

## Cartographic Demonization in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* Through the Lenses of Religious and Colonial Cartography

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### Abstract

Previous studies mostly have not paid attention to the complex connection between cartographic demonization and colonialism in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*. Therefore, we aim through this study to fill this gap by looking at how Marlowe's use of cartographic demonization reflects both colonial and religious notions. The paper examines how Marlowe generates racial, moral, and imperial frontiers by means of geographical metaphors and cartographic imagery utilizing literary mapping and postcolonial theory. The results reveal Marlowe's portrayal of Tamburlaine's conquests as a case study of cartographic demonization in which Marlowe utilizes maps and religious symbols to declare Western superiority while concurrently denouncing the East. It also illustrates how ideas of identity, and power are shaped by ideological tools based on geographical depictions. Overall, it offers novel insights into how mapping methods were used to reinforce narratives of colonial and religious supremacy therefore enhancing awareness of how cartographic demonization operates in early modern literary works.

**Key words:** *Tamburlaine the Great*; Postcolonial theory; Cartographic demonization; Religion; Colonialism; Renaissance literature

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### INTRODUCTION

Cartographic demonization is a new term we can define as the negative representation of physical, metaphorical, and verbal mapping that designates places or people as inferior or threatening. It is a mechanism rooted in Western literary works, used to demonize the Other by employing maps and geographical representations to label non-European regions, peoples, or cultures as sources of threat, chaos, or moral corruption. It is always labeled with concepts of barbarism or evil to justify the West tyranny and expansion. In English Renaissance drama, this technique reflects cultural and racial boundaries, reinforcing ideas of Otherness and moral divisions through geographical imagery (Publicover, 2017, p.44). *Tamburlaine the Great* is a good example of how place and Otherness overlap. Mainly, since its spatial portrayals disregarded non-European regions and people, it is intimately related to the demonization of cartography that came along during that period (Bartolovich, 1999, p.38). Understanding the ideological frameworks that influenced Marlowe's portrayal of Tamburlaine and the places he subjugated can be reached by analyzing the geographical demonization that occurs in *Tamburlaine the Great*. According to Robert Tally, maps were not objective renderings but ideological instruments that shaped how people thought about race and geography (Tally Jr, 2016, p.22). Regarding dominance and submission, the universe was outlined through the spatial portrayal of the Other. Their geographical origins render non-European people less significant (Harley, 2002, p.56). In *Tamburlaine the Great*, Marlowe reflects these dynamics by positioning his hero as a conqueror who reshapes the world map through violence, symbolizing the period's broader imperialist ambitions.

This research topic can be traced back to ancient Greece, where the initial instances of geographical mapping were created. Greek cartography aimed to understand the universe using a structured framework of

lines and coordinates. Ancient Greeks regularly used a Eurocentric perspective to represent the world they knew (Ptolemy, 2011, p.34). This ancient tradition revived and broadened throughout the Renaissance period as European explorers and colonizers endeavored to rechart new lands and assert ownership over them. Woodward states, "Mapping supported a sense of territorial self-entitlement that allowed religious and political leaders to claim vast areas of land overseas in the name of Christian European states" (Woodward, 2007, p.19). Although Maps evolved as political and religious instruments, they frequently delineated the limits between "civilized" European territories and the "barbaric" nations beyond (Mishkova & Trencsényi, 2017, p.3). Harney and Phillips state, "Since the Renaissance, cartographic imaging has invented modern spaces, turning abstractions into imperialist representations that could be wielded to know, contain, and control place" (Harney & Phillips, 2018, p.42). Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, which focuses on territorial conquest, is an intimately connected account of geographical demonization. It depicts Tamburlaine's destructive expansion as a reflection of Renaissance mapping views of the Other.

The modern aspect of cartographic demonization in *Tamburlaine the Great* looks at how the theological and political context of the Renaissance formed its cartographic and imperial aspirations. Marlowe wrote when European powers were actively engaged in colonial expansion in Africa, the Americas, and Asia (Loomba, 2002, p.183). Sandra Sider emphasizes that maps represented both control and exploration throughout the Renaissance period. They establish limits to delineate European supremacy (Sider, 2007, p.225). In *Tamburlaine the Great*, Marlowe employs the play's geography to signify European superiority, contrasting Occidental civilization with Oriental barbarism (Hanson, 2013, p.189). Consequently, Tamburlaine's triumphs go beyond representing the military space; they indicate a new world order that adheres to the imperial and religious ideals of the time.

This research's theoretical foundation is based on postcolonial theory and literary mapping. It is adapted from the works of Edward Said and Robert Tally. Said's concept of Orientalism provides a framework for understanding how the West historically constructed the East as the "Other" (Said, 1979, p.69). His theory is crucial for analyzing Marlowe's portrayal of Central Asia and its inhabitants in *Tamburlaine the Great* since describes Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1979, p.3). This perspective fits with the notion that Tamburlaine's triumphs are set in the context of civilizing attempts, so mirroring the West's historical inclination to impose authority and control over Eastern areas while presenting such acts as good or illuminating. Furthermore,

Robert Tally mentions that "literary cartography, literary geography, and geocriticism enable productive ways of thinking about the issues of space, place, and mapping after the spatial turn in literary and cultural studies" (Tally Jr, 2013, p.3). By manipulating the geography of the known world, Marlowe reflects the Foucauldian notion that space and power are intricately connected (Foucault, 2012, p.45). Finally, Bhabha states that "Between the Western sign and its colonial signification there emerges a map of misreading that embarrasses the righteousness of recordation and its certainty of good government. It opens up a space of interpretation and misappropriation that inscribes an ambivalence at the very origins of colonial authority" (Bhabha, 2012, p.135). His theoretical framework further enriches the analysis; it reflects how Marlowe's portrayal of conquest blends both the European and non-European, creating a dynamic tension in the geographic spaces of the play.

The logical connection between these theories and the research topic in *Tamburlaine the Great* is established through conceptualizing the new term of cartographic demonization, which ties together the theoretical approaches of postcolonialism and literary mapping with the negative geographical representations. When we examine the play through the lens of colonial cartography, it becomes clear that the manipulation of geographical space is a central feature in the play. The territorial expansions depicted in the play serve not only as a narrative of conquest but also as a metaphor for how maps functioned as tools of imperial control (Harley, 2002, p.103). Consequently, this research reveals how Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* reflects the ideological imperatives of the Renaissance era regarding demonizing the Other.

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## CARTOGRAPHIC DEMONIZATION AND RELIGION

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The religious cartography in English Renaissance drama depicted negatively non-Christian lands as territories to be conquered and converted. It aims to underline the Christian duty to "civilize" the Other (Loomba, 2007, p.118). This view is mirrored in Marlowe's portrayal of characters, who frame his conquests as divinely sanctioned. Cosroe says "That now is marching near to Parthia" (*Tamburlaine the Great*, Pt1,2.1.70). Parthia was historically associated with Zoroastrianism and later Islamic influences. This geographical representation reflects the clash between different forms of spiritual and political authorities. Tamburlaine's march into Parthia is not only a military conquest but it was depicted as a symbolic effort that was rooted in secular or pagan belief to overthrow the religious and cultural forces of the East. The emphasis on Parthia's geographical and religious context underscores the notion of divine conquest.

Marlowe represented Tamburlaine's sovereignty over both land and faith. The play's geographical representations are not merely incidental but they are deeply connected to themes of conquest, identity, and religious conflict. Said refers to the Oriental and European relation by saying that "the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen—in the West, which is what concerns us here—to be one between a strong and a weak partner" (Said, 1979, p.41). Regarding this argumentation, we can find how Marlowe constructs a narrative that intertwines geographic locations with religious ideologies when he references Damascus, Algiers, Egypt, and Syria, which define them, reflecting the tensions between Christian Europe and the Muslim world.

The depiction of demonization in the cartography of *Tamburlaine the Great* can be understood through the lens of religious conflict. It is intricately connected to representations of both the geographical and cultural worlds. Tamburlaine's conquest, for example, is portrayed not only as a military pursuit but also as a challenge to the divine forces. He makes the declaration, "To signify the slaughter of the gods" (*Tamburlaine the Great*, Pt 2, 5.3.57). In the context of a broader religious conflict, the Islamic world is portrayed as both a geographical and theological battleground (Hizam & Guo, 2023, p.8). This assertion of supremacy over divine entities is a reflection of this fight. It is a reflection of the Crusades campaign because the physical sites that were named, such as Algiers, indicate this continuous religious war in which Christian Europe is engaged in conflict with the Muslim world. One of the arguments that Edward Said makes is that Western powers established the Orient not only as a geographical location but also as a place of religious and cultural otherness. Said states that "the absolute demarcation between East and West... had been years, even centuries, in the making" (Said, 1979, p.39). He contended that the dichotomous antagonism between Christianity and Islam was not only a geographical divide but rather a religious one that was being used to rationalize conflict and dominance. The portrayal of the Orient in such irritating religious terms was both ideological and geographical. Maps frequently placed the Holy Land or Jerusalem at the center in order to emphasize the Christian worldview with regard to the Orient.

Said also questions the essentialist view of the Orient, in which religious identities are oversimplified and stereotyped, therefore fostering demonizing tendencies. Said argues, "On the level of the thematic, [the Orientalists] adopt an essentialist conception of the countries... of the Orient" (Said, 98). This is clear in Tamburlaine's representation of Islamic leaders and lands, which are sometimes shown as hideous and chaotic, a mirror of how maps and literary works collaborated to define the West's perspective of the East. In this sense, the Orient became synonymous

with the exotic and the aberrant, hence supporting the view of Muslim areas as both a threat and a target for Western intervention. Connecting back to the symbolic use of geographical location both challenged and distorted the complicated reality of religious struggle in the Mediterranean, the concept of "battling gods" is representative of the theological demonizing Marlowe imbues in his work.

Marlowe employs burning the Koran as an aggressive symbol of both religious and cultural supremacy in Tamburlaine the Great. Tamburlaine's words, "Now, Casane, where is the Turkish Alcoran, / And all the heaps of superstitious books / Found in the temples of that Mahomet, / Whom I have thought a god? They shall be burnt" (*Tamburlaine the Great*, Pt 2, 5.1.255-258), reflects his intention to eradicate not just the physical territory he conquers but also the very identities of the people he subjugates, including their religious beliefs. This act of destruction is a cartographic demonizing process whereby geography and conquest are utilized to impose power over territory and cultural identity. Tamburlaine essentially "maps" the religious basis of the areas he conquers onto his concept of superiority by burning the Koran, therefore eradicating it. This behavior fits the larger imperial story of denigrating alien religions and civilizations to support invasion. Said's study of Western misunderstandings about Islam in this framework emphasizes even more Marlowe's method. Said talks about how Christian intellectuals historically distorted Islam, comparing it with "Mohammedanism" and calling it an "imposter" in protest to Christianity (Said, 1979, p.60). Like the destruction of holy books in Marlowe's drama, this frame of view helped confirm a self-sufficient Western vision of Islam that justified its demonizing and destruction.

Marlowe's depiction of Tamburlaine's rejection of Mahomet and his assertion that he is the agent of the wrath God emphasizes the act of cartographic demonization—that is, the redefining of spiritual and theological environments by invasion. Tamburlaine's declaration, "In vain, I see, men worship Mahomet:/ My sword hath sent millions of Turks to hell, / Slew all his priests, his kinsmen, and his friends, / And yet I live untouched by Mahomet. / There is a God, full of revenging wrath, / Whose scourge I am, and him will I obey / So, Casane, fling them in the fire" (*Tamburlaine the Great*, Pt 2, 5.1. 266-273), reveals his dismissal of Islam and the power of its prophet. This act of spiritual conquest is a reflection of the historical colonizing practices of which invaders frequently mocked the Other to substitute their beliefs. When Tamburlaine presents himself as the wrathful God, he not only denigrates the Islamic faith, but he does so while simultaneously proclaiming the supremacy of Christian theological doctrine. Said's study clarifies this dynamic even further by noting that "Islam became an

image... whose function was not so much to represent Islam in itself as to represent it for the medieval Christian" (Said, 1979, p.92). Tamburlaine's denial of Mahomet and his assertion of divine wrath aimed at denigration and replacement of the captured faith with those of the conquerors. Marlowe represents Tamburlaine's deeds in the play in a way that reflects the concept of cartographic demonization, in which geographical and theological boundaries are modified to impose authority and obliterate the identities of those subjugated.

## CARTOGRAPHIC DEMONIZATION AND COLONIALISM

Colonial mapping is a major factor in the development of the narratives of dominance and subjugation that Marlowe's play and Said's Orientalism in which maps act as tools of power and control, Tamburlaine's goal is to prevail over "all the world" (*Tamburlaine the Great*, Pt2, 5.3.152-153). This might be seen as a metaphor for the imperial aim. Robert Tally emphasizes in his research of colonialism and spatiality the reality that maps were ideological creations meant to support the expansion of colonial power rather than objective instruments. He states that "maps were not neutral tools but ideological constructs that justified imperial expansion" (Tally Jr, 2013, p.94). Complementing Tamburlaine's imperial objectives, the map serves as a tool for claiming and controlling the world rather than just a portrayal of it. Through his obsession with globe mapping, Tamburlaine epitomizes the colonial perspective, which saw land and territory as objects to be controlled and changed to fit the imperial vision's criteria.

Tally also addresses how early maps, "reflecting both fear and fascination with the unfamiliar," were sometimes bursting with fanciful aspects (Tally Jr, 2013, p.26). This imagination of the unknown reflected in *Tamburlaine the Great* is also seen in the way non-European societies—especially the Islamic world—are portrayed as terrible and chaotic. Like early colonial maps showing foreign areas as inhabited by legendary animals, Bajzeth's description of "cannons mouthed like Orcus' gulf" (*Tamburlaine the Great*, Pt1, 3.2.76-77) conjures a terrible picture of a monster, godless other. Presenting the East as a territory in need of civilizing intervention, this act of "othering" through cartography not only demonizes the people of the Orient but also justifies their conquest by Western powers. Edward Said also emphasizes the ideological foundations of colonial mapping since the entire act of mapping non-Western territory engaged a selective, reductionist process. Said says, "The world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident," (Said, 1979, p.13) so underlining the binary divisions that colonial powers established

to support their spread. Then, the cartographic act was about creating a narrative of superiority and dominance as much as geography. With maps as the main instrument for this spatial rearrangement, Marlowe's drama clearly shows the East as a location to be conquered, transformed, and brought under Western forces's control.

## THE ROLE OF CARTOGRAPHIC DEMONIZATION IN SHAPING IDENTITY

For the colonizers as well as the colonized, the idea of cartographic demonization also plays a major part in how they construct their identities. Said reveals how the West created a distorted mirror image by imposing its own theological and cultural identity onto the Orient. He states "What has been of special interest for me is the extension of post-colonial concerns to the problems of geography" (Said, 1979, p.353). Tamburlaine the Great in turn reflects this geographical vision in which the conquest and redefining of alien territories shape identity. Marlowe's continuous referencing to maps represents the effort to "fix" the Other's identity by spatial depiction. Tamburlaine's instruction to "Give me a map" (*Tamburlaine the Great*, Pt 2, 5.3.152-153) exposes his will to rule not only the actual region but also the narrative surrounding the East, therefore changing it according to his imperial aspirations.

Robert Tally's notion that "to draw a map is to tell a story" (Tally Jr, 2013, p.4) emphasizes even more the junction between literature and cartography in building the identities of both colonists and the colonized. In Marlowe's text, the map represents the narrative of conquest where space and identity are entwined rather than being a tool for geographical orientation. Through spatial representation, Tamburlaine is also redefining the identity of those he encounters by charting the lands he wishes to conquer, and condemning them. The terrible images of the East in *Tamburlaine the Great* mirror this process of identity construction, as the Muslim world is not just seen as a geographical area but also as one that has to be transformed to match Western standards. Said states "a group of people living on a few acres of land will set up boundaries between their land and their immediate surroundings and the territory beyond, which they call 'the land of the barbarians'" (Said, 1979, p.63). Said's notion can be seen in the way Marlowe shapes the Islamic characters' identity. Such regions are seen by Tamburlaine as sites of anarchy and deformity, which in turn justifies his cruel invasion. Through the rewriting of cultural and religious identities as well as physical conquest, Marlowe's controversy performs out this process of boundary-setting and identity creation by utilizing the map as a metaphor for control.



## THE GEOPOLITICS OF CARTOGRAPHIC DEMONIZATION

Cartographic demonization's geopolitics draws straight from the ideological and spatial divisions. Said contends that geographical space is a political and cultural construction tool used by colonial powers rather than merely a physical one. He says, "Geography was essentially the material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient" (Said, 1979, p.216). This highlights the way stories supporting colonial supremacy were built using maps. Tamburlaine's desire for a map in the play reflects the imperial perspective, which holds that the world should be rearranged in line with conquerors' interests and ideas, therefore regulating space. The spatial iconography of the play reflects the larger geopolitical agenda of the time, in which the mapping of regions was intrinsically linked to the spread of imperial power, with many references to battles and conquests occurring all throughout the world.

Furthermore, following Tally's assessment that "the evolution of cartographic techniques paralleled the rise of European imperialism" (Tally Jr, 2013, p.25) the portrayal of the East as a site of religious and cultural strife as well as the use of maps to record conquest. The capacity of European nations to claim authority over far-off territories changed along with cartography. The spatial dynamics of the play mirror this evolution since Tamburlaine's imperial aspirations are characterized by his attempt to map and rule the planet. Through both religious and geographical depictions, the demonizing of the East was a vital component of this process since it not only justified invasion but also produced a story in which the West was positioned as the superior, civilizing agent. Tamburlaine's constant use of maps functions as a clear metaphor for the power relations that are associated with colonialism. In this context, mapping is not just about representation, but also about practicing control over both territory and identity. The view that maps are "ideological constructs that justified imperial expansion" (Tally Jr, 2013, p.94) is reinforced by Tamburlaine's desire to conquer all lands, which presents the East as a realm that can be remade according to Western ideologies.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research paper was to examine *Tamburlaine the Great* through the dual lenses of religious and colonial mapping. Furthermore, the paper demonstrated how geographical representations serve to vilify regions and peoples that are not of European descent. Marlowe uses cartography as both a symbol of imperial authority and a tool for racial and moral differentiation in *Tamburlaine the Great*. By conducting an examination of Tamburlaine's expansion within the framework of postcolonial theories, specifically Edward

Said's critique of Orientalism, this paper provides evidence that cartographic demonization plays a significant role in the play's narrative at the same time. This demonization serves as a tool to justify and maintain imperial control. The first section of the argument focuses on religious mapping, which emphasizes the use of divine justification for conquest. The second section, on the other hand, explores colonial cartography, which emphasizes the boundaries between the "civilized" West and the "barbaric" East.

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