



**Academic Research Sector
Center for Strategic Studies**

“Orientalism”: Motives and Outcomes

**Critical and Analytical Approaches and Narratives on “The Self”
and “The Other”
and Forward-Looking Views in Light of the Information Revolution**

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**“If you want to get to know a culture and its nature, you have to
get to know it from the inside, and not take special criteria to
judge the other.”**

Annemarie Schimmel

With these simple, brief words by the German Orientalist Annemarie Schimmel, she identified the general problem within most Orientalist studies; that they did not delve into understanding and accepting the diversity of the Other nor did they accept the different historical and geographical contexts, which exposed those studies to fierce criticism from those commonly called “the East” and “the Orientals”. Orientalism began as an attempt by the West to study the “East”; regions that mostly adhere to Islam and speak mainly Arabic, along with Persian, Turkish, and other languages. Therefore, most early Orientalist studies were marred by numerous shortcomings and fallacies, but the field rapidly developed and become more specialized and precise. However, the Eastern view of Orientalist studies remained one of suspicion and reservation because of the binary opposites it represented (Us and the Other).

Here, we need to address the issue of the cultural relationship between East and West. In a time when the world was not open to each other in terms of information, nor was it a small village where a person could easily roam East and West, nor browse its maps and geography through multimedia as we do today, the “East” was a geographic spot characterized by the mystery and magic of exploration into its countries, cities, and languages. That is the East that caught the attention of foreigners, whether merchants or tourists, diplomats or amateurs, thinkers, writers, or colonial invaders. The goals differed, but the idea of “Orientalism,” in today’s terminology, and the desire to discover the East, write about it, and study it have merged together. However, these were not romantic and dreamy endeavors. The Western Orientalist reading of the Arab and Islamic world or “the East” did not reflect its openness objectively and positively nor did it reflect awareness of the importance of civilizational dialogue and intellectual communication with the Other.

“Orientalism” and “Colonialism” are a Deeply Rooted Mental Image

Orientalist studies did not emerge in favorable circumstances or in a suitable environment, so they are viewed with suspicion and wariness of their view of the Other, in other words, the West’s view of the East, and are placed within the framework of a conspiracy against the East. Orientalism, and Orientalist studies in particular, were linked to a mental image closely related to

European colonialism and attempts to attack the East, especially as this image has existed since the Middle Ages, particularly with the Easterners during the Crusades. This occurred in the West as well, following the emergence of Muslim powers and the threat they posed to the borders of Europe, as they reached parts of Greece and Hungary and besieged Vienna; which led to the formation of a hostile view among Europeans, and the dominance of an explicit negative attitude towards Islam over European perception in the Middle Ages. The same applies to Easterners towards the colonial era of the "West".

This dilemma in the relationship between the East and the West did not prevent each of them from discovering the other and establishing friendly relations in periods of peace and harmony. Orientalist illustration and printing using Arabic characters, which began in Europe before the East, as well as art exhibitions, rugs, and other oriental products, played an influential and effective role in spreading the Arab and Islamic heritage, especially within European societies, and fueling the passion for discovering this artistic and diverse heritage. This coincided with the publication of some profound works about the countries of the East, most notably *Description of Egypt*, which was written by scholars of the French campaign and published in the early 1820s.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, an intellectual movement began with the establishment of a series of academic societies in various countries of Europe and America interested in the East, such as the Asiatic Society in Paris in 1822, the Royal Asiatic Society of Britain and Ireland in 1823, then the American Oriental Society in 1842, and the German Oriental Society in 1845. This interest resulted in series of conferences known as the "International Congress of Orientalists", the first of which was held in Paris in 1873, and they continued over the course of a century.

Moreover, German and American orientalist studies, for example, were somewhat far from being associated with the concept of the colonizer, which was associated with French, English, and Italian orientalist studies. Orientalist studies have achieved a prominent position in German academic life by shedding light on linguistic sciences and providing solid scientific analyzes of Arab heritage. In 1921, academic circles began the first session of the German Orientalists Conference, which was held every three years. Annemarie Schimmel is considered one of the orientalists who have delved the deepest into Eastern societies. She took it upon herself to defend the religion of Islam against the fallacies and fabrications it was exposed to in some of the writings of the Orientalists. Her mastery of the Arabic language at an early age motivated her to read Arabic sources and understand its speakers, to the point that now there is a forum in her name: "Annemarie Schimmel Forum for Cultural Dialogue". On her seventy-fifth birthday, the Institute of Oriental and Asian Sciences at the University of Bonn in Germany was named after her. She also contributed to a qualitative shift in the German orientalist school, while Russian orientalist studies were initially focused on a specific geographical scope; that of Central Asia.

From "Orientalism" to "Occidentalism"

The term "Occidentalism" is not a common word that one speaks often about, like the term "Orientalism," although it is the latter's counterpart and focuses on an in-depth study of the "West", which makes us wonder: was the East isolated from the West and its history? How was the image of the "West" formed by the "East"? Was it free of misconceptions? Or did it fall into the same dilemma that characterized most Orientalist studies, especially the early ones, which did not take into account the diversity of the East and the specificity of its contexts? Did the "Westerners" realize the diversity of Western countries and the specificity of each country? Or were there preconceptions about Western societies and their legacies? With a now more open information scope, is the same image of the West still ingrained in the minds and writings of Easterners?

In order not to make the mistake of generalizing the concept of East and West, as in most Orientalist studies, and so as not to treat the two terms as absolute terms, we will delve more deeply into defining the relationship between them by framing that reciprocal relationship with each country or geographical area separately. We will find that the writings of the Ottomans - the Turks, for example - about the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were greatly influenced by the reality of political relations between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, which called the former "the sick man of Europe." The same thing happened with Egypt, which received a surprise attack from the French in 1798, led by Napoleon Bonaparte, to occupy its lands. Therefore, the view of the East and the West towards each other differs depending on the historical and political context and circumstance. Hence, generalization and general overview will not lead us to accurate results. This is what we will discuss in the following lines.

The View of the "West" among Easterners: Historical Context and Contemporary Vision

The confusing political relations between an Eastern country and some European countries did not prevent the exchange of knowledge between them. In Egypt, we can say that the first building blocks of Westernization came with the entry of the French into Egypt as colonizers. Both sides began to delve deeper into understanding and exploring the nature of the other, as well as their behavior and customs, but the Egyptians viewed the French as colonizers while the French saw them as colonized, and there was a difference between the results of these two points of view. However, this campaign is considered an important turning point in Orientalist studies, and the beginning of systematic Orientalist studies. Then these building blocks crystallized in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the Governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha, adopting a plan to send delegations and students in the form of systematic scientific missions to Europe. It is considered a pivotal turning point in the relationship between Egypt and France as part of East and West respectively. Perhaps what Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi came up with in his book *The Extraction of Gold, or an Overview of Paris* is a material witness to this in-depth exploratory look from within French society. Here is the view of an Egyptian expatriate, not an Egyptian or a colonizer.

From Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi in the first half of the nineteenth century to Taha Hussein in the first half of the twentieth century, we see a qualitative shift in understanding and accepting others,

and even calling for adopting their methods in some matters of life. Here is Taha Hussein in *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (1938), calling explicitly in more than one article, stressing that "there is no danger to our personality from strong contact with Europe," and for the "the necessity of frankness in adopting the aspects of the European civilization." There is no doubt that he was subjected to a violent attack from some who saw in Taha Hussein's thought a threat to his legacies and traditions and an explicit public call to "Europeanization," especially since his call for that coincided with the period of the British occupation of Egypt. However, this did not prevent him from throwing his stone into still waters.

Taha Hussein's experience puts us before several questions, including:

- Did the East, or Egyptian society specifically, reject everything that came to it from the West? Did his book form an in-depth view of that West, which they explored deeply and experienced individually and systematically, not in the form of invading colonialists?
- Did the concept of the "West" or "the Other" here differ from the reality of coexistence and integration that Egyptian society experienced with the foreign communities that were concentrated in some of its cities and suburbs? Or did he not see in those communities the image of the colonialist "West"?

Many questions, all of which revolve around the view of the "West" in the eyes of the "East," which consequently cast a shadow on what the Easterners wrote about the "West," and explains the uniqueness of each Eastern country with its own experience in its relationship with the "West." The strange thing is that these questions are still valid today; about how the East sees the West at the present time.

Criticism of Orientalism

In the 1970s, the Arab thinker Edward Said presented us with a rich study that delved into defining the concept of "the Other" in his book *Orientalism* (1978), which opened the door to many studies in understanding and criticizing Orientalism and the Orientalists. On the other hand, it aroused the ire of many orientalists who found in Said's writings a direct attack on their approach, especially since the main criticism he directed at them was that most of them were not the ones who had experiences but only wrote about them. That is, they did not experience the East or engage in its societies, yet they analyzed it according to their personal convictions and views. Said also believes that some Easterners took his writings on Orientalism with some degree of flattery, and believed that he was calling for only Easterners to write about the East. This was rejected by Said and refuted in several of his interviews. Critical studies of Orientalist studies have developed rapidly, and are characterized by being more serious and balanced in classifying the Orientalists and their works and benefiting from the sound ones, refuting the falsehoods and fabrications of some, and correcting others.

To this day, critical studies directed at Orientalist studies still receive attention from research centers and centers of thought and strategic studies in the East and the West. Here, we face an important shift in the thought and logic of some Orientalists, who took it upon themselves to reread the East according to current developments and the information momentum we are

experiencing, going beyond the traditional image of the East, which uprooted the present Eastern reality, and presented it, instead, in a surreal or hyper-realistic way. Which takes us to the future of Orientalist studies.

The Future of Orientalism and Orientalist Studies

Some believe that "Orientalism" in its traditional sense was closely linked to a specific historical stage and circumstance, led by exploration and study and strengthened by colonialism in some Eastern countries, and ended with the end of the circumstance as if it had ended in the twentieth century with the end of colonialism in most Eastern countries. With the current issues in the Middle East, especially after what is known as the "Arab Spring Revolutions" in the 2010s in several Arab and African countries – Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria – some led to the migration of large numbers of Easterners to Europe, forming large communities there, and integrating into Western societies, in addition to the emergence of some political groups and movements that attributed themselves to the religion of Islam, practiced forms of violence in their societies in the East, and sometimes claimed responsibility for some of the brutal attacks carried out in the West. This direct contact, both peaceful and non-peaceful, coincided with the clashing pace of global events that some Western countries are experiencing, such as the current events between Russia and Ukraine, for example. The relationship between the "East" and the "West" - metaphorically - has become more intertwined and complex than before, as every event casts a shadow on the other, and neither side has remained isolated from the other.

Hence the importance of this book, which includes various research papers and aims to:

- Delve deeper into the nature of Orientalism, its motives, and consequences, by providing the opportunity to explore new horizons of those Orientalist studies, and form a more specific, broad and comprehensive vision and point of view after two centuries and more have passed since its emergence. Orientalism was not only in the field of theoretical, methodological, religious and linguistic studies. In the field of architecture and Islamic arts, Orientalist schools were competing with each other to explore the arts of the East and its artistic and architectural heritage, and to understand its topography, the construction of its cities, its social structure, and the hierarchy of its population.
- Currently, there is a similar historical circumstance, but this time on a different level, more dangerous and sensitive than before. The concept of Orientalism here is no longer limited to those involved in academic work, those interested in science and study, and those busy exploring the East, but rather in direct contact with the public with their varying cultural, social, and religious backgrounds. This created the necessity for us to address the future of Orientalist and Western studies as well.
- Asking questions, posing hypotheses, and arriving at answers and results that are in the interest of enhancing dialogue between the self and the other, most notably:
 - Is Orientalism currently turning to studying the current political issues of the Middle East and Islamic circles in Europe, based on the conviction of supporting

the enhancement of peace and harmony among civilizations through discussion, dialogue, and deepening the understanding of the other and their diversity? Or vice versa?

- What is the role assigned to academics in countries of the East and West in understanding, refuting, and analyzing the other, not only at the political level, but also delving deeply into the structure of society, its ways of thinking and its logic without accusations and falling into the clutches of prejudice and the risk of generalization?
- Have Orientalist research and studies become integrated and interconnected with political and social sciences? or isolated from it? To what extent has the abundance of information provided a greater opportunity to study the East or the West in a more neutral and objective manner?
- Proposing serious solutions and recommendations that can be implemented on the ground to prevent fanaticism and bloodshed between peoples, and presenting forward-looking recommendations and visions that support think tanks and research centers interested in the East or West in general, and which are entrusted with promoting ways of coexistence and acceptance of others and creating common spaces for convergence.

Suggested Topics

Section One: Theoretical Frameworks and Historical Contexts

- Attempts by the “West” to explore the “Other” or the “East” before the existence of systematic Orientalist studies.
- The concept of Orientalism and its nature, and the most prominent Arabic works on understanding and analyzing it (The Arab View of Orientalist Studies).
- Critical viewpoints from a contemporary Eastern perspective.
- The relationship between Orientalism and colonialism, and the extent of the discrepancy between Orientalist studies in the colonial and post-colonial stages.
- Orientalist studies, especially political studies in periods of wars and conflicts, for example but not limited to the First and Second World Wars.
- Orientalist schools and their curricula between yesterday and today: (French, British, German, Russian, American, and Italian schools... etc).
- The most prominent Orientalists, their biographies, methodology, and intellectual impact on the relationship between the East and the West.

Section Two: Orientalist Studies: New Approaches and Narratives

- Arabic printing in Europe and its role in enriching Orientalist studies and interest in the East, its heritage and inheritance.
- Orientalist studies in the field of science and political systems.
- Orientalist studies in Qur’anic and religious studies in general; its pros and cons.
- Orientalist studies in Arabic literature and heritage and its various topics.
- Orientalist studies in the Persian and Turkish heritages and their various arts.
- Orientalist studies in the field of architecture, urbanism, and Islamic arts.
- Orientalist studies in various forms of arts, such as performing arts (cinema and theater - the film *The Sheik* (1921), *Arabian Nights*, and *The Thief of Bagdad*), as well as the forms of fictional literature, visual arts (Orientalist photography), and others.
- Orientalist studies in the field of studying Eastern societies, their customs, and traditions.
- Are “Arabization” and Spanish studies a form of Orientalist studies? Or another form of Orientalism?
- How did the West classify the countries of North Africa (Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco)? How did the orientalist deal with them?

Section Three: Counterattacks

- Counterattacks, Easterners against the West: Passing through individual experiences (Rifa'a at-Tahtawi, for example) to centralization (Fuat Sezgin’s experience), and other individual and institutional experiences.
- Centers for Eastern and Middle Eastern studies in the West: Their history and role in understanding “the other” or “the East.”
- From “Orientalism” to “Occidentalism” (a broader geographical scope from Persia to Morocco in North Africa).
- Between “Occidentalism” and “Europeanism”: Image of the West in the East... Historical context and contemporary vision.
- “Edward Said”: His methodology and its impact on the collective mind, Eastern and Western.
- New Oriental Studies (recently published).
- The future of Oriental studies.

Circulation and Publication Regulations:

- Research papers and analytical studies are accepted according to the proposed themes. The study should not be less than 3000 words and not more than 5000 words. This requires that

the research be original in its subject matter and not previously published in paper or electronic form or any other means.

- Regarding the text: Font size is 16, and titles are 18. Traditional Arabic
- For Footnotes: They should be at the end of the study (Endnote), size 12, in Simplified Arabic font.
- Include a list of the sources and references used in the study, as well as online pages, databases, and digital archives (specifying the date of access).
- With regard to figures, diagrams, paintings, photographs and the like: The source of each should be identified, whether by indicating that it is the work of the author himself (the researcher), or copied from another (with specification) in order to preserve intellectual property rights.
- Regarding studies that include figures, paintings, and photographs; Their places are specified in the body of the study only (arranged in ascending order: Figure 1, 2, 3... Plate 1, 2, 3...) With the images and figures inserted into another separate Word file, provided with comments for each figure and image.
- Studies should be sent in both Word and PDF formats.
- Attach a brief biography of the writer of no more than 500 words.
- Studies to be sent to e-mail: susan.abed@bibalex.org