

The Arab World and the Occident: Toward the Construction of an Occidentalist Discourse

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Abstract:

Purpose: This article aims to engage in a meaningful discussion of Occidentalism as a discourse that draws its roots from Orientalism. It scrutinizes the limitations of Occidentalism in investigating the East-West encounter from the perspective of Orientals (Arab intellectuals) and the multifarious ways the latter relate to and imagine the Occident. It will cast a critical eye on the multiple and diverse constructions of Occidentalism as a discourse, arguing that unlike Orientalism, which homogenizes the Orient, Occidentalism does not Occidentalize/homogenize the Occident.

Methodology: We take as a starting point Edward Said's definition of Orientalism as a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident', and we explore the limitations and the possibilities of Occidentalism as a method to construe the colonial mechanisms of misrepresentation of the Other as everything that is different from the Self. This article compares and contrasts a plethora of existing definitions of Occidentalism as formulated by scholars from both the Arab world and the Occident.

Findings: This paper concludes that the Oriental's encounter with the Occident cannot, and should not, be projected as a reverse relationship, or, as some claim, as an 'Orientalism in reverse', but rather as a diverse set of relationships of Orientals who have experienced the Occident in a variety of manners.

Furthermore, while Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between the Occident and its Orient, oftentimes through real or imagined encounters, Occidentalism is also the outcome of a long cultural relationship between the Orient and its Occident.

What differs between the Orient and Occident, however, is the position of power and hegemony, which characterizes the Occident's encounter with the Orient.

Originality: This article takes an all-inclusive view to discuss the term Occidentalism from the perspectives of both the Orient and the Occident. It teases out the limitations of this term and challenges Orientalist methods of misrepresentation, which continue to blemish the Arab world and its discourse of Occidentalism as a discourse of hatred of the Occident. Furthermore, through the discussion of Alloula's *Oriental Harem*, it offers insight into the suggested Occidentalism method, which emphasizes the disfigurements of the Orient while tactfully writing back to the Occident.

Keywords: Orientalism; Occidentalism; Colonial misrepresentation; Colonial hegemony; Orient

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العالم العربي والغرب: نحو بناء خطاب الاستغراب

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ملخص البحث

أهداف البحث: تهدف هذه المقالة إلى الدخول في مناقشة ذات مغزى لمصطلح الاستغراب كخطاب فكري يستمد جذوره من الاستشراق. وسوف ندقق في حدود هذا المصطلح من وجهة نظر شرقية (المثقف العربي)، كما سنناقش الطرق المتعددة التي يرتبط بها هذا الأخير بالغرب وآليات تصويره له. وسوف نلقي نظرة ناقدة على الإنشاءات المتعددة والمتنوعة لمصطلح الاستغراب كخطاب لا يتوافق مع الاستشراق في تصويره النمطي للغرب، بل على عكس الاستشراق، فإن الاستغراب ينتقد التصوير النمطي الغربي.

منهج الدراسة: انطلاقاً من تعريف إدوارد سعيد للاستشراق كنمط فكري قائم على التمييز الوجودي والمعرفي بين «الشرق» و«الغرب»، نستكشف حدود وإمكانيات الاستغراب كوسيلة لتفسير الآليات الاستعمارية لتحريف صورة الآخر على أنها عبارة عن كل ما يختلف عن الذات. سوف تقارن هذه المقالة عددًا كبيرًا من التعريفات المتداولة للاستغراب كما صاغها أدباء ومفكرون من كل من العالم العربي والغرب.

النتائج: تخلص هذه الورقة إلى أن لقاء الإنسان الشرقي مع الغرب لا يمكن ولا ينبغي أن ينظر إليه على أنه علاقة عكسية، أو كما يدعي البعض على أنه «استشراق في الاتجاه المعاكس»، بل على أنه مجموعة متنوعة من علاقات الشرقيين الذين اختبروا الغرب في مجموعة متنوعة من الظروف.

وكما أن الاستشراق ينبع من تقارب خاص بين الغرب والشرق في كثير من الأحيان من خلال لقاءات حقيقية أو متخيلة، فإن الاستغراب أيضًا نتيجة لعلاقة ثقافية طويلة بين الشرق والغرب. لكن ما يفرق بين العلاقتين هو موقع القوة والهيمنة، الذي يميز هذا اللقاء.

أصالة البحث: تسلط هذه المقالة نظرة شاملة على مصطلح الاستغراب من وجهة نظر كل من الشرق والغرب كما تناقش القيود المفروضة على هذا المصطلح وتتحدى أساليب التحريف الاستشراقية التي لا تزال تشوه صورة العالم العربي وخطاب الاستغراب كخطاب كراهية الغرب. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإنه من خلال مناقشة كتاب مالك علولة «الحريم الشرقي»، نقدم عينة للنظرة الثاقبة التي يتبناها منهج الاستغراب في كشفه عن طريقة الاستشراق لتشويه الشرق؛ حيث يضع علولة تحت الأضواء تصورات الغرب النمطية للشرق ويقربها بخطاب انتقادي كرد استغرابي على الغرب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستغراب، الاستشراق، الصور النمطية، الشرق، الغرب، الهيمنة الاستعمارية

للاقتباس: زاهية إسماعيل صالح، «العالم العربي والغرب: نحو بناء خطاب الاستغراب»، مجلة كلية الشريعة والدراسات الإسلامية، المجلد ٣٩، العدد ٢، ٢٠٢١، عدد خاص حول «فكر الاستغراب في التداول المعرفي المعاصر: نحو رؤية علمية موضوعية في استكشاف الآخر»

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Introduction

While many scholars define Occidentalism as the counterpart of Orientalism, the word ‘counterpart’ signifies both the equivalent and the opposite, and as a result, these two concepts are frequently presented as two opposing extremes. As a consequence of this classification, while ‘Orient’ is often regarded as the antonym of ‘Occident’, the lexical definition of ‘Occidentalism’ has been structured as the exact reverse of ‘Orientalism’, as in the following example: Occidentalism is “a quality, mannerism, or custom, specific to or characteristic of the Occident” and “scholarly knowledge of Occidental cultures, languages, and peoples”¹.

While it is widely agreed that these functions are those pursued by Orientalism as an academic discipline that is largely motivated by colonial interest, this is strictly not the case with Occidentalism. This is so because Occidentalism is not, and cannot be, a scientific discipline (*‘ilm*) *per se* but merely a discourse and a style of conceiving and representing the Occident. In addition, Occidentalism represents the Occident not in any academically objective scientific manner, the aim of which is to produce methodical knowledge about the people of the occident, as claimed by the likes of Hassan Hanafi², but mostly in both a scholarly and a subjective literary, artistic, and polemical manner.

In this article, we aim to discuss the concept of Occidentalism in the Arab world and search for its roots that we maintain are at the very essence of the East-West encounter, with a focus on the Arab world, which is positioned as part of the Occident’s Orient. We contend that, due to historical circumstances that positioned the Occident as colonizer and the Orient as colonized, hegemony forms the baseline of this relationship, making the latter the subject of study of the former. In the course of this process of studying and subjectifying the colonized, reactions against this condition have taken a diversity of formats, allowing the colonized to write back to the colonizer in a discourse we call Occidentalism. After a discussion of this condition and an illustration of the writing back process, exemplified in the work of Malek Alloula’s *The Oriental Harem*, the article will conclude by asking a series of questions as avenues for reflection and further research into this nascent, important field of thought, which in our view is still in its formative stage.

From Orientalism to Occidentalism

In his seminal book, *Orientalism*, which we consider a major Occidental work, Edward Said supports the view that, unlike Orientalism, Occidentalism cannot claim to be or become a scholarly field that would specialize in the study of the Occident in the same manner as Orientalism has devoted itself to the study of the Orient. He asserts, “to speak of scholarly specialization as a geographical ‘field’ is, in the case of Orientalism, fairly revealing since no one is likely to imagine a field symmetrical to it called Occidentalism”³. He defines Orientalism as a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made

1 www.thefreedictionary.com.

2 Hassan Hanafi, *Muqaddimah fi ‘ilm al-istighrāb*, Beirut: al-Mu’assasah al-Jāmi‘iyah li al-dirāsāt wa al-nashr wa al-tawzī‘, 2000.

3 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conception of the Orient*, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p.50.

between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’¹, and as a result, the literature produced thus has the distinction between East and West/Orient and Occident as the dividing line between Orientalism and Occidentalism. While Orientalism originates from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient, Occidentalism also derives from this same closeness.

Furthermore, in the same way as a large body of text, called ‘Orientalist’ comes out of that closeness, whose dynamic is enormously productive even if it always demonstrates the comparatively greater strength of the Occident², an equally important volume of works by the ‘Orientals’ on their encounter with the Occident, which we call ‘Occidentalist literature’, resulted from this same encounter. It is, therefore, the works of the Orientalists that made the works of the Occidentals possible, and oftentimes, these latter works have engaged in writing back, redressing falsities, and speaking to the Occident, which indicates that literary and political dialog between Orient and Occident has always existed and is ongoing.

This same discourse is also known as colonial and postcolonial literature, but what we would specifically call the Occidentalist literature is the corpus of works concerned with the portrayal of the Occident and the East-West encounter from the Oriental perspective.

Said’s *Orientalism* did not engage with this part of the relationship between the Orient and Occident. His focus was solely on the hegemonic Western popular and academic discourse on the Orient, providing an analysis of the relationship between European colonialism and the intertwined discursive formations constructing the European experience of this same Orient. The corpus of literature and other outputs produced by the Orientals in response to these discursive formations did not receive Said’s attention. Additionally, while he scrutinized Western portrayals of the Orient, by which he meant the Middle East, which comprises Egypt, and the Arab and Muslim countries East of Egypt, he totally overlooked North Africa, which endured a much longer colonial experience (1830-1962) and therefore a much deeper encounter with the Occident.

As a major work written in English and therefore reaching a vast readership in comparison to similar works written in French or Arabic, Said’s book made an enormous impact in academic circles and drew massive waves of discontent from Orientalist thinkers and academics. However, its major impact lies in raising consciousness about the damaging effects of Orientalist representations of Orientals and their unethical approaches to the study of the Orient and its inhabitants. As expected, this condition drew a wave of criticism against Said’s work, which is, in effect, a reaction against Occidentalism as a style of thought and a discourse devoted to writing back to the Occident with the aim of highlighting its racist undercurrents and its flawed methodology in its Orientalist undertakings.

One major criticism of Said’s *Orientalism* is expressed in Robert Irwin’s book, *For Lust of Knowing: the Orientalists and their Enemies*. Irwin argues that Said used the word ‘Orientalism’ in a very restrictive manner because for him, Orientalism refers to those who traveled, studied, or wrote about the Arab

1 Said, *Orientalism*, p.2.

2 Said, *Orientalism*, p.4.

world, while in reality, the term should be extended to include Persia, India, Indonesia and the Far East¹, which are all conveniently classified as the 'Orient' by the Occident. In the case of the *Maghreb*, which is geographically situated in the North of Africa, which is south, and not east, of Europe, this opportune classification, while it is very misleading, is proof that the 'Orient' is not necessarily a geographical location but a site of otherness referring to Europe's colonies.

Another criticism of Said is based on the impossibility of conceiving Occidentalism as the reverse of Orientalism. In his article "Beyond Occidentalism: Towards Post-Imperial Geohistorical Categories", Fernando Coronil refers to Said's 'Orientalists' as 'Occidentalists'. He insists that this shift does not entail a reversal of focus from the Orient to the Occident, in other words, from the 'Other' to the 'Self'.

Coronil defines Occidentalism not as the reverse of Orientalism, but as its condition of possibility or its dark side (as in a mirror). A simple reversal, he insists, would only be possible in the context of symmetrical relations between the 'Self' and the 'Other'², which, while written as a criticism of Said, agrees with his view on the hegemonic aspect that shapes Orientalism.

The result of both arguments is that in the context of equal relations, difference would not be cast as Otherness. Therefore, to speak of Occidentalism as the exact reverse of Orientalism leads to the illusion that both the Orient and Occident are equal, which has never been the case. The Orientalist *versus* Occidentalist condition is one of hegemony in which, by dint of historical circumstances, one was the superior 'Self', and the second was, and it continues to be, even in postcolonial times, the inferior 'Other'.

The main objective of Occidentalist discourse is to challenge Orientalism, especially its flawed mode of representation in a 'counteracting', 'writing against', and writing back manner, which was the main surge behind the emergence of modern North African (Maghrebi) literature, which saw the day under colonial France at the start of the 20th century³.

What is important to highlight here is the significant differences between the Maghrebi and Mashriqi literary encounters with the Occident. While for the Maghrebis, the first documented literary encounter with the Occident took place in their own countries, where Europeans had settled as occupants, for the Mashriqis, the encounter took place in Europe, where delegations of students were sent to seek knowledge. Another fundamental difference is the language in which these encounters were inscribed. In the case of the Maghreb, unlike that of the Mashriq, such literature was mainly written in French, the language of the colonizer, which was mastered by native Maghrebi authors who were educated in colonial French schools where they underwent a full process of acculturation.

1 Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: the Orientalists and their Enemies*, (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p.6.

2 Fernando Coronil, "Beyond Occidentalism: Towards Post-Imperial Geohistorical Categories", in *Cultural Anthropology*, 11 (1996): 51-87.

3 For more details, see Zahia Smail Salhi, *Occidentalism: Literary Representations of the Maghrebi Experience of the East-West Encounter*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

This situation created a French-educated ‘elite’ within the ‘Other’ who, as a result of education, aspired to become the ‘Self’; however, because of the colonial condition that produced it, this elite was never fully admitted to the ranks of the ‘Self’, nor did it accept its natural condition as the native ‘Other’. The members of these colonized and often deeply acculturated intellectual elites lived on the border between the Orient and Occident, as they often rejected elements of their own ‘inferior’ culture, which they replaced with elements that mimicked the ‘superior’ Occident. Nevertheless, they ultimately found themselves in a condition of cultural hybridity, failing to be fully accepted by their ‘civilizers’ after they had rejected their own heritage. These cultural hybrids could not be accurately classified into either the ‘Orient’ or the ‘Occident’ or the ‘Other’ or the ‘Self’, nor could they fully adhere to any of these possible categories. Deeply disillusioned by the Occident and its multifarious levels of deceit, the ultimate reaction of such authors was to challenge Orientalism as a prejudiced method of Othering and as a misrepresentation of the Orientals.

These authors engaged with great enthusiasm in speaking to the Occident about the fabricated truths created by colonial authors, artists and photographers and the not-always accurate knowledge generated by Orientalist researchers. While they often specified that these erroneous and disorientating truths are a result of a lack of genuine encounter between the Orientalists and the people they studied and represented, they endeavored to write alternative firsthand accounts about their own people.

The discourse that resulted from this writing to, and back to, the Occident took various forms. These forms included political polemics, such as in the works of Ferhat Abbas, namely, *I Accuse Europe*¹ and *The Colonial Night*²; critical theory, such as Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized*³, Abdelkebir Khatibi’s *The Tattooed Memory*⁴ and *Love in Two Languages*⁵; and Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*⁶ and *Black Skin, White Masks*⁷. Finally, literary works constituted the main bulk of the ‘Occidentalist’ discourse in terms of representations of the Occident from the Orientals’ perspective.

In his important study “Orientalism in Crisis”, Egyptian scholar Anouar Abdel-Malek discusses these modes of representation and explicates how, under colonial rule, the Orient and its inhabitants are almost automatically appropriated by the Orientalists, who turn them into an ‘object’ of study. He demonstrates that, in this process, the Orientals are always stamped with otherness and are portrayed “as all that is different whether it be ‘subject’ or ‘object’, but of a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character”⁸. He argues that this ‘object’ of study “will be as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a

1 Ferhat Abbas, *J'accuse l'Europe*, (Alger: Libération, 1944).

2 Ferhat Abbas, *La Nuit coloniale*, (Paris: Julliard, 1962).

3 Albert Memmi, *Portrait du Colonisé précédé du Portrait du Colonisateur*, (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1957). Translated by Howard Greenfeld as *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, (London: Souvenir Press Ltd, 1974).

4 Abdelkebir Khatibi, *La Mémoire tatouée*, (Paris: Denoël, 1971).

5 Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Amour bilingue*, (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1983).

6 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Trans. Constance Farrington, (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

7 Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Trans. Charles Lam Markmann, (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

8 Anouar Abdel-Malek, “Orientalism in Crisis”, *Diogenes*, 44 (1963), p.107.

‘historical’ subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself”¹.

Despite this perilous state of affairs, Abdel Malek argues that some Orientalist motivations were purely academic and could be classified as positive. These motivations included the study of ancient civilizations; the collection of Arabic manuscripts, which are now kept in European libraries; the establishment of catalogs of manuscripts; and the publication of numerous important works.

He also acknowledges the importance of the method lesson thus given to Oriental scholars, an organization of Orientalist congresses, on the editing of studies, which though frequently was deficient and erroneous from a linguistic point of view, but was precise in method. Abdel Malek also highlights that this movement has contributed to arousing the national consciousness in the different countries of the colonized Orient and to activating the scientific renaissance movement, referring here to the Arabic *Nahdha*, which mainly took place in the Mashriq and more specifically in Egypt, the Levant, and Iraq.

From the position of the Maghreb, Abdelmajid Hannoum discusses this relationship between Orient and Occident in his article “Faut-il brûler l’Orientalisme?: On French Scholarship of North Africa”².

He contends that French Orientalism and the quality of knowledge that has been built in the context of colonization often legitimize the occupation of the Maghreb, which, although it has changed over time, perseveres in postcolonial times, both in the discourse of the former colonized and that of the former colonizer.

He explains that for the colonial machine, knowledge not only is a means of control and governance but also contains categories by which imaginaries are shaped and colonial relations and attitudes are perpetuated³. He explains that Orientalism condemned itself by becoming the tool of colonialism, and he determines that French colonialism profited from the knowledge of the Orientalists to dominate and rule over the Maghreb. Hannoum theorizes that colonialism, as a political enterprise, was a major factor in consolidating the establishment of Orientalism and subsequently that of Occidentalism as a response to the former. Without a doubt, it is colonialism that permitted the Orientalists to build complete Oriental libraries by helping them to acquire, collect, and catalog Oriental manuscripts. In addition, it is colonialism that allowed Orientalists to organize the study of the Orient in institutions founded and totally devoted to this purpose⁴. A good example is the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, which was established in 1916 specifically for a colonialist purpose to facilitate the study of the languages of British colonies as well as to train diplomats and colonial administrators⁵.

In the same vein, Abdel Malek explains that this vision of academic Orientalism accomplished in universities

1 Abdel-Malek, “Orientalism in Crisis”, p.108.

2 Abdelmajid Hannoum, “Faut-il brûler l’Orientalisme?: On French Scholarship of North Africa”, *Cultural Dynamics*, 16 (2004).

3 Hannoum, “Faut-il brûler l’Orientalisme?”, p. 71.

4 Ibid, p.75.

5 For more details see, Abdallah El-Khatib, “The Journal of Qur’anic Studies published by SOAS London University: The Question of Objectivity and Prejudice”, *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies*, vol. 38, no.1, (2020: 91-120).

and scholarly societies, which he calls ‘traditional’ Orientalism, was not the dominant vision. He cautions that, despite all its good intentions, it could not rid itself of some politico-philosophical concepts and methodological habits that often interfered with and compromised the results of their scientific findings. This leads to the second type of Orientalism, which Abdel Malek qualifies as ‘collaborating with colonial powers’. He describes this group of Orientalists in the following terms:

This latter group was formed by an amalgam of university dons, businessmen, military men, colonial officials, missionaries, publicists and adventurers, whose only objective was to gather intelligence information in the area to be occupied to penetrate the consciousness of the people in order to better assure its enslavement to the European powers¹.

Regarding the view expressed in the title of his article “Orientalism in Crisis”, this crisis occurred because of the rise of Arab nationalism, which culminated in national liberation movements and brought about the end of the age of colonial domination. At this point, Orientalist scholars faced a crisis because the territories they studied gained their national independence and were no longer under the control of their nations; therefore, the knowledge they produced became less relevant. This fact also resulted in a change in the relationship between the researcher and their studied subjects.

In the same vein, Hannoum, who agrees with Abdel Malek’s opinion, elucidates that because Orientalism put itself at the service of colonialism, both enterprises linked together would have the same fate. In other words, the end of colonialism would unavoidably bring about the end of Orientalism.

While this may be true to some extent, decolonization on the intellectual level is a much slower process than can ever be imagined by proponents of national independence. One cannot deny, however, that decades after formally ending colonialism, its modes of representation established by the Orientalists during the colonial era toward the colonized Orientals continue to influence the ways the Orient and Occident view each other to this very day. Knowledge is not always objective data about objects and subjects but a form of social relations, a form of power by which and through which domination is assured and guaranteed. In his book *Discipline and Punishment*, Foucault explains this game of power in the following terms:

Knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but also has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, ‘becomes true’. Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, 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 relations².

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Orientalism as a discipline is not solely a product of modern European colonialism. It has its roots in the 17th century, as exemplified in Barthélemy d’Herbelot’s *Bibliothèque*

1 Abdel-Malek, “Orientalism in Crisis”, p.108.

2 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, (London: Tavistock, 1977), p.27.

orientale (1697). In effect, ‘the Orient’ as a concept became formalized in this very book; although the book focused on the life of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and the history of the ‘Saracens’ as its main subject, the way they were portrayed established a new manner of viewing the Orient by Europeans for many centuries to come.

The images D’Herbelot created and widely publicized during the 17th century about Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) as an ‘impostor and a founder of a heresy’ became the foundations for an endless volume of prejudiced views about him. See, for example, William Bedwell’s book, *Mohammedis imposturae*, published in 1615, and Humphrey Prideaux’s book, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet*, published in 1697.

These views about Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) continue to be fashioned and disseminated even today in some extremist anti-Muslim media. Note, for example, the infamous Danish cartoons and the Charlie Hebdo caricatures. Such representations, while they propagate Islamophobic feelings, also express an age-old grudge against Islam whose expansion reached the very heart of Europe. The mass conversions of Christian lands and peoples to Islam posed a threat against Christianity, which set the two faiths apart as eternal enemies.

Edward Said explains how, through the work of d’Herbelot, Europe discovered its capacities for encompassing and Orientalizing the Orient¹. This very manner continues to poison the relationships between the Orient and the Occident, Islam and Christianity, by creating and broadcasting racist and Islamophobic representations of Islam and Muslims under the pretext of freedom of speech.

In addition to these venomous attacks on Islam and the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), which continue to cause much anger and disdain among Muslims across the globe, the idea of the chaotic and largely erotic Orient, propagated by Antoine Galland’s translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* (1704-1717), which set the seal on the Orient, also continue to circulate at the present causing substantial disparagement against Arab and Muslim nations.

The Thousand and One Nights, which is, in essence, a book of fiction, was received as a true reproduction of the Orient. As a result, it added to the Occidental mindset images of an Orient that is totally imagined and dangerously distorted. The Orient thus became the place of sensuality, magic, harems, thieves, and eunuchs, etc., that was extremely appealing to Western readers and contributed fundamentally to the establishment of Orientalist art, cinema, and literature. Such images, although largely unreal and misleading in their avatars, often imagined an Orient that had no equivalent in reality: an Orient of extremes, which is both violent and lascivious, but an Orient of their liking, which represented all kinds of things that could only happen there.

In addition to the above sources, one has to take into consideration accounts of Western travelers and soldiers, especially those in Bonaparte’s Expedition of Egypt (1769-1821). Although often exaggerated and with no basis in reality, their reports served as trusted sources from which many authors and artists as well

1 Said, *Orientalism*, p. 65.

as ordinary people drew their fascination of and attraction to the Orient. In his book, *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East*, Derek Hopwood¹ explains how these sources fed the Western colonial imagination and how the soldiers of the French conquest of the Maghreb in the nineteenth century drew their imagined Orient from their readings of the reports of Bonaparte's soldiers in Egypt.

In addition to soldiers' reports and voyager's diaries, Napoleon's military expedition included a team of 167 scientists, mathematicians, naturalists, chemists, etc., whose works were published in the famous *Description de l'Égypte*. The same enterprise of studying the locals as subjects of Western anthropology took place as soon as the French occupation established itself in the Maghreb.

This enterprise has, in effect, never ceased, but continued to take place throughout the colonial period as well as into postcolonial times. What has changed, however, is the awareness gained from the emergence of anti-colonial and national liberation movements in Africa and Asia after the Second World War and the victories achieved by these movements in the form of political independence.

Furthermore, we must not overlook the role played by the anti-colonial voices from among the colonized who, throughout the colonial period, engaged in a process of speaking truth to power. Such works include formal letters to colonial representatives sent by members of the local educated elite asking them to cease their racist and unjust treatment of the natives. Basing their views on the Occident's principles of justice and human rights, they challenged this same Occident to be genuine in their mission to civilize the so-called uncivilized Orientals.

Such works include books by Ferhat Abbas published in 1944 and 1963, by Albert Memmi published in 1957, by Frantz Fanon published in 1963 and 1967, and by Abdelkebir Khatibi published in 1971, as well as many others that preceded the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978.

The modern study of Orientalism, as a discipline, mostly in the aftermath of the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, as well as the publication of the abovementioned works that preceded it, brought widespread awareness to its flawed methodology and its prejudiced approach toward the colonized peoples (Orientals) it studied and represented.

Although these works were not necessarily classified as 'Occidentalist' at the time of their production and publication, we contend that they were created ahead of the term 'Occidentalism', and that they are, in effect, Occidentalist works dedicated to speaking to the Occident, writing back and against Orientalist/colonialist misrepresentations of the Orient and the Orientals, and uncovering racist colonialist exemplifications. All of these functions contribute to what we call Occidentalism.

While all the above-cited works appeared in the Maghreb and were written in the French language as critiques of colonialism and French Orientalism, there were also important Anglophone Occidentalist works written on the ways Orientalists addressed the subject of Islam and the so-called Orient, which preceded the

¹ Derek Hopwood, *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East: The British, the French, and the Arabs*, (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1999).

publication of Said's book in 1978.

In 1964, Abdul Latif Tibawi published his study "English-Speaking Orientalists: a Critique of their Approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism," while he was based at the University of London. Deeply perturbed by the way Islamic topics and the 'Orient' in general were taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies, his article was an attempt at writing back to express both his concern and discontent. He, however, declared that he did not conceive his critique in any spirit of controversy and that it should not be taken as an apology for any creed, be it religious or national¹.

Tibawi's critique received a very harsh evaluation by Irwin, who described it as a thesaurus of academic abuse². Irwin lists all the 'abusive words' used by Tibawi in his attack on the Orientalists and their works. His defense of the Orientalists through vehement attacks on 'their enemies', meaning the Occidentalists who all happened to be of Arab and Muslim descent, results in a host of direct assaults on individuals including Abdul Latif Tibawi and Anouar Abdel Malek, whom we cite in this paper.

Therefore, Irwin calls the Occidentalist Arab scholars 'enemies of the Orientalists' when they merely wrote their works as a reaction to decades of stereotyping and profiling through a commissioned dominating discourse that accompanied colonial powers and was produced during and after the colonial period. Their efforts were channeled toward the redress of falsities, which became so widely propagated that they generated often-hurtful images of Orientals that are far removed from reality. Their position as the enlightened and educated intellectuals of colonized and ex-colonized countries, where the majority of their compatriots were illiterate, made them bear the brunt of such false and damaging representations. Therefore, from their position as the enlightened intellectual elite, they felt burdened with the duty to redress, change or at least challenge these misrepresentations. Keeping silent and complacent about this condition was not an option because their silence could only signify their acceptance of such disfigurements.

Challenging Orientalism is, in fact, the essence and the base structure of Occidentalism. Deeply disgraced by colonial orientalist modes of representation, authors from the colonized Arab world wrote their works as a counter discourse that would redress these misrepresentations, give voice to their marginalized people, and write back to the colonizers. By doing so, their works endeavored to shame the colonizers on their demeaning and racist profiling of the colonized in a manner that dehumanized and disfigured them.

Malek Alloula and the Act of Writing back to the Occident

In this section, we will examine Malek Alloula's book *The Colonial Harem*, which he first published in French in 1981³ and in English in 1986, as an example of writing back to the Occident in an Occidentalist manner.

We consider Alloula's work as the dutiful and patriotic reaction by the ex-colonized to the damage perpetrated

1 Tibawi, Abdel Latif, "English-speaking Orientalists," *Islamic Quarterly*, 8, 1964, pp. 25-45.

2 Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, pp. 319-320.

3 Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, (Manchester University Press, 1986).

by French colonialism against his own people during the colonial period. His book exposes the Orientalist mode of misrepresentation by publishing, and therefore publicizing, photographs of Maghrebi subjects, especially women, produced by colonial photographers as a means of demonstrating their penetration and appropriation of the Oriental harems, which signified their control of the most intimate dwellings of the subdued natives.

By doing so, although Alloula did not change the generated situation of representation, he exposed it by giving it wider circulation. This process resulted in mixed reactions; while some criticized his method as doing further harm to the portrayed subject, others valued his work as a tool of challenging the Orientalist canon through mere exposure. The resulting mixed feelings are in fact a reaction to the situation of 'Othering' from a prejudiced colonial lens, exemplified in embarrassment, disgrace, and anger.

By placing his book in its historical context, Alloula deconstructs the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. His analysis of the collected data/photographs as pictorial realities that depict the standpoint of their authors and consumers sheds light on the difference between the 'Self' and the 'Other' in terms of hegemonic power relations. The subject of the photographs could not be reversed and, unsurprisingly, the collection is made of photographs of 'Others' *only* and not of the 'Self' or of the 'Self' together with its 'Other'. A clear delineation is evident in the colonial representations of the Oriental 'Other' as being separate and far away from the Occidental 'Self'. This condition is a result of the intrinsic hegemony between colonizer and colonized and the resulting attitude of possessing and objectifying the colonized. In addition, due to their hegemonic position, the photographers produced postcards that represented the static colonialist truth about the colonized and its harems, which traveled well beyond the colony to reach various destinations in Europe and beyond. This wide circulation aimed to naturalize these representations as truths about the colony, which was projected as a tourist attraction that offered exotic harems along with exotic Oriental landscapes.

Alloula's critique of these photographs is a means to evoke this exposed truth as a false representation. He challenges the photographs as being true to life and exposes them as the works of colonial euphoria and phantasm. He explains that native women could only be seen in the public sphere shielded in veils that covered their entire body with only their eyes visible. While these women walked through the streets undisturbed by the curiosity of the curious photographers, the latter felt defeated and almost became the subject of their own voyeurism, the women they wanted to photograph made themselves unavailable to view as they were entirely covered from sight and were therefore unavailable as subjects for their art. While Orientalist artists resorted to their imagination to create their imagined Orient, the lens of the photographers' camera could only reproduce what it sees.

Alloula explains that through failure to find the portrayed subjects in reality ('paradise found' becoming 'paradise lost'), colonial photographers created the illusory and sought-after situation of the harem in their studios. Such a reaction is a natural way to reflect the deception felt at not finding the promised paradise where oriental women roamed freely at the disposal of the European settlers and visitors, who continued

to deceive those in the metropolis that those lucky few who lived in the Orient were indeed enjoying its bounties. The imagined, as opposed to the real, Algerian women were portrayed as lounging in luxurious harems, dressed in opulent costumes, adorned and heavily bejeweled, sexually attractive and available, lying in for the encounter while they smoked hookahs and drank tea or coffee. However, a close scrutiny of these figures reveals sad faces of absent-minded women. While this may allude to their imprisonment in their own homes, represented in rooms with bars placed on windows to produce a sense of seclusion, we read their fear and embarrassment and feeling of being ill-at-ease while acting and posing following the photographers' instructions.

This level of deceit is in some cases unconcealed. For example, in one case, three separate photographs of a single woman were produced as if she were three different women representing three dissimilar places: *Young Bedouin Woman*, *Young Woman from the South*, and *Young Kabyle Woman*. Women from these three distinct regions have different features, different skin colors, and dress differently. In this very case, they were lumped together as one and were therefore largely misrepresented.

Another photograph titled *Moorish Women of Algiers*, which represents two Oriental women sitting next to each other, was posted to acquaintances in Paris written on "Anatoly's woman, R[...]s woman"¹, in this case sending misleading messages stipulating that native women could be acquired as possessions of the colonizers.

Such postcards, which mainly photographed women in semi-erotic poses, enjoyed wide circulation between the colony and the metropolis and beyond. Many could be traced to the United Kingdom. They were sent by British tourists wintering in Algiers to their relatives as holiday postcards. What is problematic in this situation is the circulation of these photographs as false truths about the visited place. While it is widely understood that the purpose of a postcard is to show someone who is not present in a place, what that place looks like, by sharing these images of colonized people rather than landscape, monuments, or wildlife, the receivers are misinformed and lured into believing what they see. Additionally, the subjects of these photographs were unethically appropriated as part of the colonial landscape and as commercial goods.

Alloula explains how the postcard straddles two spaces: the space it represents and the space it will reach. He argues that the very flatness of staged colonial postcards, with their plain descriptions of a foreign place and its people, persuaded European viewers of the photographs' authenticity. These photographs were nevertheless not plain or innocent descriptions of locals; they were tools created to convince those living in France and elsewhere that Algeria and its topless, trapped women were better off being colonized by the French who came to liberate them than living as prisoners of their veils and harems.

Furthermore, while Oriental women became central to orientalist art, which was the privilege of the upper classes, photography reactivated the phantasm at its lowest level by producing cheaper representations of these same women; for a small cost, their bodies were appropriated by people of all walks of life². The

1 Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, p. 31.

2 Ibid, p. 4.

exploitation of these colonial subjects made them thoroughly objectified and ruthlessly used to satisfy the colonialists' appetite for the exotic. In other words, they were inhumanely exploited as war booty. This, in effect, reflects the existing asymmetrical power relations between colonizers/the Occident and colonized people/the Orient.

While these women were objectified and endlessly photographed, Alloula could not find photographs of colonizers taken by the colonized, which confirms the fact that the power relations could not be reversed. What his work challenges, however, is the notion of the Orient as the silent and passive 'Other' that lends itself to control and dominance. In his book, he adopts a retaliatory form of Occidentalist discourse and depicts the Occident by confronting it with its own portrayals of the Orient. What we find extremely revealing is that while he exposes the exotic postcard as the vulgar expression of colonial euphoria, he bluntly affirms that his book is intended as a large postcard returned to its sender¹. For Alloula, curating these photographs, arranging them in the way he did and annotating them with explanations and an analysis of the colonial mindset behind their production and circulation is a kind of exorcism. It is also a way of taking charge of images that, while they were captioned as if to document life in the colony, were designed to hurt, humiliate, and dehumanize its native inhabitants. By confronting the ex-colonizers with their fabricated lies as Alloula does in *The Colonial Harem*, he demonstrates that these colonial postcards were deployed as a mirror trick that presents itself as pure reflection. They operated upon false equivalency as they presented an illusion in place of truth. As such, they do not represent Algerian women but rather French photographers' fantasies about them and Oriental women in general.

Another important book that adopts a similar stand to Alloula's is Rana Kabbani's *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of the Orient*², in which she unpacks Western fantasies and myths about the Orient. She demonstrates that such myths and stereotypes were devised during the crusades as a means to combat Islam and were propagated during the colonial period by colonialist writers and artists as a means to demean and dominate the defeated native populations of the Orient.

Therefore, as we affirmed earlier, it is the images of the Orient that made those of the Occident possible; in addition, as these reciprocal images of Orient and Occident proliferated, it became increasingly obvious that the problems of the Orient and the Occident are interconnected and rather common. Furthermore, due to a lack of rapprochement, essentialist images have been fashioned and often propagated. Such images of the 'Other', be they Oriental or Occidental, are never innocent or free from hidden political agendas that shape them and give them their final structure.

Furthermore, the way the image of the 'Other' is constructed and depicted often betrays part of the 'Self', for the 'Other' is habitually imagined as the opposite of the 'Self'. While Nicholas Thomas explains how "the capacities of populations to impose and act upon their constructions of others has been highly variable

1 Ibid, p.29.

2 Rana, Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient*, (Indiana University Press, 1988).

throughout history”¹, Carrier, who agrees with this view, contends that “Westerners have been more powerful and hence better able than people elsewhere to construct and impose images of alien societies as they see fit.”² While this is understandable and almost legitimized by its hegemonic position, it is more controversial to find that Western hegemony can also shape the self-conception of the colonized and even the ex-colonized. A good example is the way some societies in the Mashriq and the Maghreb replicate Western phantasm and thirst for the exotica as part of the tourist industry, which mainly targets Western consumers. This same phenomenon expanded into various domains of cultural creativity, including songs and literature.

Occidentalism as an Anti-Western Discourse

In their book, *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-Westernism*, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, describe Occidentalism as “the dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies”. This definition is charged with a political slant, which positions the Orient and the Occident as enemies. Accordingly, this view reveals that Occidentalism is all about the hateful discourse against the West, produced by its enemies who oftentimes are the ex-colonized writing back to the center.

Baruma and Avishai argue that Occidentalism is at least as reductive; its chauvinism merely turns the Orientalist view upside down. They contend, “to diminish an entire society or a civilization to a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, faithless, unfeeling parasites is a form of intellectual destruction”³. Their principle view is that Occidentalism as a nationalist and nativist resistance to the Occident, reproduces responses to the forces of modernization that have their roots in Western culture itself, among both utopian radicals and nationalist conservatives who see capitalism, liberalism and secularism as destructive forces.

To categorize Occidentalism as the anti-Western discourse of those who ‘loathe’ liberal democracy betrays Buruma and Margalit’s lack of understanding of such a discourse on the one hand and their one-dimensional and biased views on the other.

Contrary to their argument, Occidentalism as discourse is not racist or anti-Western. We must clarify that exposing the Orientalist methodology and modes of representation in no way aims to promote anti-Western feelings; quite the opposite, the aim is to bring awareness to Western audiences that the created image of the Orient is not only politically immoral but also harmful. The objective of such exposure is to bring awareness to the ways the West views its ‘Others’ and vice versa in the hope that this exposure would result in changing this condition. After all, most of the authors who produce the Occidentalist discourse are educated in the West, and most of them continue to live in the West and have drawn their methods of evaluation and codes of ethics of representation from Western understanding. Expressing indignation

1 Nicholas Thomas, "Anthropology and Orientalism", *Anthropology Today*, 7, (1991), p. 7.

2 James G. Carrier, *Occidentalism: Images of the* , (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 10.

3 Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-ernism*, (London: Atlantic Books: 2004), pp. 10-11.

about the West's failures in terms of essentializing its 'Others', producing sets of misrepresentations about them, the contradictions inherent in its universal principles of human rights and democracy which exclude those from outside Europe, etc...is almost a plea for bridge-building, cultural exchange and dialog, not the opposite. Furthermore, one should not mistake the fundamentalist discourse of Islamic terrorism, as it is part of the Occidentalist discourse we are pursuing in this research. Such a discourse does in fact produce radicalistic attitudes against both the East and the West and should in no way be taken as a justification for labeling Occidentalism as an anti-Western discourse that promotes hatred of the Occident.

Conclusion

To conclude, we return to the starting point and ask the question: what is Occidentalism?

Our answer to this question will take the form of a set of further questions revolving around whether, as in the case of Orientalism, the texts produced by authors from the so-called 'Orient' actually belong to a collective formation that we may call 'Occidentalism', as well as whether there is a synthesis between these texts, their authors, and this complex collective formation to which they consciously or unconsciously contribute.

In other words, in their writing back process, did the authors from the so-called Orient consciously work toward the construction of a discourse and a way of thinking which we may call Occidentalism? A way of thinking that reflects feelings of revulsion, anger and disgust in the same way as Orientalism reflects positions of domination and superiority toward an Orient, which it depicted as barbaric, inferior and flaccid. Is Occidentalism a rejection, if not a rebellion against, Orientalism? Have these authors produced their texts as a counter discourse against Orientalism? If so, are they motivated by a desire to change the negative and stereotypical images produced about them? Alternatively, did they work toward creating an equally damaging set of mis/representations that would dehumanize the Occident or at least unmask it for its inhumane deeds during and after colonization, whose legacy is seen as the main source of the ills of the present?

Moreover, if so, what is the purpose of this endeavor? Is the so-called Orient engaging in a war of words, which often justifies, whether directly or indirectly, the many political wars that exist today between Orient and Occident?

On the other hand, is this intellectual dialog between Orient and Occident not an attempt at reconciliation and rapprochement? Is distortion in representation not often a result of a lack of genuine encounter?

The term 'Occidentalism' is often defined as an inversion of Orientalism that also entails an inversion of its function, while Orientalism is a mode of representation of the Orient in a stereotypical manner; Occidentalism is also defined as the stereotyped and sometimes essentialized views on the Occident.

While we repeatedly ponder the question of 'hatred and revulsion' and the reasons that resulted in such feelings, we also reflect on the reasons that make the Occident a major attraction to people from the so-called Orient. How could hatred and revulsion for the Occident make it at the same time a pole of attraction?

Could one speak of a love-hate relationship? Alternatively, is Occidentalism only a discourse to remind the Occident about the horrors of its colonial missions?

While we may argue that Occidentalism is still an evolving concept that is constantly nourished by the ongoing relationship between the Orient and the Occident, we should also take into consideration the fact that, just as there are many Orientalisms, there are also many Occidentalisms. One fundamental difference is that we cannot think of Occidentalism as an Occidentology, '*ilm al-istighrab*', as claimed by the likes of Hassan Hanafi, who tend to forget that the fundamental baseline of Orientalism is colonial domination and Western hegemony, which cannot be reversed and therefore cannot be realized. The hegemonic Occident will not lend itself to study by the people of the East for as long as the Occident continues to enjoy its position of power over the Orient. Furthermore, while the aim of studying the Orient was motivated by colonial domination that is not in any case the aim of Occidentalism.

While we conclude that Occidentalism seems to be very amorphous and resembles phantasmagoria, we contend that if Orientalism has been the conception of the Orient by Europeans only, Occidentalism is not the conception of the Occident by Arab and Muslim people only.

Indeed, it is the multi-conceptions produced by multi-nations not only as reactions against Orientalism but also as the attitudes of at least four continents out of seven toward Western civilization and Westernization. Central to this situation is the hegemonic position of the colonizer toward the colonized, which continues to shape the postcolonial relations between Orient and Occident. In addition, to end this discussion, we ask the following question: how would Europe respond to calls from the ex-colonized for genuine decolonization? Recent youth movements in the ex-colonies, exemplified in the Algerian HIRAK movement that began in February 2019 and is still ongoing, and the Lebanese demonstrations calling for fundamental change in governance, are unrelenting expressions of their disillusion with national independence, which is a mere fantasy yet to be concretized.

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