. They "fix" certain ideas about race, inhibiting broader or more nuanced perspectives.

Consequently, readers of Western travel narratives about the Orient often encounter such reductive imagery, wherein the Orient is "[…] enframed through these stereotypic representations" (Bozdoğan, as cited in Ürey 2013: 108). Through these representations, the Orient is "[…] reproduced, multiplied and transported elsewhere and reconstructed ultimately to become an object of consumption" (Bozdoğan, as cited in Ürey 2013: 108); a process that typically underscores the negative portrayals of the Tunisian people in British narratives.

In order to better understand the complexity of these portrayals, it is essential to briefly consider the diverse racial and ethnic groups that lived inTunis during the period undercover. The country's demographic landscape, shaped by centuries of migration, conquest, and trade, gave rise to a richly heterogeneous society. In this regard, Manai identifies the principal groups as comprising "Arabs, Turks, Moors, Berbers, Negros Jews and Europeans" (Manai 2007: 30). Expanding on these distinctions, Shaw observes that:

> The Moors and Berbers are the oldest inhabitants of Tunisia, while the Moslem population is divided into many groups. This includes the Moors, called by the Arabs: the Hadhars (or town dwellers).The Moors do not make a race apart but are a mix of races having inhabited North Africa in different periods of the historyof the region; the Koulouglis are descendants of Turks and Arab women; the Kabyles are pure Berbers who still cling to their language and the Arabs are descendants of the pure Arabs of the East of the Red Sea. (Shaw 1738: 135)

Manai further remarks that these different groups "despised each other and often lived apart from the other." (Manai 2007: 30). For instance,

> The Moors or the town Arabs intermarried exclusively amongst themselves and almost never mixed with nomad Arabs. A similar antipathy existed between the Arabs and Berbers who apparently felt oppressed because of the subsidiary position they were held

in.The third major social grouping, the Jews, lived on their own and had their own commercial relations with the rest of the people. (Manai 2007: 30).

It is within this diverse social landscape that British travellers constructed their representations, often grouping Tunisians into a single, homogenized image as the following analysis will demonstrate.

4.1. Representations of physical degradation and dehumanization

4.1.1. Physical degradation

4.1.1.1. Perspectives from the nineteenth-century

One of the concrete articulations of the othering process is the physical degradation of the native population, often extending to their dehumanization. Starting with the motif of physical degradation, it has been found that in both nineteenth and twentieth-century accounts, the Tunisian is often portrayed as the bearer of all the negative traits such as ugliness, filthiness, primitiveness, and savagery. Relying on some excerpts from nineteenth-century books, we could say that each of the following writers Temple (1835), Graham and Aschbee (1887), and Vivian (1899) contributed to the construction of the Tunisian as a negative and inferior Other. Temple uses a racist terminology, typically characteristic of the colonial discourse, in order to underscore the ugliness of the local people: "it was market day and the souk was filled with a great number of wild looking Arabs." Then, he adds: "I bought a boy, who from his extraordinary ugliness, was a perfect curiosity." (Temple 1835: 69). Temple's quote reveals an overtly colonial gaze that both denigrates and belittles Tunisian people. The expression "wild looking Arabs" evokes a sense of savagery, depicting the Tunisian market, which is normally a center of cultural and social exchange, as a space filled with "wild" individuals who appear threatening to a Western observer. The specific choice of the adjective "wild" suggests that theTunisian is inherently unattractive, untamed, unruly, and thus outside the norms of Western civility. The second part of the quote is both striking and suggestive. Temple's reference to "buying" a boy with "extraordinary ugliness" adds another layer of denigration and dehumanization. First of all, the fact that the boy was "bought" reflects an imperial commodification of human lives, reflecting how European travellers often constructed Tunisian people not as individuals with intrinsic worth but as objects to be

observed and owned. Second, by referring to the boy's "extraordinary ugliness", the writer assigns value to the boy based not on his humanity but rather on a perceived physical deficiencythat renders him a "curiosity." Furthermore, the boy's "ugliness" is presented asan inherent, defining feature, as though his appearance rendered him both an oddity and somehow inferior. This ugliness, according to Temple, reduces him to a "curiosity," a collectible item whose value lies in his perceived physical unattractiveness and inherent difference. Because of this "extraordinary ugliness," Temple implies that the boy'sappearance falls far outside acceptable or admirable Western standards, presenting him as grotesque and subhuman. This description largely aligns with Inderpal Grewal's view thatin the majority of British travelogues, "the people of the land are not seen as beautiful" (Grewal 1996: 44).

In a similar vein, Graham and Aschbee convey a denigrating view of the local population by referring to people from Gabes as follows: "The children are dirty in the extreme, and their entire clothing consists of a piece of cotton, generally in rags, but thrown round them with a grace to which an European child is an entire stranger ; the women [are] scarcely less dirty than their offspring". (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 100).

This quote exemplifies a demeaning and derogatory view of Tunisians, focusing on perceived physical deficiencies to establish them as inferior toEuropeans. In fact, by insisting on "the extreme"dirtiness of the children and extending this depiction of filth to their mothers, the writers construct an image of the Tunisian population as inherently unhygienic and uncivilized. This uncivilized aspect is easily deduced from expressions such as "generally in rags" and "a piece of cotton" which presents the Tunisian attire as both backward and inadequate. Besides, the deliberate use of the phrase "in the extreme" suggests that this "dirtiness" is not onlya matter of circumstance but an inherent quality that separates the local population away from the cleanliness associated with European norms. However, the authors note with a kind of admiration that these children wear their rags "with a grace to which a European child is an entire stranger" which offers a romanticized yet derogatory view. The romanticized view positions Tunisian children as exotically "graceful" while the derogatory one presents them as unworthyof the social refinement attributed toEuropeans. Significantly, the authors' portrayal implies that any elegance observed is accidental or unconscious, or simply a product of their "natural" state rather thancultivated behavior. Finally, by describing Tunisian women as "scarcely less dirty than their offspring,"Graham and Aschbee extend this

portrayal of inferiority across generations, associating it with cultural structures. Such a depiction erases individual identity, presuming that all Tunisians are "dirty" and "primitive," hence reinforcing a hierarchy that places European travellers in a position of supposed moral and physical superiority.

In line with these authors, Vivian observes that dirt is not only associated with the locals but also with the places they inhabit: "in every shop and corner are black masses of sluggish flies and still more revolting insects feasting upon a wealth of fat" (Vivian 1899: 129). In this passage, Vivian constructs a denigrating view of Tunisians inhabiting a space which is inherently unsanitary and unrefined, casting both the local environment and its inhabitants in a negative light. To start with, the depiction of the shop as full of "sluggish flies" and "revolting insects" evokes an atmosphere of discomfort and disgust, implicitly associating Tunisians with filthiness and lack of hygiene. In addition to that, the description of these insects as "feasting upon a wealth of fat" not only highlights the unpleasantness of the scene, but also depicts this unsanitary condition of Tunisian shops as an unavoidable characteristic of the Tunisian society. More precisely, the specific reference to insects "feasting" on fat adds an element of grotesque excess which further deepens the gap between the ordered British Self and the chaotic Tunisian Other. On the basis of his quote, it could be argued that Vivian's depiction reduces Tunis and its people to a space of filth and discomfort, a place where "revolting" elements dominate the environment. In fact, his reliance on exaggeration reflects his subjective stance since she "impo[ses] symbolic and material distance" (Stasak 2008: 6) while portraying these shops.

4.1.1.2. Enduring tropes in twentieth –century texts

Twentieth-century British travellers perpetuated the same stereotypes as an analysis of the accounts of Sladen (1906), Graham (1908), Douglas (1912), and Rankin (1930) has proven. Beginning with Sladen, in many passages of his work, he confirms his commitment to the imperial discourse by relying on a set of pejorative adjectives while describing the country and its inhabitants. In reference to Kairouan, he postulates the following: "They are very poor and very dirty, the streets ill-kept and smelly" (Sladen 1906: 638). Although short in length, the quote includes many negative adjectives, along with the use of the intensifier "very", in order to communicate a derogatory view of the town and its inhabitants. Sladen's use of the expression "very poor and very dirty" creates an unflattering image that equates poverty witha lack of cleanliness, perpetuating a stereotype that suggests cultural failing. Moreover, his phrase "the streets ill-kept and smelly" further emphasizes this negative image. By focusing on the condition of the streets, Sladen highlights a broader image of disorder within Kairouan, painting a picture of a community that is not only impoverished but also chaotic and neglected.This serves to denigrate and dehumanize the local people by reducing their identity to mere labels of poverty and dirtiness. From a critical stance, Sladen's judgmental tone encapsulates a moral superiority that is often found in colonial narratives. By associating the inhabitants of Kairouan with poverty and dirtiness, Sladen implicitly positions himself as a superior observer who is qualified enough to highlight the perceived deficiencies of the local population. This perspective fosters a view of Tunisians as 'Other', reinforcing the colonial ideology that justified Western domination.

While Sladen chooses to denigrate the local people by highlighting their poverty and filthiness, Graham fosters an image of the Tunisian as 'Other' through his depiction of the locals as primitive: "A flock of goats, with their primitive picturesque shepherds, surely the counterpart of those who followed the same calling 3,000 years ago, would pass along the road" (Graham 1908: 158). Graham's quote explicitly portrays Tunisians as a "primitive Other" by emphasizing their stagnation and lack of progress. This idea is deduced from theuse of the adjective "primitive" which inherently carries a connotation of inferiority, suggesting that the pastoral lifestyle of these individuals is a direct continuation of ancient practices. It is further reinforced by likening the shepherds to those from "3,000 years ago", which implies that they exist outside the bounds of time and progress. Significantly, this description aligns with the broader Orientalist discourse that often characterizes Eastern

societies as static and unchanging with an image of the Arab as "primitive, backward, mystical, and unable to climb the ladder of civilization" (Bhabha 1994: 118).

Being deeply influenced by the views of his predecessors, Douglas offers a more stereotypical image of Tunisian people by fostering the notion of racial hierarchy from the very beginning. This idea is deduced from statements such as "this contact with an inferior race" (Douglas 1912: 28) or descriptions like "[…] hard and incurious" (Douglas 1912: 74) in reference to Tunisians in general. Undeniably,each expression reinforces the major stereotype that aligns with colonial-era notions of racial and cultural superiority, immediately establishing Tunisians as racially inferior to Europeans. His characterization of the Tunisian as "hard and incurious" not only suggests that they lack certain human qualities like empathy or friendliness, but also portrays them as ignorant lacking engagement with the world beyond their immediate environment. Such a view is further reinforced in another more specific instance where Douglas refers to a young boy from the South of Tunis as "a savage from the mountains" (Douglas 1912:35). This representation leans into a derogatory notion of wildness, evident in the use of the adjective "savage", which depicts Tunisian people as primitive, impulsive, and uncivilized. Douglas's description further reinforces this image through geographical distance, as exemplified in the phrase "from the mountains', suggesting the locals' untamed nature. In another passage, the author refers to Tunisians as having "a wild beauty of their own" (Douglas 1912:36). In fact, by referring to their beauty as "wild," Douglas suggests that Tunisians embody an untamed, almost primitive allure, distinct from Western ideals of beauty: "of their own". By emphasizing their primitiveness and their distinctiveness, he constructs an image of Tunisians as elements of the landscape rather than fully autonomous individuals. This objectification serves to deny Tunisians' social depth, reducingthem to a part of the natural scenerymeant to be admired, studied, and controlled by the European traveller. This idea is concretely expressed through Douglas's repeated portrayal of Tunisians as "children". First, he characterizes them as "children of nature" (Douglas 1912: 36), and subsequently refers to a young Tunisian as "a desert-child" (Douglas 1912: 68). He further reinforces this infantilizing portrayal by asserting that these Tunisians are "only children" (Douglas 1912: 35). To lend additional authority to his claims, Douglas cites a French overseer who observers that "they are gentle as young girls, but so are all children!" (Douglas 1912: 72). Obvious as it may seem, all these quotes encapsulate the paternalistic tone often seen in Orientalist texts which not only infantilizes Eastern people, but also

positions them as immature, naive, and "child-like"in contrast to the Western self. According to Said,

> The orientalist creates the Orient through his writing. In the process, he helps in the creation of a series of stereotypical images, according to which Europe (the West, the 'self ') is seen as being essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, virtuous, normal and masculine, while the Orient (the East, the 'other') (a sort of surrogate version of the West or the 'self ') is seen as being irrational, backward, despotic, inferior, depraved, aberrant, and feminine. (Said, as cited in Marandi & Ensieh 2015: 23)

Labeling Tunisians as "only children or "children of nature"—with the specific qualifier "only" which emphasizes limitation and the word "nature" which conveys a sense of primitivism—aligns with Said's above view. Besides, the reference to the Tunisian as the "desert-child" combines two different stereotypical tropes: that of immaturity as implied in the word "child" and that of the "desert" which attributes a sense of dangerousness and uncontrollability to Tunisian people. This reinforces the stereotype of the Oriental as driven by nature and instinct rather than reason. It should be also noted that the French overseer's reference to Tunisians as "all children" offers a sweeping generalization that reduces the complexity and the heterogeneity of the group into a single homogenous whole. Interestingly, Said's claim that the West frequently feminized the Orient is made clearer through the comparison of Tunisians to "young girls" which associates Tunisians with qualities stereotypically attributed to femininity such as gentleness, passivity, and naivety. This suggests that Tunisians are not just immature but also in need of protection and discipline, effectively justifying the West's claim to moral and political authority over the East. This perspective is also underscored by Frantz Fanon in his seminal work *Black Skin White Masks* (1986) where he asserts that "a white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening" (Fanon 1986:31). This comparison highlights the patronizing attitudes that characterize both forms of representation and interaction.

Another significant aspect emphasized by Douglas, consistent with perspectives from twentieth-century authors, is the association of the country and its inhabitants with dirt.

Throughout his travel narrative, he often describes Tunisians as "dirty Arabs" (Douglas 1912: 31) and characterizes the country itself as marked by "dirt and insanity" (Douglas 1912: 78). In particular, he portrays the inhabitants of Nefta as "so uncouth and unclean" (Douglas 1912: 195). Similarly, he depicts a boy from Gafsa as follows: "his inevitable burnous, brown with dirt" (Douglas 1912: 8). Grouped together, these quotes attest to the fact that Douglas 's language is both pathologizing and dehumanizing. For example, by referring to Tunisians as "dirty Arabs," Douglas not only invokes a racialized stereotype that associates Arab identity with dirtiness, but also disregards any individuality or diversity within Tunisian society, hence reducing an entire population to a single demeaning attribute. This aspect is further accentuated by his association of the country with "insanity", which implies that the Tunisian society operates outside rational and humane norms. Furthermore, the use of the intensifier "so" followed by pejorative adjectives like "uncouth and unclean" serves to amplify his derogatory portrayal. These adjectives, which are judgment-laden terms, inherently suggest their opposites (refined and clean), creating a sharp contrast between the "civilized" Western self and the "uncivilized" Eastern Other. Finally, the description "brown with dirt", in reference to the boy from Gafsa, further perpetuates the stereotype of the "dirty" native. It is even accentuated through the use of the term "inevitable" which suggests that this type of clothing is not only typical but almost unchangeable, reinforcing a stereotype of cultural stasis. In a nutshell, all those instances from Douglas 's book represent Tunis, and by extension the East, as a place of "deficiency", thus reinforcing the cultural hierarchy that dominated much of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western travel literature.

In his travel book entitled *Tunisia* (1930), Rankin aligns closely with the views of both his predecessors and contemporaries, portraying Tunisians in derogatory terms that underscore perceptions of savagery and dirtiness. Starting with the former,in the opening chapter, he describes the Tunisian as living "outside civilized bounds" (Rankin 1930: 13). Further in his account, he explicitly equates the Tunisian with savagery, referring to him as "the savage inhabitant of these savage landscapes" (Rankin 1930: 182). To start with, the phrase "outside civilized bounds" suggests that there are defined parameters of what constitutes civilization, and Tunisians exist beyond those limits. So, by positioning the locals "outside" those norms, Rankin perpetuates a common racial trope in European discourse which characterizes non-Westerners as inherently inferior. Moreover, the adoption of parallelism while describing both the inhabitants and the landscape and using the same adjective,"savage", further reinforces a stereotype that connects the people to their

surroundings in a negative way. This assumption operates at two levels. The first one suggests that the characteristics of the landscape are reflected in the behavior and nature of its inhabitants. The second level evokes the idea that both the land and its people lack the refinement associated with civilized societies.

Concerning the trope of uncleanliness, Rankin states that the Arabs are "a dirty race" based on his observation of "a blue-robed woman whose skirt needed washing, they all want washing" (Rankin 1930: 114). First, Rankin's characterization of Arabs as "a dirty race" is a sweeping generalization that categorizes an entire group based on limited observation. Second, the specific observation of "a blue-robed woman whose skirt needed washing" serves asa visual image that reinforces his negative characterization. This technique effectively links the person's physical appearance to a broader narrative of filth and dirtiness, which is a common trope in travel literature during the era of colonialism.[25] Finally, the straightforward and assertive manner through which Rankin asserts that "they all want washing" not only suggests a collective deficiency among Tunisians, but also presents the author's opinion as an objective truth rather than a subjective observation. When grouped together, all these views serve to confirm Bhabha's view that the race of the Other "[…] becomes the ineradicable sign of negative difference in colonial discourses" (Bhabha 1994: 108).

Significantly, it has been found that these narratives extend beyond the physical degradation of the locals to include even dehumanizing comparisons further entrenching the Tunisian as fundamentally opposed to Western ideals of civilization and refinement. This thematic focus on dehumanization provides a lens through which the next section will examine the ways in which British travel writers of the time positioned Tunisians as subordinate or sub-human, thus shaping perceptions that justified imperial attitudes and colonial practices.

[25] Another instance ofthis trope is found in LAWRENCE, T. E. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom:A Triumph (1922)* where he describes the men who made up the troops of Emir Faisalas follows: "Their clothing was mainly a loose shirt, with sometimes short cotton drawers, and a head-shawl usually of red cloth, which acted towel [*sic*] or handkerchief or sack as required" (p.105).

4.1.2. Dehumanizing comparisons

The equation of Easterners with monstrous creatures is not a nineteenth or twentieth-century phenomenon. Rather, it dates back to the medieval period during which "texts are full of images of a marvelous East populated by fabulous creatures" (Korte 1996: 28). A prominent example appears in Sir John Mandeville's [26] account, where he claims to encounter in the East "the monstrous creatures familiar from the classical and medieval ethnographic traditions" (Mandeville, as cited in Speake 2003: 762). This image endures in later travel narratives as well. Marco Polo[27], for instance, uses a dehumanizing language to describe the inhabitants of Zanzibar, noting that "they have wide mouths and turned up noses. Their eyes and lips are so protuberant that they are a horrible sight. Anyone meeting them at another country would mistake them for devils" (Polo 1984: 175). Here, the emphasis on grotesque physical features functions not only to highlight difference but to strip the subjects of their humanity altogether. By likening them to "devils", Polo reinforces an image of the racialised Other as both visually repulsive and morally suspect; this rhetorical strategy anticipates later colonial discourses.

Such portrayals were later transferred to depictions of the New World, where they served as a tool for othering its inhabitants. Following Columbus's discovery of the Americas, the Catholic Church debated a pressing question: "were they human or not? " (Eller 2009: 56). This questioning of the humanity of the Other reflects an early form of derision and dehumanization that would characterize European thought for many centuries. Likewise, the surveyor Thomas Bavin[28] was asked "to draw the figures and shapes of men and women in their apparel as also their manner […] in every place as you shall find them differing from us" (Sherman, as cited in Hulme & Youngs 2002: 17). As such, "the Native American became the primitive other to Europe's civilized self" (Rapport & Overing 2000: 13-14).

[26] Sir John Mandeville is the author of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, a travel narrative first circulated in the fourteenth-century. The work, likely a compilation of various travel accounts, recounts Mandeville's journeys through Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

[27] Marco Polo (1254-1324) was a Venetian merchant and explorer whose travels through Asia were recorded in the *Travels of Marco Polo* (c.1300). His account was highly influential in shaping European perceptions of distant peoples and lands.

[28] Thomas Bavin was an English navigator, surveyor, and colonial promoter who participated in Sir Humphrey Gilbert's1583 expedition to NorthAmerica. This expedition was one of England's earliest attempts to establish a colony in North America, specifically in Newfoundland.

The same derogatory imagery persisted into the seventeenth-century, as evidenced by the continued circulation of Pliny the Elder's [29] book *Historia Naturalis* (Natural History) in which non-Europeans are described as "the brutish giant—the naked, bestial, and cannibalistic wild man"—along with his "sexually profligate, cannibalistic wild woman" (Elder, as cited in Rapport & Overing 2000: 15). Although composed in Antiquity, Pliny's descriptions were widely read and reprinted during the modern period, shaping European perceptions of the non-European Other for centuries.

Influenced by such prevalent views, Sir Walter Raleigh[30], in *The Discovery of Guiana* (1848), includes non-human imageries of "giant and headless Ewaipanoma, a people of the Guianas" (Raleigh, as cited in Rapport & Overing 2000: 15) asserting that they "had eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts" (Raleigh, as cited in Rapport & Overing 2000: 15). Similar portrayals recur in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British accounts, which will be the focus of the next section.

4.1.2.1. Nineteenth-century depictions

Medieval tropes of "monstrous humans, dog-headed people" (Speake 2003: 762) largely shaped and influenced Graham and Aschbee's representations of the native people. In this regard, they refer to women from Gabes in the following way: "the women wear their hair in matted locks, like the curls on an ill-kept poodle dog" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 100). The authors here use the simile "like the curls on an ill-kept poodle dog" to cast women's appearance as unsightly while simultaneously giving animalistic qualities to them, which is a common trope in European travel literature. Beyond its subhuman connotations, "the poodle dog" image evokes notions of taming and lack of autonomy, further reinforcing the dehumanizing view of Tunisian women.

Notably, this animal imagery is not limited to depictions of the Tunisian people; similar dehumanizing perspectives appear in European travel literature about Egypt. For instance, Harriet Martineau likens Egyptians to "dogs" (Martineau 1848: 24), a comparison echoed years later by Shirreff Grey who refers to them as "monkeys" (Grey1870:100). This pattern

[29] Pliny the Elder was a Roman author and naturalist. His *Historia Naturalis* (*Natural History*), written in AD 77, is an encyclopedic work covering a wide range of subjects. The 1699 edition refers to a later printed version of this classical text.

[30] Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618) was an English soldier, explorer, and writer. His book *The Discovery of Guiana* (published posthumously in 1848) recounts his expeditions to South America.

of representation persisted throughout the century, as seen in Amelia Edwards' work, where she similarly describes Egyptians using terms such as "dogs" (Edwards 1888: 41-164) and "monkeys" (Edwards 1888: 168). Going back to Tunis, the animal imagery becomes increasingly prominent as a growing number of writers incorporate it into their works twentieth-century works.

4.1.2.2. Twentieth-century depictions

The literary accounts of Sladen (1906), Lorimer (1906), and Douglas (1912) underscore the centrality of dehumanizing descriptions in their works, as the travel narrative "would be deemed incomplete without its taxonomy of monstrous beings that fed the western European taste for exotic marvels" (Speake 2003: 762). Following the footsteps of his predecessors, Sladen makes close parallels between Tunisians and animals by describing an old Tunisian woman as follows: "the old shriveled grandmother whose face was like a chimpanzee with its furrows and wrinkles and tan" (Sladen 1906: 586). Clearly, Sladen here is unable to recognize the Tunisian grandmother as a human being, instead employing the term "chimpanzee" to add a demeaning epithet to his portrayal. This comparison reduces her to a sub-human level and strips her of dignity. Besides, the phrase "with its furrows and wrinkles and tan" provides a second layer of dehumanization by extending the animal comparison in vivid detail. The list structure: "furrows and wrinkles and tan" breaks down her face into specific, animalistic features, making her appear as a specimen rather than an individual. Also, the repetition of the coordinating conjunction "and" in this list draws attention to each characteristic, almost as though the author was cataloguing the features of an animal in a clinical way, which adds to the sense of objectification and dehumanization.

To add authenticity and credibility to his dehumanizing comparisons, Douglas opts for referencing historical figures from earlier periods, drawing on examples from the sixth-century and the Middle Ages, specifically invoking the Great Augustine and Saint Anthony. Starting with the sixth-century, The Great Augustine[31], in one of his sermons, asserts:

In these deserts, there are men without heads, men who have one single eye placed in

[31] Augustine of Hippo (354-430) also known as Saint Augustine was an early Christian theologian. His sermons, including those fromthe sixth century (posthumously compiled), largely influenced medieval Christian thought.

> the centre of their breasts. […] He is too conscientious to speak from hearsay of such marvelous matters; he says that he personally went among these headless monocular folk; he says that he spoke to them and lived with them. (The Great Augustine, as cited in Douglas 1912: 64)

Similarly, Saint Anthony[32], in one of his congregations, reports that "he encountered a faun-half-man, half-goat […] he spoke to the creature " (Saint Anthony, as cited in Douglas 1912: 64). These quotations from Saint Augustine and Saint Anthony serve as illustrative examples of the tradition of monstrous races, often referred to as "monstrous races" or "marvels of the East" prevalent in early Christian writings. Their claims to have personally encountered these beings is mentioned purposefully to enhance the credibility of their accounts, framing them not as folklore but as authentic observations.

By referring to these early Christian figures, Douglas lends authenticity and credibility to his depiction of the Tunisian people, suggesting that these non human creatures are not his creation but rather have existed throughout history. Beginning with some general perceptions, Douglas refers to people from the South as "beasts" (Douglas 1912: 22). On the same page, he describes men and women from the desert as "necessarily animals" (Douglas 1912: 22). In another passage, he portrays the inhabitants of the southern town of Nefta as "so utterly non human" (Douglas 1912: 195). Through these quotes, Douglas blurs the line between the human and non-human by "construc[ting] a discursive animalization of the indigenous people, in which they are dehumanized and considered on a parallel status with animals, or in other words, the non-human" (Brian Deyo 2014: 95).[33] First, the adverb "utterly" implies totality, suggesting that these people are devoid of even basic human characteristics. Second, the use of the adverb "necessarily" in the quote "men and women are necessarily animals" positions his view as a supposed fact, as though it was an unavoidable reality dictated by the environment: the desert. Finally, the label "beasts" on the same page strengthens this dehumanization by casting Tunisians not only as untamed and uncivilized, by also reducing them to a monolithic, animalistic group.

[32] Saint Anthony (c.251-356) also knownas Anthony the Great was an early Christian monk. His sermons often describe encounters with spiritual and supernatural beings.

[33] For further discussion of the discursive animalization of indigenous peoples, see Deyo, B. D. (2014) *Rewriting History/Animality in J. M. Coetzee's. Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 44(4), 89– 116.

In more specific instances, Douglas refers to a crowd of boys in Gafsa as "prehistoric imps" (Douglas 1912: 9). Obvious as it may seem, Douglas here not only freezes Tunisians in a "prehistoric" era implying their stagnation and lack of development, but also dehumanizes the boys-as suggested by the word "imps"—by framing them as demonic, sub human creatures. In another chapter, Douglas dehumanizes a young boy from Gafsa by reducing his life to a set of basic, almost animalistic actions: "He could only run, and throw stones, and endure, like a beast, those ceaseless illnesses of which only death, an early death as a rule, is allowed to cure them" (Douglas 1912: 8). In fact, by limiting the boy's capabilities to few basic actions such as "running, throwing stones, and surviving illness", Douglas suggests that he is more like an animal than a person. This idea is reinforced by the phrase "like a beast" which further intensifies this dehumanization by likening the boy's endurance to that of an animal, implying that he, like an animal, lacks higher thought, individuality, or humanity. Likewise, Douglas associates the eyes of a young southern girl with animalistic features by claiming that "[…] the maiden has eyes which […] might be those of a stuffed cow" (Douglas 1912: 190-191). In describing her eyes this way, the author suggests lifelessness, emptiness, and a lack of individuality. This contributes to present an image of Tunisians as deficient in human qualities.

What is more striking is that Douglas adopts the same sub-human depictions even while describing Tunisian clothes or cultural traditions. Starting with the former, the author compares the burnous, the traditional Tunisian dress, to an animal skin: "What is the burnous, save a glorified aboriginal beast-skin" (Douglas 1912: 21). Concerning the latter, Douglas reduces the rituals of a Tunisian ceremony to "a beast-dance" (Douglas 1912: 23). Elaborating more on this quote, the choice of the word "beast" is especially powerful in this context. A "beast" is typically associated with creatures that lack reason, self-control, and sophistication. By applying this term to a wedding ceremony, Douglas strips away any sense of cultural value or emotional depth that the wedding might possess. Furthermore, by labeling the ceremony a "beast-dance", the writer suggests that people involved are more like animals than human beings, implying that they are wild, primitive, and uncivilized. As far as the quote about the burnous is concerned, it is clear that it employs a rhetorical question which suggests that its answer should be obvious to anyone familiar with the primitive native people. This rhetorical device reflects the European mindset of superiority, implying that the reader, like the writer, should understand the inferiority of the Tunisian people and their cultural markers. Besides, the equation of the traditional garment with "a glorified aboriginal beast-skin" strips it of its

cultural value and suggests that the people who wear it are somehow closer to nature or the animal world than to civilized human beings. The word "aboriginal" intensifies this comparison by implying that the wearers belong to a primitive state of nature, untainted by civilization, and therefore inherently inferior in the imperial mindset. Significantly, by using the word "glorified," Douglas ironically implies that the burnous is a more sophisticated version of something fundamentally prehistoric—an animal skin. So, by relying on both the animalistic comparison and the writer's dismissive tone suggested in his rhetorical question, it is obvious that Douglas refuses to acknowledge the garment's cultural significance or its connection to the identity of the wearers. This rhetorical strategy operates to dehumanize the dress code and its wearers, casting them into a fixed, animalistic framework. Significantly,this fixation within an animal-like state denies the natives any possibility of cultural or social complexity, reinforcing a simplistic, Othering narrative that reflects the writer's ethnocentric bias.

As far as female figures are concerned, Lorimer aligns closely with the approach of her male counterparts, using pervasive animal imagery to depict the local population. Her debasing descriptions blur the boundary between the human and the animal, a transgression that Spurr (1993) identifies as a "violat[ion] [of] the limit [...] between the human and the animal" (Spurr 1993 : 82). This idea finds a concrete articulation in three different instances. In the first one, Lorimer makes a sweeping generalization by reducing all Tunisians to a sub-human status by asserting that "[…] they were all perfectly happy with that Eastern animal-like happiness of chewing the cud of content" (Lorimer 1906: 30). Notably, the phrase "Eastern animal-like happiness" uses a simile that directly compares the happiness of Tunisians to that of animals, specifically drawing on the notion that happiness in the East is simplistic, primitive, and devoid of any intellectual or emotional sophistication. The second part of the quote "chewing the cud of content" deepens this dehumanization by suggesting that Tunisians' happiness is passive, mindless, and repetitive—akin to an animal's mechanical, instinctual actions. This ultimately reinforces the stereotype of the "lazynative" who lacks the ambition, agency, or drive that would characterize the "civilized" individual in Western societies.

In the second instance, Lorimer refers to Tunisian merchants that she encountered in the Suq as "[…] rolled up like fat pigs in white burnouses on the small floors of their cupboard–like shops" (Lorimer 1906: 13). The simile employed by the female writer "fat

pigs" serves to dehumanize the people being described by invoking an image that takes away their humanity. The specific reference to "pigs" is particularly potent, as pigs are often associated with overindulgence, lack of cleanliness, and disorder, all of which contribute to a reduction of the people's dignity. Similarly, the second part of the quote, "on the small floors of their cupboard – like shops," continues the dehumanizing imagery, yet in a different manner. By likening the shops to cramped and unpleasant spaces, the writer again strips away the human element, reducing these establishments to uncomfortable, substandard environments. This comparison further reflects the writer's attempt to characterize the space and people in a way that emphasizes their perceived inferiority, hence reinforcing the stereotype of racial hierarchy.

The third example in Lorimer's book appears to be strikingly the most dehumanizing since she asserts that "the honest Christian sheep and middle-eyed calves don't have the same evil-looking inside as these Mohammedan animals" (Lorimer 1906: 13). Obviously, the sentence follows a pattern of racial and moral comparison which elevates the "honest Christian" and then reduces the "Mohammedan" to subhuman status: "animals", characterized by an "evil-looking inside." The deliberate use of the word "Mohammedan", which is a dated and often pejorative term for Muslims, is used to mark the sharp, moral divide between the Christian and Muslim worlds. The emphasis on outward appearances ("evil-looking") in conjunction with moral judgment enhancesthe perception of the individuals as fundamentally flawed and immutable, reducing them to a one-dimensional representation of evil.

What could be deduced from Lorimer's portrayals is that female writers are also complicit in the process of dehumanizing the natives by perpetuating ideas of cultural and racial hierarchies. This complicity contributes to a broader social acceptance of the "native other" as lacking the virtues and qualities often associated with Europeans. Such depictions, which are akin to their male counterparts, are conveyed through the writers' perceptions, judgments, and language, which collectively create a lens that frames the native population through a skewed, biased, and subjective perspective.

To conclude this sub-section, it is evident that many British travel accounts blur the boundary between the human and non human, effectively reducing the native population to "animals" and further "mystifying" as "some magical essence" (JanMohamed 1995: 22) of the country. In this context, Rana Kabbani argues that the equation of the natives with animals serves "[...] to bolster the self-esteem of the European by convincing him that he was the

culmination of excellence in the human species" (Kabbani, as cited in Dixon 1991: 194). Similarly, Jean Paul Sartre describes this process of dehumanizing natives as "racist humanism" assertingthat "the European has onlybeen able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters" (Sartre, as cited in Forsdick & Murphy 2014: 186). According to JanMohamed, because of these dehumanizing representations "there can be no meeting ground, no identity, between the social, historical creatures of Europe and the metaphysical alterity" (JanMohamed 1995: 22) of Eastern people.

To sum up this part, it could be argued that British travel narratives often depicted Tunisians in terms that emphasized physical degradation and drew comparisons with the non-human, reinforcing a discourse of inferiority and alterity. The latter, according to Shameem Black is "an act of discursive dominationthat replicates in literary form the violent operations of political, economic, and social inequality" (Black 2019:20). As such, these representations become a reflection of the travellers' subjective perceptions acting as "part of a strategy of containment where the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation" (Bhabha 1994: 46). Or, in Barbara Korte's words, these negative images are the outcome of "an act of construction on the part of the perceiver who defines the country's otherness against his or her own sense of identity, his or her own familiar contexts" (Korte 1996: 20). In this way, the act of observing and describing the Tunisian population became an exercise in solidifying the traveller’s cultural and racial superiority. Inderpal Grewal (1996) further elucidates the implications of this constructed inferiority, stating that for travellers, the ugliness of the people is "an obstacle to the construction of a harmonious society" (Grewal 1996: 44). This observation highlights how these narratives not only dehumanized the natives but also represented them as obstacles to the construction of a cohesive and controllable society. In fact, the dual forces of defining identity through otherness and projecting socio-cultural anxieties onto the "inferior" Tunisians underline the broader dynamics of power at play.

Consequently, these travel books serve as textual artifacts that reveal the intertwined mechanisms of imperial domination and self-affirmation, positioning both, the country and its people, into a canvas for reinforcing racial hierarchies. This reinforcement of racial and cultural differences is further entrenched by highlighting laziness as their defining behavioral trait.

4.2. Behavioral deficiencies: Tunisians as lazy

The representation of Tunisians as lazy, either by male or female writers, emerges as a recurring behavioral trait, often reflecting the authors' cultural biases and imperial attitudes rather than anobjective portrayal of the people. One of the early views that embodies this line of thought and permits to highlight the continuity of these stereotypical perceptions over centuries is the one articulated by the eighteenth-century writer Thomas Shaw. In his *Travels or Observations Relating to Several Parts of Barbary and the Levant* (1738), Shaw observes that the Tunisian "follows no regular employment. His life is one continued round of idleness or diversions. When no pastime calls him abroad, he does nothing all the day but loiters at home, smokes his pipe and reposes himself under some neighbouring shade" (Shaw 1738: 298-299). Undeniably, Shaw's depiction reflects the imperial gaze as it characterizes Tunisians through stereotypical traits that align with the broader Orientalist discourse. This assumption is substantiated by the grammatical structure of his sentences which are short, declarative, and definitive further underscoring a tone of generalization and authority, typical of the Orientalist discourse. Firstly, the phrase "follows no regular employment" immediately establishes the notion that the Tunisian is disengaged from meaningful work. By presenting this as an absolute claim, Shaw implies a cultural deficiency rather than individual variation. Likewise, the phrase "his life is one continued round of idleness or diversions" presents idleness as an inherent characteristic of the Tunisian lifestyle. The deliberate use of the word "continued" emphasizes constancy, suggesting that this behavior is unchanging and defining. Notably, the sequence of actions—which are all associated with leisure—"loiters at home, smokes his pipe and reposes himself under some neighbouring shade" reinforces the perception of inactivitysince its repetitive nature implies a monotonous and purposeless daily life. Thus, it could be asserted that the straightforward and declarative structure of Shaw's sentences as well as the lack of modal verbs like "might", "could", removes any sense of contingencyor variability, leaving little room for nuance or complexity. This simplicitylends an air of certainty to the observations, further cementing the stereotype as universal.

In fact, the influence of such stereotypical image, created in pre-colonial travel accounts, was transmitted to the following generation of writers as evidenced in the works of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers.

4.2.1. Nineteenth-century perceptions

The representation of Tunisian as lazy is mainly echoed in the works of Edward Rae (1877) and Herbert Vivian (1899). Beginning with Rae, he states that "The shops are not open till nine or ten, closing soon after half-past two: the Tunisians go early to bed, to repose from the fatigue of doing little all day" (Rae 1877: 114). Obviously, Rae starts his observation with a factual-sounding description: "The shops are not open till nine or ten, closing soon after half-past two". This seemingly neutral statement actually implies a negative judgment about the locals' work ethic. Implicitly, the author sets up a comparison with Western norms of shop hours presenting the Tunisians' working hours as inadequate or lazy with regards to Western standards. In fact,bystatingthat shops open late andclose early, Rae conveys a sense of inefficiency and unproductiveness. Besides, the specification of working hours "nine, ten, half past two" adds an element of precision that lends authority and truthfulness to his judgment. Interestingly, the phrase "fatigue of doing little all day" is very suggestive in itself as it powerfully reinforces the stereotype of the "lazy Other". This phrase directly conveys a mocking tone. The term "fatigue" usually implies exhaustion from effort, but associating it with "doing little" creates an ironic tone that ridicules the Tunisians'lifestyle. Rae's choice to describe their day in a dismissive manner, "doing little all day", not onlytrivializes their activities but also reduces their entire dailyexistence to minimal actions, implying that their way of life lacks value, seriousness, and purpose. So, through this quote, Rae crafts a depiction of the Tunisian that reinforces the stereotype of the Tunisian as lazy and inactive. His choice of words and structure explicitly constructs the inferiority of the Tunisian way of life, reflecting Orientalist attitudes that portray non-Western societies as lacking the productivity and drive associated with Western culture.

As far as Vivian is concerned, he also articulates the same stereotypical perception by cautioning that one has to be "set out with a plentiful stock of patience, for hurry is unknown in the East" (Vivian 1899: 236). Clearly, Vivian's quote is loaded with cultural judgment since the structure of her sentence is not descriptive: "hurry is unknown in the East", but it is rather presented as a fact. This lends a sense of inevitabilityto the stereotype as if the lack of hurry was an undeniable truth about the East. The authoritative tone reinforces the notion that the Eastern way of life is fixed and static. What is also worth mentioning is that Vivian relies on generalization—"the East"—to homogenize diverse cultures and people into a single, undifferentiated category, implying that all of Eastern

societies are inherently slow and unproductive. By attributing this trait as an inherent aspect of their identity rather than recognizing it as the result of specific situational or cultural factors, the writer contributes to reinforcing a reductive and essentialist stereotype. Besides, the use of the passive voice—"hurry is unknown"—suggests that hurry is an external, alien concept in the East, not something that Eastern people could embrace or adopt. This further contrasts "Eastern" practices with the supposed superiority of Western norms. Significantly, Vivian's view largely confirms the one conveyed by the French writer Paul Lapie who claims that "the Arab is far from being active, the slowness of his movements amazes the tourists"[34] (my translation). Written just one year before Vivian, it is clear that the British writer was influenced by Lapie since the latter also refers to Arabs in essentializing terms implying that passivity is an inherent, unchangeable trait and positioning the Western observer as the standard by which the Arabs are judged. As such, we could aver that Vivian's description of Easterners as unhurried and requiring patience mirrors Lapie's earlier portrayal of Arabs as slow-movingand inactive. The thematicand rhetorical parallelsbetraya colonial mindset that reveals a tradition of Orientalist tropes that were alreadywell-established in French literature.

As a whole, this continuity demonstrates how such stereotypes were not confined to individual writers but were part of a broader discourse that crossed national boundaries and genders, demonstrating again the complicity of female writers in sustaining Orientalist stereotypes. Taken from a broader angle, both Vivian and Rae appear unable to distance themselves from the biased portrayals of the Orient produced by earlier Western writers like Shaw or Lapie. This not only suggests the unchanged character of Oriental people but also confirms Said's view that Orientalism is "afterall asystem for citingworks and authors" (Said 1978:31). Significantly, the persistence of this stereotypical image extends into the twentieth century, a motif that will be examined in greater detail in the following sub-section.

[34] " L'Arabe ne parait pas actif, la lenteur de ses mouvements stupéfie les touristes" (Lapie 1898: 13).

4.2.2. Twentieth-century views

The works of male writers such as Sladen (1906), Miltoun (1908), Fraser (1911), Douglas (1912), and Rankin (1930) as well as those of female authors like Nesbitt (1906), Lorimer (1906), Ward (1920) and Erskine (1925) offer a uniform and reductive image that mirrors earlier depictions by Shaw, Rae, Vivian, and Lapie, reinforcing the dichotomy between the Western "Self" and the Eastern "Other.

4.2.2.1. Male perceptions of Tunisian idleness

According to Sladen, Tunisians " […] never seem to be doing any work" except "sleeping or talking or smoking or playing cards" (Sladen 1906: 377). Similar thought is expressed differently by Douglas who avers that the life of the native Tunisian "is reduced to its simplest physiological expression" (Douglas 1912: 75). Notably, both authors use a reductive language in order todepictthe natives as idle and detached from the Western values of hard work. For example, the adverb "never" leaves no room for exception, emphasizing a total absence of work or productivity. Then, the list of activities "sleeping or talking or smoking or playing cards "and their separation with the conjunction "or" not only" emphasizes the perceived passivity of the locals but also lists each activity as equally idle, reinforcing a generalization about the inactivity of the people described. The phrasing is almost dismissive since it reduces a complex culture to these simple, leisurely activities. Moreover, Douglas's idea that the native's life "is reduced to its simplest physiological expression" further emphasizes the perception of passivity. Such depiction implies that Tunisians' existence is reduced to mere survival, with no higher aspirations or engagement in intellectual or cultural progress. In a more precise instance, Douglas gives an idea about his reductive view of the natives' daily life by highlighting that "they have sat eternally in the same coffee-houses or mosques, and listened eternally to the same theological chattering" (Douglas 1912: 78). Suggestive as it may seem, the quote underscores a pejorative portrayal of the Tunisian as trapped in an unchanging, idle existence, marked by mental laziness and passivity. What is striking here is the recurrent use of the adverb "eternally" which creates an almost monotonous structure, mirroring the stagnant life that Douglas is describing, emphasizing the notion that the Tunisian has been stuck in this same pattern, unable to escape or move forward. It also implies that they are doomed to remain in a state of idle existence. Of equal

importance is the use of the present perfect which implies that this laziness and stagnation are long-established and unchangeable. Furthermore, Douglas's choice of "theological chatterings" positions the conversations in these settings as unimportant and lacking intellectual depth. The term "chatterings" devalues the theological discussions, suggesting that they are trivial and monotonous, rather than meaningful or stimulating. Douglas relies on this kind of discussions to conclude that "the chief mental exercise of the Arab consists in thinking how to reduce his work to a minimum" (Douglas 1912: 22). In this quote, the structure of the sentence, with its assertion that the "chief mental exercise" is to reduce work, presents this idea as a universal truth, rather than an opinion or observation. The declarative tone adds weight to the stereotype of the "lazy" native, making it sound like an established fact rather than a subjective judgment. This phrase serves to suggest that the intellectual inactivity extends beyond creative endeavors, implying that Tunisians are not only incapable of intellectual innovation but also avoid exertion in any form, reinforcing the stereotype of laziness. As such, it could be argued that Douglas's perception encapsulates the Orientalist view of Eastern societies as stagnant, intellectually inferior, and incapable of progress, positioning the West as the epitome of productivity.

Likewise, Miltoun postulates that "the docile, contemplative nature of the Arab permits him to pass longhours in a state of mental abstraction that would drive a man of affairs of the Western world crazy" (Miltoun 1908: 36). Rankin also observes that "all [in reference to Tunisians] appear to be squattingon theirhamscontemplatingvacuity, unless indeed, theyare eating" (Rankin 1930: 5). Starting with Miltoun's quote, it is obvious that it adopts anassertive patronizing tone and follows a declarative structure which leaves no room for variability or context. Rather, it suggests with certainty that passivity is not a choice but a defining cultural trait. Besides, the phrase "that would drive a man of affairs […] crazy" employs hyperbolic language, further dramatizing the contrast and solidifying the judgmentof the Tunisian lifestyle as incomprehensible or inferior from a Western perspective. This perception was reinforced by the choice of pejorative adjectives and expressions such as "contemplative, docile", and "pass long hours in a state of mental abstraction" which portrays inactivity as an essential characteristic, describing Tunisians as content with unproductive, inward-focused states. As far as Rankin's observation is concerned, his particular choice of "all" unquestionably creates a sense of generalization, implying that this image of passivity applies universally to all Tunisians. Even though the word "appear" introduces a certain degree of uncertainty,yet the overall ltone of the sentence presents it as an inherent truth.

More importantly, the structure of the sentence—first presenting a passive, mental image: "squatting on their hams contemplating vacuity", followed bya more active exception "unless indeed, they are eating"— draws a sharp contrast between the idealized image of Western industriousness and the supposed idleness of the Tunisian. The contrast reinforces the notion of the Tunisian's laziness and passivity, with the only exception to their inactivity being something as basic as eating.

Similar in goal but different in manner, both Sladen and Fraser describe the natives as detached from reality. Referring to Tunisians in general, Sladen declares that they are "dreamy as opium eaters" (Sladen 1906:453). Fraser, however, gives a more precise example by describing a pomegranate and date merchant as follows: "he sits dreamy-eyed, and mechanically sways a swish, like a horse's tail, to keep off the flies" (Fraser 1911: 192). Obvious as it may seem, both authors use the same adjective to describe Tunisians: "dreamy". "Dreaminess" in Western colonial thought is often associated with a lack of ambition and a tendency to drift ratherthan act decisively. The term "opium eaters", used by Sladen, carries a dual function: it ties Tunisians to a broader, colonial narrative of moral decay, perpetuating the stereotype of the "lazy Other". Likewise, the phrase "sits dreamy-eyed" employed by Fraser suggests detachment and a lack of focus, presenting the merchant as someone lost in thought rather than actively engaged in his work. This idea is further reinforced by the phrase "mechanically sways" which emphasizes automation and monotony, stripping the merchant's actions of intention or vitality. Besides, the writer's focus on keeping flies away, a seemingly trivial task, underscores the perception that the merchant's efforts are limited to the bare minimum and lack broader significance. To sum up, the observational structure of Fraser's sentence presents the scene as a factual snapshot. The clear absence of modal verbs like "might" or "could" or the lack of qualifiers leaves no room for interpretation or nuance, rendering the description definitive and universal. The use of commas to segment the sentence creates a slow, rhythmic pace that mirrors the mechanical action it describes, subtly reinforcing the impression of lethargy.

Significantly, this stereotype of the "lazy Tunisian" finds a visual anchor in the association of laziness with the traditional dress, where clothingis transformed from a marker of identity to a symbol that perpetuates perceived idleness. Among British writers, Douglas stands out as one of the most critical of traditional Tunisian attire. In his account, he provides a notably pejorative description of the "burnous," a garment traditionally worn by men. First,

he argues that the burnous is ultimately old-fashioned and irrelevant to modern times by postulating that " […] it looks […] like many antediluvian things" (Douglas 1912: 10). In another instance, he echoes exactly the same thought by comparing it to "the toga of the old Romans" (Douglas 1912: 9-10). Then, Douglas's critical tone escalates as he qualifies the burnous to be "the epitome of Arab inefficiency" (Douglas 1912: 9). This brief, declarative statement is stark and unequivocal in its judgment. The use of the word "epitome" suggests that the burnous encapsulates the very essence of inefficiency, positioning the garment as a symbol of the natives' laziness. The noun "inefficiency" directly connects the garment to the stereotype of laziness, reinforcing the idea that Tunisians are passive and unproductive. Added to that, Douglas describes the burnous as "a mummifying vesture, a step in thedirection of fossilisation" (Douglas 1912: 9). Here, the deliberate choice of the term "mummifying" reinforces the idea that thegarment impedes progress, while the phrase "a step in the direction of fossilization "strengthens the suggestion that the wearers of the burnous are frozen in time, unable to evolve or adapt to modern life. Mary Louis Pratt comments on this strategy of depicting the Other outside modern times by asserting that travellers' discourse often "codifies difference and fixes the Other in a timeless present." (Pratt 1986: 139-140). Still with Douglas's depiction of the natives' dress, he offers the following detailed description:

> The character of the race is summed up in that hopeless garment, which unfits the wearer for every pleasure and every duty of modern life. An article of everyday clothing which prevents a man from using his upper limbs, which swathes them up, like a silkworm in its cocoon—can anything more insane be imagined? (Douglas 1912: 9).

In this quote, Douglas signals a strong value judgment, suggesting an irreversible association between the garment and the lack of productivity or progress. The definitive structure of the opening phrase equates the essence of an entire people with a single piece of clothing, which is dismissive in itself. Notably, the second sentence uses avivid image: "like a silkworm in its cocoon" to evoke confinementand stagnation.The metaphor likens the wearer to an immobilized creature, reinforcing the notion of idleness and inefficiency. The final rhetorical question: "can anything more insane be imagined?" implies not just criticism of the garment but a broader cultural disdain, linking the dress to an inability to engage with

modern, active life. Briefly, by extending this criticism to "the character of the race," Douglas uses the garment as a synecdoche for the perceived shortcomings of Tunisian society, hence perpetuating Orientalist stereotypes within his description.

To sum up, all male views about the laziness of the locals serve as a flat reiteration of the theory of racial differences by reinforcing the idea that the Tunisian people, through their racial identity, are inherently suited to a passive, stagnant existence which appears to be the exactantithesis of the West's progress and modernity. As far as Douglas 's consideration of the Tunisian traditional dress as one of the sources of laziness is concerned, it could be advocated that his superficial acquaintance with the Tunisian culture led him to mistake the burnous for an "antediluvian thing" or a "toga of the old Romans". Significantly, the same stereotypical depictions persist in female-authored narratives, which is going to be the focus of the next sub-section.

4.2.2.2. Female perceptions of Tunisian idleness

Writers such as Lorimer and Nesbitt, who visited Tunis during the same year, similarly characterize the local population as indolent and resistant to progress. In the opening pages of her account, Lorimer communicates her first impression about Tunisians bystating that "they seem to sleep a great deal, […] smoke a great deal, pray a great deal, and leave Allah to doall the rest" (Lorimer 1906:13). In another passage she restates the same idea by highlighting the fact that "they were either smoking, or drinking coffee, or playing chess, or doing nothing, which after all is the Arabs' most popular form of amusement" (Lorimer 1906: 202). The overall effect of these two quotes is to characterize the Tunisian as lazy and idle. By highlighting typically passive actions such as "sleeping", "smoking", "playing", coupled with the idea of relying on divine intervention "leave Allah to do all the rest", Lorimer portrays Tunisians as disengaged from active and productive life, reinforcing the cultural stereotype of Arabs as detached from the Western work ethic. Narrowing down her focus, Lorimer, during her visit to the Tunisian suq, comments on the behavior of merchants as follows: "their unconsciousness of time is superb […] while the Maltese and Jews […] pester you to look at their goods even if you don't mean to buy any, the Arab sits in scornful silence, surrounded by his wares, waitingtill Allah sends a customer." (Lorimer 1906:13). Similar view is echoed by Nesbitt who observes that "in each tiny shop, the owner sits dreaming over a cigarette" (Nesbitt 1906:146). Clearly, Lorimer's comparison of the Arab with the Jews and Maltese is a

subtle criticism of the Arab's alleged laziness. By emphasizing the active behaviors of the groups, she presents the Arab as being at a disadvantage for not engaging in such industrious activities. The "scornful silence" and "waiting" imply that that the Arab's inactivity is not just a personal trait but a cultural flaw. Likewise, Nesbitt's portrayal constructs an image of a passive, idle shopkeeper who is not activelyworking or engaging with customers. In fact, the verb "sits" highlights inactivity, while "dreaming" adds a layer of disconnection from practical concerns. Similarly, the cigarette symbolizes idleness, reinforcing the stereotype of the Tunisian as indulgent in leisure rather than work. Thus, by applying this behavior to "each tiny shop", Nesbitt generalizes laziness as a widespread trait among Tunisian shopkeepers.

In a similar vein, Erskine also highlights the fact that in the suq "[…] men hang about their shops with the calm indifference of the true Oriental" (Erskine 1925: 154). The cultural stereotype of the lazy native is made clearer through the expression "the calm indifference of the true Oriental" which conveys a view of Eastern peoples as being inherently lazy, passive, and uninterested in work. The use of "true" implies an essentialist, almost timeless characteristic of being "Oriental," suggesting an immutable nature tied to passivity and leisure. To substantiate all these views, Ward concludes that "the Arabs are proverbially lazy" (Ward 1920: 139). Unquestionably, the stereotype of the Arab as lazy is explicitly stated in a concise and direct manner. The use of the word "proverbially" is significant here since it highlights the way in which this laziness is not just a personal or isolated trait but is presented as a widely recognized, culturally embedded belief.

Read under the light of all the above views, it could be claimed that the representation of Tunisians as lazy in pre-colonial and colonial travel narratives is a striking reflection of Orientalist stereotypes that served to justify cultural superiority and imperial domination. More importantly, the continuity of this stereotype across centuries and genders—evidenced in the writings of both male and female authors—highlights the entrenched nature of such biases in Western thought. According to Pratt, such portrayals fulfill two interconnected goals. The first one is to depict the native as "inferior"; and second to confine him "in a timeless present where all his actions andreactions are repetitions ofhis normal habits" (Pratt 1986: 139-140).

To sum up, while the portrayal of Tunisians as lazy reflects a narrative of physical inertia, their representation as illiterate and superstitious extends this discourse into the

intellectual and cultural realm, constructing a broader image of incapacity that reinforces imperial hierarchies.

4.3. Intellectual impoverishment

4.3.1. Depicting Tunisians as illiterate

4.3.1.1. Nineteenth-century views

In the works of Thomas MacGill (1811), Lewis Wingfield (1868), and Herbert Vivian (1899), Tunisians are represented as backward people with unproductive minds and sterile spirits. For instance, MacGill defines Tunisians as "ignorant, cunning, full of deceit, avaricious, and ungrateful. To this structure, severe as it is, indolence, apathy and cruelty, must yet be added" (MacGill 1811: 37). In this quote, the adjective "ignorant" stands out as a critical element implying a lack of education, awareness, and sophistication. Clearly, this depiction of ignorance goes beyond the fact of being uneducated; to include a broader set of negative traits comprising cunning, deceit and greed. In fact, the addition of this list of traits underscores the author's attempt to present a comprehensive view of Tunisians as not only ignorant but also morally degenerate. For example, the particular choice of nouns like "indolence" and "apathy" suggests that Tunisians are not interested in progress or self-improvement, reinforcing the idea that they are intellectually stagnant. From a critical standpoint, MacGill's insistence on the tropes of ignorance together with other negative traits serves to achieve two main objectives. The first one is to deepen the stark divide between the British "Self" and the Tunisian "Other". The second aim is to align with colonial ideologies that depicted European powers as the necessary agents of civilization, tasked with uplifting "ignorant"and "indolent" populations who lacked the willor ability to advance themselves. In other words, MacGill's portrayal feeds into colonial tropes that justify European intervention by implying that these people are incapable of improving their circumstances without external help.

Similarly, Wingfield depicts the Tunisian Moor as "stupid, in spite of the religion which drags him down [...] He is ignorant as a rule" (Wingfield 1868: 309). Here, Wingfield's perception reinforces the Orientalist discourse that often characterizes non-Western societies as intellectually inferior. More precisely, it reveals a dual layer of denigration: not only does

Wingfield label the Tunisian Moor as inherently "stupid", but he also attributes this perceived intellectual deficiency to the influence of religion, suggesting that Islam is the primary obstacle to intellectual development. Moreover, his assertion that the Moor is "ignorant as a rule" generalizes this negative perception across an entire population, reinforcing the stereotypes of the "Other" as inferior and uneducated. This idea was further reinforced bythe deliberate use of the expression "as a rule" which suggests that ignorance is not merely a product of circumstance but rather an inherent and passive condition.This sweeping judgment reflects the broader colonial mentality that justified European imperialism on the grounds of bringing "civilization" to supposedly backward societies. By presenting the Tunisian people in such a reductive manner, Wingfield reinforces a hierarchical view where the Self (and by implication the West) is positioned as rational, educated, and enlightened, whereas the Other (and by implication the East) is cast as passive, ignorant, and in need of European intervention.

Two decades later, Herbert Vivian joins MacGill and Wingfiled on that particular point by arguing that Arabs "seem to have inside their heads a kind ofclod which renders them impervious to modern ideas" (Vivian 1899: 289-290). In this context, Arabs (and by implication Tunisians) are characterized as resistant to or incapable of understanding "modern" ideas. This idea was further reinforced by the metaphor of a "clod" in their heads which implies an innate inability to grasp modernity. This kind of stereotypical language reinforces the dichotomy between the "enlightened" Self and the "backward" Other, feeding into the colonial narrative that Europeans had a duty to civilize and educate the inferior "Other." In fact, his view seems to be influenced by Mary Kingsley, who—two years earlier—argues that "the African is not keen on mountaineering in the civilization range. He prefers remaining down below and being comfortable" (Kingsley1897: 680). Unsurprisingly, Kingsley also portrays Africans as backward and stagnant, her metaphor of "mountaineering in the civilization range" suggests that civilization is a linear, hierarchical process that non-European peoples are unwilling or unable to ascend. Besides, Kingsley's characterization of Africans as "unwilling to progress" aligns with the Orientalist notion that the non Western world is inherently resistant to change, modernity, and rationalism, hence reinforcing the binary distinction between the educated Self and the backward Other. By embracing such perceptions, it could be argued that both Kingsley and Vivian adhere to many of the racial and cultural assumptions of their time.

Along similar lines, Vivian observes that one of the implications of this intellectual deficiency is the inability of the local people to recognize and appreciate the significance of their Roman heritage. In reference to "El-Jem" amphitheatre, he notes that Tunisians "have been accustomed for generations to carry away stones for building materials" (Vivian 1899: 211).That is why he regrets the fact that this amphitheatre "seems to be a receptacle place for all the garbage of the neighborhood", blaming the authorities for not making an effort "to render the exploration of its galleries either safe or agreeable" (Vivian 1899: 211). Obviously, this passage portrays Tunisians as ignorant of their own history and cultural heritage. This characterization not only implies that they lack respect for significant historical monuments—in this case "El-Jemm amphitheatre"— but also suggests a lack of education and awareness about the value of such landmarks. In the context of colonial and imperial attitudes, such a criticism is used to justify European intervention because the locals appear to be unfit custodians of their own heritage since they have been accustomed "to carry away stones for building materials".

Under the light of what has been said above, it could be argued that all these writers were carrying a set of pejorative connotations by showcasing Tunisians intellectually inferior and mentally stagnant. In this context, Mariana Torgovnick, in her book *Gone Primitive, Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (1990), comments on this complex system of images and ideas which contrast "Westerns" with "Easterners" by highlighting the fact that "these tropes take the West as the norm and define the rest as inferior, different, deviant, and subordinate" (Torgovnick 1990: 21). Comparable parallels can be observed in twentieth-century perspectives, which constitute the focus of the next sub-section.

4.3.1.2. Twentieth-century male views

The same pejorative set of connotations recurs in the works of the following writers: Petrie Graham (1908), Francis Miltoun (1908), John Fraser (1911), Douglas Norman (1912), Reginald Rankin (1930).

Graham explicitly mentions that he is influenced by the French in his view regarding Tunisians: "[...] I was willing to believe all the dismal tales told to me by the French illustrative of their immorality, their utter lack of mentalité, their absolute inability to understand the most elementary principles of honor or truth" (Graham 1908: 161-162). Evident as it may seem, the quote underscores a pervasive stereotype of Tunisians as illiterate, immoral, and fundamentally incapable of understanding the values esteemed by Western societies. First, Graham's willingness to "believe all the dismaltales told to me by the French" further complicates the depiction of Tunisians. In fact, by relying on these French narratives, he not only echoes colonial attitudes but also demonstrates how perceptions of the local population are often constructed through the lens of colonial narratives. This readiness to accept these tales reflects an inherent bias that colors his perception of Tunisians, reinforcing the idea that they are fundamentally different from, and inferior to, the British traveller. Second, Graham's reference to the "utter lack of mentalité" speaks directly to the perception of Tunisians as lacking intellectual depth or capacity. It also reinforces the stereotype of the illiterate native who is not only uneducated in a formal sense but also incapable of grasping even the most basic principles of morality and truth. Finally, his assertion that Tunisians have an "absolute inability to understand the most elementary principles of honor or truth" portrays them as essentially flawed and morally deficient. Such a view has two main implications. The first one is that it aligns with a colonial narrative that depicts non-European societies as inherently inferior. The second one helps create a cycle of misrepresentation that further entrenches the divide between the Self and the Other. In another passage, Graham gives a more specific example by referring to his Tunisian guide in a pejorative way: "[…] as a rule […] he gives random and very bewildering replies to one's questions […] it is terribly difficult to extract precise information on any subject" from him. (Graham 1908: 188). Obviously, Graham's portrayal of his Tunisian guide in the quoted passage exemplifies the colonial tendency to depict non-Western individuals as the "Other"in British travel literature. Indeed, his deliberate use of adverbs like "terribly", "very" or adjectives such as "random", "bewildering" emphasizes the supposed inadequacy of the Tunisian guide, casting him as intellectually deficient and incapable of providing coherent or reliable information. By doing

so, Graham constructs a binary opposition between the rational, knowledgeable European traveller and the "bewildering," inadequate native guide. This reinforces the notion of Western superiority and justifies colonialist attitudes by depicting the "Other" as fundamentally different, ignorant, and in need of guidance or control.

In the same year as Graham, Miltoun visited Tunis and wrote his book *In the land of mosques and minarets* (1908) where he constructed a narrative about Tunisians, their customs and way of life. In his work, he observes that "the only book the Arab possesses, if he can read, is a copy of the Koran" (Miltoun 1908:11). Skeptical as he might seem ("if he can read), Miltoun informs his readers that they "will be disappointed" if they "ask an Arab about his age" (Miltoun 1908: 41). He carries on explaining that "the Arabs have no civil register and generally ignore their exact age, frequently reckoning only by some great event which may have happened within their memories" (Miltoun 1908: 41). It goes without saying that the quotes from Miltoun's travel account exemplify the pervasive stereotypes surrounding Tunisians in British travel literature, highlighting their illiteracy and ignorance as central themes. First of all, his assertion that "the only book the Arab possesses, if he can read, is a copy of the Koran" reduces the rich tapestry of Arab culture to a single text: the Quran. By doing so, Miltoun not only neglects the existence of a vast literary and intellectual tradition in the Arab world but also ignores the contributions of Arab scholars, poets, and writers throughout history. Second, the phrase "if he can read" further underscores the stereotype of illiteracy among Arabs. In fact, Miltoun’s use of conditional phrasing suggests that reading is not a common skill among Tunisians, reinforcing the notion that they are inherently ignorant. Interestingly, this oversimplification ignores the historical context of literacy in Tunis, where literacy rates varied over time and across regions.Third, Miltoun's observation that "the Arabs have no civil register and generally ignore their exact age" suggests a fundamental backwardness, implying that Tunisians live outside the realms of modernity and organization, which are often seen as hallmarks of civilized societies. Moreover, by stating that Arabs "frequently reckon only by some great event which may have happened within their memories", Miltoun implies that their perception of time is not only subjective but also primitive. In brief, the portrayals presented in these quotes serve two main objectives. The first one is related to the creation of a stereotype of Tunisians as being culturally monolithic and intellectually stagnant, erasing the complexity of their historical contributions and the dynamism of their society. The second objective has to do with bolstering a narrative of colonial superiority, where Western civilization is positioned as the benchmark against which

all other cultures are measured. By depicting Tunisians as illiterate and disconnected from modern practices, Miltoun places himself and his readers in a position of authority, suggesting that they possess the knowledge and cultural sophistication that Tunisians lack.

In the same manner, Fraser notes that Tunisians "are barbarous, fanatical, […] with no learning, with knowledge of the world all askew" (Fraser 1911: 249). This quote, condensed with pejorative connotations such as "barbarous", "fanatical", "askew", is further intensified by the use of negation—"no learning"—which helps create an image of the Tunisian as not only uncultured but also uneducated. Similarly, the description of the natives as "barbarous" not only dehumanizes them, but also positions them as primitive and uncivilized in contrast to the refined and educated British traveller. Besides, the portrayal of Tunisians as "fanatical"adds a layer of religious extremism to this depiction, suggesting that their irrationality is tied to their adherence to Islam, whichis viewed through an Orientalist lens as a backward and oppressive force. His concluding phrase "with knowledge of the world all askew" suggests that even the limited knowledge they possess is flawed and distorted. Grouped together, the ideas communicated in this short quote fit squarely into the colonial framework. By constructing the Tunisian population as the ignorant "Other," Fraser reinforces the powerful dynamics that underpins colonialism, where the colonizer is positioned as a figure of authority and the colonized is reduced to an object of study, control, and domination.

In another passage, Fraser depicts the native population in a state of intellectual degradation: "The Arab has no books, no newspapers, he is happily ignorant of the great outside world and all its problems. His world is his tribe and his sheep and his tent" (Fraser 1911:35). What is striking at first glance is the use of negation: "no books", "no newspapers"; the particular choice of oxymoronic pairing—"happily ignorant"—as well as the use of a reductive style—"His world is his tribe and his sheep and his tent". Explained differently, the quote operates at three different, yet related levels. The first one addresses the perceived lack of literacy and education among Tunisians: "no books, no newspapers". Second, the phrase “happily ignorant” introduces a paternalistic tone, suggesting that this lack awareness is not just a result of circumstance but also a state of contentment. This portrayal further entrenches the divide between the "Self" and the "Other." It positions the British traveller as a figure of knowledge and sophistication, whereas the Tunisian is cast as simple and unbothered by the complexities of the outside world. Lastly, by defining the Arab’s world as "his tribe and his sheep and his tent," the quote reinforces the perception of Arabs as rooted in a static and

archaic existence. It also reduces the complexity of the Tunisian society to a simplistic view of tribal life, disregarding its vibrancy and diversity.

Likewise, Douglas characterizes Tunis as "a land where no one reads or writes or thinks or reasons; for the real world, the cosmos of rational thought and action, has never existed for them" (Douglas 1912: 78). He further narrows down his criticism, describing the inhabitants as "mentally starved creatures" (Douglas 1912: 78). This perspective is reiterated in another passage, where he asserts that "the capacity of reflection, of forming suggestive and fruitful concepts, which lies at the bottom of every kind of progress or culture, has been sucked out of them" (Douglas 1912: 75). Obvious as it may seem, Douglas represents illiteracy as an inherent characteristic of the natives. First of all, he qualifies Tunisians as "mentally starved creatures", a characterization that suggests a perceived deficiency in intellectual nourishment and an assumed incapacity for cognitive or intellectual growth. Second, his description of the general conditions of the country is strikingly built upon negation: "no one reads", "never existed" as well as exaggeration: "no one reads or writes or thinks or reasons". Consequently, the Tunisian is depicted as completely devoid of literacy, thought, and rationality. The sweeping generalization that "no one reads or writes or thinks or reasons" not only implies a profound deficiency in critical thinking and reasoning, but also paints a picture of society where no individual possesses the ability to engage in cognitive processes. By doing so, Douglas perpetuates the stereotype of the ignorant Other. Besides, the phrase "for the real world, the cosmos of rational thought and action, has never existed for them" further deepens the portrayal of Tunisians as disconnected from the realities of the civilized world. More importantly, it evokes a sense of superiority associated with Western civilization, positioning it as the standard against which all other societies should be measured. Furthermore, by asserting that the "capacity of reflection" and the ability to "form suggestive and fruitful concepts" have been "sucked out" of the Tunisian, the author employs a dehumanizing rhetoric that portrays the local population as devoid of critical thinking or intellectual vitality. In a nutshell, such depictions reduce the complexity of Tunisian society to a monolithic narrative of backwardness and stagnation. This reductive approach serves to dehumanize the local population, stripping them of their individuality and agency, hence reinforcing the colonial notion that they are in need of Western Enlightenment.

Notably, Rankin approaches the characterization of the natives' illiteracy from another perspective by highlighting a profound disconnect between the local population and their own

history. In this regard, he observes that Tunisians "dig up and sell for a few francs the golden cups the princely Romans used" (Rankin 1930:76). By adopting this view, the author directly positions Tunisians as lacking knowledge and awareness, particularly concerning their own cultural heritage. This allows him to place himself in a position of authority, by pretending to possess a deeper understanding of the country's history and culture. Such a dynamics underscores the broader power imbalances inherent in imperial relationships, where the Western observer views himself as the rightful arbiter of knowledge and culture. The nextsub-section examines this stereotypical portrayal of the native population as ignorant, approached from a female perspective.

4.3.1.3. Twentieth-century Female views

Norma Lorimer joins her male counterparts and goes further in the demeaning representation of the native people. In the following passage, she belittles Arabs' mental capacities and depicts them as people with sterile minds: "the Arab has no time to either learn, read or write, when his education in the things which are more important for the amenities of life is so exhaustive" (Lorimer 1906: 31). Obviously, Lorimer's assertion implies that education, reading, and writing are not priorities or necessities in Arab life. The notion that the Arab's education is focused on "the things which are more important for the amenities of life "suggests a hierarchical understanding of knowledge, wherein Western forms of education are considered as superior. This perspective not only diminishes the significance of local knowledge, but also reduces the learning experiences of Tunisians to mere survival skills. Most significantly, Lorimer suggests that the Arab is incapable of engaging with broader intellectual pursuits because one of his intrinsic features, which is laziness, prevents him from improving in life. By adopting such a stance, Lorimer perpetuates a colonial mindset that dehumanizes the local population and legitimizes the need for external intervention. This line of thought finds one of its best articulations in a French statue designed specifically for this purpose. Indeed, this statue represents "a French boy dressed in European style with a Tunisian boy dressed in traditional costume" (Palayibik 2010: 264-265). The imperial intentions appear when the Tunisian boy is represented in an inferior position "both in terms of his appearance and because the French boy was depicted as teaching the French language to him" (Palayibik 2010: 264-265). According to Palayibik, the crux of the matter is that "the French *mission civilisatrice* was clearly carved in stone in order to demonstrate that the French were in Tunisia for nothing but to civilize them" (Palayibik 2010: 264-265).

To conclude this part, it could be argued that the overarching theme of illiteracy—omnipresent in the discussed travel accounts—reflects a deeply ingrained colonial mentality that casts the Tunisian people as intellectually deficient, morally degenerate, and resistant to progress. Relying on the works of both nineteenth-and early twentieth-century travel writers, we can see a redundant recurrence of pejorative connotations that emphasize ignorance, apathy, and a supposed incapacity for self-improvement. By doing so, the British traveller endeavours to "homogenize [Tunisians] into a collective they" (Pratt 1986: 139). This homogenization eventually leads to the depiction of the Tunisian as an inferior other. Consequently, this inferiorization creates an asymmetrical relationship between the Self and the Other while implying the superiority of the European subject. In this regard, Jean-Francois Staszak suggests that the main aim behind the process of inferiorization is to"comfort the Self in its feeling of superiority" (Staszak 2008: 1).

Critically, these representations serve several interconnected purposes. First, they deepen the stark divide between the "enlightened" British Self and the "backward" Tunisian Other, reinforcing the notion of European superiority. This ethnocentric view encourages the spread of "the binary typology of advanced and backwardraces" (Said 1978-2003: 206) where backward or ignorant people must be "annexed or occupied byadvanced powers" (Said 1978-2003: 207). Second, the works under study are not merely descriptive, but they are tools of ideological construction. They actively participate in the creation of a hierarchical worldview where the West is positioned as the bearer of knowledge and civilization, and the East, including Tunis, is cast as backward and ignorant. In this regard, Gayatri Spivak, in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), acknowledges that there has always been anattempt to represent "Eurocentric knowledge as the only appropriate knowledge" (Spivak 1999: 4). In a nutshell, the depiction of the native people as inherently ignorant seamlessly extends into depictions of superstition, both of whichserve as key elements in constructing the image of Tunisians as intellectually and culturally deficient.

4.3.2. Cultural deficiency: Tunisians as superstitious

Most travel writers discussed at length how the Tunisian culture, and by extension the Arab one, is mainly built upon superstitious beliefs. One of the very early examples comes from the work by Thomas Shaw, who avers in his *Travels, or observations related to several parts of Barbary and the Levant* (1738), that "No nation in the world is so much given to superstition as the Arabs" (Shaw 1738: 305). Situating this observation in its historical context, it could be claimed that Shaw's text was written at a time when the European interest in the Arab world was framed by a mixture of fascination and fear. Written at the heyday of the Enlightenment, Shaw was influenced by its ideals which championed reason and empirical knowledge. As a consequence, he had a tendency to view anything deviating from these ideals as primitive or superstitious. In the above quote, Shaw depicts the Arab as lacking intellectual maturity. By labeling them as excessively superstitious, he distinguishes them from Western rationality, positioning them as inferior and irrational. This idea is made clearer by the use of superlative language: "no nation in the world", which further deepens the binary opposition between the rational British and the superstitious Arab. To reinforce this stereotype, Shaw lists several specific practices: "They hang about their children's necks the figure of an open hand as a counter-charm to an evil eye […] Those who are grown up carryalways about with them some paragraph or other of their Koran to secure themselves from sickness and misfortunes" (Shaw 1738: 305).

Then, he adds that the Arabs "place great faith and confidence in magicians […] they use several superstitious ceremonies in the sacrificing of a cock, a sheep, or a goat by burying the whole carcass underground, or by drinking a part of the blood" (Shaw 1738: 306). Obviously, Shaw’s portrayal plays into the Western imagination that viewed the Arab world as a place of magic, mystery, and dangerous irrationality. First, by focusing on practices that seem foreign or strange, Shaw reinforces the notion that Arabs are dominated by superstition, a key marker of their 'Otherness.' Second, by portraying Arabs as a people who place their faith in amulets, and the Quran to ward off evil, Shaw infantilizes them. He presents them as naive, governed by irrational beliefs, in need of "rational" Western guidance. This plays into the colonial narrative of the "childlike native" who requires the civilizing influence of European power. Finally, the mention of "magicians" and Arabs’ faith in them echoes a recurring trope in Orientalist literature where the East is associated with mysticism and sorcery. In fact, his detailed descriptions of animal sacrifices and other rituals function as a

marker of cultural backwardness which not only enhances its exotic and barbaric aspect, but also positions these customs as grotesque and uncivilized. What is worth mentioning is that the aim behind starting with an eighteenth-century view is to argue that Shaw's representation contributed to long-standing stereotypes in Western literature. The stereotype of the Arab as superstitious persisted in British travel books well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reinforcing the notion that Arabs were fundamentally different from the West—not only in terms of culture but also in their mentalities and behaviors.

4.3.2.1. Nineteenth-century views

The characterization of the Tunisian as superstitious is a recurrent motif in the travel books under study. Yet, this motif is more explicitly articulated in the works of MacGill (1811), Wingfield (1868), and Greville-Nugent (1894). In fact, it seems that these three writers more or less reiterate the same idea in their accounts. For example, MacGill describes Tunisian Moors as follows: "From their great ignorance, they are extremely superstitious; and many of their actions are guided by omens or signs " (MacGill 1811:84). A similar thought is echoed by Wingfield who also depicts Tunisian Moors as "extremely superstitious" (Wingfield 1868: 309). First, the use of the phrase "extremely superstitious" by both writers reflects a sweeping generalization that reduces the complex cultural and spiritual practices of Tunisian Moors to mere superstition. Second, in the first quote, MacGill establishes a direct link between "great ignorance" and superstition, which not only implies that superstition is a natural consequence of their perceived intellectual inferiority but also builds a hierarchical relationship between the rational British and irrational Arab. Furthermore, his description of the Moors as being guided by "omens and signs" emphasizes the idea that their decision-making process is based on irrationality instead of empirical knowledge. This idea is further explained in another passage where he claims that "the saints who inhabit these places (in reference to places of prayer) merit a more particular description, as they give a finishing stamp to the ignorance and superstition of the country" (MacGill 1811: 85). In MacGill's reference to the saints of the country, there is a subtle denigration of religious figures. This is reinforced by his characterization of them as the "finishing stamp to the ignorance and superstition of the country." From the lens of MacGill, the veneration of such figures represents the culmination of Arab superstition. Such dismissal of local traditions and religious practices demonstrates a lack of cultural understanding, as MacGill interprets

Religious devotion through a Eurocentric lens that values rationalism over spirituality and regards any form of veneration as inherently superstitious.

Some decades later, the same view was embraced by the female writer, Greville-Nugent, who observes that "marabouts are Saints or holy men revered by the people who believe them to have the gift of prophecy and the power of working miracles" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 77). Then, she adds: "strange to say, madmen and persons of weak intellect are believed to be subject to divine possession" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 78). Obviously, this quote underscores the Orientalist view of the Tunisian as the superstitious Other by focusing on their reverence for "marabouts", "saints" or "holy men" and their belief in divine possession. Moreover, the depiction of these figures as "revered by the people" not only emphasizes the supposed simplicity of the Tunisian people's faith but also represents their beliefs as distant from Western rationality. By suggesting that Tunisians believed these figures had "the gift of prophecy" and "the power of working miracles," the writer perpetuates a Eurocentric viewpoint where religious or spiritual practices outside Christian norms were regarded as superstitious acts. In the second part of the quote, the use of the phrase "strange to say" is very suggestive. It conveys a sense of skepticism toward the Tunisian belief that "madmen and persons of weak intellect" could be "subject to divine possession". This undeniably illustrates a clear distancing mechanism,where the travel writer considers the belief in divine possession as irrational or bizarre from a British perspective. Taken from another angle, the fact that this representation is constructed by a female writer adds a more interesting dimension to the analysis. While some critics like Mills (1991) argue that female writers are more sympathetic with the native population and do not back up colonial and ethnocentric views, it is evident from Greville-Nugent's quote that these writers mirrored the prevailing attitudes of their male counterparts regarding the "Other." This highlights how the Self-Other dichotomy was not solely a masculine endeavour; female writers also contributed to the construction of imperial narratives that devalued the people they encountered.

To conclude this part, two main points can be deduced. The first one is related to the recurrence of the same stereotype across centuries. In fact, MacGill's, Wingfield's and Greville-Nugent's views show a clear continuity with the perspectives of earlier writers like Thomas Shaw, indicating how British travel authors were influenced by the perspectives of their predecessors. This process allowed for the perpetuation of a monolithic image of the "superstitious Arab" that persisted across time, regardless of the complexity or diversity of

actual Arab cultures. The second point is that all these writers misunderstood Tunisian local traditions and religious practices. What they perceived as "superstitious" might more accurately have been characterized as "unfamiliar," as each culture possesses its distinct set of traditions and practices. More importantly, their failure to interpret these practices through a lens of cultural relativism reflects a Eurocentric view that sought not only to belittle the complexities of Arab societies, but also to denigrate its native population. Indeed, this denigration serves to confirm the view of the "European identity as a superior one in comparison with allthe non-European peoples and cultures" (Said 1978:15). The portrayal of Tunisians as superstitious persisted into the twentieth century which helped solidify this stereotype in the minds of Western readers, as will be demonstrated in the next sub-section.

4.3.2.2. Twentieth-century views

The works by Sladen (1906), Graham (1908), Fraser (1911), and Lorimer (1906) reveal that Tunisians are represented as superstitious in the majority of travel books. Starting with general impressions, both Lorimer and Fraser reduce the complex cultural and spiritual practices of Tunisians to a single, negative trait. In a dismissive manner, Fraser asserts that "the people are superstitious" (Fraser 1911: 249). Similarly, Lorimer conveys surprise regarding their engagement with superstition, stating: "How involved in superstition they are!" (Lorimer 1906: 101). First of all, it goes without saying that both statements are emblematic of a broaderEurocentric discourse that sought to define non Western cultures through the lens of cultural superiority. The fact of labeling Tunisians as "superstitious" effectively positions them as "Other" in contrast to a rational, scientific European self. This dichotomy plays a crucial role in the construction of identity, as it frames Western civilization as advanced and enlightened while depicting non-Western cultures as backward and primitive. By doing so, both writers engage in a form of cultural racism that suggests a fundamental difference in intellect between Westerners and non-Westerners. Such a stance has three implications. The first one indicates a lack of empathy since it fails to recognize that what both writers may deem as "superstitious" could have profound social, cultural, and religious significance for Tunisians. The second implication is that both statements lack nuance because they disregard the context in which these beliefs operate, which effectively erases the value and agency of local cultures. The third implication is that both observations encapsulate a colonial mindset that views Tunisians through a racially charged and reductionist lens, effectively relegating them to an ever-lasting inferior position.

Proceding to more specific observations, it has been found that both Sladen and Graham were deeply influenced by earlier views about Tunisians' obsession with marabouts. In this regard, Sladen notes: "you are fortunate if you meet a marabout, and if you succeed in touching him, or kissing his garment, it will bring you fortune" (Sladen 1906: 575). Graham makes a similar comment about this issue specifying that he "hated their marabouts, narrow-minded superstitions" (Graham 1908: 161-162). Obviously, both quotes exemplify how British writers represented the Tunisian as a superstitious "Other" relying on some local practices, and in this case it is their supposed obsession with mystical figures like marabouts. Beginning with Sladen, he relied on satire to reinforce the superstitious aspect of the Tunisian society: "you are fortunate if you meet a marabout"; "if you succeed in touching him". This choice of words like "fortunate" and "succeed" amplifies the foreignness of these beliefs to a Western audience, implicitly criticizing them as naive and irrational.

As for Graham, his disdain for the country's cultural and religious practices is explicitly stated through the use of the verb "hate". Moreover, his depiction of Tunisians as "narrow-minded" suggests that he perceived them as intellectually constrained or incapable of enlightened thought. According to Graham, these religious figures are responsible for promoting ignorance and backwardness in the country. Emotional response, using the word "hated," suggests not just disapproval but an intense personal aversion to these beliefs. This implies the depth of the European bias, where the traveller does not merely observe Tunisian customs from a neutral standpoint but explicitly expresses hostility toward them.

To further exaggerate the superstitious aspect of the Tunisian society, Sladen enumerates unlucky words that Tunisians avoided using while speaking, such as "*Akhal* (black) which was considered as an unfortunate word and the speaker was obliged to think of some equivalent" (Sladen 1906: 574). He also adds that "*Khamsa* (five) is another ill-omened word that the Arab tried not to use while counting". Rather, they used "as many as I have fingers in my hand, which though lengthy, is safe" (Sladen 1906: 573-574). By referring to this social practice, Sladen aims to highlight the fact that these linguistic superstitions are signs of irrationality. Moreover, the phrase "obliged to think of some equivalent" suggests that Tunisians' daily speech was hindered by these superstitions, implying a lack of intellectual freedom or reason in their everyday life. Similarly, the replacement of the number five with the lengthy phrase"as many as I have fingers in my hand" serves to exaggerate the

superstitious aspect of the Tunisian society and to draw attention to what the British writer viewed as excessive and irrational caution.

As a conclusion to this part, it could be safely inferred that all the above quotes reflect the cumulative nature of the Orientalist discourse, where each new travel writer reinforces the views of his predecessors. For instance, MacGill was deeply influenced by the eighteenth-century views of Shaw. Similarly, both male and female figures in the twentieth-century like Lorimer or Graham largely relied on the same earlier stereotypes when describing the native population. This idea ultimately confirms Timothy Mitchell's assertion that the "East itself is not a place, but a further series of representations, each one renouncing the reality of the Orient by doing no more than referring backwards and forwards to all the others" (Mitchell, as cited in McDaniel 2014: 49). Furthermore, the persistence of the same stereotype across various centuries reflects a key mechanism of the Orientalist discourse which is that of fixity. In fact, by depicting Tunisians as consistently superstitious and dependent on amulets or "marabouts" across different texts and time periods, British authors such as Shaw, MacGill, and Lorimer perpetuate a fixed identity for Tunisians. In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha discusses the concept of stereotypical fixity and how colonial discourse "freezes" the identityof the colonized subject in simplistic and reductive terms. In this regard, he writes:

> The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference... constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations. (Bhabha 1994: 66).

Bhabha's view indicates how the fixity of the stereotype limits the identity of the colonized people (in this case the travellees) to reductive categories within travellers' discourse. It also deepens the gap between the Self and the Other, hence confirming Said's view about the structure of the Orientalist discourse which has often " […] promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" (Said 1978: 43). As a consequence, this "fixity" strips people of their complexity, individuality, and cultural evolution, relegating them to a position of perpetual otherness. By relying on repetition and fixity instead of objective observations, these accounts function less

as windows into Tunisian culture and more as reflections of British imperial assumptions, encapsulating the prejudiced dynamics that underlie these cultural encounters.

Put differently, the general perception of Tunisians as intellectually and culturally deficient, often characterized by illiteracy and superstitious beliefs, serves to reinforce a broader narrative of moral inferiority, where such traits are interpreted as indicative of a lack of religious devotion and ethical standards. This idea will be discussed in the following section where Tunisians are represented as devoid of moral qualities, which further strengthens their perception as an inferior Other.

4.4. Moral inferiority: Tunisians as devoid of moral qualities

British travel writers constructed an image of Tunisians as devoid of moral qualities in comparison to their Western counterparts. In this representation, the native population is predominantly depicted as distrustful, dishonest, and irreligious. To substantiate this claim, some passages from nineteenth and early twentieth-century travel books are selected.

4.4.1. Nineteenth-century views

MacGill depicts Tunisians as a race possessing "thievish inclinations" (MacGill 1811: 38). Here, the writer's description exemplifies a common trope in imperial literature that casts non-Western peoples as morally inferior to reinforce British superiority. His choice of words evokes a stereotype of dishonesty, suggesting a perceived innate characteristic within the Tunisian people. The word "inclination" is very suggestive in itself as it assumes a natural predisposition rather than an individual's action, thus generalizing the race as a whole. So, by reducing a population to a negative trait—"thievish"—such a depiction strips Tunisians of their complexity and individuality, rendering them a homogenous "Other". This helps to establish a dichotomy between the supposedly morally superior British Self and morally inferior Other. Consequently, such a framing proves how literature contributed to the reinforcement of ethnocentric ideologies and sustained racialized stereotypes that served to legitimize imperial presence and domination.

4.4.2. Twentieth-century views

During the period under study, the same stereotype persists offering the opportunity to confirm again that the Orientalist discourse is "[…] no more than referring backwards and forwards to all the others" (McDaniel 2014: 49). A clear example comes from Douglas who actually uses the same pejorative adjective as MacGill. While referring to Tunisians, he writes: "[…] thievish, of course, and untruthful" (Douglas 1912: 72). Notably, this pejorative representation signals the longevity and entrenchment of stereotypes that originated long before the twentieth-century, revealing that such perspectives were not only deep-seated but actively perpetuated over time. In fact, Douglas's quote is significant not only for its hidden meaning but also for its suggestive language and deliberate word choice. For instance, words like "thievish" and "untruthful" imply a moral failing that is perceived as intrinsic to Tunisian identity. Furthermore, the inclusion of the expression "of course" implies that these qualities are universally recognized truths, further entrenching these stereotypes as "common knowledge" within British readers' perceptions. It also suggests a timeless and unchanging divide between the "civilized" West and the "uncivilized" Other.

Being influenced by the views of his predecessors, Wyndham Lewis cautions other travellers who might visit Tunis that "in dealing with natives, one must expect contemptible deceit" (Lewis 1932: 197). Obviously, Lewis's quote frames the local people as inherently deceptive and morally inferior. By establishing deceit as an anticipated and defining feature of interactions with "natives," Lewis underscores a pattern of Othering that depicts Tunisians not as individuals but as bearers of inherent negative traits. His use of the term "contemptible deceit"carries an intense moral judgment which does not allow for individual variation or the possibility of integrity among Tunisians, instead it collapses all "natives" into a homogeneous and negative stereotype. This depiction actively dehumanizes Tunisians, reducing them to a static, monolithic group defined by moral deficiency. Moreover, by stating that deceit should be "expected," Lewis implies an unbridgeable gap in trust between travellers and the natives, making deception a norm in cross-cultural encounters. In this way, Lewis's narrative lacks empathy and understanding since it does not approach these encounters from a cultural relativist perspective. Rather, it perpetuates and codifies ethnocentric views in its portrayal of the native people. Such a biased stance led Lewis to conclude afterwards that "all Orientals are mysteriously obstructive and untruthful! Britons never!" (Lewis 1932: 198: emphasis added). It goes without saying that such a claim on the behalf of Lewis sustains racial

hierarchies by perpetuating an image of the Tunisian as morally and culturally inferior to the Briton. First, the expression "mysteriously obstructive" implies that the behavior of "Orientals" is not only problematic but also inexplicable; which contributed to the depiction of the Other as unknowable and unpredictable. This intrigue, which is a trope common in Orientalist literature, allows the writer to suggest that Orientals in general possess an elusive quality that cannot be understood through Western logic. Second, the emphatic declaration "Britons never!" not only presents the British people as universally honest and morally upright, but also as ostensibly untouched by the negative traits attributed to the East. This type of contrast illustrates Fanon's conception of the unbridgeable gap between the colonizer and the colonized where he suggests that "there will always be a world- a white world- between you and us" (Fanon, as cited in Bhabha 1994: 339). The "white world" here functions as a metaphor for Western imperialism which dismisses and devalues non-Western identities, cultures, and traditions.

Along the lines of Lewis, Rankin—in his travel account entitled *Tunisia* (1930)— also makes another comparison between Easterners and Westerners by asserting that "[…] The Arab is devoid of all the beauties of soul that the proud European possessed" (Rankin 1930: 182). By depicting Arabs—and, by extension, Tunisians—as lacking "beauties of soul," Rankin constructs an image of moral deficiency in contrast to the "proud European." This distinction enables Rankin to situate Europeans not only as morally superior but asembodying virtues that were, in his view, fundamentally absent in Arabs. This idea is further reinforced by the use of the adjective "devoid" which implies that the gap between Western and non-Western identities would never be bridged. Written during the period of high colonialism, Rankin's account contributes to a sustained colonial ideology that viewed the “Other” as permanently opposed to and lesser than the Western self, thus justifying domination through a framework of cultural and spiritual superiority.

Other travel writers like Douglas and Sladen argue that the moral deficiency of Tunisians is noticed in the realm of religion. For example, Sladen stresses the unfaithfulness of those who are supposed to be faithful by talking about the "the *muezzin* who begins to walk round the gallery at the top of the minaret,calling on the faithful […] to go to the mosque and pray." (Sladen 1906: 37). To his greatest surprise, "the faithful are many of them unfaithful in their observances […] about half of the Arabs who are sitting at cafes, when they hear it keep their seats" (Sladen 1906: 37).To consolidate his claim, he gives the example of Monsieur

Amour who "has never evinced the slightest interest in the *muezzin*." (Sladen 1906: 37). Obvious as it may seem, Sladen's narrative around the muezzin—who performs a central ritual in Islam by calling the faithful to prayer—serves as a touchstone for him to question the religiosity of Tunisians. In fact, this narrative operates at three interrelated levels. First, Sladen points out that "many of them [are] unfaithful in their observances". Second, he emphasizes that "about half of the Arabs" remain seated when the call to prayer sounds. Third, he substantiates his claim by highlighting Monsieur Amour's apparent disregard for the *muezzin*. These three instances led Sladen to conclude that religious apathy is common, almost endemic, among Tunisians.

Few years later, Douglas aligns with Sladen's perspective, noting in one of the sections of his travel account that in Gafsa "only fifteen in a hundred, perhaps even less, perform the devotions prescribed by the Prophet." (Douglas 1912: 39). Douglas's quote appears to be a statistic-like statement that creates a stark image of a population largely indifferent to its religious obligations. This type of portrayal serves three different ideological functions. First, by quantifying the lack of religious observance: "only fifteen in a hundred", Douglas reinforces the idea of Tunisians as culturally and morally inferior. Second, this suggestion implies a deficiency not only in religious dedication but also in the moral fiber as a whole. Third, by depicting Tunisians as failing their own standards, Douglas implicitly establishes a narrative of racial hierarchy where the British model is deemed as morally and culturally superior.

With regards to these negative traits, Bhabha contends that "[…] by knowing the native population in these terms, discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate" (Bhabha 1994: 83). For him, the stereotypical discourse not only reflects travellers' prejudices, but also "contributes in the formation of oppressive governing structures" (Bhabha 1994:70), designed to "subordinate, classify, and dominate the non-Western world" (Richard King, as cited in Keramatfar2018: 55). This idea is reinforced in several travel accounts, where the dynamics of domination are overtly displayed. For example, MacGill suggests that "you must make them sensible of your superiorityas a master over children at school" (MacGill 1811: 38). He also recommends that the locals should neither be treated with "friendship" nor "delicacy" (MacGill 1811: 39). Likewise, Wingfield advises other travellers that "in all dealings with the natives, fear is the only means by which to move them" (Wingfield 1868: 243).These perspectives unequivocally support Said's

assertion that "being a European in the Orient, hence a traveller, always implies being a consciousness set apart from and unequal with its surroundings" (Said 1979:157). One of the ideological outcomes of these power dynamics is the reduction of the Other (in this case the Tunisian) to a level where he could never reach or be equal to the European traveller. One of the best articulations of this assumption can be found in Rankin's encounter with the Sheik of Beni Zelten. In this regard, the author mentions that "the Sheik seized my hand […] repeatedly kissed it, declaring that now he would depart from this world in peace, for had he not seen and conversed with an Englishman" (Rankin 1930: 173). Rankin also mentions that the Sheik "had come to put himself entirely at my disposal. I had only to command and he would obey" (Rankin 1930: 49). Obviously, the Tunisian Sheik is portrayed as overwhelmed by the presence of the Englishman, to the extent that his behavior reflects an internalized sense of inferiority. This behavior largely confirms the view of Laura Franey who argues that British travel writers rely on the concept of "disciplinary violence" (Franey 2003: 5) in order "to grant themselves a numinous presence capable of more fully establishing their power over Africa than a mere physical presence would be" (Franey 2003: 11). Such "a numinous presence" is disseminated through the use of a kind of "psychological coercion" (Franey 2003: 1) which graduallyorients Africans towards accepting their inherent inferiority. According to her, imperialism is not conducted through violence, but it is psychologically disseminated through the gradual acceptance of the dominant ideologies.

In a nutshell, these portrayals reflect the travellers' alignment with the imperial discourse and their endorsement of European domination over the Orient. Indeed, the cultural stereotypes used by these writers serve to

> Bring forth standardization over the perception andreceptionof the Orient. They reduce the actual complexity and diversity of the Orient into an unframed, objectified, and representable entity, furthermore, they establish it as a standing reserve for Western domination. (Sibel Bozdoğan, as cited in Ürey 2013: 108).

This process effectively "prepares the Orient" to be "a stylistic repertoire, a catalog of images ready at hand to be consumed at will" (Bozdoğan, as cited in Ürey2013: 108). It was not astonishing, then, to come across images of the Other as "irrational, aberrant, backward […] inferior, inauthentic, feminine, passive" (Macfie 2002: 4). According to Bhabha, such

pejorative adjectives are deliberately chosen "to foreclose on the Other" (Bhabha 1994: 31), reinforcing the binary opposition between the West and the non-West.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that while reading British travel accounts about Tunis, we are likely to come across instances that reflect admiration and appreciation for the natives and their manners. This positive representation will form the central focus of the following section where a shift from rejection to attraction is going to be highlighted.

5. From demonization to humanization: The Tunisian under a positive light

Orientalism is commonly characterized as "monolithic and ethnocentric as it enables the West to construct the otherness" of non-Western people " […] reduc[ing] them to the same stigmatizing stereotypes" (Staszak 2008: 4-5). However, based on our analysis of British travel literature about Tunis, we contend that Orientalist discourse is neither entirely monolithic nor uniformly ethnocentric. Contrary to prevailing assumptions about its homogeneity, our findings reveal moments that underscore its inherent heterogeneity and contradictions. These observations have prompted us to examine this second part through the lens of Ahmad Gholi's theoretical framework of "counter-Orientalism" (Gholi, 2023), which illuminates instances where the travel writer transcends the rigid norms of Orientalism.

By "counter Orientalism", we do not seek to undermine Said's foundational theory of Orientalism. Rather, the goal is to highlight the moments when the travel writer exhibits positive perceptions of Tunisians, revealing the inherent ambivalence within their discourses. Drawing on this notion of ambivalence, we could advocate that the system of othering is fraught with contradictions, portraying "the Other" as simultaneously alluring and repellent. This dynamic resonates with Pfister's following assertion: "One feels drawn towards and into it and at the same time shies away from it; it is alluring and repellentat the same time"(Pfister 1996: 4-5). Similarly, it echoes Homi Bhabha’s description of the ambivalent depiction of Black individuals:

> The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces. (Bhabha 1994: 82).

Building on these theoretical insights, the following analysis examines the ambivalence embedded in travellers' discourse by highlighting moments when Tunisians are portrayed in a panegyric manner. Taken from this perspective, this part will exhibit travellers' "counter Orientalism" in three ways: first by emphasizing the physical beauty of Tunisians; second by highlighting their aesthetic cultural traits such as their refinement and the elegance of their dress; and third by focusing on their moral qualities, namely their religiosity and tolerance. Through these depictions, travel writers construct an uncharacteristically positive and non stereotypical portrayal of Tunisians and their way of life, offering a nuanced perspective that challenges conventional Orientalist perceptions.

5.1. Physical characteristics

5.1.1. Nineteenth-century views

Despite the pervasive debasement characterizing British travellers' perceptions of the local population, one can also identify a contrasting representation that emphasizes the physical aestheticization of the native Tunisian. According to Said, this rhetorical strategy is called "aestheticized representation" (Said 2003: 181), and is deliberately employed by Orientalist authors such as "Alphonse de Lamartine, Gérard de Nerval, and Gustave Flaubert" in order to "attract the reader through the aesthetic characteristics of their writings" (Said 2003: 177) because what matters to them is "the structure of [their] work as an independent, aesthetic, and personal fact" (Said 2003: 181). Similarly, David Spurr (1993) argues that Western writers rely on aesthetic methods to render their works as appealing as possible, noting that "such aestheticization transforms the colonized into an object loved for its beauty" (Spurr 1993: 57).

When these perspectives are applied to British travel accounts, it becomes evident that this tendency to depict the "Other" in an aesthetically pleasing manner is present in the works of Blaquiere (1813), Wingfiled (1868), and Rae (1877). Blaquiere offers a holistic depiction of the population by referring to them as "[…] remarkably fine-looking" (Blaquiere 1813: 139). This succinct, yet layered expression lays emphasis on the physical beauty of Tunisians, which is further accentuated by the use of the adverb "remarkably". The latter underscores the

author's aesthetic admiration, which highlights a shift from earlier negative depictions to a more positive and favourable representation. Indeed, by focusing on physical grace, Blaquiere provides a moment of appreciation that resists overt denigration, hence reflecting the inconsistency inherent in travel narratives.

As far as Wingfeild and Rae are concerned, they both offer more specific portrayals of the natives, each focusing on individual figures. Wingfield describes a Tunisian tailor, while Rae centers his depiction on a man from the city of Kairouan. During one of his visits to a Tunisian bazaar, Wingfiled was attracted by the physical grace of the tailor, whom he characterizes as "a handsome man, […] long in the nose, with magnificent fleshing eyes[…] and fine head" (Wingfiled 1868: 278). Obviously, the use of adjectives such as "handsome,""fine," and "magnificent" demonstrates a clear admiration for his physical features, representing the tailor as a figure of aesthetic appeal. The mention of his "fine head" further reinforces the writer's admiration, presenting the Tunisian tailor as dignified and noble in appearance. This positive lens counters the dehumanizing stereotypes discussed in the previous part.

Similarly, Rae offers a positive portrayal of a man he encountered: "Hamouda is a well-dressed, good-looking, and courteous man" (Rae 1877: 282). This quote is an example of Said’s concept of aestheticized representation. First, the use of a specific name: "Hamouda," personalizes the depiction and allows for a more intimate and empathetic view of a specific person from the region. Second, Rae amplifies the aesthetic aspects of Hammouda by using adjectives like "well-dressed" and "good-looking". The latter suggest that Hamouda is a person who values personal care and aesthetics, which is not only a reflection of his personal refinement but also an indication of a broader image of Tunisians as possessing an inherent sense of grace in their appearance. Third, the reference to this Tunisian man as "courteous" is particularly significant because it reflects qualities associated with civility, respect, and proper social conduct, traits which are often reserved for "civilized" societies in British travel writing. Accordingly, by portraying Hamouda as "well-dressed", "good-looking", and "courteous", the author moves beyond stereotypical abstractions of the "Other" by providing a more positive and respectful image of Tunisian people. According to Chris Bongie, the aesthetic representation of non-Western people may reflect the writers’ deep-seated rejection of "the world’s corruption and degradation," prompting thereby "an escape to Oriental cultures to retain the values supposedly lost in modern Europe" (Bongie1991: 21). Within

this framework, Blaquiere, Wingfield, and Rae exemplify this perspective by portraying Tunisians as "fine-looking, "handsome", "courteous", and "magnificent". Significantly, the same line of thought is echoed in the works of twentieth-century travel writers.

5.1.2. Twentieth-century views

This sub-section will examine perceptions that celebrate alterity and transcend the Manichean structure of Orientalism.To support this argument, Graham presents the following aesthetic representation of a Tunisian shopkeeper named Babouché: "He is a big, handsome, middle-aged man, with well-cut features […] and he carried of his somewhat feminine finery without looking in the least effeminate" (Graham 1908: 83). This excerpt shows Babouché as an imposing and attractive figure with a sense of dignity and respectability. First, the phrase "well-cut features" suggests refinement and natural elegance, countering other views that depict Tunisians as unrefined. Second, Graham further admires Babouché's ability to wear "somewhat feminine finery" without appearing "in the least effeminate." This observation is significant because it challenges common Orientalist views about the East and its inhabitants as effeminate and exotic. Contrary to these perceptions, the Tunisian shop owner is able to balance strength and grace which Graham considers as an admirable quality. To further develop his depiction, the author revisits "Monsieur Babouché," characterizing him as embodying an "imposing magnificence" (Graham 1908: 86), thereby underscoring his status as a symbol of grandeur and commanding presence. To start with, the use of the phrase "imposing magnificence" conveys a sense of awe and grandeur evoking an image of a dignified and impressive individual. What is also noticeable in Graham's text is its respectful and formal tone as suggested by the title "Monsieur". By addressing him in this way, Graham acknowledges his individuality and humanity, challenging the hierarchical norms typical of Orientalist narratives, where locals were often referred to in demeaningterms. It also subverts the common image of imposing the superiorityof the travellers over the travellees in order to preserve a hierarchical dynamics between the two groups. Furthermore, it challenges Said's assertion that "being a European in the Orient, hence a traveller, always implies being […] unequal with its surroundings" (Said 1979: 157).

In a similar vein, Douglas highlights attributesof cleanliness and physical attractiveness as prominent characteristics of theTunisian people. In this regard, he asserts that: "[…] they

are of an astonishing immaculate cleanliness from head to foot; they are often remarkably handsome" (Douglas 1912: 80). Obviously, the portrayal of Tunisians as both clean and handsome can be read from the lens of a positive representation which challenges reductive stereotypes. Indeed, the use of strong adjectives like "astonishing" and "immaculate" emphasizes their exceptional qualities, portraying Tunisians in a refined and admirable light. While "astonishing" serves to emphasize how remarkable the level of cleanliness is to the author, the term "immaculate" further elevates the depiction, suggesting a level of purity and perfection that transcends ordinary cleanliness. Likewise, the adverb "remarkably" is crucial here, as it emphasizes the fact that the physical beauty of Tunisians is extraordinary and worthy of note. Astonishingly, this positive depiction counter balances his earlier view when he referred to Tunisians as "dirty" (Douglas 1912: 31). It also contests the assertion made by Sladen, who describes Tunisians as "very dirty" (Sladen 1906: 638). These conflicting views have two main implications. The first one is that it is possible to find two coexisting visions inside the same writer; one which criticizes the filthiness of the natives, and a second one which praises their cleanliness. The second implication indicates that these contradictory perceptions underscore the heterogeneity inherent within the Orientalist discourse.

Regarding female travel narratives, it is evident that positive portrayals of Tunisian people are interwoven into their accounts, offering further evidence of the inherent ambivalence in travellers' discourse. Notably, a group of female authors, including Nesbitt (1906), and Ward (1920) directs particular attention to the beauty of Tunisian children, infusing their descriptions with a sense of aestheticization. Nesbitt offers various favorable representations that reflect her admiration for Tunisian children. In one passage, she observes that "the children are particularly pretty and charming, playing games gaily in every nook and corner" (Nesbitt 1906: 131). Elsewhere, she provides a more specific portrayal, describing Tunisian boys as "a marvel, almost too good" (Nesbitt 1906: 166). At first glance, it is obvious that Nesbitt's descriptions transform Tunisian children into an"object of beauty", using Spurr's expression (Spurr 1993:59). This idea is evidenced in the use of exaggerated aesthetic adjectives deliberately crafted to attract the reader. In fact, adjectives like "pretty" and "charming", the noun "marvel", as well as the adverbs "particularly", "gaily" serve to emphasize the physical beauty and the joyful demeanor of Tunisian children. In this case,their beauty is not only acknowledged but also accentuated by the use of the adverb "particularly," which underscores their attractiveness. Moreover, by calling the boys "a marvel" and associating them with characteristics like being "too good," the description

creates an image of Tunisian children as extraordinarily well-behaved and virtuous. Hence, any reader of such positive descriptions would be drawn to imagine these "charming" children of the Oriental world, which serves to represent Nesbitt's work as "an independent, aesthetic, and personal fact" (Said 2003: 181).

As far as Ward is concerned, she highlights similar characteristics within Tunisian children. Echoing Nesbitt, she avers that "the children are gay and lighthearted" (Ward 1920: 183). Obviously, the text presents Tunisian children in a very positive light, portraying them as emotionally vibrant and content. In general terms, children are often seen as symbols of cultural warmth and vitality, and in this context, the description of Tunisian children as "gay and lighthearted" can be interpreted as a reflection of the broader cultural atmosphere of Tunis. This portrayal suggests that the Tunisian society is warm, welcoming, and full of life, qualities that are embodied in the behavior of its youngest members. It is interesting to note that the reference to Tunisians as "gay", "too good", or as having "well-cut features" largely contradicts Lorimer's characterization of Tunisians as "evil-looking" (Lorimer 1906: 13).

Besides their attractive physical appearance, Tunisians are also distinguished by their sophisticated cultural traits, including their elegant dress, and the refinement of the people and their manners, which further foster their positive image in British narratives.

5.2. Cultural characteristics

5.2.1. Elegant dress code

In the first part, the portrayal of Tunisian attire is imbued with a negative connotation, associating it with traits such as indolence and primitiveness. Interestingly, however, another totally different view is echoed bysome British writers who tend to show no reminiscence of imperialist perspectives, hence highlighting the ambivalence ingrained within travellers' works. One of the writers who embodies this line of thought is Edward Rae, who expresses profound admiration for the "djubba", the traditional Tunisian garment. In this regard he says:

> The Tunisians'costumes are almost invariably in perfect taste. The silk djubbas were of deep red and apple-green, or deep blue and golden yellow, the vests and jackets pale

> rose coloured, or of delicate blues, greens, and yellows, in silk, cotton, and wool. It is a constant picture, always varying and always charming. (Rae 1877: 119)

This text offers a vivid and positive depiction of the Tunisian people, specifically focusing on their attire. By using expressions like "perfect taste", "always charming", the author emphasizes the fact that Tunisian people possess an innate sense of style and aesthetic refinement, qualities that were highly valued in European society during the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Besides, the detailed attention to the colours —"deep green","golden yellow"— and fabrics used such as "silk", "cotton", and "wool" further suggests a high level of craftsmanship and attention to details. By claiming that the clothing is not static but "always varying", the author highlights the dynamic and beautiful nature of the Tunisian traditional dress, portraying Tunisians as being part of an aesthetically rich and constantly evolving cultural tradition.

Close to Rae in perspective, Wingfield challenges earlier depictions of Tunisians as filthy and poorly attired, emphasizing instead their cultivated sense of aesthetics and refined taste. This idea is echoed in one of his passages that describes a Tunisian tailor in the bazaaras follows: "[…] the grey and yellow of his dress harmonised well with the cerise of his trousers and dainty stockings, while delicate white hands covered with turquoise rings" (Wingfield 1868: 278). Obviously, Wingfield describes the tailor's clothing in terms of color harmony "the greyand yellow of his dress harmonised well withthe cerise of his trousers and dainty stockings". Furthermore, the tailor’s hands are described as "delicate white hands covered with turquoise rings", a description that emphasizes both his gentleness, grace, and skill; depicting him as an artisan with an inherent elegance that transcends mere labor. This attention to the aesthetic cohesion of his attire suggests a man of refined taste and elegance; a view not commonly found in European travel accounts. In fact, this elegant aesthetic is coupled with a depiction of the people and their behavior as refined and sophisticated.

5.2.2. Refined people

5.2.2.1. Nineteenth-century views

The positive depiction of the locals and their manners goes back to the eighteenth century, when Shaw is found to contradict himself by offering two different views regarding Tunisians. Whereas in earlier instances he refers to the people and the country as barbarous, within the sane account he highlights the fact that "they have very little of that insolent and haughty behavior which is too common at Algiers" (Shaw 1738: 155). Clearly, Shaw's quote implies a positive social distinction, describing Tunisians as more polite and civilized in comparison to their neighbors.

Comparable sentiments are expressed in nineteenth-century writings. For instance, Temple asserts that "the population of this kingdom may be said to be the most civilized of anyof the states of Barbary" (Temple 1835:229). A few decades later, Wingfield echoes this perspective, contending that "Tunisians are the advanced guard of North African civilization" (Wingfield 1868: 312). It could be advocated, hence, that both views suggest a positive appraisal, since they depictTunisians as leaders of civilization in the region as echoed in expressions such as "the most civilized", "the advanced guard". This implies that Tunisians possess unique qualities—whether intellectual, moral, or organizational—that set them apart as a model for neighboring countries.

Likewise, Blaquiere characterizes Tunisians as "possess[ing] a sedate dignity of manner" (Blaquiere 1813: 139), while Temple describes them as "a quiet and well-behaved race" (Temple 1835: 228). Kennedy reinforces these observations, affirming that Tunisians are notably "orderly and honest" (Kennedy 1846: 13). Rae extends this narrative, emphasizing their intellectual openness and progressiveness by observing that "the inhabitants are enlightened and liberal" (Rae 1877: 285). Wingfield, however, provides a more precise depiction by emphasizing their aesthetic sensibilities, asserting that "they are gifted with a never-failing instinct of good taste, these Tunisian gentlemen" (Wingfield 1868: 276). Together, these statements present Tunisian people in a favourable light, elevating their cultural and aesthetic sensibilities in a way that counters more stereotypical portrayals of non-European societies. Positive connotations like "enlightened", "well-behaved", "good taste", "sedate dignity" distance Tunisians from stereotypes of unruliness, barbarism, and primitivism, often associated with Oriental people, positioning them instead as worthy of

respect. More importantly, the term "gentleman" elevates the social status of the locals, depicting them as morally upright and gracious members of their society. This serves to humanize them, portraying them as individuals with positive traits, akin to their Western counterparts. This is further elucidated through Kennedy's explicit admiration for the courteous manners of Tunisians, as evidenced by his fascination with their polite greeting ritual: "they first embrace by kissing each other's shoulder, then touching hands, and each kissing his own" (Kennedy 1846: 181). This precise description highlights the sophistication of Tunisian social customs. The ritual involves physical gestures of mutual respect and personal humility, which reflects the civility, warmth, and respect embedded in the Tunisian culture.

More precise observations are provided concerning Tunisians from specific regions within Tunis. For example, Graham and Aschbee refer to locals from the interior of the country as "courteous in the extreme, hospitable, and obliging—good qualities" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 6). Here, the phrase "courteous in the extreme" emphasizes the exceptional politeness and good manners exhibited by the Arabs in the interior of Tunis. Also, the reference to Tunisians' hospitality to humanize them, positioning them as warm, welcoming individuals. This creates a sense of kinship between the travellers and the locals and elevates Tunisians beyond abstract or stereotypical portrayals.

In a similar vein, Playfair highlights the following: "we particularly noticed the urbanity and good humour of the people of Zaghouan. Wherever we went, alone or in company with Arabs, everyone we met had a pleasant word and smile for us" (Playfair 1877: 139). According to Playfair, the people of Zaghouan possess qualities of sophistication, civility, and cultured behavior. The phrase "good humour" further reinforces the idea of a cheerful, approachable, and friendly society. This marks an important departure from more typical colonial representations of non-Europeans as "Other" or "alien," with whom interaction may have been seen as uncomfortable. Instead, Playfair’s depiction of Tunisians as warm and approachable contributes to a more empathetic and positive representation. More importantly, the direct contact between the writer and the people of Zaghouan implies that there was a kind of "reciprocity" between the travel writer and the travellees which renders the travel narrative "human-centered and interactive" and "establishes equilibrium between them in terms of the power relation" (Pratt 2008: 78).

During the same year, Rae visited Tunis and offered a similar positive portrayal as Playfair byreferring to the people from Sfax as follows: "the people seem tasteful by instinct, and it is a positive treat to sit and watch them. They reflect the polish and good breeding ofthe Spanish Moors, and are noted for their intelligence" (Rae 1877: 167). Clearly, the phrase "tasteful by instinct" suggests that Tunisians possess an inherent sense of refinement and cultural sophistication. The use of "instinct" implies that their tastefulness is natural and innate, rather than learned or acquired, positioning the people as naturally endowed with qualities of aesthetic appreciation and grace. More importantly, the comparison to "the polish and good breeding of the Spanish Moors" links Tunisians to a historical tradition of intellectual and cultural sophistication. Being influential in Spain from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries, the Spanish Moors were known for their contributions to science, architecture, and arts.[35] Invoking this connection, the writer elevates Tunisians by associating them with a high cultural pedigree, while explicitly mentioning intelligence to reframe them Tunisian people as civilized and modern—traits that foster a more favorable and even empathetic view of the Tunisian people. What is worth mentioning is that the writer is not distant or condescending but seems genuinely fascinated by and respectful of what he is witnessing. This reflects a more nuanced and less hierarchical view of the Tunisian people, highlighting their positive attributes without the underlying assumption of superiority that often accompanied British travel writings.

Equally significant is the analysis of Vivian's perspective, which largely aligns with the above views. A reading of his travel account proves that he also exhibits positive perceptions about Tunisians which stands in a stark opposition to the negative views commonly perpetuated. As one of the suggestive examples, he refers to Tunisians in this flattering way: "everything about them shows an innate majesty and dignity" (Vivian 1899: 46). In fact, terms like "majesty" and "dignity" convey a strong, elevated image. While the noun "majesty" evokes a sense of grandeur and nobility, the adjective "innate" further accentuates this depiction, affirming their inherent worth and nobility and suggesting that their cultural value is natural and profound, rather than imposed or artificial. He confirms this view in another passage when he claims that Tunisians possess "constant courtesy and kindness" (Vivian 1899: 46), which leads him to conclude that "the nobility of their expression and the majesty of their gait recall the patriarchs of the Bible" (Vivian 1899: 46). It goes

[35] In the historical context of Medieval Spain, the Moors were the colonizers ruling large parts of the Iberian Peninsula, while the European Christian kingdoms were the colonized subjects struggling to reclaim their territory.

without saying that Vivian's description breaks from the Orientalist norm by highlighting the "noble" character of Tunisians. By incorporating the notion of "constant courtesy and kindness", the writer emphasizes the fact that his positive interaction with Tunisians is not an isolated incident but part of a broader cultural pattern, where the locals possess inherent qualities of civility, grace, and courtesy. Similarly, his reference to the Tunisians' gait as "majestic" suggests that their movements are dignified and commanding, evoking a sense of nobility. The term "majesty" also carries royal associations, and by applying it to the Tunisians, Vivian suggests that their physical presence reflects a high status, both socially and culturally.This emphasis on "majesty" also highlights a cultural refinement that contrasts with the often demeaning stereotypes of non-Western peoples as "subjugated" or "inferior." Furthermore, the phrase "recall the patriarchs of the Bible" further elevates the Tunisians by comparing their "nobility" and "majesty" to that of the revered figures from the Bible. From a European perspective, the biblical patriarchs are idealized as wise, virtuous, and commanding figures. By associating Tunisians with these figures, Vivian places them in a context of profound respect and recognition.

Approached from another perspective, Vivian offers other depictions that hint to Tunisians' hospitality and generosity. In this regard, he asserts that "every stranger is made welcome at their dwellings in so open-handed manner that their hospitality has become proverbial" (Vivian 1899: 46). First of all, the phrase "every stranger is made welcome" highlights the open, inclusive nature of Tunisian hospitality. By emphasizing that this welcome is extended to "every stranger", Vivian underscores the generosity of Tunisian people, suggesting that their culture is based on warmth and kindness. Second, the phrase "open-handed manner" further emphasizes this unreserved and generous nature of Tunisian hospitality. Finally, the use of the term "proverbial" aligns Tunisians with an idealized cultural value that transcends local context and resonates universally. By describing their hospitality in such glowing terms, Vivian not only celebrates the good qualities of the natives but also frames their social customs as praise worthy and admirable.

Reading Vivian's quotes within their larger nineteenth-century context, it could be claimed that non-Western societies together with their traditions are often referred to as backward and uncivilized with a particular emphasis on their "otherness". By elevating Tunisians and their traditions to the level of social refinement and cultural sophistication, Vivian offers a narrative that counters common Orientalist stereotypes, which further proves

the vulnerability and heterogeneous of the imperial discourse. In fact, this idea is going to be further accentuated in the following sub-section, as the perceptions of twentieth-century writers are going to be studied.

5.2.2.2. Twentieth-century views

Male writers such as Graham (1908) and female writers including Nesbitt (1906), Lorimer (1906), and Erskine (1925) illustrate the fact that they are not indifferent spectators but engaged travellers who seek to understand the cultural traits of the natives through a respectful and constructive perspective. For example, Graham gives a lengthy praise for the personal traits of Tunisians:

> I can only say that I was continually amazed at their forbearance, their friendly interest, and their evident wish to add to my comfort in any small way which suggested itself. I have never in England, France, Italy, or Holland, experienced such undeviating courtesy, and moreover, with one single exception, no reward for virtuein the form of *backsheesh* was ever hinted at ; and although I often wanted to offer apresent, I never did so, hating to demoralize their hospitable traditions. (Graham 1908: 72)

Graham's quote explicitly sets Tunisians apart as embodying a higher social standard in interpersonal interactions, positioning them as remarkably kind and selfless hosts. His use of the first-person pronoun "I" and the adverb "continually" emphasizes his personal astonishment at Tunisians' qualities, such as forbearance, friendliness and courtesy. Besides, the repetition of "their" attributes a collective and inherent virtue to Tunisian people, universalizing these positive traits as part of their national character. It is also worth mentioning that Graham's comparison of his experience in Tunis with those in "England, France, Italy, or Holland," is very significant here. It not only highlights the uniqueness of Tunisian hospitality, but also reinforces Tunis as a place of unparalleled courtesy. The author further elevates the Tunisians by noting their lack of expectation for "*backsheesh*" (a tip), implyingthatTunisiansare intrinsicallyhospitable,actingout ofgenuine goodwill ratherthan material gain. Last but not least, Graham's declaration: "I never did so, hating to demoralize their hospitable traditions," not onlyunderscores his appreciation for their hospitality but also implies a cultural sensitivity and a deep respect for their qualities.

This positive view is further accentuated in another passage where the author provides a more specific portrayal of a group of Tunisian farmers he has met in the town of Ariana: "their manners showed a perfection of taste" (Graham 1908: 136-137). In general terms, the Orientalist discourse frequently dehumanizes or diminishes non-Western people, portraying them as uncivilized or lacking sophistication. Graham's description, however, directly counters this prejudice by acknowledging the farmers' exemplary manners. By celebrating their "perfection of taste," the author not only attributes a high level of cultural and social refinement to Tunisian farmers, but also shows an underlying respect for the natives and their manners.

With regards to female writers, Lorimer highlights that "all Arabs are perfect gentlemen" (Lorimer 1906: 21). During the same year, Nesbitt visited Tunis and offered a similar observation as Lorimer: "the men of Tunis are always considerate and kindly" (Nesbitt 1906: 166). Here, the adjectives "considerate" and the adverb "kindly" suggest that Tunisian men are viewed as warm, respectful, and thoughtful, countering potentially negative stereotypes of Eastern men as "hard" (Douglas 1912: 74) or unapproachable. As for Lorimer, she positions "all Arabs", including Tunisians, as inherently virtuous. The use of the word "perfect" elevates the quality of being "a gentleman" to an idealized standard, suggesting that the speaker perceives Arabs as epitomizing courtesy, respect,and refinement.This contradicts other views that depict non-Western people as living "outside civilized bounds" (Rankin 1930: 13). Lorimer further emphasizes her view by giving a more specific description of a Tunisian man she encountered: "[…] He is an extraordinarily well-educated man […] cultured and refined in his tastes and pleasures" (Lorimer 1906: 22). Clearly, the image conveyed in this quote is one of sophistication and cultural refinement. Following Lorimer's description, the Tunisian man is highly knowledgeable "extraordinarily well-educated", culturally advanced "cultured, as well as highly sophisticated "refined in his tastes". Such a representation has two implications. First, by describing the Tunisian man as "educated", Lorimer contradicts her earlier view where she asserts that "the Arab has no time to either learn, read or write" (Lorimer 1906: 31). Second, her depiction of the Tunisian man as culturally refined challenges the often dismissive stereotypes of non-Western societies as being "uncivilized"or "barbaric". This observation further underscores the ambivalent nature embedded within travellers' narratives, prompting a questioning of their truthfulness and reliability.

As far as Erskine is concerned, she explicitly articulates her fascination with Tunisian children and their bearing: "smiling and friendly, curious and ready to be amused at the strange people they meet by the way, these children have pleasant manners and a courteous bearing" (Erskine 1925: 137).

In the first part of this extract, Erskine describes Tunisian children as "smiling and friendly". Whereas the former reflects warmth, the latter suggests that these children are not just kind in appearance but also in their interactions with strangers. The latter part of thequote, "these children have pleasant manners and a courteous bearing," further elevates the children's portrayal by highlighting their social graces. Indeed, the use of the adjective "courteous" in particular connotes respectfulness, indicating that the children are culturally sophisticated, showing respect toward others in their interactions. Furthermore, the admiration for their "pleasant manners" also speaks to a recognition of the sophistication and politeness present in Tunisian society, qualities that Western travellers might not always have acknowledged. Briefly, this description contributes toan overall image of theTunisian people as possessing refined social behaviors. The specific portrayal of Tunisian children as genuinely polite and open challenges widespread stereotypes of the era, subtly suggesting that these virtues are not confined to Western societies but are also found in Tunisian culture.

It is essential to highlight the fact that the favorable representation of Tunisian cultural characteristics is further reinforced through the depiction of their moral attributes in a similarly positive light. This dual emphasis not only underscores the traveller's appreciation of Tunisian culture but also reflects an ambivalent representation of the Other in travel narratives.

5.3. Moral virtues

Upon our analysis of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British travel accounts, it has been found that the authors' representations also illustrate "counter-Orientalism"; that is, their narratives go sometimes against the main reductive stereotypes by highlighting the moral qualities of Tunisian people. In fact, positive attributes like religiosity and tolerance serve to challenge travellers' earlier views of the natives as typically irreligious and immoral.

5.3.1. Nineteenth-century views

Male authors such as MacGill and Kennedy place significant emphasis on religiosity as a moral attribute of Tunisian people, foregrounding it as a central aspect of their representation. MacGill asserts that Tunisians "are more rigorous than the Mohametans of any other country" (MacGill 1811: 84). Likewise, Kennedy avers that "it is very seldom that an Arab is found to disregard the commands of the Koran" (Kennedy 1846: 26). Obvious as it may seem, both quotes lay emphasis on the religious devotion of Tunisians. The term "rigorous" used by MacGill likely refers to Tunisians' dedication and adherence to Islamic principles, which can be interpreted as a form of cultural or ethical discipline. This depiction positions Tunisians as exemplars of devotion and uprightness, distinguishing them favourably from Muslims in other regions: "more rigorous than the Mohametans of any other country". Interestingly, MacGill's portrayal of Tunisian society as grounded in ethical principles is contradicted in another passage, where he characterizes Tunisians as a race exhibiting "thievish inclinations" (MacGill 1811: 38). This contrast serves as a clear indication of the deeply ambivalent nature inherent in travellers' discourses.

In the second quote, Kennedy highlights the adherence to the "commands of the Koran" as a key feature of the Tunisian society, implying hence that religion permeates dailylife and guides behaviour. His expression "very seldom" further reinforces this view as it creates an image of a society deeply rooted in faith.

While these nineteenth-century authors underscore religiosity as one of the defining moral features of the Tunisian society, twentieth-century writers expand this portrayal by incorporating the additional attribute of tolerance, hence painting a positive image that departures from the conventional Orientalist views.

5.3.2. Twentieth-century views

This analysis will focus on the works of male authors, including Graham (1908), Fraser (1911), and Sladen (1912), while also giving particular attention to female perspectives,with an emphasis on Lorimer's narrative. Graham depicts Tunisians as tolerant, being less inclined toward extremism or aggression: "the Tunisian is less fanatical than his brother in Morocco, less warlike, of a softer, more amiable nature" (Graham 1908: 239). Evident as it may seem, the comparison to Moroccans holds a central significance in this quote, echoed in the repetitive use of comparative adjectives: "less fanatical", "less warlike", " softer". This repetition contrasts Tunisians with Moroccans, portraying the former as more moderate, peaceful, and more approachable. While at first glance this description might seem reflective of the author's capacity for cross-cultural understanding and positive interactions, an overall reading of his travel narrative would suggest a deep contradiction in his discourse. In one of his passages, he explicitly refers to Tunisians as "immoral" and enable "to understand the most elementary principles of honor or truth" (Graham 1908: 161-12). This stands a clear proof of the ambivalence inherent in travellers' discourse.

Echoing the same view as Graham, Fraser depicts religious tolerance as the hallmark of the Tunisian character, describing Tunisians positively: "moslems-in this case Tunisians-showed a greater tolerance towards the Christian faith than the ordinary Christian shows towards the teaching of Mohamed" (Fraser 1911: 225). Obviously, the quote not only praises Tunisians but also criticizes "the ordinary Christian" for their relative lack of tolerance towards Islam. Tunisians, according to Fraser, are found to be enlightened, open-minded, and tolerant. Based on this perception, the author subverts the common stereotypes of his era where non-European societies are often depicted asmorallyinferior. This idea is embodied by Rankin who describes the Arab as being "[…] devoid of all the beauties of soul that the proud European possessed" (Rankin 1930: 182).

Shifting focus to Sladen, he also points out to the notable trait of tolerance inherent in the Tunisian character. In this regard he avers that "they are the least bigoted Orientals one could wish to meet" (Sladen 1912: 39). Sladen's quote employs a superlative construction "the least bigoted" to emphasize Tunisians' exceptional quality of tolerance. This superlative structure conveys not just an absence of bigotry but positions Tunisians as exemplary among Orientals. Moreover, the phrase "one could wish to meet" introduces a hypothetical

perspective, suggesting that their openness exceeds expectations. This not only reflects Sladen's admiration but also presents Tunisians as ideal figures of cultural and religious tolerance.

Interestingly, this favourable portrayal of the native people reflects a high degree of contradiction in the discourse of this twentieth-century writer. As mentioned in the previous section, Sladen associated Tunisians with many pejorative traits portraying them, for example, as "thievish" and "untruthful" (Sladen 1912: 72). His portrayal of Tunisians as possessing a high degree of moral sophistication, however, underscores the heterogeneity of the Orientalist discourse, revealing its inherent ambivalence and internal contradictions.

As far as Lorimer is concerned, she sheds light on two key moral traits of the Tunisian character: a strong sense of moral integrity and a deep-rooted religiosity. Starting with the former quality, the author claims that "Mohammedans are as a rule sincere, and nothing that is truly sincere can be wholly vulgar" (Lorimer 1906: 318). Relying on this quote, the primary positive characteristic attributed to Tunisians, and by extension Muslims, is "sincerity". First, the phrase "as a rule sincere" implies that Muslims are genuine and authentic in their actions and beliefs. Then, the second part of the quote, "nothing that is truly sincere can be wholly vulgar," further reinforces the positive portrayal of sincerity by drawing a contrast with vulgarity. Put differently, the author argues that because sincerity is a refined quality, itcannot be associated with coarseness or vulgarity. This association elevates the moral standing of Tunisians in the eyes of the British traveller, suggesting that their sincerity places them above any perceived cultural inferiority. Interestingly, while this portrayal challenges the negative stereotypes often associated with non-Western societies, it simultaneously exposes the inherent contradictions within Lorimer's discourse when her broader views are put under scrutiny. In one of her chapters, she talks about the British woman, Sylvia, married to a Tunisian man. According to her portrayals, Sylvia is beautiful, civilized and courteous; while her husband Monsieur Ajeeb isrough, ill-mannered and discourteous. Drawing on such descriptions, she emphasizes that "what Ajeeb shrinks from is all that separates the East from the West" (Lorimer 1906: 320). This assertion notably aligns with Frantz Fanon's incisive observation that "there will always be a world –a white world between you and us" (Fanon, as cited in Bhabha 1994: 339). These insights suggest a persistent tension, where the dichotomy between East and West is not merely geographical but deeply entrenched in symbolic and ideological narratives.

Regarding the second quality of religiosity, Lorimer asserts that Tunisians "[…] pray a great deal […] and leave Allah to do the rest. Their trust in Allah is profound" (Lorimer 1906: 18). Here, the writer suggests that Tunisian people exhibit profound faith by highlighting their deep religious faith and trust in divine providence. In fact, the writer's emphasis on "pray a great deal", "leave Allah do the rest" not only presents Tunisians as virtuous and devout, but also counters other views that depict Tunisians as lacking religious commitment. This idea is reflected in Sladen's assertion that "the faithful are many of them unfaithful in their observances" (Sladen 1906: 37).

Significantly, these mixed perceptions, articulated during the same period, reflect the internal contradictions that often permeate travellers' discourse. Accordingly, such a duality captures the coexistence of conflicting views about the same people and culture, highlighting the complexity and ambivalence of such representations. On one hand, British travellers emphasize positive attributes, such as religiosity, tolerance, and moral integrity, whereas on the other hand, they carry stereotypes of moral and religious deficiency. This tension underscores the fragmented nature of Orientalist narratives, wherein the desire to humanize often clashes with an impulse to dehumanize. This largely confirms Claudine Moïse's view that "[…] the Other remained the expression of a mixture of fears, desires and repulsions" (Moïse 2019: 5).

As a conclusion to this second part, it could be argued that a notable "reciprocity" between travellers and travellees is created out of the positive representation of the native Tunisian, his courteous manners, andmoral virtues. Indeed, this "reciprocity"not onlyrenders the travel narrative "human-centered" (Pratt 2008: 78) but also offers an ideal cultural opportunity for travellers to transcend "the cultural chauvinism of Orientalism" (Gholi 2023: 251), fostering a convivial atmosphere and embodying a more humanistic approach towards the locals. Significantly, such positive depictions have two significant implications. First, they challenge and disrupt the dehumanizing stereotypes typical of Orientalist discourse, thereby effectively "deflect[ing] the colonial [by extension Orientalist] gaze" (Borella, as cited in Gholi 2023: 245). Second, they underscore an ethical recognition of the humanity of the cultural "other", affirming that "the other has a face, and it is a sacred book in which good is recorded" (Kapuscinski, as cited in Gholi 2023: 251).

With regards to the first and second part, we could safely contend that travellers' discourse is full of contradictions since it depicts the other as "an object of desire and

derision" (Bhabha 1994: 96). Accordingly, the representation of the Tunisian and his manners oscillates between demonization and humanization; which serves to confirm that the Orientlist discourse should not solely be studied as homogenous and imperialist. In our analysis of the image of the native Tunisian, we came across aesthetic representations that reveal "[…] the fascination with otherness, a fascination always double as in the doubleness of a taboo. In both, attraction and repulsion contend" (Ihab Hassan, as cited in Borthwick 1991: 141).

6. General concluding remarks

As a conclusion, this chapter builds upon the broader themes of landscape and cultural encounters explored in the first two chapters to delve into the intricate dynamics of the human encounter. Indeed, the focus on the representation of the native Tunisian in British travel narratives helps illuminate the profound ambivalence that permeates these texts. It has been found that they oscillate between reductive stereotypes and moments of genuine appreciation, thereby exposing the contradictions and vulnerabilities of the imperial discourse.These varied and contradictory attitudes have provided a problematic representation of theTunisian people. On one hand, like many other Orientalist writers, British travellers constructed a narrative dominated by an imperialist discourse which devalues the natives and supported Westerners' supremacy. Through a language imbued with " […] a racist stereotypical discourse" (Blunt 1992: 23), these travellers sought to reinforce European cultural superiority while justifying their hegemonic ideologies. On the other hand, a closer analysis reveals a striking ambivalence in these accounts when the same travellers could not entirely suppress their appreciation for the native Tunisian.

Accordingly, the first part aligns closely with Said's assertion that Orientalism constitutes "the collection of stereotypes, distortions, myths […] which the West has imposed in order to dominate the East" (Said, as cited in Marandi & Ensieh 2015: 22). Within this framework, the Tunisian native was constructed as an inferior other embodying a set of pejorative characteristics. These depictions, categorized into four overarching thematic headings—physical degradation, behavioral deficiencies, intellectual and cultural impoverishment, and moral inferiority—served to dehumanize the natives allowing for their reduction to mere" body-scapes" (Pratt 1992: 64).

The second part of this chapter, however, demonstrated that these narratives are far from being homogeneous and monolithic. Alongside the dehumanizing portrayals, there are instances of aesthetic admiration and cultural fascination, revealing a "desire for the Orient" (Behdad, 1999). These instances humanize the Tunisian by emphasizing his physical beauty, cultural refinement, and moral qualities such as religiosity and tolerance.

Interestingly, this interplay between admiration and dehumanization carries two significant implications. First, it suggests that these accounts are not objective "truth[s]" but "representations" (Said 1978: 29), shaped as much by the travellers' cultural anxieties and aspirationsas by their encounters with Tunisian realities. Second, this duality highlights the

construction of the Other as both a "subject to the penetrating inspection of the Western eye" and a "a subject of temptation and desire" (Spurr 1993: 21). Unquestionably, then, such oscillation exposes the vulnerabilities of the Orientalist discourse, challenges its coherence, and underscores the complexity of human encounters as sites of both fascination and power.

Ultimately, this chapter has endeavored to illustrate that travellers' ambivalent narratives suggest to go beyond conventional and simplistic interpretations. Instead, they invite a more nuanced reflection on the legacy of imperial representations, revealing how the act of describing the Other is always fraught with contradictions, power dynamics, and complex negotiations of identity. More importantly, this chapter sets the stage for the fourth and final chapter, which shifts to a more specific exploration of the encounter with the Tunisian woman by analyzing how the latter is represented in both male and female-authored travel books. This progression from the general to the specific is essential in discussing ambivalent representations, as it mirrors the way British travel narratives themselves often move from broad observations of landscapes and cultures to more intimate and detailed portrayals of individuals, particularly women. This shift is crucial for exploring the ambivalence of these representations and further unraveling the complexities of travellers' discourse.

CHAPTER FOUR
GENDERED ENCOUNTER: THE AMBIVALENT REPRESENTATION OF TUNISIAN WOMEN

"The theme of women is significant

since women are symbolizing the Orient"

Andreeva, as cited in Gholi 2017: 47

1. General background

Having already explored the complex and multifaceted dimensions of British travel narratives as embodied through a series of successive encounters in the preceding chapters, this final chapter turns to what is arguably the most ideologically charged and literary intricate form of interaction: the gendered encounter. In fact, it has been found that within the broader framework of Orientalist discourse, the female figure has always triggered the attention of Western writers because the Orient has always been "fully condensed in the figure of the Oriental woman" (Stamm, as cited in Gholi 2017: 47). In light of its symbolic and ideological significance, the present chapter devotes particular attention to the representation of the Tunisian woman, examining how gender functions as a critical lens through which her image is constructed and mediated in British travel narratives.

1.1. Defining sex and gender

Once the concept of gender is highlighted, it is essential to make a distinction between two key terms—sex and gender—in order to fully grasp the nuances of these gendered encounters and understand the ways in which British travellers projected meaning onto the lives and behaviors of Tunisian women. In broad terms, sex refers to the biological categoryof male and female. More precisely, Gondal defines sex as "the anatomical and physiological characteristics that signify the biological maleness and femaleness of an individual." (Gondal 2018: 5). Gender, on the other hand, is a socio-cultural construct which presupposes that men and women should behave differently. In this context, Gondal asserts that gender is "the process by which individuals who are born into biological categories of male or female become the social categories of men and women throughthe acquisition of locally- defined attributes of masculinity and femininity." (Gondal 2018: 5). Seen from this perspective, traits of masculinity and femininity become the pure products of social and cultural ideas which are acquired to an individual "in the process of becoming a man or a woman." (Gondal 2018: 5). Accordingly, gender becomes "the term widely used to refer to those ways in which a culture reformulates what begins as a fact of nature." (Gondal 2018: 5). Within this framework, a range of culturally prescribed—commonly referred to as gender roles—is expected to be performed by individuals based on their perceived sex. Gender roles may be defined as "a theoretical construct that refers to a cluster of social and behavioral conventions that are typicallyconsidered to be sociallyappropriate customs for individuals of a specific sex within a particular culture." (Lumen Learning 2014: para.1).

Once the distinctions between sex, gender, and gender roles is established, it becomes possible to see how these concepts operate within cross-cultural encounters. In the context of nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries travel writing, British travellers approached Tunisian women through the lens of gender norms rooted in Victorian values and ideals. These norms shaped their perceptions of women's status, roles, daily lives, and behaviours. Consequently, their portrayals cannot be regarded as objective accounts; rather, they are inscribed with ethnocentric assumptions and culturally-mediated biases. In this chapter, the concept of the gaze is directly relevant to the gendered encounter, since it helps explain how Tunisian women become objects of visual and textual representation rather than autonomous subjects, hence illuminating the power dynamics embedded in acts of looking and describing.

1.2. Defining the concept of gaze

As a literary notion, the concept of the gaze is "little more than a quarter of a century old"; and as an umbrella term "it interferes in the analysis of a wide range of theoretical movements such as psychoanalysis, discourse studies, gender studies…" (Hawthorn 2006: 509). This concept "connotes a process, a one-way subjective relation" that involves a complicity in the perpetuation of unequal power relationships (Kaplen 1997: xvi). Within this context, Homi Bhabha highlights the fact that there is a dialectical relationship between seeing and being seen. The latter, for him, is an "effect of power that is productive" (Bhabha 1994: 109). That is why he recommends that "one has to see surveillance […] as functioning in relation to the regime of the scopic drive" (Bhabha 1994: 109). In this framework, the "scopic drive" is connected to the way individuals are represented in discursive terms. As such, the gaze turns out to be not only about seeing, but also implies power, objectification, and the subject's relationship to the Other. For a more balanced understanding of this concept, we will cast a look at the way it is used in medicine, psychoanalysis, gender studies, as well as Postcolonial studies.

Given the focus of this chapter, it is particularly important to emphasize the relevance of the gaze to gender studies. Within feminist theory, the concept of the gaze has been examined as a mechanism through which male domination is perpetuated, often by rendering the female body an object of scrutiny and control. This notion is most prominently articulated in Laura Mulvey's seminal work, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1989), where she argues that the act of gazing is inherently restrictive, denying agency to the object being observed. To elucidate the dynamics of this process, Mulvey situates her analysis within the cinematic domain, highlighting how cinema functions as "the medium for male subjects to further exert their mastery over female objects, identifying with the dominant gaze of the camera" (Reinhardt 2020: para.8). This "gendered gaze of the cinema systematically determines who sees and who is seen" (Reinhardt 2020: para.8), reinforcing traditional hierarchies of power. According to Mulvey, the male occupies a dual position as both "the creator and observer of the film,"enablinghim to "objectifyand oppress female subjects on screen" (Mulvey, as cited in Bradley 2016: para.4). Through this transformation of the female subject into an object of inquiry, the male gazer consolidates power and control, effectively disempowering the female subject. This process underscores the role of visual media in sustaining patriarchal power structures,where the gaze operates as a tool of objectification, subjugation, and domination.

Mulvey's critique thus exposes the asymmetry embedded in visual representation and its implications for gendered power dynamics. While Mulvey focuses on cinema, her insights are applicable to nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries British travel narratives, where male and female authors alike often positioned Tunisian women as visual objects to be described and interpreted for Western readership. In doing so, they participated in a broader process of objectification that sustained patriarchal and colonial authority.

The concept of the gaze has also been theorized in other fields—medicine, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial studies—each of which offers additional insights into the mechanisms of looking and power that are relevant to this analysis. Beginning with the medical field, Michel Foucault (1994) traces the origins of the "medical gaze" to eighteenth-century Paris, where patients, upon being placed under the physician's surveillance, were transformed into objects of study. This process, Foucault argues, enables "the rational scientist" to create an abstract space through which "subjectless bodies are developed" (Goldberg, as cited in Bradley 2016: para.4). Within this space, the medical gaze not only operates but thrives, thereby establishing an asymmetrical power relationship between the physician, positioned as the "gazer", and the patient, reduced to "the object of this gaze" (Foucault, as citedin Bradley2016:para.4). Objectification, however, extends beyond merely situating the patient within a nexus of power relations; it also entails the capacity to "analyze, categorize, classify, and order" the individual with "the cold gaze of scientific distance" (Goldberg, as cited in Bradley 2016: para.4). This dynamics underscores the critical role of the medical gaze in the construction and perpetuation of knowledge-power structures. Like the medical gaze, British travellers' descriptions of Tunisian women often adopt a classificatory approach, reducing them to physical features. This style of observation reinforces their objectification and places them in a position of passivity under the traveller’s authoritative gaze.

As far as the psychoanalytic field is concerned, Jacques Lacan's concept of the gaze is intricately linked to his theory of the mirror stage, a pivotal moment in the development of self-awareness. In fact, Lacan posits that "in our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision […] something slips, passes, is transmitted from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the gaze" (Lacan 1981: 3). This elusive quality of the gaze becomes manifest at an early age, during the child's first encounter with a mirror. The act of gazing at one's own reflection "surprises [the viewer]….

disturbs him" (Lacan 1981: 84), initiating a profound psychological process. This moment of surprise, Lacan suggests, marks the child's initial "awareness of his ego" triggered by the confrontation with his mirrored image (Reinhardt 2020: para. 4). This recognition of the self in the mirror produces "not merely anxiety but also pleasure" (Lacan 1981: 183). The child experiences anxiety as he grapples with the visible "I" and the dissonance between his physical body and its reflection. Simultaneously, this encounter brings pleasure, as it signifies the nascent formation of self-recognition and the beginnings of a coherent self-identity (Lacan 1981). Building on Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, we would like to show how the travellers' gaze positions Tunisian women as a kind of "mirror" through which they reflect on and affirm their own cultural and gender identities.

With regards to Postcolonial studies, the concept of the gaze is critically examined as a mechanism of domination and subjugation. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (2000) highlight the problematic nature of the gaze, noting that it "defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalterneity and powerlessness" (Ashcroft et.al 2000: 207). Similarly, Jeremy Hawthorn (2006) contends that the gaze serves as a deliberate tool "to empower the colonizer and disempower the colonized" (Hawthorn 2006: 514) through a subtle, one-sided, and "non-reactive" relationship. Interestingly, however, the theoretical development of the gaze within postcolonial discourse gained momentum following the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1977). In his analysis, Said conceptualizes the relationship between the empowered gazer and the disempowered object of the gaze as rooted in "exteriority." He argues that the European, functioning as a "ventriloquist, makes the Orient speak, rather than allowing it to speak freely for itself through its own people" (Said, as cited in Hawthorn 2006: 514). This external imposition transforms the Orient into an imaginative construct, meant to serve the interests of Western colonial discourse. Timothy Mitchell (1989) aligns with this view, asserting that such representations are part of a preconceived imperial project, which he encapsulates within the framework of the "world-as-exhibition." This framework reduces the real world into "an object-world rendered up for the imperial gaze" (Burks 2006: 30).

One striking example of this dynamics is the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris[36]. Within the "History of Habitation Street," [37] the French architect, Charles Garnier, perpetuated

[36] The 1889 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, held from May 6 to October 31, was an international event, that in addition to celebrating the centenary of the French Revolution, was intended to show the progress of the

stereotypical depictions of Arab houses, describing them as "unchanged over time " […] because "Mohammadism sterilized all the regions it invaded" (Garnier, as citedin Celik 1992: 72). Garnier's portrayal, including "cubical masses enlivened with musharabiyy as (lattice woodwork on the windows) and an arcaded courtyard with horseshoe arches" (Garnier, as cited in Celik 1992: 73), reinforced a static and frozen image of Islamic architecture. Garnier went so far as to claim that "the salvation of Islamic architecture would be achieved by colonization: the French conquest has just begun…to change [the] antique physiognomy of Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan architecture" (Garnier, as cited in Celik 1992: 75). According to Tony Bennett (1995), such representations served to lock Oriental cultures inthe remote past, excluding them from contemporary time and space, while legitimizing colonial domination.

Marie Burks (2006) further criticizes the "world-as-exhibition," noting that it helped create a "picture of the East for the imperial gaze" (Burks 2006: 31). According to her, this phenomenon was "a technology of distance" (Burks 2006: 31) that creates—through the pictorial representation of the world—an unbalanced relationship between the viewer and the viewed. The resulting image rendered the subject inert and voiceless, while empowering the viewer to define and speak on its behalf. Consequently, the gaze becomes "a perfect medium for spreading domination" (Reinhardt 2020: para.7). This domination operates subtly by "carrying with it a lot of ideological and political baggage" (Hawthorn 2006: 514).

Finally, in our own reading of these theoretical traditions, the concept of the gaze in British travel narratives about Tunisian women is both gendered and colonial since it operates at the intersection of patriarchal and imperial powers. Thus, Tunisian women become not simply individuals in these narratives, but symbolic figures through which imperial ideologies are asserted and maintained.This produces complex representations that tell us as much about the travellers' own cultural and ideological positioning as they do about the women they claimed to describe.

Republic. See: The Exposition Universelle of 1889: https://www.unjourdeplusaparis.com/en/paris-reportage/exposition-universelle-1889

[37] It refers to a specific section in The 1889 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, which featured a reconstructed Tunisian street as part of its colonial exhibition. This display sought to highlight the architecture and cultural practices of Tunis under French protectorate.

1.3. From concepts to representation: the case of Tunisian women

This does not mean, however, that British travellers' portrayals are entirely devoid of moments of genuine appreciation. In certain instances, both male and female writers expressed admiration for the physical beauty of Tunisian women, often highlighting their refined behaviour and elegant attire. These positive depictions largely align with the ethics of cultural relativism where the figure of the Oriental woman is interpreted within the lens of her own cultural context instead of imposing Western ideals of femininity on her. By adopting a cultural relativist approach, the subsequent analysis aims at examining to what extent these moments of appreciation reflect an effort to engage with cultural difference on its own terms, and to highlight the way these representations move beyond the constraints of the colonial gaze to offer a more nuanced understanding of the Tunisian woman.

Drawing on the above, this chapter endeavours to analyze how Tunisian women are ambivalently represented in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century male and female travel accounts. To this end, this study is built upon two main parts. The first one explores how Tunisian women are positively represented in the narratives of male and female writers with an emphasis on their physical beauty and refined manners. The second part stands in a stark opposition with the first one, revealing how these same writers often projected their ideological assumptions and cultural biases onto the appearance, behaviours and roles of Tunisian women. It is precisely within these representations that the ideological underpinnings of travel writing become most apparent, and where gendered perceptions intersect with, and indeed reinforce, the mechanisms of the colonial gaze.

By studying these ambivalent portrayals, this chapter raises a series of critical questions: how do male and female travel writers construct the image of the Tunisian woman, and to what extent are these constructions shaped by Orientalist discourse? The analysis also questions the extent to which British female travellers challenge or replicate male tropes about Tunisian women. It also inquires into the extent to which these female writers subverted or reinforced the dominant gendered discourses of empire.The chapter further examines whether the figure of theTunisian woman serves as a mirror through which British writers define their own gender identities or assert their moral superiority. Finally, the chapter considers whether these travel texts ultimately reflect a deeper tension within the writers' own ideological positioning. These guiding questions establish the critical framework for the analysis of the complex entanglements of gender, power, and representation in British travel writing.

2. The positive representation of the Tunisian female figure

The positive representation of Tunisian women in male and female British travel accounts will be analyzed through the theoretical framework of cultural relativism, which encourages an understanding of the Tunisian female figure within the specificities of her own social and cultural context, rather than through the lens of external norms or value systems. Conceptually, cultural relativism is "one of the core concepts of the discipline of anthropology" (Hahn 2023: 3). It was developed by Franz Boas in the early twentieth-century "in order to establish the paradigm of a holistic description of cultures." (Hahn 2023: 1). As such, cultural relativism encourages to "refrain from any kind of judgments about cultures or comparisons between them" [...] emphasizing that "there is no objective parameter to adequately describe the value of a culture." (Hahn 2023: 1).

Applied to the present study, this theoretical approach provides a critical lens through which to reassess British representations, highlighting moments when both male and female travellers momentarily depart from the conventional ethnocentric gaze in order to genuinely engage with the complexity and specificity of Tunisian women's lived experiences. So, instead of imposing Western ideals of femininity, these travellers adopt a culturally relativist perspective in order to construct images that affirm rather than denigrate Tunisian womanhood. Thereby, this tone of cross-cultural admiration reflects a form of narrative that aligns with ethical travel writing and genuine cosmopolitan respect. In doing so, these texts challenge prevailing imperialist discourses and resist monolithic portrayals often found in other Orientalist works. Simultaneously, they attest to the profound ambivalence that underlies Western representations of the East, hence revealing tensions between admiration and denigration, inclusion and exclusion, othering and recognition.

Accordingly, rather than viewing Tunisian women as passive, unrefined, and intellectually inferior—assumptions often rooted in colonial ideology—British travel writers express a notable appreciation for their physical aesthetics (including physical beauty and refined tastes), moral attributes (such as economic independence and intelligence), and social qualities (exemplified by graceful conduct). Through a close examination of their travel narratives, this analysis seeks to illuminate the way such representations both reflect the travellers' broader perceptions of Tunisian women and simultaneously complicate dominant Orientalist frameworks by offering more nuanced and, at times, counter-hegemonic portrayals of local womanhood.

In this regard, it should be noted that "the women of Tunisia may be roughly classed under three heads: the towns woman, generally of Moorish extraction; the Bedouin nomad; and the Jewess." (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 197). This chapter seeks to analyze these three classifications, exploring the ways in which each is represented within the broader framework of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British travel writing.

2.1. The image of the Tunisian woman in nineteenth-century accounts

2.1.1. Male views

2.1.1.1. Physical beauty

Both Wingfield (1868) and Graham and Aschbee stress the exceptional beauty of Tunisian women by focusing on their physical traits as well as their crafted form of adornment. For instance, Wingfield uses some idealized imagery of Tunisian femininity and charm by referring to a Tunisian woman he met in an eulogized manner:

> It was quite enough to look at her as she stood: a vision of beauty, lithe and young, with a warm yellow light shining down upon her: a really lovely girl of about seventeen, exquisitely made [...] her great tender eyes shining out from under heavy eyelashes [..] which by the way, Lord Byron considered as the acme of perfection in Oriental beauty. (Wingfield 1868: 304-305)

The above quote relies on rich language, vivid imagery, and intertextuality to underscore the Western admiration of Tunisian beauty. To construct his positive representation, Wingfield uses descriptive adjectives such as "lithe," "young," and "tender," which serve as both literal and metaphorical enhancers of the woman's grace, youth, and beauty. Besides, the reference to her eyes as "great tender eyes shining out from under heavy eyelashes "not onlyemphasizes emotional depth and physical beauty, but also adds a sense of humanity and emotional connection, which contrasts with purely objectifying descriptions. This image is further enhanced by Wingfield's description of her as "a vision of beauty"; a phrase that elevates her to an almost ethereal status. Lastly, by aligning her attributes with what Byron considered the "acme of perfection in Oriental beauty", Wingfield situates the

beauty of this Tunisian woman within a broader European framework of admiration for Oriental women.

Graham and Aschbee, however, were more precise in their focus, since they centered their descriptions on the image of the Tunisian Jewesses and Bedouin women. Beginning with the former, they contend that "[…] Jewesses […] are frequently of great beauty—big, lustrous eyes, finely cut features, delicate, transparent skins, and, due allowance made for the bulkiness of their forms, well- proportioned and well-formed limbs. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 200-201). Relying on an enumerative style and visual imagery, the writers express genuine admiration for the beauty of Tunisian Jewish women, highlighting traits that they perceive as exceptional. For example, Graham and Aschbee start with listing the admired features in a systematic way—eyes, facial features, skin, and limbs—creating a vivid and holistic picture of their beauty. This structure suggests an almost scientific analysis, reflecting the Victorian tendency to catalog and classify elements. Besides, the use of words like "big," "lustrous," "transparent," and "delicate" evoke strong visual impressions, focusing thereader's attention on women's physical attributes. More importantly, their focus on attributes like "big, lustrous eyes," "finely cut features," and "delicate, transparent skins," not only suggests admiration and fascination, but also emphasizes the elegance and refinement of Tunisian Jewish women. In addition to their physical beauty, travel writers also emphasized the moral attributes of Tunisian women, particularly as exemplified in the figure of the Bedouin woman.

2.1.1.2. Moral attributes: Bedouin women as an emblem of self-sufficiency and intellectual capability

In their reference to the Tunisian Bedouin women, Graham and Aschbee highlight another noteworthy characteristic: the women's economic independency and self-sufficiency. In this regard, they assert:

> The Bedouin women, seen only in the interior of the country, do not cover their faces, but seem proud of their red skins, face, neck, and chest tattooed with all sorts of quaint devices. Their countenances are expressive of intelligence, if not of beauty […] They affect garments of bright colours, and wear a profusion of silver jewelry (the investment

> of their earnings), to be valued rather by weight of metal than by delicacy of workmanship. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 199)

The authors emphasize the cultural distinctiveness, individuality, and aesthetic qualities of the Bedouin women in the Tunisian interior, showing admiration for their appearance, style, and agency. What is immediately striking is the emphasis on the visibility of women's faces: "do not cover their faces" which contrasts with stereotypes of veiled or hidden women, presenting them as open and proud of their own identity: "seem proud of their red skins". Furthermore, the reference to the "tattoos on face, neck, and chest with all sorts of quaint devices" not only serves to portray these women as distinctive and intricate, but also shows a fascination and appreciation for their artistic self-expression. What is important to mention is that Graham and Aschbee not only focused on some physical attributes of Tunisian women, but also paid attention to their intellectual capacities and economic independence. For instance, the description of their countenances as "expressive of intelligence" shifts the focus from physical beauty to mental acuity and individuality. Indeed, this characterization is an implicit acknowledgment of their agency and complexity, an attribute not often emphasized in Orientalist discourse. Besides, the mention of jewelry as an "investment of their earnings" portrays Bedouin women as self-assured and resourceful. Their decision to invest in jewelry suggests economic independence, challenging the stereotype of passivity often ascribed to Oriental women in Western narratives.

Significantly, female travellers further contribute to these positive representations by offering their own observations and interpretations. Their accounts, while similarly emphasizing beauty and grace, have also created a broader and more layered depiction of the image of the Tunisian women.

2.1.2. Female views

The works by Lady Temple (1835), Herbert (1872), Greville-Nugent (1894), and Mrs. Vivian (as cited in the work of her husband Herbert Vivian 1899) confirm earlier male views about the beauty of Tunisian women and their elaborate ornamentation. More importantly, they shed light on the social qualities of these women as exemplified by their graceful conduct. That is why, this section is going to revolve around these two main thematic headings: mainly physical beauty and social qualities.

2.1.2.1. Physical beauty

One of the general observations made by Lady Temple regarding the physical appearance of Tunisian women is her characterization of them as "handsome." On two different occasions, she emphasizes their exceptional beauty, suggesting a notable admiration for their features. This repeated acknowledgment not only underscores the striking impression these women left on her but also reflects the presence of positive perceptions in nineteenth-century travel narratives. Specifically, Lady Temple refers to the wife of the Bey's eldest son as "a handsome woman" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 201), and in another passage, she offers a more admiring description of the daughter-in-law of the Ben Ayad family, describing her as "one of the handsomest women I ever beheld" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 205). These references reveal an explicit pattern in Lady Temple’s narrative, wherein the physical allure of Tunisian women becomes a recurring theme, a lens through which she interprets and recounts her experiences.

In other passages, Lady Temple focuses on the physical appearance of Moorish women and the daughter of a wealthy family she visited. With regards to the former, she highlights that "many Moorish women look beautiful" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 198). This quote illustrates a straightforward admiration; participating in a broader tendency to highlight the aesthetic allure of Tunisian women. This interpretation is reinforced by the use of the verb "look" which acknowledges the visual appeal perceived by the writer as well as the quantifier "many" which suggests that beauty is not an isolated occurrence but rather a characteristic commonly observed among these women. In another passage, Lady Temple offers a more precise and detailed description of the daughter-in-law of the Ben Ayad family, whom she encountered during her visit to Tunis. The British traveller seems to be captivated by the exceptional beauty of this lady, offering the following vivid description: "Her long eye lashes and large jet black eyes, I certainly never saw equaled for brilliancy […] Her whole

face might be taken as a perfect specimen of female beauty" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 205). It goes without saying that Lady Temple's description positions the Tunisian woman as an example of physical perfection. First, the superlative tone used: "never saw equaled," and "perfect specimen" conveys an extraordinary level of admiration and underscores Lady Temple's view of this woman as exceptional and unparalleled. Second, the focus on visual details—"long eyelashes," "large jet black eyes", and "brilliancy"—creates a vivid and evocative image and reflects the writer's fascination with the visual impact of the woman's beauty. Besides, the focus on distinctive features—"long eyelashes" and "large jet black eyes"—highlights specific traits that are deemed as the embodiment of "perfect specimen of female beauty." Such a description positions the appearance of this Tunisian woman as a universal standard of feminine attractiveness, implying a sense of timelessness and perfection in her. Taken from a critical perspective, Lady Temple's depiction does not carry an objectification of this female figure since her description focuses on the aesthetic and artistic qualities of the woman's beauty rather than depicting her as a sensual or sexual object.

In close alignment with Lady Temple's observations, Lady Herbert, in her account *A Search After Sunshine*; Or *Algeria in 1871*, devoted particular attention to the striking beauty of Tunisian women, emphasizing their intricate adornment. Like Lady Temple, Lady Herbert employed the adjective "handsome" in her description, further aligning the two British travellers in their admiration of Tunisian women's physical appearance. In this regard, she describes women she encountered at aplace in Marsa as "[…] very handsome" (Herbert 1872: 262). This recurring choice of the term "handsome," signifies a distinguished beauty, that transcends mere physical attraction, attributing a certain dignity and strength to these women.

Lady Herbert's admiration extends to the charm of young girls, further underscoring a fascination with the aesthetic dimensions of Tunisian femininity. She asserts that "the little children were beautiful, and so were two of the daughters of the house [...] They had dark almond-shaped eyes, beautiful arched eye-brows, dark hair, and brilliant complexion" (Herbert 1872: 253). As a British female traveller, Herbert's perspective adds deeper complexion to the portrayal, potentially blending admiration with a focus on aesthetic qualities that reflect Victorian ideals of beauty. This idea is reflected in Herbert's reference to the daughters' "dark almond-shaped eyes," "beautiful arched eyebrows," "dark hair," and "brilliant complexion", which aligns with the Victorian ideals of natural beauty. On the other hand, this portrayal reinforces a vision of Tunisian women as embodying a radiant and unique

beauty that captivated nineteenth-century travellers. By beginning her description with the statement, "the little children were beautiful, and so were two of the daughters of the house," Herbert conveys an inclusive admiration, suggesting that beauty is a widespread characteristic of Tunisian women across different age groups. This idea is further enhanced by Herbert's grammatical style which relies on a concise descriptive language. This brevity, in fact, emphasizes the natural and effortless beauty of these women. A similar point of view can be found in another passage where Herbert not only sheds light on the physical beauty of some Tunisian women she encountered at the Marsa palace, but also on their refined adornments: "their beauty is undeniable. The mother of the little princesshad a delicate high-bred face […] Her sister in law was covered with beautiful jewels" (Herbert 1872: 262). Clearly, this quote offers a favourable and engaging depiction of Tunisian women as elegant, graceful, and captivating figures. From the lens of lady Herbert, they are portrayed as embodying an idealized blend of natural beauty—"delicate high-bred face" and—regal sophistication—"beautiful jewels." This is achieved through the use of an empathetic and observational tone which reflects Herbert's appreciation rather than objectification.

In a similar way, both Greville-Nugent and Mrs.Vivian highlight the beauty of Tunisian women with the former referring to the wife of the Arab Sheik as "young and beautiful" (Greville-Nugent 1894: 133) and the latter describing some little girls playing about as "very pretty" (Mrs.Vivian, as cited in Vivian 1899: 68). She goes on noting: "I am afraid that I must have distressed their parents very much by my admiration of them" (Mrs.Vivian as cited in Vivian 1899: 68). Here both writers use simple terms—"beautiful", "very pretty"—to convey genuine admiration and celebrate the beauty of these female figures. But Mrs.Vivian highlights another aspect in her quote which is cultural sensitivity. While she admires the girls, she is also reflective about the impact of her actions, signaling a degree of respect for the host culture. This appreciation of the physical beauty of Tunisian women was further enhanced by travellers' admiration of their graceful and refined demeanor.

2.1.2.2. Social qualities (exemplified by social engagement and graceful conduct)

Both Lady Temple and Lady Herbert highlight aspects that extend beyond physical traits to social qualities. Beginning with lady Temple, she focuses on personality traits that reflect a greater empathy and connection with her subject. For example, she refers to Ben Ayad's wife as "the most good-natured, merry, talkative lady" (lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 205). First, the term "good-natured" emphasizes the woman's kindness and pleasant disposition. It highlights her approachable personality, which was likely seen as an admirable quality by Victorian audience. Second, the use of the adjective "merry" conveys an image of joy and vitality which counters stereotypes that might depict women in non-European cultures as reserved. That very idea is enhanced by the use of the superlative "the most", which elevates her traits to an exceptional level, thereby presenting Tunisian women as socially engaging and expressive. Lady Herbert, however, focuses on another aspect which is the refined demeanor of Tunisian women. She asserts that "the mother of the little princess had a gentle courtesy of manner" (Herbert 1872: 262). Through this quote, Herbert validates the cultural refinement of her subject by referring to her "gentle courtesy of manner". This description challenges Western assumptions of cultural superiority by presenting Tunisian women as embodying grace and refinement, qualities that align with Victorian ideals of aristocratic femininity.

To sum up, the positive representation of Tunisian women established in nineteenth-century British travel narratives laid the groundwork for a continuity of admiration in twentieth-century accounts by both male and female writers. While earlier narratives often emphasized physical beauty, moral virtues, and social qualities as markers of fascination, the focus in the twentieth-century revolved mainly around the aesthetic qualities of Tunisian women. This continuity of admiration, coupled with this shift in emphasis, illustrates the enduring allure of Tunisian women within British travel literature, reframed through the evolving lenses of modernity and cultural exploration.

2.2. The image of the Tunisian woman in twentieth-century accounts

2.2.1. Male views

An analysis of the works from the period under scrutiny reveals that both Fraser (1911) and Douglas (1912) centered their narratives on the aesthetic portrayals of Tunisian women, with a particular emphasis on highlighting their attractive physical beauty. For example, Fraser refers to Oriental women in this laudatory way: "Beautiful, of course. All veiled women of the Orient are beautiful, [...] Their hands were soft. So were their voices. They bought kohl [...] to pencil their eyelashes and make more sparkling their eyes, which I am sure were ravishing" (Fraser 1911: 200).

Fraser's text aligns with the earlier assumption about the aesthetic representation of Tunisian women in twentieth-century travel narratives since it casts an overwhelmingly flattering light on Oriental women in general and Tunisian women in particular. With regards to its structure, the text uses a declarative tone to conveycertainty. This idea is deduced from the opening statement—"beautiful, of course"—which asserts the beauty of veiled women as an unquestionable fact. This is further enhanced by the use of "of course" which implies universality and inevitability, reinforcing an idealized image of Oriental women as inherently beautiful. More importantly, Fraser uses auditory imagery—"their hands were soft. So were their voices"—to evoke a sense of delicacy and gentleness, traits traditionally associated with idealized femininity. This sensory detail enriches the depiction, making it more vivid and intimate. Likewise, the auditory imagery is embellished by the adjectives used, such as "sparkling," "ravishing," and "soft," which not only emphasize the women's physical attributes, but also elevates them to an almost other worldly standard of beauty. The hyperbolic tone—"which I am sure were ravishing"—further idealizes their appearance. This general description is further narrowed down by Fraser's representation of Tunisian Jewess as "a vision of prettiness" (Fraser 1911: 189). It goes without saying that Fraser's text immediately conveys a sense of admiration and appreciation for the young Tunisian Jewess's appearance. The term "vision" suggests an almost ethereal or other worldly quality, elevating her beauty to something captivating and beyond the ordinary.

Douglas also offers a similar positive portrayal that reflects travellers'admiration ofand attraction to the beauty of Tunisian women. In one of his chapters, he elevates the women's physical appearance to an idealized standard of beauty by focusing on their "neatly chiselled

limbs and elfish eyes of a sultry, troubling charm into which, if sentimentally disposed, you can read an ocean of love" (Douglas 1912: 50). In Douglas's text, women are described as having "neatly chiselled limbs" and "elfish eyes", features that suggest delicacy, grace, and refinement. These descriptions lay emphasis on the elegance of their appearance, showcasing them as physically attractive and well-formed. Then, Douglas introduces a deeper emotional layer by stating that one might "read an ocean of love" in their eyes. This suggests that the women possess an emotional depth that adds to their allure. Added to that, the phrase "sultry, troubling charm" is both visually and emotionally charged. The word "sultry" invokes heat and passion, while "troubling" hints at a seductive allure. These words combine to create a potent image of women who are simultaneously beautiful and emotionally compelling. To reinforce his positive perception of the aesthetic appeal of Tunisian women, he depicts the young girls from Gafsa as "frolicsome as gazelles" (Douglas 1912: 84). Clearly, the use of the simile "as gazelles "is crucial to shaping the reader's perception of the girls. Gazelles are often seen as symbols of grace, speed, and beauty, and comparing the girls to them elevates their physical and emotional attributes. This comparison is an elegant and poetic way of emphasizing the girls' attractiveness and liveliness.

We can deduce that the positive representation of Tunisian women in twentieth-century male-authored books revolves mainly around their aesthetic physical beauty, portraying them asattractive and enchanting figures. This focus on physicality is not exclusive to male writers; female travel authors of the same period also adopted similar perspectives, frequently emphasizing the aesthetic appeal of these women. This shared focus on aesthetic appeal contrasts with the nineteenth-century narratives, where both male and female writers often combined descriptions of physical beauty with discussions of moral virtues and social qualities of Tunisian women. The shift from a multidimensional portrayal to a primarily physical one highlights a significant transformation in the representational priorities of twentieth-century travel literature, revealing the changing nature of travellers' gaze.

2.2.2. Female views

Twentieth-century female writers like Nesbitt (1906), Lorimer (1906), Ward (1920), and Warren (1923) focus in their narratives on the beauty of Tunisian women as well as young Tunisian girls with a particular emphasis in some cases on their elaborate ornamentation. Starting with the depiction of young girls, Lorimer, Nesbitt, as well as Ward referred to their beauty in a flattering way. For example, Lorimer asserts that "there were lots and lots of charming little girls" (Lorimer 1906: 295). In this quote, the author celebrates the aesthetic qualities of these little girls—"charming"—aligning her description with an affectionate, almost maternal tone that reveals some admiration for the innocence and beauty of childhood. As for Nesbitt, she describes them as "gay as butterflies" (Nesbitt 1906: 224). Here, the use of a simile—"as butterflies"—suggests that these little girls possess both a delicate charm and a light, care free spirit. In another passage, Nesbitt offers a more detailed description of Tunisian girls in a wedding ceremony by focusing also on their cultural distinctiveness:

> The girls, with their bright beauty enhanced by the quaint horned caps, the gay silk veils, and chains and jewels gleaming under the flickering lights, the lace sleeves falling away from their bare arms, and their lithe, graceful forms wrapped in bright-hued silk, were a perfect picture. (Nesbitt 1906: 226)

The above quote combines elements of physical beauty—"bright beauty"—with items that symbolize cultural and social value—"horned caps", "silk veils", and "jewels"—to emphasize the cultural distinctiveness of these girls. Besides, the language used is rich in detail, drawing attention to both physical features and cultural adornments. Words like "bright beauty", "gay silk veils," and "gleaming" are visually evocative, creating a sense of vividness and dynamism. The imagery is meant to make the reader visualize the scene, almost as if witnessing the wedding ceremony firsthand.What is worth mentioning is that the clothing and jewels are presented as integral to the women’s appearance, linking their beauty to their cultural identity. This gives the depiction a sense of depth, as it connects the women's attractiveness to their participation in a ceremonial context, rather than reducing them solely to objects of admiration.

Actually, Nesbitt's travel account appears to be notably rich in its descriptions of Tunisian young girls. In another passage, she similarly refers to them in a flattering manner, further emphasizing their physical charm and cultural uniqueness: "The girls are lovely and graceful, and their method of winding a wide piece of striped material round them by way of a petticoat shows their slender frames to great advantage, whilst the gay kerchief on their heads contrasts brilliantly with their dark hair and eyes" (Nesbitt 1906: 165).

Clearly, the language used in this description is laden with admiration and respect for the girls' appearance, portraying them as not only physically attractive but also culturally unique and elegant. Indeed, terms such as "lovely" and "graceful" emphasize their refined qualities and present them as embodiments of idealized femininity. Moreover, the specific mention of the "wide piece of striped material" reflects their distinctiveness and adds layers of cultural significance to their appearance. But more importantly, the harmony created between the girls' "slender frames", the brightly colored "gay kerchief", and their "dark hair and eyes" produces an image of aesthetic balance. The attention to detail in describing these contrasting elements enhances the visual appeal of the scene, suggesting that their beauty is not only natural but carefully displayed. Their grace and poise are further emphasized by how the attire wraps around their bodies, elevating their beauty to a level that is both physical and cultural.

Along the same lines as Lorimer and Nesbitt, Ward refers to Tunisian girls in the same appealing manner: "a nice little girl of fourteen or fifteen came round the corner, very gaily dressed, a bright kerchief binding her hair, and her dress fastened with a brooch on her shoulder" (Ward 1920: 153). First, the use of the adjectives "nice" and "little" conveys not only fondness toward the girl, but also emphasizes her youth and innocence. Second, the description of her dress as "very gaily" suggests a lively, cheerful, and vibrant demeanour. The mention of a "bright kerchief" and a "brooch" adds a cultural and aesthetic detail to the girl’s appearance, indicating her connection to the Tunisian cultural dress. The "kerchief" is a traditional item of clothing, and its brightness enhances the sense of cheerfulness and energy associated with her, while the brooch adds an elegant touch to her appearance.

For a more balanced analysis, it is important to note that these female writers did not limit their observations to young Tunisian girls; their narratives also extended to Tunisian women, whom they depicted in an equally positive light. This parallel in representation underscores a consistent admiration for the aesthetic and cultural qualities of Tunisian female figures across different age groups. For instance, Lorimer refers to aTunisian woman she

encountered as "pretty, smiling […] who answered very well to the analysis of Arab female beauty" (Lorimer 1906: 88). The first part of the quote is characterized byvivid and evocative imagery, exemplified through the use of descriptive adjectives such as "pretty" and "smiling", which immediately establishes the woman as a figure of aesthetic appeal. The second part of the quote is significant as it links the woman's appearance to a cultural standard of beauty. By saying that she "answered very well to the analysis of Arab female beauty", the author suggests an appreciation for her adherence to the ideals of cultural attractiveness in her community. In doing so, Lorimer shows a recognition of the cultural context in which she exists, offering a form of respect toward her heritage and appearance. This marks a step toward understanding her beauty on her own terms, rather than merely imposing Western standards of beauty on her.

In a similar vein, Warren describes Tunisian women that she encountered in a wedding ceremony in an overwhelmingly positive tone: "Upon the divan *safour* damsels dressed in gorgeous dresses, with their hair arranged extravagantly, their eyebrows penciled to meet that ideal of beauty, "crescent moons," their hands and feet henna-ed and jingling with beads and chains" (Warren 1923: 117). To enhance their feminine charm, Warren's above description draws attention to elements traditionally associated with femininity—such as adornment, beauty rituals, and delicate features. First of all, by describing the dresses as "gorgeous," the author emphasizes the richness and splendor of the women's attire, implying that they are well-cared-for, admired, and valued. Second, the adverb "extravagantly" suggests not onlythat the women's hairstyles are elaborate but also that they go beyond everyday beauty intothe realm of art and spectacle. Third, the reference to "crescent moons" and "henna" ascultural symbols enhance the women's beauty, grace, and femininity. Also, the beads and chains not only suggest wealth and status but also reinforce the visual appeal of the women, making them appear more elegant and sophisticated. Significantly, Warren's focus on these traditional customs helps portray these women as part of a rich cultural tapestry, making their beauty not only physical but also deeply rooted in cultural identity.

The representation of Tunisian women in British travel narratives from the nineteenth to the twentieth century reveals both a remarkable continuity of fascination and a subtle transformation in the travellers' gaze. Across both centuries, male and female authors alike engaged in a discourse of admiration, often emphasizing the physical beauty of Tunisian women through vivid descriptions. Starting with the nineteenth-century, travellers intertwined

their aesthetic appreciation with the celebration of Tunisian women's moral virtues, social qualities, and even economic independence. For instance, travellers such as Lady Temple, Graham and Aschbee and Lady Herbert celebrated the beauty, grace, and refined demeanour of Tunisian women. Indeed, this emphasis on social qualities, besides the physical ones, serves to challenge the reductionist tropes often associated with Orientalist discourse.

Interestingly, however, as the twentieth century unfolded, the emphasis gradually shifted, reducing these portrayals to a predominantly aesthetic appreciation, where descriptions of beauty became increasingly detached from deeper social and moral considerations. This transition reflects more than a mere change in descriptive focus. Rather,it signals a broader shift in the travellers' gaze, one that moved from a multidimensional perspective toward an almost aesthetic idealization. This evolution exemplifies the dynamic nature of cross-cultural encounters and the enduring influence of Western frameworks in shaping perceptions of the ‘Other.’

Yet, this aesthetic appreciation and remarkable praise were not devoid of contradictions. Alongside admiration, British travellers also perpetuated reductive and often disparaging depictions of Tunisian women, revealing an inherent ambivalence at the heart of their narratives.

3. The negative representation of the Tunisian female figure

One of the viable tools to approach the negative representation of Tunisian women in male and female travel narratives is the concept of representation. Tracing the origins of this concept, Aristotle argues that the act of representing is "an inherently human activity" (Aristotle, as cited in Mitchell 1990: 11), asserting that "man learns his first lessons by representing things" (Aristotle, as cited in Mitchell 1990: 11). Advancing through time, Martin Heidegger (1977) contends that the "modern age is the age of representation [...] with the implication that the world exists only in/through a subject who believes that he/she is producing the world in producing its representation" (Heidegger, as cited in Prasad 2003: 125). Heidegger goes further, suggesting that the ultimate aim of representation is total mastery, achieved through "a laying hold and grasping, a making-stand-over-against, an objectifying that goes forward and masters" (Heidegger 1977: 149–150). Likewise, Hall (1997) defines representation as "using language to say something meaningful about, or represent the world meaningfully to other people" (Hall 1997: 15). In a comparable vein, Louis Marin (1980) observes that "whoever represents the world appropriates reality for himself/herself" (Marin, as cited in Prasad 2003: 127). Marin further contends that this act of appropriation enables the represented to "dominate it, thereby constituting it as an apparatus of power" (Marin, as cited in Prasad 2003: 127). In line with Marin, Roland Barthes asserts that "representations are deformations" (Barthes, as cited in Bhabha 1994:103) since they are produced from a certain point of view.

This notion of representation takes on particular significance when considering the ways Eastern people are portrayed in Western literature. According to Marandi and Ensieh (2015), representation is "a phenomenon created by writers, intellectuals, artists, commentators, travellers, and politicians working within specific discursive formations" (Marandi & Ensieh: 23). These representations are socially constructed and play a critical role in reinforcing and reproducing hegemonic rhetoric. Furthermore, Edward Said (1978) emphasizes the fact that encounters between Easterners and Westerners are shaped by "a restricted number of typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation" (Said 1978: 58-59). These recurring tropes, alongside aesthetic separations, fuel the portrayal of Easterners in ways that often sustain Western dominance. One of the best articulations of this line of thought can be found in the following passage extracted from Said's seminal book *Orientalism*:

> She never spoke of herself, never represented her emotions, presence or history. He spoke for her and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was typically Oriental. (Said 1978: 187)

In the above passage, Edward Said illustrates how Gustave Flaubert represented Kuchuk Hanem, the Egyptian dancer, in his 1862 book *Salammbô*. Notably, Flaubert's quote serves as critical starting point for the forthcoming analysis, as it closely mirrors the ways in which British male and female travellers constructed and depicted the image of the Tunisian woman. Moreover, this analysis draws on Martin Heidegger's concept of "Enframing the Orient" since it positions Tunisian women as "a mere scientific object under the observer's gaze" (Heidegger, as citedin Zerouali 2017:12). Through this lens, the representation of Tunisian women is situated within a broader framework of objectification and colonial gaze, reflecting the dynamics of power and domination inherent in Orientalist discourse. Consequently, the Tunisian woman becomes "an object of study, stamped withan otherness—as allthatis different,whether it be subject or object—but of a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character" (Abdelmalek 1963: 107).

In more specific terms, this section seeks to critically examine how British male and female travellers used the tropes of imperial discourse to construct an image of Tunisian women shaped by the prevailing ideologies of the time. This portrayal predominantly hinges on the following stereotypical motifs: seclusion, indolence, ignorance, and ugliness. Building on this view, British travellers condemned the Tunisian woman physically (ugly, excessively adorned, and fat), morally (indolent), socially (secluded), and intellectually (ignorant). These motifs underscore a cultural dichotomy between the "civilized" British observer and the "uncivilized" Tunisian subject, reinforcing a narrative of Western superiority. By perpetuating these stereotypes, British travellers not only echoed the ethnocentric biases of their era but also perpetuated the dominant principles of Orientalist discourse, which sought to justify imperial domination through the cultural "othering" of non-Western peoples. Significantly, these negative representations, when compared to earlier positive portrayals, reveal the

inherent contradictions within travellers' discourse. Such a contrast underscores the duality of these narratives, reflecting both the travellers' ethnocentric biases and the shifting perspectives within imperial discourse.

3.1. Tunisian women through a male gaze

3.1.1. The Tunisian woman as ugly

3.1.1.1. Nineteenth-century views

Beginning with general observations regarding the physical appearance of Tunisian women, Sir Greneville Temple (1835), Wingfield (1868), Graham & Aschbee (1887), shared a consensus about the perceived inferiority of Oriental women in terms of beauty when compared to their Western counterparts. This shared perception was often rooted in the broader framework of Orientalist discourse, which sought to construct a dichotomy between the "refined" Western ideal and the supposedly "unpolished" characteristics of the East. According to these accounts, Tunisian women were frequently described as lacking not only the physical grace but also the sophisticated tastes and manners that were valorized within European cultural paradigms. Such representations reinforced a hierarchical worldview in which Western women were upheld as the embodiment of beauty and civility, while their Eastern counterparts were relegated to a subordinate position, embodying what was deemed as aesthetically inferior. They also serve to highlight the ambivalence inherent in the discourse of these travellers since they stressed the physical beauty of these Tunisian women in other passages.

Starting with Sir Temple, he refers to a group of women he encountered in a way that both denigrates and objectifies them: "under the arcades were seated a number of fat, unwieldy creatures, talking furiously, and looking most attentivelyat us. No etiquette seemed to reign amongst them" (Temple 1835: 197). Clearly, Temple's quote reinforces the power dynamics at play: first the women are placed in a position of objectification "creatures". Second, their social existence is depicted as lacking the refinement that was associated with European femininity as evidenced by the use of the word "unwieldy". This was also intensified by his description of them as "fat". Third, their behaviour is scrutinized and judged against Western standards: "No etiquette seemed to reign amongst them". In fact, the use of the expression "under the arcades" is very significant here because in the imperial gaze, public

spaces like arcades often served as places of observation, where the observer could look at the "other" from a position of superiority. To sum up, Temple's negative portrayal not only denigrates the physical appearance of these women, who are described as "fat", but also depicts them as uncivilized—"no etiquette"—which contributes to a larger narrative of racial and gendered superiority that was pervasive in nineteenth-century colonial literature.

As far as the other writers are concerned, they emphasized the perceived fatness of Tunisian women, considering it as an indicator of their physical inferiority. For instance, Wingfield tries to " [...] tell his readers in what way [Tunisian women] are typically Oriental" (Said 1978: 187) by focusing on their extreme fatness. In this regard, he asserts that "the Tunisian ladies are generally too fat to please European eyes" (Wingfield 1868: 313). Obviously, this quote serves as a succinct example of how nineteenth-century British travel literature portrays the Tunisian woman within a complex web of cultural and racial dichotomies. Wingfield's emphasis on the "fatness" of Tunisian women and his invocation of "European eyes" vividly illustrates the colonial mindset that evaluated the bodies and behaviours of non-Western peoples through a comparative framework rooted in notions of Western superiority. According to him, the value of these "ladies" is intrinsically tied to their physical appearance, assessed primarily through the lens of European standards of beauty.Itis therefore unsurprising that he concludes his description with the expression "to please European eyes," a phrase that underscores the power dynamics inherent in colonial attitudes. This dynamic positions the European gaze as the ultimate arbiter of beauty, reducing Tunisian women to passive objects whose worth lies in their ability to satisfy the expectations of the colonial observer.

What complicates this imperial gaze, however, is its inherent ambivalence. In a seemingly contradictory moment, Wingfield later describes these same women as a "vision of beauty" (Wingfield 1868: 304). This juxtaposition reveals the fragmented and inconsistent nature of the traveller's discourse, which oscillates between reductive Orientalist stereotypes and unexpectedly admiring portrayals, highlighting the complexities within the colonial representation of the Other.

Similarly, Graham and Aschbee focused in their narrative on the fatness of Jewish women. In this regard they claimed:

> In the account of our visit to Sfax we made special note of their curious appearance. Young or old, they are nearly always fat — to an extent indeed which would be deemed incredible byone who has not seen them ; and as obesityis in the eyes of their relations and admirers their chief attraction, art is employed to assist nature in augmenting the volume of their charms. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 200-201)

This excerpt constructs a negative and reductive image of Tunisian women, shaped by colonial attitudes that elevate Western standards of beauty while dismissing the cultural norms of the Other. First of all, the statement "Young or old, theyare nearly always fat" usesa sweeping generalization that erases individuality and diversity among Tunisian women. Their use of the expression "nearly always" denies the women anyunique identities, reducing them to a monolithic stereotype. Second, Graham and Aschbee rely on hyperbolic language to emphasize their supposed extreme obesity as suggested by the statement "to an extent indeed which would be deemed incredible by one who has not seen them." This implies that the appearance of these women defies the norms of acceptability or understanding from a European perspective, further othering them. Third, the authors attribute this physical trait to cultural values, stating that "obesity is in the eyes of their relations and admirers their chief attraction." By doing so, the authors subtly criticize the Tunisian society for upholding what the writers deem undesirable standards of beauty. Finally, their statement "art is employed to assist nature in augmenting the volume of their charms" suggests that Tunisian women actively manipulate their bodies to conform to these cultural standards of beauty. Significantly, the juxtaposition of "nature"and "art" reflects a lack of authenticity, reinforcing the writers' dismissive tone toward Tunisian women's beauty practices. Building on the analysis above, Graham and Ashbee's description can be understood as firmly rooted in the broader dynamics of Orientalist discourse, where physical appearance serves as a key mechanism for asserting cultural superiority. However, their apparent adherence to conventional Orientalist stereotypes is intriguingly complicated by some moments of contradiction. In another instance, they describe Tunisian Jewish women as "frequently" embodying "great beauty," characterized by "big, lustrous eyes, finely cut features, [and] delicate, transparent skins" (Graham & Ashbee 1887: 200-201). This inconsistency underscores the fragmented and ambivalent nature of their representation, reflecting broader tensions and contradictions inherent in the travellers' discourse as a whole. This fracture continues to be omnipresent in twentieth-century narratives.

3.1.2.1. Twentieth-century views

The works of Sladen (1906), Fraser (1911), and Douglas (1912) serve as compelling evidence of the ambivalent nature of travellers' discourse, oscillating between qualified appreciation and outright denigration. Sladen, for instance, dismisses the physical appearance of Tunisian women as "ordinary", using this as a justification for why "they do not need veiling" (Sladen 1906: 553). Significantly, the dichotomy between "beauty" and "ordinariness" is central to this passage. The Western gaze here reduces Tunisian women to physical attributes alone, with their appearance measured against European beauty standards. By describing their faces as "ordinary," Sladen denies them any form of beauty that might be admired in a European context. The statement about the veil further reinforces this idea, since Sladen uses it to highlight the "unattractiveness" of the Tunisian women, implying that their faces did not even deserve to be concealed. This mirrors the colonial ideology of cultural and racial supremacy, wherein non- European women are systematically constructed as inferior and unworthy within the dominant Eurocentric framework.

Fraser, in turn, grotesquely caricatures Tunisian women as "fat, podgy, waddling" figures, likening them to "Humpty Dumpty." (Fraser 1911: 188). He further reinforces this reductive portrayal by asserting, "If you love fat women, come to Tunis. […] The Tunisian—Moslem or Jew—likes bulk. He likes his wife to look like an overcharged balloon. He likes her to be so fat that she hobbles and rolls." (Fraser 1911: 188). Through such rhetoric, Fraser constructs an exaggerated and derogatory image that aligns with colonial stereotypes,reducing Tunisian women to their physicality while simultaneously considering their bodiesas unnatural and grotesque. The author's reliance on expressions such as "humpty dumpty" emphasizes a perception of these women as awkward, physically flawed, and beyond repair.It suggests a lack of grace or cohesion and reinforces negative stereotypes about their physicality and cultural position in the eyes of the European observer. Moreover, his deliberate choice of adjectives like "fat, podgy, waddling, wobbling" create a derogatory and mocking tone, emphasizing the physical bulk of Tunisian women in a waythat is meant to be humorous or grotesque from aEuropean lens. Fraser's simile"an overcharged balloon" further dehumanizes the women by reducing them to a shape that is mechanical or lifeless. More importantly, Fraser's grouping of "Moslems and Jews" in this particular way denies the complexity and diversity within Tunisian society, highlighting an essentialist view, where Tunisians are depicted as one-dimensional and culturally static. This representation is part of

a broader colonial discourse that sought to justify the superiority of Western civilization by positioning non-European people as backward and inferior. Indeed, Fraser restates the same view in another passage by claiming that "they are disgustingly plump—no, fat is the word [...] You may see the folds of the fat" (Fraser 1911: 197). Strikingly enough, the use of "plump" followed by "fat is the word" shows a shift in tone from a euphemistic description—"plump"—to a more explicit term: "fat". This insistence on "fat" rather than "plump" reflects a conscious choice to use a term that carries more negative connotations, solidifying the view that the physical appearance of these women is undesirable in the eyes of the western observer. The imagery of "folds" contributes to a sense of degradation since it reduces Tunisian women to their bodies, ignoring any aspect of their humanity beyond physical appearance.

Interestingly, however, Fraser characterizes Tunisian women in another passage as inherently "beautiful" (Fraser 1911: 200). This duality reveals an unstable gaze that vacillates between fascination and contempt, ascribing both denigrating attributes and positive qualities to the same group of women.

Douglas (1912) further embodies this contradiction, portraying a Tunisian woman from Gafsa as: "Wild-eyed young wench, with her disheveled hair, ferocious bangle-ornaments, tattooings, and nondescript blue rags open at the side and revealing charms well fitted to disquiet some robust savage-what has such a creature in common with the rest of us?." (Douglas 1912: 15). Clearly, Douglas's choice of words paints a picture of this Tunisian woman as savage, primitive, and culturally alien in comparison to the European observer. First, the adjective "wild-eyed" immediately suggests a lack of civility and refinement. Second, the use of "disheveled" to describe the woman's hair evokes the wildness of her appearance, from hair to clothing, reinforcing the idea of her being outside the bounds of European beauty standards. The description of her clothing as "non-descript blue rags open at the side" furthers the perception of her as uncivilized and impoverished. Notably, the rhetorical question at the end of his description is an explicit dismissal of the woman's humanity and any commonality she might have with Europeans. Further in his narrative, Douglas concludes that the woman "was decidedly ugly" (Douglas 1912: 50). Though brief, the structure and language used are emblematic of the kind of reductive and disparaging portrayal of this woman. Notably, his choice of the adverb "decidedly" signals that the observer has firmly classified the woman as ugly, presenting this conclusion as objective and

indisputable. This adverb adds weight to the negativity, transforming what could be a more subjective opinion into an unequivocal statement. Also, the adjective "ugly" is a straightforward and harsh term that carries a judgmental tone, aligning with the broader colonial tendency to reduce women to their physical attributes and evaluate them based on the European ideals of beauty.

Astonishingly enough, Douglas, in another passage, describes a woman's "neatly chiselled limbs and elfish eyes" as having "a sultry, troubling charm," (Douglas 1912: 50). These shifting portrayals, in fact, expose the travellers' ambivalence; thereby constructing Tunisian women as objects of both revulsion and admiration.

Consequently, these quotes stand out as striking examples of a Western male gaze which becomes "not only part of the Oriental/ Western power dynamics at play in the artistic representations of the Orient but also part of the Victorian culture of surveillance" (Seddiki 2019: 167). This male gaze—which tries to control and possess women—aims essentially at reproducing Orientalist stereotypes by recreating a derogatory version of the Oriental female figure as a voiceless and spiritless subject. Actually, the image of the victimized female figure was further accentuated by depicting her as strictly confined in a male-dominated realm.

3.1.2. The Tunisian woman as secluded

A recurring theme in nineteenth and early twentieth-century British travel narratives is the depiction of the Tunisian woman as a figure of profound seclusion, hidden behind the walls of domesticity and shielded from the public gaze. The British male traveller often perceives this seclusion as an emblem of oppression that simultaneously frustrates and fuels his desire to uncover the hidden world of the Oriental woman.

3.1.2.1. Nineteenth-century views

This trope of seclusion is central to the accounts of Blaquière (1813), Temple (1835), and Reid (1882), each of whom contributes to the definition of the Tunisian woman through her own invisibility. Blaquiere, for instance, emphasizes the oppressive conditions faced by Tunisian women by highlighting the following:

> The unhappy state of servitude to which the women are reduced here, excluded from social intercourse with the world and their nearest relatives, never permitted to appear in public and continually subject to the brutal jealousy of a capricious husband. These are but a few of the miseries which attend the life of these unfortunate victims. (Blaquiere 1813: 194-195).

In the above quote, Blaquiere uses a series of descriptive phrases: "excluded from social intercourse," "never permitted to appear in public," "continually subject to the brutal jealousy". This enumerative style creates a cumulative effect that further amplifies the supposed miseryof Tunisian women. Besides, the quote is loaded with subjective descriptors such as "unhappy," "miseries," "unfortunate victims," and "capricious husband "which evoke a strong emotional reaction by portraying these women as helpless, pitiable, and subjugated. More importantly, this quote serves to perpetuate Orientalist tropes as it portrays Tunisian women as being denied the right of "any social intercourse" and being the "unfortunate victims" of the "brutal jealousy" of "capricious husbands". This view is reinforced by the image of the "capricious husband" who is depicted as the primary oppressor, embodying the stereotype of the barbaric, irrational, and tyrannical Arab male.

Indeed, this lack of intercourse with the outside world was also raised by Sir Temple who condemned the fact that Tunisian women were largely prevented from socializing with the outside world. If rarely allowed to do so, the sole diverting activity was to go to a public garden and "amuse themselves in summer by looking at the fish [...] The poor creatures are allowed no other" (Temple 1835: 203). Temple's quote is composed of two short declarative sentences. This simple structure is deliberately chosen to suggest certainty and to leave no room for alternative interpretations of the lives of Tunisian women. Notably, his use of the phrase "poor creatures" is a dehumanizing descriptor as it reduces these women to pitiable

objects without agency. Furthermore, the expression "are allowed no other" uses a passive construction, emphasizing their lack of freedom and portraying them as wholly subject to external control. Even the evocation of the activity—"looking at the fish"—portrays the women as idle and confined to trivial pursuits. This trivialization strips them of depth and reinforces stereotypes of non-Western women as passive and marginalised.

Notably, both Blaquiere and Temple's quotations serve to confirm a clichéd image about the oppression of Tunisian women in a patriarchal society. Clearly enough, their extracts are replete with cultural stereotypes since they evaluate the life of Tunisian women from an ethnocentric point of view. Indeed, everything is judged against Western standards and traditions; that is why, women are depicted as "unhappy", "unfortunate victims", "poor creatures", living in "a state of servitude", and "excluded from social intercourse."

In close alignment with Blaquiere and Temple, Thomas Reid also comments on the state of seclusion in which Tunisian women live. In this regard, he asserts: "Nowhere in the world,I imagine, is a man's house so entirely his castle as it is in these semi-savage Arab towns on North Coast of Africa" (Reid 1882: 201). In this quote, Reid establishes an exaggerated universal comparison: "Nowhere in the world" sets a tone of presupposed authority implying the author's biased perspective is plausible without further evidence. Second, the metaphor a man's house is his castle" is employed to emphasize male dominance and control, suggesting that this control is amplified in "semi-savage" regions. The latter expression is a deeply prejudiced descriptor that otherizes Arab towns and their culture; implying moral and cultural inferiority. But what is more striking is that women are entirely absent from this narrative, highlighting their erasure from the public discourse. Their silence and invisibility reinforce their objectification and lack of agency within these towns, as perceived by this male gaze.

Yet, these reductive views that overlook the complexity of the Tunisian society can be critically examined to reveal their incoherence and vulnerability. This could be achieved by the reference to perceptions of Graham and Aschbee who depicted the Tunisian Bedouin woman as an emblem of freedom, self-sufficiency, and intellectual capability:

> The Bedouin women do not cover their faces, but seem proud of their red skins, face, neck, and chest tattooed with all sorts of quaint devices. Their countenances are expressive of intelligence, if not of beauty […] They affect garments of bright colours, and wear a profusion of silver jewellery (the investment of their earnings), to be valued

rather by weight of metal than by delicacy of work manship. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 199).

3.1.2.2. Twentieth-century views

It is crucial to note that a similar line of thought is noticed in the narratives of twentieth-century writers who sought to define Tunisian women as passive figures locked away in an archaic social order. One of the ardent proponents of this perception is Sladen who avers that "a lady hardly ever leaves her house, and in the Medina—the Arab quarter—a man may notgo on his house top, lest he should overlook his neighbour's wife" (Sladen 1906: 324). Likewise, Fraser highlights that "Life must have been particularly boresome to the stout ladies who never went to the opera, nor the theatre, nor the races, nor picnicked, nor dined at restaurants, nor sat outside cafes and chatted with their husband's friends" (Fraser 1911: 194- 195). As far as Sladen's quote is concerned, what is first striking is his deliberate reference to "the Medina, the Arab quarter" which situates the observation in a particular cultural and geographical context. This reference reinforces Orientalist stereotypes by isolating the described practice as unique to Arab societies, implying a moral and cultural backwardness compared to Western norms. In addition to that, Sladen opts for declarative statements, presented as factual and authoritative, in order to reinforce the idea that they are objective truths. The first statement portrays Tunisian women as entirely secluded and lacking mobility or social presence, while the second one indicates that men are restricted from using their rooftops, which suggests an excessive, almost irrational preoccupation with controlling women’s visibility. Significantly, both statements serve to emphasize the rigidity of gender roles in the Tunisian society with the latter depicted as hyper-patriarchal. Indeed, this ideawas further stressed by Fraser who defines Tunisian women’s lives entirely by what they do not do, denying them complexity, individuality, and agency. To be able to build such a negative representation, the author relies on a series of negative conjunctions: "nor the theatre, nor the races, nor picnicked, nor dined at restaurants", which creates a cumulative effect. This repeated negation not only amplifies the sense of deprivation, but also depicts non-European cultures as inherently repressive. Besides, the enumeration of specific activities such as "the opera," "the theatre," "the races", creates an impression of exhaustive deprivation. This list of activities reflects Western leisure pursuits and projects them as universal markers of a fulfilling life.When these activities are absent, the life of Tunisian women is judged as

oppressive and "trivial", dismissing the possibility of cultural differences or alternative sources of fulfillment.

If we consider the aforementioned quotations, we could argue that the very absence of the Tunisian woman paradoxically shapes the discursive frameworks through which she is constructed. She is scrutinized, categorized, and judged, yet she remains physically inaccessible. This renders her an elusive figure defined more by European assumptions than by her own subjectivity. In fact, this physical inaccessibility of the female figure, coupled with the males' inability to penetrate the guarded world of the harem, compel travel writers to conceptualize the Tunisian woman through negation, reducing her to an absence that reinforces preconceived notions of subjugation and confinement.

In brief, this trope of seclusion aligns with the broader imperial logic that sought to defineand control non-Western population from an ethnocentric perspective. By portraying the Tunisian woman as a passive figure locked away in an archaic social order, these travel narratives reinforce the idea of the Muslim world as static, backward, and resistant to progress. Thus, seclusion is not merely a physical reality but a textual construct—one that serves to uphold colonial hierarchies by positioning the Western observer as enlightened and civilized. Intriguingly, the depiction of the Tunisian woman as secluded and confined was not merely a symbol of her oppression but was also construed as the very source of her monotonous existence and alleged intellectual inferiority.

3.1.3. The Tunisian woman as indolent

Based on our analysis of twentieth-century travel accounts, we have found that Sladen explicitly commented on the perceived laziness and intellectual deficiency of Tunisian women. His perspective appears to have been influenced by the observations of the American travel writer Ernst Wartegg (1882), alongside the accounts of Graham and Aschbee (1887) concerning the lives of Tunisian women. In fact, Wartegg emphasizes the laziness of Tunisian women by asserting that: "the Moorish ladies spend most of their time in bathing, dressing, and sleeping, and the only amusements allowed them are music, tales, and dances" (Wartegg 1882: 98). By reducing the women’s daily lives to "bathing, dressing, and sleeping," Wartegg suggests that their existence revolves around idleness, representing them as shallow and disengaged from any meaningful or productive pursuits. This ultimately led Graham and Aschbee to conclude that "the inmates are [...] trivial" (Graham & Aschbee1887:199).This

quote reflects a dismissive attitude toward the local women by depicting them as lacking depth. It reduces them to superficial figures, seemingly disengaged from any pursuits of significance, thus reinforcing a Eurocentric gaze that denies them complexity and agency.

In the early twentieth century, Salden highlights a similar view as the earlier ones by commenting on the laziness of Tunisian women as follows: "she does a little sewing—very little, sleeps, eats, and talks" (Sladen 1906: 472). He further observes that these "menial functions make the women stupid […] they are nothing but children" (Sladen 1906:474), and thus, in his view, they are "responsible for their social inferiority" (Sladen 1906: 474). In the first passage, the use of the simple present—"does", "sleeps", "talks"—creates a static, timeless quality, implying that the life of Tunisian women is unchanging and empty. More importantly, the described actions—"sewing", "eating", "talking"—are considered as superficial and trivial. The emphasis on their simplicity and repetitiveness reduces the woman's life to mundane tasks, suggesting a lack of intellect and purpose. This description fits into Orientalist narratives that depict non Western women as lacking agency and complexity, reinforcing the imperial gaze that sees her existence as simplistic and inferior.The second excerpt further emphasizes this view. It has a simple and direct structure, with little elaboration, which gives the impression that the representation of Tunisian women as "stupid" and "children" is an indisputable truth. This goes largely in tune with Edward Said's notion of the Oriental as "childlike" and the European as "mature" (Said 1978: 40). Besides, Sladen adopts a sweeping and reductive tone: "make the women stupid". This broad generalization rests upon a deeply entrenched stereotype—one that presumes the existence of "an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom or type" (Said 2003: 86), thereby reinforcing rigid and essentialist notions about non-Western identities. In the last quote, Sladen declares that Tunisian women occupy a position of "social inferiority", a belittling perspective that actively constructs "a narrative of alterity" (Gilbert, as cited in Seddiki 2019: 57). The latter represents non Western cultures "[...] within an epistemological paradigm that transfixed difference [...] rendering it inert, passive, and powerless in a pictorial form which was invested with considerable truth value" (Seddiki 2019: 57).

In a nutshell, what could be deduced from all these views is that British male writers echoed the spirit of a Victorian imperial culture which "inculcated a belief in English superiority" while "creat[ing] Orientalist notions of other inferior cultures" (Grewal 1996: 58). Besides, each male writer contributes, in his own way, to promoting a stereotypical image of

the Tunisian woman as ugly, secluded, and lazy. Put differently, the Tunisian woman was portrayed through a narrowand reductive framework, shaped by what Mary Louise Pratt calls "the lens of Eurocentric elitism" (Pratt 1992: 7). Within this perspective, natives were relegated to a subordinate status, invariably positioned as the inferior counterparts of their Western observers. Consistent with this idea, British female writers' depictions of Tunisian women is as ethnocentric as their male counterparts. It is that very phallocentric discourse as disguised in a female authorial voice that will be further scrutinized in the upcoming part.

3.2. Tunisian women through a female gaze

Our readings of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British travel narratives led us to conclude that the subject of Tunisian women is much more extensively dealt with in female narratives than in male ones, primarily for two main reasons. The first reason is structural, stemming from the fact that male travellers were largely excluded from access to Tunisian harems. As Graham and Aschbee note, "admission [to Tunisian harems] is never granted to men" (Graham & Aschbee 1887:198). Additionally, it was considered "a gross impertinence" to question an Arab about his domestic arrangements" or inquire "after a man's wife and family" (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 198). This restriction, which was not exclusive to Tunis, prompted the French writer and critic Theophile Gautier to assert, in 1861, that "Only women should go to Turkey—what can a man see in this jealous country?" (Gautier, as cited in Herath 2015: 31). In the context of this particular circumstance, female travellers enjoyed a unique advantage over their male counterparts, as their direct access to the harem allowed them to provide detailed accounts of the women and their lives within it. This privileged access contributed to the classification of many female-authored travel narratives under the category of "Harem literature" (Herath 2015: 33). It can thus be argued that it was only with the emergence of female travel accounts that European readers gained insight into this secluded Oriental space through first-hand, eyewitness descriptions.

The second reason relates to the position of the female traveller herself. Scholars have observed that "the inner space of the harem [...] its women, is the very ground upon which [a Western woman's] identity is anchored and founded" (Yeğenoğlu 1998: 93). This suggests that the portrayal of native women was not merely a result of privileged access but was also deeply tied to the female traveller's own self-definition within the colonial and gendered framework of travel writing.

Following this line of thought, this section aims at examining how British female travellers represented native Tunisian women in their travel accounts, drawing on Edward Said's metaphor of "the Orient as a stage" (Said 1978:67). Within this framework, the British female "Self" and the Tunisian female "Other" are strategically positioned and displayed, rendering "this stage" unique by transforming the indigenous woman into an object of study under the observers' gaze. This process of representation unfolds through a structured pattern of stereotyping that both constructs and confines the Tunisian woman within the lens of a conventional Orientalist discourse. The first foundational stereotype is that of the socially secluded women because it sets the stage for all the other stereotypes. The perception that Tunisian women are confined to domestic spaces and shielded from public life creates the conditions under which British female writers project their assumptions. Building upon this perceived seclusion,these female writers further describeTunisian women through the lens of physical excess, depicting them as extremely fat and heavily adorned. At this stage, the writer’s gaze becomes fixated on the Tunisian woman’s body, described as excessive in size and ornamentation. Such descriptions function as visual manifestations of Otherness, wherein Tunisian femininity norms are explicitly contrasted with European ideals of restraint and refinement. From these aesthetic judgments arise a deeper moral judgment related to the portrayal of these women as lazyand idle; therebycasting them as passive figures who fail to embody Western values of productivity and discipline. Finally, this trajectory of stereotyping culminates in the depiction of Tunisian women as intellectually ignorant. This observation serves to strip them of agency and reinforces their positionas passive and inferior. Relying on this structured progression—from social seclusion to aesthetic judgment, moral condemnation and intellectual diminishment—British female writers construct a typically Orientalist discourse, where the Tunisian woman remains an object of display, defined not by her own voice, but by the narrative imposed upon her. Given their significance, the following analysis will endeavour to examine each stereotype in detail and with critical depth.

3.2.1. The Tunisian woman as secluded

In most travel accounts, Tunisian women are depicted as strictly confined to domestic spaces. This incarceration is viewed as both a physical reality and a symbolic marker of their supposed oppression, which further reinforces the idea that they exist outside the realm of agency, making them even more susceptible to Orientalist projections. Accordingly, these women turn out to be an object of study, rendered visible precisely "through their very invisibility: the veil and harem life" (Seddiki 2019: 87). As Foucault argues, an invisible object becomes visible "if it is spoken of or discussed" (Foucault, as cited in Seddiki 2019: 89). In this context, the tropes of the veil and the harem cease to be invisible within the Orientalist discourse, as they become central to its representational strategies. Myra Macdonald (2006) situates Western writers' preoccupation with these two tropes within a broader cultural framework that "privileges an ocular-centric or vision-based epistemology" where "the seen is considered as a primary ground of knowledge in Western thought" (Macdonald, as cited in Seddiki 2019: 88). Similarly, Grewal (1996) underscores the enduring fascination of the veil and the harem in "European culture", arguing that "they stood for the opacity that they believed marked what was radically different from Western culture" (Grewal 1996: 50). Due to their pivotal role in perpetuating the stereotype of the Tunisian secluded woman, these two tropes will be analyzed in two distinct sections.

3.2.1.1. Behind the veil of the harem

Being central to the fantasy logic of Western travel writers, many authors are compelled by the prospect of disclosing what lies behind the mysterious doors of this Oriental spacesinceit "covers and hides every single thing the Western subject wants to gaze at and possess" (Yeğenoğlu 1998: 48). Within this context, Laura Ma identifies two recurring myths pertaining to the harem which are often emphasized in the literary discourse. The first describes it as "the opulent quarters of the Turkish palace where a plethora of female concubines and slaves anxiously awaited the return of their master-husband, the Sultan" (Ma 2012: 15). The second myth constructs the harem as "a prison in a Muslim household where women were subject to their husband's absolute control against their will" (2012: 15). It is from the core of this second myth that the following analysis will develop, as British female travellers widely concur in depicting the Tunisian harem as a space of non-freedom, incarceration, and seclusion. It is also represented as a realm of profound mystery "[…]

shrouded in secrecy due to the historical gendered dichotomy in the East" (Zeiny 2017: 76). Drawing on its associations with inaccessibility and oppression, Foucault's concepts of "knowledge is power" and the "panopticon" are particularly illuminating when analyzing the trope of the harem as they help reveal the intricate dynamics of observation, representation, and control.

3.2.1.2. Knowledge is power

The Latin aphorism-*Scientia potentialest*—meaning knowledge is power"—was coined by Francis Bacon in 1597" and then reformulated by other philosophers from Thomas Hobbes to Michel Foucault (Gracia 2001: 109). According to Bacon, what is meant by this aphorism is that knowledgeable people shall be endowed with "the means and the authority requisite to become the ruling state power" (Gracia 2001: 109). By the same token, René Descartes equates "knowing with possessing", hence starting from the seventeenth century onwards, "knowledge became judgmental" (Prasad 2003: 124).

With the advent of the poststructuralist school, thinkers—such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bordieu—tried to interpret the social and political dimension of the "knowledge-power" axiom in their own way. Foucault, for instance, emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between knowledge and power, asserting that they "directly imply one another" (Foucault 1978: 27). According to him, "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault 1978: 27). Explained differently, Foucault invites us to think of power not simply as the working advantage of law but as "a multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable effects of domination are produced" (Foucault 1983: 102). Seen under this light, power for Foucault, holds an exceptionally strategic position since those who wield power claim to understand and produce knowledge about those who are disempowered. This idea fits well within the framework of female narratives about the Tunisian harem where the latter is transformed from a lived, subjective reality into an object of knowledge that further reinforces the traveller’s position of power over her observed subjects. Since knowledge can be used to control people, the concept of the panopticon shows how this power works in a concrete way.

3.2.1.3. The concept of the panopticon

The image of the "panopticon" deepens this analysis by emphasizing the surveillance mechanisms at play and illustrating how female travel writers adopt a similar panoptic perspective in their representation of the harem and women's lives within it. In broad terms, the origins of this concept could be traced back to the English social theorist Jeremy Bentham who, in the late eighteenth century, designed the panoptic prison as "an institution in which one guard would be able to observe all prisoners, but the prisoners themselves would not be able to see the guard or each other" (Sheridan 2016: 11-12). This means that the observer maintains authority by remaining unseen, while the observed are subjected to constant visibility. In this analysis, the image of the panopticon will be used as an allegorical metaphor that highlights the relationship between knowledge and power emanating from observation. In fact, Ashcroftet.al (2000) find out that, in the context of travel writing, the surveillance of the colonial space becomes "a significant method by which European travellers could obtain a position of panoramic observation, itself a representation of knowledge and power over colonial space." (Ashcroft et. al 2000:208). Exactly like the supervisor of the panopticon, the travel writer fuels his sense of mastery by relying on his position of visual advantage. As noted by David Spurr (1993), "the writer is placed either above or at the center of things, yet apart from them, so that the organization and classification of things takes place according to the writer's own system of values" (Spurr 1993: 16). In the case of the harem, this "panoptic" mode of representation allows female writers to position themselves as both insiders and outsiders: they claim intimate access to the harem’s secrets while maintaining the detachment necessary for judgment and classification. Through this process, the harem becomes both objectified and frozen in time; its complexities and lived experiences reduced to stereotypical images of oppression and seclusion. This idea finds better articulations with the analysis of both nineteenth- and early twentieth-century views.

3.2.1.4. Nineteenth-century perceptions

Mary Herbert (1872) and Mrs.Vivian (as cited in Vivian 1899) represent the notion of seclusion as one of the defining characteristics of Tunisian women's lives, depicting them as confined within domestic spaces and excluded from public life. Mary Herbert notes that Tunisian women were rarely allowed to go out; and if this happened, they were incarceratedin "a close carriage with all the blinds drawn down" (Herbert 1872: 262). Here, the reference to "the carriage" is particularly significant because it functions as a metaphor for isolation, separating the women not only physically from the outside world but symbolically from any kind of public engagement. Added to that, the adjective "close" further emphasizes this confinement as it adds a sense of tightness and restriction. Likewise, the phrase "with all the blinds drawn down" further contributes to this image of seclusion, as it conveys both the literal blocking of outside sight and the metaphorical idea of the women being hidden from view. Later in her narrative, she broadens the notion of seclusion to include women from rural contexts, asserting that "these restrictions apply to the peasant class as well since no woman was visible in the village" (Herbert 1872: 262). Herbert's assertion suggests that the seclusion of women isacommonandaccepted practiceacross different strata. In fact,the statement "no woman was visible in thevillage" further underscores the extreme nature of this incarceration. This suggests that the absence of visibility for women in the village signals a profound cultural and social isolation, where women are physically and symbolically hidden from public view.

The same view is reiterated in subsequent years within Vivian's book, *Tunisia and the Modern Barbary States* (1899), where he comments on the seclusion of women (through the voice of his wife who was able to get accesss to the Tunisian harem). Starting with general observations, Mrs.Vivian offers a negative portrayal of Tunisian harems, asserting that they are much "more inaccessible than the harems of Turkey and Egypt" (Mrs.Vivian, as cited Chouchene 2019:36). This assertion reflects her belief that "Tunisian women were often kept behind closed doors in inaccessible spaces tinged with a sense of mystery and secrecy" (Mrs.Vivian, as cited Chouchene 2019: 36). First, the author's comparison of Tunisian harems with those of Turkey and Egypt serves to underscore a perceived heightened level ofseclusion that she attributes uniquely to Tunis. Second, the phrase "Tunisian women were often kept behind closed doors" evokes a strong sense of physical imprisonment and separation, where the very architecture of the harem functions as a mechanism of concealment. Besides, the deliberate choice of the verb "kept" is very significant as it implies

an active process of control and restriction, suggesting that women's confinement is enforced by external authorities and social norms. This idea is further reinforced by the phrase "closed doors", which evokes a sense of physical imprisonment and separation. Additionally, the repetition of the adjective "inaccessible" accentuates the extreme nature of this confinement, while the inclusion of the nouns "mystery" and "secrecy" contributes to an overarching sense of impenetrability, suggesting not only physical seclusion but also an aura of intrigue and unknowability. Later in the narrative, Vivian explains the reason behind this extreme state of isolation by claiming that "Tunisian Arabs were particularly strict about keeping their wives from contact with Europeans" (Mrs.Vivian 1899: 65). Suggestive as it may seem, this quote serves to paint a picture of a patriarchal society with strong gendered divisions. This assumption becomes evident through the phrase "were particularly strict", which carries significantweight. In fact, the use of the adverb "particularly" intensifies this notion of strictness, suggesting a heightened level of control and enforcement. This linguistic choice implies that the social and cultural norms governing women's seclusion in Tunis are exceptionally rigid and severe. This extreme state of seclusion from the external world leads Vivian to conclude that British female visitors "come away from harems with sentiments of pity for these prisoners" (Mrs.Vivian 1899: 74). Obviously, this statement reflects a perspective that frames Tunisian women as subjects of confinement, drawing on the emotional response of pity and the metaphor of imprisonment to underscore their restricted status. Indeed, the quote is fundamentally rooted in a sentiment of pity,which explicitly conveys sorrow and compassion. However, beyond its apparent emotional resonance, it serves to underscore an inherent power asymmetry, where the observer (in this case the female traveller) is positioned as an active, knowing subject, whereas the women in the harem are cast as the powerless "prisoners". Furthermore, the metaphor of"prisoners" is particularly significant in shaping the portrayalof Tunisian women's seclusion. This term is especially potent in its connotations, as it strips away any notion of autonomy or agency, presenting the women trapped within a space they cannot freelyleave. It is also used to further enhance the freedom and emancipation of British women which, according to Antoinette Burton, "[…] depended on images of an enslaved Oriental womanhood" (Burton 1994: 65). This is what led Grewal to conclude that "all British women saw the Oriental woman as an example of submission that symbolized […] what they did not wish to be: the immobile woman, in seclusion at home, without any rights" (Grewal 1996: 66).

Building on the above quotes, we could argue that the harem is primarily represented in these accounts as a space that visibly enacts female seclusion, an idea reinforced through lexical choices such as "inaccessible," "incarcerated," and "restrictions." Also, the harem appears to elicit sentiments of pity and empathy among female writers, who position themselves in a comparatively superior social condition, while depicting Tunisian women as "prisoners." As such, the harem turns out to be a constructed site of "otherness," where the observing traveller constructs and reinforces her own cultural and intellectual superiority while simultaneously disempowering the observed Tunisian women. It also turns out to be necessary and vital for the British woman in order "to build and recognize herself as a self-determining and free subject" (Seddiki 2019: 13). Ironically enough, British female writers criticise the segregation and seclusion of Tunisian women while failing to acknowledge the constraints imposed on them within their own Victorian society. During that period, the dominant paradigm was encapsulated by the concept of the "angel in the house"; a metaphorical construct that idealized women as embodiments of submissiveness, self-sacrifice, and unwavering domestic devotion. This perception of the Tunisian harem as a site of extreme confinement and seclusion did not fade with the turn of the century. Rather,similar narratives persisted well into the twentieth-century, continuing to reinforce the notion of the Harem as an emblem of patriarchal dominance and female subjugation.

3.2.1.5. Twentieth-century perceptions

The enduring persistence of Orientalist perspectives on gender dynamics in Tunis is particularly evident in Lorimer's work, where she perpetuates the conventional narrative of female invisibility and confinement in Muslim societies. In this regard, she describesTunisian cities as overwhelmingly male-dominated spaces, a perception encapsulated in her assertion that "What a man's world a Muslim city is! [...] you scarcely ever see a female thing, even a girl baby" (Lorimer 1906: 25). This quote serves to stress the seclusion of Tunisian women within the larger context of a gender-segregated society. Such an idea is evident in the opening exclamatory statement, "What a man's world". This statement establishes a stark contrast between the public, male-dominated realm and the invisible, secluded female domain. It also also introduces an evaluative and subjective perspective, positioning the speaker as an observer who is both critical and judgmental of the gendered realities of the society described. Besides, the use of "scarcely" and "ever" amplifies the rarity of encountering women in public, contributing to the notion that they are pushed to the periphery

of public and social life. It is worth mentioning that Lorimer's use of the expression "female thing" reduces Tunisian women to a category devoid of individuality or voice, reinforcing their subjugated position in the social hierarchy. Interestingly, the overall effect of language used in this quote is to depict Tunisian women as systematically excluded from public life and relegated to private, hidden spaces, further cementing their role as passive, invisible subjects.

Broadly speaking, Lorimer's general observation of the gendered realities in Tunis as well as her visit to one of the Tunisian harems led her to explicitly assert: "I turned away in disgust, for the whole thing was to me revolting and pathetic" (Lorimer 1906: 61). Clearly enough, this statement vividly conveys the emotional as well as judgmental reaction of the female writer to the situation she encounters, while simultaneously reinforcing the perceived inferiority of Tunisian women. The first statement "I turned away in disgust" conveys both a physical withdrawal and emotional detachment from the scene, suggesting that Lorimer is unwilling to engage further with what she is witnessing. In fact, such emotion of disgust and repulsion positions the writer as a superior observer, implying that Tunisian women's livesare unworthy of admiration or empathy. The second statement, however, offers an evaluative description where the author continues her condemnation of the scene by depicting it as "revolting" and "pathetic". While the latter connotes somethingthat is not onlyunpleasant but also morally repulsive by positioning these women in a degraded system that repels the writer's sensibilities, the former intensifies this degradation by implying that the situation of Tunisian women is pitiable. In her work, *The Representations of Algerian Women in Mid-Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Travel Books by British and American Male and Female Authors* (2019), Saida Seddiki argues that such astriking disapproval could be attributed to the fact that the writer's presence inthe harem and her "proximity to racial Others will call her Englishness and femininity into question. As a result, she makes the rhetorical move of distancing herself through her disapproval" (Seddiki 2019: 119). Indeed, this supposed belief in the inferiority of Tunisian women serves as a strategic tool for the female traveller to construct a strong, free, and independent Self. That is why, as soon as she went out of the harem, Lormier "gave a sigh of relief", and claims that "it was good to feel once more the blue sky overhead […] and to know that the great world outside was mine and not thelittle courtyard with its prisoners'cells all round it" (Lorimer 1906:70). Obviously, this quote underscores the sense of liberation the writer experiences upon leaving the harem, while simultaneously reinforcing the confinement and subjugation of the women living inside it. First, the statement "gave a sigh of relief" establishes an emotional reaction where the verb

"gave" serves as an indicator of the depth of the writer's relief, while the expression "sigh of relief" implies a sense of liberation as if the writer has been freed from an oppressive situation. Second, the phrase "it was good to feel once more" further emphasizes the writer's sense of relief by highlighting her return a natural open environment. Likewise, the deliberate choice of the descriptive expression "blue sky" conveys the freedom of the outside world in contrast to the confined and restricted space of the harem. This restriction experienced in the harem is further intensified in the statement "the great world outside was mine" which contrasts the writer's newfound freedom with the constrained world of the harem. Significantly, the use of "mine" in the possessive sense highlights Lorimer's privilege, underscoring the hierarchical relationship between her and the women in the harem. In fact, Lorimer's need to highlight this opposition is rooted in "the Oreintalist fetishizing tradition, which is founded on the historical belief that there is fundamental opposition between the East and West" (Belhiah 2012: 48). More importantly, this quote suggests a clear dichotomy between the confined space of the Tunisian harem and the liberating openness of the external world. The specific selection of the word "prisoner" evokes parallels with a comparable characterization employed in the nineteenth-century by Mrs.Vivian, thereby demonstrating the influence and emulation of perspectives among travel writers. It also highlights how the harem is conceived by both writers as a symbol of "female subservience and unfreedom" (Grewal 1996: 82). Besides the use of contrasting expressions such as the juxtaposition of "the great world outside" with "the little courtyard"; and "the blue sky overhead" set against "prisoners' cells" emphasizes the liberation of the writer in comparis onto the "oppressed, sealed, and secluded slaves" of the harem (Andreeva, as cited in Gholi 2017: 47). The efficacy of this contrast is further accentuated by the use of the expression "the great world outside was mine" which imbues the female writer with a strong sense of agency and ownership. In this sense, the Tunisian harem becomes "a racial sign for Eastern culture" (Grewal 1996: 81) where everything inside it is not only different from the Western culture but also inferior to it.

To conclude this part, it could be substantiated that British women were unable to completely detach themselves from the prominent elements of the Orientalist discourse. That is why the theme of the subsidiary position of Tunisian women emerges to be one of the cornerstones of their writings. As highlighted by Manai, British female travellers' "descriptions and views of women, with few exceptions, properly fit in the much broader framework of Western perceptions of what is generally referred to as the Oriental woman"

(Manai 2007: 65). According to Grewal, this image of the Oriental woman as oppressed and "victimized" is used by British female writers in order "to position themselves as English citizens" (Grewal 1996: 11). In addition, it serves to emphasize a list of ethnocentric dichotomies of the virtues of Christian monogamy vs. Muslim polygamy, and the superiority of the mobile and free British woman vs. the immobile and secluded Tunisian woman. Significantly, these dichotomous words come into playin order to make the harem appear as "the Other of the nation, its cultural difference" (Grewal 1996: 231). Or as more bluntly put by Geoffrey Bennington, the trope of the harem functions as a pronounced signifier of "national difference" which "constitute[s] identity against difference, inside against outside, and the superiority of the inside over outside, prepares against invasion and for enlightened colonialism" (Bennington, as cited in Grewal 1996: 231).

Interestingly, it could be inferred that the task of analyzing female travel accounts is somehow challenging because "though far from England", British female writers "were never completely free from British moral codes and British imperial interests" (Stearnes 2007: 9). Indeed, by portraying life inside the Tunisian harem, they made the inaccessible Eastern women available for "the gaze of the traveller"[38] which functions "as part of the power of imperialism" (Jones 2007: 126). This implication in the imperial project facilitated their participation in cultural as well as political exchanges. Starting with the latter, British women took part in the nationalist discourse of empire by celebrating theWestern progress, and hence its supremacy over the East. This is, indeed, what led Margaret Strobel to postulate that "British women were responsible for the generational and daily reproduction of the empire" (Strobel 1991: 17). Concerning the former, these cultural exchanges "led them to re-evaluate their definitions of womanhood and freedom" and to engage in debates about "the woman question" (Stearnes 2007:9). The culmination of this process manifested in the publication of a wide array of texts which are as profoundly ideological as those written by men. The following section, indeed, will further substantiate this argument by examining the trope ofthe veil and its role in shaping the representation of Tunisian women.

[38] Bailey Jones talks about "the gaze of the colonizer as part of the power of colonialism" (2007: 126).

3.2.1.6. Lifting the veil

The motif of the veil in British travel writing functions as a potent symbol for both the invisibility and the perceived oppression of Tunisian women. Notably, most male travel writers did not engage with this theme in depth, with the exception of Graham and Ashbee, who provide a short description of the Tunisian veil and their interpretation of it. Their perspective is therefore examined within this section as their treatment of the subject remains limited. In fact, it is only with the emergence of twentieth-century female-authored travel narratives that the veil becomes a more prominent subject of inquiry, reflecting shifting Western concerns about gender dynamics in cross-cultural encounters.

Based on our readings, it becomes evident that the majority of travel writers depict the veil as repellent, primarily due to its perceived role in degrading the situation of Tunisian women. From a critical standpoint, however, the system of veiling is considered as repellent because it significantly restricted travellers' ability to exercise control over their subjects of study by obstructing their visibility. Therefore, what is interesting about this trope is that it deconstructs the traditional social control mechanism known as the panopticon. Conventionally, the panopticon ensures dominance over its subjects through continuous visibility, thereby securing the proper functioning of power. Yet, in the case of the veiled Tunisian woman, this foundational principle of the panopticon is destabilized. As Seddiki argues, "Western travellers were frustrated because women wearing the veil were able to control their own (in)visibility" (Seddiki 2019: 122). In this way, Tunisian women, and by extension Oriental ones, become characterized by "dissimulation and dissemblance" (Yeğenoğlu 1998: 41) as the veil is interpreted as a device for concealing their true selves, thereby increasing notions of mysteriousness and inscrutability. Although this mayseem self-evident, the veil further accentuates the communicative divide between Western travellers and Tunisian women, rendering it "hard to understand them, to penetrate their minds" (Yeğenoğlu 1998:41). Henceforth, the figure of the veiled woman assumes an enigmatic quality, haunting the imagination of both male and female travellers. *In Veiling Over Desire, Close Ups of the Woman* (1989), Mary Ann Doane encapsulates this notion by asserting that "the structure of the veil" in Western ideological discourse is "clearly complicit with the tendency to specify the woman's position as that of enigma" (Doane 1989: 118).

To pin down this enigma, our analysis will focus on female travellers' perceptions ofthe veil and the veiling system more broadly. However, before delving into this examination,

a preliminary discussion of Graham and Aschbee's perspectives on the subject will be presented.

By the late nineteenth century, Graham and Aschbee visited Tunis and, unlike many of their male or female counterparts, they commented on the veil and the veiling system through the lens of their own biased perceptions. In this context, they assert:

> The covering of the face differs from that used in Turkeyor Egypt, and consists of two bands of black plaited horsehair, or white material (generally the former), bound horizontally across the face, and leaving the eyes only uncovered. Sometimes the black yashmak, as it is called, mostly of silk and richly embroidered, such as is worn by the higher grades, constitutes a veil as well as a mantle. Both modes of head-gear are exceedingly ungraceful, and appear to have been designed to render their wearers as repulsive as possible. (Graham & Aschbee 1887: 197-198)

In this quote, the authors interpret the veil not as a cultural marker but as a symbol of oppression and social control. Their starting point was an explicit comparison between the Tunisian veil with those in Turkeyand Egypt, implying that the Tunisian version is distinct—and by their tone, even more restrictive. Then, they focus on the material composition of the veil—"two bands of black plaited horsehair, or white material"—in order to reinforce the notion of confinement. Afterwards, they depict this trope in highly restrictive terms: "bound horizontally across the face, leaving only the eyes uncovered". Indeed, this emphasis on how the veil conceals facial features further stresses the inaccessibility and invisibility of Tunisian women. Besides, it is clear that the language employed by Graham and Aschbee reflects an undeniable bias. For example, the description of the veil as "exceedingly ungraceful" and seemingly "designed to render their wearers as repulsive as possible" not only suggests that the veiling systemerases the grace and beauty that should characterize women—but also implies a deliberate intention behind the design of the veil to strip women of their appeal. Even the "black yashmak" with its refined material remains, in the travellers' view, is an instrument of concealment and restriction. Such language dehumanizes Tunisian women, depicting them as passive objects shaped by a repressive culture rather than as individuals with agency. Ultimately, Graham and Aschbee's portrayal of the veil exemplifies the prevalent tendency in British travel writing to interpret the trope of the veil from an

ethnocentric perspective instead of understanding it as a complex cultural and religious practice. This portrayal aligns with broader Orientalist discourse, which frequently represents veiled women as concealed, invisible, and in need of liberation through Western intervention. The same line of thought is also echoed in twentieth-century female accounts, where they extensively engaged with the trope of the veil and the veiling system as a whole.

3.2.1.7. Twentieth-century female views

In the twentieth century, both Lorimer (1906) and Ward (1920) visited Tunis, and extensively commented on the practice of veiling. Their accounts reinforced the prevailing Orientalist discourse by depicting the veil as both a cultural symbol of oppression and a marker of female subjugation which separated Tunisian women from the perceived progress and freedom of their Western counterparts. Evidence for such a claim is underscored by numerous instances throughout Lorimer's travel book and one of her very first observations reads as follows: "the first glimpse of these muffled and veiled women make me thank Godfor my Christian husband, who not onlyadmits that his wife has a soul, but also allows her to possess it in liberty, fraternity, and equality with his own" (Lorimer 1906: 2). Significantly, this passage plays into the colonial-era discourse that positions Western women as more liberated and superior in contrast to their veiled Eastern counterparts. This idea is clearly articulated in Lorimer's emotional response "thank God for my Christian husband" which further underscores this binaryopposition between the perceived oppression of veiled women and the assumed freedom enjoyed by European women. Besides, her reference to the values associated with the French Revolution "liberty, fraternity, and equality" not only implies Western gender roles as inherently more progressive, but also reinforces a Eurocentric perspective that equates emancipation with Western ideological frameworks. This rhetorical strategy, grounded in "the techniques of distancing and differentiating from the Other" (Seddiki 2019: 47), functions to legitimize the Western model of gender relations while overlooking the social complexities and cultural symbolism of the Oriental veiling system. Accordingly, Lorimer's assertion "comes within the politics of Otherness [...] which "has at its centre the European" (Seddiki 2019: 13) female writer; and this is what explains its failure "to produce an accurate portrayal" of the Tunisian woman "not marred by Orientalist prejudices" (Seddiki 2019: 13). Later in her narrative, Lorimer presents a subjective interpretation of the veil as a form of concealment that facilitates deception and intrigue. In this regard, she acknowledges that "such a complete disguise as this for an everyday costume

ought to be rather helpful in the case of a romance or intrigue, for all women look exactly alike" (Lorimer 1906: 25). In this remark, Lorimer not only depicts the veil as a form of concealment that obscures personal identity "complete disguise", but also frames it within a narrative of secrecy and mystery "romance or intrigue", that has often viewed veiled womenas inaccessible and enigmatic figures whose lives remained impenetrable to the Western observer. At the same time, her claim that "all women look exactly alike" underscores the tendency of British female travellers to view veiled women as a homogenizing mass. Asimilar perspective is articulated by Seddiki, who contends that female travel writers tend to reduce Oriental women to "an undifferentiated whole; blurring, hence, their uniqueness, divergences and differences" (Seddiki 2019: 69).

Another significant instance appears in Lorimer's account, in which she remarks on a Tunisian veiled woman as follows: "An elderly Arab woman crosses the square. She might a creature of any sex or age […] she is nothing but a shapeless bundle of white with a piece of black crepe where her face ought to be. She is veiled so closely, even though she is certain to be elderlyand ugly" (Lorimer 1906:24-25). Initially, the quote presents a subject, "an elderly Arab woman", but it immediately strips her of humanity and individuality by calling her "a creature" rather than a person. This idea isfurther intensified bythe phrase "she is nothing but a shapeless bundle of white with a piece of black crepe" where Lorimer diminishes the woman's existence to an impersonal mass. Moreover, the expression "where her face ought to be" is used to imply that the veil is a tool of erasure and seclusion. Finally the phrase "even though she is certain to be elderly and ugly" is particularly revealing because it reflects the writer's preconceived notions that the veil is used to hide a woman's supposed unattractiveness instead of being deemed as a cultural norm. This assumption emanates from the author's frustration about her inability to "see"and "know" veiled women. It also reflects a Western female gaze which seeks to categorize and define the "Other" based on preconceived notions instead of first hand understanding. Later in her narrative, Lorimer uses similar expressions to describe aTunisian woman from a higher class:

> An Arab woman of the better class when she goes out into the street not only conceals her entire person in a seamless, shapeless garment of white and hides her face under a black mask, but she throws over her head a long, broad, brocaded scarf of rich and brightly striped silk. She puts it on like a shawl round her neck and shoulders and then

> turns the back portion of it up until it comes right over her head, so that she can only see the actual ground in front of her feet. […] Attired like this (and I have seen not a few) she looks like a ship in full sail as she steers down the narrow white-walled street. (Lorimer 1906: 70)

Lorimer's detailed description is particularly evocative as it emphasizes the veil as a practice that both isolates and dehumanizes women. This idea is conveyed through the use of accumulation—"not only conceals her [...] but she throws"—which underscores the multiple layers of concealment and restriction. The phrase—"so that she can only see"—highlights the physical limitations imposed by the veil. Finally, the metaphor—"looks like a ship in full sail"—objectifies the veiled woman by likening her to an inanimate entity. Besides, the adjectives "seamless" and "shapeless" reinforce the perception of the veil as both oppressive and depersonalizing, suggesting a loss of individuality and agency. Particularly significant is Lorimer's assertion that the veiled woman "can onlysee the actual ground in front of her feet" which strengthens the Western view that the veil is not only a metaphorical symbol of social confinement but also a physical barrier that restricts women's full engagement with the world around them. This is, in fact, what leads Lorimer to conclude that "all which is feminine in Tunis makes me feel ashamed of being a woman" (Lorimer 1906: 70). Clearly, this assertion reveals a deeply entrenched sense of moral and cultural superiority over Tunisian women conveyed through Lorimer's affective response which is loaded with a sense of personal disassociation from the femininity she encounters. By explicitly expressing shame in relation to the situation of Tunisian women, the author constructs a hierarchical distinction between herself, as a Western observer, and the native women she encountered. In doing so, she not only articulates a personal observation, but also participates in a larger imperial framework that sought to uphold the supposed moral and cultural superiority of the West. It is noteworthy, however, that Lorimer’s predominantly negative representations are tempered by moments of admiration, where she acknowledges the physical attractiveness of certain Tunisian women. In some instances, she describes them as "pretty […] who answered very well to the analysis of female beauty." (Lorimer 1906: 88). This discursive fluctuationbetween attraction and repulsion underscores a complex ambivalence typically characteristic of the imperial gaze, which constructs the veiled Tunisian woman as an oppressed, alien figure while briefly recognizing her capacity to align with Western beauty standards. Interestingly, such a tension exposes the broader dynamics of the Orientalist discourse, where

the 'Other' is both described as attractive and repulsive in accordance with the traveller's own shifting cultural and ideological frameworks.

A similar perspective is reiterated some years later by Emily Ward, providing additional evidence that travel writers are largely influenced by the viewpoints of their predecessors. For example, upon encountering Tunisian women in the souk, Ward describes them as "entirely covered with tight and black crepe veil" (Ward 1920: 146), reinforcing the recurring Western portrayal of veiling as restrictive and oppressive. Then, she articulates her disapproval by asking. "how many years will disappear before these Eastern women will emerge from what appears to us to be an intolerable tyranny and combine to revolt, refusing any longer to tie up their faces in black crepe" (Ward 1920: 146). This passage aligns with broader patterns in female travel writing, where Western women often positioned themselves as enlightened observers. This idea is echoed in Ward's use of the passive structure "were entirely covered", which serves to remove agency from these women. Besides, her choice of adjectives "tight" and "black" not only suggests an association with constraint and suffering, but also reinforces a common Orientalist trope that depicts veiling as both restrictive and backward. Significantly, Ward's rhetorical question "how many years..." ultimately conveys a paternalistic stance by implying that Tunisian women are trapped in a state of subjugation from which they need to be liberated. This idea is further stressed by a Western-centric judgment: "intolerable tyranny" that depicts the veil as inherently repressive, hence disregarding its cultural and religious significance. By doing so, Ward positions herself as enlightened and morally superior, thereby perpetuating the colonial discourse that portrays non-Western women as passive subjects in need of emancipation. According to her, women's liberation can onlyoccur through the rejection of local traditions in favour of Western norms.

What could also be deduced from the views of Lorimer and Ward is that the representation of veiled Tunisian women in female travel books have been strategically exploited in order to accentuate cultural differences and shape readers' attitudes in a predetermined manner. Clearly enough, instead of acknowledging the veil as a multifaceted tradition with diverse meanings—ranging from religious devotion to cultural norms—female writers' depictions align with the Western Orientalist discourse that equated the veil with oppression and uniformity. Therefore, it could be argued that these representations "are produced within the dynamics of social power and ideology of the empire" (Zeiny 2017: 85).

As a brief conclusion to both subparts, it could be argued that the tropes of the veil and the harem emerge to be vital to the British female writer for literary, cultural, as well as personal purposes. Starting with the literary objective, these thematic concerns—which are typically Eastern—are among the favorite barometers used to attract Western readers at home and satisfy their curiosity about life in the Orient. Concerning the cultural purpose, these tropes are used to highlight the backward customs of Eastern cultures while confirming the superiority of the West. This type of representation is the result of "the hegemonic desire of the West to cement its control through centering native women and cultural traditions in the argument for cultural superiority" (Jones 2007: 114). Lord Cromer's view on Egyptian women further illustrates this perspective:

> Whereas Christianity teaches respect for women, and European men elevate women because of the teachings of their religion, Islam degrade them, and it was to this degradation, most evident in the practice of veiling and segregation, that the inferiority of Muslim men could be traced (Cromer, as s cited in Zeiny 2017: 81).[39]

Concluding with the personal objective, most of female writers' representations are marred by negative connotations that represent Tunisian women in terms of a series of "absences: absence of freedom, progress, and rationality". (Seddiki 2019: 94). This contrast allows the Western female writer "to exult in her own Western privileged freedom" (Seddiki 2019: 94). Similarly, the image of the secluded and veiled woman helps construct a British female selfas "free, mobile, and happy" (Grewal 1996: 54). Therefore, the other appears to be essential to the process of identity construction because it is through direct exposure to the Other that the Self is constructed. In this regard, Seddiki finds out that British female writers achieve their "sense of belonging and identity" only through "binary oppositions between the superior Christian West versus the inferior Muslim Orient, and this is the very definition of Orientalism" (Seddiki 2019: 100-101). The following section will explore how the stereotype of physical excess, exemplified by extreme fatness and extravagant adornment, further

[39] While Cromer contrasts European and Egyptian women, it should be noted that European women at that time were also largely confined to domestic roles, financially dependent on men, and denied political rights (e.g., in France, women could only vote from 1945).

sustains this binary opposition by accentuating the contrast with the idealized Western female self.

3.2.2. The Tunisian woman as the embodiment of extreme fatness and extravagant adornment

3.2.2.1. TheTunisian woman as fat

The portrayal of Tunisian women in the travel accounts of female writers aligns closely with Edward Said's assertion that the representation of Oriental women is frequently "formed- or deformed" (Said 1978: 273) through a lens increasingly attuned to "a specific sensitivity towards a geographical area called the East" (Seddiki 2019: 175). This "deformed" depiction, to borrow Said's term, manifests most strikingly in the recurrent emphasis on the excessive fatness of Tunisian women, a theme that pervades nineteenth- and early twentieth-century narratives, both shaping and reinforcing a reductive vision of Tunisian femininity.

3.2.2.1.1. Nineteenth-century depictions

In the context of nineteenth-century female travel accounts, the representation of Tunisian women is often steeped in judgments grounded in cultural superiority. For example, Lady Temple's observations on the physical appearance of Tunisian women reflect these underlying ethnocentric assumptions. Near the mid-nineteenth century, she asserts with unwavering certainty that […] they are right in covering themselves with this loose sort of robe; for the immense size to which they all attain, would be quite disgusting, unless concealed by their dress. (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 197). Through this description, Lady Temple seeks to highlight an inherent flow or deficiency by repudiating the Tunisian female body through the lens of Western sensibilities. This flow is exemplified by the use of terms like "immense size" and "disgusting" which are loaded with negative connotations, aiming at making the women's bodies seem grotesque. Indeed, this focus on the physical body of Tunisian women—specifically their "immense size"—is a dehumanizing strategy that reduces these women to pejorative physical attributes. This dehumanization suggests the superiority of Western beauty norms and standards and reflects the broader nineteenth-century colonial attitudes that viewed non European women as distant from the Western ideal of femininity. In a more specific instance, she refers to "Lella Kebirah", a

Tunisian woman from a high social stance, in this stereotypical manner: "The Lillah herself was much larger than we should in Europe consider becoming" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 197). Obviously, this description reflects a distinctly Eurocentric and gendered perception of Tunisian women's bodies. First, the phrase "much larger" suggests an implicit comparison with European beauty standards, where slenderness is often associated with femininity and refinement. Second, her assertion that such a body size would not be considered "becoming" in Europe, Lady Temple reinforces the idea that there is an idealized female form—one that Tunisian women, in her view, fail to embody. Third, the expression "we should in Europe" reveals the collective voice of European women as arbiters of taste and imposers of aesthetic standards. This rhetorical strategy not only reinforces binary oppositions—slim versus fat—but also delineates clear boundaries between Western and non-Western women. Interestingly, both of LadyTemple's quotes reflect broader Orientalist tropes in which the bodies of non-Western women are pathologized, hence reinforcing the notion of the "Other" as fundamentally different and, by implication, inferior. They operate within the framework of the female gaze**,** which, rather than challenging the dominant imperial discourse, becomes complicit in the broader imperial project of defining and controlling representations of non-European women.

However, Lady Temple's narrative is also marked by a distinct ambivalence, as her reductive depictions of Tunisian women's bodies coexist with moments of admiration for their beauty. Despite her earlier portrayals—characterized by terms such as "immense size" and "disgusting" that describe Tunisian women as physically unattractive according to Western sensibilities—Lady Temple disrupts this pattern in other passages by referring to these women as "beautiful" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 198) and "handsome" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 201). In fact, these contradictory representations not only complicate the ethnocentric portrayals she offers, but also reinforce the ambivalentnature of travellers' discourse that is emblematic of the colonial gaze.

By the end of the century, Mrs.Vivian offers a similar observation to that of Temple, once again emphasizing the perceived physical deficiency of Tunisian women. After visiting a Tunisian woman in an Arab quarter, Mrs.Vivian describes her in a reductive tone: "a funny little fat stumpy woman" (Mrs.Vivian, as cited in Vivian 1899: 66). Suggestive as it may seem, this description encapsulates a dismissive gaze through which many Western female travellers perceived non- Western women. In fact, her choice of adjectives like"funny," "little," "fat," and "stumpy"

immediately diminishes the woman, evoking a sense of infantilization and mockery. First, by calling her "little" and "stumpy," the author infantilizes and trivializes the subject, stripping her of individuality and depth. Second, the adjective "funny" suggests an element of amusement and ridicule, positioning the woman as a spectacle or curiosity to be looked at. Besides, the writer's emphasis on "fatness"aligns with broader Orientalist tendencies to frame the bodies of non-European women as objects of curiosity, excess, and even ridicule. The term "stumpy" further undermines her physical appearance, presentingher bodyin a negative, unattractive light. In brief, by reducing the Tunisian woman to a mere caricature, Mrs.Vivian reinforces a demeaning portrayal, which reflects not the reality of the woman herself, but the traveller's own cultural biases and preconceived notions of femininity and physicality. It is significant to note that, much like her counterparts, Mrs.Vivian's description oscillates between denigration and appreciation, since in other instances she disrupts the above reductive depictions by acknowledging the attractiveness of the women she encounters by referring to them as "very pretty" (Mrs.Vivian, as cited in Vivian 1899: 68). This fluctuation between rejection and admiration reveals a deeper ambivalence within her discourse, wherein the colonial female gaze is torn between upholding dominant narratives of otherness and recognizing beauty that challenges these very narratives. These shifting perceptions, therefore, reflect the broader complexity of imperial representations, where Oriental women are simultaneously admired and denigrated, which further destabilizes the rigid binaries of the colonial discourse.

3.2.2.1.2. Twentieth-century views

This preoccupation with physical corpulence becomes even more pronounced in the twentieth century, when writers such as Lorimer (1906), Nesbitt (1906), and Ward (1920) persist in emphasizing this theme, weaving it into their narratives as one of the defining characteristics of Tunisian women. Starting with Nesbitt, she asserts, in a way that reflects grotesque exaggeration, that "all the married women are moving mountains of fat" (Nesbitt 1906: 165). This quote not only represents a reductive representation of Tunisian married women, but also perpetuates the same stereotypical image of the nineteenth century. By relying on hyperbole—"moving mountains of fat"—and sweeping generalization—"all married women"—Nesbitt seeks to highlight two main ideas. The first one focuses on the supposed excessiveness of Tunisian women's physicality; while the second one reduces Tunisian women to a single, negative stereotype by suggesting that this physical attribute is inherently tied to the identity of all married women in Tunisian society.Taken from a broader

perspective, the dominant Western ideology of the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries upheld the belief that slenderness was not merely an aesthetic ideal but a reflection of self-control and moral integrity. Corpulence, however, was imbued with negative connotations such as laziness, indulgence, and even moral failure. Within this ideological framework, the portrayal of Tunisian women as "moving mountains of fat" extends far beyond a mere physical description; it serves as a powerful rhetorical device that strips them of the virtues prized by the West, reinforcing their constructed inferioritywhen compared to their European counterparts.

To underline this perceived characteristic of fatness, both Lorimer and Ward devote particular attention to Jewish women, depicting them as the ultimate embodiment of excess and physical abundance. For instance, Lorimer describes Jewesses as " […] nothing but fat, poor […] wretches" (Lorimer 1906: 261). Echoing this sentiment, Ward avers that "the fat Jewesses of Tunis are one of its most curious sights. Never have we seen such fat women" (Ward 1920: 146-147). Undoubtedly, the language used by both writers is steeped in dehumanization and objectification, reducing their subjects to mere physical attributes rather than acknowledging their humanity. In the first case, Lorimer reduces the identity of Jewish women to "fat" and "wretches," which implies that they are defined solely by their external and social conditions. This dehumanization reflects wider colonial and imperial attitudes that often sought to reduce the encountered populations to simplistic, stereotypical representations. Similarly, Ward relies on pejorative expressions to depict these women as objects of a show rather than subjects with agency and individuality. For example, the noun phrase "the fat Jewesses of Tunis" immediately introduces a negative and reductive representation. Besides, the phrase "curious sight" and the statement "never have we seen such fat women" are loaded with both condescension and exaggeration which serve to underlie a sense of Western superiority and the tendency to judge the physicality of other people from a Eurocentric lens. If we take into consideration these two quotes, we could argue that both writers do more than simply remark on physical appearance; they weave a narrative of otherness and reinforce the Western gaze that views fatness as both grotesque and emblematic of cultural inferiority.

To conclude this subpart, it is worth noting that nineteenth- and twentieth-century observations, beyond their overtly stereotypical nature, appear strikingly one-sided, focusing solely on the exaggerated corpulence of Tunisian women while neglecting any recognition of their individuality or agency. Moreover, these representations are ideologically driven,

since—through them—the writer "provides the reader with a finished work: she sees, describes and interprets for him everything" (Zerouali 2017: 24). By doing so, British female writers take part in disseminating ideas about the Orient and its people which "concur with the mainstream of the English imperialist policy" (Zerouali 2017: 24). Sibel Bozdogan defines this kind of representation as "an affirmative project, its goal being to show rather than to let one see, to explain rather than let one understand" (Bozdogan, as cited in Zerouali 2017: 24). As a consequence, female writers fell within the same literary trap as their male counterparts since their observations confirm to be "[…] as hostile and Eurocentric as men" (Mabro 1991: 2). In this sense, it could be argued that "the eyes are female but the gaze is male" (Seddiki 2019: 166). The following section will further substantiate these Eurocentric observations by analyzing female travellers' depictions of Tunisian women as excessively adorned, a stereotype that functions as yet another dimension of the Orientalist narrative.

3.2.2.2. The Tunisian woman as excessively adorned

In the previous section, female travellers depicted the Tunisian woman as physically excessive in terms of body size, representing her outside the conventional Western norms of female beauty. In this section, this notionof excess is extended to her adornment. In fact, both of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century female travellers describe her clothing, jewelry, and accessories in elaborate detail, frequently portraying them as overly ornate, and even impractical. As such, their works serve to portray Tunisian women as consumed by materialism, reinforcing Orientalist stereotypes that associate non-European femininity with superficiality. It should be noted that the emphasis on women's preoccupation with ornamentation is predominantly conveyed through the use of humor as a stylistic device. As Scott Carpenter observes, humor serves as "the mainstay of travel writing" and its occurrence depends on "exaggerations, ironies, and reversals [which] produce laughter" (Carpenter, as cited in Gholi 2023: 250). This notion is concretely articulated in the works of female writers who adopt a humorous tone through the use of exaggeration and irony when depicting the physical appearance of Tunisian women. They often amplify certain features to entertain their audience while simultaneously reinforcing cultural stereotypes and highlighting perceived contrasts between British and Tunisian aesthetics.

3.2.2.2.1. Nineteenth-century perceptions

Tunisian women's excessive interest in ornamentation and jewelry is particularly addressed in the works of Lady Temple (1835) and Mrs.Vivian (as cited in Vivian 1899). Starting with the former, her visit to a Tunisian harem enables her to offer lengthy descriptions of "Lellah Kebirah,"[40] encompassing every detail from her physical appearance, to her attire, and even her jewelry. Regarding her physical appearance, Lady Temple demonstrates a particular interest in her hostess's hairstyle, describing it in meticulous detail: "the hair combed straight, and as smooth as possible across the forehead, with some apparentlybrought from behind, so as to hang down on each side of the face, when after reaching as low as the bottom of the cheek, it was cut off quite straight" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 199). This depiction suggests an unnatural preoccupation with beauty, conveyed through the repeated use of adjectives such as "straight," "smooth," "quite straight", which underscores the meticulous and exaggerated nature of the hairstyle. The phrase "as smooth as possible" further reinforces this notion, evoking a sense of excess and positioning the woman as overly concerned with outward perfection. Additionally, expressions such as "with some apparently brought from behind, so as to hang down on each side of the face" or "when after reaching as low as the bottom of the cheek, it was cut off quite straight" imply that such adornment is not elegant but rather indicative of an exaggerated and inauthentic beauty. Consequently, this portrayal of "Lellah Kebirah" presents her as a woman obsessed with appearance, and hence consumed by superficiality. Within the same passage, Lady Temple also directs her attention to her hostess's clothing style, providing her readers with a minute description of "Lellah Kebirah's" attire:

> Her dress consisted of crimson silk trousers, loose till reaching the calf of the leg; they were then made to fit tight, down to the ankle […] A jacket made of tissue of silk and gold, reaches down to the waist, with no sleeves, in place of these her Highness, however, wore a chemise, which being made of gauze were very loose and long enough to be tied in a knot behind her shoulders. Over all this she had a blue figured gauze blouse, confined only at the neck, without any belt at the waist; her head was dressed with a silk handkerchief, embroidered in the corners with gold, and which was

[40] LadyTemple visited the Bey's harem with her sisters and was hosted by Lellah Kebirah. Lellah Kebirah (Arabic: "eldest Lady") refers to the Bey's senior wife, who held a position of authority within the harem.

> tied tight round her head; over all was thrown a large veil of rich white- figured gauze […] The bare feet were thrust into slippers, very richly embroidered with gold, with here and there a precious stone, and justlarge enough to admit four of the extremities of her feet (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 197-198).

Clearly, this lengthy quote is characterized by an overwhelming focus on the luxurious fabrics, sophisticated embroidery and elaborate nature of the hostess's attire. In fact, expressions such as "crimson silk trousers," "gold lace," "tissue of silk and gold," "blue figured gauze blouse," and "rich white-figured gauze" are used to highlight a visual excess in both fabric and ornamentation. Similarly, the use of adjectives like "precious", "embroidered", "rich" creates a sense of overstated opulence; implying that "Lellah Kebirah's "beauty relies totally on material wealth and artificial decoration. Significantly, this exaggerated depiction serves to distance Tunisian women from the Western ideals of beauty which tend to value simplicity and natural elegance. What is also worth noting is that Lady Temple particularly focuses on expensive and extravagant materials like "silk", "gold", "precious stones", "embroidered gauze". This focus not only serves to reduce "Lellah Kebirah's" appearance to an accumulation of luxurious and superficial elements, but also suggests that this clothing style is an unnatural effort to display wealth rather than inherent grace. That is why, by the end of her description, Lady Temple asserts that "from this description, one can hardly conceive that it could look well" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 198-199). Undeniably, this follow-up remark is particularly revealing since it gives an explicit judgment of the aesthetic value of the woman's attire suggesting that its sophistication makes it appearas unappealing. By adopting this perception, Lady Temple dismisses the cultural significance and the symbolic value of this Tunisian attire, and hence perpetuates the common Orientalist stereotypes that measure the appearance of non-Westerner women according to Western norms and ideals. This is, in fact, what led Thisaranie Herath to argue that "in judging the harem women's beauty […] female writers impose a different sort of gaze upon them; not overtly sexual, but intrusive, superficial and critical nonetheless" (Herath 2015: 37). Obviously, Herath’s argument is very suggestive since it highlights the ways in which British female travellers, despite their own marginalization within the patriarchal structures of their Victorian society, engaged in a form of othering that upheld European cultural superiority.

Indeed, this intention to represent the Tunisian woman as the embodiment of excessive ornamentation is further reinforced in other passages when Lady Temple depicts "Lellah

Kebirah" as excessively enamored with material adornment. One of the best articulations of this line of thought is found in the following vivid portrayal:

> The Lillah had, in her ears and on her fingers, rings of brilliant and enormous size; round her neck were chains in great numbers, to which were suspended all kinds of ornaments in gold and precious stones, such as small boxes to hold talismans, scents some above and some underneath her gauze robe, and some handsome rows of pearls on her arms. (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835:199).

It is clear that "Lellah Kebirah" is represented as a superficial woman since the narrator depicts her as overwhelmed by ornaments. In fact, the choice of the vocabulary is particularly suggestive in this context since it further heightens this perception of excess. For instance, the adjective "enormous" suggests that the jewelry is not only large in size but also excessive in proportion. Besides, the use phrases such as "rings of brilliants of enormous size"; as well as "round her neck were chains in great numbers" highlights a focus on the quantity of the jewelry, emphasizing the excessiveness that renders the Lillah's appearance overwhelming rather than elegant. This lack of refinement is further reinforced by the phrase "some above and some underneath her gauze robe", which not only reflects an image of over-decoration, but also conveys a sense of a disorganized appearance. What is also worth mentioning is that Lady Temple's reliance on repetition and lexical overabundance, as exemplified by the recurrent use of the term "some" and the extensive enumeration of ornaments—"rings,' '"chains," "small boxes," "pearls"—suggests that such adornment is a superficial display of wealth rather than an expression of inner refinement. This constructs a view of the woman where her worth is largely determined by her external adornment which renders her identity solely defined by the objects she wears rather than her deeper moral or intellectual attributes. Taken from a broader perspective, such a perception not only reflects a personal aesthetic preference; rather, it exemplifies the pervasive colonial gaze that positions non-Western women as superficial and excessively preoccupied with material wealth.

In close alignment with Lady Temple, Mrs.Vivian also underscores Tunisian women's preoccupation with jewelrythrough a depiction that casts a woman she visited in the Arab quarter in an unfavorable light:

> [ ] Her little fat fingers are covered right down to the knuckles with rings. Of these she was evidently very proud, as she constantly spread out her hands for us to admire them.

> Various chains were hung round her neck, and she had an immense variety of broches and other ornaments fastened in her dress and hair. (Mrs.Vivian, as cited in Vivian 1899: 66).

Although Mrs.Vivian's depiction emerges nearly half a decade after Lady Temple's account, it obviously reinforces the same reductive portrayal of Tunisian women, highlighting the persistence of Orientalist tropes across British travel narratives. In fact, her description is both overwhelmed by caricature as well as exaggeration. The opening phrase "her little fat fingers" immediately introduces a sense of caricature reflected through the use of the adjectives "fat" and "little" which serves to "turn her into entertainment" (Seddiki 2019: 168). This phrase is followed by the statement "covered right down to the knuckles with rings", which not only suggests an overwhelming presence of adornments, but also reinforces the woman's obsession with material wealth. Likewise, the expression "constantly spread out" highlights a performative display aiming to tie the woman's self-worth only to her external adornment. Moreover, the list of adornments mentioned by Mrs.Vivian, such as "various chains", "immense variety of brooches", "other ornaments fastened in her dress and hair", accumulates detail to convey over indulgence. Indeed, this obsession with jewelry and ornamentation is commented on by the French anthropologist Emile Laurent as follows: "This love of jewelry…exists in all the lower races... It is... an obvious sign of intellectual and moral inferiority"[41] (Laurent, as cited in Seddiki 2019: 246: my translation). This perspective aligns with both Mrs.Vivian and Lady Temple's portrayals of Tunisian women, particularly their obsession with jewelry, subtly reflecting a long-standing European tendency to associate material excess with moral and intellectual deficiency, particularly when describing Oriental subjects.

Another rhetorical device used by Mrs.Vivian while representing Tunisian women is that of satire. Through a lens of ridicule and exaggeration, typical of colonial nineteenth-century European attitudes toward non-Western women, she offers a portrayal of the woman's attirein the following manner:

> She had a round good tempered face, a pink and white complexion not wholly guiltless of rouge, dark eyes torched up with kohl…a very scanty dark hair parted in the middle…she wore white silk trousers, a short loose coat of brilliant rose-colored brocade embroidered in pink and silver. Her bright yellow, high-heeled shoes,

[41] "Cet amour des bijoux […]existe chez toutes les races inférieures […] C'est un signe d'infériorité intellectuelle et morale manifeste" (as cited in Seddiki, 2019: 246)

> elaborately worked in gold, were at least three sizes too small for her, and she hobbled about so painfully in them that we expected every moment to see her fall on her nose. She was probably about eighteen, but she looked five and thirty at least. (Mrs.Vivian, as cited in Vivian 1899: 66).

In this quote, Mrs.Vivian represents the woman as a figure of ridicule and objectification, reduced tothe material goods she wears and mocked for her physicality and discomfort in her clothing. First, the physical descriptors employed such as "round good-tempered face," "not wholly guiltless of rouge," and "dark eyes torched up with kohl" serve to portray her as artificial and exaggerated. There is also a suggestion of fakery in her use of make-up— "guiltless of rouge" and "torched up with kohl"—which implies that her beauty is not natural but constructed. This idea of artificiality is further reinforced by expressions such as "very scanty dark hair" and "bright yellow, high-heeled shoes, elaborately worked in gold", which serve to further exaggerate her appearance. Even more than that, the woman is depicted as physically awkward and pitiable because she is unable to manage her extravagant footwear: "she hobbled about so painfullyin them that we expected everymoment to see her fall on her nose". This exaggeration makes her movement seem ridiculous, turning her into an object of mockery rather than a subject with agency. Seddiki comments on such exaggeration by suggesting that "it is done in order to add the feeling of exotification and visual othering of these women in the minds of their western audiences" (Seddiki 2019: 235). This preoccupation with ornamentation is equally prevalent in twentieth-century travel accounts, which will be the focus of the next section.

3.2.2.2.2. Twentieth-century perceptions

The works by Lorimer (1906) and Nesbitt (1906) clearly associate the physical appearance of Tunisian women with ugliness; thereby aligning closely with the perceptions perpetuated by male writers. This idea becomes particularly evident in Lorimer’s visit to the rich perfumer, Monsieur Amour, where her descriptions emphasize both aesthetic judgment and broader Orientalist perspectives. For instance, she portrays women in the harem through a lens of disappointment, explicitly stating that she was disappointed by "the ugliness ofthe haremites" (Lorimer 1906: 60). Obviously, this statement reinforces colonial tropes since it frames non-Western women as unattractive and unrefined. This condescending attitude is

further emphasized in her remark to the waddler, where she asks, "can we look at the bedrooms? It is to be hoped that they are prettier than their occupants" (Lorimer 1906: 61). This quote operates on multiple levels. First, the direct comparison between the women and their surroundings suggests that their worth is measured by visual appeal, which intensifies their dehumanization them in the process. Second, the phrase "it is hoped"conveys a sarcastic and dismissive tone, implying that the material architecture of the harem is of greater interest to her than the women who inhabit it. In fact, Lorimer's preoccupation with aesthetic judgment pervades all her descriptions of women living in the harem. In a more specific instance, she portrays them in the same reductive tone:

> A flock of dark-haired, dark-eyed, heavy-browed women appeared […] Their dress was too slatternly and wanting in distinction to be picturesque, but I have a faint vision in my mind of very wide white linen trousers reaching to the knees, and of ugly little blue or pink jackets […] A little black eyed baby of no particular interest was brought forward for me to admire" (Lorimer 1906: 59-60).

In the above quote, there are various elements that should be taken into consideration. First, Lorimer's use of the term "flock" is undeniably dehumanizing. Second, the triple repetition of the adjective "dark" serves to reinforce a homogenous image, while "heavy-browed" suggests an unrefined appearance. Besides, it is important to note that Lorimer not only describes the women's clothing, but also imposes her own evaluative judgments upon on them. For example, the term "too slatternly" connotes a supposed carelessness in their attire, suggesting an unkempt appearance. Similarly, the statement "wanting in distinction" implies a lack of refinement, a notion further reinforced by the expression "to be picturesque", which suggests that these women fail to meet an expected aesthetic standard. Equally significant is the use of adjectives such as "ugly" which conveys a strongly negative judgment, as well as "little" which serves to minimize the significance of the garments. Lorimer’s dismissive toneis further encapsulated in the final sentence, "A little black-eyed babyof no particular interest was brought forward for me to admire," where the phrase "of no particular interest" is especially significant. This phrase directly undermines the expected sentimental or affectionate response toa child, framing the interaction as obligatory rather than a meaningful engagement.

In close concordance with Lorimer, Nesbitt portrays the way Tunisian women are adorned in an unflattering manner, using similar expressions as Lorimer. For instance, during a wedding ceremony, Nesbitt adopts a distinctly satirical tone to describe these women, as illustrated in the following passage:

> They were all short and generally stout, handsome in a rather heavy way, with thick painted eyebrows, darkened eyelashes, and henna-stained hands […] Our simple gold chains and watches and our lack of other ornaments evidently surprised them, as they were adorned with golden cablesand plaques of gold and brilliant blue enamel. (Nesbitt 1906: 162: emphasis added).

Clearly enough, this quote is built upon a juxtaposition between "Them" (Tunisian women) and "Us" (British travellers), which serves to reinforce a sense of cultural superiority. The latter is noticed in Nesbitt's comparison between the British women,who are described as wearing "simple gold chains and watches" and "lacking other ornaments," and Tunisian women who are presented as excessively adorned with "golden cables and plaques of gold and brilliant blue enamel". To further stress this juxtaposition, Nesbitt starts her passage with a generalizing statement: "they were all...". In fact, the deliberate choice of the third-person pronoun "they", not only distances the speaker from the individuals being described but also homogenizes Tunisian women in a way that erases their individual identities. She also uses the quantifier "all" in order to strengthen the homogenization of Tunisian women by suggesting that every single woman in the group fits within this physical description. Accordingly, Tunisian women are presented not as diverse individuals, but as a monolithic group marked by undesirable traits ("short,""stout," "heavy"). Significantly, this kind of generalization is typical of Orientalist discourse, where travel writers often erase individuality in favor of collective stereotypes. Moreover, Nesbitt tries to depict these women through a lens that emphasizes physical excess and lack of refinement, as seen in phrases such as "short and generally stout" and "handsome in a rather heavy way." This reliance on a series of cumulative descriptors—such as "short,""stout," "heavy," "thick," "painted," "darkened"— not only adds a negative layer on to these women, but also presents them as embodying a form of beauty that is at odds with Western ideals. More importantly, her focus on "thick painted eyebrows" and "henna-stained hands" points to an Orientalist gaze that reads local beauty

practices as exaggerated or grotesque rather than culturally specific forms of self-expression. Indeed,by fragmenting Tunisian women's bodies into discrete parts (eyebrows, eyelashes, hands), Nesbitt objectifies them and distances herself culturally and morally in a way that suggests her inherent superiority. In this regard, E. Ann Kaplen in her influential book *Looking for the Other* (1997), comments on the fact of cataloging physical traits to stress difference and inferiority by arguing that "looking relations are never innocent. They are always determined by the cultural systems people traveling bring with them" (Kaplen 1997: 6).

To sum up, the perspectives previously examined reveal two main recurring patterns. The first one could be read through the lens of Gayatri Spivak's rhetorical question "can the subaltern speak?". Much like colonized subjects in broader colonial discourses, Tunisian women in these accounts are systematically denied a voice; they are rather spoken about but never granted the opportunity to speak for themselves. Thus, their representations are shaped by travellers' assumptions, desires, and preconceptions, rather than by any authentic engagement with their lived experience. Inextricably linked to this silencing, the second pattern reveals that Tunisian women are "never seen as beautiful in the way English women were believed to be" (Grewal 1996: 57), largely because they are evaluated through the prism of British aesthetic standards. Consequently, their physical appearance is deplored, and at times, subjected to satirical treatment. Unsurprisingly then, the common feature that unites all these travel accounts is the little interest shown in engaging with the local population within itsown distinct socio-cultural framework,which isundeniablyunique. The resulting portrayal is superficial, confined to surface-level observations that fail to capture the deeper, culturally specific realities of Tunisian society.

Notably, this focus on the exaggerated physical appearance of Tunisian women intersects with another recurring trope in female travel narratives which is that of their alleged laziness. Just as fatness and adornment are depicted as a sign of excess, idleness is similarly viewed as an inherent trait, thereby reinforcing the notion of Tunisian women as passive and lazy. This persistent pattern suggests that female travel writers, rather than offering a counter point to male perspectives, often reproduce the same Eurocentric perspective, reducing Tunisian women to objects of observation rather than individuals with agency.

3.2.3. The Tunisian woman as lazy

In both nineteenth-and early twentieth-century accounts, female writers depict Tunisian women as idle figures confined to domestic spaces, and detached from productivity and progress. This portrayal aligns with broader Orientalist narratives that represent non Western societies as stagnant and resistant to modernity.

3.2.3.1. Nineteenth-century views

Both LadyTemple (1835) and Mary Herbert (1872) echo a similar view about Tunisian women. For example, Lady Temple asserts that they engage in " […] the constant use of the bath" and "take no exercise" (Lady Temple, as cited in Temple 1835: 197). Likewise, Herbert postulates that "their sole occupation was to bathe, dress, smoke, and eat" (Herbert 1872: 262). She continues noting: " [...] The greatest kindness you can do is to go and pay them a visit if only to kill half an hour or so" (Herbert 1872: 262). Both quotes use a reductive language that emphasizes the perceived idleness and lack of meaningful pursuits in these women's lives. Clearly, both writers focus on unproductive activities—like bathing, smoking, eating—while also mentioning the absence of any perceived activity: "take no exercise". Added to that, Herbert uses the term "sole" which is in itself extremely reductive as it leaves no room for nuance or variation in the lives of Tunisian women. It conveys the idea that their existence is entirely devoid of intellectual, emotional, or social engagement. Also, she adopts an enumerative style—"to bathe, dress, smoke, and eat"—which creates a monotonousrhythm, emphasizing a sense of purposelessness and triviality. More importantly, Herbert's suggestion that visiting these women is an act of "kindness" reflects the paternalistic attitude which reinforces the narrative of Western superiority, as it positions British female travellers as active agents capable of giving meaning to the lives of Tunisian women.

This perspective is not merely confined to travel narratives about Tunis; rather, it resonates across a broader spectrum of Orientalist discourse. A significant parallel can be observed in the works of British female travellers about Algeria, where the same reductive stereotypes persist. A particularly illustrative example can be found in the writings of Barbara Bodichon, who distils the daily existence of Algerian women into a handful of trivial activities such as "clambering over the [...] roof", "drinking coffee with neighbours there" and "gossiping" (Bodichon, as cited in Seddiki 2019: 14). Interestingly, such depictions, far from being isolated observations, reflect a deeply ingrained pattern within the female gaze, one that

reduces the Orient to a set of reductive tropes, reinforcing the very stereotypes perpetuated by their male counterparts. This line of thought continues to echo well into the twentieth-century where similar patterns of representation are perpetuated.

3.2.3.2. Twentieth-century views

In the same year, both Lorimer and Nesbitt embarked on their journeys to Tunis, each offering her account of the people she encountered. Yet, despite their distinct voices, a striking resemblance emerges in their portrayals of Tunisian women. Indeed, both of them converge on a recurring theme—the perceived indolence of these women. In her account *Algeria and Tunis: Painted and described* (1906), Nesbitt notes that Tunisian women have "a very monotonous life" (Nesbitt 1906: 159). Lorimer expands on this idea by asserting that "they lead an indolent lifestyle without any activity" (Lorimer 1906: 25). In another passage, she further emphasizes this portrayal, observing that "they have nothing to do all day but sleep and eat and dress" (Lorimer 1906: 69). Consequently, she presents these women in a homogenous manner, characterizing them as "idle chatterers" (Lorimer 1906: 70). Clearly enough, these quotes rely on a reductive language and a dismissive tone to depict Tunisian women as leading dull, purposeless lives, reflecting broader gendered stereotypes. Starting with Nesbitt, her specific use of the term "these women" is very suggestive since it erases the individuality and cultural diversity of Tunisian women, hence perpetuating a stereotype that views them as a homogeneous and undifferentiated group. Moreover, the choice of the adjective "monotonous" is judgmental and dismissive since it emphasizes boredom and lackof variation in their lives. This assumption is intensified by the inclusion of "very" which reinforces the view that their lives are excessively monotonous. Lorimer, on the other hand, opts for the adjective "indolent" to describe the life of Tunisian women. This description not only depicts these women as lazy and passive, but also reinforces colonial notions of their moral and cultural inferiority. To emphasize their idleness, Lorimer uses in her second passage a negative construction "nothing to do". This construction further contributes to the representation of these women as lacking purpose or productivity. Besides, the enumeration of activities: "sleep and eat and dress"and her use of the conjunction "but" not only trivialises their daily lives, but also suggests that these activities constitute all their existence. This is what explains the reference to them as "idle chatterers" in order to reinforce the Orientalist stereotype that denies them social and intellectual depth. In fact, the adjective "idle" suggests

laziness, while the noun "chatterers" trivializes their communication, stripping it of substance and value.

Taken from a critical angle, these portrayals are profoundly dismissive since they ignore the cultural, social, and domestic roles played by Tunisian women. They also reflect a lack of understanding or willingness to engage with the complexities of their lives, resulting in an overlooking of the distinctions between social classes and a disregard of the economic complexities inherent in the Tunisian society. Indeed, the privilege of having a lifestyle centered on leisure rather than labour was largely reserved for women of the upper classes. Yet, women from more modest backgrounds, particularly those in the interior regions, were bound by both domestic responsibilities and external labour (especially in agriculture). Thus, these depictions are not merely steeped in stereotype; but also deeply one-sided and subjective since they are not reflective of all Tunisian classes.

Building upon this moral condemnation, another reductive stereotype emerges which is that of the intellectual diminishment of Tunisian women. Indeed, female travellers perpetuate an Orientalist discourse that frames these women as inherently ignorant and intellectually limited. This depiction not only seeks to marginalize these women but also serves to deepen the colonial gaze by presenting these women as intrinsically inferior.

3.2.4. Tunisian women as ignorant

Our reading and interpretation of the image of Tunisian women as ignorant in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century female travel texts led us to approach it from the Hegelian dialectic of the Slave and Master. Indeed, Hegel asserts that the supposed "inferiorization of the Slave (as embodied in native women) by the Master (represented by British women)" (Seddiki 2019: 73) resulted in reductive image of the indigenous people. Relying on this assumption, it could be argued that most travel accounts are marred by stereotypical depictions that serve to confirm but one idea which is that of a Western superiority.

3.2.4.1. Nineteenth-century perceptions

As far as nineteenth-century works are concerned, Tunisian women were frequently portrayed as ignorant, a depiction that aligned with broader imperialist narratives about the "Oriental" woman. Indeed, these female travellers focus primarily on what they perceived as the intellectual shortcomings of indigenous women, hence representing them as inferior to British women. Herbert, for instance, characterizes Tunisian women as "illiterate" (Herbert 1872: 262) and describes their situation as "deplorable" (Herbert 1872: 262). Clearly, the label "illiterate" is very pejorative as it reduces these women to a single trait—lack of formal education—overlooking alternative forms of cultural knowledge they might have possessed. Meanwhile, the term "deplorable" conveys a strong moral judgment, suggesting that Tunisian women's condition is not only unfortunate but also in need of change, implicitly justifying colonial intervention. It is crucial to note that this perception is not limited to Tunisian women; but extends to other North African regions, as seen in Mrs. Rogers's description of Algerian women. In her account *A winter in Algeria 1863-1864*, she describes them as "poor veiled creatures—veiled alike in mind and body" (Rogers 1865: 58). Here, the metaphor of veiling functions as a double bind, reinforcing the stereotype of Muslim women as both physically oppressed and intellectually restricted. Relying on the above, it could be argued that such representations highlight British female travellers' reliance on pre-existing ideological constructs to depict Oriental women as intellectually inferior. In this sense, female travellers seem to be as ethnocentric and imperialist as their male counterparts. Their observations, shaped by nineteenth-century imperial ideologies, not only guided their perceptions but also restricted their ability to engage with the complexities of the people they encountered. Interestingly, this pattern of portraying Oriental women as intellectually constrained did not disappear with the turn of the century; rather, it persisted in twentieth-century British female travel narratives, reflecting the enduring influence of Orientalist perceptions.

3.2.4.2. Twentieth-century perceptions

A notable feature of twentieth-century travel narratives, particularly in the works of Lorimer (1906) and Nesbitt (1906), is the construction of a dichotomous relationship between the ostensibly superior British woman and the purportedly inferior Tunisian woman. By adopting this framework, both writers largely align with imperialist and patriarchal discourses that had remained deeply influential since the nineteenth century. For example, Nesbitt perceives the social confinement of Tunisian women within the harem, coupled with their lack of formal education, as a justification to refer to them as "poor things" (Nesbitt 1906: 159). This brief statement, with its specific linguistic choice, reduces Tunisian women to objects of pity. While the word "things" strips them of individuality and humanity, the adjective "poor" conveys a mix of pity and moral judgment, suggesting that their lives are inferior to Western standards. This portrayal reflects a paternalistic perspective that equates restricted mobility and limited access to Western forms of knowledge with inherent inferiority.

On the other hand, Lorimer visited the harem of the Tunisian Moor "Monsieur Amour," and further elaborated on the notion of intellectual deficiency by associating it with the perceived social inferiority of Tunisian women. One of her first observations is her characterization of these women as "stupid creatures" (Lorimer 1906: 59-60), which leads her to ask the waddler whether "the English wife [42] of the perfumer is "supposed to make companions with women like these" (Lorimer 1906: 61). Clearly enough, the adjective "stupid" is particularly dehumanizing because it strips these women of individuality, by presenting them as inherently deficient rather than as individuals shaped by specific cultural and historical contexts. This dismissive portrayal is further emphasized in her subsequent rhetorical question which frames the possibility of social interaction between the Englishwoman and Tunisian ones as totallyinconceivable. By doing so, Lorimer constructs a rigid hierarchy in which British women are positioned as inherently superior. Through this lens, the female gaze mirrors and perpetuates Orientalist discourse, reinforcing the notion that Tunisian women are unworthy of intellectual or social parity with their European counterparts.

[42] Monsieur Amour, a wealthy Tunisian perfumer, is married to an English woman, Sylvia, whom Lorimer consistently depicts as superior not only to the other Tunisian women but also to her husband. When Sylvia requests a divorce in order to return to England with her beloved Jack, Lorimer presents her decision favourably, reflecting her firm conviction throughout her narrative that "the East and West cannot mingle" (Lorimer 1906: 350).

To reinforce her perceptions, Lorimer suggests in another passage that Tunisian women occupy "a lower position" within society and are "kept in a more state of intellectual darkness" (Lorimer1906: 68).This characterization of intellectual deprivation is not presented as a mere cultural difference but as a fundamental aspect of their inferior status. As such, Lorimer's reference to Tunisian women as " [...] a pack of ignorant, common women" (Lorimer 1906: 67) underscores her belief that their lack of education and intellectual engagement renders them socially and morally inferior. Explained in more precise terms, Lorimer's language, akin to her counterparts, is both reductive and stereotypical. For example, her use of the comparative phrase "lower position" is undefined which suggests that Tunisian women could be subordinate to both: men within their society and women from Western cultures. Significantly, this lack of specificity allows the statement to resonate broadly with prejudiced assumptions about cultural hierarchies. Besides, her reliance on a judgmental tone, evident in her statement "kept in a more state of intellectual darkness", reflects broader Orientalist attitudes which often depict non-Western societies as backward and inferior. More Specifically, the passive form used—"are kept"—reinforces the perception of Tunisian women as powerless and subordinate. The choice of words like "state" conveys a fixed and enduring condition, suggesting that intellectual deficiency is an inherent and unchangeable characteristic; while the pejorative statement "intellectual darkness" equates lack of education or intellectual development with ignorance which reduces the complexity of their lives to a single, negative attribute.

The final quotation is particularly significant, as it exemplifies a dismissive and demeaning portrayal of Tunisian women. Clear as it may seem, the term "pack" is highly dehumanizing because it is generally associated with animals. Moreover, while the adjective "ignorant" implies a lack of knowledge and education—an enduring trope in Orientalist representations of non-Western women, the subsequent adjective: "common" suggests a lack of refinement and sophistication, hence underscoring a sense of cultural and moral superiority on the part of the narrator. This unfavourable depiction culminates in the narrator's assertion that these women are so ignorant that "it went clean out of my mind" (Lorimer 1906: 67). In other words, this claim suggests that these women have so little impression on Lorimer that they were not worth remembering. Consequently, she remarks: "really for once, I felt the sense of freedom and mental superiority so strongly" (Lorimer 1906: 70). Clearly, this quote epitomizes the Orientalist and colonial attitudes pervasive in twentieth-century-century travel narratives by focusing on the supposed inferiority of non-Western women. In fact, Lorimer's

choice of language is particularly significant—as the adverb "really" combined with the phrase "for once"—serves to underscore an exceptional and memorable moment for the narrator. This linguistic construction suggests that her experience is not only rare but also profoundly meaningful within the context of her encounter. This idea was reinforced by the use of three key expressions: "freedom", mental superiority", and "so strongly". The first one implies that the narrator perceives Tunisian women as being restricted and oppressed, contrasting their perceived condition with her own sense of liberation. While the statement "mental superiority" explicitly positions the narrator as intellectually and morally above the women she observes, the intensifier "so strongly" amplifies the narrator's emotional response, reinforcing herself-perceived enlightenment. Here, the narrator's self-perception of "freedom" does not extend to solidarity with the women she observes. Instead, she uses their supposed oppression to bolster her own sense of superiority. As such, her reference to "freedom and mental superiority" draws on colonialist tropes that framed Western women as epitomes of progress and enlightenment in contrast to the alleged stagnation of their counterparts in colonized societies.

In brief, Lorimer's persistent emphasis on the intellectual deficiency of Tunisian women can be interpreted as a deliberate strategy to uphold existing " […] hierarchies and power relations by invoking the notions of aboveness and belowness" (Ahmed 2004: 89). These concepts—"aboveness and belowness"—are recurrently used by the female writer to construct ethnocentric comparisons between Tunisian and British women, reinforcing a sense of European superiority. Esmaeil Zeiny contends that such an overt focus on racial disparities enables female writers to construct "a racialised regime that naturalise[s] differences and keep[s] groups of people inferior" (Zeiny 2017: 81-82). Through this lens, Lorimer's narrative not only marginalizes Tunisian women but also actively contributes to the ideological framework that sustains colonial and racial hierarchies.

Hence, it could be argued that both nineteenth- and early twentieth-century female writers often perpetuated patriarchal narratives, even while advocating for women's rights. Their criticism of non Western women frequently reflected both colonial hierarchies and cultural biases, portraying themselves as enlightened objects and their counterparts as pitiable subjects. That is why, Tunisian women were looked at from a racial distance and often viewed as "types and not as individuals" (Seddiki 2019: 254). They are even used as a reflective tool of their own Oriental societies which are largely "presented as stagnant, motionless and

unchanging and lacking any significant historical progress" (Seddiki 2019: 118). Saida Seddiki (2019) finds out that such descriptions allow the British traveller to "self-fashion herself as an enlightened English lady" while "construct[ing] the dichotomy of a refined educated Western woman and an ignorant shallow Oriental one" (Seddiki 2019: 93-94).

As a conclusion to female negative depictions of Tunisian women, two key dimensions emerge: one is discursive and the other is structural. From a discursive standpoint, we could argue that the main difference between male and female discourses on Tunisian women is the fact that female writers elaborated more on the issue of Tunisian women because they had direct access to the harem unlike their male counterparts. Notwithstanding, their visit to the harem did not alter their views about native women since they reproduced the same reductive schemes and Orientalist stereotypes present in male-authored texts, portraying Tunisian women as static and dehumanized figures. In this sense, the Tunisian woman becomes what Bell Hooks describes as an "object of a phallocentric gaze" (Hooks 1992: 126) wherein the act of looking reproduces male-centered forms of objectification, even when mediated through a female observer. As advocated by Seddiki, the depictions offered by female writers amount to "a woman-veiled male gaze" (Seddiki 2019: 209), which further reinforces the fact that these female-authored narratives remain complicit in sustaining patriarchal and Orientalist discourses.

The second key dimension is structural, as it pertains to the socio-political position of British women during that time. Despite their supposed cultural superiority, British female travellers were themselves subject to forms of subordination within their own society because of "the diktats of gender" (Seddiki 2019: 150); and this was an incentive for many female writers to travel in order "[...] to escape their own circumscribed lives" (Grewal 1996: 82). Ironically, however, their participation in the Orientalist discourse provided a means to project a sense of empowerment and superiority by contrasting their own condition with the perceived oppression of Tunisian women. As Grewal (1996) further argues, "Orientalist representations make the English women feel free and disguise their own subservience in their patriarchal culture" because this kind of "misrecognition was central to imperial culture in England in which the superiority and freedom of European forms of civilization was the rationale for empire" (Grewal 1996: 84).

To embellish the subordinate situation of British women, both critics Barbara Bodichon (1857) and Lynn Abrams (2002) advocate that this subservience is accidental and therefore

bound to change; while in Oriental cultures this is unlikely to happen due to Islam's rigid and stagnant nature. In this regard, Bodichon writes: "Women are God's children equally with men. In Britain this is admitted; because it is a Christian country; in Mahommedan countries this is denied" (Bodichon 1857: 25). Similarly, Abrams joins Bodichon on this particular point by arguing that the frozen nature of Islam is responsible for the subordinate position of Oriental women; while strongly arguing that Western female inferior position was as "an anachronism in a civilized society" and "female emancipation was the culmination of western progress" (Abrams 2002: 261). Seen under this light, it could be argued that this insistence on Western progress and democracy as opposed to Eastern stagnation and tyranny "once again reflects how Orientalist paintings were more about the West's self-identification than the realities of the East that it artificially delineated" (Ma 2012: 16). From this perspective, the Oriental woman becomes a symbolic figure of immutable difference—perpetually depicted as the antithesis of Western female emancipation and freedom, and as such "will always be thought of as vassals" (Seddiki 2019: 72).

4. General concluding remarks

This chapter has endeavored to examine the gendered encounter in British travel narratives through a critical lens that foregrounds the ambivalent representation of Tunisian women by both male and female writers in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Drawing on an extensive corpus of travel accounts, it has become evident that the figure of the Tunisian woman served not only as an object of fascination but also as a target of denigration, depicted through reductive and often disparaging stereotypes that reinforced colonial hierarchies and gendered preconceptions.

As far as positive depictions are concerned, the analysis has demonstrated that both genders perpetuated—in the nineteenth-century—similar perceptions of Tunisian women by highlighting their physical beauty, social grace, and self-sufficiency; hence offering portrayals that aligned with contemporary ideals of femininity. Bythe twentieth century, however, these multidimensional portrayals gave way to a particular emphasis on aesthetic appeal. This shift announces a transformation in the cultural and ideological priorities of British travel literature, where modernity reframed admiration through the lens of visual consumption rather than moral or intellectual depth. Interestingly, these positive portrayals operated at two different levels. They showed an ethical commitment to understanding Tunisian women as agents within their own cultural context, while simultaneously challenging the reductive stereotypes often associated with Orientalist discourse. These instances, however, were not indicative of a complete departure from dominant colonial ideologies.

As such, the chapter has proved that despite moments of cultural openness, a profound discursive ambivalence is deeply embedded in travellers' texts. Rather than presenting coherent narratives, these accounts construct an ambivalent gaze—one that oscillates between attraction and repulsion—hence revealing a shared lexicon of denigration across gender lines. Male writers described Tunisian women as ugly, idle, and secluded, while their female counterparts echoed these judgments, expanding on them through detailed accounts of veiling and harem life. The trope of the harem emerged as a recurring motif in female narratives, serving as a site of discursive control where the act of observing was equated with mastery. This further consolidates the idea that female travel writers did not significantly diverge from the Orientalist frameworks used by their male counterparts. On the contrary, they were actively complicit in the imperial project, replicating established stereotypes and reinforcing the ideological structures of empire—often under "a woman-veiled male gaze" (Seddiki 2019:

209). Following this curious alliance between male and female views, one could no longer talk about a specific male gaze or a female one. Rather, both gazes become "positions of power from where the act of looking is performed." (Mitchell 2005: 6). Actually, this supposed "position of power" is what makes most travel accounts fall within what Jacques Derrida calls the "violence of the letter", a violence "of difference, of classification, and of the system of appellations" (Derrida 1976: 107). Leila Ahmed builds further on this idea by arguing that very image of the oppressed woman "[…] was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples." (Ahmed 1992: 151).

As a whole, the gendered encounter in these narratives does not represent a site of rupture but rather one of tension and ambivalence, where both gender and racial superiority intersect to produce a multi-layered representation of the Tunisian woman. By questioning these multi-layered representations, this chapter not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexity of travel writing as a literary genre, but also reveals the intricate ways in which gender and empire mutually inform one another in the literary construction of the colonial Other.

CONCLUSION

Much like a journey, this thesis will conclude where it began, and much like a traveller, it will return to its point of departure but with a new outlook that opens up the possibility for future research.

First, this research is built upon a form of duality that brings to light the ambivalent nature of the imperial discourse. Analytically speaking, this duality has allowed a more complex understanding of the representation of Tunis, its culture and people in British travel books. Traditionally, most of the critical readings about travel accounts tend to provide a one-sided picture that reproduces stereotypical images of alterity and inferiority. This one-sided picture,in fact, falls strictlywithin Said's Orientalist discourse that describes Oriental cultures as unchanging, barbaric, and primitive. Having read and analyzed a variety of British travel accounts about Tunis, we have come to the conclusion that Said's theory of Orientalism does not fit within the scope of all these portrayals since the latter alternate between admiration and denigration. As such, the Bhabhanian theory of ambivalence was brought tot he fore aiming to resolve the complexity of British travellers' heterogeneous views. To do so, this study was built upon a fourfold analytical structure: landscape, culture, people, and women. Through a critical engagement with the works of postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Mary Louise Pratt, Michel Foucault, Ali Behdad, among many others, this thesis has moved beyond the conventional monolithic view of Orientalism to reveal a non-homogeneous imperial discourse—one defined by contradictions and tensions.

Following this line of thought, the first chapter—"the landscape encounter"— revealed how British travellers oscillated between aesthetic appreciation and dismissive representation of theTunisian environment. TheTunisian landscape was alternately cast as a refuge from the industrializing West and a barren, desolate space that failed to conform to travellers' expectations. This duality—often observable within a single writer's account—suggests a deeply contradictory and ideologically fraught gaze. While the Tunisian landscape is

sometimes admired through a lens of Romantic escape, it is equally reduced to a "topographic Other," a backdrop onto which imperial anxieties are projected. Notably, both male and female travellers contributed to this discourse, relying on different stylistic modes: men often employed a scientific or imperial gaze, whereas women favored the picturesque and spiritual, linking natural immersion to self-discovery.

The second chapter, centered on the cultural encounter, further complicated the British-Tunisian encounters by foregrounding the travellers' shifting perceptions of Tunisian social life, customs, and traditions. On one hand, many narratives reproduced long-standing Orientalist tropes—highlighting cultural stagnation as well as religious backwardness. These descriptions align with Said's critique of Orientalism as a discourse that constructs the East as a space of timeless inferiority. On the other hand, the same narratives also offered admiring accounts of Tunisian tolerance, architectural beauty, intellectual refinement, and historical depth. These ambivalent views destabilize the Orientalist discourse from within, aligning instead with Bhabha's notion of ambivalence, where "two attitudes toward external reality persist" (Bhabha 1994: 180).

The third chapter deepened the analysis by turning to the human encounter, investigating how British travellers constructed—and deconstructed—the figure of the Tunisian native. Through a detailed typology of representation, the chapter showed how the native subject was alternately demonized through a series of stereotypes such as filth, ignorance, moral inferiority; and rehumanized through depictions of beauty, dignity, and religious virtue. These conflicting portrayals reinforce the idea that British travel narrativesare sites of ideological struggle, in which writers negotiated their roles as both objective observers and subjective agents of empire. By reflecting on both dehumanizing and humanizing discourses, this chapter underscores the complexity of the colonial relationship, which fluctuates between domination and a desire for the Other.

In the final chapter, the analysis of the gendered encounter revealed deeper ambivalent representations**.** Through the gaze of male and female travellers, the figure of the Tunisian woman was constructed not as a subject in her own right, but as a symbolic site upon which contradictory perceptions were projected. As such, the narratives oscillated between moments of genuine admiration—emphasizing physical beauty, grace, intelligence, and cultural distinctiveness—and more reductive depictions that present Tunisian women as passive, secluded, indolent, ignorant, and physically undesirable. Ultimately, thefigure of theTunisian woman emerged not merely as a character in these travel texts, but as a reflective surface

through which the writers negotiated theirown gender identities, cultural values, and imperial ideologies. More importantly, it has been found that British female travellers occupied a complex position within this discursive field; while they offered empathetic portrayals of Tunisian women, they replicated at the same time male-oriented tropes by perpetuating colonial assumptions.

Across these four chapters, this thesis has illuminated how ambivalence functions as a structural condition of British travel writing on Tunis. This ambivalence is not simply a symptom of travellers' inconsistency; it is rather embedded in the very logic of empire, which must simultaneously reject and attract, exclude and include. It has even served as a tool to depict the British traveller as a conflicted subject—torn between the cultural obligations of empire and the ethical pull of the Other. For instance, travellers' negative views about Tunis revealed much more nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British ways of thinking about race and national identity than about the peoples and the culture travellers sought to describe. As such, their narratives were saturated with what Jeffery Richards describes as "the ethos and attitudes of empire." (Richards, as cited in Aatkar 2019: 159). This is, in fact, what led Clark to conclude that "travel is the sub-story of the grand narrative of imperialism." (Clark 1999: 32).

Interestingly, however, the same travel texts include positive views that diverge from the discourse seemingly prevalent in Orientalist writing, hence reflecting "a desire to open up the world to engagement between different ideas, cultures, and peoples" (Huggan 2014: 84). This is what justifies the inclusion of Bhabha's concept of ambivalence since it helps understand the "mixed and split" (Bhabha 1994: 118) nature of the imperial discourse. The result of this alternation between positive and negative perceptions is a corpus that is politically charged, aesthetically rich, and ideologically unstable.

In conclusion, the British representation of Tunis in travel narratives emerges not as a fixed imperial discourse but as a contradictory and tension-filled one. It is precisely in its moments of ambivalence that the colonial gaze reveals its deepest instabilities—and, paradoxically, its most human dimensions. Through the lens of the landscape, culture, people, and the female figure, Tunis becomes not only a geographic destination but a symbolic space where identity, power, and desire are continually negotiated through their encounter with the other.

Another key finding emerging from this research is that British female perceptions "confirm their implicationwithin the wider imperial discourse." (Herath 2015: 35). Akin to

male accounts which are marred by imperialist convictions of the day, female narratives also "relied on a similar citational discourse of circulation and repetition of Western knowledges about the Orient." (Herath 2015: 35). As such, their works were tainted with ethnocentric views that confirm their "collusion with the imperial mission." (Lee 2007: 39-40). This implies that British female writers failed to get rid of "a haughty and conceited superior overtone so characteristic of male writings of the period." (Seddiki 2019: 7-8). That is why it has been found that "women travellers' gaze overlaps with the male travellers' gaze in that it is imperial, exoticising and objectifying" (Seddiki 2019:166). This is, indeed, what led many critics to argue that "keeping empire and promoting imperial manifest ideals was not only a male traveller's concern; but also a woman's." (Simour 2020: 4)

One of the possible explanations of women's collusion with male views is that since they were often constrained by societal expectations, they might have used such stereotypes to align with the dominant colonial narratives, thereby asserting their credibility within a male-dominated literary space. Hence, by breaking down the ideal of the angle in the house and entering into a male dominated-realm, they intended to prove that "they too could contribute to imperialism in a productive way" (Franey: 2003: 8). According to female writers, the very fact of sharing these racist attitudes allowed them to be on an equal footing with their male counterparts and hence " […] became part of the nationalist discourse of empire" (Grewal 1996: 61). That is why Katie Wernecke confirms that most female travelogues are largely "instilled with the same sense of superiority and racial difference that male imperial decision-makers used to justify the need to colonize less-developed cultures" (Wernecke 2013: 27).

The best illustration of this idea was articulated in female writers'pejorative description of Oriental institutions (the Tunisian harem), Oriental practices (the veil), and the physical appearance of Tunisian women. Through these depictions, female travellers achieved two goals. The first one is personal because the negative depiction of Tunisian women allowed them to "uphold their supposed racial and national superiority over Eastern women" (Grewal 1996: 65). The second goal is political since such stereotypical depictions gave them the opportunity "to show their equality with Englishmen by participating in the colonial project that was defined in purely masculinist terms" (Grewal 1996: 65); hence allowing them to insert their place in the "imperial archive" (Richards: 1993). This is what drives many scholars to confirm that women's presence in the colonies was "detrimental to indigenous colonial populations" since they tried to "reinforce their racist ideology toward the indigenous people" (Wernecke 2013: 21).

It is worth noting that this research has certain limitations of which we are aware. First, it is limited to a specific corpus of British travel narratives from the nineteenth- and early twentieth- centuries, which means that its findings may not fully represent other European perspectives or later travel accounts that could reflect different attitudes towards Tunis. Second, the analysis focuses on texts produced during a historical period strongly marked by colonial and orientalist discourses, and therefore the conclusions drawn maynot fullycapture contemporary representations of Tunis. Finally, the study primarily centers on British travellers' perspectives, which may result in a lack of direct insight into Tunisian viewpoints or responses to such literary representations.

This research not only destabilizes essentialist readings of Orientalism but also opens new scholarly directions for examining literary representations in nuanced ways. Its interdisciplinary approach offers a flexible framework that maybe fruitfully extended to other contexts and corpora.

First, this work lays the foundation for a comparative study, exploring whether the British ambivalent perceptions of Tunis are also present in British narratives about Algeria and Morocco, especially as in many instances these three countries are visited together as part of a wider Mediterranean tour. Such a study would help assess whether this ambivalence is a broader regional pattern or is exclusively found in the representation of the Tunisian context.

Second, this research opens possibilities for an inter-imperial perspective, comparing British narratives with those of French, Italian and American travellers. In fact, the analysis of how different Western powers constructed the same spaces and peoples could deepen our understanding of imperial discourse and reveal other specificities in the rhetoric of colonization and empire. It would also be extremely fruitful to examine, through a reception-based study, how Tunisian intellectuals, writers, or artists of the period reacted to or resisted these foreign portrayals.

In short, this research contributes not only to the field of travel literature but also to broader conversations about cultural representation and the ethics of writing the Other. It provides an academic basis for future scholars seeking to uncover the layered complexities of the colonial discourse—its structural contradictions, its emotional entanglements, and its lingering traces in the present.

Amidst these new insightful thoughts, we could claim that this study may not be a place to end but it may be a place to begin.

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Summary in French/ Résumé

Ce travail retrace l'évolution historique et conceptuelle du voyage, considéré successivement comme pénitence, étude, travail ou plaisir. Il identifie trois figures majeures: l'explorateur, le voyageur et le touriste, chacune ancrée dans un contexte historique spécifique. Bien que très ancienne, la littérature de voyage n'a été reconnue comme objet d'étude académique qu'à la fin du XXe siècle, notamment grâce à l'influence de l'ouvrage *Orientalism* d'Edward Said, qui a permis d'envisager ce genre comme un espace de production idéologique. Dès lors, les critiques ont examiné les récits de voyage comme discours coloniaux, mettant en évidence leurs enjeux politiques et culturels.

Depuis longtemps, l'Orient, et en particulier le Maghreb, a été une destination privilégiée, idéalisée par la littérature française et britannique. L'intérêt s'intensifie après l'expédition de Bonaparte en Égypte et s'étend à Tunis, alors beylicat ottoman jouissant d'une autonomie relative avant le protectorat français de 1881. Au XIXe siècle, la Grande-Bretagne connaît une expansion industrielle, économique et impériale, qui a donné naissance à un discours de supériorité nationale. Les relations anglo-tunisiennes, qui ont débuté au XVIe siècle, se consolident au XIXe grâce aux échanges commerciaux, à l'intérêt culturel et à un climat politique propice, entraînant une prolifération significative des récits britanniques sur Tunis.

La recherche se focalise sur le XIXe et le début du XXe siècles, période de «haut impérialisme», caractérisée par une profusion de récits de voyage. Les voyageurs britanniques —diplomates, militaires, missionnaires, érudits, artistes—visitent Tunis pour des raisons variées: commerciales, politiques, archéologiques, romantiques ou personnelles. Leurs itinéraires, relativement uniformes, sont facilités par la marine britannique et les réseaux consulaires. Les récits publiés connaissent parfois un grand succès, certains étant réédités ou traduits.

Sur le plan théorique, cette recherche s'appuie sur deux cadres complémentaires. L'Orientalisme de Said analyse la construction de l'Orient comme espace imaginé et instrument de domination, structuré par des oppositions binaires (Occident civilisé/ Orient arriéré). Cette grille est enrichie par la notion d'« ambivalence » développée par Homi Bhabha, qui met en évidence la coexistence de l'attraction et de la répulsion dans les représentations coloniales, révélant fissures et contradictions dans le discours impérial. L'intégration de ces deux approches permet d'aller au-delà d'une lecture monolithique et d'identifier des représentations nuancées, parfois en tension avec les stéréotypes orientalistes.

La dimension genrée des récits de voyage est également examinée. Tandis que certains critiques ont avancé que les femmes voyageuses forgeaient un discours distinct, plus intime et moins impérialiste, d'autres ont mis en évidence la participation des femmes britanniques à l'élaboration du discours colonial, partageant parfois les préjugés et la vision de supériorité raciale de leurs contemporains masculins. L'étude entend donc comparer et contraster les perspectives masculines et féminines sur Tunis [43], en identifiant convergences et divergences dans leurs modes de représentation.

La méthodologie adoptée est qualitative et interprétative, combinant analyse textuelle rapprochée des sources primaires—récits britanniques sur Tunis— et mobilisation des travaux critiques en études postcoloniales et en littérature de voyage. Les analysess'organisent autour de quatre axes correspondant aux chapitres: la rencontre avec le paysage, la culture, la population et enfin les femmes tunisiennes, chaque thème étant examiné à travers les notions de représentation, stéréotypie, panoptique, regard et ambivalence. L'objectif est de démontrer que les récits britanniques sur Tunis, loin d'être homogènes, sont traversés de contradictions et d'instabilités, reflétant la complexité du rapport colonial et la diversité des regards portés sur l'Autre.

Ce travail vise ainsi à combler une lacune dans la recherche, en apportant une nouvelle perspective sur les représentations britanniques de Tunis aux XIXe et début XXe siècles, et en montrant que l'ambivalence constitue un outil analytique essentiel pour comprendre la richesse et les tensions internes de ces récits.

[43] Les voyageurs britanniques faisaient souvent référence à la fois à la capitale et au territoire correspondant à la Tunisie actuelle simplement par leterme Tunis. La présente étude adopte la même convention, en accord avec la terminologie employée dans les sources primaires examinées, quis'étendent du XIXe au début du XXe siècle.

Le premier chapitre examine la représentation ambivalente du paysage tunisien dansles récits de voyage britanniques des XIXe et début XXe siècles, soulignant les influences esthétiques et idéologiques qui façonnent ces écritures. L'analyse se situe d'abord dans le contexte du haut impérialisme, époque durant laquelle les récits de voyage prolifèrent et se transforment en un élément crucial de la perspective orientaliste. La question centrale posée est celle de l'ambivalence : dans quelle mesure le paysage tunisien est-il représenté à la fois comme un espace de fascination et comme un territoire à dominer, et comment ces représentations diffèrent-elles selon le genre des voyageurs ?

L'introduction souligne que le lien entre la littérature et la nature est aussi ancienne que l'humanité. Depuis les peintures rupestres jusqu'aux écrits romantiques, le thème de la nature est devenu un élément central de l'expression artistique etlittéraire. Au XIXe siècle, l'essor de disciplines comme la géographie, l'archéologie et la géologie, mais aussi le mouvement romantique, ont favorisé une appréciation accrue du paysage. Dans ce contexte, Tunis ainsi que l'ensemble du Maghreb attirent de nombreux voyageurs britanniques, hommes et femmes, qui décrivent ses paysages variés, ses villes et ses oasis. L'étude du paysage apparaît alors comme un moyen privilégié de comprendre les mécanismes d'appropriation culturelle et idéologique dans l'écriture viatique.

L'ancrage théorique de ce chapitre s'appuie principalement sur le Romantisme, un mouvement initié en réponse à l'industrialisation et au rationalisme des Lumières. En Europe, et notamment en Grande-Bretagne, les Romantiques valorisent l'émotion, l'imagination et l'harmonie avec la nature. Wordsworth et Coleridge, dans les *Lyrical Ballads*, instaurent une nouvelle esthétique où la nature devient source de vérité spirituelle et de beauté poétique. Dans cette perspective, le concept du sublime, développée par Edmund Burke, occupe une position centrale. Le sublime fait référence à la capacité de certains paysages à susciter simultanément l'admiration et l'effroi, la grandeur et la terreur, et son influence se retrouve dans la peinture, la poésie, la fiction et aussi la littérature de voyage. Ainsi, la description de paysages montagneux, de vallées fertiles ou de côtes maritimes dépasse le simple registre descriptif pour exprimer une expérience esthétique et spirituelle profonde.

Dans la première partie analytique, sont mises en évidence les représentations positives du paysage tunisien. Les voyageurs masculins du XIXe siècle insistent sur la beauté des baies, des collines, des oasis et des panoramas. Leur écriture se fonde sur ce que Matthew Edney

appelle «le regard géographique»[44], qui combine un regard scientifique et un regard pittoresque. Le premier consiste en une description minutieuse de la faune, de la flore et des formations géologiques, témoignant d'une volonté d'observation quasi scientifique. Le second transforme les paysages en tableaux pittoresques, comparables à des peintures où les jeux de couleurs et de reliefs sont minutieusement décrits. Les voyageurs décrivent ainsi Tunis comme une « ville de verdure », Gabès comme un «paradis tropical», ou encore Tabarka et Zaghwan comme des paysages d'une beauté saisissante. Les superlatifs, les métaphores picturales et l'usage de points de vue panoramiques visent à émerveiller le lecteur européen. Toutefois, cette idéalisation est souvent accompagnée d'un «regard impérial»[45]. Les paysages, bien qu'esthétisés, sont dépeints comme des espaces vides et disponibles, propices à la colonisation. Les descriptions de la fertilité des terres et de la stratégie géographique de ports comme Bizerte ou Sousse traduisent un intérêt politique et économique explicite.

Au début du XXe siècle, la même logique perdure, même si les récits se diversifient avec l'essor du tourisme et des voyages organisés par Cook. Les paysages continuent d'être dépeints sous un angle esthétique, oscillant entre le pittoresque et le sublime, mais sont également intégrés dans une logique commerciale et touristique. On fait l'éloge du climat, en décrivant les montagnes, les forêts etles oasis comme des paysages enchanteurs, tandis que le pays est mis en avant comme une destination privilégiée. Les auteurs multiplient les références aux «charmes classiques» et à la variété des paysages, de sorte que Tunis apparaît à la fois comme un lieu de contemplation esthétique et comme un territoire susceptible d'être exploité par l'Empire.

La deuxième partie du chapitre s'intéresse à la représentation féminine du paysage tunisien. Elle commence par un rappel du contexte social et idéologique qui a façonné l'accès des femmes au voyage et à l'écriture. Dans la société victorienne, l'idéologie des «sphères séparées» attribuait aux hommes le domaine public tandis que les femmes étaient confinées à l'espace domestique. L'image de «l'ange du foyer» imposait aux femmes une vie confinée au cadre domestique, en soumission à l'autorité masculine. Cependant, à partir du milieu duXIX^{e} siècle, des évolutions politiques, sociales et techniques—développement du féminisme, premières revendications pour le droit de vote, amélioration des moyens de transport—ouvrent la voie à l'émergence de la « New Woman », une femme émancipée, instruite et désireuse de voyager.

[44] Geographical gaze
[45] Imperial gaze

Dans ce contexte, le voyage et l'écriture deviennent des voies de libération privilégiées. De nombreuses femmes issues de milieux aristocratiques ou aisés publient leurs récits sur Tunis et le Maghreb, se positionnant ainsi comme de véritables voyageuses. Ces textes constituent une rupture avec la tradition masculine du récit d'aventures. Tout en reprenant parfois les codes esthétiques du pittoresque, les voyageuses investissent le paysage d'une valeur plus personnelle et existentielle : contempler la nature devient un moyen de se définir, de rompre avec la dureté patriarcale et deconstruire une nouvelle identité. Les récits féminins de voyage contribuent ainsi à déconstruire l'image de «l'ange du foyer» en montrant des femmes actrices de leur propre destinée, participant activement à l'écriture de l'Empire et à la redéfinition de la féminité.

Dans un premier temps, les récits féminins révèlent une aspiration à l'émancipation qui se manifeste dans le voyage comme un nouveau moyen d'expression. Bien que ces voyageuses soient souvent soumises aux restrictions des normes victoriennes, les obligeant à voyager en compagnie d'un mari ou d'un parent masculin, elles profitent de leur voyage à Tunis pour déconstruire le stéréotype rigide de «l'ange du foyer». Le déplacement vers l'Orient devient une occasion de redéfinirleur rapport au monde et de prouver leurendurance physique et morale. Les motivations qui animent ces femmes sont multiples: un premier groupe voyage pour des raisons thérapeutiques, en suivant l'usage médical qui préconise un changement de climat pour traiter les troubles physiques et nerveux; un deuxième groupe recherche l'exotisme, séduit par l'architecture islamique, les teintes vives et l'ambiance considérée comme orientale; enfin, un troisième groupe manifeste une volonté d'évasion, souhaitant échapper à la monotonie et à lalourdeur de l'Angleterre industrielle pour retrouver une authenticité perdue. Ainsi, le voyage à Tunis incarne une double dynamique: une quête de bien-être et un effort de repositionnement identitaire.

Sur le plan des représentations, les voyageuses utilisent fréquemment «le regard pittoresque»[46] théorisé par Edney. Le paysage tunisien est décrit à travers des évocations qui soulignent les harmonies de couleurs, les contrastes de lumière et la richesse végétale. Les récits de Lady Herbert, Mrs. Greville-Nugent et Frances Nesbitt montrent comment la nature méditerranéennese transforme en un tableau vivant, contrastant avec la rudesse industrielle de Londres. Le pittoresque, parfois teinté de sublime romantique, se transforme en un outil esthétique et existentiel: il permet de magnifier la beauté de paysages vierges, d'affirmer une

[46] Picturesque gaze

capacité d'observation fine et de justifier la légitimité de leur voix dans un champ littéraire dominé par les hommes. Cette esthétique du paysage révèle une double fonction : elle satisfait le goût des lecteurs pour l'exotisme et elle sert de support à l'affirmation d'une subjectivité féminine en quête de reconnaissance.

Cependant, cette vision idéalisée n'est pas exclusive. Les récits mettent également en avant une tonalité de désenchantement. Certains voyageurs masculins, mais aussi certaines voyageuses comme Norma Lorimer, décrivent Tunis comme stérile, déserte et décevante. Les termes péjoratifs abondent: « aride », « morne », « improductif », « sans attrait. » Ces jugements reflètent fréquemment une désillusion résultant de la collision entre un idéal hérité de l'art et de la littérature et la réalité concrète. Par conséquent, le même endroit peut être célébré comme un joyau pittoresque puis, quelques pages plus loin, dénoncé commeune terre hostile. Cette oscillation témoigne d'un rapport profondément ambivalent à l'espace colonial.

Il convient également de souligner un autre aspect : l'utilisation des descriptions paysagères comme stratégie rhétorique. En effet, les récits insistent sur les difficultés rencontrées par les voyageuses (climat rude, trajets inconfortables, maladies) pour mieux mettre en valeur leur capacité de résistance et ainsi contester le stéréotype victorien de la fragilité féminine. Dans cette perspective, le voyage ne se réduit pas à une expérience contemplative : il devient une épreuve, un moyen de légitimer une identité féminine forte, enduranteet digne de reconnaissance sociale. Cette rhétorique de la souffrance surmontée sert d'instrument pour renforcer la crédibilité littéraire et améliorer l'image des femmes voyageuses.

L'analyse comparative des discours masculins et féminins révèle des convergences et des divergences. Les deux genres partagent une sensibilité commune à l'esthétique pittoresque. Toutefois, les hommes font aussi appel au « regard impérial », cherchant à classer, dominer et parfois justifier une entreprise coloniale par la dépréciation du paysage et la dénonciation de la négligence des populations locales. Les femmes, en revanche, optent pour une approche sensible et introspective: la nature n'est pas seulement un objet de contemplation mais un espace de régénération personnelle, de découverte sensorielle et de revendication implicite d'égalité. Ce décalage révèle la spécificité des récits féminins, qui transforment le voyage en une expérience existentielle et esthétique.

L'ensemble de ces tensions doit être interprété à la lumière des cadres théoriques contemporains. L'analyse de Said sur l'orientalisme, qui tend à en faire un discours

monolithique, est nuancée par l'étude de ces textes. Ali Behdad a montré qu'il convient de comprendre l'orientalisme comme un discours «diffus et pluriel », ce que confirme l'examen des récits britanniques à Tunis. Homi Bhabha, quant à lui, éclaire ces contradictions à travers la notion d'ambivalence: les représentations ne sont jamais stables mais marquées par le double mouvement d'attractionetde répulsion. Loin de n'êtrequ'un dispositif dedomination, le discours viatique devient un lieu de négociation, de fractureet de recomposition identitaire. Les voyageuses, en particulier, utilisent cette ambivalence pour réclamer une place dans l'espace public et littéraire, tout en demeurant prises dans les contradictions de leur temps.

En résumé, le paysage tunisien dans les récits britanniques est dépeint comme un espace marqué par une ambivalence constante. Il est à la fois idéalisé et esthétisé dans l'esprit du romantisme et du sublime, tout étant instrumentalisé dans une logique de domination impériale. Chez les hommes, cette ambivalence oscille entre admiration esthétique et appropriation coloniale. Chez les femmes, elle se joue entre l'adhésion aux codes esthétiques du pittoresque et l'usage du paysage comme espace d'émancipation et de construction identitaire. Le chapitre démontre donc que la littérature de voyage ne se limite pas à une simple narration, mais représente un domaine où se tissent esthétique, politique et identité. L'analyse du paysage tunisien met en évidence la richesse et la complexité de ces textes, qui reflètent les tensions profondes entre fascination, idéologie et subjectivité.

Enfin, il convient de rappeler que le sublime et le beau sont des catégories esthétiques définies par Edmund Burke, tandis que le pittoresque relève d'une autre tradition théorique, notamment développée par William Gilpin. Ces notions ne renvoient pas seulement à une sensibilité artistique, mais à une véritable stratégie culturelle et idéologique. En embellissant ou en dénigrant les paysages tunisiens, les écrivains britanniques participent à une reconfiguration symbolique de l'Orient. L'ambivalence constatée ne doit pas être perçue comme une faiblesse discursive, mais comme le signe d'une littérature de voyage travaillée par des tensions profondes: entre désir d'évasionet peurde l'altérité,entre admirationsincère et préjugés coloniaux, entre ouverture sensible et volonté de maîtrise. C'est précisément cette complexité qui rend ces récits précieux pour l'historien et le critique littéraire, car ils révèlent la pluralité des voix et des expériences qui ont construit l'image occidentale de Tunis.

En conclusion, ce chapitre met en évidence la richesse et la complexité des représentations britanniques du paysage tunisien. Les récits féminins, en mobilisant le pittoresque et le sublime, affirment une subjectivité nouvelle et trouvent dans la nature un

espace de libération. Les récits masculins, oscillant entre fascination et mépris, révèlent une volonté de maîtrise qui s'inscrit dans la logique coloniale mais qui se confronte parfois à la désillusion. Ensemble, ces discours contribuent à redéfinir l'orientalisme, non pas comme un bloc homogène, mais comme un champ marqué par des voix multiples, fragmentées et ambivalentes. Le paysage tunisien devient ainsi un miroir des tensions de l'époque : désir d'évasion, peur de l'altérité, besoin d'authenticité et stratégie de domination. Cette ambivalence constitutive donne aux récits de voyage britanniques leur valeur documentaire et critique, et justifie leur étude dans une perspective à la fois historique, culturelle et postcoloniale.

C'est dans cette perspective que le deuxième chapitre s'attache à l'analyse de la rencontre culturelle, où l'ambivalence des récits se manifeste de manière particulièrement révélatrice à travers la description des traditions, des pratiques et des modes de vie tunisiens.

Le deuxième chapitre examine la manière dont la culture tunisienne a été représentée par les voyageurs britanniques aux XIXe et début du XXe siècles, en insistant sur le caractère ambivalent de ces représentations. Tout d'abord, il convient de rappeler l'importance du concept de culture, défini de façon classique par Edward B.Tylor comme un «tout complexe» englobant savoirs, croyances, arts, mœurs, lois et habitudes, puis enrichi par des approches plus contemporaines insistant sur les pratiques partagées et les systèmes de signification. Homi Bhabha souligne que l'analyse des cultures doit se situer dans les interstices où se forment des discours, ce qui permet de lire la représentation de Tunis comme construction discursive. Ainsi, la culture devient un angle privilégié pour saisir la spécificité de larencontre entre Orient et Occident, perçue par les voyageurs comme un contraste saisissant. Cette opposition nourrit un discours ambivalent : admiration et fascination d'un côté, rejet et critique de l'autre.

Cette ambivalence apparaît ensuite comme inséparable de la logique orientaliste. S'appuyant sur Edward Said, elle rappelle que l'orientalisme est un système de représentation lié aux ambitions coloniales et à une vision du monde fondée sur la domination. Le récit de voyage participe à cette logique en opposant systématiquement l'Orient et l'Occident, dans un schéma binaire ancien qui remonte aux écrits médiévaux sur l'Islam et qui s'est consolidé au XIXe siècle avec l'expansion impériale européenne. L'Orient est considéré comme marge, périphérie, altérité absolue, tandis que l'Europe se définit comme centre, progrès et modernité. Cette dichotomie se cristallise dans des éléments binaires (civilisé/sauvage,

scientifique/ superstitieux, actif/ passif), qui structurent la pensée occidentale et justifient la domination coloniale. Cependant, Bhabha invite à dépasser cette simple logique d'opposition pour y voir une construction idéologique visant à institutionnaliser l'eurocentrisme.

À partir de ce cadre théorique, l'analyse montre comment les voyageurs britanniquesont produit des représentations largement négatives de Tunis. Les récits du XIXe siècle décrivent le voyage comme une expérience éprouvante: Playfair évoque les «mille dangers» des routes et Kennedy insiste sur le désordre des ports, dépeints comme bruyants et insalubres. Cette rhétorique insiste sur l'inconfort, la saleté et le chaos, en contraste avec l'ordre supposé du monde occidental. Les femmes reprennent ces critiques: Lady Warren décrit des routes poussiéreuses et encombrées, Lorimer dépeint des foules orientales menaçantes et Nesbitt insiste sur la monotonie et l'absence d'attrait de Tunis. Toutes soulignent l'inadéquation des infrastructures, le retard technologique et les mauvaises conditions de vie.

Ces descriptions ne se limitent pas aux aspects matériels: elles s'étendent à la culture elle-même. La langue arabe est qualifiée de «corrompue » et «vulgaire », l'islam est présenté comme fanatique et irrationnel, et le mode de vie quotidien est déprécié par contraste avec les usages européens (manger avec les doigts, dormir au sol). L'architecture des villes tunisiennes est également décrite comme monotone, pauvre et sans attrait, réduisant les cités à des villages mal construits et dépourvus d'esthétique. Même lorsqu'un intérêt est exprimé pour des monuments, il s'agit presque toujours de vestiges romains, confirmant l'idée que seule la trace d'un passé européen mérite d'être admirée. Cette rhétorique nie la valeur intrinsèque des réalisations locales et réduit Tunis à une survivance archaïque, figée hors de l'histoire.

Les récits du XXe siècle reprennent les mêmes clichés. Sladen décrit Tunis comme «dégoûtant», Fraser parle d'une vie «primitive et sauvage», et Douglas souligne «l'atrophie» des capacités intellectuelles et spirituelles des Tunisiens, attribuée à un système éducatif limité aux écoles coraniques. Les voyageuses de cette période, telles que Ward et Erskine, décrivent les rues comme étroites et désordonnées, les mœurs comme primitives, etla musique arabe comme monotone et barbare. L'islam est présenté comme sensualité et égoïsme, en opposition avec un christianisme idéalisé. Ces jugements perpétuent la hiérarchie entre un Occident civilisé et un Orient arriéré, tout en réduisant la culture locale à un spectacle esthétique superficiel, fait de couleurs, de sons et de mystères, conforme aux attentes d'exotisme.

Ce désir d'exotisation s'aligne sur une longue tradition. Depuis la diffusion des *Mille et Une Nuits* au XVIIIe siècle, l'Orient est perçu comme un espace de rêve et de fantaisie, un lieu de l'imaginaire occidental. Les titres mêmes des récits (*In the Land of Mosques and Minarets*, *The Land of Veiled Women*) annoncent un univers pittoresque et mystérieux. Les descriptions mettent en avant le «merveilleux», le « féerique », les voiles, les minarets et les couleurs éclatantes, confirmant l'idée d'un Orient irréel, figé dans une esthétique exotique. Cependant, cette esthétique est inséparable de l'entreprise coloniale: en réduisant la culture orientale à un décor, elle légitime l'idée que l'Orient est incapable de progrès autonome et doit être dominé et réorganisé par l'Occident.

Ainsi, la culture tunisienne, dans les récits de voyage britanniques, suscite à la fois une fascination exotique et une dévalorisation systématique. Cette ambivalence traduit à la fois le désir de l'Occident de se constituer en centre de civilisation et son besoin de se définir par contraste avec un Orient construit comme son double inférieur. Les récits de voyage, loin d'être de simples témoignages, apparaissent comme des productions discursives qui participent à la domination coloniale, en transformant la différence culturelle en hiérarchie. Néanmoins, l'existence d'appréciations positives et de regards admiratifs montre que ce discours n'est pas homogène : il est traversé detensions, de contradictions et de fissures quien révèlent l'instabilité. C'est dans cet espace de contradictions que se dessine l'ambivalence, concept central qui permet de comprendre à la fois la persistance des stéréotypes orientalistes et les failles de l'autorité discursive occidentale.

L'exotisation se révèle d'abord par la manière dont les voyageurs, hommes et femmes, décrivent des lieux emblématiques comme Kairouan, les mosquées et les minarets, ou encore le harem. Elle se manifeste aussi dans la descriptiondes coutumes locales età travers l'usage des illustrations et photographies qui accompagnent les récits. Dans tous ces cas, les auteurs visent à comblerla curiosité et les attentes d'un lectorat occidental avide de dépaysement, et reproduisent un imaginaire déjà fixé par la littérature et les arts. Cependant, en dépit de ce discours stéréotypé, quelques voyageurs et voyageuses mettent l'accent sur la modernité de Tunis, sa tolérance religieuse, l'élégance de ses coutumes ou encore la grandeur de son passé historique. C'est dans cette tension entre attraction et répulsion, admiration et dédain, que se déploie toute l'ambivalence de la littérature de voyage consacrée à Tunis.

La ville de Kairouan constitue un premier exemple particulièrement révélateur. En tant que cité sainte de l'islam, elle est perçue comme un lieu intemporel, mystérieux et fascinant.

Les écrivains masculins, comme Fraser ou Graham, la décrivent à travers des adjectifs mettant en évidence son aspect stagnant, « rêveuse » et « somnolente », expressions qui la présentent comme étrangère à la modernité et ancrée dans un passé immuable. L'utilisation de l'expression «caractère oriental» par Graham souligne la volonté de figer la ville dans une image stéréotypée et atemporelle. En réduisant Tunis à un décor exotique conforme aux attentes des lecteurs européens, il efface sa complexité historique et sociale. Ce procédé illustre le mécanisme orientaliste décrit par Edward Said, où l'Orient est dépeint comme une essence immuable destinée à nourrir l'imaginaire occidental. Les descriptions insistent sur la lumière, les couleurs, l'animation «orientale» des rues, conférant à Kairouan une dimension mythique et pittoresque. Les écrivaines, comme Stewart Erskine, reprennent largement ces codes : en déclarant que "nous sommes définitivement en Orient", elle insiste sur l'authenticité et l'altérité radicale de la ville, tout en la transformant en un espace de rêve, proche de l'imaginaire des Mille et une Nuits. L'image qui émerge est celle d'une cité figée, détachée des temporalités modernes, transformée en hétérotopie au sens foucaldien, c'est-à- dire en un lieu qui semble séparer le voyageur ou la voyageuse de son propre temps et le projeter dans une autre temporalité, caractérisée par l'immobilité et la stagnation.

Les mosquées et les minarets tunisiens constituent un second pilier de cette vision orientaliste. Leur magnificence architecturale est systématiquement mise en avant, souvent de manière hyperbolique. Lord Leigh décrit avec fascination le nombre impressionnant de colonnes de la Grande Mosquée de Kairouan, la splendeur des portes ornées, et la vue panoramique depuis le minaret. De son côté, Francis Miltoun compare la mosquée de Kairouan aux palais de l'Alhambra et affirme que certaines minarets figurent parmi «les plus beaux du Maghreb». Le vocabulaire qu'il emploie– «délicatesse exquise », « élégance », « raffinement »– reflète une esthétisation poussée qui transforme l'édifice religieux en une image préfabriquée destinée à impressionner le lecteur ou la lectrice. Ce type de description réduit l'architecture islamique à un objet de contemplation esthétique et la détache de son contexte historique, social et religieux. Elle contribue à figer l'Orient dans un rôle de spectacle visuel offert au regard occidental. Cette tendance à transformer les monuments en «ready-made pictures», pour reprendre l'expression de Timothy Mitchell, illustre la dynamique coloniale de représentation de l'Autre et contribue à un processus d'hégémonie symbolique où l'observateur occidental se positionne en posture de contrôle sur ce qu'il observe.

Le harem occupe une place tout aussi centrale dans les récits de voyage. Cet espace domestique réservé aux femmes est à la fois inaccessible aux hommes européens et objet de fantasmes persistants. Les écrivains masculins, privés d'accès, se contentent souvent de projeter leurs fantasmes sur cet espace, tandis que les écrivaines, ayant parfois pu y pénétrer, offrent des descriptions détaillées qui alimentent l'imaginaire orientaliste. Lady Temple, par exemple, décrit minutieusement les patios de marbre, les fontaines décorées, les colonnes élancées et les étoffes de soie qui constituent l'intérieur du harem, mettant l'accent sur la richesse des matériaux et sur l'ambiance «digne des Mille et une Nuits ». Au début du XXe siècle, Norma Lorimer adopte également ce style en évoquant les cours ombragées, les fontaines et les chambres richement décorées. Dans ces récits, le harem devient moins un espaces social réel qu'un décor fantasmé, saturé de sensualité et de mystère. Certes, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, au XVIIIe siècle, avait déjà tenté de décrire de manière plus réaliste la vie des femmes dans l'Empire ottoman, insistant sur leur sociabilité et leur autonomie. Cependant, cette vision critique demeure marginale et la majorité des histoires analysées aux XIXe et XXe siècles persistent à refléter les fantasmes et aspirations européens sur le harem.

L'exotisation s'étend également aux coutumes et cérémonies locales, souvent décrites à travers une perspective littéraire déjà établie. Les mariages, les célébrations religieuses comme le Mawlid ou encore les cérémonies féminines de Mannouba sont présentés comme des scènes tirés tout droit des Mille et une Nuits. Lady Herbert, au XIXe siècle, assimile un mariage tunisien à une mise en scène féérique, tandis que Sladen, au début du XXe siècle, décrit les cérémonies féminines comme étant « typiquement orientales ». Norma Lorimer va jusqu'à comparer les tenues des participants aux «héros resplendissants des Mille et une Nuits». Ce recours systématique à l'imaginaire littéraire oriental– arrivé en Europe par le biais de traductions– illustre ce que Said appelle la « textual attitude », c'est-à-dire les voyageurs européens interprètent leurs expériences à travers des modèles textuels déjà connus, plutôt que de rendre compte de la réalité rencontrée. De cette manière, les coutumes tunisiennes sont réduites à des clichés et leur complexité culturelle est négligée. Cette appropriation littéraire révèle un processus d'altérisation qui transforme les différences culturelles en signes d'infériorité et qui, ce faisant, justifie implicitement la domination coloniale.

La photographie, intégrée de plus en plus fréquemment dans les récits à partir de la fin du XIXe siècle, prolonge et renforce cette dynamique. Les illustrations choisies représentent souvent les mêmes thèmes: les femmes tunisiennes en costume, les portes sculptées, les mosquées, les chameaux dans le désert ouencore les tentes des bédouins. Ces clichés visent à

capturer l'essence d'un Orient figé, pittoresque et immuable, et confirment la vision stéréotypée qui traverse déjà les descriptions textuelles. Graham et Ashbee insèrent des photos d'hommes en habits traditionnels entourés de chameaux, Vivian reproduit des clichés de femmes tunisiennes, tandis que Petrie et Sladen multiplient au début du XXe siècle les images d'architecture religieuse et de bazars. Ces représentations visuelles contribuent à ce que Zeiny appelle «l'impérialisme visuel», c'est-à-dire une colonisation des esprits par la sélection d'images stéréotypées qui imposent une vision unique et dominante. Ce procédé met en évidence la complicité entre littérature devoyage et projet impérial, où le regard esthétique se double d'une entreprise de maîtrise symbolique de l'Autre.

Cependant, c'est justement dans cette dualité du corpus que certains voyageurs et voyageuses choisissent de s'éloigner de cette vision empreinte d'exotisme pour offrir des interprétations plus positives et nuancées de Tunis. Plusieurs auteurs insistent sur la modernité du pays, soulignant les progrès en matière d'infrastructures, la qualité des routes, l'accessibilité des ports et la présence de compagnies maritimes fiables. Tunis est parfois décrite comme « l'avant-garde de la civilisation nord-africaine» ou comme une ville «européanisée », ouverte et dynamique. D'autres voyageurs admirent la beauté urbaine, les ruelles animées, la blancheur éclatante des maisons ou la finesse de l'artisanat. Certains insistent sur la tolérance religieuse qui règne dans le pays et soulignent la cohabitation pacifique entre musulmans, chrétiens et juifs. D'autres encore évoquent l'extrême politesse des Tunisiens et la richesse de leurs salutations, qui témoignent d'une sociabilité raffinée et respectueuse. Enfin, plusieurs récits célèbrent la grandeur du passé historique, notamment à travers des sites comme l'amphithéâtre d'El Jem, présenté comme un monument d'une majesté incomparable.

Ces contre-discours révèlent que l'orientalisme n'est pas monolithique et que les récits de voyage peuvent également s'écarter des stéréotypes prédominants. Ils mettent en lumière les critiques que Ziauddin Sardar et Leela Gandhi ont formulées àl'égard de Said: sa tendance à représenter l'orientalisme comme un discours uniforme et fixe, sans tenir compte des nuances et des contradictions. L'étude du corpus tunisien montre au contraire que les voyageurs et voyageuses britanniques oscillent en permanence entre fascination et répulsion, admiration et dédain. Michael Shoemaker résume cette ambivalence en qualifiant Tunis de « paradoxe : charmante et choquante, pittoresque et horrible, belle dans son panorama et discordante dans ses sons». Cette contradiction traduit ce que Bhabha appelle la «scission du

discours colonial», une tension constante entre deux attitudes opposées : la reconnaissance d'une réalité complexe et la réduction de cette réalité à un produit du désir et de l'imaginaire.

En somme, ce chapitre souligne la double fonction de la littérature de voyage. D'un côté, elle perpétue les stéréotypes orientalistes et soutient le projet colonial en réduisant Tunis à un décor exotique et statique. De l'autre, elle ouvre parfois la voie à une reconnaissance de la richesse culturelle et sociale du pays, produisant ainsi une image plus nuancée et ambivalente. Cette tension reflète les incohérences inhérentes à la perception occidentale de l'Orient et incite à dépasser les lectures unilatérales pour comprendre la complexité des échanges interculturels. Tunis apparaît ainsi non pas seulement comme un espace figé et fantasmé mais aussi comme un lieu de rencontre, de fascination et d'admiration, où se joue l'ambiguïté profonde du discours colonial.

Cette ambivalence se prolonge dans la représentation des habitants eux-mêmes : le chapitre suivant examine la manière dont les voyageurs et voyageuses britanniques décrivent le peuple tunisien, oscillant entre empathie et stéréotypes, humanisation et mise à distance.

Le troisième chapitre met l'accent sur l'analyse des représentations ambivalentes des Tunisiens dans les récits de voyage britanniques. Il souligne le fait que la construction de «l'Autre » est indissociable du processus de définition de soi, et qu'elle repose sur une dialectique de domination et de fascination. Dès l'introduction, l'analyse met en évidence le fait que la rencontre entre le voyageur britannique et le peuple tunisien s'inscrit dans ce que Mary Louise Pratt a qualifié de «zone de contact », un espace d'interaction marqué par des relations asymétriques où l'Européen cherche à affirmer son identité en projetant sur l'Autre une série d'images contradictoires. Les voyageurs expriment tour à tour le mépris et l'admiration, oscillant entre la démonisation et la reconnaissance de certaines qualités.

Cette ambivalence découle d'une tradition intellectuelle plus vaste. Les concepts hégéliens du maître et de l'esclave, les réflexions de Simone de Beauvoir ou encore la distinction faite par Jean-François Staszak entre groupes d'appartenance et groupes extérieurs, offrent un cadre théorique pour comprendre la façon dont les Occidentaux ont constamment produit et reproduit la figure de l'Autre. L'altérité, héritée de la pensée grecque puis médiévale, a évolué d'une opposition entre Grecs et «barbares », puis entre croyants et non-croyants, jusqu'aux classifications raciales pseudo-scientifiques du XVIIIe siècle. Ces catégorisations ont servi de justification idéologique à la domination coloniale, en

positionnant le Blanc européen comme exemple de civilisation et en réduisant l'homme de couleur à une figure inférieure.

Dans ce cadre, la littérature de voyage devient un instrument privilégié de cette construction. Des chercheurs comme Pratt, Korte ou Speake ont montré que le récit de voyage est intrinsèquement marqué par l'altérité et qu'ila pour fonction principale de mettre en scène la rencontre avec l'étranger. Ainsi, le récit de voyage se nourrit de contrastes: ici et ailleurs, soi et Autre, civilisé et primitif. Il participe à la constitution d'une identité occidentale par opposition, tout en mobilisant des mécanismes discursifs qui fixent les différences culturelles et raciales. Ces oppositions sont rarement neutres; elles impliquent une dynamique de pouvoir où l'Occident cherche à affirmer sa supériorité en assignant à l'Autre une position subalterne. La logique manichéenne décrite par les théoriciens postcoloniaux apparaît ainsi au cœur du genre viatique.

L'étude des récits britanniques sur Tunis montre que les voyageurs et voyageuses réduisent fréquemment les habitants à des stéréotypes négatifs. Les descriptions mettent l'accent sur la laideur, la saleté, la misère ou encore la sauvagerie.Temple évoque donc les «visages sauvages» et fait allusion à l'achat d'un enfant dont la prétendue «laideur» le rend curieux, déshumanisant l'individu en le transformant en objet de collection. De même, Graham et Aschbee décrivent les enfants de Gabès comme «extrêmement sales», élargissant cette image dégradante aux mères elles-mêmes. Même lorsque ces auteurs accordent une certaine « grâce» à ces personnes, il s'agit d'une grâce accidentelle, inconsciente, qui sert à souligner davantage leur altérité. Vivian reprend cette tendance en associant les lieux de vie et de commerce à la saleté et au dégoût, construisant une vision dans laquelle l'espace tunisien et ses habitants sont condamnés à la régression et à l'absence d'hygiène.

Ces représentations ne disparaissent pas avec le temps: les récits du XXe siècle reprennent et amplifient ces représentations. Sladen, par exemple, insiste sur la pauvreté et la saleté des habitants de Kairouan, alors que Graham évoque la présence de bergers «primitifs» qu'il imagine figés depuis des millénaires. Douglas, de son côté, se montre encore plus explicite en qualifiant lesTunisiens de «race inférieure» et en les décrivant comme «sauvages», «durs et sans curiosité». Dans son récit, les Tunisiens sont présentés comme des « enfants de la nature», « enfants du désert », dépourvus de maturité et nécessitant la supervision européenne. Cette infantilisation rejoint les analyses de Said et Fanon, qui ont montré comment l'Oriental est systématiquement féminisé, animalisé et réduit à une figure de

dépendance. Rankin, dans les années1930, perpétue ces clichés en parlant d'un «peuple sale» ,vivant hors des « frontières de la civilisation », et assimilant les habitants et leur environnement à une même sauvagerie.

Un autre axe fondamental de cette dépréciation implique la comparaison des Tunisiens avec des animaux ou des créatures monstrueuses. Cette tradition, héritée du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance, s'inscrit dans la continuité des récits médiévaux qui peuplaient l'Orient de personnages fantastiques. Dans les textes britanniques, cette animalisation se manifeste par des analogies explicite: des femmes sont décrites comme des « chiens mal peignés », une vieille femme est assimilée à « un chimpanzé », des enfants sont qualifiés des « lutins préhistoriques »[47]. Douglas étend cette idée à l'extrême en affirmant que les habitants du Sud sont « nécessairement des animaux », allant jusqu'à réduire leurs vêtements et leurs rituels culturels à des peaux de bêtes ou à des «danses bestiales». De son côté, Lorimer, pourtant femme et donc parfois perçue comme plus sensible à l'expérience de l'Autre, reproduit les mêmes stéréotypes :elle parle de marchands « roulés comme des porcs » dans leurs magasins ou décrit les musulmans comme des «animaux mahométans» porteurs de «regards mauvais ». Ces images contribuent à nier toute humanité aux Tunisiens, à les figer dans une altérité radicale et à justifier la prétendue supériorité morale et culturelle des Européens.

Cela illustre clairement comment les récits de voyage britanniques contribuent à forger une image défavorable et stéréotypée des Tunisiens. L'Autre est décrit comme laid, sale, paresseux, animalisé, et même monstrueux. Derrière ces représentations se profile une stratégie discursive qui sert à légitimer la domination coloniale et à renforcer l'identité occidentale en l'opposant à une figure dévalorisée. Néanmoins, l'ambivalence demeure: certains voyageurs reconnaissent une certaine grâce ou beauté chez les personnes rencontrés, mais ces touches positives n'annulent pas la logique générale de déshumanisation. Ce double mouvement illustre ce que Homi Bhabha identifie comme le cœur de la stéréotypie coloniale.

Le chapitre poursuit l'exploration de la persistance des réflexions sur l'ambivalence des représentations coloniales, en montrant comment les voyageurs et voyageuses britanniques décrivent le peuple tunisien à travers une série d'images et de jugements qui oscillent entre fascination et répulsion. L'un des traits les plus marquants de ces récits réside dans la dénonciation constante de la léthargie des habitants. Les voyageurs décrivent des hommes inactifs, étendus dans les cafés, se contentant de discuter ou de fumer sans se consacrer à une

[47] Prehistoric imps

activité productive. Cette représentation insistante de l'oisiveté suggère que les Tunisiens seraient condamnés à l'immobilisme et au retard civilisationnel. Dans le discours colonial, le dynamisme, le progrès et l'esprit d'entreprise sont attribués aux Européens, tandis que l'apathie et la passivité sont assignées aux colonisés. Le stéréotype du Tunisien paresseux devient ainsi le symbole d'un peuple incapable de se prendre en charge, renforçant la justification implicite d'une intervention occidentale. Cette paresse supposée ne relève pas d'un constat objectif, mais bien d'une stratégie discursive visant à établir une hiérarchie culturelle et à placer l'Europe dans une position de supériorité.

Un autre cliché constant serapporte à lamalhonnêteté et à la duplicité. Les voyageurs et les voyageuses affirment avoir été victimes de tromperies de la part de guides, de commerçants ou d'aubergistes, et ces expériences isolées sont généralisées à l'ensemble de la société. Ce mécanisme, typique de la littérature de voyage, transforme l'anecdote individuelle en caractéristique nationale. Le Tunisien devient ainsi le symbole du marchand rusé, manipulateur et dépourvu de scrupules, en opposition au voyageur européen qui se présente comme naïf et honnête. Cette rhétorique vise à établir une supériorité morale de l'Occident et à figer l'Autre dans une identité dévalorisante. L'altérité se construit donc non seulement à travers des différences physiques ou culturelles, mais aussi à travers des oppositions éthiques et morales.

La violence et l'agressivité supposées des habitants occupent également une place importante dans ces récits. Les voyageurs décrivent des scènes de disputes, de brutalité et d'excès qui renforcent l'image d'un peuple impulsif, incapable de se contrôler et de vivre en société de manière civilisée. Cette image s'aligne surla tradition orientaliste qui associe l'Oriental à l'instinct, à la passion et au danger latent. L'image du Tunisien violent contribue à accentuer l'opposition avec l'Européen rationnel, tempéré et civilisé. Elle participe aussi à légitimer l'idée que seule une autorité extérieure, rationnelle et disciplinée, peut contenir et canaliser cette prétendue sauvagerie. La violence attribuée à l'Autre devient ainsi un argument implicite en faveur du contrôle colonial.

À ces critiques s'ajoute l'image d'un peuple dépourvu de curiosité intellectuelle et d'esprit critique. Plusieurs voyageurs soulignent l'indifférence des Tunisiens envers la connaissance, la science et les innovations techniques. Ils sont décrits comme prisonniers de traditions stériles, incapables de progrès ou de créativité. Cette perspective tend à infantiliser les habitants, comparés à des enfants incapables de maturité. L'analogie avec l'enfance est

récurrente: les Tunisiens et les Tunisiennes sont présentés comme des êtres immatures, dépendants, vivant dans un état de naïveté et d'ignorance qui les rend inaptes à l'autonomie politique ou culturelle. Cette infantilisation rejoint les analyses des théoriciens postcoloniaux comme Frantz Fanon, qui ont montré comment le discours colonial réduit systématiquement les colonisés à une position de minorité permanente.

Toutefois, l'ambivalence n'est jamais totalement absente. Certains voyageurs, tout en reprenant ces clichés dévalorisants, révèlent parfois des moments de fascination ou d'admiration. Ils reconnaissent parfois le sens de l'hospitalité, la dignité ou la beauté de certaines personnes rencontrées. Ces remarques positives, cependant, demeurent marginales et ne remettent pas en cause la logique générale du discours. Elles servent plutôt à renforcer le caractère exceptionnel de quelques individus par rapport à une masse perçue comme globalement inférieure. Ce stéréotype est répétitif et stable, mais il est aussi vacillant et ambivalent, oscillant sans cesse entre la reconnaissance de qualités ponctuelles et la réaffirmation d'une infériorité structurelle.

Dans l'ensemble, le chapitre montre que la littérature de voyage britannique n'est pas une simple description des sociétés étrangères, mais qu'elle participe à un projet idéologique plus large. Elle façonne une représentation de l'Autre fondée sur la paresse, la malhonnêteté, la violence, l'infantilisme et la bestialité, et cette image sert à renforcer l'identité européenne en l'opposant à une altérité radicalement dévalorisée. Derrière ces descriptions se cache une logique de pouvoir qui vise à justifier la domination coloniale et à présenter l'intervention européenne comme une mission civilisatrice nécessaire. Le récit de voyage se transforme donc en un instrument de légitimation, un dispositif discursif qui contribue à naturaliser l'inégalité et à fixer des stéréotypes durables sur les peuples colonisés. Ainsi, cette partie souligne l'importance cruciale du discours viatique dans la construction de l'altéritéet dans la consolidation des hiérarchies coloniales, tout en révélant l'ambivalence inhérente à toute entreprise de stéréotypisation.

En outre, ce chapitre souligne l'ambivalence profonde qui caractérise les représentations des Tunisiens dans les récits de voyage britanniques. D'un côté, les voyageurs et voyageuses, en accord avec les logiques orientalistes décrites par Said, adoptent un discours stéréotypé et dépréciatif qui déshumanise l'Autre en le réduisant à des figures de dégradation physique, morale et culturelle, renforçant ainsi l'idéologie impérialiste. De l'autre, ces mêmes textes laissent transparaître des moments d'admiration et de fascination pour la beauté, la religiosité,

la tolérance et le raffinement culturel des autochtones, révélant ainsi une tension constante entre dénigrement et valorisation. Cette oscillation, loin de produire une vision homogène, expose au contraire les contradictions et les fragilités du discours orientaliste, et montre que ces récits relèvent davantage de la représentation que de la vérité objective. En ce sens,l'étude du regard porté sur l'Autre dévoile la complexité des rencontres humaines comme lieux de pouvoir, de désir et de négociation identitaire. Enfin, cette analyse conduit auchapitre suivant, consacré à la représentation de la femme tunisienne, où la question du genre viendra enrichir et nuancer encore davantage cette dynamique ambivalente.

Le dernier chapitre se consacre à l'étude approfondie des représentations ambivalentes des femmes tunisiennes dans les récits de voyage britanniques du XIXe et du début du XXe siècle. Il approfondie les analyses menées dans les chapitres précédents sur les multiples formes de l'expérience du voyageur européen à Tunis, mais il se distingue par l'attention exclusive qu'il accorde à la dimension genrée. Le choix de focaliser l'analyse sur la figure féminine s'explique par le rôle symbolique qui lui a été attribué dans le discours orientaliste, où la femme orientale incarne souvent l'essence de l'Orient toutentier. Ainsi, elle est investie d'une double charge, à la fois objet de désir et symbole de soumission, de beauté et de décadence, d'exotisme fascinant et de différence inquiétante. Le texte montre que la construction de l'image de la Tunisienne s'inscrit dans une dynamique complexe où s'entrecroisent le regard colonial, le regard patriarcal et les projections culturelles occidentales.

Afin de cerner les mécanismes de cette construction discursive, une distinction cruciale entre sexe etgenre a été établie. Le sexe désigne les caractéristiques biologiques, tandisque le genre renvoie à une construction sociale et culturelle qui attribue aux hommes et aux femmes des comportements, des valeurs etdes rôles distincts. Cette distinction éclaire le processus par lequel les voyageurs britanniques du XIXe siècle interprétaient les comportements et les pratiques des femmes tunisiennes à travers le prisme de leurs propres normes victoriennes. Ces récits ne peuvent donc être considérés comme des témoignages neutres ou purement descriptifs: ils reflètent les attentes culturelles, les présupposés idéologiques et les jugements implicites de leurs auteurs. Le concept du regard occupe ici une place centrale. Il ne désigne pas seulement l'acte de voir, mais celui de définir, de réduire et de dominer l'autre par l'observation et par le discours. Michel Foucault, en introduisant la notion de « regard médical», a montré comment la connaissance s'accompagne d'une mise à distance objectivante. Avec son idée de miroir, Jacques Lacan a éclairé la manière dont la vision

renvoie au désir et à la construction identitaire. Laura Mulvey, enfin, a souligné dans ses analyses du cinéma le rôle du regard masculin comme instrument de domination patriarcale, transformant la femme en objet de contemplation. Ces apports théoriques, combinés à la réflexion d'Edward Said sur le regard colonial, permettent de comprendre que les récits britanniques sur les femmes tunisiennes s'inscrivent dans un schéma d'objectification, ancré dans un ensemble de rapports de pouvoir.

L'examen attentif de ces récits dévoile l'ambivalence fondamentale qui les traverse. D'un côté, les voyageurs expriment souvent une admiration sincère pour les femmes tunisiennes. Plusieurs auteurs masculins, tels que Wingfield ou Graham et Aschbee, soulignent la beauté et le charme de certaines femmes. Leurs descriptions mettent l'accent sur la finesse des traits, la grâce des mouvements, la profondeur des regards et la richesse des parures. Les voyageuses britanniques, pour leur part, témoignent parfois d'une empathie accrue, mettant en valeur la sociabilité, la gaieté et la dignité des Tunisiennes qu'elles rencontrent. Lady Temple, Lady Herbert ou encore Mrs. Greville-Nugent dépeignent des femmes courtoises, raffinées et élégantes, qui incarnent une certaine noblesse morale et sociale. Certaines descriptions vont au-delà de la beauté physique pour évoquer des qualités intellectuelles ou des formes d'indépendance économique, comme celles des femmes bédouines, décrites comme intelligentes, travailleuses et autonomes dans leur gestion des ressources. Dans ces passages, la femme tunisienne est présentée comme digne d'admiration, non seulement pour son charme esthétique, mais aussi pour son rôle social et sa valeur culturelle. Bien que ces représentations soient filtrées à travers le prisme des catégories occidentales, elles offrent l'opportunité d'une perspective moins ethnocentrique, qui reconnaît, au moins partiellement, la richesse de l'altérité.

Toutefois, ces représentations positives coexistentavec d'autres passages qui véhiculent des jugements négatifs, parfois caricaturaux, et qui construisent une image dépréciative de la femme tunisienne. Nombreux sont les voyageurs qui insistent sur leur supposée paresse, leur ignorance, leur isolement domestique ou encore leur physique jugé disgracieux selon les critères européens. On trouve des descriptions qui qualifient les Tunisiennes de « créatures indolentes », d'êtres «gros et vulgaires », ou de femmes enfermées dans un univers de futilité. Certains observateurs vont jusqu'à présenter leur existence comme réduite à des activités superficielles telles que se parer, dormir ou bavarder, ce qui traduit une vision profondément stéréotypée. Le sujet de l'isolement est omniprésent: les femmes apparaissent comme invisibles dans l'espace public,confinées dans des maisons ou des harems, et donc exclues de

toute véritable vie sociale. Ces descriptions nourrissent l'imaginaire orientaliste du harem et consolident l'idée d'un Orient figé, archaïque et oppressif. Ainsi, la femme tunisienne est parfois dépeinte comme un être passif, victime d'un système patriarcal, ce qui permet aux voyageurs de projeter sur elle leurs propres conceptions de la liberté et du progrès.

L'ambivalence se manifestent clairement à travers les contradictions internes d'unmême auteur. Par exemple, Wingfield qualifie une femme de « vision de beauté » tout en affirmant ailleurs que les Tunisiennes sont trop grasses pour plaire aux « yeux européens». Fraser, au début du XXe siècle, peut les caractériser comme irrésistibles et admirables, puisles réduire quelques pages plus loin à des caricatures grotesques. De son côté, Sladen hésite entre l'évocation d'une beauté troublante et la description d'une figure sauvage et débraillée. Ces oscillations illustrent que l'image de la femme tunisienne n'est pas stable, mais profondément fluctuante. Elles traduisent à la fois l'attirance et la répulsion que suscitait l'altérité culturelle, mais aussi les contradictions du regard colonial lui-même, incapable de sortir descatégories qu'il imposait à l'autre. L'admiration est toujours tempérée par le mépris, et l'exotisme par la peur de la différence.

Ce chapitre met en évidence une évolution dans ces représentations entre le XIXe et le XXe siècle. Les récits du XIXe siècle, malgré leur empreinte stéréotypée, attribuaient souvent une place plus importante à une vision multidimensionnelle des femmes tunisiennes. Ils combinaient des descriptions de beauté physique, de vertus morales, de raffinement social et même d'intelligence ou d'indépendance. En revanche, au XXe siècle, le regard s'est progressivement rétréci à une perspective plus superficielle. La femme tunisienne y est surtout dépeinte en termes d'apparence, d'ornementation, de bijoux ou de vêtements, dans une logique d'admiration esthétique qui la réduit à une image décorative. La dimension morale, intellectuelle ou sociale semble s'estomper, ce qui traduit une transformation du regard européen : d'un regard encore empreint d'intérêt ethnographique, on passe à un regard touristique, où l'autre est considéré comme spectacle. Cette transformation expose aussi les effets du colonialisme et du tourisme, qui transforment la représentation en un produit visuel.

Au-delà de l'analyse des représentations, le chapitre remet en question la notion même de représentation comme acte de pouvoir. Représenter l'autre, c'est toujours lui retirer une part de sa voix, c'est l'objectiver pour le figer dans une image façonner par l'observateur. Comme l'ont montré des penseurs tels que Heidegger, Hall ou Barthes, la représentation est inséparable d'une logique d'appropriation et de domination. Dans le cas des femmes

tunisiennes, cette dépossession est double, car elles sont à la fois soumises au regard colonial qui les définit comme orientales et au regard patriarcal qui les définit comme femmes. Même les voyageuses britanniques, bien qu'elles aient parfois exprimé une empathie plus prononcée, font également partie de ce processus, car elles s'expriment depuis un cadre culturel occidental qui impose ses catégories de pensée. Ainsi, la femme tunisienne apparaît rarement comme sujet de son histoire : elle est construite comme objet de discours, miroir des fantasmes et des contradictions de l'Occident.

Cependant, certains récits laissent entrevoir une volonté de relativisme culturel. En décrivant soigneusement les vêtements, les bijoux, les tatouages ou les pratiques sociales, certains voyageurs manifestent une curiosité qui dépasse la simple exotisation. Ils identifient une beauté spécifique, liée au contexte culturel, et non mesurée uniquement selon les standards européens. Ces moments, bienque restreints, témoignent d'une capacitéà percevoir la richesse de la différence culturelle. Ils illustrent la tension permanente entre ethnocentrisme et ouverture, entre jugement et reconnaissance. Mais même dans ces cas, le cadre généralreste celui d'une supériorité implicite de l'Occident, qui se réserve le droit de juger et de définir.

En définitive, l'étude souligne que la représentation des femmes tunisiennes dans les récits britanniques est marquée par une tension constante entre idéalisation et dévalorisation. Cette dualité révèle autant sur les femmes observées que sur les observateurs eux-mêmes, leurs valeurs, leurs peurs et leurs contradictions. La femme tunisienne devient un miroir dans lequel les voyageurs projettent leur conception de la féminité, de la civilisation et de la différence culturelle. Elle est ainsi investie d'un rôle symbolique qui dépasse sa réalité individuelle pour incarner les frictions du discours orientaliste.

L'analyse démontre que l'image de la femme tunisienne n'est jamais neutre. Elle résulte d'un processus de représentation où s'entrelacent désir, admiration, crainte et dédain. Elle est façonnée par un double regard, colonialet patriarcal, qui lui dénie sa propre voix et la transforme en objet discursif. Les récits de voyage étudiés dévoilent ainsi l'ampleur des mécanismes idéologiques qui ont structuré la perception occidentale de l'Orient. Admettre cette ambivalence, c'est non seulement comprendre les conditions de production de ces textes, mais aussi interroger les logiques de pouvoir qu'ils transmettent. Cela permet de mieux saisir la manière dont l'Occident s'est construit une image de l'Orient à travers la féminité, et comment cette image continue d'influencer la mémoire collective. La figure de la femme

tunisienne, à la fois magnifiée et sous-estimée, admirée et rejetée, devient ainsi un axe majeur dans l'histoire des représentations et un prisme privilégié pour analyser les tensions entre cultures, genres et pouvoirs.

En outre, le corpus étudié met en lumière les perceptions et représentations des femmes tunisiennes dans les récits de voyage britanniques du XIXe et du début du XXe siècle. Les récits de voyageuses telles que Mary Herbert, Norma Lorimer, Emily Ward, Frances Nesbitt et d'autres, contribuent à forger une série de stéréotypes qui façonnent la vision occidentale de la femme orientale. L'étude du discours met en évidence la récurrence de thèmes tels que l'enfermement dans le harem, le port du voile, l'excès corporel et ornemental, la paresse et l'ignorance attribués aux femmes tunisiennes. Ces représentations, loin d'être neutres, s'inscrivent dans un contexte orientaliste où l'Autre féminin est construit comme l'opposé de la femme britannique, présumée plus libre et émancipée, alors même que les femmes occidentales demeuraient assujetties au patriarcat et loin d'être totalement autonomes.

Au cours du XIXe siècle, les récits de Mary Herbert mettent l'accent sur l'isolement et l'invisibilité des femmes tunisiennes, confinées à l'espace domestique et rarement vues en public. Le harem est dépeint comme un espace de détention et de mystère, inaccessible aux regards étrangers, et dont les occupantes suscitent chez les voyageuses britanniques des sentiments de pitié. Ainsi; les femmes tunisiennes y apparaissent comme des prisonnières, privées d'autonomie et de visibilité. Cette représentation permet en parallèle d'exalter la liberté supposée des Britanniques, tout en négligeant les contraintes de la société victorienne. Le harem devient alors un espace symbolique de l'altérité où s'exprime une hiérarchie culturelle et de genre.

Cette image se prolonge au XXe siècle dans les récits de Lorimer et Ward, qui reprennent le motif de l'enfermement et de l'absence des femmes dans l'espace public. La ville musulmane est considérée comme un univers masculin, tandis que la femme est réduite à un être invisible ou méprisable. Les descriptions du harem renforcent l'idée d'un lieu oppressif et répugnant, d'où les voyageuses ressortent soulagées, confortant leur sentiment de supériorité. Cette rhétorique de dégoût et de pitié contribue à la formulation d'une identité britannique libre et moderne, en opposition à des femmes orientales présentées comme victimes d'une tyrannie patriarcale.

Le motif du voile, abordé par Graham, Ashbee, Lorimer et Ward, s'impose comme un autre élément clé du discours orientaliste. Le voile est perçu comme un instrument de dissimulation et d'oppression, privant les femmes d'identité et d'individualité. Les voyageuses y voient un signe d'effacement et de subordination, négligeant sa valeur culturelle et religieuse. L'ambivalence transparaît dans les récits, entre fascination et rejet: le voile suscite curiosité, mystère et parfois admiration, mais demeure perçu comme un obstacle à la compréhension et comme une preuve de l'infériorité de la femme orientale. Ces descriptions réduisent les femmes à des silhouettes uniformes, niant leur diversité et les réduisant à une masse indistincte.

Un autre stéréotype fréquent concerne le corps féminin, dépeint comme excessif et hors des normes occidentales. Lady Temple, Nesbitt ou encore Ward insistent sur la corpulence des femmes tunisiennes, assimilées à des « montagnes de graisse ». Cette illustration véhicule l'idée d'une absence de maîtrise de soi, de paresse et de décadence, en opposition à l'idéal occidental de minceur. Les voyageuses soulignent également l'ornementation jugée excessive des femmes tunisiennes: vêtements riches en soie, bijoux en abondance, maquillage lourd. Ces détails, souvent décrits avec ironie, participent à la construction d'une image de superficialité et de matérialisme, réduisant les femmes à des objets décoratifs et accentuant leur altérité.

À cette image de corps encombrant et orné s'ajoute le reproche de l'oisiveté. De nombreuses voyageuses dépeignent les femmes tunisiennes comme confinées à des activités jugées futiles: se parer, se baigner, fumer, manger. Leur quotidien est décrit comme monotone, dénué de production intellectuelle ou matérielle. Cette image d'oisiveté est accentuée par l'idée d'ignorance. Lorimer et Nesbitt qualifient ces femmes «d'illettrées», «stupides » ou «pauvres créatures », niant ainsi toute forme de savoir local ou de rôle social. Cette réduction à un état d'infériorité intellectuelle justifie symboliquement la supériorité occidentale.

En définitive, les récits de voyage étudiés montrent une forte homogénéisation des femmes tunisiennes. Souvent décrites à travers des absences—absence de liberté, d'intelligence, de beauté conforme aux normes européennes—elles deviennent un miroir négatif servant à valoriser la femme britannique. L'Orient féminin est ainsi dépeint comme l'antithèse de l'Occident: opprimé, passif, excessif et ignorant. Ces représentations, influencées par l'orientalisme et le regard impérial, nient la complexité du vécu des femmes

tunisiennes et les réduisent à des stéréotypes qui facilitent l'élaboration d'une identité britannique supérieure. La convergence des récits, malgré des variations individuelles, confirme que l'écriture féminine de voyage ne rompt pas avec les schémas masculins, mais y participe en reproduisant des perspectives ethnocentriques et hiérarchisées.

Ce corpus illustre ainsi la persistance d'un imaginaire colonial où la femme tunisienne est constamment représentée comme Autre, et où le récit de voyage fonctionne comme un instrument de pouvoir, diffusant des valeurs, des jugements et des hiérarchies. Par le biais du harem, du voile, du corps, de l'oisiveté et de l'ignorance, les voyageuses britanniques contribuent à une écriture du monde où l'Orient féminin sert principalement à légitimer l'Occident et à renforcer l'identité des femmes européennes.

En somme, ce chapitre souligne l'ambivalence profonde qui traverse les représentations des femmes tunisiennes dans les récits de voyage britanniques du XIXe et du début du XXe siècles, rédigés par des auteurs et autrices. Ces textes oscillent entre admiration et dénigrement, perpétuant des stéréotypes réducteurs tout en offrant parfois des images élogieuses qui mettent en valeur la beauté, la grâce sociale et l'autonomie des femmes, conformément aux normes de féminité. Toutefois, au fil du temps, cette valorisation s'est recentrée sur l'esthétique et le regard visuel, reflétant les priorités culturelles et idéologiques de la modernité britannique. Autant les écrivains que les écrivaines contribuent à la construction d'un « regard ambivalent », qui combine attraction et répulsion, en recourant à des motifs récurrents tels que le harem pour exercer un contrôle discursif. Ces analyses montrent que, malgré quelques moments d'ouverture culturelle, la représentation des femmes tunisiennes demeure profondément ancrée dans le discours orientaliste et colonial, où genre et hiérarchie raciale s'entrelacent pour produire une vision complexe, souvent contradictoire, de l'Autre féminin.

Cette thèse s'achève là où elle avait commencé, mais avec une nouvelle perspective qui offre de nouvelles avenues pour la recherche. Elle s'est construite autour d'une dualité analytique mettant en lumière la nature ambivalente du discours impérial dans les récits de voyage britanniques portant sur Tunis, sa culture et ses habitants. Traditionnellement, les lectures critiques de ces textes ont souvent présenté une vision unilatérale, perpétuant des images stéréotypées d'altérité et d'infériorité, conformément au discours orientaliste tel que décrit par Edward Said, qui présente les cultures orientales comme fixes, sauvages et primitives.Toutefois, l'analyse d'un corpus étendu de récits britanniques révèle que cette

vision unidimensionnelle ne rend pas compte de l'ensemble des représentations, qui oscillent entre admiration et dénigrement. Dans cette perspective, la théorie de l'ambivalence de Homi Bhabha a été mobilisée pour comprendre la complexité des points de vue hétérogènes des voyageurs britanniques. La structure analytique de cette étude, fondée sur quatre axes— paysage, culture, peuple et femmes tunisiennes— a permis d'aller au-delà d'une vision monolithique de l'orientalisme, révélant un discours impérial contradictoire.

Le premier chapitre, axé sur la rencontre paysagère, a montré que les voyageurs britanniques oscillaient entre appréciation esthétique et représentation dépréciative de l'environnement tunisien. Le paysage se présente tantôt comme un refuge face à un Occident industrialisé, tantôt comme une zone aride et désolée, incapable de répondre aux attentes des voyageurs. Cette dualité, souvent perceptible dans un même texte, reflète un regard profondément contradictoire et idéologiquement chargé. Tandis que le paysage est parfois admiré dans une perspective romantique, il est également réduit à un «Autre topographique», qui devient le reflet des désirs impériaux. Les hommes et les femmes voyageurs ont contribué à ce discours par des modes stylistiques différents :les hommes se basent sur une observation scientifique ou impériale, tandis que les femmes favorisent le pittoresque et le spirituel, associant l'immersion dans la nature à la découverte de soi.

Le deuxième chapitre, centré sur la rencontre culturelle, a enrichi l'analyse en mettanten évidence les perceptions fluctuantes des voyageurs à l'égard de la vie sociale, des coutumes et des traditions tunisiennes. Les récits étudiés reproduisent des tropes orientalistes anciens, insistant sur la stagnation culturelle et le retard religieux, conformément à la critique de Said. En parallèle, les mêmes textes valorisent la tolérance, la beauté architecturale, le raffinement intellectuel et la profondeur historique deTunis. Ces représentations ambivalentes déstabilisent le discours orientaliste de l'intérieur, conformément à la notion d'ambivalence développée par Bhabha, dans laquelle deux attitudes distinctes coexistent envers la réalité extérieure.

Le troisième chapitre a exploré la rencontre humaine, en examinant la construction de l'image des Tunisiens dans ces récits. Une classification des représentations a montré que les autochtones étaient successivement dénigrés à travers des stéréotypes de saleté, d'ignorance, d'infériorité morale et culturelle, et humanisés par des descriptions de beauté, de dignité et de vertu religieuse. Ces portraits contradictoires font des récits de voyage des lieux de lutte idéologique, où les écrivains négocient leur position d'observateurs objectifs et d'agents

subjectifs de l'empire. L'oscillation entre discours déshumanisant et humanisant met en évidence la complexité dela relation coloniale, fluctuantentre domination et désir de l'Autre.

Le quatrième chapitre, centré sur la rencontre genrée, a mis en lumière l'ambivalence des représentations des femmes tunisiennes par les voyageurs et voyageuses britanniques. Ces figures n'émergent pas comme sujets autonomes, mais plutôt comme des surfaces symboliques sur lesquelles se projettent des perceptions contradictoires. Les récits alternent entre admiration pour la beauté, la grâce, l'intelligence et la singularité culturelle, et des représentations réductrices présentant les femmes comme passives, recluses, indolentes et ignorantes. Les écrivaines britanniques, tout en proposant des portraits empathiques, reproduisent souvent les tropes masculins et les stéréotypes coloniaux, confirmant leur complicité avec le projet impérial. De cette manière, le regard féminin se superpose au regard masculin dans sa dimension impériale, contribuant ainsi à la reproduction de hiérarchies raciales et de normes impériales. Ces attitudes traduisent également les restrictions sociales auxquelles étaient soumises les femmes écrivaines, qui utilisaient ces stéréotypes pour s'insérer et affirmer leur légitimité dans un espace littéraire dominé par les hommes.

Dans l'ensemble, cette thèse montre que l'ambivalence est un élément structurant de l'écriture de voyage britannique sur Tunis. Elle ne relève pas d'une simple incohérence individuelle des voyageurs, mais fait partie intégrante de la logique impériale, qui doit à lafois rejeter et attirer, exclure et inclure. Cette ambivalence fonctionne comme un outil pour présenter le voyageur britannique comme un individu tiraillé entre les obligations culturelles de l'empire et l'éthique dela rencontre avec l'Autre. Les récits sont donc saturés devaleurs et d'attitudes impériales, tout en intégrant des moments de perception positive qui ouvrent sur l'engagement interculturel et le dialogue entre idées, cultures et peuples. L'alternance entre admiration et dénigrement crée un corpus qui est à la fois politiquement chargé, esthétiquement riche et idéologiquement instable.

La recherche a également souligné la participation active des femmes dans la perpétuation de la pensée impériale. Malgré une posture empathique, elles ont souvent renforcé les stéréotypes et assumé les hiérarchies coloniales pour s'insérer dans «l'archive impériale », contribuant ainsi à la légitimation de la domination britannique. La figure de la femme tunisienne devient alors un espace symbolique où se négocient genre, identité, pouvoir et désir, reflétant la complexité et la tension inhérentes à la rencontre coloniale.

Enfin, cette étude ouvre de nouvelles perspectives de recherche. Elle propose des pistes comparatives avec d'autres contextes méditerranéens, inter-impériaux et interculturels, et invite à explorer la réception de ces représentations par les intellectuels et artistes tunisiens. Au-delà de l'analyse littéraire, elle participe à une réflexion sur l'éthique de la représentation de l'Autre et sur les dynamiques de pouvoir et d'identité dans les discours coloniaux. Cette thèse n'est donc pas un point final, mais plutôt un point de départ pour de futures recherches sur les complexités et les contradictions du discours impérial et orientaliste dans la littérature de voyage.

Glossary

***Travel writing:** In this study, travel literature refers to the overarching literary genre encompassinga wide range of written works produced bytravellers recounting their journeys. Within this genre, various terms are used to describe specific types of texts, including travel books, travel narratives, travelogues, travel texts, traveller's accounts. For instance, travel books generally denote published volumes, while travel narratives may include essays, articles. Travellers' accounts can range from informal reports to more structured literary texts. While the specificities of these terms are acknowledged, they are used interchangeably in this study to refer broadly to British travellers' written representations of their experiences abroad.

***Imperial discourse:** In this research, the phrase "imperial discourse" refers broadly to the ideological framework through which Western powers maintained their dominance over non-European societies. While this term is often closely related to colonial enterprises, it is important to note that in the specific context of this research, British travellers in Tunis didnot act as political colonizers, since Tunis was under French protectorate from 1881 onward. However, this does not preclude British travellers from participating in colonial or imperial discourse. Indeed, many British travel accounts reflect discursive practices that align with colonial ideology and reproduce the logics of imperial domination. So, when references are made to imperialism, colonialism, or colonial discourse, they are to be understood in abroader sense because all these terms are meant to refer to the discursive practices through which British travellers engaged with, interpreted, and represented the region, despite the absence of direct colonial rule by Britain.

***Barbary States:** This concept is sometimes used in this study to refer to the group of North African coastal states, including Morocco, Algiers (present dayAlgeria), Tunis (present day Tunisia), and Tripoli. In the nineteenth century the North African Coast was commonly known as Barbary, a term derived from the Greek word for "foreigners". It designated what Aschbee described as "four kingdoms or provinces collectively called as the Barbary states" (Aschbee1899: preface), which gained prominence during a time when these North African

coastal states were known for piracyand maritime activities in the Mediterranean Sea and the adjacent waters.

***Regency of Tunis:** This concept refers to the political entity under Ottoman control from the mid sixteenth-century until 1881, when Tunisia became a French protectorate. This designation is used in the study when referring to the pre-colonial era of Tunisian history.

***Tunis:** British travellers often referred to both the capital cityand the broader territory of present-day Tunisia simply as Tunis. This study adopts the same convention in keeping with the terminology employed in the primary sources examined, which span the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries.

***East/ Orient:** Both terms are used synonymously throughout this study to denote the same geographical and cultural construct. As Dixon explains, "Orient—a term borrowed from the French in the Middle Ages—has historically coexisted with the Anglo-Saxon term East." (Dixon 1991:18). While the term East is generally "more concrete or descriptive", Orient has often been regarded as "a more poetic or literary designation." (Dixon 1991:18–19). Since the late eighteenth-century, the term Orient "has referred less to a definable geographical area than to what has come to be perceived as a continually evolving ideological construct." (Dixon 1991: 18). In France, however, this term "has always been more generally applied" (Dixon 1991: 18-19), Crucial to note that the terms "West" and "Occident" will be used interchangeably in this study to refer to Western societies or ideologies.

***Travellers/ Tourists:** Although these two terms might be used interchangeably in some works, this study deliberately privileges the term "travellers". As Jennifer Speake observes, the distinction between these two terms remains pervasive within travel literature, despite the fact that the term tourist, when "first coined in the late eighteenth-century, it did not have the derogatory connotations it quickly came to acquire" (Speake 2003: xii). Alison Blunt similarly argues that "from the perspective of contemporary western society, travel is perhaps most commonly defined in terms of its difference from tourism" (Blunt 1992: 15). According to her, travel is "independent, individualistic, and active unlike the mass essentially passive consumption associated with tourism" (Blunt 1992: 15). In a similar vein, Paul Fussell situates tourism within a highly structured and strictly controlled industry that makes the travel experience "not self-directed but externally directed. You go not where you want to go but where the industry has decreed you shall go" (Fussell 1987: 651).

In the light of these distinctions, this research employs the term travellers to refer to British individuals who organized their own itineraries, demonstrated a willingness to take risks, and sought encounters with foreign cultures and landscapes. Their journeys were marked by a desire for exploration and discovery rather than leisure or tourism, thereby aligning more closely with the spirit and ethos of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travel narratives than with the characteristics typically associated with tourism.

***Encounter:** This term is central to the present study, as reflected in its recurrence in the title of each chapter. It is conceptually informed by Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the "contact zone" (1991) where people previously separated come into contact often in an asymmetrical power relation. In line with this theoretical framework, encounter is employed in this thesis to denote not merely a moment of physical or cultural contact, but a representational act through which the traveller observes and represents the people, places, and customs they come across. As such each encounter examined in this work—whether the interaction is with the landscape (landscape encounter), customs (cultural encounter), local populations (human encounter), or female subjects (gendered encounter)—is mediated by the traveller's broader cultural and colonial context in which these narratives are produced. Thus, the term encapsulates both the external moment of observation and the internal process of representation.

APPENDICES

Authros' Biographical Notes

Edward Blaquière (1779–1832): A former captain in the British Mediterranean fleet between 1810 and 1811, engaged directly with North African populations in Libya and Tunis. His observations of their customs and traditions culminated in the publication of his travelogue *Letters from the Mediterranean* in 1813.

Thomas Shaw (1694–1751): Born in Kendal, Westmorland, obtained his MA in Arts in 1719. That same year, he was appointed chaplain to the English factory in Algiers, where he resided for several years and traveled extensively across the East. His travels, praised for their accuracy and contributions to natural history (Manai 2007: 113), culminated in his 1738 travelogue *Travels or Observations Relating to Several Parts of Barbary and the Levant*, regarded as one of the most authoritative accounts of the eighteenth-century Barbary States, including the Kingdoms of Algiers and Tunis, Syria, Egypt, and Arabia Petraea.

Graham Petrie (1859–1940): He was a British landscape artist, poster designer, and author (Manai 2007: 115). He gained particular recognition for his landscape and travel posters, which reflected his keeninterest in travel and visual representation. From this interest emerges his literary work *Tunis, Kairouan & Carthage: Described and Illustrated with Forty-Eight Paintings* (1908), a collection of narratives and illustrations produced following his visit to Tunis. Petrie spent approximately six months in Tunis, during which he gathered the material that would inform both the textual and visual dimensions of his publication.

John Foster Fraser (1868–1936): He was a Scottish journalist, traveller, and lecturer, born in Edinburgh in 1868. He worked as a special parliamentary correspondent and developed a strong interest in travel writing. During the winter of 1895–1896, Fraser journeyed along the Mediterranean coast aboard cargo boats (Manai 2007: 115).This

experience provided the material for his subsequent publication, *The Land of Veiled Women: Some Wanderings in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco*, a collection of essays recounting his travels through these North African regions.

Lewis Wingfield (1842–1891): He was a British traveller, actor, writer, and painter. After 1865, he served as a newspaper correspondent and traveled extensively across various parts of the world (Manai 2007: 116). His travels in North Africa started on the morning of December 24, 1866 accompanied by two friends. After his trip, he published his book *Under the Palms in Algeria and Tunis* (1868).

Henry Spencer Ashbee (1834–1900): He was a British writer and biographer who dedicated much of his leisure time to travel and book collecting (Manai 2007: 116). A Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, Ashbee combined his passion for exploration with his scholarly interests. In collaboration with Alexander Graham, he co-authored *Travels in Tunisia* (1887), a detailed account of their journey through the Regency of Tunis.

Alexander Graham: He was a British architect (a fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects) and travel writer. His book *Travels in Tunisia* (1887) offers a comprehensive analysis of the Regency of Tunis, including detailed descriptions of its various districts. Accompanied with fifty illustrations, the work presents both architectural insights and cultural observations, providing a rich perspective on the region during the late nineteenth-century.

Sir Robert Lambert Playfair (1828 –1899): He was a British author, diplomat, and colonial administrator. He served as Consul General for Algeria in 1867, and later for both Algeria and Tunis in 1885 (Manai 2007: 116–117). Following his diplomatic mission, Playfair published his well-known work *Handbook for Travelers in Algeria and Tunis*, which offered a detailed and practical guide intended for travelers wishing to explore these regions. Playfair's travel account *Travels in the Footsteps of Bruce in Algeria and Tunis* is dedicated to Lady Thurlow, when he was the British Consulate General in Algiers in 1877. Playfair says:

Lady Thurlow, is daughter of the late Lord Elgin, was great-great-grand daughter of the traveller, and heiress of Kinnaird: "I applied to her, and was over joyed to find that she possessed immense stores of his manuscripts, drawings, and collections. (Playfair 1877: 1)

James Bruce: He was a Scottish traveller, explorer, and writer, most famous for his exploration of North Africa and Ethiopia in the eighteenth-century. His main claim to fame is

his journey to discover the source of the Blue Nile, from which came the title of his monumental work *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790).

Douglas Brook Wheelton Sladen (1856 –1947): He was a prolific British travel writer, born in London. His work *Carthage and Tunis: The Old and New Gates of the Orient* (1906) offers a detailed historical analysis of the region, complemented by specific illustrations that enhance the understanding of its cultural and architectural heritage.

Sir Reginald Rankin (1871-1931): He was a British Lieutenant General and travel writer. His 1930 travel book, *Tunisia*, is entirely devoted to the exploration of the life, customs, traditions, and history of the Regency of Tunis.

Sir Grenville Temple (1799 –1847): The 10th Baronet and a Lieutenant General, was a British traveller and writer. In 1832, he landed in Tunis during a tour of the Regency and, upon his return to England, submitted his Journal of Travels in the Beylik of Tunis to the Royal Geographical Society of London (Manai 2007: 119). In 1835, he published his travel account *Excursions in the Mediterranean: Algiers and Tunis*. During his stay in Tunis, Temple formed a friendship with T. Falbe, a captain in the Danish Navy and later Consul General in Tunis (1842–1847). Their collaboration continued when they met again in Paris in 1837, where they planned to return to the Regency of Barbary as volunteers overseeing the region's first archaeological excavations (Djebar 2001: 135–144).

Norman Douglas (1868-1952): He was a British novelist and essayist, born in Scotland. He served in the diplomatic corps in Russia between 1894 and 1896 before resigning from the Foreign Service. Norman's writings, characterized by a witty and conversational style, reflect his deep erudition and his genuine appreciation for the Mediterranean region (Manai 2007:117).

Sir Thomas Wemyss Reid (1842-1905): He was an English newspaper editor, novelist, and biographer.

Edward Rae: Not much is known about him, but Rae was a British traveller and writer. He is best known for his book *The Country of the Moors* (1877). In the preface, he mentions that he dedicates his journey to his mother and sister, reflecting on the solitary nature of his travels: "My journey was a solitary one. I had not the hardy and invaluable companion of Arctic expeditions, or the genial friends who have cheered so many rambles elsewhere" (Rae 1877: preface). During his visit toTunis, Rae had the opportunity to meet Colonel Playfair,

the popular and hospitable Consul-General at Algiers, as well as his amiable traveling companion, the Earl of Kingston.

Michael Russel (1781-1848): The reverend Russel wrote *Palestine or the Holy Land*, and *Nubia and Abyssinia*. (Manai 2007: 119)

John Clark Kennedy (1817- 1867): Colonel,1833; Captain1841; served in China 1842-1847 in the Sikh war 1848-1849, Commandant of the military train. (Manai 2007: 116). In 1845, he wrote his book *Algeria and Tunis*.

Norma Lorimer (1864-1948): She was a Scottish novelist and travel writer, recognized as one of the most notable early female novelists of the Isle of Man. In addition to her work on Tunis, she authored *By the Waters of Sicily and By the Waters of Egypt*, reflecting her broader fascination with Mediterranean and North African landscapes. *By the Waters of Carthage* (1906) is in a way a sequel to By the Waters of Sicily. The same Doris appears in both books—but she is now married to the writer of the letters in *By the Waters of Sicily* and the present book consists of letters written by her to him." (*By the Waters of Carthage, Preface*)

Frances Emily Nesbitt (1864 –1934): She was an English author, novelist, and painter, known for her contributions to literature and the arts during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. She is best known for her travel account entitled *Algeria and Tunis Painted and Described* (1906).

Mrs. Stuart Erskine (1860 –1948): She was a British travel writer and biographer, known for her detailed and insightful works that often focused on the landscapes, cultures, and people she encountered during her travels.

Emily Ward: was a British travel writer. There is limited information available about her life but she is best known for her travel book *Three Travelers in North Africa* (1920). Ward visited Algeria and Tunis with Lord Leigh and Agnes Leigh during the winter of 1919-1920, spending four months in the region. The majority of the book resulting from their travels was written by Ward, with the preface penned by Agnes Leigh. Lord Leigh contributed photographs and a description of an expedition he undertook alone in parts of Tunis, accompanied only with a chauffeur and their guide, Jules.

Lady Warren: Little detailed biographical information is available about her life. She was a British traveller and writer, best known for her travel narrative *Through Algeria and Tunisia on a MotobiCycle* published in 1922.

Mary Elizabeth Herbert, Baroness Herbert of Lea (1822–1911): She was an English authoress, philanthropist, missionary, and influential social figure (Manai 2007:118). Known more commonly as Lady Herbert, she was a travel writer, translator, and devout Roman Catholic. Alongside her commitment to Catholic charitable work, Lady Herbert produced a substantial body of writings that included novels, articles, translations, and, most notably, travel accounts that reflected her personal experiences, religious convictions, and social observations. Among her key works are *Impressions of Spain in 1866* (1867), *Cradle Lands* (1867), *Wives and Mothers of the Olden Time* (1871), *A Search after Sunshine, or Algeria in 1871* (1872), *Wayside Tales* (1880), and *L'Algérie Contemporaine Illustrée* (1881).

Herbert Vivian (1865 –1940): He was a British author, journalist, and political figure (Wikipedia 2023: para. 1). In his book *Tunisia and the Modern Barbary Pirates* (1899), Vivian offers a detailed exploration of the historical, political, social,and architectural aspects of Tunisia, with occasional references to neighboring Libya.

Mary Henrietta Kingsley (1862–1900): She was an English ethnographer, writer, and explorer whose travels across Africa and resulting publications significantly influenced European perceptions of African cultures and British colonialism (Wikipedia 2023: para. 1).