KHALED ALJENFAWI

Mahomet and Mustapha: George I's Turkish Servants as Surrogate Targets

When George I arrived in Britain in 1714, he brought with him his two Turkish servants Mahomet and Mustapha (the spelling varies in different contemporary texts), who continued to wear their Turkish turbans while working in court as personal servants to their Hanoverian master. Though the Turk in general may have represented what many eighteenth-century Britons saw as the abomination, deception, and apostasy of Islam, however, this usually exoticised figure in British consciousness at this time has also served as a means by which contemporary political, social and cultural power could be reenacted, reinstated and re-empowered. This essay considers how Mustapha and Mahomet functioned within a specific cultural, political, economic and social eighteenth-century environment, the beginning of the Hanoverian reign in Britain. King George seems to have used his two turbaned Turkish servants as surrogate targets to evade and redirect British domestic criticism from his court.

However, some caution is necessary at this stage of the argument in order to point out the real position of these two Turkish servants in the court. The roles of Mahomet and Mustapha in the first Hanoverian court should not be blown out of proportion by claiming, for example, that their impact on contemporary British politics was highly significant and concrete. Therefore, it is important to point out that in this article I am only trying to underline the controversial nature of their role, and to argue that both of these Turkish valets can be considered part of a larger predictable process of deflection of criticism directed toward the court, whether from contemporary political circles, periodicals, pamphlets or otherwise. Mahomet and Mustapha, to some contemporary political observers and players, like the Tories who were considered by their opponents, the Whigs, as Jacobites, might have had no significance at all apart from being considered exotic valets wearing Turkish turbans for a German-speaking British king. As is argued below, however, Mahomet and Mustapha either fortunately or unfortunately were caught unawares, perhaps, within a contemporary machinery of eighteenth-century British political intrigue.

This shift in the perception of the Turkish figure in contemporary eighteenth-century British popular consciousness relates specifically to the impact of the new Hanoverian court on the larger British social, political and cultural context. As a case in point, George of Hanover, King of Britain (1714-1726), arguably the first real constitutional monarch in Britain, was invited by the British parliament in 1714 to sit on the throne after the death of Anne:

> When George in pudding times came o'er and moderate men looked big, Sir,
> My politics I changed once more and so became a Whig, Sir.[5]

The Vicar of Bray was alluding to the arrival of George I. Indeed, when he came to Britain in 1714, the "harvests were generally good, population growth was very slow, [the] political establishment was developing toward a stable configuration of the different political powers,

especially after the nation succeeded in averting a new civil war after the dethroning of James II in 1688. In fact, an increasing number of British political forces, like Whigs or Tories, came to admire and feel secure with 'the Glorious Constitution.'"[6]

However, this optimistic ima

"thousands of strangers, refugees in England, for more than thirty years."[9] James argued that George of Hanover had no real support in England except that offered by other intruding foreigners like himself, such as the Protestant Huguenot refugees.[10]

In fact, far from being welcomed as a stability factor in the political environment, the new German and court-French speaking monarch, his courtiers, the numerous German administrators he brought with him to Britain, and his royal household,[11] were accused of immorality and corruption; indeed, there were repeated calls for rebellion.[12] The new king, to make matters worse, kept two former German mistresses as well as the two turbaned Turkish *valets de chambre*.[13] It seems that the actions of these two royal servants infringed on the rights of British courtiers who claimed a traditional right to wait on the king, and considered Mahomet and Mustapha as barriers preventing their access to him. However, I will argue that George I seems to have realised the importance of manipulating the image of Turks in contemporary British consciousness to his own advantage. And though one can also argue that the king seems to have been insensible of or unconcerned about public reaction to his Turkish servants, nonetheless one cannot deny the importance of his use of those servants as buffer-zones to deflate, evade, and regulate public criticism of his court. Mustapha and Mahomet's contradictory representation in court (faithful servants and regulators of the King's sexual life), as discussed later, disguises the real ideological struggle between a British public continuously distrustful of its governments and a German king who neither spoke English properly nor was interested in nation-building.

There is some haziness in eighteenth-century contemporary and even present-day sources about the dates of Mahomet's and Mustapha's recruitment to George's household. In fact, none seem to agree about how the King acquired his Turkish servants, or even whether they continued to be considered by him as only pages, or personal attendants, or whether they had

more active roles in the British public arena. Ragnhild Hatton in *George I Elector and King*, for example, explains that,

> as personal attendants on George[, the] two Turks, Mehmet and Mustafa, held long-established positions though they were, and *remained* [my emphasis], body servants without political influence. Contrary to popular legend neither had been captured by George during his Hungarian campaigns: English historiography would seem to have confused them with a young Turkish boy who George did capture and send home to his mother.[14]

I agree that the role of Mehmet and Mustapha remained as body servants "without political influence;" however, ironically this lack of political influence does not seem to have convinced contemporary politicians, who criticised the court for various reasons. For many Jacobites for example, Mahomet and Mustapha were part of a usurping household which replaced the legitimate Stuart monarchy, and both valets would have played a significant role in Jacobite lore as targets of abuse in the new German court. Many Britons, especially those who continued to support the dethroned house of Stuart would not have hesitated to associate them with the reported corruption of the first Hanoverian court. Whether or not Mustapha or Mahomet in fact realised the extent of their *paradoxical* position in the minds of those opposed to the court, their peculiar position as private valets to the King made them susceptible to being suspected of corruption.

Both Mahomet and Mustapha seem to have come into George's service after 1685 while he was still in Hanover. According to John Walters, Mahomet and Mustapha "had allegedly saved George's life in 1685 in the siege of Vienna and then entered into his service in Hanover. Belying his name, Mahomet repudiated the Moslem religion to become a Lutheran and married a German Woman."[15] Of the two, Hatton writes:

> Both so much a fixture at George's court in England that they were depicted in the murals of [Hampton Court] Palace, Mehmet held the more responsible position and was in charge of George's private accounts, the Schatullrechungen or Quittungen from 1699 until his death in 1726. The surname he adopted on his ennoblement in 1716, von Konigstreu (lit. true to the king), can be assumed to have been chosen by himself—since

Upon his arrival, however, George ushered his two Turkish servants into the new British social and political scenes as exotic objects. As *valets de chambre*, they had extensive functions at court. It seems that Mahomet and Mustapha, like other contemporary *valets de chambre*, were responsible for their "master's appearance," charged with ensuring that he "appear[s] as modish as possible." Their close proximity to George would have made it possible for them to "literally [help] him on with his clothes," and prepare his "coiffure."[19] It is crucial to understand that being body-servants of the king, Mahomet and Mustapha were constantly present around their master, while Mahomet would have been responsible for paying whatever the king commanded in daily court expenses. This proximity to the king underlines the many advantages enjoyed by these Turks in contrast with their English colleagues, who might not even have been able to communicate with their new monarch as he conducted his daily transactions either in German or French. However, this close attachment to the king made Mahomet and Mustapha targets for contemporary criticism. Being a Turk in Britain during the early eighteenth century does not seem to have been an easy role. H. M. Imbert-Terry argues that "because they were prevented from [acquiring] crown land [George's] German mistresses and even the Turkish valets invariably sold their influence to the highest bidder." H

keeping a mistress did not totally discredit individuals, especially if those individuals were monarchs or aristocrats, but Defoe was disturbed by the function of Mustapha and Mahomet in the new British court. Indeed, for Defoe, and presumably for many of his readers, the two turbaned, German-speaking Turks could only serve

advertise itself among British subjects? Indeed, the social, political, and cultural situations of eighteenth-century Britain were dire, sensitive and potentially explosive. John Beattie, for example, explains that "the presence of these personal servants naturally curtailed the activities of the English bedchamber staff."[27] In Beattie's view, George I needed these Turkish servants to overcome the rigid formalities of the conventional English court. He offers a contrast between George I and his son, who enjoyed the British court's formalities. According to Beattie, "George I had such a strong aversion to formal etiquette that even without his German valets it is doubtful whether he would have submitted to the morning rigours that his son enjoyed."[28] Of course, one can argue here that Turkish courts may have also subscribed to similar formalities, of which Mahomet and Mustapha would be already aware if they had worked there, but what is significant here is that as foreigners they were also used to facilitate their foreign master's position in the British court. Lacking any real experience in the British court's formalities, the new monarch needed their help to negotiate its etiquette. But while fulfilling such functions, Mahomet and Mustapha must also, inadvertently, have widened the gap which already existed between the new monarch and his new people.

For example, one might ask why the new king insisted on his Turkish servants continuing to wear their turbans. In addition, the Hanoverian family had become famous among its new British public for its inter-familial quarrels, escalating into a crisis between George I and his son and future king, George II. George's hatred of and disgust for his son developed into an explicit questioning of his legitimacy.[29] These accusations were documented in many contemporary non-literary writings such as Lord Harvey's diary and the diary of Lady Mary Cowper, lady-in-waiting to Princess Caroline, wife of the younger George.

These and other familial tensions led to a salacious rumour about George II's son,

between [Princess] Caroline

sphere by orchestrating these counter-processions.[33] In other words, both Tories and Whigs seem to have used their full power to control the public space in attempts to further their political ambitions. However, one can argue that these public demonstrations and counter-demonstrations presented a new political context for further social unrest during the rest of the Hanoverian era.

The public space, as Habermas envisions it, as a new social and political phenomena in the eighteenth century, became after the coronation of George I in 1714 a more likely location for criticising the new regime.[34] I would argue that among the first targets of public criticism were George I's two Turkish servants. Daniel Defoe in the political tract mentioned earlier objects to the role of Mahomet and Mustapha at court because he argues that their primary function is to manage the king's sexual life. Describing what is portrayed as the "real" function of Mustapha and Mahomet, Defoe represents these two Turks as fulfillers of an "abominable purpose" at court.[35] What is fascinating in Defoe's description of their tasks is how he utilises and appeals to an already well-established negative public perception of Turks to antagonise and provoke his readers further against Mahomet and Mustapha. During the early eighteenth century, and even earlier, the British public, generally speaking, already associated "moral perversions" like sodomy with Muslims in general.

Various mediums, like travel narratives, cheap publications (chapbooks, small pamphlets, almanacs, etc.) contained stories that

some quite fraudulent."[37] The Turk, seamen, labourers, private manservants like Mahomet and Mustapha, and occasional continental "Moorish" visitors continued to occupy the spotlight in the British public sphere as foreigners. However, the "Turk" did not usually occupy a favourable position within this emerging phenomenon.

Three years before Defoe published his tract in 1718, a sample of the numerous advertisements in the publication of *Old Bailey Proceedings,* which were collections of reports of trials at Britain's most important criminal court, dated 1-6 September 1715, reveals recent publications that seem to have been appealing to many contemporary readers. For example, a list "printed for Andrew Bell, at the Cross Keys and Bible in Cornhill," contains some of the following titles: "The History of the most Remarkable Trials in the Courts of Britain in Capital Cases, viz. Hereby, Treason, Incest, Adultery, Rapes, Sodomy, Perjury, Murder, &c. Faithfully extracted from Records, and other authentic Authorities, as well Manuscript as Printed,"[38] but in addition, within the same advertisement, one finds titles like "The Arabian Nights Entertainments, consisting of 1001 Stories. In Eight Vols. Pr.11s."[39] What is peculiar about this advertisement is that it juxtaposes proceedings of trials and Arabian tales, a curious combination of the grotesque and the exotic. The sensational, the exotic, and the absurd have been historically favoured by ordinary laymen, and I would argue that such a combination of genres contributed to later erotic and exotic projections of Mahomet and Mustapha. So when Defoe uses the adjective "abominable" to describe their supposed role at court (managing the monarch's sexual life) and to express his apparent belief that they are worthy of the contemporary British public's disgust, he bases his appeal on an already established representation of Turks, linked in the public imagination with moral and sexual corruption.

Mahomet: Royal Populist Par Excellence

mistress's apartment where he was visiting his granddaughter, heard him tell the story of the late Queen of Prussia, George I's sister, who had recently died. Mahomet, according to Lady Cowper's diary entry, "prais[ed] the late Queen of Prussia, Sister to the King, who died at Hanover of two Day's Sickness." Mahomet informs his listeners that the late queen was "suspected of having been poisoned, before she left Berlin, with Diamond Powder."[44] According to Mahomet, the suspicion of death by poisoning of the late queen was confirmed by him. Indeed, the Turkish royal *valet de chambre* tells his listeners that he is certain that the queen was poisoned because, implicitly commanded by his master, Mahomet proves the truth behind this rumour through a physical examination he conducts on the queen's body.[45] After "she was opened," Mahomet explains to his aristo

one of the aristocratic attendants of the royal chamber writing such an entry in her diary. Nonchalantly, Lady Cowper starts her unemotive account of the story's grotesque details, as she heard them from Mahomet, who continues by relating how "the king was in such a sorrow, that

faith and been christened Ludwig Maximilian…was ennobled by the emperor in 1716 as Ludwig von Konigstreu. He married the daughter of a wealthy Hanoverian and by her had two children, one of whom became a cavalry officer in the Hanoverian army."[55] For George to allow him to retain his Muslim name Mahomet is contradictory, for it is a derivation of the name Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. By keeping this name after his conversion to Christianity, Mahomet may have continued to retain some of its negative connotations to the British public. There is no contemporary evidence to indicate whether he objected to such contradictory naming, but it is safe to assume that he already knew that his master preferred him to keep his Turkish origins alive in contemporary British consciousness.

The presence of the Muslim Other within an eighteenth-century British historical, cultural and political context has created opportunities for many British authors and writers, whether diarists, poets, novelists or journalists, to create surrogate targets for their criticism of what many of them considered a corrupt British government and court. The Muslim Other, in fact, problematised these British authors' treatment of many contemporary issues, while at the same time disrupting the structure of the texts in which it is treated as an object of desire, hatred, disgust and exoticism.

Notes

[1] Kenneth M. Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam and Prophecies of Turkish Doom* (Philadelphia: APC, 1992), 43.t7(o)-4(cr).64

[31] Many political factions in Britain like "the Tories mistrusted the new Hanoverian dynasty. They were attracted to James II's young son in continental exile and drank toasts to 'the king across the waters.'" See Raymond Birn, *Crisis, Absolutism, Revolution: Europe 1648-1789* (New Yorn714Tj 2.c(i)7u E5(s)12.2 -0.0091BDC BT /TT15 .4Tj7-8