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## **Marginalised Identity in Timberlake Wertenbaker's Play: *New Anatomies*\***

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to discuss the space for a marginalized feminine identity in contemporary British feminist dramatist Timberlake Wertenbaker's play. The play *New Anatomies* dramatizes the life of a historical woman called Isabelle Eberhardt, who disguised herself as an Arab man called Si Mahmoud living among Algerians. The focus of the play is the construction of a marginalised identity through dislocation of a woman from the European culture. Finding no space for her radical identity, she disguises herself as an Arab man to escape the constraints imposed on women by European ideals of femininity. Eberhardt disrupts the conventional gender codes by showing how gender is dramatized within the space of the salon. In contrast, Eberhardt is received as a man in male attire when travelling in Algeria trying to find out a space for her radical identity. She achieves a certain kind of freedom by her dislocation although this eventually leads to her death in desert.

**Keywords:** Contemporary British Drama, Feminist drama, Marginalized identity, Dislocation, Western/Eastern question.

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## Introduction

Timberlake Wertenbaker's first published feminist play *New Anatomies* (1981) dramatizes the life of Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904), the French writer and traveler who disguised herself as an Arab man and lived among Algerians named as Si Mahmoud at the turn of the twentieth century. The play was written in collaboration and produced by the Women's Theatre Group for the Edinburgh Theatre Festival in 1981, since Wertenbaker needed "a supportive women's environment for her writing" (Aston, 1995, p. 8). Timberlake Wertenbaker's *New Anatomies* is an all female cast of five women and musicians. All of the parts are performed by the five actresses; each actress plays a Western woman, an Arab man and a Western man except for the actress playing Isabelle and her disguised self, Si Mahmoud. This type of Caryl Churchillian cross-casting, the play's episodic structure and its Brechtian dramaturgy of alienation effect, (both by making actresses not impersonating their roles and the audience being aware of the fact that what they are watching is a play which hinders them developing an intimacy to one character) doubling gender roles, cross-dressing and historicisation render on the contemporary stage the forgotten historical figure Isabelle Eberhardt. All of those technical aspects that appear in the very beginning of the play as note on staging highlight the reconstruction of the image of women, gender, sexuality and the politics of both national and gender identity.

## Discussion

I would like to explore Isabelle's construction of "a new structure of gender" (Peacock, 1991, p. 166) and identity, which subverts the nineteenth century cult of domesticity. I would like to highlight how the protagonist Isabelle and other unconventional women in salon try to exist in a dominant masculine society, which "trapped" women "in the 'golden cage' of normality" (*New Anatomies, World Drama*). The unconventional woman like Isabelle tries to construct a "new anatomy", as the title suggests, by moving across the gender roles in a patriarchal society, to form a new type of gender apart from social constraints. I will also explore how Isabelle moves across gender boundaries by cross-dressing as do other female characters such as Verda Miles, Séverine, and Lydia. Isabelle's transformation is different from the other women characters in the play because Isabelle not only transgresses her gender but also radically transforms religious, national and cultural identities both by externalizing all the social impositions in her escape to the desert and by rejecting her religious and national identity in order to construct a new one. Furthermore, Isabelle's quest for gender transgression goes parallel with her quest for religious, racial, and cultural transformation. She escapes to the heart of the Sahara Desert expecting to find freedom in an Eastern location. I shall discuss

how the colonized Eastern Society, which is also oppressed, shares the same fate as women who are also subject to patriarchal oppression. Isabelle is in search of liberation finding no space for her marginalized genderless identity. She discovers that she can only find personal freedom (through her adventurous travels) by escaping from her sexual, cultural, and religious background.

Isabelle Eberhardt is a marginal character and thus a forerunner and spokeswoman of the playwright. She is different than the other women characters in disguise because “Isabelle experiences not only gender transgression but also racial, religious, and cultural transformation” (Gömceli, 2010, p. 91). Isabelle’s manifold transformation gives her a unique identity. Through deploying flashback, time shifts back and forth and place varies from Europe (Geneva, Paris) to North Africa (Algeria, Ain Sefra, the Kasbah, the desert, and Constantine). This depicts the universality of women’s adventure in establishing a genderless identity avoiding sexual stereotypes imposed on her by patriarchy that limits women’s liberation and existence in any society. As the title points out, with Isabelle Eberhardt’s attempts to disqualify the sexual stereotypes and turning upside down the image and the role of the women in society, “new anatomies” establish “new structures of gender” (Peacock, 1991, p. 166) in which, according to Peacock (1991), both “. . . men and women can find new ways of living equitably together” (p. 167). I disagree with Peacock in the idea that both sexes can find a new way of equality because the main idea beyond forming a new anatomy requires forming a unique feminine identity apart from masculine-dominant society. This special anatomy focuses on feminine culture; women identified-women culture, rejecting the patriarchal norms or lifestyles as radical feminists strongly emphasize. This new anatomy defends marginalisation of strong feminine identity apart from the conventional “equality” between sexes. Wertenbaker’s multicultural experience might have played a significant role in rewriting such a marginal figure. The historical figure Isabelle Eberhardt and Wertenbaker’s play expose gendered tropes and gender ideals through their travels to different culture where both of them express their freedom. Thus they tend to form their own multicultural identities, which is a medium to express their marginal selves. Wertenbaker’s plays, as Wilson states, point out the playwright’s experience of geographic dislocation creating cultural dislocation (Wilson, 1993, p. 48). I shall examine Wertenbaker’s multicultural background to interpret the culturally dislocated characters of her plays.

### ***Life and ideology of Timberlake Wertenbaker***

Timberlake Wertenbaker was born in 1944 in New York, and is an American raised in the Basque region of France. Before settling in London, Wertenbaker lived in different

geographies such as France, America, Greece which hindered her developing a national identity and most probably made her an outsider like her character Isabelle who also did not belong to anywhere except for a vast desert (in the middle of nowhere). In an unpublished interview, Wertenbaker points out her multicultural experience as follows:

I was brought up with a complicated cultural mix—Basque, French, Anglo, and American and I always felt slightly outside any of them. I think I can identify with outsiders imaginatively. What it means to be an outsider has always interested me . . . —that feeling of being estranged from your childhood and your roots . . . (Carlson, 2000, p. 141).

The feminist playwright Wertenbaker's multinational background heightens the awareness of "power dynamics involved in language and discourse" (Goodman, 1993, p. 33), which appears frequently in her plays. As Goodman (1993) proposes "language, gender, power and rhetoric are common topics in feminist theory of the theatre" (33), feminist theatre is a rhetorical enterprise mostly based on action which challenges both patriarchy and the dramatic canon by proposing alternative theatres. Pattie Gillespie points out that the primary purpose of feminist theatre is action rather than art in which the theatre companies work with the playwright "to promote the identities of women, to increase awareness of the issues of feminism, or to advocate corrective changes" (Gillespie, 1978, p. 279).

Timberlake Wertenbaker who is recognized as one of the most important contemporary women playwrights of the British stage draws our attention to rewriting boldly Isabelle's story as an outcast who forms a new type of in-between gender. As other playwrights such as Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems do, the play is set in the past and presents the life of a historical person. The focus on the past establishes feminine writing through rediscovering and reinterpreting the position of women both in the past and in the present. There is a bridge between the past and the present, since the playwright provides a comparison to the plight of a woman in the past and in contemporary times. As Caryl Churchill in *Vinegar Tom* utilized seventeenth century witchcraft in the contemporary theatre, Wertenbaker depicts the position of women in the past to a contemporary audience. The (re)production of the past and past characters depict gender bias images and reinterpret history from a female perspective in the plays. Universal female experience provides a historical context for the plight of modern women who try to survive and take their place by challenging patriarchal system. That is why Wertenbaker picks up a historical character like Isabelle whose experience is no different than that of modern women today. It is not a coincidence that Wertenbaker's plays mostly dramatize geographical and cultural dislocations by exploring cultural identity and searching for a female identity.

Wertenbaker depicts a European woman rejecting her gender, nation, religion, and even her name in the oppressive patriarchal society and by doing so criticizes sexual stereotypes. She also proposes how some marginal women react against the manipulation of male power in political, cultural and sexual codes. Isabelle's attempt to counteract patriarchal oppression by adopting a marginal life style is also put into practice in contemporary times. Wertenbaker brings Isabelle to the stage as a symbol of "any sexually-conscious woman" (Carlson, 1989, p. 157). By the Second Wave Feminism in 1960s women were in the subject position in theatre; thus the plight of women is reexamined and restructured in the character of Isabelle. Wertenbaker's protagonist Isabelle offers: "a sophisticated analysis of sexuality and its institutional and cultural context" (Carlson, 1989, p. 169). Wertenbaker's "cross-gender casting", as Carlson points out, serves for Isabelle's wish for a "genderless existence" (1989, p. 169). I think that Wertenbaker offers a "genderless existence" through Isabelle's search to establish a liberated identity free from patriarchal oppression.

### ***Life and ideology of Isabelle Eberhardt***

I will explain first who Isabelle Eberhardt is before analyzing her in the text. Isabelle (1877-1904) is a historical figure and this contemporary play, through using flashback, sets events in the time of Isabelle's life. Isabelle Eberhardt was born in Geneva as a daughter of a Russian father Alexander Trophimowsky Eberhardt, and a mother of German descent Anna Eberhardt. She had an elder sister called Natalie who conventionally married when her parents died and a step brother with whom Isabelle had a kind of romantic relationship. The brother later joined the French Foreign Legion in Algeria. Isabelle was influenced by her father who taught her chemistry, metaphysics, philosophy, classical, modern languages and Arabic. Her father was a nihilist and an anarchist who converted to Islam (Foster, 2008, p. 110). Isabelle's father obviously had a great impact in shaping her character. In her twenties, Isabelle was an adventurer who dressed as an Arab man; she journeyed to French North Africa visiting Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and the depths of the Sahara Desert where the French authorities banned her from traveling upon discovering her gender as a female. In fact Isabelle, as Yang states, was "a cultural exile who embraced a life of an outcast" (Yang, 2014, p. 19) because she was not accepted in the Western patriarchal society. She tried to find a new identity – new anatomy – in a different culture and religion than her own. Attracted by Arabian Muslim culture, Isabelle adopted the name Si Mahmoud Essadi. She converted from Christianity to Islam, plausibly influenced by her father's conversion and wrote books on Islam, short stories and travel notes ("Isabelle Eberhardt"). Having converted to Islam, Isabelle joined the Qadria brotherhood of Sufis. When she was attacked by a rival group, the Tidjanya brotherhood, she left Algeria but came back for the trial. She was put on trial. In the meantime, she supported

herself by writing for the newspaper *El Akhbar*. Either from malaria or possibly syphilis, she lost her teeth (Foster, 2008, p. 110). This most extraordinary person died in a most extraordinary way: She died in a flash-flood in the desert village of Ain-Sefra in 1904 at the age of twenty-seven.

### *New Anatomies Play*

The play *New Anatomies* opens a few hours before Isabelle's death. With Isabelle disguised as an Arab man, beginning to narrate her life story to Séverine, a French lesbian journalist, who records it. This is an important point because Séverine keeps the herstory/history of a neglected and almost forgotten woman called Isabelle. The patriarchal authority in the name of Judge informs readers/audience that "this person must be officially forgotten" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 57) at the end of the play. Surely, the existence of such an unconventional personality disturbs the patriarchal authority. Isabelle rejects her feminine identity from the very beginning of the play by adopting a male identity and cross-dressing. Not only Isabelle's appearance but also her behavior and use of language reveal her adopted male identity. By subverting her female conventional attitudes, Isabelle enters the scene "dressed in Arab cloak" in masculine appearance and behavior. She is sick, toothless and almost hairless because of malaria. She burps frequently, takes out a cigarette and "sticks one", repeatedly expresses her sexual desire in a male attitude telling how she needs a "young man" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 5) to sleep with. Isabelle uses slang, offensive language and swears through most of Act 1 scene 1.

Isabelle constructs a new identity by cross-dressing and rejecting stereotypical feminine identity. As Ryan Claycomb asserts, Isabelle's cross-gendered performance is a challenge to the traditional gender categories. She also moves "between genders and ethnicities" (Claycomb, 2004, p. 179). The critics Peacock (1991) and Palmer (1998) point out the play demonstrates the victimization of women by men and thus brings into question conventional gender roles<sup>2</sup>. Likewise, Claycomb (2004) points out how Isabelle rearticulates patriarchal society. Claycomb (2004) interprets Isabelle's cross-dressing both as a way of obeying the patriarchal law which permits her to go into Geneva only if she dresses as a boy and a way of subverting the patriarchal order. The effect of cross-dressing appears in manifold ways. Isabelle by cross-dressing challenges traditional gender stereotype, as Verna Foster (2008) states, the playwright explores the construction of gender (p. 115). I agree with the critics

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<sup>2</sup> D. Keith Peacock, *Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1991, read p. 164-167; read Richard H. Palmer, *The Contemporary British History Play*, Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1998, p. 152-54 for more information.

stating that cross-dressing challenges traditional gender stereotype; however Isabelle's intention is more than challenging or protesting. She tries to find a space for freedom in which the patriarchal society does not interfere with her way of living. She escapes to the desert where none of the social rules apply; thus she feels the freedom of adopting a self which is far from any categorization. Isabelle's cross-dressing is also a transvestite attitude violating the dressing code of the society. Both Isabelle's transvestite inclination and her breaking down the gender identification by cross-dressing make her to adopt a genderless existence to establish a liberated identity free from patriarchal oppression. Marjorie Garber (1992) explains transvestite attitude "as signs of another kind of vestimentary transgression, one that violated expected boundaries of gender identification or gender decorum . . . Class, gender, sexuality, and even race and ethnicity ... are themselves brought to crisis in dress codes and sumptuary regulation" (p. 32). Garber contends that "the transvestite is the figure of and for that crisis" (p. 32). Cross-dressed acting on contemporary stage points out cultural anxiety because the identity is not fixed and this creates problems in the society. Isabelle does not care about the "cultural anxiety" which appears as the figure of the Judge in the text, thus she exceeded her limits depicting no certain identity defined by the patriarchal society.

It is most problematic that Isabelle assimilates herself in Arabic/ Muslim culture where there is limited room for women in that culture either. Women are secluded from public life in North Africa in the nineteenth-century with stricter limitations imposed compared to European woman. The seclusion of harem culture places women within the domestic sphere where no man is allowed to enter. Saleh, the Arabian character in the play, states the trivial position of women in Arabic culture: "a mare is more valuable than a wife to us" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 28). It is obvious that Isabelle totally rejects her feminine identity in order to be included in Arab culture. Although Islam preaches tolerance for everyone, there is still seclusion for women which places question on Isabelle's inclusion by her Muslim friends Bou Saadi and Saleh. Even if the French officer reveals Isabelle's identity as a woman, Saleh says: "We accept whatever name Si Mahmoud wishes to give us" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 32) and continues his speech: "Si Mahmoud knows the Koran better than we do. He's in search of wisdom. We wish to help him." (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 33). Both Bou Saadi and Saleh ignore Isabelle's sexual identity accepting her gender as male. Still, the Captain decides that Isabelle should return to the city within ten days, so Isabelle will soon appeal to the protection of the French Army and get permission to live in the desert. Bou Saadi states that "It's not a good idea to irritate Europeans. It's best to pretend you're stupid and keep laughing . . ." (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 33). Isabelle leaves for Paris promising her Arab friends that she will come back. Wertenbaker's multicultural background places her protagonist in the heart of Eastern culture that is in quest of identity seeking for liberation in this scene. It is important to

note that the oppression is double-sided: the colonized Eastern society and women's oppression by patriarchy. The women and the colonized Eastern society share the same fate which is explicitly emphasized throughout the text.

Wertenbaker investigates the position of women in the Eastern society through a religious perspective, which is also subject to oppression (both by patriarchy and the colonizers). Muslims respecting their religion and belief in Allah's (God's) omnipotence play a very significant role in shaping the deeds and lives of them. An exceptionally knowledgeable woman in search of God is regarded as a respected and holy person even if she is a woman of Eastern culture. A wise woman such as Isabelle has a different status in Eastern societies if compared to the trivial position of women in Western societies. Wise and knowledgeable woman like Zineb and Isabelle have a more privileged position in Eastern culture. Arab men talk to Isabelle about a holy woman called Lalla Zineb and many people who visit her tomb:

ISABELLE. A woman?

BOU SAADI. Not an ordinary woman.

ISABELLE. But a woman?

SALEH. What difference does it make, Si Mahmoud, if she was wise? They say she predicted the victory of the French and then died in grief.

*Silence* (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 28).

Silence speaks louder than words: There is double oppression, a holy woman and an oppressive force of colonialism. The privileged position of women in Arab culture is left on the periphery when the oppressive forces of the Western dominant ideology come into question. As we see, scene six takes place in the desert where Isabelle searches for wisdom with her Arab acquaintances, Saleh and Bou Saadi. The friends represent North African oppressed society by the Western cultures.

Then, why does Isabelle in disguise choose the desert? Plausibly, Isabelle chooses the desert since there is no strict social and cultural norms, no order but only vast freedom. Only wise women can be put on a pedestal removing patriarchal control in Eastern societies. That might be another reason why Isabelle adopts Eastern culture. As a victim of gender oppression in the patriarchal Western society, Isabelle escapes to the desert in Algeria where no strict social norms apply. Isabelle's Arab friends respect her; they do not question her real identity. When Saleh states: "It is courtesy in our country not to be curious about the stranger" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 32). Different cultures expose what the colonial culture lacks. Still, the existence of Isabelle's passive Arab friends in the play highlights colonial oppression which can be viewed as parallel to gender oppression. In other words, while the colonized and oppressed Eastern



society shares the same fate as women who are subject to patriarchal society. Both the Western hegemonic colonial power and patriarchal power symbolically oppressed the weaker colonized Eastern society (mostly feminized in literature) and women as the weaker sex. That is why colonialism appears as a subplot in the play to express the main oppression by patriarchy. Isabelle disguises herself to form a genderless existence to establish a liberated identity free from patriarchal oppression.

Wertenbaker, by presenting two different cultures, as Palmer highlights, discusses the impact of colonialism on the 'otherized' Eastern culture. It can be also considered as "a metaphor for sexual oppression" (Palmer, 1998, p. 152). For instance, Natalie's discourse on "the other" position of the Eastern people echoes when she calls Arabs "stupid" because they "give you valuable jewels and clothes for trinkets" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 18). On the other hand, the materialist Natalie returns from town with local costumes which she intends to sell in Switzerland. Natalie, as a colonialist, exploits raw materials of the Easterners and looks down upon them. Another example of similar oppression appears in Yasmina's case who is a servant to Jenny. Jenny intends to insult Yasmina when she insistently calls Yasmina as 'Fatma' because she sees herself superior to Yasmina. Jenny does not care about Yasmina's cultural identity and her emotions. Jenny, as a European woman, rejects Yasmina's identity because of her Eastern background therefore she performs a colonial attitude. Jenny says: "their names are unpronounceable. We call them all Fatma" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 19). Isabelle is attracted by this Arab woman's story: "Poor girl, they tried to marry her to a cousin she hated. It was death or the degradation of becoming a servant. I'll write about her" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 19). Yasmina as a woman has double oppression suffering from "the imported European system and the native culture" (Yang, 2014, p. 4). The critic Yang (2014) draws our attention to the colonial aspects in the play which offers an alternative perspective from earlier critics. Yang emphasizes the double oppression of the Eastern women who try to survive both in patriarchal and colonial oppression.

It is most significant that Wertenbaker takes up issues of the Orient and women hand in hand because both are exploited in white Western European patriarchal society. Gömceli (2010) clarifies the exploited position of both women and Eastern society as follows:

While the colonized Eastern society, which is the oppressed, debased, and the humiliated side, shares the same fate as women who are subject to physical and sexual exploitation as well as oppressed by patriarchy, the colonial power, which is the ruling side, resembles the male power that regards women as the weaker sex that needs to be controlled (p. 111).

In this respect, Isabelle's escape to Eastern culture in disguise as an oriental man is not a coincidence. Isabelle adopts Eastern religion, culture, and cross-dresses as a member of this culture in order to reject the Western dominant power which exploits both women and the Occident.

Wertenbaker deliberately depicts Isabelle's brother Antoine as an opposite figure to emphasize Isabelle's adaptation of masculine identity. When Isabelle was thirteen, she was a dominating figure if compared to the sixteen-year-old brother Antoine who was described as "frail and feminine" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 8) in scene two. They have romantic relationship embracing each other saying "beloved" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 11). Isabelle as a child develops an imaginary Oriental adventure hoping to travel to the desert, a dream she realizes later in her life. Isabelle and Antoine are playing a dream play in their childhood which seems unrealistic. In the meantime, their elder sister Natalie is getting married. Natalie represents a traditional woman by saying "a mother who teaches her children how to behave and looks after the house, cooks meals, doesn't let her children eat out . . ." (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 12). Natalie, after the death of her parents, tries to arrange a marriage for Isabelle with Stephane's (her husband) cousin saying Isabelle "need[s] a roof over your [her] head" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 17). Natalie advises Isabelle of forgetting her dreams: "You'll forget all that when you're married. You'll forget all those dreams" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 17). This demonstrates that marriage puts limits to dreams since it controls the lives of women under the patriarchal order. Isabelle is the only one who realizes her childhood dreams through adopting an unconventional life in patriarchal society. Marriage is considered as conventional and acceptable way of living in the patriarchal society according to the text, so Isabelle does not accept to get married. She prefers to live alone in the desert which is also an implication of her rejecting social rules. Her decision can be considered as a step to form a unique and marginalized identity. On the contrary, Antoine abandoned their childhood dreams of freedom by joining the French Foreign Legion and marrying a conventional bourgeois girl to live under the rules of white colonial patriarchal society.

Isabelle's identity starts to take shape when she wears jellaba. This is the first step towards her radical transformation. She feels "at home in it" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 24) because she is aware of the fact that she finds happiness and freedom in her male identity and her racial identity as an Arab. While Jenny is annoyed with Isabelle's clothes, Antoine approves of Isabelle: "Isabelle looks like our recruits. No one would know you were a girl. Is this male or female?" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 25). Dressing has different connotation for the others. For instance Jenny emphasizes her femininity with her pregnancy, and puts on an Arab veil teasing her husband, "I'm in your harem. You're the sheikh. Oh, come to me" (Wertenbaker,

1996, p. 23). Jenny exploits Eastern culture even by the cultural costumes that bring the problem of identity to the surface. Wertenbaker implicitly draws the audience's attention to issues of gender, cultural and racial identity. Indeed, the politics of power displays itself even in the utilization of clothing: Isabelle changes clothing from that of a European woman to an Arabic man, saying: "There is no law in the Muslim religion that says a woman may not dress as a man" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 46). Jenny wraps her face in a veil as an exotic Arabic woman, to colonize the other position of a feminized, exploited and colonized Eastern culture "to re-create the exotic referents of Oriental eroticism: the objectification of the women, the patriarchal desire for domination, and the exotic lascivious sexuality" (Yang, 2014, p. 5). Jenny uses the Eastern attire to draw attention to Oriental eroticism and sexuality whereas it is a medium of freedom and radical transformation for Isabelle. Isabelle embraces male clothing because it represents her new identification. She says to Antoine: "let's go back to our dreams" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 25), which symbolically refers to her transgression when Natalie warns her not to go out "at this time of night". Isabelle rejects her femininity when she responds: "But in these . . . I'm not a woman" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 26). Isabelle internalizes her new identity in her soliloquy in scene five at the Kasbah:

... If the voice pursues me: foreigner, European – I'll not turn around. If the voice says: you, woman, yes, woman – I'll not turn around, no, I'll not even turn my head. Even when it whispers, Isabelle, Isabelle Eberhardt – even then I won't turn around. But if it hails me: you, you there, who need vast spaces and ask for nothing but to move, you, alone, free, seeking peace and a home in the desert, who wish only to obey the strange ciphers of your fate – yes, then I will turn around, then I'll answer: I am here: Si Mahmoud. (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 26).

This speech functions as a manifesto of Isabelle's masculinity by rejecting religious, national and gender identity. This is an important transformation of Isabelle who not only reconstructs her sexual identity, but also her racial and religious identity by rejecting the previous identities. Isabelle's reconstructed marginalized identity brings her freedom and breaks the boundaries of the previous identities imposed by her society. Yang (2014, p. 6) and Carlson (2000, p. 141) draw attention to Isabelle's gender transvestism offering an alternative perspective from what earlier critics have said. Yang interprets Isabelle's change as a "desire and struggle for identification" (Yang, 2014, p. 6), Carlson (2000) describes it as "cultural transvestism, which ultimately rendered her marginal to both cultures – the hybrid European community of French Algeria and Muslim North Africa society" (2000, p. 141). Isabelle confesses that she "wanted to possess this country. It has possessed me" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 42). Isabelle's hybrid identity can be seen as an alternative to European position of power.

Carlson (2000) points out the exchange of Isabelle's clothes as an act of erasing her identity as a European woman. Isabelle does not hail her previous identity because of

(1) Her search to re-define desire and sexuality without having to accept the stereotypes of European female behavior, and (2) her search to understand Arab culture and let its social and institutional structures replace those constraining European ones under which she has operated (2000, p. 140).

Wertenbaker brings together a group of unconventional women in disguise in a Parisian salon in act II. They try to preserve their own identities in the patriarchal society that oppresses women. They are stereotypes of marginal women, like Isabelle, dressed as men in order to conceal their identities. Lydia cross-dresses in order to be creative and intellectually superior while writing. She does not feel comfortable when she dresses as a woman: "But when I dress as a man, I simply begin to think, I get ideas" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 38). Lydia feels herself more productive and creative in male attire. This is a patriarchal view imposed on women, so Lydia unconsciously internalized the patriarchal outlook for women. As Gömceli (2010) points out, Wertenbaker's voicing of the idea that in patriarchal societies when women perform intellectual activities such as writing they should adopt a male identity. The great women novelists of the nineteenth century wrote under male pseudonyms like George Eliot, so this is an indication that performing an intellectual job is associated with male domination (p. 97). Hence, Lydia cross-dresses and adopts a male identity to be acceptable in Western patriarchal society.

Severine also adopts male clothing because she is not accepted as a lesbian in male heterosexual patriarchal society. She is not allowed to lead a lesbian life openly therefore she disguises herself as a man in public in order to survive. Verda Miles is a male impersonator who wears male clothes while singing because she has "hundreds of exciting roles before [her]" and it is "much more interesting . . . challenging to play men" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 42). Verda received love letters from women; when there was a passionate lover who pursued her she had to reveal her real identity by inviting her fanatic to her dressing room: "I let my hair all the way down and wore the most feminine gown I could find. And then I gave her a good talking to. She never came back" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 39). Verda has no freedom in her female identity she leaves the group in anxiety because of her husband. When Séverine has sympathy with Isabelle, Isabelle avoids Séverine's affection as she states: "I am not a woman. I'm Si Mahmoud. I like men. They like me. As a boy, I mean. And I have a firm rule: no Europeans up my arse" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 40). It is important to note that Isabelle follows "vision of gender-bending" (Carlson, 2000, p. 140).

This group of women, even if they are in disguise, are still entrapped within the confines of their Western culture. That is why Isabelle escapes to the desert rejecting all her “imposed” identities to realize her dream, which also seems problematic. Séverine sums up in-between isolated position of cross-dressed women who are always imprisoned:

SEVERINE. Normality, the golden cage. And we poor banished species trail around, looking through the bars, wishing we were in there. But we’re destined for the curiosity shops, labeled as the weird mistakes of nature, the moment of God’s hesitation between Adam and Eve, anatomical convolution, our souls inside out and alone, always alone, outside those bars . . . (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 39).

Their transvestite and marginalized lives place them as outsiders in their society. Claycomb states that, “multiple identities reveal a layering of constructed selves” (Claycomb, 2004, p. 204) because Isabelle’s “multiplicity of her own identity brings most other assertions of identity into question” (Carlson, 2000, p. 139). There is no sense of belonging neither in Isabelle nor in the other disguised women in Paris. Thus, multiplicity of identity places those women on the periphery of the dominant culture.

The displaced position of those marginal female characters seems problematic because none of them “has a feminist consciousness” (Gömceli, 2010, p. 104). Hence they develop their own strategies like living in disguise to put up with the patriarchy. There is a lack of “sisterhood” in terms of socialist/materialist feminism: survival seems impossible without collaboration in mass. The playwright illustrates the condition of all women who have similar life styles and entrapments such as Isabelle and it echoes in Séverine’s speech: “Fenced in, Isabelle, all of us” (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 50). Peacock emphasizes how male influence inhibits female freedom in this speech. The playwright frequently reminds the audience of women’s imprisonment. In act II, scene iii, the Judge in the courtroom in Constantine accuses Isabelle of “offensive masquerade” (Wertenbaker 49). The Judge says: “This Mr. Wilde had a perversion of inclination. You Miss Eberhardt, have perverted nature” (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 49) and bids Isabelle to stay out of the desert. As the Judge points out Oscar Wilde’s homosexual perversion is more tolerable than Isabelle’s case in her perversion of both inclination and nature. The Judge expresses common sense by otherizing sexually perverted individuals. In his speech, he makes a comparison between Oscar Wilde and Isabelle of their perversion, which should be taken under patriarchal control. According to the Judge, Wilde had a perversion of inclination, he did not disguise but he was accused of homosexuality thus he was put in prison. Still, Wilde’s case seems better than that of Isabelle’s because Isabelle perverted both inclination and nature by rejecting her feminine identity. It is important to note that liberation is somehow attained through perversion.

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, 1980's feminist drama taking women as a subject position in drama posits women's plight, their survival, and their lack of equality within male-based society. The de-naturalization of women, gender transvestism, efforts to move outside race, religion, culture and society, marginalized identities denying any sexual and gender stereotype spring out of the heart of oppressive Western patriarchal societies. Wertenbaker focuses on "a woman who has been radically dislocated from the culture into which she was born" (Wilson, 1993, p. 149). The play is set in the past and presents the life of a historical person. The focus on the past establishes feminine writing through rediscovering and reinterpreting the position of women both in the past and in the present. There is a bridge between the past and the present, since the playwright provides a comparison to the plight of a woman in the past and in contemporary times. The (re)production of the past and past characters depict gender bias images and reinterpret history from a female perspective in the plays. Universal female experience provides a historical context for the plight of modern women who try to survive and take their place by challenging patriarchal system. Wertenbaker by bringing a forgotten historical figure back to contemporary times allows the audience to reconsider the condition of women that is still under patriarchal oppression in contemporary times.

The unconventional woman like Isabelle tries to construct a "new anatomy", as the title suggests, by moving across the gender roles in a patriarchal society, to form a new type of gender apart from social constraints. Isabelle not only transgresses her gender but also radically transforms religious, national and cultural identities both by externalizing all the social impositions in her escape to the desert and by rejecting her religious and national identity in order to construct a new one. Furthermore, Isabelle's quest for gender transgression goes parallel with her quest for religious, racial, and cultural transformation.

Colonial oppression of the Eastern people is depicted as a subplot that is not separate from the main plot, which is the patriarchal oppression of women. In the light of this view patriarchal oppression can be viewed as parallel to gender oppression in the text. In other words, the colonized and oppressed Eastern society shares the same fate as women who are subject to patriarchal society. Both the Western hegemonic colonial power and patriarchal power symbolically oppress the weaker colonized Eastern society (mostly feminized in literature) and women as the weaker sex. That is why colonialism appears as a subplot in the play to express and highlight the main oppression by patriarchy. Isabelle disguises herself to form a genderless existence to establish a liberated identity free from patriarchal oppression.

Apart from Isabelle's Eastern friends who find no way out but to obey what is brought by the colonial Western forces, Isabelle disrupts the conventional gender codes. Isabelle's

reconstructed marginalized identity brings her freedom and breaks the boundaries of the previous identities imposed by her society. It is important to note that Wertenbaker's experience of geographic dislocation echoes in cultural dislocation of Isabelle Eberhardt. Isabelle is received as a man in male attire when travelling in Algeria. She tries to find out a space for her radical identity. She achieves a certain kind of freedom by her dislocation although this eventually leads to her death in desert. Even in the case of Isabelle's ironic death by drowning in a flash of flood in the desert, she "frantically" moves "outside the gender, race, and culture to which she was born" (Carlson, 2000, p. 141). The reaction of Western patriarchal ideology is mouthed by the Judge who considers her as non-existent because there is no space for such existence: "Close the file. This person must be officially forgotten" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 55). There is neither tolerance nor space for such marginal and liberated identities like Isabelle who is considered as non-existent in the traditional patriarchal society.

Once again marginalized Isabelle developed a "new anatomy" where she found no space even in the desert –a place signified freedom for her— she must dislocate herself from this world. Isabelle's construction of "a new structure of gender" and identity subvert the nineteenth century cult of domesticity. Although Isabelle transgresses her gender boundaries by cross-dressing, rejecting her religious and national identities by externalizing all the social impositions in her escape to the desert, she can only find personal freedom limited by the patriarchal authority. Still the desert is under the control of Western oppressors that also oppress the colonized Eastern society. Both the Eastern society and women share the same fate that is subject to physical and sexual exploitations. Thus, the oppression of both colonial and patriarchal power leaves no space for marginalized identities like Isabelle. Isabelle's dream about the possibility of moving across gender roles in a patriarchal society is never fulfilled at the end of the play. This seems a utopia dream in the history of the oppressed women by the patriarchy.

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