

LEIDEN STUDIES IN  
ISLAM & SOCIETY

# After Orientalism

*Critical Perspectives  
on Western Agency and  
Eastern Re-appropriations*

*Edited by*  
François Pouillon and  
Jean-Claude Vatin



BRILL

## After Orientalism

# Leiden Studies in Islam and Society

*Editors*

Léon Buskens (*Leiden University*)  
Petra M. Sijpesteijn (*Leiden University*)

*Editorial Board*

Maurits Berger (*Leiden University*) – R. Michael Feener (*National  
University of Singapore*) – Nico Kaptein (*Leiden University*)  
Jan Michiel Otto (*Leiden University*) – David S. Powers (*Cornell University*)

VOLUME 2

The titles published in this series are listed at [brill.com/lisis](http://brill.com/lisis)

# After Orientalism

*Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and  
Eastern Re-appropriations*

*Edited by*

François Pouillon  
Jean-Claude Vatin



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: Osman Hamdi Bey [1842–1910], *A Persian carpet dealer or Street scene in Constantinople*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 60 × 119,5 cm. Copyright: bpk / Nationalgalerie, SMB / Bernd Kuhnert.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Colloque "L'orientalisme et après? - Méditations, appropriations, contestations" (2011 : Paris, France)

After orientalism : critical perspectives on western agency and eastern re-appropriations / edited by Francois Pouillon, Jean-Claude Vatin.

pages cm. – (Leiden studies in Islam and society ; v. 2)

Original French title: *Après l'orientalisme : l'Orient créé par l'Orient*.

Includes index.

Translated from French.

ISBN 978-90-04-28252-0 (pbk. : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-90-04-28253-7 (e-book)

1. Orientalism–Congresses. 2. East and West–Congresses. 3. Middle East–Civilization–Congresses. I. Pouillon, Francois. II. Vatin, Jean-Claude. III. Title.

DS61.85.C6513 2011

303.48'2182105–dc23

2014034595

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual “Brill” typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see [www.brill.com/brill-typeface](http://www.brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 2210-8920

ISBN 978-90-04-28252-0 (paperback)

ISBN 978-90-04-28253-7 (e-book)

Copyright 2015 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff and Hotei Publishing.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA. Fees are subject to change.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

# Contents

Acknowledgements IX

Preface X

*François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin*

## PART 1

### *Alternative Historiographies of Orientalism*

**Orientalism, Dead or Alive? A French History** 3

*François Pouillon*

**The Real Discourses of Orientalism** 18

*Robert Irwin*

**The Invention of Islamic Law: A History of Western Studies of Islamic Normativity and Their Spread in the Orient** 31

*Léon Buskens and Baudouin Dupret*

**The Forbidden Orient! Endo-Exoticism and Anti-Anthropological Nationalism in the Writings of Some Contemporary Moroccan Intellectuals** 48

*Zakaria Rhani*

**Between Tolerance and Persecution: North Africans on North African Jewish History** 64

*Jessica M. Marglin*

**“It is Good to Know Something of Various Peoples’ Ways of Life”** 74

*Olivier Herrenschmidt*

## PART 2

### *Other Imperialisms*

**The Ottoman Empire and Orientalism: An Awkward Relationship** 89

*Edhem Eldem*

**“Go West”: Variations on Kemalist Orientalism 103***Emmanuel Szurek***Some Side Effects of a Progressive Orientalogy: Academic Visions of Islam in the Soviet South after Stalin 121***Stéphane A. Dudoignon***Minority Nationalities in China: Internal Orientalism 134***Elisabeth Allès*

## PART 3

***Recovering Non-indigenous Heritages*****The Museum of Arab Art in Cairo (1869–2014): A Disoriented Heritage? 145***Jean-Gabriel Leturcq***A Genealogy of Egyptian Folklore: Ahmad Amîn as a Reader of Edward Lane 162***Emmanuelle Perrin***Mohamed Galal (1906–1943): a Pioneering Egyptian Anthropologist 175***Nicholas S. Hopkins***Italian Colonial Knowledge and Identity-Shaping in Libya: A Dual Instrumentalization of Endogenous Anthropological Knowledge 188***Mouldi Lahmar*

## PART 4

***Inventing Orientalist Traditions*****Arab Receptions of the *Arabian Nights*: Between Contemptuous Dismissal and Recognition 199***Sylvette Larzul***The Invention of the Moroccan Carpet 218***Alain de Pommereau*

**Creative Differences, Creating Difference: Imagining the Producers of Moroccan Fashion and Textiles** 236

*Claire Nicholas*

**Middle Eastern Collections of Orientalist Painting at the Turn of the 21st Century: Paradoxical Reversal or Persistent Misunderstanding?** 251

*Mercedes Volait*

**After Orientalism: Returning the Orient to the Orientals** 272

*Jean-Claude Vatin*

**List of Contributors** 279

**Index** 282





# Acknowledgements

*François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin*

These texts principally originate from a series of seminars and a symposium organized in Paris in the course of the academic year 2011-2012. The meetings were supported by the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA). Additional support was offered at the EHESS by the Centre d'Histoire Sociale de l'Islam Méditerranéen (CHSIM) and the Institut d'Etude de l'Islam et des Sociétés du Monde Musulman (IISMM), and by the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), through its Institut national des Sciences humaines et sociales and its area studies centers: Center for the Study of Modern and Contemporary China, and Center for Turkish, Ottoman, Balkan, and Central Asian Studies (CETOBAC). We also gratefully acknowledge the role of the following institutes, French and foreign: the Centre Jacques Berque (CJB), in Rabat, Morocco; the King Abdul-Aziz Al-Saoud Foundation for Islamic Studies and the Social Sciences in Casablanca, Morocco; the Institut de Recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain (IRMC) in Tunis, Tunisia; The Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (LUCIS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, gave important support for this publication; and the Institute for the Transregional Study of the Contemporary Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia in Princeton, USA, gave specific help for the translation into English of most of the texts published in this volume.

In addition to the institutions which have generously supported the meetings and the publication of the articles in which they resulted, we are indebted to a number of colleagues for helping us to make this publication possible: Robert Ageneau (Editions Kathala, Paris); Léon Buskens (LUCIS, Leiden); Dominique Casajus (CNRS, CHSIM, Paris); Pierre-Noël Denieuil (CNRS, IRMC, Tunis); Baudouin Dupret (CNRS, CJB, Rabat); Mohamed Sghir Janjar (King Abdul-Aziz Al-Saoud Foundation, Casablanca); Bernard Haykel (Transregional Institute, Princeton), Bernard Heyberger (EHESS, IISMM, Paris); Lucette Valensi (EHESS, Paris); Mercedes Volait (CNRS, InVisu, Paris); and François Zabal (IMA, Paris).

We are also grateful to the two translators who worked on this volume for their care and their craft, Amy Jacobs and Jessica M. Marglin, and to the anonymous peer reviewers solicited by Brill for their constructive reports.

## Preface\*

*François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin*

The debate concerning Orientalism began over half a century ago with decolonization. The scholarly turn that came in the wake of Edward Said's landmark book *Orientalism* (published in 1978) was in fact part of a larger political critique of "colonial science" which had already made a significant impact on the humanities and the social sciences. Today, it is time for an historical evaluation of the assertion that the various forms of Orientalism (literary, artistic, linguistic, architectural, cultural)—as both fields of scholarly inquiry and styles of creative expression—were fundamentally subservient to an enterprise of Western domination whose ultimate incarnation was colonialism.

Although the field of Orientalism extends significantly beyond this relatively brief period and the specific territory of the colonial regime, we do not intend to provide an inventory of the criticisms that were levelled at this thesis. Nor do we claim that the link between Orientalism and Western imperialism is entirely false. Our goal here is instead to broaden the discussion. Until now, scholarship on Orientalism has focused on establishments located in the metropolis and on the agents of science and power that were involved in this enterprise of knowledge, representation, evocation or domination. This unilateral approach is inherently limited and should be corrected.

In the framework of the *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* (Paris: IISMM & Karthala, 2008), we undertook a nearly comprehensive study of those in the francophone world who, in one way or another, were associated with Orientalism: their social and political affiliations, their itineraries, their motivations, as well as their *modus operandi*. This endeavor demonstrated the extraordinary diversity of situations and levels of involvement among so-called Orientalists. Moreover, the dictionary showed that the field of Orientalism is riddled by inherent contradictions and utterly devoid of the consensus, notably in ideological terms, with which it is most often portrayed. Moreover, we limited ourselves to the French-speaking world; far greater discrepancies would appear were we to extend the comparison to what took place in other regions, starting with the Anglo-Saxon world, and to an even greater extent with other western powers whose colonial histories were significantly different and followed their own specific chronologies (such as Germany).

---

\* Translation by Jessica M. Marglin.

Much remains to be done to illustrate not just one but many histories, according to the languages used (Orientalism in German, Italian, English, Russian, etc.), fields of activity (in addition to more “classic” disciplines such as the study of languages and civilizations, artistic productions, religious sciences, travel literature and so on, greater attention should be paid to music and the arts), and cultural regions (beyond the Arabic, Turkish and Persian Islamic world, which has already been largely explored, more consideration should be given to India, China, Japan and other outlying regions). In order to be conclusive, these “regional” endeavors would have to adopt a rigorous comparative approach.

The present volume does not attempt impossibilities, i.e. on the one hand to refute Said’s statement or to discuss the pros and cons of his thesis nor, on the other, to survey all questions regarding stereotyped Orientalism. Rather, this is an attempt to broaden the scope of the debate by raising new issues through an innovative perspective: we propose to study these issues not from the center but from the peripheries.

One of the sharpest criticisms aimed at Edward Said’s thesis emphasized that it reduced Orientalism to a unilateral action on behalf of the West. As a result, Said’s understanding of Orientalism implies that the Orient, or rather Orients in the plural, did not have recourse to any agency or intervention in the global movement for the production of self-knowledge, not to mention power. They would remain eternal victims, a status which might suit them in certain ways but does not by any means capture the entirety of their experience. This point of view not only ignores the acculturation processes and group strategies employed by the people who lived in these Orients, but also fails to take into account the dynamic that notably led to the emergence of various fundamentalisms, from which the notorious theory of the “clash of civilizations” stems.

It is precisely this part of the story that we would like to examine by addressing the question of Orientalism from the point of view of those places called Oriental. Our aim is to analyze the effects on local societies of what was both an important intellectual and institutional movement—one which necessarily changed not only their world, but also how they represented their world. In 2010–2011 we began working on a significant project in various seminars at the Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and the Institut du Monde Arabe. This collaboration resulted in an international symposium entitled “L’orientalisme et après” (“Orientalism and afterwards”) that was held in Paris on 15–17 June 2011 and which has already resulted in several publications in Paris, Tunis and Rabat.<sup>1</sup> This symposium was truly international, gathering

---

1 Special issue, ‘L’Orient créé par l’Orient’, *Qantara*, 80, (July 2011); *Après l’orientalisme: l’Orient*

together not only Europeans but also scholars from the Middle East, North Africa, India, China and the United States. Nonetheless, the majority perspective was quite opposed to the tone of “subaltern” or “postcolonial” studies which helped make *Orientalism* a foundational text, and this perspective is evident in all the resulting publications. The contributions to the present volume are the outcome of this symposium.

What follows is an abridged version for an Anglophone audience of earlier publications.<sup>2</sup> In order to offer a more detailed view of what we would like to demonstrate about Orientalism as we see it today, we will deal first with alternative historiography, before addressing the question of “other” forms of imperialism. Then we will turn to local chief actors, both to the ones able to recover non-indigenous heritage and to those literally inventing Orientalist traditions.

We begin with a series of historiographical analyses that are intended to elaborate on the thesis that the history of Orientalism is neither uniform nor unequivocal. Rather, this history demonstrates surprising twists and turns as well as paradoxical relationships between intellectual metropolises of the colonial period and new peripheries. Indeed, local debates and contexts took precedence over a supposedly global history in what were ultimately quite decentralized—and thus extremely dynamic—spaces.

The lessons of world history, which assumes a plurality of worlds, ask us to go beyond a notion of empire which is limited to metropolis and colony (or post-colony). A contemptuous and even objectifying attitude towards peripheral populations is generally characteristic of imperialisms—each of which has its “Orient” and its “Orientalisms.” Going beyond this binary should make us question the specific character we have imbued to Orientalism in the West.

Hence the opportunity to explore whether Said’s critique would also apply to empires other than those of Western European powers. The three cases that are analyzed in the present collection of essays—those of the Ottoman Empire, the Russian (and Soviet) empire, and the Chinese empire—demonstrate the characteristics these hegemonic powers shared in common and how they

---

*créé par l’Orient* (Paris: IISMM/Karthala, 2011; North African edition, Casablanca: Fondation du Roi Abdul-Aziz Al Saoud, 2012); Special issue ‘Après l’orientalisme? Médiations, appropriations, contestations’, in *Maghreb et Sciences Sociales* (Tunis: IRMC/L’Harmattan, 2012).

2 The contributions were originally written in English or translated thanks to the support of the Transregional Institute of Princeton. They all offer condensed versions which aim to capture the main argument of each piece. Readers interested in longer and more detailed versions of these texts can find them in the above-mentioned French-language publications, especially in the edited volume published by Karthala (2011).

differed in their construction of knowledge about other, usually dependent, societies and cultures.

Another important aim of the book is to observe how post-independence states have made use of the knowledge accumulated under colonial rule. A number of contributions examine how these states appropriate the discourse of their former masters for the sake of national identity and the building of nation-states and how they reflect passages from “colonial” scholars to “post-colonials” who shift, adapt, and re-organize what was once the hegemonic discourse of the imperial powers for their own purposes.

The greatest contribution of these essays is to re-examine cultural creations born in the encounter (colonial or not) with foreigners—productions that mirror or echo the construction of the self by the other—and understand it as an indigenous production. This is more than a mere ruse; it is the result of a creative practice that belongs to all groups, and is a manifestation of their liberty.

What emerges from the essays in this book is nothing less than a new landscape in which to situate past, present and future research on cultures and societies of the non-Western world. Together they provide a guide that leads us beyond the restrictive dichotomy of a confrontation between West (which is usually limited to Europe) and East (normally meaning the Middle East).

All of these re-examinations have another point in common; they refuse to mount an antithesis to the thesis that has been critiqued and found problematic. Nonetheless, they are useful insofar as they bring to the fore the critical faculty encouraged by anthropology; no one is spared from the imperative to counter what is best seen as an “ideological lullaby” with a plausible historical narrative, concrete albeit uncertain; in other words, French empiricism instead of French theory.



PART 1

*Alternative Historiographies of Orientalism*







# Orientalism, Dead or Alive? A French History\*

François Pouillon

## Disjointed Histories

The Orientalism debate was launched over half a century ago at the time of decolonization and as part of the wave of critical analysis then rolling through the social sciences, and it is fair to say that Edward Said's famous work<sup>1</sup> was neither the first nor the most striking publication in this field, at least for a time. The debate was first launched by secular-minded French-speaking intellectuals armed with a dual culture but enrolled in the nationalist movement: entitled "Orientalism in Crisis," an article by the Egyptian Marxist sociologist Anouar Abdel Malek dates from 1963;<sup>2</sup> the Algerian nationalist intellectual Mohamed Sahli published "Décoloniser l'histoire" in 1965;<sup>3</sup> and in 1976, the Moroccan novelist Abdelkebir Khatibi published a broadside against Jacques Berque later entitled "L'orientalisme désorienté."<sup>4</sup> Khatibi presumably did not know that as early as 1960, during an Orientalist conference, Berque himself had already opened fire on the discipline by criticizing certain practices.<sup>5</sup> Considering the terms "Orientalist" and even "anthropologist" politically and scientifically obsolete, Berque preferred to call his chair at the Collège de France "Histoire sociale de l'islam contemporain."

This deconstructive work being undertaken in France was to extend still further. Above and beyond Orientalism as the scholarly study of a body of languages and civilizations, what came under fire was the political dimension of the organized social sciences and their close connections with the colonial enterprise. That was the substance of an essay on the history of the Maghreb published by Abdallah Laroui in 1970 with the activist publishing house François Maspero.<sup>6</sup> Laroui objected to a textbook that had been in use for four decades, the work of Charles-André Julien, senior professor in the

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs.

1 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

2 Anouar Abdel Malek, 'Orientalism in Crisis', *Diogenes* 44 (1963), pp. 104–112.

3 Mohamed Chérif Sahli, *Décoloniser l'histoire* (Paris: Maspero, 1965).

4 Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'Jacques Berque ou la saveur orientale', *Les Temps Modernes* (June 1976).

5 Jacques Berque, 'Pour l'étude des sociétés orientales contemporaines', *Correspondance d'Orient* 5, (1961)—see in *Opera Minora III* (Paris: Bouchène, 2001), pp. 131–132.

6 Abdallah Laroui, *L'histoire du Maghreb: un essai de synthèse* (Paris: Maspero, 1970).

History of Colonization at the Sorbonne and himself an intransigent activist in the decolonization cause. What is important to note here is that the initial move to reassess colonial history was relayed by French intellectuals. As early as 1964, Julien published the first volume of an *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*,<sup>7</sup> a work that has not been superseded to this day; the second volume was written by another major historian of the region, Charles-Robert Ageron.<sup>8</sup> These were “Français de France” (as opposed to French citizens born in Algeria), recognized by the academic institution and with no connections to activist undertakings, and yet they too, in the same period, were committed to a thorough overhaul of what Ageron termed the “colonial vulgate.”

It was similarly as a critique of “colonial science”—another name for Orientalism, at that time, in France—that an entire generation infused with anti-colonialist convictions became involved in the “*coopération*,” a program of development aid that followed on from the independence of former French colonies.<sup>9</sup> Publications in connection with this experience include Philippe Lucas and Jean-Claude Vatin’s *L’Algérie des anthropologues*,<sup>10</sup> criticized for being overly schematic, and *Le Mal de voir*, an anthology of papers presented at a conference held in the wake of May 1968 and quite explicitly subtitled “Ethnology and Orientalism: Politics and Epistemology, Critique and Self-Critique.”<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, an anthology entitled *Anthropologie et impérialisme*,<sup>12</sup> likewise published by Maspero, denounced scholars’ involvement in America’s imperial enterprise in Southeast Asia. So an entire library was already on French academics’ bookshelves before Said’s work was published, which itself marked the birth of “postcolonial studies,” which originated in the United States. This explains why the French translation of the work, published in 1980,<sup>13</sup> went virtually unnoticed in France.

While most French-language researchers working in the Arab zone agreed that social science research was fully entangled in colonial history, Said’s

---

7 Charles-André Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine I (1830–1870)* (Paris: PUF, 1964).

8 Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine II (1870–1954)* (Paris: PUF, 1979).

9 See Jean-Robert Henry and Jean-Claude Vatin, *Le Temps de la coopération* (Paris: Karthala, 2012).

10 Philippe Lucas and Jean-Claude Vatin, *L'Algérie des anthropologues* (Paris: Maspero, 1975).

11 *Le Mal de voir. Ethnologie et orientalisme: politique et épistémologique, critique et autocritique* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1976).

12 Jean Copans (ed.), *Anthropologie et impérialisme* (Paris: Maspero, 1975).

13 *L'Orientalisme. L'Orient créé par l'Occident* (Paris: Seuil, 1980) (préface by Tzvetan Todorov).

handling of this question seemed greatly oversimplified: on our side of the Atlantic we had already left behind ideological critique and moved on to another phase of inquiry. At that time, for us, the point was to study the social history of intellectual productions, and so to do monograph studies of individual or collective actors at pure and applied research institutions. At a conference he organized at Princeton University on “social sciences and colonialization,” Jean-Claude Vatin launched a new research program along those lines,<sup>14</sup> and it was in that direction that we worked for the next two decades, producing a thorough critical assessment entitled *D’un Orient, l’autre*<sup>15</sup> and a collective study of “scholarly explorations” from the Mediterranean.<sup>16</sup> All researchers working in and on the Middle East at that time agreed that Said’s argument was as self-evident—and therefore fundamentally well-founded—as his analysis was simplistic. But though we shared his sensitivity for all ex-colonized peoples, his concern to emphasize the entanglement of knowledge and power and even his political commitment to Palestine, made the work seem to us dangerously reductive as Maxime Rodinson, a man of immense Orientalist erudition and a steadfast commitment to the left, showed in bringing together some of his own remarkable articles on the subject in *La fascination de l’Islam*.<sup>17</sup> In the private preserve of specialists of Islam and the Arab world, Said became the target of much criticism on both theoretical and historiographical grounds. The combination of convincing scholarly critiques of *Orientalism*, advancements in the history of sciences in the region, and the return to grace of “Orientalist” painting led scholars working on these questions in France to stop thinking of Said’s book as a required reference work.

### The Assault from America

It was therefore with some astonishment that two decades later we found ourselves watching as Said’s work became in the United States the banner for the “postcolonial” movement. It seemed to us that in those intervening decades our representations of things had significantly evolved. After the enthusiasm of

14 Jean-Claude Vatin (ed.), *Connaissance du Maghreb. Sciences sociales et colonisation* (Paris: CNRS, 1984).

15 Jean-Claude Vatin (ed.), *D’un Orient, l’autre* (Paris: CNRS, 1991), 2 vols.

16 *L’invention scientifique de la Méditerranée: Égypte, Morée, Algérie* (Paris: EHESS, 1998).

17 Maxime Rodinson, *La fascination de l’Islam* (Paris: Maspero, 1980); English trans. as *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

decolonization had come “national disenchantment”,<sup>18</sup> which began infusing the collective political consciousness as early as the 1970s. This state of affairs did not lead us to write the kind of nostalgic, communitarian history that the *“pieds-noirs”* (“Black feet,” i.e. French people born in Algeria) of former colonial Algeria were continuing to produce. We had chosen the cause of Third World peoples against American imperialism and its offspring, Zionism. But despite the persistence of “progressive” convictions among us, disillusion had tempered our enthusiasm. Our project now was to comb the archives, reading literary and scholarly material less superficially than we had in the past, taking care to learn languages well—a practice that had fallen into some disuse, including among “indigenous” academics. These labours necessarily gave us a less monolithic image of what we had called “colonial science”: its authors were diverse, and they had had diverse relationships with the colonial powers and colonial institutions. Above all, we set out to disconnect the general ideology of the (inevitably colonial) texts from their heuristic value. But that was not all. The renewed vogue for Orientalist painting brought back to light a fairly comical but often highly entertaining sort of imagery, and it allowed us to attain a kind of ironic distance, which was never the forte of the “big paradigms” period. Re-editions of travel narratives, films, and novels, reproductions of postcards, and re-mastered recordings of colonial songs brought vivid images of the “good old times” of the French colonies. This went along with neither nostalgia nor a desire for revenge but instead amounted to a critical probing of the schematic interpretations made at the time of decolonization: they no longer seemed so obviously right, so accurate. Thus, the arrival *en force* of postcolonial studies, the takeover in our own academic world of a type of studies bearing a label—and an American label at that—making it clear that its practitioners were “on the offensive” took us somewhat by surprise.

Against this assault we reacted like managers of a body of knowledge that we believed we had acquired a certain authority over. In fact, our rather condescending critiques of Said’s thinking were quite ineffectual, if not downright counterproductive. For a broad alliance had developed between the Third World and North America, and its members were not the least bit interested in the competence we laid claim to. At a time when European countries were locking their borders against the South, the United States and Canada were offering more than comfortable working conditions to the most brilliant graduates of African and Asian universities. The combination of various communitarian intellectual groups and a sizeable Indian diaspora worked to create a sort

---

18 Hélé Béji, *Le désenchantement national. Essai sur la décolonisation* (Paris: Maspéro, 1982).

of institutional imperative on American soil: to create “cultural studies” and later “postcolonial studies” departments that would be staffed by the aforementioned nationals. These processes have been analysed and their ambiguities identified and deconstructed. But more than this was needed in order to construct a monumental success story out of the book and figure of Said. A central feature of that success was Said’s positioning of his argument as a weapon in the fight for the Palestinian cause. This made *Orientalism*—a scholarly work, whatever one may think of the scholarship—an exhibit in a trial meant to illustrate a vast-ranging historical thesis: Orientalism as a trans-historical constant of the imperial West.

Finding ourselves on the front line, we had to choose sides. We were now in a context where any refutation of Said’s argument, however scholarly well-founded, was immediately suspect. He himself, however, bore many suspect traits: as a Christian Arab belonging to the cosmopolitan *grande bourgeoisie*, he had received all the signs of recognition the American university system could offer. But these ambiguities were the common lot of intellectuals of his condition. As an intercontinental migrant exercised by his situation of exile despite the fact that he had come to hold several high academic positions, he resembled many intellectuals “in diaspora”<sup>19</sup> who find a large field for expressing themselves and their particular predicament in metropolises while continuing to claim a strong symbolic tie to their society of origin. In Said’s case this tie implied an intransigent defence of the Palestinian cause. For this alone he came to represent an entire population of academic intellectuals, writers and essayists who had moved from one shore to another and whose heroic legitimacy was based in part on their ability to figure the societies of the South. But, in reality, Said’s thesis triumphed elsewhere, in the much larger spaces of literary history and art criticism, areas directly related to travel in and representations of the Orient.

The condemnation of Orientalist productions should have put a definitive end to studies of those intrinsically perverse creations but what happened was precisely the opposite. With the jubilation and concern for detail that had inspired Christian preachers in the Classical Age when evoking the cardinal sins and writhing naked bodies subjected to terrible tortures in hell, researchers and critics could now with full legitimacy minutely analyse the racist stereotypes, caricatures, and sociological embezzlements by which writers, painters, essayists and scribblers of all sorts had paved the way for colonization and colonialist domination and thereby anticipated the imperialist action that would

---

19 See ‘Intellectuels en diaspora et théories nomades’, special issue of *L’Homme*, 156 (1998).

implant Israel in the heart of Arab space. Not only could Said's thesis be widely applied—as long as one was not overly preoccupied with exceptions or the subtleties of local difference—but it also brought political spice to the traditionally calm, carpeted spaces of literary criticism, art history, and the history of decoration; it became a black flag to be brandished in the boudoir.

That *Orientalism* was translated into thirty-five languages and became virtually required reading on American campuses was due not to approval from specialists in the matter but on the contrary to the multiple, mutually independent types of support the work had found: political, identity-related, ideological—“academic” above all. That English word clearly reflects the confusing combination of university backing, intellectual and literary authority, and a certain conventional way of thinking that would later become crystallized in a term that impacted on the very architecture of the disciplines: “postcolonial studies.”

### A False Dialogue

Has a real debate on Orientalism actually taken place? Obviously not. While it is clear that there are “pro-” and “anti-Said” thinkers and writers it is just as clear, given the diversity and mutual independence of the histories and personal-professional itineraries motivating them, that they are not all on the same argumentative plane. Instead of an on-going scholarly exchange of carefully worked-out arguments, a kind of clan logic has taken over. The French translation of Said's work came out more than thirty years ago, and we can only observe that there has been little in the way of progress on the matter. There is no reason for the various players to abandon their entrenched positions, positions founded on political biases and prejudices; firmly, not to say rigidly, defined identities of self and other; and essentialized intellectual stances. These are questions raised at different levels but that are never exclusively conceptual or merely speculative; these are based on life commitments, with the understanding that they count as much as cogent opinions.

How then might we re-forge the terms of the debate? One position would be to plead “not guilty” and seek to demonstrate this by way of a “white book” showing that all members of the Orientalist camp were genuine scholars concerned to use tools that would truly enable them to understand the Other: language-learning, acquiring the mass of existing knowledge on the history of civilizations, or using strict methods of inquiry. What these scholars produced was the fruit of study, we thought, and though there may have been an underlying ideological program, particularly for Christian ecclesiastics initially

concerned to spark and promote anti-Muslim polemics, their concern for exactitude ultimately won out over their partisan commitment. While in some cases an obvious lack of empathy can be noted, the importance of the body of work produced by these same ecclesiastics (to stick to that example) can only elicit respect, however reluctantly we may grant it. No doubt this world of recluses belonged to a history that, as we all know, had its myopia and blind spots (and what period has none?), its shared though tacit understandings with the powers in place, particularly the colonial power but also the postcolonial powers of the new states, but it also knew how to recall the fundamental importance of objectivity, the only means of differentiating between knowledge and hypothesis. The relations between Père de Foucauld and General Laperrine, founder of the Saharan Meharist Companies, do not change the fact that Foucauld's *Dictionnaire Touareg-Français*<sup>20</sup> is a monument of impeccable erudition. The same may be said of the collected works of such immense scholars as Louis Massignon and Bernard Lewis, though the men themselves occasionally and without any scruples served political causes. Moreover, we have not been attentive enough to the fact that the politicians needed reliable informers, not just propagandists, advertising agents or devoted courtesans. Scholars feel invested with certain moral responsibilities, or at least certain principles, including that scientific study has to be independent of the powers-that-be—a moral requirement that has guided scientific practice since the time of Galileo. It was in the name of this principle that defenders of Orientalist scholarship defended it: as a corporation animated by an ethos stipulating that its work must be independent of the political powers.

We are therefore situated on the dividing line between those who see colonial science as pure science, independent of all powers-that-be, and those who claim it is no science at all because its idea of the universal camouflages domination by the West. The latter group see their own practice as *engagé*, anchored in fixed, impassable identities implying fundamental solidarity: oppressed peoples; dominated minorities; narrow, marginal, frustrated existences all demanding respect for their difference; and the maintenance of a kind of partial dignity to be defended against dissolution in the universal and against intellectual globalization, which is experienced as dispossession.

It is of course fairly easy to stigmatize these symmetrically opposed positions. The first can be discarded as epistemological *naïveté* at best, at worst a kind of mystification that Westerners have made into a speciality, such as “human rights,” an idea which we know how to apply differently depending on

---

20 Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1951–1952, 4 vols.



the circumstances. Marx long ago explained that the dominant ideology was the ideology of the dominant class.<sup>21</sup> But these scholars' retort is just as sharp: they denounce the return of a grim Stalinist system where proletarian science stands opposed to the bourgeois variety; they denounce Said-ist "Zhdanovism," which seeks to impose itself on the grounds of authority whereas such matters admit only of scholarly demonstration. Furthermore, behind the postcolonial studies groundswell there may well have been institutional ambitions, the aim being to conquer positions, departments and intellectual territories, get texts published, and to obtain academic jobs and intellectual—and possibly political—power. Between these two diametrically opposed, irreconcilable positions, can a middle ground, a synthesis, be found? Given that a kind of *modus vivendi* has been established between them wherein they fuel each other with their contradictions rather than contradictory debate, that type of solution does not seem possible. Is it even to be wished? I'm not sure. Nonetheless, let us try to establish some limits to the opposition between them.

### Politics of Science

First, let us agree that even though this war is a political combat or at least a fight about the politics of science, it is still a fairly civil one. In this theatre as in others, the dead get up at the end of the play to take a bow before going off to rehearse new plays. For this reason the epic tone taken here and there in the debates is not appropriate. Said was undoubtedly threatened and his office was raided in appalling conditions. But in "violent" America, the violence he was subjected to can hardly be compared to what the McCarthy's victims or civil rights activists were made to endure. Up until the end—which came in the aftermath of September 11—Said enjoyed all obtainable signs of institutional recognition. In this connection we should analyze why academics and others in the postcolonial studies sphere of influence, often refugees from the misery of decolonized Third World countries, have been so careful to spare the country that welcomed them, methodically attacking nineteenth-century colonial powers—France and Britain—while sidestepping evidence of American imperialism, from the Monroe doctrine to the Cuba blockade. Wasn't the harshness of the attack against Orientalism also related to the fact that the territory targeted by postcolonial studies did not include the United States?

---

21 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, 1845 (published 1932).

Can we posit that one of these “sides” has given different meaning to the research activity, and to popularizing research, a meaning consistent with a more generous political line vis-à-vis Southern countries, a meaning used to reject the ideological foundation on which neo-imperial policies are based, and used in the service of humanist expertise of a sort that works to counter the cold economic calculations that have led the European Union citadel to close its gates against migrants and ban pluralism within its borders? All of that is a legitimate undertaking; it belongs to the best philosophical tradition which, from Plato up to our contemporary “intellectuals,” has aimed not to take power itself but rather to impact on the rulers’ decisions. Yet the impact at the time was limited. The effect of intellectuals on political authorities is immense but it operates indirectly or diffusely. Except when critiques by intellectuals are restricted to single cases of injustice—in France for such work we have had Voltaire, Zola, Gide, Sartre, Vidal-Naquet—they are usually powerless. But in this connection it should be noted that intervention is beyond the technical field of scholars anyway. This raises the question of how to separate fields of activity, how to distinguish between what pertains to research and experimentation and what to ethical purposes and bias. Like all other citizens, especially in France, intellectuals are called upon to intervene in public debates and assert their personal convictions in all matters. The question is whether or not their research becomes an *instrument* of those convictions. Some researchers think this is the case; we do not share that illusion. Above all, we are conscious of the dangers of mixing genres, of doing performative research whose theses must serve a cause and whose conclusions are therefore ever-already locked in place. We believe in critical thinking, getting beyond one’s initial convictions, perhaps even reversing them.

It has been observed often enough that a research study undertaken within the bounds of an assertion of identity can only be corrupted by, for example, critical blindness in evaluating data, the construction of fanciful genealogies, or genealogies that pull in the direction of an age-old past. Young de-colonized nations have often produced examples of this kind of research. Concerned to construct a past, an identity, a heritage, they have gone in for the game of abusive interpretations. In this they were, of course, well trained by French history text-books: “*Nos ancêtres les Gaulois*” (“our ancestors the Gauls”) were invented by Napoleon III<sup>22</sup> to promulgate a French ethnic group that would *not* be a cross between “two races.” And that is how the Jacobin republic operated when it came to educating small children of the French provinces, provinces

---

22 Cf. Jean-Louis Brunaux, *Nos ancêtres les Gaulois* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

no less diverse than those of the French Empire. Contrary to history of the sort founded on a teleological philosophy of history and necessarily “*engagé*,” we aspire to discursive, dialectic, even polemical history, history that knows how to grab hold of dear-paid freedom, and we accept the risk involved in working carefully and strictly, leaving room for nuance and qualification, uncertainty and contradiction.

It is this opposition, it seems to us, that is a fundamental part of the “debate” on Orientalism. To our left, as explained, are proponents of vindictive historiography, concerned to inventory what is proving an unending series of historical crimes. To counter the threat of amnesty or amnesia, they call for reparation.<sup>23</sup> Said is their suffering hero and they stress his heroic position. To our right, proponents of a science that, while not itself pure, calls out to be purified: unfaithful descendants of Benedictine monks who in their time prayed to God by patiently establishing sacred texts. They call for an ethos disengaged from political tribulations. Though we are certainly not in line with Said, we also do not think there can be any pure Orientalist science: the general intertwining of science and politics has been too well demonstrated for the question to be re-opened. But entanglement is not enlistment, and there is something to be said for reaffirming an ideal even when it verges on illusion. The simplest thing to do is to note how political realities surround research. But we must not think it had to be this way. And this in turn means understanding that there were exceptions, differences, and some degree of play in the situation. This fact in turn re-establishes the intellectual’s dignity.

### A Retrial

This is what we were at pains to illustrate by way of the thousand and one entries of our *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*.<sup>24</sup> The entries are generally biographical in structure, and we were especially attentive to professional training, promotion, recognition, family ties, personal networks, and collective spheres of influence or solidarity, as these are all clues to the given Orientalist’s relationship to the institution and the powers-that-be. Our inventory made it clear that we were dealing with a population neither more

---

23 Emmanuel Terray, *Face aux abus de mémoire* (Avignon: Actes Sud, 2006).

24 François Pouillon (ed.), *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* (Paris: IISMM, Karthala, 2008).

nor less differentiated than any other, a population fully anchored in its own time, enabling some of its members to demonstrate their originality and non-conformity, and even to engage in certain types of resistance and revolt. Need it be said that there was no point to our identifying mistakes and erroneous generalizations in Said's work? For Said laid no claim to punctilious erudition and was not at all concerned to correct the patent errors peppering his own text,<sup>25</sup> being instead attentive to general movements of history. For him, Orientalism was an ideology, a world of coordinated ideas that existed in relation to a political structure—imperialism—yet independently of the individuals who incarnated that structure. Here we would need a broader critique of the notion of ideology, a notion belonging to both Plato and Marx and that Said actually borrowed from a subtle Marxist, Gramsci. Let us settle for granting his thesis its indisputable statistical truth—what Bourdieu summed up by saying that certain theses were “not even false”: if all we have to say is that there are dominant and dominated agents, good guys and bad guys, this will not get us very far. The problem is that in a “clash of civilizations” context, Said's fairly mechanistic retrospective reading has proved fairly effective.

One criterion for selecting authors for the *Dictionnaire* from among the vast range of Orientalists was to put forward and valorise the eminent contribution of Orientals themselves, even if in “minor” and—let's use the word—*subaltern* mode; that is, as having necessarily played less of a role than figures of official history, those great authors and scholars from mainland France. The main point of the undertaking was to bring to light symbolic hierarchies and even a kind of cast logic governing relations between Orientalism's centre and its periphery. A beneficial side effect was to make crystal clear the quantitative weight and role of an entire population of intermediaries, renegades, enclaves and hybrid groups who were not always considered by their fellow “natives” as go-betweens and interpreters but as bastards, turncoats, spies and traitors. During the colonial period, persons such as those or belonging to such groups sometimes knew the joy of sociological and status promotion. Often they paid dearly for it, being collectively expelled or eliminated, a grim example being the “*harki*” Algerian back-up troops, ignominiously abandoned by the French colonial power to the pitiless vengeance of their brothers. The rejection process might not lead to physical eradication but it often did lead to symbolic disappearance, the end of an identity, an example here being children of mixed

---

25 See Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing. The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 282.

unions, eliminated from the statistics and condemned to vanish like the impure types of classification identified by Mary Douglas.<sup>26</sup>

The fact is that in highlighting the active participation of indigenous individuals and groups in the enterprise of representation and knowledge acquisition that constitutes Orientalism we were touching a painful spot in history, one that could not be put to simple ideological use. Surely it was an act of justice to restore dignity to these indigenous contributions, this eminent participation in knowledge acquisition that went virtually unrecognized by the paternalist regime that ruled both society and science at the time. This act of positive discrimination was a means of rectifying the judgment of history.

It was this that we obtained through the methodical inventory that produced the *Dictionnaire*. Could we let it go at that, concluding simply that Said's thesis was incomplete because in some cases it was inexact, and that in the end and along with him, we might as well consign Orientalism to the dustbin of history, recuperating some components for use in area studies or special fields within disciplines of greater theoretical scope such as linguistics, archaeology, history, or ethnology? It is in this direction that Lucette Valensi would have us go, as she explained in her long introductory text to the *Dictionnaire*.<sup>27</sup> Orientalism, she said, belonged to the past, and this was due not so much to the vast denunciation and stigmatization of it as to the fact that it had epistemologically dried up, and could be reproached with many things, as Berque had already done. To the failings he had pointed out—misunderstanding of the theoretical social science debates of the time; refusal to take into account current developments and events, particularly political ones; and a proven inability to bring indigenous members of the societies under study into the labour of scholarship—we could add, said Valensi, more fundamental defects: the almost religious importance granted to texts; the tendency to think of popular practices as deriving from high culture; the essentializing of terms, a defect patent in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* with its tendency to rigidify into a-historical notions ideas and practices of which there are infinite regional and historical variations; and a clerical approach, which could be remedied by more secular epistemological practices focusing on the history of political action, current events, even popular fervour.

This brings us back to the fundamental problem: What is to be done with Orientalism today, given changes in the disciplines, in knowledge regimes,

---

26 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1966).

27 See Pouillon (ed.), *Dictionnaire*, 'Discours préliminaires'.

in the very function of museography, given the popularization of indigenous productions in what is now called “airport art”? Can Orientalism be re-founded, re-conceived as a framework for research, a focus of present and future study? I will not take up the question of defining Orientalism or the different meanings it has acquired or the different understandings of the concept underlying it precisely because the condition for perpetuating it seems to be a certain vagueness, a paradoxical synthesis of the phenomena that explain its recent renewed relevance. I have already pointed out the most surprising feature: the success of Said’s book has given considerable legitimacy to an entire area of preoccupations that would otherwise have been judged obsolete. To put it another way, that a text so radically condemning the concept should have worked to give it so much prominence in historical, literary, pictorial, musical and decorative art studies is in itself intriguing. What explains this paradoxical legitimization?

### Accepting the Heritage?

The area of painting represents the clearest answer to some rather obscure questions. Here the return of Orientalism in the 1970s and 1980s was part of a much wider process. With the rehabilitation of academicism, a new market for “kitsch” resuscitated an entire body of work that had long been condemned to public obloquy for having crushed “real” painting, i.e., the impressionist variety and all the movements that followed, which in their own time managed to win nothing more than grudging recognition. The general rise in market prices for academic art pushed into the auction rooms a considerable amount of what had been dismissed as “lousy painting.” This process encountered speculative demand as high-priced paintings became seen as an excellent investment for public and private collectors at the time.

Some said simply and uncritically that the paintings attested to the ordinary life of people in Muslim countries—which is indeed what some of their creators had set out to do. The phenomenon was accentuated on the Oriental painting market by soaring oil revenues, resulting in considerable monetary stocks that had to be “invested.” The initial target was work by indigenous painters trained in the framework of Orientalism: in Algeria, Racim, who reinvented the miniature for that particular location and, in Turkey, Osman Hamdi, an institutional archaeologist painting in the style of Gérôme. Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco were also involved in this process of reincorporating an iconography deeply marked by Orientalist preoccupations. This in turn became a springboard for a myriad of sales of “Muslim” art (decorative objects in this

case) and “Orientalist” art, which became the province of specialized antique dealers, art historians, auctioneers, and an informed public more interested in the subject, the painter, or the site painted than the work itself which, oddly in some cases was viewed with contempt.

This baroque combination was what made a great success out of a specific art that had never been much appreciated in its own time (despite the fact that consummate artists such as Renoir, Matisse and Klee had shamelessly ventured to practice it), thereby granting it an existence. Today we need hardly mention the great wave of experts, specialists, monograph writers, multi-site exhibitions, museum sections, academic studies, etc. on and around Orientalist art. Taken together, these facts, events, and developments ended up producing something, and the oil emirates had only to create a few “Oriental” art museums for rates to soar once again. The various publics called on to admire these images surely read them differently: the images may be taken at face value as an accurate reflection of things and people of the past, or on the contrary condemned as hateful caricatures created by the Western conqueror with the aim of disfiguring an identity that demanded, and demands, greater respect. Somewhere between these two “readings” we can glimpse the probable attitude of dual-culture collectors: they are likely to view the works with some humour, mixed with admiration for the painter’s skill—and to make a lot of money selling them to much more naive amateurs or to institutional collectors. Contrary to what Said wrote of Orientalist painting, it was always characterized by a complex semantic game, and it is likely that in the contemporary Orient, which is no less complicated than the Orient of the past, this great game will continue. This much may be said for images, which are all the more polysemic when no text or context is assigned to them. But what of texts? Can libraries assembled by centuries of scholarship or in the pleasure of traveling be re-appropriated and made into heritage in the same way? For emerging nations history books are the least digestible texts, as they are very likely to be run through with colonial ideology. Anthropological works raise the same issue, but several interpretive levels can be found within them: all texts mentioning collections of objects that can be made into heritage will readily be reused, though what is “imperial” in them may be discarded in the reconstruction process. The original editions of Prosper Ricard’s *Corpus des Tapis Marocains*<sup>28</sup> and Baron d’Erlanger’s *Musique Arabe*<sup>29</sup> are currently being republished as is.

---

28 Prosper Ricard, *Corpus des tapis marocains* (Paris: Geuthner, 1924–1934), 4 vols.

29 Baron Rodolphe d’Erlanger, *La musique arabe* (Paris: Geuthner, 1930–1959), 6 vols.

The matter is more delicate for the tribes of the region, a classic focus of ethnological study. Nationalist ideology would not look kindly on any attempt to play up fundamental identities that seem to instil insurmountable difference within the national magma, recalling factions and vendettas that the rulers would prefer to get beyond, especially because the scars still cause pain. But if we change perspectives or, rather, scales, we discover a resurgence of “minorities” once again trying to fight the centralizing state, of regional and local solidarity established on new bases, so it seems to me that the new protagonists themselves should be able to recycle ethnological accounts, especially since the vector for doing so is local intellectuals trained in capital cities. No doubt these texts will be read and interpreted quite differently by these indigenous heirs, with intense interest in selected passages and a tendency to leave aside the globalizing dimension of that variety of anthropology. But, in the end, isn't that the fate of any text with pretensions to a certain scope?



# The Real Discourses of Orientalism

*Robert Irwin*

Although it is widely acknowledged that Edward Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1978, contained many errors of fact and interpretation, it is often defended and praised for having opened new areas of enquiry and stimulated debate. But I think that that book and those written under its influence have actually closed off areas of enquiry and, though there has certainly been debate, that debate has been conducted within restricted parameters. If a full and accurate history of academic and artistic Orientalism is ever to be written, then its authors will need to sidestep the arbitrary chronological and topographical limits suggested by Said and his followers. It is odd, for example, that Said chose to ignore almost entirely the French presence in North Africa and the close collusion that existed there between colonial administrators, academics and artists. That seriously undermined and deformed the account given by Said of French Orientalism, as he relied excessively on the interpretation of a few romantic literary works.

It is understandable that Said did not feel qualified to discuss Orientalism more broadly and analyse Egyptology, Hebrew studies, Persian studies, Turkish studies, Sanskrit studies and Sinology, as well as the broader range of western cultural responses to the Orient. The paragon who could tackle all this has not yet been born. But even the faintest awareness of how Sanskrit studies or Sinology evolved might have given Said pause.

Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798 may or may not have been a watershed in the western study of Arabs and Islam. I shall return to 1798 later, but let me say here that I do not think that it was, though it may have been an event in the history of Egyptology. But if one glances at the history of Sinology, a field dominated for a long time by the French, then 1798 is evidently a date of no particular importance. France was the first to set up a chair of Chinese in 1814 and in the nineteenth century Julien, Rémusat and Hervey de Saint Denys pursued their researches into Chinese matters without reference to France's imperial ambitions. Paul Pelliot and Henri Maspero continued the tradition in the twentieth century and until the Second World War France was the leader in Sinology. Nevertheless, as Simon Leys has pointed out, a high proportion of the leading Sinologists both today and in the past have been Chinese.

If one considers India and Indian studies, one might guess that the British occupation of most of the subcontinent in the course of the eighteenth century would have led on to the rise of a flourishing body of researchers and publications on Sanskrit and related matters and, indeed some early and important

contributions were made to Indian studies, notably by Sir William Jones and Henry Thomas Colebrooke. But on the whole, scholarship did not follow the flag and British universities were very slow to embrace Sanskrit studies. The Orientalist Sir Charles Lyall worked in the Indian Civil Service, but he did not spend his scholarly free time in working on Sanskrit or other Indian topics, but rather chose to translate Pre-Islamic poetry from the Arabic. It was the French who set up the first chair in Sanskrit studies. A chair of Sanskrit studies was then established in Germany for August Wilhelm von Schlegel in 1808. By contrast, Britain only acquired a Sanskrit professorship in 1853.

I am not qualified to say anything much about Indian studies, but Raymond Schwab's *La Renaissance orientale* (1950) seems to suggest that Anquetil-Duperron's publication of the *Zend-Avesta* in 1771 was the real watershed in the history of Oriental studies. Later, Sanskrit studies became peculiarly the province of the Germans, with such works as Friedrich von Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indien* (1808), August Wilhelm von Schlegel's translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* and other works and Max Muller's translation of the *Rig Veda*. Of the literary figures singled out by Schwab as having been strongly influenced by the discovery and progressive translation of Indian literature from the late eighteenth century to the 1890s—Goethe, Lamartine, Novalis, Hugo, Michelet, Baudelaire, Heine, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Emerson, Whitman, Shelley—only the last was British. Though the contribution of British Orientalists was less impressive, nevertheless researches by members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and others did have a role in inspiring the indigenous 'Bengal renaissance', in which Indians rediscovered and took pride in their own past. Moreover, as Charles Allen has argued in *The Buddha and the Sahibs* (2002), Orientalist researches made an important contribution to the resurgence of Buddhism in South Asia.

To labour the obvious, Orientalism was not cut from one cloth. In different European countries it developed at different times, with varying intensities and varying emphases. The development of Arabo-centric Orientalism in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had been centred round the academic, critical and, sometimes, polemical study of the Quran, *hadiths* and *tafsir*, as well as the translation of a select band of historians including Abu 'l-Fida, Bar Hebraeus, Ibn 'Arabshah and, later, al-Tabari. Essentially religious concerns dominated the study of the Arab world until at least the twentieth century. One studied Arabic in order to understand the Hebrew of the Bible better, or in order to gain some insight into the way of life of the ancient Israelites, or in order to compile a universal chronology that would demonstrate the essential correctness of the dates provided by the Old Testament, or in order to prepare oneself for missionary work, or in order to bring the Eastern

Christian churches into communion with one or other of the western churches, or in order to find ammunition for making polemical points against the Papists, the Protestants, or the Deists, For a long time clergymen dominated Islamic studies. Religious motivations lay behind the establishment in the seventeenth century of the first chairs of Arabic in England—the Laudian professorship at Oxford and the Thomas Adams professorship at Cambridge. Rather than empire it was salvation, hope of heaven and fear of Hell, that was the primary engine of Orientalism.

Arabic literature, qua literature, had a negligible impact on European culture in the post-Renaissance, with the single but mighty exception of *The Arabian Nights*. It is true that in the early nineteenth century, it did seem for a while that a cult of the Arab epic of *Antar* might develop, but this never came to anything much and people, like Charles Lyall, who seriously interested themselves in the pre-Islamic poetry of the Arabs were rare indeed. Illustrated Arabic manuscripts attracted little or no scholarly or aesthetic attention

But the case with Persian literature and art and their impact on the West was quite different from that of Arabic studies. Academic and religious agendas were less prominent. There was not much of a continuous tradition of Persian studies in Britain, Germany or France. British and German knowledge of Persia was mostly filtered through French sources. The translations in the 1630s by André du Ryer, one of the first Frenchmen to study Persian, were of primary importance. The intermittent fad for Persian culture is best understood mostly in terms of a series of landmark translations of poetry, including André Du Ryer's translation of Sa'di, William Jones's translation of Hafez and Sa'di, Julius Mohl's translation of Firdausi's *Shahnama* and Fitzgerald's translation of Umar Khayyam. To this cluster of poetry translations, we should add writings by a handful of people who had actually travelled in Persia, notably Pietro della Vale, Jean Chardin, James Morier, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau and Pierre Loti. In the case of the Western cult of all things Persian, this centred not round theology or history, but was based instead first, on the appreciation of Persian poetry, or at least what was taken to be Persian poetry, and, secondly, on a developing appreciation of the art of the Persian miniature. Aesthetic and mystical interests were thus to the fore. In *La Renaissance orientale* Raymond Schwab argued that Persia, once conquered by Arabia took the lead, exalting its own pre-Muslim ages through Avestan, Pahlavi, and cuneiform. It was from Persia, through Anquetil that everything began to open up ... [p. 6]

Even if one restricts oneself to western engagement with the Middle East from the late eighteenth century onwards, it is noteworthy that it was for the most part the Turks and, to a lesser extent, Persians and Indian Muslims, rather than Arabs, that attracted the interest of the Romantics. The *Arabian Nights*

apart, Byron was not very interested in Arab matters, but rather in Turks and Albanians. Moore's *Lalla Rookh* was about Persians and Indian Muslims. The earliest group of Orientalist painters were known as 'les peintres du Bosphore', for obvious reasons. Nineteenth-century literary Orientalism was not a simple homogenous movement with a common vocabulary and body of suppositions. British literary Orientalists—Moore, Southey, Shelley—were quite likely to be armchair Orientalists, in contrast to the French who more often wrote of where they had been—Chateaubriand, Nerval, Lamartine, Flaubert, Fromentin, Loti, Gide—and therefore the French narratives tended to be more documentary and less imaginative.

Byron, Moore, Southey, Shelley, Thomas Hope, Walter Scott, James Morier—the heyday of British literary Orientalism, with its themes of revolt, passion, abduction and arbitrary power, was in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and this is odd. For its chronology does not match that of empire, nor of that of Orientalist painting, nor that of Orientalist music. Until the 1880s Britain had no possessions in the Middle East except a supply station at Aden and its political ambitions in region were restricted to keeping the Ottoman Empire going as a buffer against Russia and the Russian drive for warm-water ports. From the late 1880s onwards Britain effectively ran Egypt as a colony and from there advanced into Sudan. But it was only in the aftermath of the First World War that Britain acquired a real, albeit short-lived, empire in the Middle East.

The chronology of British Orientalist painting fails to match either the literary or the imperial chronology. Orientalist painting only really took off among the British with David Wilkie, David Roberts and John Frederick Lewis from the 1830s onwards, when steamship travel across the Mediterranean and the slow easing of quarantine requirements made Egypt and the Holy Land much easier to access. As for musical Orientalism, setting aside the eighteenth-century vogue for Janissary music, this became significant in the late nineteenth century, with Borodin, Rimsky Korsakov, Ravel, Satie, Bantock and others. As for British academic Orientalism, that was also something that started or revived in the late nineteenth century, with William Wright and Robertson Smith inaugurating that revival. So it really does not make sense to talk of a single Orientalist discourse.

Then, setting aside for the moment the question of whether there is one Orientalist discourse or many, one might ask whether the unproven axiom of the primacy of the political in what is claimed to be Orientalist discourse is correct or not. In my book *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies*, I set out to provide a straightforward history of Arabic and Islamic studies that did not proceed from the assumption that the driving force behind those studies must have been political. Such an assumption struck me as anachronistic.

I wanted to rescue the enlightened bishops and scholarly clergymen from what E.P. Thompson has called 'the enormous condescension of posterity'. We live a secular age and perhaps that is a good thing, but we must be wary of projecting that secularism back on earlier generations. Latin was for a long time the first language of Orientalism, as it was of all scholarship, though one would not guess it from much of the current debate. The primacy of Latin, as well as the importance of Greek, had all sorts of implications and symptoms. Since it was an international language, it was easy for Danes, Dutchmen, Russians and Spaniards to make contributions in the field. The Dutch went so far as to take Latin names: Epenius, Golius, Raphaelengius. Furthermore, when scholars began to compile the first grammars of the Arabic language they tended to try to model their works inappropriately upon Latin grammars. Historians who studied the rise and fall of the Arab Caliphate tended to model their narratives upon that of Gibbon in his *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The East India Company exams placed stress on the candidate's ability to translate Homer, Herodotus, Cicero and others. The history of the Roman Empire served as a briefing for the governance of the British Empire. Jean Chardin and, much later, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau saw Persia through the eyes of Herodotus.

The Classical literature of Greece and Rome provided the yardsticks by which all Oriental literatures were judged. Sir William Jones mitigated the strangeness of the Persian poets by comparing them to Homer, Anacreon and Horace. Even in the twentieth century R.A. Nicholson sprinkled his *Literary History of the Arabs* (1907) with references to Homer, Lucian, Herodotus and Tacitus. When Renan did his thesis on Averroes and Averroism, he mostly relied on Latin translations of Averroes (which was just as well, since his Arabic was extremely bad). When in the twentieth century Enno Littmann translated the *Arabian Nights* into German, he put the obscene bits into Latin. Of course, the Latinate formation of Orientalist scholarship meant that the wider reading public had little or no access to the researches of Arabists and Islamists.

As late as the twentieth century de Goeje was producing the *Bibliotheca Geographicorum Arabicorum* in Latin. However, the French were the pioneers in publishing serious works of scholarship in the vernacular. (The Germans were more obstinate in clinging to Latin) André Du Ryer was one of those who led the way in the sixteenth century with his translations of Sadi's *Gulistan* and the Koran into French. Subsequently the publication of the vernacular *Bibliothèque orientale* in 1697 made a great deal of Orientalist scholarship available to the general public. Antoine Galland, who had been closely associated with Barthélemy d'Herbelot in that enterprise, went on to publish his famous translation of the *Arabian Nights* into French. His collection of what were, roughly speaking, fairy stories, had been preceded by Charles Perrault's *Contes* (1691–

1695), a collection of folk tales, including such famous tales as 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Bluebeard' and 'Cinderella' which were rewritten by him in an elegantly mock-simple style.

Earlier Perrault had launched the fiercely debated 'Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns', by claiming that seventeenth-century France had reached a higher level of civilization than that of ancient Greece and Rome. He attacked the ancients and, most specifically Homer, for barbarousness. Perrault's fairy stories had been collected and stylishly rewritten as a demonstration that there could be a distinctively modern French literary culture that owed little or nothing to classical precepts. Moreover, the fairy stories with his added glosses were, he claimed, more moral than most of the stories found in ancient Greek and Latin literature. Galland's collection of stories was similarly admired for the fresh repertoire of plots, settings and characters that it provided. 'Read Sinbad and you will be sick of Aeneas', the Gothic novelist Horace Walpole urged. Galland, like Perrault, wished to moralise and, in a prefatory note to his translation, he expressed the hope that those who read his stories would be ready to profit from the examples of the virtues and vices found in them. Galland's translations of Arabic stories, like Jones's later translations of Persian poetry, had a markedly liberating effect on European literature, as it they helped to establish new genres and break away from the classical canons of decorum and the conventions of Latinity. But I digress ...

To stick with the classic theme just a little longer. Most of Europe's Arabists had a formation in the classics and when they came to Arabic, it was almost invariably classical Arabic that they chose to study. When they encountered a speaker of contemporary colloquial, such as Abudacnus the Copt who arrived in Oxford in 1610, the bookish self-taught Arabists were quite foxed. Academic Arabists studied the medieval written language. This meant that their Arabic was of limited use to governments, imperialists and merchants, though it is true that such figures as Scaliger, Thomas Hyde and Silvestre de Sacy were capable of drafting elegant diplomatic letters for their respective governments. But though Said insisted (without providing any evidence) that Silvestre de Sacy trained Bonaparte's Arabists for the 1798 expedition to Egypt, it is unlikely that Silvestre de Sacy could have been of much use here as that great scholar could not actually speak Arabic and had no knowledge of the Egyptian colloquial. Instead Bonaparte seems to have relied mostly on dragomans, or *tarjumans*. The classical bias remained something of a tradition in academia and, speaking from personal experience, at Oxford and at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies as late as the 1960s all the weight of teaching was on classical Arabic. If one actually wanted to speak to Arabs in their own language then one went to a Berlitz language school.

Today Oriental studies is more or less monopolised by universities. But it was not always so. It would be anachronistic to project back into past centuries our current knowledge of numerous well-funded universities and departments of Middle Eastern studies and an international community of experts who constituted an establishment and shared a scholarly consensus about Arab and Islamic matters. Britain in particular had very little in the way of an academic establishment in these areas (and Turkish, Persian and Chinese studies were even more poorly catered for). Although the Laudian and Thomas Adams chairs had been set up in the seventeenth century, they were often left unfilled and when they were filled they were often filled by men who had no desire to teach and perhaps little to teach even if they had had the desire. Edward Said suggested that Edward William Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) was 'a work directed towards the growing organization of academic Orientalism'. [p. 164] But here Said was jumping the gun somewhat. First, it is perfectly clear that the publication of Lane's book by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge was explicitly aimed at the broad reading public and for this reason it was priced cheaply. Charles Knight the manager of the Society was particularly interested in reaching out to the working class and the newly literate. Secondly, and this is my main point, there was no academic establishment to take a specific interest in Lane's book. Lane was not an academic, having trained as an engraver, and he seems to have had no academic friends.

Lane apart, I think that I am right in saying that there were no Arabists of note in Britain in the 1830s. There were at that time no British academics who interested themselves in the lives of contemporary Egyptians. In the seventeenth century Pococke had been chiefly interested in early Islam. When Islamic studies in Britain revived in the late nineteenth century, from 1870 onwards with William Wright, Robertson Smith and Edward Palmer, what was studied was again the classical literature and early development of Islam. For the Orientalists of the nineteenth century, the orient was something that had happened in the past. There was no academic interest in the lives of contemporary urban Egyptians. The academic study of the ethnography and anthropology of the Arabs was a twentieth-century development.

In his discussion of Lane, Said went on to claim that the Royal Asiatic Society 'was the structural recipient of Lane's information, processed and formulated as it was'. But I had a look at all the issues of the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for the late 1830s and I did not find any mention of Lane or his book. Lane was not at that time a member of the Society. Not only was there no mention of Lane in the *Journal*, but there seems to have been no interest at all in contemporary Arab culture. Most of the articles seem rather amateurish

and were mostly devoted to particular aspects of Indian culture. Incidentally, there is in an interesting contrast here with *Journal Asiatique* as it was in the 1830s. Most of the content of the French *Journal* was provided by such grand academics as Etienne Quatremere and Garcin de Tassy from the Ecole des Langues Orientales. Needless to say, the *Journal Asiatique* paid no attention to Lane's book or to the manners and customs of modern Arabs.

One of the reasons that Germans, from the early nineteenth century onwards (that is to say the generation of von Hammer-Purgstall and Fleischer), dominated Arabic and Islamic studies is that they had so many universities. Every German prince seemed to want to have his own university to patronise. Göttingen was particularly important and a pioneer in the new more contextual approach to classical texts and then by extension to Biblical and Arabic texts. The emancipation of the Jews also had a role in putting Germany at the forefront of Arabic studies and scholarly Jews often drifted from Hebrew studies to Arabic studies, as did Abraham Geiger and Gustav Weil.

Another reason for the pre-eminence of German universities in Oriental studies was their embrace of philology. Philology was an exciting, cutting-edge science in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among other things, it was seen as a tool for discovering how men lived and thought even in the centuries before recorded history. Philology was the exciting cutting edge science. Very few British scholars had had philological training and most of the few that did had acquired that training in Germany. I believe that the German supremacy in philology was an important factor in stimulating Ernest Renan's enthusiasm for almost all things German. On discovering German culture felt as if he was 'entering a temple'. 'Germany was my mistress'. Herder was the writer that Renan engaged with most intensely. Another reason for Germany's lead in the obscure territories of Orientalism was the universities' practice of allowing unpaid *Privatdozenten* to offer specialised courses on any subject they chose.

It is part of their *deformation professionnelle* that academics today should exaggerate the importance of academia in the past. By the late eighteenth century France had twenty-four universities, but England just had Oxford and Cambridge. (London and Durham Universities were founded in the early nineteenth century.) Although the universities of Leiden and Oxford had made important contributions to the development of scholarly Orientalism in the seventeenth century (think of Pococke, Scaliger and Erpenius), that efflorescence was not sustained and thereafter the contribution of universities only slowly became important in the nineteenth century. It is anachronistic to think of Orientalist research prior to the nineteenth century as being campus-driven. Aristocrats and churchmen played a larger part (think of Archbishop Laud,



Bishop Lancelot Andrewes and the Reverend William Bedwell in seventeenth-century England.)

Social class had a certain role in learned societies. Aristocrats and clergymen played a disproportionately large role in the development of Oriental studies. In the 1820s the Perpetual President of the Société Asiatique was the Duc d'Orleans, two barons were its vice presidents and various dukes, marquises, counts and barons sat on its council (*Journal Asiatique*, 'Tableau du Conseil d'Administration', 1829: 59–60). The Duc de Blacas, though only an ordinary member, was one of the greatest collectors of Islamic art in the century (Vernoit, 2000: 1, 23). The British Royal Asiatic Society was, like the Société Asiatique, founded in 1823 and in the course of the nineteenth century its members included the Duke of Wellington, the Earl of Liverpool, the Earl of Aberdeen, the Marquess of Salisbury and other members of the aristocracy far too numerous to list here—as well as quite a few Indian princes (Beckingham, 1979: 4–5). Salons had as large a role as libraries in the diffusion of Orientalist learning and in Paris such grand scholars as Silvestre de Sacy, Julius Mohl and Ernest Renan were the successive habitués and even the hosts of such salons. The salon of Princesse Mathilde Bonaparte (1820–1904) was particularly important and was attended by the Orientalist painters Delacroix, Ingres, Vernet, Fromentin and Gérôme, as well as by Dumas, Renan, Gautier and Flaubert, all writers who contributed in their various ways to literary Orientalism. Orientalism was a field that was dominated by Christian gentlemen—and the odd princess.

Until the twentieth century, Orientalist publications, with their expensive typefaces and restricted readerships, were rarely funded by universities. Instead they owed almost everything to aristocratic and episcopal patronage. Such figures as Archbishop Laud, Bishop Lancelot Andrewes and Sir Henry Saville played a benevolent role in the development of Arabic studies in seventeenth-century England.

As already noted, Edward William Lane was not part of any academic establishment. His *Arabic-English Lexicon*, the most important such dictionary to be published in the nineteenth century, could never have been published without the friendly interest and financial subsidies of Algernon Percy, Lord Prudhoe, later the Duke of Newcastle. Lane acknowledged this in the dictionary's introduction where he described Percy as 'the originator of this work, and its constant and main supporter'. The Duke was also an important sponsor of Egyptology and a collector of ancient Egyptian artefacts. The Persianist and collector of Oriental manuscripts, Charles Schéfer had no need of his professorial salary, as he was a man of independent means.

As Dennison Ross, (a student of Schefer's and later the first Director of London University's School of Oriental Studies) wrote of him, he 'was not only a

very fine scholar, but also a *grand seigneur*, a man of considerable wealth. I once visited him in his lovely château at Chambéry'. Examples of the contribution made by wealthy aristocrats, usually amateurs, to scholarly Orientalism would be easy to multiply.

Really grand Orientalists who were not of aristocratic origin might be co-opted into the elite, as was the case with Silvestre de Sacy who received a dukedom and Hamilton Gibb who was knighted. This practice, I regret to say, has now ceased.

Many of the early Orientalist painters only reached the Middle East in the retinue of wealthy men. For example the unfortunate Richard Dadd travelled out to the East as painter to Sir Thomas Phillips. He was, as it were, employed to take Sir Thomas's holiday snaps (and perhaps the job drove him mad). John Frederick Lewis travelled for a time in the entourage of Viscount Castlereagh. Dauzats served as lithographer to the expedition of Baron Taylor in 1830. A year later the painter Marilhat travelled with the expedition of Baron Charles von Hügel. And so on. Naturally the tastes of the social elite fed into the subject matter of Orientalist painting. The market wanted pictures of horses. As Charles Newton has observed, it "is difficult to understand now in the age of the internal combustion-engine, the sheer pervasiveness of hippomania". Fromentin wanted to paint more camels, but he was warned by his dealer that what the buyers wanted was more pictures of horses. In his *Souvenirs littéraires* Maxim Du Camp wrote of Fromentin's predicament:

A toutes ses propositions on répondait; "Non, faites-nous quelque chose d'Algérien, vous savez, avec un de ces petits chevaux nacres auxquels vous excellez." Il pestait, et, pour la centième fois, il recommençait le petit cheval blanc, le petit gué argenté, le petit arbre sans nom dans la botanique et le petit Arabe aux bras nus. Un jour qu'il venait de terminer un de ses jolies toiles, il me la montra, et, levant les épaules avec impatience, il me dit; "je suis condamné à ça à perpétuité!"

As well as horses, the gentry wanted pictures of hunting. Newton comments on a watercolour of Arabs hunting wild goats near Petra that "with the Victorian obsession with hunting, this scene was a familiar theme set in unfamiliar surroundings". Paintings of Arab horsemen and fantasias also fitted in with the Victorian cult of the medieval and the chivalric.

In a well-known essay, the art historian Linda Nochlin, an ally of Edward Said, has written about Orientalist paintings as if they were first and foremost advertisements and recruiting posters for imperialism and racism. Nochlin's artists deliberately sought to portray that Arabs and Turks in a patronising fash-

ion and to stress the multiple failures of Islamic civilization, by concentrating on ruins, harems, slave markets and violent executions. Though, according to Nochlin, artists were prisoners of ideology, they seem not to have been subject to market pressures. Nochlin's Orientalist painters seem more like salaried academics than artists or artisans who had to sell each item that they produced. But surely the manner and content of Jean Leon Gérôme's paintings owed less to the ideology of French imperialism than it did to the need to satisfy the tastes of his predominantly American clientele? The same came also to be true of the Russian Orientalist Vassili Vereshchagin who also found his best customers in the United States. The most important market for British painters was in the summer exhibitions of the Royal Academy. The hanging committee of the Royal Academy was not well-disposed to lubricious paintings and British Orientalist art tended more to the Biblical than it did to the sensual. When Gérôme's 'Egyptian Slave Market' was displayed at the Royal Academy in 1870 it caused a scandal.

Orientalists tended to avoid painting shanty towns, ragged beggars and filth in the streets (which were all attested in written accounts of the Near East) as there was little or no demand for this kind of subject matter among the moneyed clients of the painters.

Nochlin's criticised the high finish of the paintings of Gérôme and his students and allies as if it were an Orientalist conspiracy foisted on the Middle East, but, as Theodore Zeldin has pointed out, the French Academy demanded a licked finish, not specifically for Orientalist painting, but for all paintings—portraits, landscapes, still lifes and paintings with historical or religious themes. The idea was that the painting should be so smoothly executed that the hand of the artist should not be visible. Theodore Zeldin has noted that the rise of photography led to a demand from most people in the second half of the nineteenth century that the paintings they bought should be as accurate as photographs. The licked finish was taught at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and was the hallmark of French Academic art.

Rich men and a few women treated the Middle East as their playground. The Western image of the Orient was shaped to a large degree by the perceptions of the wealthy and the aristocratic; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Volney, Chateaubriand, Hester Stanhope, Kinglake, Lamartine, Maxim Du Camp, Wilfrid Blunt, Charles Doughty, George Curzon and Gertrude Bell. For example the youthful Alexander Kinglake, later the author of the high-spirited and stylish travel classic *Eothen*, set out on a tour of the Ottoman Empire in the years 1834–1835. He did so not as a scholar interested in detailing the manners and customs of the Turks and Arabs, nor as an antiquarian in quest of ruins, nor as a Christian pilgrim. Rather he went travelling out of fun looking for adventure and hoping

to prove himself. Much earlier, around 1500, Ludovico di Varthema travelled to Egypt and points further East, not in order to further some scholarly or imperial purpose, but because he had a desire 'to behold the various kingdoms of the world which has urged on others'. He wrote that when they arrived in Egypt, he was 'longing for novelty, as a thirsty man longs for fresh water'. The Roman aristocrat Pietro della Vale's journey to Persia seems to have been motivated by the need to get over an unhappy love affair. Recent accounts of Orientalism have, I think, elided the importance of money, youth, high spirits and the quest for novelty and adventure. When Western aristocrats travelled in the Middle East they treated the porters, shopkeepers, peasants and herdsmen that they encountered out there in the same manner that they treated similar folk back home—that is to say, arrogantly and patronisingly.

Also, even in the nineteenth century dragomans, munshis and native intellectuals played a larger role in Orientalist scholarship than either I or Edward Said have allowed. In the compilation of his *Arabic-English Lexicon* Edward William Lane relied heavily on the assistance of Shaikh Ibrahim al-Dasuqi. My book *For Lust of Knowing* should have at least mentioned such scholars as Dasuqi, Tantawi, Ali Baghat and Yacoub Artin Pasha. It is not entirely true that the Orient has had no powers of self-representation. After all, for a long time two of the most widely read histories of the Middle East were by Amir Ali, Philip Hitti and *A Short History of the Saracens* (1899) and *The History of the Arabs* (1937) respectively.

The opening up of Egypt was not the direct product of Bonaparte's expedition in 1798, but rather of the policies later pursued by Muhammad 'Ali. From about 1810 onwards Westerners flooded into Egypt not as invaders, but as invitees, instructors and technical experts. It is also important not to exaggerate the importance of the *Description de l'Egypte* for the history of Orientalism. First not many people owned copies of this book as it was prohibitively expensive and the volumes were only slowly produced. Insofar as its authors were interested in the contemporary inhabitants of Egypt, as opposed to the subjects of the Pharaohs, they were interested in the Turco-Circassian elite rather than the Arabs. Lane, who was chiefly interested in Arabs, remarked on this and it was for this reason that he chose to take Russell's *Natural History of Aleppo* as the model for *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. Lane found that the text of the *Description* was strewn with factual errors, and the artist David Roberts similarly found the pictures inaccurate (though he also made errors of his own in his watercolours).

If we are to consider how western images of Islam and the Arab world were shaped, we have to move beyond the academic and literary elites and the interpretation of obscure subtexts which may not be there after all. We

need to look at pulp fiction, doggerel, cinema, theatre, music hall, popular sing-songs, pantomime, postcards, science fiction and cartoons. With this in mind I have recently been reading a lot of thrillers set in the Middle East as well as sub-genre of erotica known as sheikh romances. Though the sheikh romances are enjoyable, there is often an unpleasant flavour to the thrillers which tend to be rabidly anti-Islamic and anti-Arab. With reference to the importance of popular fiction, I am pleased to observe that the *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue français* has included discussion of Benoit's *Atlantide*, Peyré's *L'escadron blanc* and the adventures of Tintin.

Finally, turning now to another matter altogether, I have been fascinated by Foucault's ideas ever since as a young university lecturer, I investigated medieval attitudes towards insanity. As I understand it, a discursive field, in Foucault's sense, has limits. It has a restricted vocabulary by which participants are unconsciously constrained. The point about discourse, as it was presented in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, is that it constrains what can be said and how it can be said in any particular area of knowledge—whether erotology, nuclear science or literary criticism—in order for what is said to be understood and accepted. According to Said's *Orientalism* [p. 43], 'Orientalism imposed limits upon thought about the Orient. Even the most imaginative writers of the age, men like Flaubert, Nerval and or Scott, were constrained in what they could either experience of or say about the Orient.' But what was it that Scott, or Beckford, or Disraeli or Nerval or Morier could not say about the Orient? Flaubert does not seem to have suffered from a restricted vocabulary. What was it that the academic Orientalists were unable to articulate? Said never explained what it was that was unsayable, nor did he even hint at what they were constrained from saying. Well if you can't say it, you can't say it and you can't whistle it either.

# The Invention of Islamic Law: A History of Western Studies of Islamic Normativity and Their Spread in the Orient<sup>1</sup>

*Léon Buskens and Baudouin Dupret*

In memory of Albert Dekker (1952–2011), scholar and friend



Arguing that the notion of “Islamic law” is a scholarly and social construct is stating the obvious. The phenomenon of normativity in Muslim societies existed before and was independent of the introduction of the concept of Islamic law by colonial administrators and scholars. However, nowadays the concept has become so self-evident and politicised, for Muslims as well as for outsiders, that some Muslims consider the analysis of its coming into being as a provocation. In this essay we analyse the development and spread of this way of understanding of normativity in Muslim societies. Our subject is the process by which orientalist and politicians through their studies of normativity transformed it into Islamic law.

In the West scholars only started to study Islamic law seriously from the end of the eighteenth onwards, as European colonialism stimulated the quest for knowledge of local law overseas. The European governments needed to become better informed about the government and norms of the societies which they colonised in order to impose their law and order. This process of knowledge formation meant imposing Western concepts such as “law” on alternative understandings of normativity and social order.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unlike Bontems (Claude Bontems, ‘L’invention du droit musulman algérien à l’époque coloniale (xix<sup>e</sup> siècle). Une approche anthropologique’, in Yadh Benachour, Jean-Robert Henry & Rostane Mehdi (eds), *Le débat juridique au Maghreb. De l’étatisme à l’Etat de droit. Etudes en l’honneur de Ahmed Mahiou* (Paris: Editions Publisud—IREMAM, 2009)) we use the term “invention” not only in the epistemological innocent sense of “discovery,” but we also intend to stress the constructive character of the category “Islamic law.”

In this short essay we investigate the history of this scholarly and political concept by analysing some examples taken from the Dutch and French traditions of the study of Islamic law, and from the post-colonial teaching and legal practices in some Muslim societies. In order to stress the fact that the use of the expression “Islamic law” implied an altogether new conception of Islamic normativity we deliberately use the rather fashionable term “invention.” The positivist conception of Shari‘a as law was foreign to the understanding that Islamic scholars themselves had of the tradition that they transmitted. However, at present this view has become dominant to the extent that students at institutions for Islamic higher learning take courses in “Islamic law” and “Islamic legislation,” and that Islamists and other activists strive for the introduction of “Islamic law” in Islamic states.

### Beginnings and Debates: Lessons from Delft and Leiden

At the end of the eighteenth century British linguists and jurists were among the first to converse with local scholars about the norms governing the lives of Hindus and Muslims in India.<sup>2</sup> A few decades later some French Arabists and soldiers started research on the native laws of Algeria.<sup>3</sup> At about the same time, a number of Dutch scholars tried to understand what norms were governing the daily lives of indigenous and “oriental” inhabitants of Indonesia.<sup>4</sup> These practice-orientated studies of what was considered to belong to the legal domain were closely linked to the emerging tradition of learned Orientalism, which aimed at collecting, describing and analysing distant civilisations.<sup>5</sup>

---

2 On the British studies, see e.g. Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge. The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

3 Jean-Robert Henry & François Balique, *La doctrine coloniale du droit musulman algérien. Bibliographie systématique et introduction critique* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1979); Bontems, ‘L’invention du droit musulman algérien’, 39–51.

4 See B.J. Boland & I. Farjon, *Islam in Indonesia. A Bibliographical Survey 1600–1942 with post-1945 Addenda*, (Dordrecht: Foris Publications Holland, 1983); Albert A. Trouwborst, ‘Anthropology, the Study of Islam, and Adat Law in The Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies, 1920–1950’, in Han Vermeulen & Jean Kommers (eds), *Tales from Academia. History of Anthropology in the Netherlands* (Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Saarbrücken GmbH, 2002), vol. 2, 673–694; Léon Buskens & Jean Kommers, ‘The Delayed Reception of Colonial Studies about Adat Law and Islamic Law in Dutch Anthropology’, in Han Vermeulen & Jean Kommers (eds), *Tales from Academia. History of Anthropology in the Netherlands* (Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Saarbrücken GmbH, 2002), vol. 2, 733–755.

5 On the French tradition, see Maurice Flory & Jean-Robert Henry (eds), *L’enseignement du*

In order to answer the new questions on local or “indigenous” law, scholars followed philological, historical, ethnographic, and legal approaches. From the beginning, researchers, administrators and politicians were engaged in debates about what the law was, and what it should be. Knowledge was not only a matter of description and analysis, but also a question of normativity as defined by Western legal positivism. The issue of the relationship between theory and practice, which has since become central in the Western study of Islamic law, originated in these scholarly and political debates of the nineteenth century.

The beginnings of the study of Islamic law in the Netherlands, which were closely linked to the colonisation of Indonesia, especially of the islands of Java and Sumatra, offer a telling example of the early entanglement of scholarly and practical questions. Until the departure of the British in 1814, Dutch civil servants were hardly involved in the administration of local communities. From then on, Dutch policy developed the idea that a proper colonial government implied the maintenance of law and order.<sup>6</sup> To this end, the government established institutes for the education of colonial civil servants in Delft and Leiden. In 1844 the Arabist Albert Meursinge (1812–1850) was the first in the Netherlands to publish an introduction to Islamic law. The manual was an adaptation of a manuscript text written in Malay by a scholar originating from Aceh, who had resided in Mecca for many years, at the request of a seventeenth-century female ruler of Aceh. Meursinge’s abridged edition was used as a textbook for students at the colonial institute in Delft.<sup>7</sup>

---

*droit musulman* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1989). Zomeño gives an overview of Spanish studies on Islamic law in Morocco: Amalia Zomeño, ‘El derecho islámico a través de su imagen colonial durante el Protectorado español en Marruecos’, in Fernando Rodríguez Mediano & Helena De Felipe (eds), *El protectorado español en Marruecos. Gestión colonial e identidades* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2002), 307–337. Kemper offers a history of Russian Orientalism, especially concerning the relation between Islam and local customs: Michael Kemper, ‘Adat against Shari’a: Russian Approaches toward Daghestani “Customary Law” in the 19th Century’, *Ab Imperio* 3 (2005): 147–174.

- 6 On colonial law and jurisprudence in the Dutch East Indies, see Albert Dekker & Hanneke van Katwijk, *Recht en rechtspraak in Nederlands-Indië* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 1993), and Jan Michiel Otto and Sebastiaan Pompe, ‘The Legal Oriental Connection’, in Willem Otterspeer (ed.), *Leiden Oriental Connections 1850–1940* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 230–249.
- 7 Albert Meursinge, *Handboek van het Mohammedaansche regt, in de Maleische taal; naar oorspronkelijke, Maleische en Arabische, werken van Mohammedaansche regtsgeleerden bewerkt door ...* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1844).



Salomo Keyzer (1823–1868), the successor of Meursing in Delft, published the first introduction to Islamic law in Dutch.<sup>8</sup> In this handbook he stressed the importance of knowledge of “pure Islam,” which he contrasted with the “aberrations” of daily life in Indonesia. According to him the law of Indonesian Muslims was to be found in the normative texts of Muslim scholars, the books of *fiqh*. Keyzer taught these texts following the classical order in which Islamic scholars treated legal issues. “Practical men” working in Indonesia, such as civil servants and entrepreneurs, engaged in fierce polemics with Keyzer concerning his teachings and understanding of indigenous law. For people like W.R. van Hoëvell the actual law was to be found in the practices of the natives, in their local customs, which were completely different from the norms which the Muslim scholars stipulated in their texts, and which varied from one place to another.<sup>9</sup> According to Keyzer’s critics the education of future colonial civil servants should be focused on local customs and native languages, rather than on “pure” and “universal” Islamic law and classical Arabic.

The polemics on the relative weight of classical Islamic norms as laid down in *fiqh* texts and their relation to local practices lasted for several decades, and were finally brought to an end by the Arabist and Islamicist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936). In cooperation with the jurist Cornelis van Vollenhoven (1874–1933) he managed to impose the doctrine of *adatrecht* (Indonesian customary law) as the authoritative view both in academia and in the colonial administration.<sup>10</sup> Together they encouraged their students and colonial administrators to collect local customs and court practices in the field, which were published in compilations of customary law (*adatrechtbundels*). Afterwards van Vollenhoven further analyzed these raw materials in a monumental

8 Salomo Keyzer, *Handboek voor het Mohammedaansche regt* (’s-Gravenhage: Gebroeders Belinfante, 1853).

9 W.R. van Hoëvell, ‘Varia; brief aan den heer S. Keijzer’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 15, no. 1 (1853): 452–454; W.R. van Hoëvell, ‘Varia; antwoord aan S. Keijzer’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 24, no. 1 (1862): 260–261 (cf. *ibidem*, 195–197); Salomo Keyzer, ‘Varia; brief aan de redacteur W.R. van Hoëvell’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 24, no. 1 (1862): 258–260 (cf. *ibidem*, 54–57; 195–197).

10 Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Verspreide geschriften* (Bonn & Leipzig: Kurt Schroeder; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1923–1927), especially volume IV; Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Œuvres choisies de C. Snouck Hurgronje présentées en français et en anglais par G.-H. Bousquet et J. Schacht* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1957); Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje et al., ‘Adat Guide’, in J.F. Holleman (ed.), *Van Vollenhoven on Indonesian Adat Law. Selections from Het Adatrecht van Nederlandsch-Indië (Volume 1, 1918; Volume 11, 1931)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 262–265. On the doctrine of *adatrecht* see Peter Burns, *The Leiden Legacy. Concepts of Law in Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004).

synthesis and in separate studies. Through these collections and analytical restatements these scholars transformed local customs (*adat*) into customary law (*adatrecht*), for which they claimed a normative authority comparable to Dutch codified law. The Arabist and jurist Theodoor Willem Juynboll canonised the teachings of the two masters on the relation between Islamic law and local customs in his manual on Islamic law, first published in 1903.<sup>11</sup> In this book he systematically juxtaposed the classical norms of the Shafi'i school, one of the four surviving Sunni schools of law, with local customs of the various Muslim regions of the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>12</sup> For half a century all colonial civil servants had to learn this handbook by heart during their studies to imbibe themselves with the sole authoritative view of Islamic law in Indonesia. Until about two decades ago Juynboll's manual was still considered a proper textbook to teach Islam and Islamic law in Dutch.

### The Positivism of the New Categories

The understanding of indigenous norms followed to a large extent the evolution of legal thinking in continental Europe, which was dominated by national legislation and Napoleonic codification. Scholars studying Islam and Muslim societies had to decide whether a norm was worthy of being elevated to the level of a legal rule or not. One of the stages of the research consisted of transforming norms into law. When these scholarly opinions were accepted at the political level they became the new law of the colonial administrators, and sometimes even of the administered natives. There were many reasons for this legal positivism, which led to a stark form of conceptual ethnocentrism. Many colonial civil servants had initially been trained in law, a considerable number of scholars combined the study of oriental languages with law, and several early ethnologists had started out as legal scholars.

In the nineteenth century legal scholarship was dominant in the self-understanding of the colonising societies. This normative view of social processes was intimately linked to the process of the formation of nation states, which

11 Th.W. Juynboll, *Handleiding tot de kennis van de Mohammedaansche wet, volgens de leer der Sjafi'itische school* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1930, fourth edition [orig. 1903]).

12 Apparently the manual was considered to be so important for the maintenance of law and order and for the understanding of Muslims in Indonesia that a Dutch publishing house in exile had it reprinted in the United States during the Second World War (New York: Querido, 1943). German (1910) and Italian (1916) translations were published to cater to the needs of colonial administrators and scholars dealing with Shafi'i Muslims.

dominated the history of Europe at that time. Romantic legal philosophy, expressed by for example Von Savigny, held that nations were considered to find their expression in their law. In turn, legal positivism was used to understand normativity in Muslim societies, which led to obfuscating the differences between the European and Muslim systems and benefitted the imposition of the European conception of norms as law.

This “epistemic violence” expressed itself in the introduction of new analytical categories, such as “personal status,” “criminal law,” and “public law” versus “private law,” which were until then unknown to Islamic scholars. The European researchers tried to determine as soon as possible the most authoritative summaries of each law school (*madhhab*) and to publish editions and translations of these. The Dutch concentrated on the classical Shafī‘i texts taught in Indonesia, whereas British scholars became specialists in the Hanafi school dominant in South Asia. French and Italian scholars were involved in the colonisation of the Maghrib and hence focused on editing and translating the Maliki classics.

Several scholars, however, raised objections to this legal approach to Islamic normativity. Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje severely criticised the ethnocentric conception of Shari‘a as law, which might partly have been due to the fact that he did not have a background in law, unlike many of his fellow scholars on Islamic law.<sup>13</sup> He contributed greatly to abolishing the division of labour between fieldwork and library research, and between the study of texts and of practices. Due to his background in theology and philology he had a sound knowledge of the normative texts, but he was also well versed in spoken variants of Arabic and Malay, and the vernaculars particular to the different regions of Indonesia, such as Sundanese and Acehese. His prolonged sojourns in the field, in the Hijaz and in Indonesia, enabled him to collect rich ethnographic data. He was gifted in developing personal networks of friendships and family alliances, which contributed considerably to his insights into local societies.

While in Jeddah in 1884 he converted to Islam, and bought an Abyssinian slave girl (*jama‘a*) after his move to Mecca in 1885. Through the good services of this concubine he managed to obtain intimate data about the daily life of women, as he shows in the second, ethnographic volume of his study on Mecca. Later

---

13 On the life of Snouck Hurgronje and on his studies on Islamic law, see Jan Brugman, ‘Snouck Hurgronje’s Study of Islamic Law’, in Willem Otterspeer (ed.), *Leiden Oriental Connections 1850–1940* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 82–93, and Léon Buskens & Jan Just Witkam (eds), *Scholarship in Action. Studies on the Life and Work of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936)* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

in Java he successively married two female members of the Sundanese Muslim elite and thus reinforced his ties with the ruling class, which he had already established in Mecca. While the Dutch colonial government paid him to collect useful data and to give advice on Islamic affairs, Snouck Hurgronje managed to combine political action with scholarly research. Due to his analysis of Acehese society and his practical advice the Dutch colonial army managed to finally “pacify” this “rebellious” region.

When Snouck Hurgronje returned to Leiden in 1906 he started a new life as a professor of Arabic and Islam, and as a family man: he married a young Dutch woman and fathered a daughter named Christien. But he remained involved in colonial affairs, together with his neighbour and friend the Leiden law professor Cornelis van Vollenhoven. As already mentioned, together they developed the doctrine of *adatrecht*. But they also strongly advocated the idea of an “ethical policy” towards Indonesia. For them this implied an active concern for the education of the Indonesian elite. They supervised a considerable number of Indonesian doctoral students in Leiden, in the fields of Arabic, Islam, Indonesian languages and cultures, and law. From a scholarly point of view Snouck Hurgronje should be considered the founder of an anthropology of Islamic law which combines the study of texts with ethnographic fieldwork.

Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje stressed the original character of Islamic normativity in his writings. For him Islamic normativity found its main expression in *fiqh*, a term which he rendered into Dutch as *plichtenleer* (“a doctrine of obligations”), which was more a deontology than a legal system, and as such rather similar to the Jewish Law.<sup>14</sup> Snouck Hurgronje recommended the use of Arabic terms rather than renderings in European languages for the analysis of local norms, in order to demonstrate the singularity of Islamic normative categories. Snouck Hurgronje’s approach was similar to van Vollenhoven’s conception of Indonesian customary law, for which sound linguistic knowledge and the use of vernacular concepts and texts were also fundamental. He was strongly opposed

---

14 Snouck Hurgronje might have been influenced in these views on the similarity between Islamic and Jewish normativity by his contacts with his friend Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921). The two of them are generally considered to belong to the founders of the Western academic study of Islam. Their extensive lifelong correspondence, edited by Van Koningsveld in 1985, sheds important light on the development of their understanding of Islamic normativity (Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld [ed.], *Scholarship and Friendship in Early Islamwissenschaft. The Letters of C. Snouck Hurgronje to I. Goldziher. From the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest* [Leiden: Documentatiebureau Islam-Christendom, Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, 1985]).

to attempts at the codification of Islamic norms, as he considered the idea of a law code as completely contrary to the “spirit” of Islamic law.<sup>15</sup> Snouck Hurgronje’s “deontological” conception of Islamic normativity was spread by his two main pupils, the German (and later British) Arabist Joseph Schacht (1902–1969) and the French sociologist Georges-Henri Bousquet (1900–1978), neither of whom were jurists by training either. However, they both used the term “Islamic law” in the titles of their manuals and essays.<sup>16</sup>

### Contributions of Oriental Collaborators

The work of European scholars in the nineteenth century was only possible because of the help of local collaborators. The contributions of these assistants, who gathered materials and information which enabled their European masters to write their studies, have generally received scant attention. Often the role of informant went together with the tasks of interpreting, translating, assisting in research, and counselling. Some worked as dragomans for foreign consulates and combined their knowledge of oriental languages with an expertise of local norms. Later on, colonial governments created specific institutions for the transmission of knowledge and the education of local staff. Institutions for the maintenance of law and order, such as services for native affairs and law courts, also depended heavily on the cooperation of native servants with knowledge of local languages, customs and norms.

The co-operation between researchers and colonial civil servants on the one side and their oriental “assistants” on the other often took the form of a mutual exchange. Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje gained access to Meccan society because of the good services of Si Aziz. This Algerian scholar had been banned by the French from his native country, to which he hoped to return

---

15 These views can be found scattered throughout his collected studies (Snouck Hurgronje, *Verspreide geschriften*), especially in the second volume, which brings together his studies on Islamic law; see, for example, pp. 139–140. On the question of codification of Islamic law, and on the *Projet de Codification du Droit Musulman* in Algeria, see Snouck Hurgronje, *Verspreide geschriften*, vol. IV, II: 259–266.

16 On Schacht, see Janet Wakin, *Remembering Joseph Schacht (1902–1969)* (Cambridge, MA: Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School, 2003); on Bousquet, see Laure Bousquet-Lefèvre & Michel Robine, ‘L’œuvre islamologique de Georges-Henri Bousquet (1900–1978). Bibliographie thématique’ in Maurice Flory and Jean-Robert Henry (eds), *L’enseignement du droit musulman* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1989), 171–227.

with the help of his Dutch acquaintance. Snouck Hurgronje also gathered a considerable amount of his ethnographic data with the help of some Indonesian students residing in Mecca, such as Raden Aboe Bakar Djajadiningrat and Hasan Moestapa.<sup>17</sup> These young gentlemen also took good care of Snouck Hurgronje's already mentioned Abyssinian slave girl, who turned out to be pregnant after her master had been forced to leave the Holy City prematurely. Their reliability and assistance later helped them to obtain important positions in the colonial administration in Indonesia, and secured the lifelong support of their family interests by Snouck Hurgronje. In Southern Morocco the famous sociologist and colonial administrator Robert Montagne could do his research on Berber customary law thanks to the materials and information furnished by Ben Daoud, a military interpreter.<sup>18</sup>

The Orientalist perspective which transformed Islamic normativity into Islamic law became natural and self-evident to the local collaborators through their daily involvement with the colonial administration. By actively participating in and contributing to the colonial project they assimilated a new understanding of their own society and culture. This process is already visible in the first doctoral thesis on Islamic law that was defended at Leiden University. Emile Testa (1821–1896) was born in Istanbul into a family which originally came from Venice and which had for several generations provided foreign legations in the Ottoman Empire with dragomans and diplomats. In 1843 Testa presented a sketch of Hanafi family law, based on al-Halabi's well-known overview *Multaqa al-abhur* and Shaykh-zade's commentary, under the title *Specimen juris inaugurale de conjugii jure moslemico*. The work of Carel F. Winter (1799–1859) on judicial practice in the sultan's court at Surakarta (Java) offers a similar case. Winter acted as an informant through correspondence for Taco Roorda, who was a professor of Javanese in Amsterdam and later in Delft.<sup>19</sup> Winter was a member of a family which lived in the East and played an important role in collecting, disseminating, and practicing the new knowledge on local norms. An example is their work as official *translateur* at the court of Surakarta, a position to which Carel succeeded his father in 1825.

17 Jan Just Witkam, 'Inleiding', in *Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, Mekka in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw. Schetsen uit het dagelijks leven*. Vertaald en ingeleid door Jan Just Witkam (Amsterdam & Antwerpen: Atlas, 2007), 7–182; Michael F. Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia. The Umma Below the Winds* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

18 See: Ben Daoud, 'Recueil du droit coutumier de Massat. Exemple des Ida ou Mout', in *Hespéris* 4, no. 4 (1924): 405–439.

19 E.M. Uhlenbeck, *Critical Survey of Studies on the Languages of Java and Madura* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 45–51; 142–143, and *passim*.

In general the oriental collaborators received much less appreciation for their scholarly work than their masters. They did not write the manuals and overviews which were intended to become authoritative in the mother countries, but were rather relegated to the humble tasks of editing texts, letters and documents, with translations, annotations and glossaries,<sup>20</sup> of composing guidebooks to judicial practice,<sup>21</sup> or of translating the classics of Islamic law.<sup>22</sup> Traces of their activities as brokers between two cultures are certainly to be found in the court records and in the archives of the colonial administrations and of the Chambers of Commerce. This kind of *microstoria* largely remains to be written.<sup>23</sup>

Among later generations a growing number of jurists with an oriental background defended doctoral theses on “Islamic law,” either in the mother countries or at local institutions of higher learning. Some of them became rather famous, such as the Egyptian jurist ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri (1895–1971), who would become the master architect of the codification of civil law in the Middle East, which he tried to build on the legacies of Islamic, Roman, and French law.<sup>24</sup> His Egyptian colleague Chafik Chéhata offers another example of the internalisation of the legal positivist perspective on Islamic law, and the title of his doctoral thesis which he defended in 1936 in Cairo is revealing: *Essai d'une théorie générale de l'obligation en droit musulman* (“Essay of a General Theory of the Obligation in Islamic Law”).

For an Indonesian example we might turn to the life and work of Pangeran Ario Hoesein Djajadiningrat (1886–1960), a nephew of Raden Aboe Bakar, Snouck Hurgronje’s friend in Mecca and Indonesia. He was the first Indonesian to obtain a doctorate from Leiden University, in 1913, again under the guidance

20 E.g. E. Zeys & Mohammed Ould Sidi Saïd, *Recueil d'actes judiciaires arabes avec la traduction française et des notes juridiques* (Algiers: Adolphe Jourdan, 1886, deuxième édition revue par Henri Pérès, 1946).

21 E.g. Ahmed Hacène, *Manuel-formulaire à l'usage des interprètes judiciaires de l'Afrique du Nord et des candidats à ces fonctions précédé d'une étude sur ...* (Algiers: Adolphe Jourdan, 1917).

22 E.g. Ahmed Laïmeche, *Averroès. Bidayat al moudjetahid. Manuel de l'interprète des lois et traité complet du juriste. Livre des échanges. Théorie générale des contrats et obligations. Des différents contrats* (Algiers: Minerva, 1940).

23 For an example of this kind of research, see Colette Establet, *Etre caïd dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1991).

24 Guy Bechor, *The Sanhuri Code, and the Emergence of Modern Arab Civil Law (1932 to 1949)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007); Enid Hill, *Al-Sanhuri and Islamic Law. The Place and Significance of Islamic Law in the Life and Work of 'Abd al-Razzaq Ahmad al-Sanhuri Egyptian Jurist and Scholar 1895–1971* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1987).

of the faithful friend of his family. Hoesein Djajadiningrat would transmit his master's views on Islamic law and local customs in his own teachings at the colonial law school in Batavia and in his advice to the Dutch colonial government.<sup>25</sup>

The oriental collaborators had studied law in a European fashion, which modelled their understanding of Islamic normativity on legal positivism. For them the notion of "Islamic law" had become entirely self-evident. For example, contemporary Indonesian scholars and practitioners use the expression *hukum islam* to refer to Islamic law, whether in the titles of introductory handbooks or in the name of the official restatement of Islamic family law, *Kompilasi Hukum Islam*. It would be useful to trace the history of the terminology related to Islamic law in the various languages used in Muslim societies. The history of Islamic normative thought which the reformist intellectual Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Hajwi (1874–1956), who also acted as a Minister of Justice in Morocco under the French protectorate, composed under the title *al-Fikr al-sami fi ta'rikh al-fiqh al-islami* and which was published in instalments between 1917 and 1932, might offer a starting point for such a genealogy.<sup>26</sup> We might also understand the usage by other authors of expressions such as *al-tashri' al-islami*, "Islamic legislation," for example employed by Mahmassani,<sup>27</sup> as an indication of a new view of Islamic normativity. But at the same time we should also pay attention to possible differences between Orientalist understandings of Islamic law and the interpretations of local researchers, who often had an excellent training in classical Islamic scholarship and superior linguistic skills.

Finally, we should consider the social position of these oriental scholars and collaborators. Sometimes they were members of local elites or of classes which aspired to social mobility, such as Aboe Bakar and Hoesein Djajadiningrat.

25 Hoesein Djajadiningrat, *De Mohammedaansche Wet en het geestesleven der Indonesische Mohammedanen* (Weltevreden: G. Kolff & Co., 1925); and Hoesein Djajadiningrat, *Ver slag van de Commissie van advies nopens de voorgenomen herziening van de priesterraad-rechtspraak* (Weltevreden: Landsdrukkerij, 1926).

26 Second edition in two volumes, presented as the first edition, published in: Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Hajwi al-Tha'alibi al-Fasi, *al-Fikr al-sami fi ta'rikh al-fiqh al-islami* (al-Madina: al-Maktaba al-'ilmiyya, 1397 AH/1976–1977). On the author, see Abdallah Laroui, 'Muhammad al-Hajwi et l'ordre urbain', in Abdallah Laroui, *Esquisses historiques* (Casablanca: Centre culturel arabe, 1992), 115–121.

27 S. Mahmassani, *Falsafat al-tashri' fi al-islam. The Philosophy of Jurisprudence in Islam. Translated by Farhat J. Ziadeh* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961).



Often they belonged to minorities, such as Jews in the Maghrib or Christians in the Levant, who were employed as dragomans.<sup>28</sup> Their marginal position made contacts and exchanges with foreigners both easier and more necessary for their survival. The ways in which these people used their ambiguous social status brings to mind Benjamin Disraeli's saying, which Edward Said chose as a motto for his famous book: "The East is a career."<sup>29</sup> Their engagement not only entailed a social career which offered them a living and upward social mobility, but also a cultural transformation of their way of understanding their own societies through their explanation of these to foreign diplomats, scholars, and rulers. Their culture became hybridized and mixed, impregnated with a conceptual Orientalism. Through the internalisation of new concepts and technologies of knowledge these collaborators westernised themselves, which implied adopting an Orientalist perspective, a process which Edward Said labelled "Orientalism from within."

### Texts and Scholarly Techniques

European scholars introduced scholarly techniques and textual forms which were dominant in legal scholarship in Europe.<sup>30</sup> Their local collaborators adopted these techniques and forms, together with the new conception of Islamic law. The use of printed texts, instead of the manuscripts in which *fiqh* was transmitted until the nineteenth century, was a major innovation. For centuries Islamic scholars had opposed the use of print technology for the transmission and reproduction of religious texts. But book culture changed dramatically after Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, when printed texts started to be considered indispensable for new methods of education and administration. With the introduction of printing, the lay-out and organisation of texts also

---

28 Christians have for a long time played a role as cultural and political intermediaries in the Levant. Bernard Heyberger (ed.), *Orientalisme, science et controverse. Abraham Ecchellensis (1605–1664)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010) presents a compelling case study; as does Lucette Valensi, *Mardochée Naggjar. Enquête sur un inconnu* (Paris: Stock, 2008), for Jews in the Maghrib.

29 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), xiii; 5.

30 Léon Buskens, 'Islamic Commentaries and French Codes: The Confrontation and Accommodation of Two Forms of Textualization of Family Law in Morocco', in Henk Driessen (ed.), *The Politics of Ethnographic Reading and Writing. Confrontations of Western and Indigenous Views* (Saarbrücken & Fort Lauderdale: Verlag Breitenbach Publishers, 1992), 65–100.

changed profoundly.<sup>31</sup> The commentaries of the *fiqh* were replaced by the law codes and annotated court rulings of French law.

Together with this new technology, new ways of understanding and formulating Islamic normativity spread. Whereas in classical Islamic scholarship the proper language to compose *fiqh* texts was Arabic, with occasional use of local languages to explain things to beginners, Orientalist scholarship on Islamic law assigned a dominant role to European languages. Local collaborators who aspired to a career in the colonial administration or in academia had to express themselves in the language and concepts of Orientalist scholarship. Those who wanted to gain a reputation in the world of scholarship or administration had to have their writings printed with local publishing houses, especially in colonial capitals such as Rabat, Algiers, Tunis, Delhi, or Batavia, or with metropolitan publishers in Paris, London, Oxford, or Leiden.

The Orientalist understanding of Islamic law was structured by regionally specific colonial experiences. In every region of the colonial world researchers took it upon themselves to “discover” the specific configurations of customs, Islamic norms, and decrees of local rulers, and then remodelled these according to the conceptions of legal positivism. This applies to the studies of *ʿamal* in Morocco, Kabyle customary law in Algeria, Anglo-Muhammadan law in British India, or *adatrecht* in Indonesia. These regional understandings of Islamic law and their relation with local customs were marked by various national traditions of statecraft and law, and of legal scholarship and practice. Hence it does not come as a surprise that the image of Islamic law in the Maghrib among French scholars reflects the French civil law tradition, while the Anglo-Muhammadan law is deeply rooted in British common law.

### Positivism and Codification: The New “Economy” of Islamic Law

The Orientalist conception has lasted until the twenty-first century, and was reproduced from generation to generation, both in the East and West. The concept of “Islamic law” was somehow naturalized, for researchers as well as Muslims, so that many consider speaking of the “invention of Islamic law” as

---

31 On lithography as an intermediary form of publishing, see Brinkley Messick, ‘On the Question of Lithography’, *Culture & History* 16 (1997): 158–176. Messick’s works are fundamental for an understanding of the relation between textual forms and legal norms; see especially Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State. Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

something sacrilegious. Since the colonial period there have been attempts at codifying Islamic law (*Code Morand* in Algeria or *Code Santillana* in Tunisia) and customary law (Van Vollenhoven's *Het adatrecht van Nederlandsch Indië*<sup>32</sup> and *Een adatrechtboekje voor heel Indië*) which were inspired by this positivist perspective. Qadri Pasha's codification of Hanafi jurisprudence, in 1875, in Egypt, and the promulgation of the Ottoman *Mecelle*, in 1877, constitute early forms of a reception of legal positivism. Such trends continued beyond independence with the Sanhuri codifications in Iraq, Egypt and other Middle-Eastern countries.<sup>33</sup> This positivist conception of Islamic law is nowadays livelier than ever, and the codification experiments multiply, as in Iran and Indonesia. The same positivist conception of Islamic law can be found in university curricula and teaching, in Muslim countries as well as Europe.<sup>34</sup>

The understanding of Islamic normativity was thoroughly transformed within two centuries. Judiciaries and judicial systems were totally reshaped.<sup>35</sup> Without strictly correlating it to colonialism—not all countries were colonized—it is obvious that religion-inspired law was progressively confined to the sole domain of personal status (marriage, divorce, affiliation, inheritance) and jurisdictions adjudicating in this domain were stripped of their competences in favor of more or less secularized courts. Iran since the 1979 revolution, Saudi Arabia and some of the Gulf states are exceptions to this general trend. Even in the restricted area of personal status one can observe the adoption of codified statutes—a technique alien to the Islamic normative tradition—the application of which belongs to specialized circuits of civil courts with judges trained within law faculties. The tendency, from the 1970s onward, to “Islamize” the law

32 Cornelis van Vollenhoven, *Het adatrecht van Nederlandsch-Indië* (1906–1931). See also J.F. Holleman (ed.), *Van Vollenhoven on Indonesian Adat Law. Selections from Het Adatrecht van Nederlandsch-Indië (Volume 1, 1918; Volume II, 1931)* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981).

33 Bechor, *The Sanhuri Code*; Hill, *Al-Sanhuri and Islamic Law*.

34 Jean-Claude Vatin, ‘Exotisme et rationalité: A l’origine de l’enseignement du droit en Algérie (1879–1909)’, in Jean-Claude Vatin (ed.), *Connaissances du Maghreb. Sciences sociales et colonisation* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1984), 161–183.

35 For an overview of these changes, see Wael B. Hallaq, *Sharīʿa. Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jan Michiel Otto (ed.), *Sharia Incorporated. A Comparative Overview of the Legal Systems of Twelve Muslim Countries in Past and Present* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2010). For a discussion of the transformation of Shariʿa under colonial rule, which in many countries is the foundation of the contemporary legal system, see: Léon Buskens, ‘Sharia and the Colonial State’, in Rudolph Peters and Peri Bearman (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Islamic Law* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 209–221.

because the latter was considered too secular did not translate into a return to classical Islamic normativity but in the adoption of legislative texts which explicitly referred to the Shari'a, which is often upgraded to the rank of the principal source of legislation.

The Egyptian case allows us to assess the influence of these transformations at the legislative and judicial levels.<sup>36</sup> At the former level, the reference to Islam is embedded within the frame of the parliamentary institution, which is in charge of passing laws in a state characterized as Islamic. As soon as Islamic law, designed under the name of Shari'a, is constitutionally elevated to the rank of the main source of legislation, the legislature is in charge of checking the conformity of the laws in two ways: in a political way (not hurting public opinion) and in a legal way (not exposing itself to the Supreme Constitutional Court's negative review). Since the language of the Egyptian public sphere became from the 1970s onward increasingly religious and oriented to the promotion of society's re-Islamization, Islam—not to speak of Islamism—became the language that fits every situation, although it can correspond to extremely different normative attitudes. For instance, members of parliament can refer to the Qur'an in order to promote as well as to oppose this or that provision. However, the Islamic repertoire does not determine the acceptability of the text; it is its umbrella, not its substance. Islamic normativity gets its authority from within the constraining framework of the parliamentary procedure, which has its own rules of speech, vote and majority. What we call Islamic relevance can determine the rhetorical color of the debates, but it proves insufficient to constrain their outcome.

At the judicial level, in Egypt again we see that, at the very place where the reference to Islamic law is supposedly dominant, i.e. personal status law, it is actually far from systematic. This dominance of the reference does not stem from the importance the scientific tradition ascribes to the Islamic reference, nor from the supposedly exceptional nature of its expression. On the contrary, it looks very ordinary, non-exceptional, and routine-based, while reference to the authority of Islam is only occasional. Moreover, it is mediated through the use of what constitutes nowadays the major sources of Egyptian positive law: statutes and case law. It is embedded in the banal accomplishment of the judge's everyday work, which mainly consists of legally characterizing the facts which are submitted to him. In doing so, the judge is keen to exhibit his

---

36 Nathalie Bernard-Maugiron & Baudouin Dupret (eds), 'Le Prince et son juge. Droit et politique dans l'Égypte contemporaine', *Egypte-Monde arabe* 2 (1999); Nathan Brown, *The Rule of Law in the Arab World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

capacity to judge adequately, according to the standards of his profession, the formal constraints attached to its accomplishment, the legal sources to which he resorts, and the rules of his interpretive work it supposes. If ever referring to Islam, the judge does so through the intermediary of Egyptian positive law and institutions.<sup>37</sup>

*Fiqh*-referred Islamic law was diluted into the modern constitutional order and Islamic normativity positivized. It is without doubt that the contemporary experiences of integrating the Shari'a within the nation states' legal body led to the disruption of the economy and epistemology of normativity, that is, the transformation of the general balance, fundamental principles, sources and references on which this normativity leans. This is true at an institutional level, with the building of constitutional architectures devoted to the division of powers, the hierarchy of jurisdictions, the legislative principle, the popular representation, and fundamental rights and freedoms. It is equally true at a substantial level, since the applicable norms are largely formulated by the means of codification, not in a doctrinal continuity with Islamic classical normativity (*fiqh*) but rather in an attempt at not blatantly contradicting it.

Although the Shari'a and *fiqh* in their classical forms have almost disappeared from the legal universe, the law referring to Islam—that is, a positive law inscribed, through the game of sources and references, under the umbrella of the Shari'a—has imposed itself. The vast majority of the constitutions of countries where the population is dominantly Muslim give a place to Islamic law, under one denomination or another, and this requires some work of conforming not to substantial provisions but to a kind of ethical standard. This is why we observe the ever-growing place occupied by notions like “Islamic public order,” in which legal technique gives way to moral assessments of the socio-political spirit of the time. In sum, even in situations where Islamic normativity is put in the middle of the legal system, it is achieved according to institutional, procedural and referential modalities which are partly or wholly different from what they used to be before the Orientalist invention of Islamic law.

Even in situations where Islamic normativity is “again” put in the middle of the legal system, it is done in ways hugely different from what they were, for instance, at the end of the eighteenth century. The “return” to the Shari'a never consists of the utopian journey dreamed of by the supporters of authenticity and tradition, but of the imposition of a law exclusively referring to Islam and

---

37 For an ethno-methodological critique of the concept of Islamic law, see: Baudouin Dupret, ‘What is Islamic Law? A Praxiological Answer and an Egyptian Case Study’, *Theory, Culture and Society* 24 2 (2007): 79–100.

at the same time, thoroughly permeated by the legal dynamics of a globalised world.

Islamic law, as a scientific and normative category, is an Orientalist legal invention largely fashioned after the Western notion of positive law. One could say, following Jacques Derrida, that it is a form of conceptual and epistemological “violence”. However, one should add that oriental scholars and jurists greatly participated in this process—and not only in situations of colonial domination. It was an academic, political and practical invention. Having its roots in a nineteenth century colonial context, this notion got a sequel that has not been contradicted up until now.

Some Western scholars contested this positivist understanding of Islamic normativity. From a philological rather than a legal background, these scholars compared *fiqh* to Jewish normativity and often contrasted the French *droit* and *loi* in order to speak of Islamic normativity in terms of divine law. The notion of “Islamic law” nevertheless spread to the point that it eventually imposed itself on the majority of scholars, administrators, politicians and practitioners. Its success is largely explained by the emergence of the modern nation state.

The idea of a “discovery” rather than an “invention” of Islamic law is flawed; it was part of the rhetoric of Western scholars who wanted to make believe that their categories corresponded to an already-existing reality. From a historical point of view it was indeed a new conception of normativity within Muslim societies and therefore the creation of a scientific and political category that did not exist before. The creation of this new category must be understood in parallel to the invention of overseas customary law.

Studies in Islamic law constitute knowledge of a practical nature which used to serve, and still does serve, to govern. It is also normative knowledge in which the “ought-to-be” dominates. It is only in the last instance academic knowledge. Islamic law is a form of knowledge intimately linked to the exercise of power. It is therefore imperative to deconstruct the notion, in particular through a reconstruction of its genealogy.

# The Forbidden Orient! Endo-Exoticism and Anti-Anthropological Nationalism in the Writings of Some Contemporary Moroccan Intellectuals\*

*Zakaria Rhani*

Let me begin this essay somewhat provocatively with an irreverent comparison between two books on the same topic brought out by the same publisher at a distance of over fifty years: *Marabouts, Maroc* by Tahar Ben Jelloun<sup>1</sup> and *Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin* by Emile Dermenghem.<sup>2</sup> In addition to matter and style, I will be looking at form, title choice and how concepts are used in the two works.

It would have been more appropriate for Dermenghem to use the word “marabout”: he was writing in the early 1950s in connection with ethnographic experience in Algeria and the word was much used in the field at that time. Instead, Dermenghem chose a more general term that not only showed attentiveness to different local sensibilities (that is, the distinct countries of North Africa) but also designated the social phenomenon as a whole. As he indicated in his preface, the author meant to move beyond initial impressions of strangeness and exoticism; by contextualizing and ethnologically framing extreme cases, he would be transmitting knowledge of current realities. The poetic power of the strange, he wrote, paraphrasing Baudelaire, should not have a merely aesthetic effect but should help the reader towards an objective understanding of social realities. Ben Jelloun, on the other hand, confines the reader to an exotic world and aestheticized magic. His approach not only ignores social facts in their entangled complexity, but actually works to obscure those facts. And the definition of holiness he gave may be described as “magnified” and “purified”; for him, the hallmarks of a saint are silence, peace, tolerance. Consequently, he is a man without pretention, arrogance, pride or political ambition; a person who need not even perform miracles.<sup>3</sup>

The wonders a saint is said to work actually pertain to a primitive, sometimes archaic mentality which, when disarmed before harsh reality, attempts to upset

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs.

1 Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Marabouts, Maroc* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).

2 Emile Dermenghem, *Le culte des saints dans l'islam maghrébin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).

3 See, for example, pp. 20, 28, 32 and 35.

it by way of the supernatural. It is a sort of madness that allows for “repairing the way the mind works when caught up in deep, complex difficulties”<sup>4</sup> and thus for changing the natural, normal course of events. And these “irrational” practices are much less likely to express social, cultural, political or economic discontent than to be “pagan survivals” diametrically opposed to the spirit of Islam.<sup>5</sup> Such categorical allegations sound very much like those of an anthropologist of the colonial (and precolonial) era or an ardent defender of a certain type of Muslim orthodoxy (to put it euphemistically).

We do not need to read Dermenghem to show how incongruous Ben Jelloun's assertions about Moroccan holiness are. It suffices to roam the country's urban spaces and its marginal or remote areas and to *listen* to the people—precisely what Dermenghem did. They say that saints are human beings who live in the society and play a role in its politics, and that their temperaments vary: they may be irascible, prone to ecstasy, warlike, ascetic, scholarly, simple, visionary or millenarian. Clearly there are no grounds for asserting, as Ben Jelloun does, that magic and the sacred, myth and history, are discontinuous. Fifty years earlier, Dermenghem explained quite the opposite: that there was undeniable continuity between metaphysical and mystical conceptions of holiness and symbolic representations of it, between scholarly and popular notions of it, between myth, ritual and reality.

In fact, it makes sense that someone who has not grasped the geographical depth of saint worship cannot fully grasp its cultural girth. Ben Jelloun himself acknowledges that he never knew there were so many saints in his own country and that had it not been for the Chilean painter Claudio Bravo he would have remained, to borrow a renowned verse of al-Mutanabbi, blessed in his sad ignorance. But the problem is not so much ignorance as the cultural blindness it reflects. Ben Jelloun does not give a fig for what the people have to say. In rejecting the imaginary, the symbolic and representation, the novelist ends up *inventing* his own idea of holiness. It is not the act of representing holiness that he refuses to accept but rather a representation that “degrades” and contradicts his own representation. The saint with which he presents us is the exotic ideal of a saint: fleshless, bloodless, devoid of mystical and social contradictions and tensions.

The preceding irreverent comparison purports above all to point to a certain cultural and discursive ambivalence. Firstly, in his definition of holiness, Ben Jelloun positions himself on the side of high culture, thus echoing the stance

---

4 Ibid., p. 49.

5 Ibid., pp. 21 and 44.



of many modernist, nationalist Arab ideologues whose conception of progress leads them to underestimate popular culture and reject all anthropological approaches to society. Secondly, as provocative as my comparison may seem, it nonetheless shows how a discourse on the Orient dating from the colonial period can be more relevant and even more “post-Orientalist,” as it were, than the postcolonial ideology and sociology that condemn that discourse. Thirdly, this comparison invites us to meditate on the following psychological equations: local intellectuals may say of their own society what they forbid others to say; the self has a right to exoticism and fantasies about the self but the other has no such right with regard to *his* otherness. Let us first consider this last paradox.

### Mernissi and Her Forbidden Harems

Whereas Ben Jelloun can be granted poetic or novelistic license, it is much harder for a professional sociologist to justify similar anthropological *ecstasies*. And when it comes to Islam, Fatema Mernissi serves up the same exoticism, the same essentialism, the same abstractions, all of them indifferent to ethnographic and historical realities. She projects an image of Islam as remote from the religion it is supposed to represent as it is from the daily lives of the people who live that religion. From her first writings—namely *Beyond the Veil*<sup>6</sup>—to her more recent ones she always seems to be humming the same tired tune, full of stereotypes about Arabs and their religion, the song of an immutable Islam, incapable of cultural change.<sup>7</sup>

In *Le Harem et l'Occident*,<sup>8</sup> Mernissi continues to reproduce the same vision of a monolithic Islam, virtually identical from Morocco to Malaysia and all countries in between, including Egypt, Turkey and Mongolia. The impression is that “Muslim society” is all one; ditto for Muslim culture, history, even the Muslim psyche. Mernissi’s Muslims resemble those intrepid heroes of *The*

---

6 Fatema Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (New York: Halsted Press, 1975).

7 See also Daniel Martin Varisco’s critique of Mernissi’s essentialism, *Islam Obscured: The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 110.

8 Fatema Mernissi, *Le Harem et l'Occident* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001). This book is a loosely reproduced French version of *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001). All quotations in this analysis were translated from the French version.

*Arabian Nights* who tirelessly cross any and all geographical, cultural and linguistic barriers. And her Islam is a sort of mythified mysticism incarnated by a woman, her grandmother Yasmina, illiterate and closed up in a harem in the medieval city of Fez yet still a spring and source of wisdom in the manner of a gyrovague, being an ancient wisdom that tells of the inexhaustible virtues of wandering and traveling. Imagine the scene: in the narrow streets of a medieval city buzzing with rumours about ascetics who acquire an unheard-of amount of knowledge and have extraordinary visions due to what they are able to learn from narratives by foreigners,<sup>9</sup> an old illiterate woman locked up in an inaccessible harem—a prison—transmits rich, mystical and possibly Shi'ite teachings to her granddaughter in a sort of secret initiation process: wisdom about travel, the visionary experience, otherness, “ideological secretiveness” (*taqiyya*) and the ordeal of a Christ-like figure, the Sufi al-Hallaj (857–922), whom she just happens to know quite well! Do we not have here all the necessary ingredients for a good tale, if not a thriller?

But who is speaking when Yasmina speaks—Yasmina herself or her granddaughter Fatema? For whom and to whom does Fatema write when she writes? Like Scheherazade in *The Arabian Nights*, Mernissi seems to be narrating fantastic little stories to seduce an imaginary Shahrayar—in this case, the Western reader, who must be shaken free of his grim convictions about Oriental women. It is therefore hardly surprising that the sociologist should elaborate her representation of Oriental harems on the basis of such tales. *The Arabian Nights*, she writes, opens with a scene of betrayal: King Shahrayar discovers that his wife is having an affair with his slave Mas'ud and orders his vizier to bring him a virgin every day who will be his spouse for one night, only to be executed at dawn the next morning. It is in this context that Scheherazade is brought to the palace of the sacrificer-king. She was not forced to go; indeed, she does so against the will of her father (who is none other than the king's vizier), in the hope of saving her fellow virgins.

Thanks, then, to her “bold ingenuity” and her “mastery of the art of communication” the dire tragedy culminates in a fairy tale ending. For in addition to her gift for mediation, Scheherazade, writes Mernissi, is also an intellectual who, by refusing to identify herself with her own sensuality and voluptuousness, turns “that characteristic of herself into a powerful instrument of seduction.” It is therefore thanks exclusively to her intelligence and her “eminently cerebral power of super-strategist” that she is able to escape her fate. The real—the Oriental—Scheherazade, insists Mernissi, does not dance but *thinks*,

---

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, p. 8.

weaving her thought into tales so wondrous that Shahrayar loses all desire to have her killed.<sup>10</sup>

This female storyteller, explains Mernissi, is “avant-garde” in that she knows that to have power one must know how to cast word spells. Her erotic and occasionally pornographic tales are not mere smut; on the contrary, they carry formidable political and philosophical messages. It is not the explicit sexual lasciviousness in the tales (women’s, in this case) that the sociologist disapproves of but rather the willingness to conceal or deny their socio-political and ideological aspects.<sup>11</sup> When Scheherazade “went West” she lost all her discursive skills, becoming a frivolous airhead who only knew how to dance and writhe around lasciviously.<sup>12</sup> Scheherazade’s ideological, revolutionary, emancipatory message was suppressed in the Western version of *The Arabian Nights*. What explains this reversal? How did “Occidentals” come to forge a purely sensual and sexual “miraculously idyllic” image of the Oriental women who lived and in some cases held sway in harems?

For Mernissi, the move to dissociate “beauty” and “intelligence” represents a radical difference between East and West.<sup>13</sup> And it is this cultural split that seems to structure her representation not only of Oriental harems but also Western representations of them. As seen by Westerners, she exclaims, harems have nothing of the threatening female energy and high-stakes political games that were actually operative in them.<sup>14</sup> Westerners abjectly transformed the harem into an orgy house where men wallowed (or bathed) in limitless libidinal delight and women, enslaved and humiliated, while not even attempting to avenge themselves. This biased Western understanding derived from images created by painters and filmmakers, whom Mernissi accuses of having taken malicious pleasure in turning women into “odalisques” and “*jarya*” of easy virtue, thereby subliminally linking sensual delight and subservience.

While impugning these Occidental representations of the Oriental harem, Mernissi has curiously enough created her own Orient with its own harems, in which men are less likely to expect easy sexual pleasure than fierce resistance from women slaves and servants. To counter Western Orientalist essentialism she develops another kind of essentialism, modelled on the former and therefore not at all founded on attested historical reality but on miniatures and the

---

10 Ibid., p. 50.

11 See, for example, pp. 74, 77 and 185.

12 Ibid., p. 72.

13 Ibid., p. 99.

14 Ibid., p. 35.

fables of *The Arabian Nights*. As Mernissi would have it, those tales themselves and “Muslim artists’” reproductions of them, even when particularly fantastical, are all just so many illustrations of harem women’s formidable intractability.<sup>15</sup> Far from being naked, idle and lascivious as in Western paintings, those women were turbulent, seditious, belligerent and “fully clad,” not to say “breast-plated.”

Mernissi thus substitutes one myth for another: Oriental women were not passive and submissive as in Western representations but hyperactive, strong, wily and in some cases dominant—to such a degree that even the most powerful men, particularly Caliphs, were in great danger of being reduced to slaves by female servants who were not only “talented” and “intelligent” but also “blood-thirsty.”<sup>16</sup> Instead of being a place where the prince came in search of relaxation and entertainment, the harem in her vision resembles a battleground where danger and uncertainty were the rule, fomented by subversive women with the power to annihilate law and replace it with chaos. The author does of course cite some examples to substantiate this understanding, but they are highly particular cases whose importance she magnifies, abusively holding them up as rule and essence, incarnations of a culture. Cultured sultanas endowed with exceptional personalities, recalcitrant temptress princesses, and a female Moroccan pirate become proof of this “politics” of female rebellion that she claims consistently dominated harem society. The superlative example is Scheherazade herself, daughter of the grand vizier, storyteller, philosopher, poetess and, I am tempted to say, sociologist.

Mernissi turns Scheherazade into the quintessence of the Oriental woman living in a harem. She becomes an archetype, an ideal type who, unfortunately, effaces all other women—that is, the poor, illiterate, gentle, fatalistic, weak, submissive, consenting, stupid, passive, horny, voluptuous, sexy, sentimental ones and every other type. Scheherazade, Mernissi tells us, was no ordinary storyteller but a cultured, “intelligent,” “scholarly,” “wise,” and “refined” princess. She was exceptional and indeed unique, surpassing not only the other women and men of her time but modern women too. So be it. But then how can Scheherazade be representative of harem slaves? How many women—and here I am referring not only to cloistered women but also those who could move about freely because they belonged to privileged groups or circles—are (were) the least bit like her or have (had) the opportunity she did to live in luxury and culture?

---

15 See, for example, p. 59.

16 See, for example, pp. 41–42.

It will be remembered that Scheherazade does not dance. Whereas all the other wives before her danced for the king and were put to death, this exceptionally gifted storyteller overcomes death with words. But Mernissi seems to forget that while Scheherazade speaks, of course, she is above all “spoken.” She is the voice of the sociologist but first and foremost of the *male* writer-storytellers of *The Arabian Nights*, who used fable to recount both their own society and culture and societies and cultures they dreamed up or dreamed about. Might the Oriental Scheherazade, the storytelling one, be the voice of that absent society, just like the version of her “invented” by Westerners is the expression of an absence, a desire? It is here that the sociologist’s ambivalence is at its keenest. She seems to be playing a quite ingenuous game of cultural obstinacy, consistently claiming the opposite of what Western writers and artists represented. Mernissi undresses her heroines where Westerners covered them, covers them where Westerners stripped them, demonizes where Westerners angelicized and angelicizes where Westerners demonized. Her Oriental women are submissive yet fiercely dominant, persecuted yet murderous, naked yet armour-clad, puerile yet wise, imprisoned yet free, whores yet puritans.

Mernissi enjoys presenting us a terrible and temptress Scheherazade, but when others do so she points and cries “How could they!” “Poe’s Scheherazade,” she writes, “is so diabolical that she makes Eve look like a debutante.”<sup>17</sup> As she sees it, the American writer seems to have denatured the *dénouement* of *The Arabian Nights*, turning the happy ending into a tragic one in which Scheherazade calmly, resignedly and with good grace accepts her grim fate. Because he was entirely external to the society he described, Mernissi insinuates, Poe had neither the political intuition nor the cultural sensibility needed to understand the storyteller’s revolutionary message.

Mernissi thus does the opposite of what she claims to do: instead of universalizing the figure of Scheherazade she ethnicizes it, building the walls of her harem so high and so jealously that no eyes, even in imagination, can admire the multitude of women—and men—living there. And like her favourite caliphs, polygamous yet handsome, fine, and intelligent, only her eyes and her fantasies are allowed. She alone can see and say what she cannot observe—and only she who could believe that women in the Orient have actually broken the chains of servitude and shaken the foundations of despotism. She alone can find virtue in orgy and deception, greatness in harassment and injustice (especially when practiced by women), dignity in horniness, tragedy in lubricity, politics in pornography. Feminine lasciviousness, if uttered, is imme-

---

17 Ibid., p. 90.

diately reinterpreted by her in connection with some hypothetical political and ideological intentionality, whereas masculine lubricity—and Western erotic representations—are mere luxuriousness and eroticism or, worse still, alienation.

Let me repeat: Scheherazade does not dance. But if she had thought or desired to dance, her dance would have been—we learn with astonishment—a strong political message, a mystical ascension, an unfathomable act of transgression and a genuine training for the conquest of dignity. For in “the Oriental context,” claims Mernissi, the purpose of carnal dancing is not to please a potential viewer but to assert one’s sovereign right to an intimate and indeed narcissistic pleasure. “In this sense, Oriental dance cuts the woman-dancer off from the surrounding world, turning her inward in what tends to be a spiritual quest.”<sup>18</sup> Like the novelist Ben Jelloun, the sociologist ends up adopting the most “Orientalist,” “colonial” theme imaginable—that of pagan survivals—to defend her claims. Belly-dancing (in Morocco here) is thus understood as connected to a spirituality inherited from pre-Islamic times, the worship of ancient goddesses. The “magic-like” trances practiced today, notes Mernissi, are survivals from those forgotten times. Nonetheless, women’s solitary dancing managed to survive, above and beyond “cults around magic,” as a pastime and form of domestic entertainment.<sup>19</sup>

Can the same be said of belly-dancing in bars and luxury hotels? Or of the dividing line between belly-dancing and prostitution? Of the spiritual and political message of Oriental dancing at Moroccan weddings? In Egyptian movies?<sup>20</sup> In the partially cosmopolitan Egyptian society that film took root in, wrote Khatibi (2008), the bodies of actors and actresses initiated into film work by way of Levantine theatre in Lebanon and Syria came to delight spectators accustomed to fables of daily life and Koranic psalmody:

Women’s bodies were shown and admired in connection with two images: the film odalisque derived from exoticism and the full-fledged star. Bahiga Hafez in *Leila, Daughter of the Desert* (1937), a film she directed herself, and Mary Queeny in Youssef Chahine’s *Women without Men* (1953) are two examples of the first sort. *These were new odalisques: mobile, unveiled,*

---

18 Ibid., p. 80.

19 Ibid., pp. 80–81.

20 Surprisingly, explains Mernissi, the “self-enhancing” and “spiritual” dimension of Oriental dance is absent from Hollywood movies, which reduced that dance to a series of serpentine, occasionally perverse provocative gestures (p. 82). But is that spiritual dimension really “present” in Arab films?

*sparked into existence by the movie camera ... Dresses with low necklines appeared, bare bellies and bare legs, uncovered hair done in fashionable hairstyles, feet clad in elegant lightweight shoes and later, women holding a cigarette or wearing dark glasses. The belly dancer ... walked straight out of The Arabian Nights to entertain the anonymous spectator, now a prince, sitting in his armchair, captivated by the melodrama which corresponded to the effervescence of that monarchic era.*<sup>21</sup>

Let there be no mistake, this is not some Western author writing, scarred by the aftermath of an imperial past, projecting personal, male fantasies and corrupting the real, but rather the voice of an ardent critic of Orientalism. It was an indigenous voice that told of the nudity of the woman storyteller in *The Arabian Nights*, recalling her ineluctable fate thus: "Scheherazade's night was to be the locus of authoritarian pleasure [*jouissance*]."<sup>22</sup>

I would surely not have engaged in such a long critical account if Fatema Mernissi were not a recognized sociologist, a researcher who does fieldwork and immersion. Ingres and Poe were artists who painted (the latter in words) fantasy, dream, unreality. This is exactly what the sociologist does, but *she* claims to be describing social and historical reality. My point here has simply been to describe the workings of this misrepresentation so as to redirect us toward the real grounds of critical battle. Deconstructing Orientalism and its tendency to produce biased accounts and representations cannot spare us the work of objectively criticizing the "Orient", or rather "Orients", and their histories, cultures and societies, however painful that may be. Sentimentalist self-defence will not deconstruct Orientalist thought or return the Orient's greatness to it. On the contrary, it is only another post-Orientalist way of doing Orientalism. There is no point in countering a Western view of the Orient with a supposedly truer, more real, Eastern-made Orient that in fact amounts to an invented society and culture that are *not* those of Orientals. As Khatibi put it so well, any reading or re-reading of our Islamic Arab heritage (*turath*) or view of that past glory can only have decisive weight for Orientals if it works to deconstruct both Western logo-centrism and ethnocentrism *and* the knowledge and discourses that various Oriental societies have elaborated about themselves. This two-pronged critical process is necessary if we are to enable researchers

21 Abdelkebir Khatibi, 'Le regard de l'autre dans l'image de soi', in *Oeuvres de Abdelkebir Khatibi*, vol. III, *Essais* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2008), pp. 109–110; my italics.

22 Khatibi, 'La voix du récit', in *La blessure du nom propre* (Paris: Denoel, 1974), p. 226. On Scheherazade's nudity, see p. 241.

in those societies and countries—countries that continue to read and reread their *turath*—to attain knowledge that is less imitative and more attuned to and reflective of their real difference,<sup>23</sup> thereby transforming “documents into monuments,” as Foucault so powerfully put it.<sup>24</sup> Let us examine Khatibi’s argument in detail.

### Khatibi and His Disoriented Orient

The Moroccan author distinguished three dominant features of Orientalist discourse. First, despite its proclaimed relativism, Orientalism was first and foremost an ethnocentric way of proceeding: “Arabs” were understood to be a kind of Western classicism [*sic*] and their destiny amounted to nothing more than a metaphysical phase in Western history. The second characteristic, which followed from the first, concerned the ideological and intellectual dimension of Orientalism, which Khatibi saw as a manifestation of western theological humanism. Third, Orientalist rhetoric was marked by a positivist tendency that categorically—and paradoxically—ignored *la pensée de la différence* as theorized by critical Western philosophers and thinkers, particularly Nietzsche, Marx, Heidegger, Sartre and Blanchot.

Khatibi developed his critique of one major figure of Orientalism, Jacques Berque, whom Edward Said designated a “theorist of decolonization,” in connection with this third point. For the Moroccan sociologist, the French Islamicist was guilty of positivist perception and ethnocentric historicism: “Berque might well say he had exploded Orientalism, explaining that participant surveys would let people and things emerge of their own volition, the fact is that with him we can be sure we won’t get anywhere. Why is this? This heir to Orientalism in North Africa experimented with his epoch and his field (“the Arabs”) like a little machine that gobbles up everything in its path.”<sup>25</sup> For the French thinker, Khatibi explained, the Orient was always “fake news,” a “mere humanist exercise”; Berque’s real references were not *les penseurs de la différence*, i.e. Marx or Sartre, but *les philosophes de la lumière*—Enlightenment philosophers.

23 Khatibi, ‘double critique’, in *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoel, 1983), pp. 48–49. See also “pensée-autre,” p. 20.

24 *Maghreb pluriel*, p. 62. According to Khatibi it was crucial to “put an end to our obsession with heritage, a return to past glory, depressive nostalgia, infinite death.”

25 *Ibid.*, p. 130.



For Khatibi, Berque was a “soothsayer” who, proceeding “by suggestion” and “catchy paradoxes,” was attracted in particular to the sensual atmospheres of an imaginary Arab world. And his smooth, refined logic ultimately annihilated the Arabs. Paradoxically—“a significant paradox for an Orientalist—Jacques Berque did not like Islam; he liked pre-Islam.”<sup>26</sup> Khatibi accused Berque of having a theologically reductive view of Islam that emphasized naturalism and pagan survivals. This explained why he so ardently celebrated pre-Islamic poetry with its “strange” lyrical density—poetry that defied orthodox Islam. While accusing a certain type of Muslim “orthodoxy” (“which one?” we may well ask) of repressing pre-Islam, Khatibi paradoxically condemned Berque for having loved and celebrated that same pre-Islam. “It was a perfectly legitimate love,” he writes, “but then why did [Berque] delude himself about the object of his desire? He celebrated the *jahlia* and its poetry with so much energy and such naturalist nostalgia for its so-called pagan aspects that we would do well to lend our two ears, Islamic and pre-Islamic, when listening to him.”<sup>27</sup> This recurring distinction between Islam and pre-Islam, “orthodoxy” and “heterodoxy,” is quite surprising on the part of a sociologist. What Arab scholar, however fervent a Muslim he may be, does not like the sensual and occasionally overtly erotic poetry of Imru’ l-Qays, the poetry of ‘Antara ibn Shaddad with its celebration of honor and warrior fervor, and ‘Amr ibn Kalthum’s poetic praise of wine, love and the uncertainty of the future?

Berque was not as confused about the object of his desire as Khatibi was about his target and weapons. It is curious that for Khatibi the French Islamacist was both a “theorist” of decolonization who inspired his own analyses and socio-historical approach<sup>28</sup>—a much more formidable theorist than Frantz Fanon<sup>29</sup>—and a theorist of caprice and counterfeit. Khatibi’s ambivalence should be understood within the framework of the general aspiration to “decolonize” the social sciences in the Arab world. The main point was to promote radically critical thinking on the “ideological machine” of imperialism and ethnocentrism, to “decolonize by deconstructing the discourses operating in diverse, more or less dissembled ways to impose imperial domination.”<sup>30</sup> As mentioned, the point was to critique simultaneously on two fronts: to deconstruct Western logo-centrism and ethnocentrism and to undertake a

---

26 Ibid., pp. 141–142.

27 Ibid., p. 142.

28 Khatibi, ‘double critique’, in *Maghreb pluriel*, p. 105, n. 2.

29 Ibid., p. 119.

30 Ibid., pp. 47–48.

self-critique of Arabs' social productions about themselves, with the understanding being that the second critique derived directly from the first. In fact, this longed-for "decolonization" was never really accomplished, as Khatibi openly acknowledged:

It is true that we have not managed to decolonize our thinking. If we had, we would not only have toppled that power but asserted our difference: free, absolute subversion at the level of the mind. Instead there is something like a void, a kind of silent interval between the fact of colonization and the fact of decolonization.<sup>31</sup>

It is a well-known fact that the main motivation behind this planned sociology of decolonization was the drive for independence and development. The rise of decolonization sociology is inseparable from the nation-building process, in which priority was given to economic and political factors. In fact, the preferred intellectual focus of decolonization sociologists was the tradition/modernity antinomy, the understanding being that modernity corresponded to progress and a sharp break with the past whereas tradition was continuity and *passé-ism*, and therefore underdevelopment. This dualist perspective excluded anthropology. All questions concerning popular culture, ethnic groups, tribes, beliefs and symbolic representations (saints, rituals, myths, traditional or popular arts and crafts, etc.) were repressed and disqualified for many years. And thus "demonizing" ethnology seemed to justify idealizing sociology and developing a positivist, nationalist project for that discipline, a project that would facilitate state development projects and the building of national unity rather than fostering understanding and analysis of social complexity. This is why the writings of the colonial period were stigmatized, rejected as belonging to a past better forgotten. Anthropology was marginalized in favour of "clerical" social science done in offices,<sup>32</sup> "castrated" science<sup>33</sup> cut off from fieldwork and human beings. Anthropological and ethnographic methods were rejected in the name of the so-called "internal" approach.

---

31 Ibid., p. 48.

32 Abdellah Hammoudi, 'Construction de l'ordre et usage de la science coloniale: Robert Montagne, penseur de la tribu et de la civilisation', in François Pouillon and Daniel Rivet (eds) *La sociologie musulmane de Robert Montagne* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2000), p. 268.

33 Paul Pascon used the word in 'La sociologie rurale pour quoi faire?', *BESM: 30 ans de sociologie du Maroc*, 155–156 (1986), pp. 59–70.

### Laroui and His Anti-Anthropological Nationalism

This tendency is clearly represented and illustrated by the renowned Moroccan historian and ideologist Abdallah Laroui. In the introduction to *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*, Laroui dismissed all ethnographic approaches as “external” and “positive” and therefore guilty of failing to grasp truth because of their “arrogant pride.” In his opinion, ethnographers necessarily remained outside what they described and analysed: “They classify cultural works as objects that came out of nowhere in connection with a value scale whose source and scope they do not specify.”<sup>34</sup> The ethnographic approach only really suited societies that do not evolve or whose evolution is imperceptible, he argued; it distorted the genuine order of things for it could not account for a changing, evolving society, a society on the move. According to Laroui, one method alone was valid for studying decolonized societies: an “internal” method involving the application of “critical consciousness” and therefore implying “intrusion by the future” into the daily lives of societies aspiring to develop themselves.

In this view, ethnography was inappropriate because it referred not to the desired future but to a present and past made up of prejudices and ungrounded assumptions. The author sharply distinguished between “expressive works” and “folkloric works,” a fundamental distinction that, as he saw it, reflected the essence of Moroccan society and indeed Arab society in general. Any cultural expressions that did not aspire to be universal but instead confined themselves to the specific and regional were “folklore.” Visual arts, street theatre, popular music, storytelling, peasant songs, popular poetry and religiosity were signs of decadence, “the archaeological storage rooms of a numbed society.”<sup>35</sup> In this understanding, “folklore” was tainted with essential, congenital inferiority because it did not seek to overcome the society’s backwardness and actually obscured cultural problems.

In Laroui’s view, folklore expressed a subculture that perpetuated the inferiority of the society it claimed to represent. What really counted in his perspective was the psychology of people “living” that subculture, not its content and expression. In this sense, folklore and what it expressed were transitory, circumstantial, a stage, a phase—and an archaic one at that—that would be obliterated by the society’s development, a development in turn recognizable by the society’s degree of “bourgeois-ification”.

---

34 Abdallah Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine* (Paris: Maspero, 1967), p. 5.

35 Ibid., pp. 5 and 175.

Curiously, Laroui simultaneously disqualified absolutist colonial anthropology for ranking cultures on a scale ranging from “primitive” to “developed” and attacked ethnological “relativism” for its egalitarianism, which precluded any clear distinction between developed and backward societies.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, his model was a Western one that established a hierarchy between two distinct levels of cultural expression: written literature and “the ramblings of old women.”<sup>37</sup> The assertion underlying that model is that culture is only culture if it is self-conscious and capable of consciously expressing its social environment. In this “arrogant” and profoundly positivist vision, orality, folklore, ritual, mythology and the unconscious are relegated to a-cultural status, as it were. It is of course not at all clear how this developmentalistic, would-be modernist and modernizing ideology that ignores all the psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of human existence could possibly attain genuine understanding of the complex conditions that might lead to modernity or the cultural “resistances” likely to impede its genesis.

For certain Moroccan “modernists” modernity is a technique that can readily be imported from a society where it “works” to a sub-modern society. Having fixed development as the goal seems to justify all authoritarian, coercive intervention on the part of the nation-state and its intelligentsia.<sup>38</sup> A state that assumes the role of central player in a development and modernization process becomes a sort of transcendent being situated outside the social equation and the cultural system it in fact participates and develops in. It is as if the state and the intelligentsia surrounding it were somehow in their essence already modern! Need I point out the obvious socio-political consequence of an ideology of this sort? In the great development and modernization project, neither the corruptibility of the state and the intelligentsia nor their political and ethical legitimacy are ever questioned or analysed, though that legitimacy is grounded on little more than “tradition,” a tradition in turn based primarily on genealogy and ideological or familial clientism. We begin to glimpse how terribly wrong developmentalist ideology can go when cut off from the *ground* and individuals.

Anthropology, a science focused on what is “outside,” yielded to a nationalist ideology of progress conceived as “internal” and more capable of serving post-colonial society and imagining a future for it. This “futurist” sociology came

---

36 See also Abdallah Laroui, *Islamisme, modernisme, libéralisme: Esquisses critiques* (Casablanca: Centre Culturel Arabe, 1997).

37 Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*.

38 Laroui, *Islamisme*. See also Abdelilah Belkeziz, *Mina al-nhada ila al-hadatha* [From Renaissance to modernity] (Beirut: Markaz dirasat al-wahd al-arabiya, 2009).

to be accepted as a legitimate and legitimizing social science while its ideological discourse made it clear that the only way to have any authority—or even to exist—was to be “nationalist.” The simple fact of claiming that this science differed from and deconstructed colonial social science seemed to exempt “nationalist” intellectuals from critiquing their own practice. As Ennaji remarked, this way of proceeding enabled that ideology to attain a strong position at low cost to itself:

To mark its difference, [this ideology] claims to be fully modern and condemns all traditional features to oblivion. It does not consider for a moment how to integrate those aspects; it simply ignores their presence ... This reductive approach with its sweeping generalizations bears the seeds of a new colonial science that denies difference.<sup>39</sup>

Paradoxically then, the sociology of “decolonization” ended up prolonging at the local level such undesirable effects of colonialism as hegemony, bureaucracy, and stubborn official refusal to accept social science done in the field or focused on marginal situations. A sociological or ideological discourse powerless to move beyond the initial colonial aggression took over as the discursive authority and legitimated all sorts of *self*-colonization. The ideologists of decolonization cannot be thought of as the opposite of colonial ethnologists in the same way as his supposedly internal analyses may be thought of as the opposite of external colonial ones. As Abdellah Hammoudi has noted,<sup>40</sup> what we have here is two ways of being external: that of the colonial sociologist invested with colonial power and all the technical, racial and cultural tools of self-legitimation that go with it, and that of the postcolonial ideologue on the counter-offensive, invested with nationalist convictions and moral self-legitimation.

However, ethnological practice can attain realities that ideologues do not even know exist. Whereas ethnologists get close to people and social groups through personal contact and incessant local travel, including at the margins of society, the nationalist ideologue “plunges into parchments” “in the manner of certain clerics,”<sup>41</sup> and the only way he ever manages to approach those realities is through *ethnographic* texts. As I see it, this goes a long way to explaining

---

39 Mohamed Ennaji, ‘Une science sociale au Maroc, pour quoi faire?’ *Peuples méditerranéens* 54–55 (1991), pp. 213–220.

40 In ‘Construction de l’ordre et usage de la science coloniale: Robert Montagne, penseur de la tribu et de la civilisation’.

41 Ibid.

why nationalist ideology and sociology of decolonization have failed to bring about decolonization and development or to understand and explain the deep dynamics that structure formerly colonized societies.

In fact, de/postcolonialism should be presented not as radically different from the colonial and pre-colonial periods but critically continuous with—*and* critical of—their sociological and ethnographic productions. By “critical” I mean that they should produce a re-reading of the colonial and Orientalist heritage that is not obscured by either the anti-anthropology tendencies of developmentalist sociology or the fervour of ideological nationalism. Any critique of Orientalism (and colonialism) that neglects that will work against rather than for the liberation of individuals with particular histories living in a real society. And those individuals will thereby have been “negated” in two ways: by the Orientalists (and colonialists) who essentialized and suppressed them, and by a form of post-Orientalist (or postcolonialist) critique that also, in its way, essentializes them while “repressing”—that is, failing to be conscious of—their reality.

# Between Tolerance and Persecution: North Africans on North African Jewish History

*Jessica M. Marglin*

The history of Jews in the Islamic world is generally told in one of two ways, reflecting two ends of a historiographical spectrum that stretches between the poles of tolerance and persecution. Scholars have traced the origins of both approaches to the political circumstances in Europe and, later, Israel. Mark Cohen's analysis of the "myth of interfaith utopia" and the "neo-lachrymose" counter-myth which characterize the history of Jews under Islam has been the most influential discussion of the topic.<sup>1</sup> While studies of Jews in North Africa follow a similar oscillation between the two extremes of the historiographical spectrum, there are important differences which distinguish how Maghribis both Jewish and Muslim have written on the history of the region's Jews.<sup>2</sup> In its North African incarnation, the myth of Islamic persecution of Jews stemmed more from the influence of European writers and educators on Maghribi Jews' self-perception. The negative perceptions about Muslims and Jews current among nineteenth-century Europeans—described by many scholars as Orientalist stereotypes—shaped North Africans' understanding of their own history, including the history of Maghribi Jews. The myth of Islamic tolerance, on the other hand, developed as a counter-myth among Maghribi Jews and Muslims who wanted to debunk the lachrymose view of North African Jewish history.

It is worthwhile summarizing the historiographical evolution identified by Cohen as characteristic of Jews in the Islamic world more generally. The first generation of historians to engage in the scientific study of Jewish history (members of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school) invented what Cohen has coined the "myth of an interfaith utopia."<sup>3</sup> These scholars focused on

- 
- 1 First articulated in Mark R. Cohen, "Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-myth, and History", *Jerusalem Quarterly* 38 (1986), pp. 125–137, and later reformulated in idem, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), Chapter 1.
  - 2 For an excellent analysis of the emergence of North African Jewish history, see Colette Zytnicki, *Les Juifs du Maghreb: Naissance d'une historiographie coloniale* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011). Zytnicki does not, however, focus on North African scholars in particular, nor does she discuss scholarship by Muslims.
  - 3 Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, pp. 3–5.

medieval Spain and were particularly interested in culture and literature as evidence of Jews' successful assimilation into the broader Islamic society in which they lived—a picture which reflected their own hopes of assimilating into nineteenth-century German society.<sup>4</sup> In the twentieth century scholars further developed this approach to the history of Jews in Islamic Spain and beyond; the term “Convivencia” came to epitomize a view in which Jews flourished under the relative tolerance of their Muslim rulers and Jews and Muslims forged close social, intellectual, and cultural bonds.<sup>5</sup>

According to Cohen, historians on the persecution end of the spectrum did not gain prominence until after the Six-Day War of 1967, when Jewish scholars began to espouse what Cohen has coined a “neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history.”<sup>6</sup> Adopting what Salo Baron first termed a “lachrymose” approach to Jewish history,<sup>7</sup> these historians pushed back against what they saw as rose-tinted idealism; instead, they argued that Muslim tolerance of Jews was nothing more than a myth. These historians portrayed Jews as oppressed victims of Islamic states which were fundamentally unjust towards non-Muslims.<sup>8</sup> An important variation on this neo-lachrymose approach is that taken by a number of scholars who argue that Islam during the medieval

4 See especially Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* 5 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1949), esp. v. 3, pp. 53–54, 234–236.

5 This term was originally used in an historical context by Américo Castro in 1948: Américo Castro, *España en su historia: cristianos, moros y judíos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1948). (On this term, see Jonathan Ray, “Beyond Tolerance and Persecution: Reassessing Our Approach to Medieval ‘Convivencia,’” *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no. 2 (2005): pp. 1–3.) For more recent examples, see, e.g., Elyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain* vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973); Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002).

6 Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, pp. 9–12.

7 Salo W. Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation”, in *The Menorah Treasury: Harvest of Half a Century*, ed. Leo Schwarz (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), esp. p. 63.

8 For a general appraisal, see Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985); idem, *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 2002); Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1979); idem, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991). Norman Stillman's overview of the subject is in fact somewhat balanced, but his choice of primary sources underscores his neo-lachrymose approach; see Mark R. Cohen, “Review of Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*”, *Association for Jewish Studies Newsletter* 28 (1981).



period was fairly tolerant of Jews, but that the early modern period initiated a decline in Jews' status and began a long era of Jews' persecution under Islamic rule.<sup>9</sup>

Maghribi Jewish historians, on the other hand, adopted a neo-lachrymose approach to the history of North African Jews even before the Six Day War. The first scholarly studies of North African Jews by North Africans were penned by André Chouraqui, whose work began to appear in the 1950s (discussed in detail below). Chouraqui and the other Jewish scholars who followed his lead took an approach in many ways similar to that of Cohen's neo-lachrymists. These studies draw largely on European understandings of Jews in the Maghrib, especially as they were transmitted through French schools established for North African Jews.

European writing about Jews in pre-colonial Morocco almost uniformly adhered to a lachrymose narrative.<sup>10</sup> As Colette Zytnicki has observed, European travellers to the Maghrib adopted a set of stereotypes about Jews, including the idea that Jews were oppressed by their Muslim rulers.<sup>11</sup> This "black legend"<sup>12</sup> was particularly useful as a justification for European intervention

---

9 For an excellent analysis of the 'decline' theory in Jewish historiography, see Daniel J. Schroeter, "From Sephardi to Oriental: The 'Decline' Theory of Jewish Civilization in the Middle East and North Africa", in *The Jewish Contribution to Civilization: Reassessing an Idea*, ed. Jeremy Cohen and Richard I. Cohen (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), pp. 125–148. For proponents of the 'decline' theory, see Shlomo Dov Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: A Concise History of their Social and Cultural Relations* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005); Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). For the Ottoman case, historians generally deferred the decline of Jewish-Muslim relations until the seventeenth century, paralleling the decline in the fortunes of the Ottoman Empire generally: see, e.g., Abraham Galanté, *Turcs et Juifs: Étude historique, politique* (Istanbul: Haim, Rozio & Co., 1932); Moïse Franco, *Essai sur l'histoire des Israélites de l'empire Ottoman: depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Alliance Israélite Universelle and Lettre Sépharade, 2007); Morris S. Goodblatt, *Jewish Life in Turkey in the xvith Century, as Reflected in the Legal Writings of Samuel de Medina* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1952); Mark Epstein, *The Ottoman Jewish Communities and Their Role in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Freiburg: K. Schwarz, 1980).

10 Mohammed Kenbib, *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859–1948* (Rabat: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, 1994), Introduction: Aomar Boum, "Muslims Remember Jews in Southern Morocco: Social Memories, Dialogic Narratives, and the Collective Imagination of Jewishness" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Arizona, 2006), pp. 140–151; Zytnicki, *Les Juifs du Maghreb*, pp. 21–35.

11 Idem, *Les Juifs du Maghreb*, pp. 21–22.

12 Kenbib, *Juifs et musulmans*, p. 2.

on behalf of Jews and, eventually, to argue for the necessity of France's colonization.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, Maghribi Jews were exposed to a European understanding of Jewish history through their education. In Morocco and Tunisia, the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) was the most important intermediary in communicating European ideas to North African Jews. The AIU was founded in 1860 by a group of French Jews who had assimilated to French society yet retained a strong commitment to Judaism. These Jews decided that French Jewry, which had benefited from emancipation before any other group of European Jews, had a particular responsibility to help less fortunate Jews in other parts of the world. While also involved in political causes, the AIU focused its efforts on education in order to bring Enlightenment rationality, science, and modernity in general to the Jews of the Islamic Mediterranean. The AIU's first school opened in Tetuan, Morocco, in 1862, followed by many more schools in Morocco and Tunisia.<sup>14</sup> In Algeria, Jews attended French schools, especially after the Crémieux Decree of 1870 made them French citizens en masse.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the AIU ran supplementary Jewish educational programs there as well. The fact that Algerian Jewish institutions were also managed by the French Jewish Consistory meant that the world view of French Jews—largely similar to that of the AIU—was equally if not more influential for Algerian Jews.

The AIU's perception of Maghribi Jews (and indeed Jews in the Middle East more generally) relied on negative stereotypes about the Islamic world.<sup>16</sup> This

13 On Western diplomats' use of Jews to justify their intervention in Morocco, see especially *ibid.*, 4–6 and Chapter 3; *idem*, *Les protégés: contribution à l'histoire contemporaine du Maroc* (Rabat: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, 1996), p. 225; *idem*, "Muslim-Jewish Relations in XIXth Century Morocco: A Historical Approach", in *Cultural Studies, interdisciplinarity, and the University*, ed. Mohamed Dahbi, Mohamed Ezroua, and Lahcen Haddad (Rabat: Publications of the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, 1996), pp. 153, 159.

14 On the AIU in Morocco, see Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862–1962* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983). On the teaching of Jewish history in AIU schools, see Zytynicki, *Les Juifs du Maghreb*, pp. 255–277.

15 Steven Uran, "Crémieux Decree," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman Stillman (Leiden: Brill, 2010), vol. 1, pp. 688–690.

16 Paula Hyman in fact uses the term 'Orientalist' to describe the AIU's ideology: Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 83. See also Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 12.

attitude is related to broader trends among European Jews as they tried to define themselves as Western, often in the face of a society which perceived Jews as Orientals and applied negative stereotypes about the Orient to European Jewry. As Ivan Kalmar and Derek Penslar have observed, modernizing European Jews responded by “setting up traditional Jews as oriental, in contrast to modernized Jewry which was described as ‘Western.’”<sup>17</sup> The AIU’s ideology is a perfect example of this constructed dichotomy. Needless to say, the students who attended the AIU’s schools imbibed this worldview from a young age, and came to see Maghribi Jewry as in need of Westernization.<sup>18</sup> Their attitude towards France and its colonization of North Africa was, concomitantly, one of gratitude and appreciation for the civilizing mission extended to Jews.<sup>19</sup>

André Chouraqui, who was among the very first North African Jews to write about the history of his own people, was heavily influenced by the approaches adopted by the AIU and French imperialists.<sup>20</sup> Chouraqui was born in Ain Témouchent, Algeria, in 1917 and died in Paris in 2007.<sup>21</sup> He went to French schools throughout his life, first in Algeria and later in France, finally earning a doctorate in law in 1948 from the Université de Paris. Chouraqui’s career is a testament to his faith in the French *mission civilisatrice* and its specific Jewish iteration. His devotion to the AIU was particularly strong: Chouraqui worked

---

17 Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek Penslar, “An Introduction”, in *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek Penslar (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), p. xviii.

18 Few studies exist on the effect of AIU schools on North African Jews, but see, e.g., Susan Gilson Miller, “Gender and the Poetics of Emancipation: The Alliance Israélite Universelle in Northern Morocco, 1890–1912,” in *Franco-Arab Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon*, ed. David C. Gordon, L. Carl Brown, and Matthew Gordon (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1996); Jessica Marglin, “Modernizing Moroccan Jews: The AIU Alumni Association in Tangier, 1893–1913,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 101, no. 4 (2011), pp. 574–603.

19 Zytnicki, *Les Juifs du Maghreb*, pp. 273–277.

20 Perhaps his most classic works are: André Chouraqui, *La condition juridique de l’Israélite marocain* (Paris: Presses du livre français, 1950); idem, *Les Juifs d’Afrique du Nord: Marche vers l’Occident* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1952) (translated into English: idem, *Between East and West: A History of the Jews of North Africa* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968)); idem, *L’Alliance Israélite Universelle et la renaissance juive contemporaine, 1860–1960; cent ans d’histoire* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1965). On Chouraqui’s work generally, see Zytnicki, *Les Juifs du Maghreb*, pp. 324–339.

21 Idem, *Les Juifs du Maghreb*, pp. 325–326.

as the AIU adjunct secretary general from 1947 to 1953. He even entitled his memoir *Mon testament: le feu de l'Alliance*.<sup>22</sup>

Chouraqui was somewhat equivocal in his assessment of Jews' experience in North Africa before French colonization. Parts of his first synthetic history, tellingly entitled *Les Juifs de l'Afrique du Nord: Marche vers l'Occident* ("March towards the West"), indicate that Muslims oppressed Jews in ways far worse than anything they experienced in Europe. For instance, in the introduction he writes, "The worst miseries of the European ghetto are not comparable to the moral and material degradation that existed in the mellahs [Jewish quarters] of the foothills of the Atlas or of the remote Sahara until they were emptied with the migration of their inhabitants to Israel."<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, he argued that nowhere in North Africa did one encounter the hatred of Jews found in European anti-Semitism, and points out that Jews' experience was not worse than that of many Muslims.<sup>24</sup>

If Chouraqui avoided making definitive pronouncements about Muslims' treatment of Jews, he was very clear about the role of France and French imperialism. He depicted France's arrival in North Africa as Jews' savior, because French colonization brought both political emancipation—the end of Jewish subservience to Islamic rule—and moral emancipation—the beginning of Westernization through education:

[The French] presence meant the end of spiritual decadence and economic stagnation, the beginning of a new era in which North Africa, torn from its isolation, would be introduced once more into the great currents of modern life and would reassume its traditional position as an international crossroads. The French conquest was of even greater importance for the status of the Jews themselves. With its gospel of liberty, equality and fraternity, France was to raise them from the condition of inferiority that had been their lot under the domination of Islam.<sup>25</sup>

22 Paris: Bayard Press, 2001.

23 Chouraqui, *Between East and West*, p. xviii; cf. for the same argument, p. 39. Chouraqui spends a great deal of time explaining that the status of Jews under Islam stems directly from the life of Muḥammad and the Qur'an: *ibid.*, pp. 42–45.

24 *Idem*, *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord*, p. 63. Zytnicki emphasizes this dimension of Chouraqui's work: Zytnicki, *Les Juifs du Maghreb*, pp. 331–333.

25 Chouraqui, *Between East and West*, xviii. See also pp. 142, 242–243. For another work which emphasizes France as Jews' savior, see Doris Bensimon, *Evolution du judaïsme marocain sous le Protectorat français, 1912–1956* (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1968), pp. 34, 127–128. Although Bensimon was more qualified in her appraisal of Moroccan Jews' successful Westerniza-

According to Chouraqui's teleology, the mass exodus of Maghribi Jews from North Africa was the natural culmination of this state of affairs. "The nature of Islamic law concerning the dhimmi [...] explains to some degree the urgency of their flight from the countries where Islamic law held sway as soon as the establishment of the State of Israel made this possible."<sup>26</sup> Thus while Chouraqui refrained from painting a picture of North African Jewish history that was entirely lachrymose, he ultimately emphasized Jews' degradation under Islamic rule and their subsequent salvation by France and, later, Israel. Two scholars in particular, Shmuel Trigano and Georges Bensoussan, have echoed this approach in their more recent work on North African Jews.<sup>27</sup>

Haim Zafrani was the pioneer leading a counter-argument against the lachrymose views espoused by European observers and echoed in the work of Chouraqui. Born in 1922 in Essaouira, Morocco, Zafrani was also a student of the AIU. Zafrani's first scholarly study of Moroccan Jews was published in 1969.<sup>28</sup> His most famous synthetic work, *Mille ans de vie juive au Maroc* (later published as *Deux mille ans de vie juive au Maroc*), first appeared in 1983.<sup>29</sup> Zafrani's

---

tion, she constructed the history of Moroccan Jews as an evolution from ignorance towards enlightenment (see, e.g., p. 21). She placed particular influence on the positive influence of the AIU (23) and French colonization (123).

26 Chouraqui, *Between East and West*, p. 45.

27 For more recent work which largely echoes Chouraqui, see Shmuel Trigano, ed. *Le monde sépharade*, 2 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 2006) and idem, ed. *La fin du judaïsme en terres d'islam* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2009). Trigano was born in Algeria in 1948 and left with the vast majority of Jews in 1962, at the age of fourteen (see his personal website: www.shmuel-trigano.fr, accessed June 5, 2011). In his edited volume on Jews' mass exodus from Islamic lands after World War II, for example, he portrays European colonial powers as Jews' 'saviors' who prevented Jews from being subject to Islamic atrocities (idem, "Introduction; la face cachée du nationalisme en terres d'islam", in *La fin du judaïsme en terres d'islam*, ed. Shmuel Trigano (Paris: Editions Denoël, 2009), p. 18). As recently as 2012, Georges Bensoussan, born to a Jewish family in Morocco and a prominent scholar of anti-Semitism, published a study of Jews in the Arab world which takes its cue from lachrymose narratives like that of Chouraqui (Georges Bensoussan, *Juifs en pays arabes: Le grand déracinement, 1850-1975* (Paris: Tallandier, 2012)). In his discussion of Jews in Morocco during the nineteenth century, Bensoussan relies almost exclusively on European sources, particularly travel narratives. While Bensoussan claims to avoid arguing for either the lachrymose or rosy view of the history of Jews in Arab lands (see the 'Avant-propos'), his depiction of the nineteenth century is decidedly lachrymose.

28 Haim Zafrani, *Pédagogie juive en terre d'Islam: l'enseignement traditionnel de l'hébreu et du judaïsme au Maroc* (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1969).

29 Idem, *Mille ans de vie juive au Maroc: histoire et culture, religion et magie* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1983).

approach is undoubtedly related to his critical perception of the AIU; although Zafrani, like Chouraqui, was an AIU alumnus, he praised the value of traditional Moroccan Jewish education and lamented its demise at the hands of the AIU.<sup>30</sup>

Zafrani adopted a rosy view of the history of Jews in North Africa, emphasizing the extent to which Jews were able to flourish under Islamic rule, especially as compared to their experience in Christendom. For instance, in his discussion of the status of *dhimmi*s, Zafrani portrayed Jews' plight in a relatively positive light:

[Being a *dhimmi*] was, of course, a degrading and often precarious status, but, taken all in all, it was a liberal legal status (providing a very high degree of legal, administrative, and cultural autonomy) as compared with the arbitrary position of the Jews under Christian rule in Ashkenazi lands. Moreover, the largely secular nature of the medieval civilization of the Arabic East and West allowed *dhimmi*s ..., as peoples of the book, to feel that they were heirs to a great and honorable cultural tradition.<sup>31</sup>

Zafrani's argument that Arabic (or Islamic) civilization was "largely secular" stood at odds with Chouraqui's emphasis on the essentially religious nature of Maghribi Islamic society. The view that Moroccan Muslims could be seen as secular was also a departure from the tendency of European observers to see Islam as the force driving all aspects of North African society, and by extension as the determinant for the status of Jews. In recent years, Robert Assaraf has followed Zafrani's lead in his approach to the history of Jews in Morocco.<sup>32</sup>

30 See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 55–56, 71.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 4. There are passages in which Zafrani suggests a much darker view of Jews' experience under Muslim rule in Morocco (see, e.g., pages 10, 140). Nonetheless, the tone of the book emphasizes the relative security Jews experienced—especially when contrasted to Chouraqui's work.

32 See especially Robert Assaraf, *Une certaine histoire des juifs du Maroc, 1860–1999* (Paris: Jean-Claude Gawsewitch Editeur, 2005). See also: *idem*, *Mohammed v et les juifs du Maroc à l'Époque de Vichy* (Paris: Plon, 1997); *idem*, *Elements de l'histoire des juifs de Fès: de 808 à nos jours* (Rabat: Editions et impressions Bouregreg, 2009); *idem*, *Elements de l'histoire des juifs de Marrakech* (Rabat: Centre de recherche sur les juifs du Maroc, 2009). Assaraf, like Zafrani, stresses that despite periods of upheaval, Jews generally lived in security under Moroccan Muslim rule (see, e.g., *idem*, *Histoire des juifs du Maroc*, pp. 19–22, 75, 109, 17).

Yet the most important historiography on North African Jews to emerge in opposition to the lachrymose narrative has come from Moroccan Muslim historians.<sup>33</sup> In the case of Morocco, the myth of interfaith utopia (as described by Cohen) is usually more subtle than a direct assertion that Jews were always well-treated under Islamic rule. Nonetheless, a rose-tinted historiography is evident in the view advocated by many Moroccan Muslim scholars that Jews and Muslims (and by extension, Jews and the Makhzan) generally got along before their good relations were ruined by Western powers. Starting in the 1980s, a generation of historians began to draw extensively from the Moroccan state archives to write the history of Jews in Morocco.<sup>34</sup> These scholars focus largely on the role of the state, in part because of the nature of the archives (which consist mainly of official correspondence). They adopt a narrative in which Western interference—which they see as beginning in the nineteenth century and culminating in colonization—was largely to blame for dealing the death blow to the harmonious coexistence of Jews and Muslims.<sup>35</sup> Such an interpretation fits well with a nationalist narrative that pinpoints Western imperialism as the source of Morocco's troubles. It also stems from post-colonial Morocco's uniquely positive relationship with its Jewish minority. The Moroccan government has emphasized that Jews are a welcome part of Moroccan society, even recognizing the "Hebraic" contribution to Morocco in the

33 Concerning Morocco and North Africa more broadly, many Maghribi historians are reacting to the prevalence of narratives which emphasize the oppression and degradation of Jews, narratives which originated with travel accounts of Europeans starting in the seventeenth century: see Zytnicki, *Les Juifs du Maghreb*, pp. 25–35.

34 See especially Germain Ayache, "La recherche au Maroc sur l'histoire du judaïsme marocain," in *Identité et dialogue: Juifs du Maroc* (Paris: La pensée sauvage, 1980), pp. 34–35, where Ayache both calls for more researchers to use Moroccan archives in studying the history of Jews in Morocco and asserts that doing so will present a counter-narrative to the neo-lachrymose histories of Moroccan Jews.

35 See esp. Kenbib, *Juifs et musulmans*; idem, "Muslim-Jewish Relations"; 'Umar Afa, *Tārīkh al-Maghrib al-Mu'āsir: Dirāsāt fī al-mašādīr wa-'l-mujtama' wa-'l-iqtisād* (Casablanca: Maṭba'at al-najāh al-jadīda, 2002), pp. 189–192; 'Abdallāh Laghmā'id, "Jamā'āt yahūd Sūs: al-Majāl wa-'l-tamaththulāt al-ijtimā'iya wa-'l-siyāsiya, 1860–1960" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Université Mohammed v, 2002), e.g. pp. 4–6, 128; Khalid Ben Srhīr, *Britain and Morocco during the Embassy of John Drummond Hay, 1845–1886* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), pp. 158–166; Aḥmad Shahlān, *Al-Yahūd al-Maghāribā: min manbit al-uṣūl ilā riyaḥ al-furqa: qirā'ah fī al-mawrūth wa-'l-aḥdāth* (Rabat: Dār Abī Raqrāq lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-'l-Nashr, 2009), pp. 82–89. For a similar argument concerning Egyptian Jews, see, Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

constitution passed in 2011.<sup>36</sup> This Moroccan historiography is quite distinct from that of Arab authors writing in the Mashriq who largely blame Zionism for disrupting the good relations among Jews and Muslims. Nor do Moroccan Muslim historians incorporate anti-Semitic stereotypes into their scholarship.<sup>37</sup> The very fact that the historiography of Jews in Morocco has been largely shaped by the significant contributions of Muslim scholars distinguishes it from that of Jews in any other part of the Islamic world; nowhere else in North Africa or the Middle East have Muslims played such an important role in writing Jewish history.

Ultimately, however, the lachrymose and rosy views of North African Jewish history have a similar effect on historical methodology. Both share a focus on how Jews were treated by Muslims, and thus seek to answer the question of whether or not Jews were victims of Islamic rule. On the one hand, seeing Jews only as victims obscures any agency that Jews had by reducing them to objects of oppression. On the other, asserting that Jews and Muslims generally “got along” ignores the real religious and social inequalities inherent in Islamic society and shifts the emphasis of historical analysis to the problems created by Western imperialism rather than the internal history of Islamic societies.

Instead, it is time to set aside this historiographical spectrum entirely and move away from the question of “was it good for the Jews?”<sup>38</sup> Rather than asking how Jews were *treated*, a more fruitful direction would be to understand the ways in which they interacted with Muslims on a quotidian basis. Such an approach would view Jews as individuals with agency who made strategic choices about how they participated in Islamic society, rather than seeing Jews either as passive victims of Islamic oppression or as passively benefiting from Islamic tolerance. Perhaps most importantly, such a framework allows scholars to move beyond narratives of tolerance or oppression to a more nuanced and, ultimately, a more interesting history of Maghribi Jews and of Jews in the Islamic world more broadly.

---

36 See the ‘Preamble’, p. 2. The full text can be found at [http://www.sgg.gov.ma/Portals/o/constitution/constitution\\_2011\\_Fr.pdf](http://www.sgg.gov.ma/Portals/o/constitution/constitution_2011_Fr.pdf).

37 On this, see Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, pp. 6–8.

38 Jonathan Ray makes a similar suggestion, though he proposes a solution based on understanding medieval Jews’ attitudes towards Convivencia and a focus on individual, rather than group, identity: Ray, “Beyond Tolerance and Persecution,” p. 4.



# “It is Good to Know Something of Various Peoples’ Ways of Life”\*

*Olivier Herrenschmidt*

It is good to know something of various peoples’ ways of life so that we may judge our own more soundly and not think—as those who have seen nothing of the world often do—that every departure from *our* way of life is ridiculous and irrational ... The greatest benefit I extracted from [my] observations was their showing me many things which, although seeming wild and ridiculous to us, are nevertheless commonly accepted in other great nations; which taught me not to believe too firmly anything I had been convinced of only by example and custom

DESCARTES, *Discourse on Method*<sup>1</sup>



Postcolonial ideology (an “avatar” of postmodernism) is still alive and well in the thinking of many Indian and Western researchers in anthropology, history and Sanskrit studies, whether the former reside in India or are part of the American academic establishment, and Edward Said and his “Orientalism” continue to be the backdrop for that approach.<sup>2</sup>

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs. My thanks to Charles Macdonald for his comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this text.

1 René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One’s Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. Jonathan Bennett; [www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/descdisc.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/descdisc.pdf).

2 A. Raghuramaraju wrote that “in an important sense, Said is very central to postcolonial discourse” but “unlike many postcolonial thinkers” he failed to recognize “the internal tensions within the west, or the internal project of modernity”: “It is necessary to preface our discussion of what the west did through colonialism to non-Western societies with the question ‘What did Western modernity do to its own pre-modern societies?’”. The author cites the passage by Descartes that I have used as my title and epigraph to show that the “other” as constructed by postcolonialist thinkers was only of marginal interest for Descartes, whose tone was “very

In Hyderabad in December 2001, in the process of trying to get in touch with an Indian professor who is a specialist on the *Dalits* (former "Untouchables") and a determined activist, I found myself speaking with a female professor close to him who was quite well-known in radical circles. I was doing an ethnographic study on lower castes in village life, and in 1998 I had taken part in a seminar in India on Ambedkar.<sup>3</sup> I therefore believed that the two of us would be on common, friendly ground. I was wrong. She dismissed several of the female researchers I mentioned with the accusation that they were "former Stalinists", then dismissed my own research on low-caste Hindu Fishers<sup>4</sup> with a remark as absurd as it was irrefutable: "Who says they're Hindus?" Her point was that *I* had simply assumed they were. Then came the ultimate condemnation: "You're nothing but a Western leftist with left universalism." At that point, the conflict between us became scientifically, politically and ideologically serious. For of course her negation of universalism (a term which does not admit of adjectival qualification) necessarily called to the mind of this seasoned Western leftist the assertion that science had no right to be if it was not proletarian.

Back in France I organized a two-year seminar on postcolonialism and its supporters and detractors for ethnology students at my university (Paris 10-Nanterre).<sup>5</sup> I did so because it was obvious that ideological critique of this

---

sharp when criticizing the older beliefs and practices of his 'own' and soft when referring to other societies and their 'customs.'" For Descartes and, later, for Kant, "modernity's other is the pre-modern west" (A. Raghuramaraju, 'Internal Project of Modernity and Post-colonialism', *Economic and Political Weekly* 40/39 (Sept. 24, 2005), pp. 4214–4218).

- 3 Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar (1891–1986) was a great figure of twentieth-century Indian political history. Born into the Mahar "Untouchable" caste of Maharashtra State (at the time part of the Bombay Presidency), Ambedkar did a doctoral degree in economics in the United States and another in law in England. All his life he defended the Untouchables and was a determined opponent of Ghandi's policy towards them. As an elected member of the Constituent Assembly he played a decisive role in drafting the constitution of the Union of India. Two months before his death he converted to Buddhism (which he had been thinking of doing for twenty years), and he was followed in so doing on the same day by 300,000 Mahars and a few former Untouchables of other castes. Ambedkar's remarkable sociological analysis of Hindu society is not granted enough importance by Indianists; see my 'Ambedkar and the Hindu Social Order' in S. Jondhale and J. Beltz (eds), *Reconstructing the World: Dr. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 37–48.
- 4 I have followed the convention of capitalizing caste names that refer to hereditary occupational specializations: Fishers, Barbers, Washermen, Florists, etc.
- 5 A critical bibliography: Richard M. Eaton, '(Re)imag(in)ing Otherness: A Postmortem for the Postmodern in India', *Journal of World History* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 57–78; Bruce Kapferer, 'Star Wars: About Anthropology, Culture and Globalization', *Journal of the Finnish Anthro-*

sort could only disqualify me—and all Western researchers—and brand my research illegitimate, as it sought to ban any research that was not first and foremost a militant act by an individual member of a community, with the understanding that such persons alone could legitimately claim to speak the truth of that community. The front door of ethnoscience had been flung open and science reduced to one form of local knowledge among others,<sup>6</sup> and Enlightenment philosophy to a mere discourse for legitimizing Western colonization of the world. I was profoundly hurt by this move to “essentialize” and lump all Western research together, as it denied any possibility for Western history or Western researchers to break with colonial ideology and practice. I dared think that the history of France, and my own story, were not that simple.

The accusations that Gananath Obeyesekere, Professor of anthropology at Princeton at the time, levelled against Marshall Sahlins for his attempt to understand and explain why “the people of Hawaii took Captain Cook for their own god Lono when he visited the islands in 1778 and 1779” (Sahlins 1982, p. 73)<sup>7</sup> are a perfect example of this move to disqualify Western researchers. In 1992 Obeyesekere published a long refutation of Sahlins’ argument (for which he was awarded a prize by the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies), specifying his reasons thus: “To put it bluntly, I doubt that the natives created

---

*ological Society* 26, no. 3 (2001), pp. 2–29; Meera Nanda, “Breaking the Spell of Dharma: A Case for Indian Enlightenment,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 36/27 (July 7, 2001), pp. 2551–2556 (republished in *Breaking the Spell of Dharma and Other Essays* [New Delhi: Three Essays Press, 2002])—S. Anand, who publishes books on the Dalits, analyzed this last article in another work by Meera Nanda, published along with an interview with her in 2003 (Navayana, Pondicherry); Nico Wilterdink, “The sociogenesis of postmodernism,” *European Journal of Sociology* vol. 43 no. 2 (2000), pp. 190–216.

- 6 The notion of local knowledge knocks modern science down to the level of popular knowledge, though this was not the intention of postmoderns, for whom the notion of “ethnoscience” raises *popular knowledge* to the same level as *modern science*. For India, this undertaking led to granting renewed value and emphasis to “Vedic science.” On this question, see Meera Nanda’s critique (ch. 5) of the chapter entitled ‘Equality of all “ethnosciences”’ (ch. 4) in *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodernism, Science and Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).
- 7 The first of Sahlins’ texts on this question was ‘L’apothéose du capitaine Cook’ in M. Izard and P. Smith (eds), *La fonction symbolique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 307–343 (English translation by John Leavitt in *Between Belief and Transgression* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982]); Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Marshall Sahlins, *How “Natives” Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Kapferer’s “Star Wars” (see n. 5, above) starts from this dispute.

their European God; the Europeans created him for them" (1992, p. 3). Sahlins answered with another long book in 1995. I am not interested here in Captain Cook's real fate but in the terms Obeyesekere used to defend his authority. He explains in the opening pages that it was not by chance that he had taken an interest in the fate of Captain Cook at that time: he had written his book "in a context of terror," world terror and the terror specific to his native country Sri Lanka, where no one—neither Sinhalese nor Tamils, Buddhists nor Hindus—could escape the "culture of terror" (pp. xv–xvi). It was in this context and as a Sri Lankan caught in "existential predicaments" that he felt outraged by Sahlins' claims about the "deifying" of Cook: "Why so? Naturally my mind went back to my Sri Lankan and South Asian experience. I could not think of any parallel example in the long history of contact between foreigners and Sri Lankans, or, for that matter, Indians" (p. 8). In sum, his own personal history and the fact that he himself was "a native," i.e., someone who had been colonized—a meaning that justified identifying a twentieth-century Sri Lankan with eighteenth-century Polynesians, "who are like me in a sense" (p. 21)—enabled him to understand "real-life natives'" ways of thinking better than anyone else. No "outsider-anthropologist" could claim understanding such as his (p. 22).

The following passage from Sahlins' reply seemed to me then, and still seems, particularly relevant: "The inverted ethnocentrism has to end in anti-anthropology. Obeyesekere asserts that a common practical rationality [a property of the human species, including Hawaiians] is what allows him 'to talk of the other culture in human terms.' Since he opposes this rationality to cultural particularity [which Obeyesekere denies, contrary to Sahlins], the contention here is a pure negation of anthropological knowledge" (1995, p. 151). Obeyesekere did not conceal the fact that his book was an ideological response to a vision of "natives" that he considered equally ideological. As far as he was concerned, all research expressed an ideological stance; for him there were simply good and bad ideologies, just as for the female Indian researcher there were bourgeois and proletarian types of science.

Obeyesekere's approach makes it quite clear how arguments came to be amassed to discredit all social sciences—not only anthropology but also history, Indian studies, etc.—on the basis of Western practice of them.

Initially the point was to discredit study of differences between human societies and assert the unity of the human species; that is, to emphasize resemblances. This, of course, amounts to absolute disqualification of the social sciences, particularly anthropology as Mauss sought to define it.<sup>8</sup> Jean-Paul

---

8 "Social phenomena are not permanent and universal; on the contrary, they vary from one

Sartre offers a good example of generous but extremely stupid humanism in his 1964 foreword to a book of photographs of China by Henri Cartier-Bresson.<sup>9</sup> Sartre thanked the photographer for showing us “disconcerting Chinese, most of whom don’t look at all Chinese enough ... What remains are human beings who resemble each other *as human beings*” (ibid., p. 9; italics in the original). Cartier-Bresson, explained Sartre, had gotten beyond characteristic tourist and colonialist interest in the picturesque; he had rejected “the aristocratic pleasure of counting separations: ‘I have my hair cut, he braids his; I use a fork, he uses sticks’” (ibid., p. 7). Sartre had a good excuse: the war in Indochina had come to an end in July of that year; the war in Algeria had begun in November. At the time his text expressed militant opposition to French colonialism and the French colonial spirit, and his journal *Les Temps modernes* was a crucial player in the anti-colonial struggle. It is worth mentioning here Simone de Beauvoir’s enthusiastic review of Lévi-Strauss’s *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* in the same journal.<sup>10</sup> Clearly she was interested neither in the study of “differences” nor in the study of the meaning that differences have for actors—that is, neither *ethnographie* nor *ethnologie*—but rather in *anthropologie*: the fact that “even as the author offers a detailed discussion of the matrimonial system of the Murngin or the Kachin, he is working to penetrate the mystery of society in its entirety—the very mystery of man” (1949, p. 944). Here we have the good old hierarchical opposition between ethnography, that dull occupation of field study drudges where the point is meticulous description of difference, and anthropology, the noble undertaking of philosophical thinkers concerned to establish and maintain the universal—a hierarchy particularly prized in France.<sup>11</sup>

---

society to another and across periods within a given society” (Marcel Mauss, *Œuvres 2: Représentations collectives et diversité des civilisations* [Paris: Minuit, 1969], p. 205). In his 1908 review of Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie*, Mauss criticized Wundt for seeking to “explain history directly in terms of individual psychology and the general faculties of human consciousness”: for Wundt, wrote Mauss, “what is social is simply what is human.” This critique echoes what he had written in 1906 with Henri Hubert: “We differ from English anthropologists and German psychologists. They go straight for similarities, seeking the human and the shared—the ordinary—everywhere” (“Introduction à l’analyse de quelques phénomènes religieux,” *Œuvres 1: Les fonctions sociales du sacré* [Paris: Minuit, 1968], p. 38).

9 In *D’une Chine à l’autre* (Paris: Delpire, 1954); Sartre’s text was republished in *Situations v* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

10 *Les Temps modernes* 49 (Nov. 1949), pp. 943–949. Only a few months earlier, in the same journal, Lévi-Strauss had published ‘Le sorcier et sa magie’ (41 [March 1949]).

11 See Charles Macdonald, ‘L’anthropologie sociale en France, dans quel état?’ *Ethnologie*

We see that mistrust of, if not outright refusal to accept, study of difference—a refusal made in the name of political activism—has not been confined to “postmoderns” or “postcolonials.” But Sartre and his journal never anathematized anthropologists or their profession; indeed, several anthropologists were invited to write for *Les Temps modernes*. It did not seem strange that a man like Jean Pouillon, intellectually close to Sartre and indeed a close friend of his (Pouillon signed the September 6, 1960 *Manifeste des 121* claiming the right for French draftees not to serve in the Algerian war) should “convert” to anthropology late in his career and work closely with Lévi-Strauss, becoming editor-in-chief of the journal *L’Homme* while maintaining a strong relationship with Sartre.<sup>12</sup> In those times, when the colonies were up in arms and struggling to obtain independence, political militants occasionally knew how to make allowances for the scientific seriousness of field study and intellectual reflection on the meaning of the collected material, even though ethnographic procedure may have occasionally appeared suspect to them.

Later it became very effective to accuse the social sciences of wanting to “categorize,” label and pigeonhole societies and humans, to rigidify them into a being that was in fact merely the anthropologist’s own discourse—the discourse of the dominant, that is—with all the anthropologist’s negative ulterior motives, principle among which was the move to essentialize the other.<sup>13</sup> Surely

---

*française* 38, no. 4 (2008), pp. 617–625; also my ‘Robert Hertz Lecture’ delivered to the Association Pour la Recherche en Anthropologie Sociale (APRAS) on June 10, 2010 (<http://www.mae.u-paris10.fr/apras/>).

12 Jean Pouillon (1916–2002) was editor-in-chief of both *Les Temps modernes* and *L’Homme* from their respective foundings (1945 and 1960); he remained at the latter until 1996. Pouillon did his first field studies relatively late, in Chad in 1958. See the special issue of *L’Homme* devoted to him (no. 143 [July-Sept 1997]) and the journal’s obituary for him (no. 164 [Oct-Dec 2002]).

13 This is very different from E.R. Leach’s famous accusation in the first chapter of *Rethinking Anthropology* (London: The Athlone Press, 1961; quoted from the paperback edition, *Monographs on Social Anthropology* 22 [London: London School of Economics, 1966]) against “anthropological butterfly collectors,” disciples of Radcliffe-Brown who saw themselves as naturalists, “typology-makers,” taxonomists. At the time he approved of Lévi-Strauss, and of Malinowski: “Instead of comparison, let us have generalization; instead of butterfly-collecting let us have inspired guesswork.” This is hardly a systematic rejection of comparison or field study, which for Leach remained “the essential core of social anthropology,” a discipline which of course required the work of describing and naming. What Leach disapproved of in his colleagues was that they had given up on all “comparative generalizations” and intellectual audacity and now wrote only “impeccably detailed

this was what provoked the female Indian researcher's accusation in the form of a question regarding the Fishers I was working on: "Who says they're Hindus?" What she and others would have liked to do was to "think without categorizing."

To make it clear just what a problem ethnographic field studies and the work of writing them up (the point of the latter exercise being to understand what a society is) have been for leftist humanists<sup>14</sup>—even before the postcolonial attack on them—let me return to a brief text by Jean-Loup Amselle published in the French left-wing daily *Libération* (April 24, 1990) and entitled "Can we think without categorizing?" Amselle denounced as racist the ascribing of identity, claiming it stems from the "language of community." The language of community—defined by Sartre, whom Amselle quotes, as "capturing an aggregate of individuals in the net of a group conceived as a body"—is for him "a major feature of the sociological tradition." The "commonplace label of 'community' that gets slapped onto primitive societies or minorities (has been) a key feature of French sociology since Durkheim"; as if, for French sociology, only "members of the majority ethnic group had a right to stand up as individuals unconfined to any community-determined identity." Against this "disputatious fragmenting of thought," Amselle wrote, we must "defend the individual's right to define himself or herself as he or she wishes"—as, for example, a Jew, a Zionist, an atheist, or something else. "Such self-identification is strictly personal and private," Amselle continued: "the right to be different holds for individuals and must not allow anyone else to ascribe collective difference or stigmatize by doing so."

I see a great deal of confusion and lack of discernment in this slip from denouncing racist insults to insinuating that Durkheimian sociology is responsible for them. I am not particularly concerned to defend Durkheimian sociology, and in any case it is clear that Amselle's accusation is aimed at all sociology. I sense here the same suspicion/accusation underlying the question "Who

---

historical ethnographies of particular people." Some years later, in *L'unité de l'homme et autres essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980) he was still clearly devoted to the project of understanding human societies and, along with many of us still today, it seemed to him that what needed to be studied was "the dialectical relationship between 1) the unity of man as a species [and] 2) the non-unity of man as a social being."

- 14 They raise even more serious problems for authoritarian regimes, who are not likely to look kindly on anyone, especially not foreigners, who often bring to light their contradictions, profound inequalities and forms of exploitation—precisely what anthropologists often do.

says they're Hindus?" Indian law knows how to distinguish: calling a former "Untouchable" by his/her caste name incurs harsh legal sanctions now.<sup>15</sup> These people are registered under their caste names as "Scheduled Castes"; certain public service jobs and slots in higher education are officially "reserved" for them, and each caste has its own political organization. Still, in my daily relations with Mâlas and Mâdigas I encounter no problems using those caste names to differentiate them from each other and ask them what is going on with them. And Fishers who are no longer Hindu because they have converted to Christianity know very well how to say that about themselves while remaining fully-fledged members of their caste. The reason I can call them Mâlas or Mâdigas or Fishers is precisely because they recognize themselves and are recognized as such by their neighbors, the administration, etc. In other words, they classify themselves by defining themselves as Fredrik Barth defined an "ethnic group": any social group that "has a membership which identifies itself and is identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order."<sup>16</sup> The only way individuals can *identify themselves* is by *identifying with* a pre-constituted "we."<sup>17</sup> And if a "stigma" is attached to that identity, the anthropologist is not to blame for it; it is part of the overall society and the social relations obtaining between that society's "communities." Let me close this part of the discussion by asking what Amselle makes of all those primitive societies that began classifying well before we did and made it a fundamental intellectual and social activity, as Mauss and Durkheim showed in their pathbreaking article, "De quelques formes primitives de classification"?<sup>18</sup>

From here we arrive imperceptibly at what we think we have learned from Clifford Geertz; namely, that all discourses on people and human societies are works of fiction produced exclusively by the researcher's own subjectivity. This means there is absolutely no value to anything researchers might report of their field experience or archive study (for here anthropology and history are

---

15 As imposed by the law of 1989, "The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act."

16 Frederik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1989), p. 10.

17 "Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves" (*ibid.*). For Barth this is the "critical feature" of ethnic groups.

18 Marcel Mauss and Emile Durkheim, 'De quelques formes primitives de classification: Contribution à l'étude des représentations collectives' (1903), *Œuvres* 2, pp. 13–89; published in English under the title *Primitive Classification*, trans. Rodney Needham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).



in the same boat). The only possible conclusion is that there is no longer any justification for field or archive study at all.<sup>19</sup>

And so we come full circle back to Obeyesekere's argument: Minorities can only be understood by their own members.<sup>20</sup> Westerners, Europeans and whites should study themselves and leave minorities living among them or elsewhere out of the picture. Taken to its logical extreme, if the "Nation" is only a collection of minorities forced to live together (in France, that collection would encompass Basques, Bretons, Auvergnats, Alsatians, and others), then Westerners are out of a job and a profession.

Johannes Bronkhorst, an eminent Indianist at the University of Lausanne, has directly experienced this rejection of external perspectives—all such perspectives being understood as quintessentially colonial—in his field of Sanskrit studies. Bronkhorst criticized the claim made by Brahmanical pandits that they were "linked to the authors of the texts they study through an unbroken tradition" of hundreds and even thousands of years that would somehow endow them with a kind of competence that those whom they call modern researchers—that is, non-Brahmins and above all Westerners—could never attain. Bronkhorst asks: "Is there place for modern scholarship in the study of Indian thought? Are modern scholars not doomed to be at best pale copies of the traditional scholars, whom they cannot but try to imitate?"<sup>21</sup> There are many such examples of indigenous refusal to accept any external gaze. Speaking at an international conference of Philippine studies in June 2004 Charles Macdonald warned against such "epistemological nationalism," recalling that science necessarily operates at a general level.<sup>22</sup> Was Aristotle's knowledge mere "local knowledge"?

So where do we stand now? Nothing that social science does—describing social realities as different from each other, classifying, organizing, naming and consequently comparing them—is recognized as legitimate in itself any longer. That means there is nothing left but ideology. But ideology is infinitely more

---

19 Richard Eaton has observed that in the 1980s and '90s archival research decreased considerably. Correlatively, and predictably, the quantity of research on pre-British India fell.

20 This is precisely how the species is defined: same reproduces same.

21 "Traditional and modern Sanskrit scholarship: How do they relate to each other?" in Axel Michaels (ed.), *The Pandit: Traditional Scholarship in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), p. 167. A few years earlier another eminent Sanskrit scholar confided a similar feeling to me: "The Pandits could no longer bear having Westerners comment on their Hindu philosophers."

22 "What is the use of area studies?" *IAS* [International Institute for Asian Studies] *Newsletter* 35, nos. 1–4 (Nov. 2004).

powerful when used by censors than by researchers who have been disqualified. Since all sociology has been rejected, together with any perceptions of a social group that do not come from the group's own members, it is hardly surprising that sociology should turn back on its censors. Since the aim of that discipline is no longer recognized as valid, it has become impossible to hear what it tells us of the dangers of "spontaneous sociology," to understand that "immediate knowledge," like "transparency," is an illusion or that "for sociologists, being familiar with a given social world is the quintessential epistemological impediment."<sup>23</sup> Consequently, there is an absolute refusal to admit of epistemological breaks—which are an absolute condition of scientific research.

Against such radical ideological stances, where the aim is to make it impossible for researchers (whose history and culture have been declared mutually incompatible substances in a world reduced over the centuries to the political and economic domination and exploitation of the many by the few) to work, we owe it to ourselves to reaffirm the possibility—and necessity—of doing research that is open to all, research that does not renounce the modest scientific aim of understanding something about human societies. We must hold fast to ethnography and anthropology, though it will surely become increasingly difficult to practice them intelligently. The hostility encountered in a considerable part of our "postcolonial" world is compounded by the governmental policies and orientations of many states, which now only subsidize "useful" research; that is, research steered from on high and preferably focused on the researcher's home society. Research whose goals are defined by the scientific or scholarly community itself, where researchers are free to work as they choose, subject only to the methodological and ethical rules of the profession, most of them implicit, will in all likelihood soon be no more. Our mistake was to believe that a certain understanding of scientific research could be taken for granted and that everyone, regardless of where he or she came from, would, after some reflection, categorically adopt the methodological and epistemological rules that are the condition of all scientific research. Our mistake was to assume that each researcher would remain free to ask questions about himself or herself and about others from his or her own historical and sociological location and position.

For my part, I will continue to try on the basis of my limited field experience to understand the workings of the society I have been interested in for such

---

23 A direct reference (p. 35) to what every young social science researcher should still be using as a textbook: P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Chamboredon and J.-C. Passeron, *Le métier de sociologue* (Paris: Mouton-Bordas, 1968).

a long time, how those who compose it live and think, in the hope that this may also help me understand something of the great nation called the Union of India. I know full well, following Max Weber, that “we cannot go beyond understanding what the divine means for this or that system [*Ordnung*] or within this or that system.”<sup>24</sup> I would be happy enough if I could one day attain some understanding of what “the divine”—or anything else for that matter—means for the *Hindu* Fishers I study.

Let me close on a more optimistic note, recalling how A.K. Ramanujan, a southern Indian Brahmin, poet, linguist and philosopher, who died in 1993, cleverly and humorously led us to compare two profoundly different “civilizations”—so different that the difference provoked mutual incomprehension and irritation—using concepts drawn from extremely modern Western thinking that are actually not at all foreign to Hindu philosophy.<sup>25</sup> The reason his thinking seems so relevant (and hardly confined to questions of Sanskrit grammar) is surely that, as Louis Renou put it, “to grasp Indian thought one must first think like a grammarian.”<sup>26</sup> Citing Chomsky’s distinction between “context-sensitive” and “context-free” rules, Ramanujan affirmed that the latter characterized Western thought and the former Hindu thought.<sup>27</sup> The *Laws of Manu*, which he cites several times, are obviously a rich anthology of “context-sensitive” (social and moral) rules. On the Western side, the best, most concise illustration of this opposition lies in Hegel’s well-known statement, quoted by Ramanujan, that “While we say, ‘Bravery is a virtue’, the Hindoos say, on the contrary, ‘Bravery is a virtue of the Cshatriyas’.”<sup>28</sup> Ramanujan concluded his

24 See Max Weber, *The Vocation Essays: Politics as a Vocation; Science as a Vocation*, trans. Rodney Livingston (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), p. 23; [http://books.google.fr/books/about/The\\_Vocation\\_Lectures.html?id=AHpXbQ6KFDgC&redir\\_esc=y](http://books.google.fr/books/about/The_Vocation_Lectures.html?id=AHpXbQ6KFDgC&redir_esc=y).

25 In an article that seems to have been initially published in French: ‘Existe-t-il une manière indienne de penser?’ *Cahiers Confrontation* 13 (Spring 1985), pp. 59–75; published in English under the title ‘Is there an Indian way of thinking?’ *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 23, no. 1 (Jan. 1989), pp. 41–58; republished in *India Through Hindu Categories*, ed. Marriott McKim (New Delhi/London: Newbury Park Sage Publications, 1990).

26 As Fritz Staal recalled in ‘Euclid and Panini’, in *Universals: Studies in Indian Logic and Linguistics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 158; first version published in 1965. In this work, cited by Ramanujan, Staal claimed that the grammarian Panini was to Indian thought what Euclid was to European thought (*ibid.*).

27 See Staal, ‘Context-Sensitive Rules in Panini’ (1988), pp. 171–180.

28 Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. The reference here is to normative Brahmanical treatises, of which the *Laws of Manu* are the best known. According to those texts, the model of the ideal society consists of four hierarchically ranked states or orders (*varna*), each of

article with a grammarian's proposal on what we call modernization and what could be understood in India "as a movement from the context-sensitive to the context-free in all realms: an erosion of contexts, at least in principle." For example, "the Indian constitution made the contexts of birth, region, sex and creed irrelevant, overthrowing Manu, though the battle is joined again and again" (Ramanujan 1990, p. 55).<sup>29</sup>

All of this brings us back to comparative research, which is what enables us to understand and learn about each other above and beyond resentments and anathema. This seems fully compatible with the following claim by Max Weber, in which "Chinese" could be replaced by "Westerner", or any other human being:

It has been and remains true that a systematically correct scientific proof in the social sciences, if it is to achieve its purpose, must be acknowledged as correct even by a Chinese—or—more precisely stated—it must constantly *strive* to attain this goal ... Furthermore, the successful *logical* analysis of the content of an ideal and its ultimate axioms and the discovery of the consequences which arise from pursuing it ... must also be valid for the Chinese. At the same time, our Chinese can lack a "sense" for our ethical imperative and he can and certainly often will deny the ideal itself and the concrete value-judgments derived from it. Neither of these two latter attitudes can affect the scientific value of the analyses in any way ... [A] social science journal, in our sense, to the extent that it is scientific, should be a place where those truths are sought which—to

---

which has its own nature and function (an illustration of the Indo-Europeans' three-part functional division): to the Brahmins fall knowledge of the order of the world and a monopoly on ritual practice; the Kshatriyas exercise sovereignty and wield arms; the Vaisyas are workers and producers who feed the entire society, while the Shudras exist merely to serve the three higher *varnas*. The *avarna* (without a *varna*) "Untouchables" only appeared later. Following Hegel, I have always insisted that nothing could be said about a Hindu individual without knowing his or her determining sociological features (sex, age, caste), meaning that we must take into account the different *points of view* implicated in those determinations; see Herrenschildt, 'L'Inde et le sous-continent indien', in J. Poirier (ed.), *Ethnologie régionale II* (Paris: Gallimard, Encyclopédie la Pléiade, 1978), p. 145. Hindu thought is characterized by profound sociological realism—the opposite of our abstract individualism.

29 On the difficulty of "overthrowing Manu" see my account of the political opposition that ultimately vanquished Ambedkar when he sought to reform the Hindu Code Bill, in "The Indians' Impossible Civil Code," *European Journal of Sociology* vol. 50 no. 2 (2009), pp. 309–347.

remain with our illustration—can claim, even for a Chinese, the validity appropriate to an analysis of empirical reality.<sup>30</sup>

In my view, this is a nobler version of the “universality of Reason” than Obeyesekere’s.

---

30 Max Weber, *Methodology of Social Sciences*, trans. and ed. Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2011 [1949]), p. 59. Weber published this text, entitled “Objectivity” in social science and social policy’ in 1904, in the first issue of the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*.

PART 2

*Other Imperialisms*





# The Ottoman Empire and Orientalism: An Awkward Relationship\*

*Edhem Eldem*

It may seem like an exaggeration to claim that Turkey and the Turks—a loose definition of a notion encompassing the last period of the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey—were spared much of the weight of the Orientalist discourse so strongly criticized by Edward Said. Indeed, there is little doubt that most of the Orientalist tropes were used over and over again to describe the culture, the history, the society, and the political environment of this region of the globe. Yet there are a number of reasons that can be invoked to suggest that Turkey, as defined above, was better—or perhaps more accurately, less—treated by Orientalist scholarship, literature or art. For one thing, the greater familiarity of the West with the Ottomans, compared to some more remote, ‘exotic,’ and later discovered peoples of the East, made them less likely to attract the attention of essentialist discourses. The gradual shift of European interest, from the eighteenth century on, towards newer horizons, especially India, China and Japan, combined with the fact that this shift would be accompanied by the creation of the first western colonial dominions in the East, was essential in pulling the gaze of Westerners away from Ottoman lands. Not that the Ottoman Empire would ever disappear from European visions of the Orient; but its survival as an old, familiar and still independent polity on the fringes of Europe made it much less a target of the kind of Orientalist enquiry that would characterize the treatment of subject peoples in colonial India<sup>1</sup> and Egypt, in the French colonies of North Africa, and of the peoples of far-away (and semi-colonized) China or of exotic Japan.<sup>2</sup> As for the European-dominated territories of sub-Saharan Africa—the lands and peoples ‘without history’—they were almost exclusively relegated to ethnographic and anthropological study.

---

\* Like its French original version, but much shorter, this text is to a large extent taken from our *Consuming the Orient* (Istanbul, 2009), pp. 218–226.

1 Raymond Schwab, *La Renaissance orientale* (Paris, 1950); *The Oriental Renaissance* (New York, 1984).

2 “Orientalism is the learned study of what Disraeli called the great Asiatic mystery, which included Arab, Indian, Chinese and Japanese civilizations” (Edward Said, “Arabs, Islam and the Dogmas of the West,” *The New York Times Book Review*, 31 October 1976, reproduced in Macfie, *Orientalism. A Reader*, p. 104).



If its ability to preserve some degree of independence and autonomy set the Ottoman Empire apart from the rest of the vaguely defined Orient, so did the fact that the vast imperial domains could never be associated with a single ethnic and/or religious identity. The great variety of races and creeds that characterized the Ottoman population did not lend itself easily to all-encompassing generalizations, especially given the large variety and numbers of non-Muslim populations that were blended into the social fabric of the Empire. True, this lack of homogeneity was often compensated for by a lumping together of all such populations under a single 'oriental' label—sometimes through the pre-modern use of the term 'Levantine'—that comprised all inhabitants of the empire regardless of ethnicity or creed. Yet, generally speaking, a vague and heterogeneous taxonomy was used that consisted of a number of pragmatic definitions: 'Turks,' narrowly defined as the power-holding elite, as in the use of 'Grand Turk' to describe the sultan, and broadly defined as the Muslim inhabitants of the realm; 'rayas,' the tribute-paying non-Muslims of the Empire; 'oriental Christians,' into which were lumped Armenian, Orthodox, Nestorian, Chaldean, Maronite, and other Christian populations; 'Armenians' and 'Greeks,' often quoted separately for their prominent position within non-Muslim groups; 'Jews,' a self-evident and familiar label by European standards; and, occasionally, ethnic or regional terms describing a wide array of populations throughout the imperial domains: 'Serbs,' 'Albanians,' 'Kurds,' 'Arabs,' 'Barbaresques,' etc.

It would not be before the nineteenth century that European scholarship would truly start a dichotomous treatment of Ottoman populations according to their creed, dividing them systematically into the (Muslim) Turks and the (Christian) Rayas—Jews were generally left in limbo between the two—, with a potential antagonism to the former and a growing sympathy for the latter. In earlier times, the doctrinal and cultural distance between Westerners and oriental Christians was too great to make such sympathies possible, and the reverse was also true from the perspective of the Christian subjects of the empire. Yet, from the end of the eighteenth century on, as Europe acquired greater diplomatic and military leverage on the empire, as western traders gained a prominent position in Ottoman trade with Europe, as Philhellenism rose among a growingly Romantic intelligentsia and public opinion in the West, as oriental Christians—especially Armenians—became increasingly accessible to the conversion efforts of Catholic and Protestant missionaries, the status of oppression that had already been associated with non-Muslims gained a new and more powerful political connotation that begged for greater solidarity and sympathy from the West. The logical consequence of this trend was the growing estrangement of the 'Turks' from contemporary perceptions

of civilization as they came to be identified with despotism and oppression alone, having lost their earlier capacity to threaten Europe. Yet even then, the Ottoman Empire was never totally blended into the dominant Orientalist image of the Arab/Muslim. The fact that the Ottomans maintained their independence while large chunks of the Arab lands were swallowed up by the colonial empires, the realization that they, too, ruled over culturally and linguistically distinct Arab populations, and the significant differences their imperial culture showed from other Middle Eastern and Muslim societies set them apart from the dominant stereotypical images of the nineteenth century.

Despite the resilience of some of the Orientalist tropes that had been used for at least more than a century to describe the Ottomans at a time when they were still the principal target of western curiosity, the gradual transformation of the empire—especially among the upper echelons of the ruling elite and of society at large—could simply not be ignored. Nor could Europeans turn a blind eye on the enthusiastic—and often naïve—way in which reformist Ottomans embraced the forms, principles, and ideals of western culture and civilization. Interestingly, this phenomenon brought about a differentiation of the nineteenth-century westernizing Ottoman from the archetypes of Orientalism, but not necessarily in a positive way. To some ‘purists,’ westernization did little more than produce a hybrid and degenerate form of half civilization, which, while shedding its essential oriental features, was incapable of grasping the true and deeper meaning of the West, and, therefore, of properly acquiring the model it sought to emulate.

Underlying this was something much more profound and much more insidious: the belief that westernization had created a monster because of the basic incompatibility between Turkish/Oriental and European/Western character. Simpleminded folk with a ‘natural’ propensity to violence but a good soul deep beneath—a version of the ‘noble savage’ of the eighteenth century—the Turks were being corrupted by their superficial exposure to civilization and were gradually turning into amoral and degenerate creatures who embodied the worst of both civilizations. As late as 1912, the famous French *Guide bleu* warned the potential traveler against this terrible danger:

The Turk of the countryside and the Turk of the lower classes, generally speaking, is kind, honest and generous; he has a sense of justice and loyalty; you will never catch him mistreating animals. He is known for his hospitality ... The Turk of the masses has a degree of religious fanaticism, but this trait becomes aggressive only under orders ... There is perhaps no nation in the world of greater frankness, of more profound honesty, and worthy of more sympathy.

Unfortunately this is far from being the case with the civilized Turk, the affluent Turk of the cities, especially the Turk living in the capital city. There are, of course, some honourable exceptions to the rule, but it happens only too often that once in contact with western civilization, the city-dwelling Turk should lose all the virtues of his race and retain only the vices of Europeans. The liberal ideas, which he will flaunt ostentatiously, mask a great degree of fanaticism, of a racial rather than religious sort, and a profound hatred of the European whose superiority he senses and resents ... He has a marked taste for intrigue. His duplicity and dissimulation form an absolute contrast with the honesty and kindness of the popular Turk.<sup>3</sup>

'Damned if you do, and damned if you don't,' as Edward Said put it in a very similar context.<sup>4</sup> Restrained within his own cultural world the Turk was a barbarian, albeit with some redeeming features; but if he wanted to break free from this stereotype by emulating his accusers, he could only fall into an even worse situation, becoming a sort of dark and degenerate image of modernity.

For centuries, Ottomans and later Turks received mixed messages from the West, ranging from accusations of barbarism to praise for modernization, and from fascination with their oriental qualities to scorn for the abandon of their allegedly essential nature. Under these circumstances, it should not come as a surprise that the Ottoman/Turkish response was also of a mixed nature. Yet for a response to form, it was first necessary that the message be properly perceived. Contacts with the West were obviously not sufficient for the rise of such a consciousness; what the Ottomans needed first was an interest for what 'others' might be saying about them. Despite close contacts with westerners since the fifteenth century—diplomatic, commercial, military ...—the Ottomans do not seem to have paid much attention to western perceptions of their culture.

It would be extremely naïve to think one could date with any kind of accuracy the passage from self-confident isolation to an increasingly self-conscious concern for what others may have had to say about them. Yet, I would like to put forward a famous letter written on December 21, 1803, by Said Halet Efendi

---

3 *Guide bleu de Paris à Constantinople* (Paris, [1912]), quoted by Alain Servantie, "Les médias modernes à grande diffusion, véhicules de stéréotypes politiques: bandes dessinées sur la Turquie," *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien*, 8 (July–December 1989).

4 Said, *Orientalism*, p. 314. Said was referring to the irony in Vatikiotis' contradictory statements that the Arabs are 'naturally' prone to revolution and that they were incapable of organizing one.

to the palace during his embassy in Paris as a striking example of a radical change in mentalities among some members of the Ottoman elite of the time regarding their perception of the West and, more importantly, their assessment of the meaning of western images of the East.<sup>5</sup> Following a rather routine-like exposition of his contacts and observations in Paris, the Ottoman ambassador suddenly broaches the matter of possible comparisons between *Frengistan* (the land of the Franks) and the lands of Islam:

To whoever praises the land of the Franks with the intention of frightening or provoking us you should ask the following: "Have you ever been to Europe?" If he answers "No, I have not, but I know it from history books," then he is one of two things, which I will now explain. If he says "Yes, I have been [to Europe] and have spent some time there," he most certainly is a partisan of the Franks and a spy at their service. If he says "I have not been there," he can be one of two things. Either he is an ass and listens to everything the Franks write, or he is praising the Franks out of religious zeal, so that it may result in an insult against Muslims. Learn well this general rule.<sup>6</sup>

Obscure and naïve as it may be, this paragraph contains a number of subtexts. First, there is the fact that Europe is being praised by some, with the admission that such praise is likely to either frighten or provoke Muslims. Second, one learns that praising Europe is necessarily linked to an animosity against (Muslim) Ottomans, and that this is the doing of either total subservience to western interests, or of religious ardor, evidently of a non-Muslim nature. In a nutshell, then, Halet Efendi, representing at least part of the bureaucratic elite and palace entourage of the time, was clearly conscious of the threat posed by a growing need to compare Europe to the Ottoman Empire. Those guilty of this crime were easy to identify: non-Muslims who were gradually breaking away from the empire, either because of a growing attachment to the West, or because of rising anti-Islamic feelings. The next paragraph of the letter brings this potential conflict into the open, on a familiar Orientalist issue:

5 A facsimile of this letter was reproduced in the 1938 Guide to the Topkapı Palace Archives (*Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi Kılavuzu* (Istanbul: 1938), document XXVIII); it was taken up by Enver Ziya Karal (*Halet Efendi'nin Paris Büyük Elçiliği, 1802-1806* (Istanbul, 1940), pp. 32-34, 35, 62); and then it was (rather sloppily) translated by Bernard Lewis in his *Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York-London, 1982), pp. 56, 290-291. I used it in the same context as here in "18. Yüzyıl ve Değişim," *Cogito*, 19 (Summer 1999), pp. 189-190.

6 *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi Kılavuzu*, document XXVIII.

All the Armenians and Greeks in the world keep saying that all Muslims are sodomites, and that, God forbid, such a thing would never happen in Europe, and if it ever did, the perpetrators of such shameful acts would immediately be thrown into the fire. We have so frequently heard this that we have ended up believing it. However, in actual fact, it appears that they have no other business than that. There is in Paris a place they call the Palais Royal, which resembles a covered bazaar, but much larger with shops on all four sides and a great variety of goods in the shops. Above the shops are rooms, and in the rooms fifteen hundred women and five hundred boys whose only purpose is sodomy. It is shameful to go there at night, but as there is no harm in going during the day, we went especially to watch. Once one enters, one is surrounded by women and men from all sides who distribute leaflets to the visitors. The leaflets advertise "I have this many women, my room is in such and such place, and the price is so and so." Another one of these printed leaflets says "I have this many boys, their ages are as follows, their price is such and such." And if any of these boys or women should ever be sick with the syphilis, they are treated by physicians assigned by the government. And the women and the boys assault every visitor from all sides and accompany them, asking which of them pleases them most. And even the nobles ask you with pride: "Have you been to the Palais Royal, and did you like the women and the boys?" Read this passage to Hoca Abraham; God be praised, there aren't as many sodomites and pederasts in the lands of Islam.<sup>7</sup>

Halet Efendi's reasoning is simply fascinating, and for quite a number of reasons. First, it is a very early case of an Ottoman addressing one of the strongest Orientalist conceits of the time, that of the habitual homosexuality of Orientals. Taking up his reasoning from the preceding paragraph, Halet Efendi attributes this accusation to the non-Muslims of the Empire: they are the ones who say so, and who give the Europeans as an example of moral purity. This is the unmistakable sign of a rift between the Muslims and non-Muslims of the empire, and a preparation to the almost systematic labelling of the latter as a potential 'fifth column' of the European powers. What follows, however is stupefying: Halet Efendi admits that "we," i.e. himself and the Muslims of the Empire, have come to accept this accusation and its moral counterexample to be true. It is

---

7 *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi Kılavuzu*, document XXVIII.

therefore with great relief that he is able to relay to his correspondent the truth of the matter: “they” are even worse than “us”! The whole passage is extremely revealing of a radical change in the Ottomans’ self-perception and self-confidence. They *do* care about what is being said about them, and what is more, they tend to believe it; it takes all the efforts of an ambassador turned anthropologist to discover that the ‘Sotadic Zone’ extends much farther than their own world. What restores their confidence is not what they think of themselves, but simply the relief of discovering that their accusers, or rather those who are presented as a paragon of moral excellence, are no better than they are. Halet Efendi’s last remark, aimed specifically at a certain Hoca Abraham—a typical way to address an Armenian of some standing, probably a *sarraḡ* (banker)—shows to what extent he is intent on settling the score with somebody who must have been involved in these accusations.

Halet Efendi may well have been the initiator of a very complex process through which the Ottomans were soon to pass: that of dealing with the mixed feelings provoked by the combination of admiration for, and resentment of, the West that would characterize them throughout the hardships of westernization. These conflicting feelings were practically inevitable. Admiration for the West was the basis of much of the process of modernization cum westernization that started in the 1820s and gained speed after the *Tanzimat* decree of 1839. Yet it was practically impossible not to resent the West at the same time, considering that the adoption of the western model came with an implicit recognition of European superiority and a corresponding admission of Ottoman failure to maintain its former status on the international arena. If one adds to this the growing success of the Great Powers in practically every domain of relevance to the empire, from territorial expansion to material progress, and the corresponding rise of a critical, or at the very least condescending, form of Orientalism directed against the Orient in general, and the Ottomans in particular, one can easily imagine the feelings of resentment that stemmed from the necessity to emulate the very forces that threatened the integrity of the empire. Coping with this situation was certainly not a simple matter, and it provoked a combination of often antagonistic attitudes.

Under these circumstances, one should not be surprised to see that the Ottoman acceptance of western superiority ended up giving birth to one of the strangest phenomena of the time: Ottoman Orientalism.<sup>8</sup> Based on the awkward combination of a desire to westernize and the implicit admission that

---

8 See, for example, Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review*, 107, 3 (June 2002), pp. 768–796.

this required to 'Orientalize' one's own culture, this attitude is particularly frequent from the mid-nineteenth century on. What made the process relatively less painful than one might imagine was the possibility for the Ottoman elite—those who were first and foremost concerned with westernization—to avoid the risks of self-hatred by projecting Orientalist tropes onto selected groups and populations within the empire. Ottoman Orientalism was therefore able to create a form of ambiguity, which relied essentially on the fact that the empire lay at the interstices of East and West and that it thus managed to create for itself a grey zone where the oriental nature ascribed to the Ottoman Empire by the West could be redeemed or diverted by the orientalization and otherization of some sectors of the population with respect to the core of the empire. The extreme example of this phenomenon may well have been the Bedouin, and to some extent the Arab, often depicted by Ottoman administrators and intellectuals in almost the same terms as in the western colonial discourse of the time.

The implicit logic behind this was rather simple: if the Ottomans shared with the West a vision of equally comparable subject populations, western visions of the Ottomans as Orientals would have to be corrected to make way for their integration into the world of civilization. A necessary corollary of this view was to develop a different identity for the Ottoman centre/core and elites that would not allow for a conflation of Ottoman with Oriental. 'Turkishness,' already recognized by some western authors and observers as an identity separate from that of the majority of the local population, came in handy in this respect since it allowed for a distinct genealogy from that of the Semitic/Arab Oriental. The emphasis on 'Turkish' contributions to Islamic art with little if any reference to Arab art, in a work such as *L'architecture ottomane*, a prestige publication aiming at promoting the image of Ottoman art and architecture among western circles,<sup>9</sup> is a good example of this strategy. Yet more than anything else it was the 'colonial subjects,' i.e. principally the Arabs and Bedouins of the empire, who served as the scapegoat and a kind of deflecting mirror against European Orientalism by providing the Ottoman elite an opportunity to try itself at practicing a form of colonialism, often mixed with a flavour of racism.

However, Ottoman versions of colonialism and racism, if they ever existed fully, were essentially different from their European counterparts in that the target populations were generally of the same creed as themselves, which made it difficult to overtly 'otherize' these subjects. If Europe could find in Islam—

---

9 Marie de Launay, *L'architecture ottomane* ([Istanbul], 1873).

or Hinduism, shamanism, animism, paganism, etc.—a moral justification for looking down on its colonial subjects, Ottomans could rarely do so on the basis of religion. The non-Muslims—mostly Christians—of the Empire could be hated, mistreated, oppressed, segregated, but in the context of modernity and westernization internalized by the elites of the Empire, who wished to resemble, and believed in the superiority of, the West, the construction of a western-inspired discourse of ‘essential backwardness and primitiveness,’ in the manner of Orientalism, aimed at the Armenian, Greek, or other Christian populations of the Empire could hardly be convincing at a time when Europe claimed these populations as its ‘natural’ extension. On the other hand, as those populations that did fit the model—Arabs and Kurds mostly—happened to share the same religion as the Ottoman elite, any attack on the basis of this religious identity, apart from a religious *faux pas*, was bound to create an inconsistency, or, at least, a risk of seeing Orientalist notions turned against Ottomans themselves. Therefore, most of the Ottoman Orientalist arguments directed at the provincial populations carefully avoided any religious connotation, and concentrated on civilizational essentialism, namely sociological concepts of nomadism, Bedouinism (*bedeviyet*), and savagery (*vahşet*),<sup>10</sup> not to mention the easy target of blacks. Only the boldest among the elite and the intelligentsia, those who were flirting with ideas of secularism, religious reformism, criticism of Islam, or even atheism, were able to reproduce almost verbatim the European model of Orientalism and direct it at subject populations. It was this very legacy that would eventually come to form the basis of the Kemalist republican discourse of modernity and secularism.

Perhaps one of the most telling examples of this trend can be found in the life and works of Osman Hamdi Bey (1842–1910), a major intellectual figure of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Educated in France in the 1860s as a result of a decision of his father, İbrahim Edhem Pasha (1818?–1893), himself a French product of the 1830s, Osman Hamdi Bey is best known through his career as a painter and as the ‘founding father’ of Ottoman archaeology and museology. In 1869, as he was just back from almost ten years of residence in Paris, he was sent to Iraq to serve under Midhat Pasha, the progressive and reformist governor of Baghdad. Passages from his dense correspondence—in French—with his father reveal a mental framework very germane to the feelings of a Frenchman visiting North Africa:

---

10 Selim Deringil, “They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45/2 (April 2003), pp. 311–342.



We should not concern ourselves with the inhabitants of the greater cities here, and especially with those of Baghdad: Although they seem to be preferable to the populations of the desert because they no longer live under a tent and have the ordinary looks of a nineteenth-century man, these city-dwellers, I insist, are in fact a thousand times worse than the Bedouin. For if the latter leads a primitive and patriarchal life, the former leads one of corruption and infamy, to the point that in all of Baghdad and principally among those who serve the government, you would not be able to find a single honest man! As to merchants, the one with the most honourable reputation in France would be sent directly to forced labor.<sup>11</sup>

A few months later, he submitted to his father a long diatribe against Ottoman and Islamic traditions and customs, provoked by his refusal to engage in a traditional marriage:

With the exception of my dear family and a few others, please, Dear Father, just look around you! What do you see in families? Nothing but corruption, depravation, fights, divorces. They are infested by slavery and lose their morality to odalisques. The wife is not submissive to her husband, and the husband fails to respect his wife. He goes his way, as she goes hers. They have never held hands. They have never formed a family. The children are abandoned. The mother has never thought of them. Entrusted to a slave who thinks s/he is movable property, these poor children are left to vegetate, while the mother goes to the Sweet Waters to dirty and roll in the mud a name she carries but hates. And all of this is just because a ridiculous convention in our degenerate customs requires that a man should close his eyes before taking a wife. A convention which requires that marriage should not result from the free will of a man and woman, but rather from an agreement between their parents.<sup>12</sup>

Having gone this far, he could not resist the urge to lament over the absence of a proper bourgeoisie in his own country, again due to an endemic sense of fatalism that blocked the way to progress. Following a statement that “bourgeois

---

11 Osman Hamdi to Edhem Pasha, Baghdad, 29 August 1869, in Edhem Eldem, “Quelques lettres d’Osman Hamdi Bey”, *Anatolia Moderna—Yeni Anadolu*, 1/1 (1991), pp. 129–130.

12 27 April 1870, Eldem, “Quelques lettres d’Osman Hamdi Bey”, p. 135.

families [in Europe] are all more or less irreproachable, especially in Germany," he proposed a comparison with the local middling classes:

Just go to the mosque on a Friday, and look at the artisan, at the bourgeois, the only source of wealth of a country. He is nothing but a wretch dressed in rags, a shade that only inspires pity. No industry, no trade, nothing! Just a patient form of fatalism! Everything is God's making. He goes to a half-ruined hut he calls a shop and finds it robbed: it is God's making. He returns to a shanty he calls home and finds it in flames: it is again God's making. And it is never the administration's fault! There you have the artisan; there you have the taxpayer; there you have the people.<sup>13</sup>

Was all this just a bitter discourse of self-hate? Most probably not, and I would like to suggest that it was no more than the logical consequence of a genuine belief in western civilization and of a kind of idealism that made it necessary to criticize one's country in order to ensure that it would eventually engage in the path of progress along the lines of modernity and westernization. But westernization came with a package, partly made of Orientalism, which was bound to influence the very way in which Ottoman progressive and reformist intellectuals or bureaucrats would perceive their own system. There was always the possibility of protecting one's dignity by projecting this vision onto a number of sections of the population, viewed as 'really' oriental: the Bedouins, the Arabs, the Kurds, the traditional masses, the uneducated, the religious reactionaries. There was also the option of turning one's own past and traditions into an exotic curiosity, an aesthetic entertainment, or even an academic pastime. Osman Hamdi's painting was largely inspired by the French Orientalist school and focused on a systematic recreation of imaginary scenes from a timeless past, with great care given to the accuracy of the setting and the objects that gave the scene its touch of authenticity.<sup>14</sup> He was the commissary for the Ottoman section at the Vienna exhibition of 1873, where he exhibited, among other 'classics' of Ottoman culture, a whole collection of folk costumes and dresses; this was also the occasion for him to have his own picture taken in oriental garb, prefiguring many of the Orientalist paintings in which he would depict himself in very similar attire.

Osman Hamdi Bey may have been an extreme case, not the least because he was able to create for himself an environment that was highly consistent

13 Eldem, "Quelques lettres d'Osman Hamdi Bey", p. 136.

14 Eldem, "Osman Hamdi Bey ve Oryantalizm," *Dipnot*, 2 (Winter-Spring, 2004), pp. 39–67.

with his almost unconditional attachment to western civilization, by marrying a French woman, living a perfectly francophone and westernized life at home, devoting much of his time and energy to the creation and management of the Imperial Museum—a local version of the ideal western museum of antiquities—, maintaining solid bonds with the European scientific community, and focusing behind closed doors on his art which was entirely western in its form and themes. Others may not have been as lucky as him, but a sizeable number of intellectuals and bureaucrats of some standing were exposed to a more or less intense version of the same phenomenon. Educated in French, familiarized with European ways of life, gradually replacing an *alla turca* lifestyle with *alla franca* manners, they were moving a little further away every day from the masses and from the cultural setting that they associated with the Orient, tradition, and backwardness. By the turn of the century, the distinctions and barriers between modernity and tradition had come to acquire a physical dimension, reflected in the furniture used at home, in the nature of the education followed, or even in the social topography of the capital of the empire, where some quarters came to be stigmatized as ‘oriental’ and ‘traditional,’ while others became symbolic receptacles of modernity and westernization.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps nothing is more telling of this phenomenon than the gradual shift in the meaning of the expression *alla turca* (in Turkish, *alaturka*), which was initially used to describe an alternative (and local) style as opposed to *alla franca* (*alafanga*), but soon began to acquire negative connotations linked to notions of primitiveness, backwardness, and ‘Oriental’ behaviour as opposed to the positive norms of (western) civilization. There is probably no other culture in the world that may have reached the point of using a term based on its alleged national identity, such as *alaturkalk* (the fact of habitually behaving *alla turca*), to describe a reprehensible and uncivilized mode of behaviour.

Needless to say, any attempt at defining as complex a phenomenon as the relation between the Ottoman elites and Orientalism is bound to reduce this multifaceted reality to the level of a caricature. Indeed, how could one ignore that the great variety of forms that Ottoman Orientalism may take makes it in fact impossible to regroup them under a common term. When viewed from the Arab periphery of the empire, as Ussama Makdisi and Selim Deringil have, there is little doubt that it acquires a colonial dimension strongly inspired from western models. Nevertheless, can one exclude from this vision the pos-

---

15 Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman and Bruce Masters, *The Ottoman City between East and West* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 202–205.

sible legacy and influence of an imperial culture, which, since the sixteenth century, fed on negative stereotypes targeting the nomadic populations of the periphery? In similar fashion, can one really claim that the case of some super-westernized individuals,<sup>16</sup> such as Osman Hamdi, whom I have so frequently examined, represent more than an extremely marginal tendency concerning a minute community of exiles in their country?

These questions need to be addressed more thoroughly, and this phenomenon should be studied anew with a more critical assessment that would go beyond the most blatant examples, which, tempting as they may be, may well be the least representative. All the same, one needs only to visit the Young Turk period and the rocketing of Turkish nationalism, or, even more, the first decades of the Republic to realize with what force Orientalism had ended up penetrating the system in the first half of the twentieth century. As a result, then, while it is true that one can express doubts as to the impact and representativeness of Orientalist trends in the Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth century, there is no denying that, limited as they may have been, these currents had managed to lay the foundations of the transformation of mentalities in the decades to come.

The passage from Ottoman Orientalism—or rather Ottoman Orientalisms—to a Turkish (republican) version of this state of mind was relatively easy, especially when the new regime decided to divorce itself from the cultural and ideological legacy of the empire. Kemalist Orientalism, as one would be tempted to coin the first version of Turkish Orientalism, had a serious advantage over its Ottoman predecessor: it could afford a much more explicit break with the Orient and a much more direct thrust in the direction of the West. Indeed, the reforms of the 1920s and 1930s led to radical changes in those fields where Ottoman reformers had followed a more gradual and temperate method. The abandonment of—and the ban on—Oriental costume and headgear and their replacement by western garments, the adoption of the Latin script instead of the Arabic, and the introduction of secularism as one of the ideological bases of the new regime were all changes that needed a decisive break with the Ottoman past, thus liberating local Orientalism from certain limits and taboos it had had to take into consideration until then. In those points where the Ottomans found it difficult to apply negative stereotypes against some subjects of the empire due to a common religious culture, republican modernism

---

16 Şerif Mardin, “Super Westernization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century,” Peter Benedict et al. (éd.), *Turkey: Geographic and Social Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 1974) pp. 404–446.

and secularism came to the rescue of the Kemalist elites. There was no longer any harm in overtly pointing at the Orient, at Arabs, at Kurds, or even at Islam, as some of the major causes for the underdevelopment of the country, and as a treacherous disease that could and needed to be eradicated through the promotion of a Turkish identity, which, in combination with westernization and modernization, would enable make it possible to reach the “level of contemporary civilizations.” This primal component of an ideological reconstruction of history, deeply rooted in the logic of a comparison between past and present, had as its main goal the legitimation of a new regime through the invention of an old one.<sup>17</sup>

---

17 For a discussion of Turkish Orientalism from the 1920s to the present, see Eldem, *Consuming the Orient*, pp. 226–269.

# “Go West”: Variations on Kemalist Orientalism\*

*Emmanuel Szurek*

The *diktat* was the veil. All those who lived lives of servitude to the Orient under the diktat of the black force and fanaticism turned to the revolutionary who was seeking to rid them of it:—Did I ask you for freedom?

FALİH RIFKI ATAY<sup>1</sup>



Understood as an ideological system or a series of social, political and cultural reforms implemented in interwar Turkey, Kemalism is more often associated with the notion of “Occidentalism” than with Orientalism. And yet the Kemalist discourse includes a series of binary oppositions that would fall under the rubric of what Edward Said called Orientalism. In the Kemalist case, neither the west nor the Orient are foreign realities: the east-west axiology takes the form of an opposition between the backwardness of the Islamic Middle Ages and the Enlightenment of Western civilization; Islamic fanaticism in the east versus scientific knowledge in the West; the social anaemia and despotism of the old Ottoman Empire opposed to the regeneration and the emancipation of the modern Turkish nation. In that sense, Kemalism makes another case for an “internal Orientalism”, quite similar to those that have been explored elsewhere in the Middle East or China as well as in Europe itself.<sup>2</sup>

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs. I would like to express my gratitude to Leah Feldman, Güneş Işıksel, and Özgür Türesay for their bibliographical guidance and their wise advice.

1 Falih Rıfki Atay, *Çankaya: Atatürk'ün Doğumundan Ölümüne Kadar Bütün Hayat Hikâyesi* [Çankaya: Account of the entire life of Atatürk from his birth to his death] (Istanbul: Doğan Kardeş Matbaacılık, 1968), pp. 411 ff.

2 See, for example, Milica Bakic-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalism: The case of former Yugoslavia”, *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995), p. 918; Gabriel Piterberg, “Domestic Orientalism: The representation of ‘Oriental’ Jews in Zionist/Israeli historiography”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 2 (1996), pp. 125–145; Sheldon Pollock, “Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit

Was Kemalist Orientalism generated through the process of internalizing a presumably external Orientalism, in which it constituted itself merely as an ordinary by-product of postcolonial nationalism?<sup>3</sup> Or should it be seen as *sui generis*, a vernacular form of Orientalism that transcends the separation between “the West” and “the East”, the “colonizers” and the “colonized”?<sup>4</sup> In the former case Kemalist Orientalism absorbs a European imperialist epistemology, which thus preserves the role assigned to it in Said’s narrative. In this understanding, Kemalist Orientalism is first and foremost a collateral, *ex post* diffraction—a mimetic, and indeed Eastern, postcolonial variant of a Western arch-Orientalism.<sup>5</sup> In the latter case, the focus is placed on Kemalist agency and the ability to translate and instrumentalize, but also to transpose and invent. Should it thus be considered a “specific version of Orientalism”, an “autonomous and indigenous form of Orientalism”?<sup>6</sup>

In this paper, I aim to explain how the Kemalist model mobilizes the binary east-west axiology through the mixture of three key components that are partly compatible and partly contradictory: anti-imperialism (or anti-Westernism, or

---

and Power Beyond the Raj”, in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1992), pp. 76–133; Louisa Schein, “Gender and Internal Orientalism in China”, *Modern China* 23 (Jan. 1997), pp. 72 ff. For a critical reassessment of the notion of “internal Orientalism” see my “Trans-, méta- et post-. Pour un usage contrôlé de l’orientalisme intérieur”, in François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin (eds), *Après l’orientalisme. L’Orient créé par l’Orient* (Paris: IHMM-Karthala, 2011), pp. 53–60.

- 3 The process through which “Orientals” themselves internalize the categories of European Orientalism is a situation that worried Edward Said; Edward Said, *Orientalism, Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 322. For a more general assessment of this historical connection, see Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London: The United Nations University, 1986), pp. 36–39.
- 4 It is useful to recall that, strictly speaking, Asia Minor was never colonized by a European power.
- 5 This interpretation predominates in Ahmet Yıldız, “*Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*”: *Türk Ulusal Kimliğinin Etno-Seküler Sınırları (1919–1938)* [“Happy is he who can call himself a Turk”: the ethno-secular boundaries of Turkish national identity, 1919–1938] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2010 [2001]), pp. 116 ff.; Meltem Ahıska, “Orientalism/Occidentalism: The Impasse of Modernity”, in Müge Gürsoy Sökmen and Başak Ertür (eds), *Waiting for the Barbarians: A Tribute to Edward Said* (London-New York: Verso, 2008), p. 144; Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation-State* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 11.
- 6 See Hasan Bülent Kahraman, “İçselleştirilmiş, Açık ve Gizli: Oryantalizm ve Kemalizm” [Internalized, manifest and latent: Orientalism and Kemalism], *Doğu Batı* 20 no. 1 (2002), pp. 154–155; Edhem Eldem, *Consuming the Orient* (Istanbul: Osmanlı Bankası Arşiv ve Araştırma Merkezi, 2007), p. 227.

even anti-Orientalism), mimetic Orientalism (or Orientalism imported from the West and reproduced as such by the Kemalists), and vernacular Orientalism (or Orientalism localized, re-invented by the Kemalists to suit local needs). My argument is that Kemalist Orientalism was not only a reaction to "the West" or an "internalization" of the Western gaze. It was rather a flexible set of discursive and representational tropes that helped the elites of the "New Turkey" to define, justify and implement their own domestic agenda according to a process of social refinement through which the progressive, secularist, nationalist camp (the West within) needed to be separated from the reactionary, clerical, Kurdish or backward camp (the Orient within).<sup>7</sup>

### Kemalism as Anti-Westernism

In defining their own political mission, the Kemalist intellectuals first came to perceive the West—and the collection of enduring Orientalist and Turcophobic prejudices noisily clanking along behind it—as the main obstacle to international recognition of the "New Turkey". In that sense, Kemalist nationalism can be said to have been first developed in opposition to the European discourse on the Orient in general and on the Turks in particular.<sup>8</sup>

One forum in which Kemalist anti-Westernism was fully articulated was *La Turquie Kémaliste*, a bimonthly journal published almost entirely in French by the department of the Interior Ministry responsible for the press.<sup>9</sup> Several contributors to this international propaganda organ had studied in Berlin in the

---

7 Here, "Kemalists" refers first to the leadership elite—bureaucrats, the military, state-sponsored intellectuals—who assumed power in the state founded in Anatolia in 1923 and remained in power until at least 1950; second, to what I call the "Kemalist class", that is, low-level civil servants, party cadres, primary school teachers, members of the provincial liberal petty bourgeoisie who implemented and enacted in the Turkish provinces the symbolic order conceived by that elite from the mid-1920s to the late 1940s. On the former, see Emmanuel Szurek, "Le linguiste et le politique. La *Türk Dil Kurumu* et le champ du pouvoir à l'époque du parti unique", in Marc Aymes, Benjamin Gourisse and Élise Massicard (eds), *L'Art de l'Etat en Turquie. Arrangements de l'action publique de la fin de l'Empire ottoman à nos jours*, (Paris: Karthala, 2014), pp. 75–101. On the latter, see my "Dil Bayramı. Une lecture somatique de la fête politique dans la Turquie du parti unique", in Nathalie Clayer and Erdal Kaynar (eds), *Penser, agir et vivre dans l'Empire ottoman et en Turquie. Études réunies pour François Georjeon*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), pp. 497–523.

8 Hasan Bülent Kahraman, "İçselleştirilmiş, Açık ve Gizli: Oryantalizm ve Kemalizm", p. 177.

9 The journal was founded in June 1934. From the late 1930s the proportion of articles in German rose, alongside those in English.



late 1910s or early 1920s, during which time they developed Communist sympathies. However, by the late 1920s, they had swapped the Communist, internationalist slogans of their youth for mature nationalist and Kemalist convictions.<sup>10</sup> Many articles in this journal illustrate how extremely wary these state-sponsored intellectuals were of the European view of Turkey. For instance, they were notably sensitive to the way their country was represented in the photography of foreign journalists. Here is how Vedat Nedim put it in 1934:<sup>11</sup>

And do you know what proved of sensational interest to a world famous news photographer who came to Ankara this year? A peasant riding a donkey, an old boutique, a thatched roof threatening to cave in, and a man dressed in rags!

The schools and institutes, hospitals, public buildings, villas, aqueducts, parks, monuments and statues of this brand new city, built at a feverish pace in rebellious natural surroundings, could not penetrate the armour of prejudices this man wore, and he remained likewise indifferent to the rise of the new, vibrant spirit here.

Like a sleepwalker questing for the moon, all he could look for in Ankara was the Oriental picturesque, the Oriental sensation.<sup>12</sup>

Photography is directly connected to the technology of modernity. The disenchantment of the Kemalists was even greater because the focus of the pho-

10 Many of these writers came together in the *Kadro* group (1932–1934) and contributed to the eponymous journal; see Temuçin Faik Ertan, *Kadrocular ve Kadro Hareketi (Görüşler, Yorumlar, Değerlendirmeler)* [Kadro: the men and the movement (opinions, commentaries, assessments)] (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1994); George Harris, *The Communists and the Kadro Movement: Shaping Ideology in Atatürk's Turkey* (Istanbul: Isis, 2002); İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Bir Cumhuriyet Öyküsü: Kadrocuları ve Kadro'yu Anlamak* [A tale of the Republic: Understanding *Kadro* and its members] (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2003).

11 Vedat Nedim (1897–1985) was initiated in Marxism-Leninism in Berlin (1916–1922) by his professor Werner Sombart, who directed the thesis he defended in 1922, entitled *Türkiye Nasıl Bir Emperyalizm Konusu Oldu?* [How did Turkey come to be subjected to imperialism?]. In the fall of 1922 he participated in the Fourth Congress of the Komintern as a delegate of the Turkish Workers and Peasants Socialist Party. He embraced Kemalism in the late 1920s and became a spokesperson of the régime. Cf. İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Bir Cumhuriyet Öyküsü*, pp. 76–95; Dorothée Guillemarre-Acet, *Impérialisme et nationalisme: l'Allemagne, l'Empire ottoman et la Turquie (1908–1933)* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2009), pp. 218–225.

12 Vedat Nedim Tör, “Sensation”, *La Turquie Kémaliste* 2 (Aug. 1934), p. 1.

tograph's attention was Ankara, the pride of the country, and a city that had sprung up from the Anatolian wasteland in the 1920s, unlike historic Istanbul, the former capital of the Ottoman Empire. The writers of *La Turquie Kémaliste* regularly noted the weight of the oppressive gaze, or the "evil eye", of the Western photographer who was reluctant to see how Turkey had changed. Indeed, Ercumend Ekrem Talu entitled one of his 1935 editorials "Oculos habent sed ..." [Latin for "They have eyes, but ..."], concluding, "but they see not!"<sup>13</sup> The exclamation was directed against foreign journalists coming to Turkey in the hopes of finding a kind of candy-box Orient:

Let me add that some of these foreign colleagues—for reasons I cannot fathom—still exhibit the mentality of Loti and Claude Farrère. They all write the same thing: moans and lamentations for the vanished "Orient". It would be easy to take them for hired lamenters under professional obligation to weep crocodile tears over the fez, the *sharshaf*, slatted blinds, dervish monasteries, stray dogs and the few brainless, apathetic idlers who spend their lives strolling about and yawning in cafe corners.<sup>14</sup>

Here we see Talu's anger against an Occident that refuses to recognize shifting cultural norms, including the abandonment of the fez, the restrictions concerning religious dress, and the forced closure of medreses, instead continuing to envision Turkey through the canonical forms of Orientalist painters and writers. One of the last contributors to the tradition of the Orientalist travelogue was the French novelist Pierre Loti (1850–1923), who was known by the title "friend of the Turks" because he continuously sided with the Ottoman Empire over the Oriental question and presented himself as the incarnation of Turcophilia. However, according to the modernist perspective of the 1930s, Loti's love for the eternal Orient, which he found in the Ottoman capital, embodied the western infatuation with a world "which could never do harm, which was resigned and passive, completely inactive, ignorant even of its own inactivity, where time is spent in contemplation: in cafes, among the falling Plane tree leaves, and in anticipation, waiting for the hour of prayer".<sup>15</sup>

13 Cf. Psalms 113 v. 14: "oculos habent et non videbunt". It is not clear whether this biblical reference was intended.

14 Ercumend Ekrem Talu, "Oculos habent sed ...", *La Turquie Kémaliste* 5 (Feb. 1935), p. 1.

15 Hasan Anamur, "L' image de la Turquie nouvelle dans la littérature française. 1919–1939", in Hamit Batu and Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont (eds), *L'Empire ottoman, la République de Turquie et la France* (Istanbul: Isis, 1986) pp. 499–521: 504–505.

This anger generated a rhetorical violence. In April 1935, Burhan Asaf Belge (1899–1967)<sup>16</sup> drew up a list of enemies of the Turkish revolution which included “imperialists”, “clerics”, “anti-feminist petty bourgeois” and

a handful of persons afflicted with the very romanticism that is currently being eliminated in their own countries. In the last century they tried to heal their disease on the shores of the Mediterranean, in an Orient offering them the spectacle of a perpetual fair—the weightiest and most varied component of which was the Ottoman Empire.<sup>17</sup>

A mere four years after the human zoos of the Paris Colonial Exhibition, the Turkish journalist imagined an asylum for the most illustrative representatives of this degenerate romanticism:

And today these sick persons write against us. We must not feel any anger toward them. Do we not have space and funds for putting all these inoffensive madmen in an Oriental-style pavilion? We could exhibit them to American tourists free of charge. For their race has begun to disappear.<sup>18</sup>

What is striking here is the ardent desire of the Kemalist propagandist to invert the objectivist violence of the naturalist gaze. The Europeans who are nostalgic for the Old Ottoman Empire—rather than the alleged Orientals—are the true representatives of archaism, and as such they are the ones who should be displayed as fair animals and exposed to the sight of tourists visiting Turkey. Jean Deny, who was a professor of Turkish at the *École nationale des langues orientales vivantes* in Paris, was not mistaken when, in the spring of 1933 on his return from a mission to Turkey, he offered the following advice to French visitors to the country in a lecture at the prestigious *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* entitled “La psychologie du peuple turc”:

All tourists who leave for Turkey already regretting—misguidedly, as I see it—the disappearance of the fez—that monotony of red, that most uniform of headgears—should be made to understand that they do more

16 Close to Vedat Nedim, Burhan Belge studied sociology and architecture in Berlin from 1916 to 1923. On his particular path from Marxism to Kemalism see İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Bir Cumhuriyet Öyküsü*, pp. 95–104.

17 Burhan Belge, “Ils disent que”, *La Turquie Kémaliste* 6 (Apr. 1935), p. 1.

18 Ibid.

harm than good to the pretty cypress trees and picturesque cemeteries when they clumsily set out to defend it. The modern Turk becomes tense on hearing such complaints, which he readily sees as reflecting a malevolent desire to remind him of the humiliation attaching to the time of the "capitulations".<sup>19</sup>

The Kemalist resentment of the 1930s prefigures, in different ways, the epistemological anger that Edward Said would take up four decades later. In another paper published in *La Turquie Kémaliste* on the development of the fine arts in his country, the Turkish painter Fikret Adil (1901–1973) might even be said to have literally anticipated Said's semanticisation of the term "Orientalism", for he too detached the word from its strictly literary or pictorial sense to make it suit a more generic vision of the Orient. Here, for instance, is how Adil denigrates his illustrious predecessor, the famous Ottoman painter Osman Hamdi Bey (1842–1910):

The opening of the Academy of Fine Arts (1883) [in Istanbul] marked the start of a new phase in Turkish painting, a phase represented by the academy founder and Orientalist painter Hamdi. I say "Orientalist" because Hamdi, who was a very faithful painter, presented us with subjects of highly dubious veracity, depicting a kind of fairground Orient.<sup>20</sup>

In short, what emerges from reading *La Turquie Kémaliste* is the identification and indictment by the Kemalist intellectuals of one and the same "Orientalist" tradition in both French and Ottoman archives produced by men of the past and of the present; writers, painters, and reporters from Europe who perpetuate through their photographic production the same archaic layout of the Orient. However, it would be wrong to see in Kemalist "anti-Orientalism" the foreshadowing of postcolonial thought. For indeed, as much as it challenges the Western view of the East, Kemalism, paradoxically enough, largely resumes its account.

---

19 Jean Deny, "La psychologie de peuple turc", *Séances et travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, 93rd year, published under the direction of M.Ch. Lyon-Caen, permanent secretary of the Academy (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1934), p. 124.

20 Fikret Adil, "Cinquante ans de peinture et sculpture turques", *La Turquie Kémaliste* 18 (Apr. 1937), pp. 8 ff.

### Kemalism as Mimetic Orientalism

In the February 1937 editorial of *La Turquie Kémaliste*, signed by Burhan Belge, we find two assertions, separated by only a few lines of text, whose near juxtaposition condenses the very alchemy, if not schizophrenia, of the Kemalist topology:

The Orient is not a fairground peddling the picturesque.

It is the Turks who are defending European civilization—at the very gates of Asia.<sup>21</sup>

The first assertion illustrates once again the “anti-Orientalist” stance of the Kemalist relation to the West. But the second assertion reveals the corollary of this anti-imperialist rage: the Kemalist Turk has taken up the European man’s burden. For the Kemalists were not interested in deconstructing the Western episteme of “the Orient”, the backwardness of which they did not deny at all. They simply wanted to shift the lines, letting it be known once and for all that “the legendary sick man in the Bosphorus”—as Vedat Nedim put it—had finally expired and had been superseded by a new social physique that was embodied by a new leader:

Out of the firm will of a popular Hero named Mustafa Kemal a brand new nation has been born—a nation without sultans, harems, capitulations, the fez; a free and independent nation, revolutionary, statist, republican, secular and democratic.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, the Kemalist publicists wanted their Western readers to realize that their country no longer lay on the dark side of the border between backwardness and civilization, though they never denied that such a border existed. The mimicry went even further since Turkey, they claimed, had a major role to play in Western civilization’s fight against Oriental backwardness. “Kemalist Turkey has a mission” wrote Burhan Belge, “and that mission is to make Anatolia a bastion of culture and civilization once again.”<sup>23</sup> If Turkey had a mission, it

21 Burhan Belge, “Une nouvelle réponse à une ancienne question”, *La Turquie Kémaliste* 17 (Feb. 1937), p. 1.

22 Vedat Nedim Tör, “Sensation”, *La Turquie Kémaliste* 2 (Aug. 1934), p. 1.

23 Burhan Belge, “La mission du kamâlisme”, *La Turquie Kémaliste* 20 (Aug. 1937), p. 1.

also had a guide. Belge wrote “the avant-garde of Western civilization, [Turkey] will one day be called upon to carry out a mission of universal scope. All Asian eyes are already riveted upon us. As a foreign [female] writer at a Congress in Istanbul [probably the 1935 International Women’s Congress] put it, ‘In the eyes of Asia, ATATÜRK is ATAŞARK’”:<sup>24</sup> the “Father of the Turks” (Atatürk) was the father of the Orient (Ataşark); that is, represented by its authoritarian leader, Turkey had endorsed the European *mission civilisatrice*.

Kemalist Orientalism is not exactly a republican extension of Ottoman Orientalism. Let us recall that the notion of “Ottoman Orientalism”<sup>25</sup> was put forward by Ussama S. Makdisi in the wake of postcolonial studies and against a backdrop of broader questions on Ottoman “imperialism” and “colonialism”.<sup>26</sup> Here is Makdissi’s definition:

By Ottoman Orientalism, I mean a complex of Ottoman attitudes produced by a nineteenth-century age of Ottoman reform that implicitly and explicitly acknowledged the West to be the home of progress and the East, writ large, to be a *present* theatre of backwardness.<sup>27</sup>

- 
- 24 Serf Eryol, “Faisons le point”, *Les Annales de Turquie*, 6th year, 1 (Jan. 1936), p. 22. We are never told who the foreign lady was.
- 25 Ussama S. Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism”, *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002), pp. 768–796. See also Christophe Herzog and Raoul Motika, “Orientalism *alla turca*: Late 19th/Early 20th Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim ‘Outback’”, *Die Welts des Islams* 40 (2000), pp. 139–195; François Georgeon, “Exotisme et modernité: l’image des provinces arables dans un magazine ottoman vers 1900”, in *Sous le signe des réformes: État et société de l’Empire ottoman à la Turquie kémaliste (1789–1939)* (Istanbul: Isis, 2009 [2003]), pp. 361–370; Ehdem Eldem, *Consuming the Orient*, pp. 214–227.
- 26 Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), pp. 164 ff.; Ussama S. Makdisi, “Rethinking Ottoman Imperialism: Modernity, Violence and the Cultural Logic of Ottoman Reform”, in Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp and Stefan Weber (eds), *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Würzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2002), pp. 29–48; Selim Deringil, “They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery: Perceptions of Provincial Imperialism in the Late Ottoman Empire”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003), pp. 311–342; Thomas Kühn, “Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism: Contesting Boundaries of Difference and Integration in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1919”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007), pp. 315–331; Marc Aymes, “Un texte sans titre”, and Özgür Türesay, “Le ‘colonialisme ottoman’: Réflexions sur une tournure historiographique récente”, conference papers for “L’orientalisme désorienté: La Turquie contemporaine au miroir des approches postcoloniales”, Institut d’Études Politiques de Rennes, Jan. 28–29, 2010, forthcoming.
- 27 Ussama S. Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism”, p. 769.

As for Edhem Eldem, he speaks of an “Oriental Orientalism” that reflects “the radical transformation of elite Ottoman mentalities that began in the second half of the nineteenth century”, when the logic of the reforms (*tanzimat*) brought to light a “new division within the Empire between the ‘civilized’ West—Istanbul—and the ‘wild’ East; i.e., the provinces, particularly the Arab ones”.<sup>28</sup>

Ottoman Orientalism was a discourse of empire. It had made “Ottomaness” an equivalent of “civilization”. Kemalist Orientalism was a nationalist, historicist discourse. For the Kemalists, the line of demarcation between East and West amounted first of all to a chronological break between “old” and “new” Turkey, that is, between the backwards Ottoman Empire and the civilized Kemalist republic. In the eyes of the Kemalist intellectuals the word Ottoman itself was synonymous with a corrupt, cosmopolitan, despotic Orient and the Ottoman Empire, as in the eyes of Western observers, was “the sick man of Europe”. In *Les Annales de Turquie*, another journal devoted to the international propaganda of the regime, one reads the following: “With the sweat of their tired bodies the sons of Osman ... watered the flowerbeds of Imperialism, surrendering to fatalism in *tekke* and *zaviyes*, letting themselves be lulled to sleep by the sound of prayer beads”.<sup>29</sup> And in the following passage, we encounter a Kemalist representation of the Turks in the nineteenth century—and not just their incurable despots—which echoes what could be found in the most biased European literature:

Under the reign of the Sultan-Caliph, the Turkish nation was held captive to backward, superstitious beliefs; it believed in legends, was incapable of engaging in economic relations with the West and even of opening a bank ... of having a social and family life founded on the principles of liberty and equality. All sorts of *kavuks*, turbans, felt caps, fezes, tunics, knickers and pantaloons ... The gazi had planned everything so that this nation, condemned by its accoutrements to appear ridiculous in the eyes of the world, could appropriate contemporary civilization in its entirety, whatever the cost.<sup>30</sup>

28 Edhem Eldem, *Un Ottoman en Orient: Osman Hamdi Bey en Irak, 1869–1871* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010), p. 66.

29 Tayar Fethi Bey, “Répétons à l’unisson la Marche de la République”, *Les Annales de Turquie* 6 (Nov. 1933), p. 96.

30 Ahmet Cevat Emre, *İki Neslin Tarihi: Mustafa Kemal Neler Yaptı* [History of two generations: Mustafa Kemal’s accomplishments] (Istanbul: Nurgök Matbaası, 1960), p. 324.

The second major difference between Ottoman and Kemalist Orientalism is the place dedicated to Islam. Here the thinking of the Ottoman sociologist Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), the main pre-Republic theorist of Turkish nationalism, offers a transition between the two discourses. The Kemalists owe to Gökalp much of their notion of an absolute antagonism between all that is “Ottoman”, understood to belong intrinsically to “Oriental civilization”, and all that is “Turkish”, which could and would leave the Orient behind and join “Western civilization”.<sup>31</sup> But in Gökalp’s thinking, as in the understanding of the late nineteenth-century Ottoman elites, it was out of the question to consider Islam the dividing line between East and West. For Gökalp, Turks had to hold onto their “national” religion as they made the shift to Western civilization.

It was on this point that the Kemalists broke radically not only with Ottoman Orientalism but also with Ziya Gökalp.<sup>32</sup> In their account religious institutions, the clergy, and Islam itself could not be dissociated from the paradigm of Ottoman decay and oppression. By adopting the principle of a semantic equivalency between *Oriental* backwardness and *Muslim* civilization, the Kemalist Orientalists ventured much closer to European Orientalism than their Ottoman counterparts. The journalist Falih Rıfki Atay (1894–1971) perfectly represents this mix of revolutionarism (or historicism) and anti-clerical rage that suffused the generation in power in Turkey between the two World Wars: “Christendom’s Middle Ages lasted fifteen centuries; Islam’s Middle Ages were only extinguished—and then only in Turkey—with the Kemalist Reform”.<sup>33</sup>

The imperative to destroy “tradition” that we find in Kemalist writing is very similar to what we find in the mouths of the preachers of the French Revolution. However, the Kemalist move to define the Ottoman *Ancien Régime* as its “significant other”<sup>34</sup> amounted to more than the rhetoric of a regime change. The conceptual resources already being developed by the Kemalists in the early 1920s for constructing the diachronic antagonism between old and new Turkey could be immediately recycled to serve the construction of

31 Ziya Gökalp, *Türkcülüğün Esasları* [The principles of Turkism], ed. Mehmet Kaplan (Istanbul: Millî Eğitim Basımevi, 1976 [1923]); Yücel Karadaş, *Ziya Gökalp’te Şarkıyatçılık: Doğu’nun Batıcı Üretimi* [Orientalism in the thinking of Ziya Gökalp] (Istanbul: Anahtar Kitaplar, 2008), pp. 115–183 and “Orientalism and Invention of Tradition in the Cultural Concept of Ziya Gökalp”, *Eurasian Journal of Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2010), pp. 44–58.

32 Ahmet Yıldız, “‘Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene’”, p. 119; Yücel Karadaş, *Ziya Gökalp’te Şarkıyatçılık*, pp. 143–151.

33 Falih Rıfki Atay, *La Turquie Kémaliste* 16 (Dec. 1936), p. 1.

34 Yılmaz Colak, “Ottomanism vs. Kemalism: Collective Memory and Cultural Pluralism in 1990s Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (July 2006), p. 591.



a new social and political—synchronic—order. In this perspective, Kemalist Orientalism was not only a discourse turned towards the Ottoman past and dedicated to the foundation of the Republic. Transposed, re-elaborated, and instrumentalized to suit domestic needs, the Kemalists' Orient could be used to legitimate a specific social-engineering endeavor. In that sense, it qualified less as a mimetic than as a vernacular form of Orientalism in the service of the “Turkish revolution”.

### Kemalism as Vernacular Orientalism

Falih Rıfki Atay's prose reveals this shift from mimetic, historicist to vernacular, societal Orientalism. For him, “the true enemy of the Turkish nation” was not just the Ottoman Empire—“that medieval, semi-theocratic state”<sup>35</sup>—but also “that Oriental mentality which could not be reached by positive knowledge” (*müspet ilim ışığı vurmeyan Şark kafası*).<sup>36</sup> The Orient did not simply come *before us*, he argues, but rather is *within us*. The “old man” is not completely dead after all, but still lives on, and threatens the Turkish nation through a whole series of figures encompassed by the Kemalist “Oriental” paradigm: superstitious mobs, retrograde provinces, ignorant peasants, and depraved women:

It was with women that the epoch of our new, real freedom would begin. Women were now to live. And yet when we came to Ankara we found a much more backward life there than in Istanbul. In Ankara [which became the seat of the Kemalist government in 1920] there were almost no *alla franca* families like those in Istanbul. The few enlightened nationalists (*uyanık miliyetçi*) living in Çankaya [the district where the leaders of the new state settled] lived among themselves in a company of men and women. But women were totally absent from the public thoroughfare. This is also why sexual morale was so low. There was, I remember, an instruction diffused by word of mouth that I would be ashamed to quote even here.<sup>37</sup>

---

35 In his writings, Atay often uses Marxist and Leninist expressions, archetypally recalling the National-Bolshevism mentioned above: the Ottoman Empire is described as a “semi-Asiatic theocratic state” (*yarı Asyalı bir teokratik devlet*), for example, or a “medieval, semi-theocratic state” (*ortacağlı yarı teokratik devlet*).

36 Falih Rıfki Atay, *Çankaya*, p. 387.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Certain signs—ignorance, superstition, fanaticism—could not be missed, and all of them made it clear that the sick man of Europe was still alive—*inside* the national borders:

From the perspective of a civilized nation, what were we to think of all these masses, drawn along in the wake of all sorts of shaykhs, *dede*, *seyyit*, *çelebi*, *baba* and emirs? What were we to think of these masses of people who used to entrust their lives and destinies to fortune-tellers (*falci*), sorcerors (*büyücü*), amulet makers (*muskacı*)? Was it right to let these elements and institutions, which betrayed the true essence of our Nation, subsist in the new Republic of Turkey?<sup>38</sup>

The dividing line between Orient and Occident crystallized the social paternalism and class racism that informed the relations between the elite and the rural majority in Turkey under the rule of the Republican People's Party.<sup>39</sup> The terms East and West not only distinguished between the old and new Turkey in accordance with a "before/after" millenarian schema, but also provided the foundation for a sociodicy that separated good and bad citizens—"us and them"—during the Kemalist moment itself.

In other words, the Kemalist dialectic of "Progress" and "Reaction", of Islam and secularity, already clearly laid out on the historiographical plane,<sup>40</sup> was strongly seconded by the Orient/Occident antinomy. Members of "the revolutionary class" were ready to fight those identified as partisans of "the black force" (*kara kuvvet*),<sup>41</sup> "black ignorance" (*kara cahillik*)<sup>42</sup> or "the black class" (*kara sınıf*).<sup>43</sup> "Enturbaned cadres" (*sarıklı kadro*), "hojas and agitators for Shariatism" (*hocalar ve şariatçılık kıskırtıcılık*), and "the clique that profits from fanaticism and religion" (*taassup ve din istimarculuğu*)<sup>44</sup> represented that "intrac-

38 Ahmet Cevat Emre, *İki Neslin Tarihi*, p. 314.

39 Birol Caymaz and Emmanuel Szurek, "La révolution au pied de la lettre: L'invention de 'l'alphabet turc'", *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 6 (2007): <http://ejts.revues.org/index1363.html>.

40 Gavin D. Brockett, "Revisiting the Turkish Revolution, 1923–1938: Secular Reform and Religious 'Reaction'", *History Compass* 4, no. 6 (2006), pp. 1060–1072; Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey*, p. 3.

41 Falih Rıfık Atay, *Çankaya*, p. 369.

42 Ahmet Cevat Emre, *İki Neslin Tarihi*, p. 314.

43 Reşit Galip, "Les recherches nouvelles autour de l'Histoire en Turquie", *La Turquie Kémaliste* 1 (June 1934), p. 2.

44 Falih Rıfık Atay, *Çankaya*.

table medieval root that has been growing like a tumor in the body of the state and nation since the *Tanzimat* and that had to be eradicated “at the root”, just as the “Oriental mind” had to be “exterminated” [*söndürmek*].<sup>45</sup> In sum, Kemalist Orientalism can be defined as a discursive arsenal in the service of the ruling group, used to disqualify all individuals who did not conform to the model of the ideal citizen; i.e. peasants resisting republican social engineering, political opponents hostile to secularist reforms, or Kurds rejecting forced assimilation.<sup>46</sup>

The Kemalist Orient was a programmatic formula. Every reform adopted in interwar Turkey was made in the name of—or rather in opposition to—that vision of the Orient. This was especially the case for the “language revolution”; that is, the Romanization of the alphabet in 1928, the move to purge the Turkish language of its Arabic and Persian vocabulary, and the adoption of European technical terminology in the 1930s and '40s. Here is how Ahmet Cevat Emre justified abandoning the Arabic script:

Language was the crank with which we got this great undertaking [“our shift from the medieval culture of the Orient to Western civilization”] under way. The first thing we needed was a language that would express the culture and technology of the West with subtlety, profundity, precision and accuracy. There is a strong relationship between the Western alphabet and a language capable of expressing Western terminologies ... From then on we would have to reject our culture and yesterday’s techniques, just as we rid ourselves of obsolete, rusty tools. And the most obsolete, rusted feature of our culture was our alphabet. With that alphabet, the Arabic alphabet, it was impossible to appropriate Western culture.<sup>47</sup>

The same understanding fuelled the Kemalists’ systematic elimination of the Arabic and Persian lexicon, which was likened to the purging of a foreign body from the national language. For the historian Fuat Köprülü, speaking at the first

---

45 Ibid., pp. 386 and 420.

46 On the issue of the Kemalist Orientalist perspective on Kurds, see Welat Zeydanlıoğlu, “The White Turkish Man’s Burden: Orientalism, Kemalism and the Kurds in Turkey” in Guido Rings and Anne Iffé (eds), *Neo-colonial Mentalities in Contemporary Europe? Language and Discourse in the Construction of Identities* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 155–174; I consulted the Turkish version of this text at [http://www.gelawej.net/pdf/beyaz\\_turkun\\_yuku.pdf](http://www.gelawej.net/pdf/beyaz_turkun_yuku.pdf) (Aug. 16, 2011).

47 Ahmet Cevat Emre, *İki Neslin Tarihi*, p. 323. For other examples, see Birol Caymaz and Emmanuel Szurek, “La révolution au pied de la lettre”.

Turkish Language Congress (September 1932), which marked the beginning of the lexical "purification" process, the point was

to save the Turkish language, which lost its independence after entering the fold of Muslim civilization, regressing under the influence of various factors, falling under foreign yokes ... Up until recently, it was normal that our scholars, who accepted the yoke of Arabic and Persian in their language without feeling its weight, should adopt such an attitude: they were intellectuals in a country whose institutions belonged to the Middle Ages. But today Turkish society has broken all its medieval bonds, thanks to the reforms undertaken since the great victory. It is a brand new society, a society of progress.<sup>48</sup>

Here the notion of *vernacular* is to be taken at face value: the new language called "pure Turkish" as imagined and indeed fashioned by the Kemalist intelligentsia of the 1930s was a fundamentally Orientalist construction.

Our travels through Kemalist Turkey would not be complete without one last figure: the *Levantine*. For the Kemalists the term referred to all non-Muslims, not just Latin Catholics. In their sociodicy, the Levantine Oriental was quite distinct from the Muslim one; a shady, cosmopolitan, and mercantile character, one particularly unsettling because of his suspect connections to the West and westerners. In this sense the Levantine also incarnated the anachronistic, harmful survival of Ottoman pathologies within the Turkish present. Ever preoccupied by how Europeans saw them, Vedat Nedim called on "every Western intellectual interested in studying Turkey" to "keep his distance from the self-interested opinions of foreign capitalists and Levantine circles".<sup>49</sup> Likewise Ercument Ekrem deplored the fact that European journalists newly arrived in Turkey all "rushed to establish their headquarters not only in Istanbul but in the very heart of Beyoğlu", preferring the Ottoman city, specifically its non-Muslim district on the northern shore of the Golden Horn, to modern Ankara, the Kemalist's ideal capital:

48 Fuat Köprülü in Türk Dil Kurumu, *Birinci Türk Dili Kurultayı 1932, Tezler, Muzakere Zabıtları* [First Turkish language conference, Theses and minutes, 1932] (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), p. 413; Ruşen Eşref [Ünaydın], "Une contribution à l'histoire de la Révolution: La Société pour l'Étude de la Langue Turque", *Türk Dili* 2 (Sep. 1933), pp. 1–20 [recte 49–69].

49 Vedat Nedim Tör, "Qu'attendons-nous de l'intellectuel occidental?", *La Turquie kémaliste* 11 (Feb. 1936), p. 1.

[The Western journalist's] first concern upon taking up his work is to find an assistant who not only usually belongs to a non-Turkish race and knows nothing about us but is also a complete novice in journalism ... Moreover, our foreign colleague has nothing better to do than lend an ear to gossip and the vain rumors that circulate in any sort of milieu—but [he] always [listens to] those coming from the other side of the *Bridge*—and so to write the news (the letter or telegram he sends to his newspaper) either in a café or at home ... What these impotent eyes need is certainly not the cloudy lenses of a few Sweet-Water Europeans, the last survivors of the old regime, but rather the clear, pure vision of an authentic Turk of the new generation ... To make matters worse, the non-Turkish milieus to which these foreign colleagues confine themselves and the people they keep with them only resuscitate this nostalgia and suffering, for they are in no way able to explain our reforms to them, they themselves do not understand them ... Eyes that follow events through “Tokatlian” windows do look, of course, but they see not.<sup>50</sup>

The “Sweet-Water European,” i.e. the Levantine or the Frank, was not a westerner, but rather another facet of the Kemalists’ Orient. Like the figures of the Armenian, Greek or Jew, he was a body that was foreign to the Turkish race, which for its part represented the West in all its ideal purity. Falih Rifki expressed this without any ambiguity in December 1934:

The first of Kemalism’s many particularities is the definitive triumph of the Westernization movement, a triumph ensured by the simultaneous elimination of Ottomanism and the institutions of Oriental civilization. Furthermore, this Westernization movement has finally been purged of the Levantinism and cosmopolitanism by which it was long afflicted; replaced by *nationalisme intégral*. For together with the preachers, Levantinized Ottomans were Kemalism’s first enemies.<sup>51</sup>

The surfacing of Maurras’s phrase, “*nationalisme intégral*”, and its rendering in French are hardly insignificant. Here we have our last variation on Kemalist Orientalism, which was marked by xenophobia against non-Muslims:

---

50 Ercument Ekrem Talu, “Oculus habent sed ...” My italics: the bridge is the Galata Bridge, which separates the Frankish city to the north (Pera and Beyoğlu) from the Muslim city to the south (Stambul). The Tokatlian Hotel was one of the most famous luxury hotels in Pera.

51 Falih Rifki Atay, “La femme turque”, *La Turquie kémaliste* 4 (Dec. 1934), p. 1; my italics.

The Kemalist's idea of independence is an unyielding attachment to Turkishness and Turkey, an attachment without any impurities or rough patches. If in spirit Mustafa Kemal ... was a man of the West and a partisan of civilization [*bir Batılı ve medeniyetçisi ise*], to the point of having a healthy aversion to the very word "Orient", he also kept such a distance from Franks [*Frenklik*] that he could actually be called xenophobic.<sup>52</sup> He was as much an enemy of Sweet-Water Franks (*tatlı su Frenkleri*) as of Orientals and fanatics.<sup>53</sup>

Like the images of the veiled woman, the *hoja* and the Kurd, the Levantine was an anachronism in Mustafa Kemal's Turkey. However, unlike these other figures, the Levantine had no potential to become a good Turk, remaining ever foreign to the national body. Kemalist Orientalism, in other words, was not always Jacobin and assimilating, but was instead an exclusionary, "dissimilating" form of nationalism in which any non-Muslim could become an outsider to the Kemalist West.

Far from rejecting Orientalist essentialization, the Kemalist *logos* is obsessively concerned with shifting the lines between darkness and light, so as to end up on the right side of it. Whether it is called "Orientalism" or "Occidentalism"—and it would be a nominalist error to persist in distinguishing them—the Kemalist cosmogony reveals a complex grammar of identity, which combines a plurality of components: a hatred for the imperialist West and even a premonitory denunciation of European Orientalism, revolutionary millenarianism and a historicist demonization of the Ottoman *ancien régime*, secularism and the censure of religious or Kurdish "Reaction", and finally xenophobic nationalism and the stigmatization of non-Muslim citizens. Kemalist Orientalism thus presents a panoply of reifications and dominations which combine class, race and gender-based violence, an array which outlines in the negative the portrait of the ideal citizen as Western through and through yet fiercely nationalist, a militant secularist yet exclusively Muslim, a confirmed republican yet one who views the people with suspicion. Kemalists are thus distinguished by their inventiveness, their ability to design their own Orient and to use it to serve their own social interests.

---

52 This term appeared in both French (*xénophobe*) and in Turkish (*ecnebi-sevmez*) in the text. The term *Frenk* is equivocal, designating first Europeans, then Christians, and ultimately all of Istanbul's non-Muslims.

53 Falih Rifkî Atay, *Çankaya*, p. 302.

One would have to be blind to deny the crushing weight of European Orientalism on Turkish nation-building and the social ideas of its Kemalist protagonists. But to claim that the discursive arsenal I have explored here was nothing more than the passive consumption of European Orientalism would amount to seeing those protagonists as cultural imbeciles. Clearly the term “internalized Orientalism” would be inadequate here as, from that perspective, Kemalist Orientalism would be nothing more than counterfeit, or a curio of the sort “Orientals would like”. The “internalization” notion, highly popular among exegetes of “Oriental” Orientalisms, should be monitored closely. It carries with it the highly questionable postulate that there can be enduring, reciprocal extraneousness between an (Oriental?) “interior” and a (Western?) “exterior”, and therefore contributes to the notion of cultural self-containment at the core of naturalist (nationalist, Orientalist, racist, etc.) thinking, a kind of thinking which it extends and enacts in scholarly discourse. The Kemalist case, both mimetic and vernacular, offers a powerful argument for rejecting essentialist applications of Said’s theory and for conceiving Orientalism as a transcultural rather than exclusively (post)colonial phenomenon.<sup>54</sup>

---

54 On the distinction between “transcultural Orientalism”, “metaphorical Orientalism”, and “postcolonial Orientalism”, see my “Trans-, Méta- et Post-”, pp. 53–60.

# Some Side Effects of a Progressive Orientology: Academic Visions of Islam in the Soviet South after Stalin

*Stéphane A. Dudoignon*

It was as early as 1980, in the wake of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and of the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Army in December of the same year, that Edward Said was translated into Russian for the first time—even if the translation was exclusively available for official use, only those trusted by the Soviet state and the Communist party having access to it. During that period the Soviet authorities were wondering what ideologically correct interpretation to give to the Iranian revolution labelled ‘Islamic’ by the Western experts and to the structuring of an Afghan resistance movement led from its beginning in the name of jihad.<sup>1</sup>

Though urgent for Moscow, the situation was not entirely new. Already in the 1920s, the nascent USSR had had a pressing need for expertise on its own Muslim world, as well as on the regions of the world of Islam identified as possible fronts for the projection of Bolshevik power. Paradoxically, it was in the ‘bourgeois’ literature on the Orient produced in the West that the young Soviet Union searched for answers, as well as in the sacred texts of Islam. Earlier the Russian Empire, inspired by Great Britain in India, was already notable for its vision of Islam as a vector of social conservatism.<sup>2</sup> Based on Tsarist practices, early Soviet academics had applied themselves to both Muslim sources and European scholarship to formulate ideas about the formation of political forms of Islam like those Russia was faced with in its own territory, as well as in the Caucasus and Central Asia. A new Marxist school of Oriental studies was entrusted with the task of adjusting these ideas, eventually, after the cultural revolution

- 
- 1 Cf. Hanna E. Jansen & Michael Kemper, “Hijacking Islam: The Search of a New Soviet Interpretation of Political Islam in 1980,” in M. Kemper & S. Conermann, eds., *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (London—New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 124–144.
  - 2 About the oscillation of Russia’s policy in colonial Turkestan between ‘neglect’ (*ignorirovanie*) and ‘civilising’ (*prosveshchenie*) of vernacular Muslim populations, see notably Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire* (London—New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 90–113; Robert D. Crews, “An Empire for the Faithful, a Colony for the Dispossessed”, *Cahiers d’Asie Centrale* 17–18 (2009), pp. 79–106.



of 1927–1928, constructing its own discourse on the basis of normative readings of the Qur'an and a reinterpretation of Western Orientalism.

After Stalin's collectivisation, this 'Red Orientalism' became dominant. It strongly narrowed the initial diversity of the Soviet discourse on Islam, equating it with 'feudalism'.<sup>3</sup> It achieved hegemony in the 1930s through the 'purges' to which scholars were invited to contribute by denouncement and exposure.<sup>4</sup> Its dominance would effectively be maintained until the end of the Soviet period, due to tougher lines taken in the late 1950s and in the late 1960s. De-Stalinisation, however, permitted the growing diffusion of works by more classical figureheads of early Soviet Oriental studies, like the Arabic scholar Ignatii Iu. Krachkovskii (1883–1951) and the specialist of Persian studies, Evgenii E. Bertel's (1890–1957). The latter's role in the establishment of new research and teaching institutions, and his promotion of national legacies and identities for the Central Asian republics of the USSR constantly re-enforced his position.<sup>5</sup>

- 
- 3 On the elimination of Oriental scholars during the 'Red Terror' from 1928 to 1937, notably in the field of Turkic studies, see notably F.D. Ashnin, V.M. Alpatov, D.M. Nasilov, *Repressirovannaia tiurkologiia* [Repressed Turkic Studies] (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2002)—and my review of this book in *Central Eurasian Reader* 1 (2008), pp. 25–26. On this period of the history of Oriental studies in the USSR, and on the baleful role played by a small group of ideologists, see Michael Kemper, "The Soviet Discourse on the Origin and Class Character of Islam (1922–1933)", *Die Welt des Islams* 49/1 (2009), pp. 1–48; *ibid.*, "Ljucian Klimovič: Der ideologische Bluthund der sowjetischen Islamkunde und Zentralasienliteratur", *Asiatische Studien / Études asiatiques* 63/1 (2009), pp. 93–133; *ibid.*, "Red Orientalism: Mikhail Pavlovich and Marxist Oriental Studies in Early Soviet Russia", *Die Welt des Islams* 50/3–4 (2010), pp. 435–476.
- 4 For example, on the early activity as a denouncer of the Tajik politician and historian Babajan Ghafurov (1909–1977)—a motif of collective praise in the archconservative Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, see: Haidarsho Pirumshoev, "Bobodzhan Gafurov: ot zhurnalitsiki k istoricheskoi nauke" [B. Ghafurov, from Journalism to Historical Science], in Abdullo Gafurov & Bakhrinniso Kabilova, ed., *Akademik B. Gafurov—vydaiushchisia issledovatel' istorii Tsentral'noi Azii / Akademik B. Ghafurov—muhaqqiqi barjastai ta'rikhi Osiioi Markazi* (Dushanbe: Akademiia nauk Respubliki Tadjikistan, Institut istorii, arkhologii i etnografii im. A. Donisha, 2009), pp. 49–64—and my review of this article in *Central Eurasian Reader* 3 (2014), in print.
- 5 In Central Asia, the term of Arabic origin *mirath* ("heritage," "patrimony")—in Uzbek and Tajik: *meros*—lies at the core of these reappraisals. On the management of cultural patrimonies by the federated republics created between 1924 and 1936, see notably: Alexandre Bennigsen, "Soviet Minority Nationalism in Historical Perspective", in Robert Conquest, ed., *The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet Empire* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), pp. 131–150; Stéphane A. Dudoignon, "Djadidisme, mirasisme, islamisme", *Cahiers du monde russe* 37/1–2 (1996), pp. 13–40.

From the 1930s onwards, academic Orientalism was also contributing, in intimate association with those local literati spared by the Terror, to the formation of national patrimonies of established literary languages—on the basis of Stalin’s theory of nationality, and through the promotion of norms and rituals instituted, till the relocations of the Second World War, in the Soviet Union’s metropolitan research centres of Moscow and Leningrad. With regard to these national identities it should be noted that the creation of cross-border historical spaces in the southern periphery of the USSR (as in North-West Iran during the Soviet military occupation of 1941–1947) permitted the diffusion outwards (in this case, towards Iran’s academic centres) of the notion of nationality as it had been developed since the 1920s in the Soviet academic institutions in charge of Oriental studies.<sup>6</sup>

In parallel, the rediscovery of the sacred texts of Islam (in the wake of the Russian translation of the Qur’an by Krachkovskii in 1963) and the rehabilitation of gnostic literatures (e.g. Sufi texts published by Bertel’s) paved the way for further reappraisals. The shortage of qualified religious personnel—badly hit by Stalin’s purges and by the repressions of the Khrushchev period—would soon permit philologists to accede to the role of “*mufassir*” (Ar.: exegete) of Islam. Two ‘moments’ in the aftermath of de-Stalinisation allowed for the rehabilitation of Islam as a vector of civilisation by new generations of scholars born of ‘Muslim’ peoples of the Soviet Union. Launched around 1958 and 1976, these two remobilisation campaigns orchestrated from Moscow, following the denunciation of Stalin’s crimes and the failure of Khrushchev’s reforms respectively, concentrated first on the valuation of national cultures. Gradually extended to new fields, the rehabilitations of the mid-1950s and mid-1970s permitted a revision of nineteenth-century Islamic reform and modernisation. These rehabilitations would be promoted by scholars educated in the Oriental Faculties created in the late 1950s in the south of the USSR—initially for the Union’s need for qualified cadres with a Turkic or Persian background, and with a store of knowledge in Arabic studies.

Diffused by school education and mass culture, Soviet Orientalism opened the path for a gradual rediscovery of Islam, sometimes by Muslim clerics themselves. What will be dealt with here is the interaction between academic scholars, writers, creators, and clerics within the framework of a public culture directed by the supreme instances of the CPSU and of the Soviet state, both in

---

6 On this aspect of cross-border historical spaces, see notably the innovative work by political scientist Gilles Riaux, *Ethnicité et nationalisme en Iran: La cause azerbaïdjanaise* [Ethnicity and Nationalism in Iran: The Azerbaijani Cause] (Paris: Karthala (Meydan), 2012), pp. 76–89.

the metropolis and in the federated or autonomous national republics. Focusing on 1958 and 1976, what we aim to show in this contribution is how bodies of initiatives and measures devised in the political and scientific centres of the Soviet metropolis with the aim of providing answers to peculiar political challenges have also paved the way for gradual reappraisals of pre-modern literary traditions reinterpreted as national legacies, within—but also well beyond—the Soviet officialdom of Oriental faculties and research institutions.

### 1958: Orientalism and Nationality Policy

The year 1958 is relevant because of at least three interconnected developments: de-Stalinisation, which had started in 1956, was beginning to take effect; political prisoners were returning from the Gulag;<sup>7</sup> and official campaigns were launched for the rehabilitation of national cultures—viz. of Oriental and Islamic cultures in those Muslim-majority-peopled regions of the Soviet Union—which had been planned already in 1956 but were implemented only two years later. This third element was by no means a grassroots initiative, but was imposed by the central instances of the CPSU with relays at the level of each republic involved.

In the aftermath of the denunciation of Stalin's crimes and later after Khrushchev's reforms had halted, a remobilisation was necessary for the party and the state.<sup>8</sup> As little more than extensions of political power, academics and the 'creative intelligentsia' (Rus. *tvorcheskaiia intelligentsiia*) were closely associated in this effort. At the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR, one example was the philologist, translator, novelist, scriptwriter and playwright Rasul Hadizada (1928–2010), the son of a well-read family of Samarqand and a graduate student of the Institute of Oriental Studies of Leningrad, who embarked on the study of the manuscript work by

7 Among them were a number of 'mullahs' arrested between 1932 and 1944, whose return brought about an Islamic revival from the mid-1950s onwards: on this yet understudied historical fact, see my article "From Revival to Mutation: The Religious Personnel of Islam in the Tajik SSR, from De-Stalinization to Independence (1955–1991)", *Central Asian Survey* 30/1 (2011), pp. 53–80.

8 On this aspect, see the classical works by political scientist Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, *Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: The Case of Tadzhikistan* (Washington, DC: John Hopkins University Press, 1970); *ibid.*, "Patterns of Political Change", in A. Bromke & T. Rakowska-Harmstone, eds., *The Communist States in Disarray, 1965–1971* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), pp. 323–350.

Bukharan reformist scholar of Islam Ahmad Makhдум al-Siddiqi al-Bukhari, alias Danish (1826/7–1897). Initially a translator of Lenin's works into Tajik Persian, Hadizada was to finish his rich career as a commentator of the Qur'an. In the meantime, the Thaw permitted him to publish, in 1957, a very partial edition of Danish's treatises, followed by a synthesis some twenty years later. The official argument for this rehabilitation of Islamic reform was the notion that 'enlightenment' would be achieved through acculturation to Russia's modern civilisation.<sup>9</sup>

A trait of the Soviet South's Oriental studies in the late 1950s was the close partnership between scholars and writers. For instance, in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR, created in 1958, one could find poet laureate Mirza Tursunzada (1911–1977), an exalter in verse of the peoples' friendship, and writer Satim Ulughzada (1911–1997), the still popular author of historical novels about Central Asia's Tajik *and* progressive past.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, this association between research on manuscripts and literary creation continued to exist until well after independence: in Tajikistan a new Institute for Manuscript Heritage created in 1991 was entrusted initially to poet Mu'min Qana'at (b. 1932),<sup>11</sup> before being reunited in early 2011 with the Institute of Oriental Studies and Written Heritage under the direction of the Marxist and nationalist polygraph Akbar Tursun (b. 1939), a physicist by training.

An apt illustration of this common mobilisation of researchers and writers under the supervision of the party's central committees within each republic

9 On that period of time, see the memoirs published by Hadizada a few years before his death: *Khudoio, khudro bishnosam: kitobi khotirot* [O God, May I Know Myself: A Book of Memoirs] (Dushanbe: Devashtich, 2006), esp. pp. 262–268. For a regrettably sketchy survey of the literature devoted since the 1950s to the 'Enlightenment' movement in Central Asia, see Evelin Grassi, "Soviet Studies on the Literature of the Enlightenment" (Second Half of the Nineteenth Century), *Eurasian Studies* 7/1 (2009), pp. 51–70; see also my analysis in "Un orientalisme 'progressiste' et ses effets collatéraux: les Suds de l'URSS après Staline", in F. Pouillon et J.-Cl. Vatin (ed.), *Après l'orientalisme: l'Orient créé par l'Orient*, Paris, IISMM/Karthala, 2011, pp. 272–273.

10 Cf. D.S. Saidmuradov, Iu. S. Mal'stev, *Iz istorii vostokovedeniia v Tadzhikistane (1917–1958)* [On the History of Oriental Studies in Tajikistan (1917–1958)] (Dushanbe: Donish, 1990), pp. 55–60. Ulughzada had opened the path for the Soviet rediscovery of Danish's work through the publication of a historical novel on him during the remobilisation period in the immediate aftermath of WWII: *Ahmadi Donish*, Stalinabad, Nashriioti davlatii Tojikiston, 1946.

11 See for instance M. Khurosoni, "Mu'min Qanoat", in A.M. Khurosoni & N. Amirshohi, *Sharqshinosii tojik (1958–2008)* [Tajik Oriental Studies (1958–2008)] (Dushanbe: Maorif va farhang, 2009), pp. 98–99.

consisted of the celebrations, in 1958, of national poets of the pre-modern past. In the Tajik SSR the beneficiary was the tenth-century didactical poet Rudaki, whose celebration allowed for the postulation that the neo-Persian language was formed in the territory of present-day Tajikistan. Celebrated first in the 1920s as a champion of the “progressiveness” of Central Asia’s Persian literature,<sup>12</sup> Rudaki was rediscovered in the course of de-Stalinisation. In 1958 the inauguration of a mausoleum constructed for the poet in his native village was accompanied by the publication of his works in the Arabic and Cyrillic scripts, and by the production of an Oriental epic by the Tajikfilm Studios called *Destiny of a Poet* (Rus. *Sud’ba poeta*), on a screenplay by Ulughzada.<sup>13</sup> The way these national jubilees were organised under the aegis of central committees sheds light on the political and industrial logic of such celebrations.<sup>14</sup> Through films on figureheads of each republic’s literary past (Nawayi in the Uzbek SSR; Makhtum-Quli in the Turkmen SSR; Nizami in the Azerbaijani SSR, etc.), Soviet cinema would play a leading role in the promotion of a “positive” representation of remote national pasts.<sup>15</sup>

- 
- 12 Cf. P.N. Olimova, “Nazari Turaqul Zehni ba maqomi Ustod Rudaki” [Turaqul Zehni’s Perception of Rudaki’s Place], *Akhboroti Akademiiai ilmhoi Jumhurii Tojikiston, Shu ‘bai jam ‘iatshinosi*, 2009/2, pp. 159–165; through two articles published in 1925 in the Tajik newspaper of Samarqand *Awaz-i tajik* by literary critic Turaqul Zehni (1891/2–1983), the author shows how Zehni underlined the difference between Central Asia’s and Iran’s Persian literatures, insisting on the former’s more “progressive” character.
- 13 On this film’s genesis and critical echo, see Ato Akhrorov, *Tadzhikskoe kino* [Tajik Cinema] (Dushanbe: Donish, 1971), pp. 156–164, although in fact this book deals principally with the 1950s–1960s; see also, by the same author “Rudaki dar pardai sinamo” [Rudaki on the Cinema’s Screen], in A. Rajabov, R. Muqimov, M. Karimov, eds., *Rudaki: diruz va imruz* [Rudaki Yesterday and Today] (Dushanbe: Akademiiai ilmhoi Jumhurii Tojikiston, 2007), pp. 631–642.
- 14 See for instance the correspondence between the Central Committee of the Tajik Communist Party, the Union of Writers of the Tajik SSR, and the Tajikfilm cinema studios, poet laureate Mirza Tursunzada taking on responsibility for the whole set of events; State Central Archive of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1505-1-143; unpublished typescripts of the Union of Writers [about the 1958 jubilee, the party’s central apparatus taking care of the celebrations’ most diverse aspects—including miles of cotton thread for the beards of actors and extras in the Rudaki film].
- 15 On the fortune of Persian epics in the cinema produced in the Tajik SSR, see Ato Akhrorov, *Tadzhikskoe kino, 1969–1974 gg.* [Tajik Cinema, 1969–1974] (Dushanbe: Donish, 2010), notably pp. 78–96. On similar developments in the theatre, see Nizom Nurdzhanov, *Ocherki istorii tadzhikskogo dramaticheskogo teatra, 1968–1978 gg.* [Studies in the History of Tajik Drama Theatre, 1968–1978] (Dushanbe: Donish, 2008), pp. 37–65 (especially on Rudaki’s dramatization).

During the same period Oriental sections and faculties (Rus. *vostfaks*) were being established at the universities of federated republics, as in Baku in 1957 and Dushanbe the following year. Centred on the study of Arabic language, enlarged gradually to Persian and then to a variety of Turkic tongues, these establishments had been intended for the training of an élite of specialists of external intelligence and of foreign affairs. For this reason the departments of Arabic studies were attended first by cohorts of privileged persons: one could have access to them exclusively *cherez* (Rus. 'through')—the famous Soviet concept of intermediation or recommendation—because aspiring interpreters, translators, and other agents of the Soviet diplomatic system had to possess an impeccable family pedigree and/or solid personal protections within the party and state apparatus.

From the 1950s onwards Communist-background intellectuals of varied origins were to play a key role in the development of Arabic studies, for instance the Iraqi Hasan-Ibrahim al-Naqqash (1925–1986) and the Byelorussian Vladimir Demidchik (1930–1988) in the Tajik SSR. They taught generations of specialists on the Muslim East, including future leaders of the nationalist and Islamist opposition to the Tajik Communist Party in the 1980s. The openings of new faculties and research departments in the late 1950s tended to coincide with the launching of new campaigns against the public practice of Islam under Khrushchev. Academic experts of Arabic studies from the southern *vostfaks* and institutes of Oriental studies would soon be in demand, beside academic philosophers, for the production of polemic literature about Soviet Islam itself.<sup>16</sup>

This institutional life went hand in hand with the appearance of micro-societies involving Oriental scholars and a range of figures from the religious personnel of Islam. Among other places of exchanges, one must mention the understudied role of the neo-traditional literary circles (Ar. *mahafil*, sing. *mahfil*) that tended to mushroom from the mid-1950s onwards, as thousands of 'mullahs' repressed in the 1930s–1940s returned from the Gulag. Such was the case, for example, in Kulab on the Afghan border of the Tajik SSR, where the lyrical poets Mirza Latif (1902–1967) and Mulla Sharif (1906/7–1995), both former camp residents, attracted a circle that consisted of several dozens of

16 As in the case of a famous Uzbek-language textbook compiled in the 1980s against the rise of fundamentalist movements, by academic philosopher M.A. Usmonov: *Islom, spravochnik* [Islam: A Guide] (Tashkent: Uzbek sovet entsiklopediiasi bosh tahririati, 1986)—a publication very much discussed since that date in the country's rich religious underground: see for instance <http://forum.islom.uz/smf/index.php?topic=10341.5;wap2> (consulted on 24/05/2012).

participants by the end of the Soviet period. The owner of a rich personal library, Mulla Sharif rediscovered the heritage of Persian Sufi poetry through the academic publications of the abovementioned Evgenii E. Bertel's.<sup>17</sup>

Arabic calligraphers should also be mentioned as key intermediaries between the varied spaces of Soviet society. This is illustrated by the life and work of Habib-Allah Salih, also known as 'Laqay'; he had been educated as an artist, but at some point worked as a relay for the *qazi* of the Tajik SSR, 'Abd al-Rashid b. Musa-Bek (1883–1978), before becoming a manager of the restoration of ancient religious buildings in independent Uzbekistan in the 1990s.<sup>18</sup>

Oral micro-history brings to light the multiple links that developed from the 1970s onwards in the southernmost regions of the USSR between academic Oriental studies and the milieu of the *hujras* (literally 'cells'), an Arabic term that came to designate at the same time the largely tolerated non-accredited schools of Muslim religious learning, as well as the local units of a nascent Islamic revival movement inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood. The most famous case of such an association is no doubt the connection between the Tajik Oriental scholar 'Abd al-Ghani Mirzayeff (1908–1976), a disciple of Bertel's in Leningrad and a leading specialist of Persian gnostic poetry, and the Fergana-born, Kashmir-educated Hanafi theologian Mawlawi Hindustani (1892–1989), recruited by the former in the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR as a specialist of Urdu.<sup>19</sup>

### The Turning Point of 1976: Islamic Reform Revisited

The year 1976 was another important milestone in the history of Russian Oriental studies for three reasons: 1) since the mid-1960s the economic reforms by Alexei Kosygin (Prime Minister of the USSR from 1964 until shortly before his death in 1980) had been implemented, in the wake of which academic literature

17 Cf. Stéphane A. Dudoignon, Ariane Zevaco, "Sur le 'Mail des Rhapsodes': sociabilités traditionnelles, groups de statut, ethnies minoritaires en Asie Centrale soviétique" [On the 'Rhapsodes' Mall': Traditional Gatherings, Status Groups, Ethnic Minorities in Soviet Central Asia], *Asiatische Studien / Études asiatiques* 63/2 (2009), pp. 273–321.

18 Interview with Habib-Allah Salih, Islamic University of Tashkent, September 8, 2009.

19 Mirzayeff and Hindustani's mutual relations were a taboo in the late Soviet period, as suggested by the silences of the former's first biographer A'lokhon Afsahzod: *Akademik Abdulghani Mirzoev* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1985).

in the humanities and social sciences witnessed an explosion of creativity;<sup>20</sup> 2) the simultaneous launching of a rehabilitation of Islamic reform in various Muslim-peopled regions of the USSR (e.g. the Volga-Ural region and Central Asia); 3) the beginning of a new historical phase culminating in the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Soviet Oriental studies also adopted a new course with regard to history of Islam in general, and in the field of rationalist philosophy and of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Islamic reform and modernisation movements in particular.<sup>21</sup> A tentative reappraisal of these movements had timidly begun in 1958, but it had soon been suppressed as antireligious campaigns resumed. At the same time, the Russia-based philologists and specialists of Central Asian literatures, Liutsian Klimovich (1908–1989) and Iiosif Braginskii (1905–1989), imposed a conservative Marxist-Leninist line, both denouncing “bourgeois nationalism” at work in the writings of early-twentieth-century reformist writers and activists. Twenty years later, another attempt at rehabilitation was made. Just like in 1958, in places as varied as Kazan, Makhachkala, Tashkent, and Dushanbe, the year 1976 witnessed the publication of a number of monographs on the regional and national history of Islamic reform, many of them by authors who had actively participated in the 1958 jubilees.<sup>22</sup> While

20 E.g., Moshe Lewin, *Russia's Twentieth Century: The Collapse of the Soviet System* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 315.

21 See for instance M. Osimov, “S’ezdi xxv KPSS va problemahoi inkishofii minba’dai ilm dar Tojikiston” [The Twenty-Fifth Congress of the CPSU and the Issues of the Farther Development of Science in Tajikistan], *Kommunisti Tojikiston* 1976/12, pp. 43–51. At a late date of Kosygin’s government, academy philosopher and apparatchik Muhammad ‘Asimi (Osimov, 1920–1999), the Chairman of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan from 1965 to his assassination—in parallel the Director of the academy’s Institute of Oriental Studies between 1976 and 1986—comments on the decisions of the Twenty-Fifth Congress of the CPSU held in Moscow in February–March 1976. In the field of philosophy and Oriental studies, which had been placed under his authority that same year, ‘Asimi insists on the necessity to take into account “the peoples’ spiritual heritage” (in Tajik Persian: *merosi ma’navii khalqho*) better, though in a strict Marxist-Leninist interpretation (pp. 48–49).

22 In the Tajik SSR, Rasul Hadizada had participated, however modestly, in the celebration of Rudaki as a Tajik national poet. See for instance on this aspect of his work his synthesis of the debates of the time in the columns of the Tajik CP’s monthly: “Sardaftari nazmi klasikii tojik ustod Rudaki [Master Rudaki, the Founder of Tajik Classical Poetry]”, *Kommunisti Tojikiston* 1958/9, pp. 37–46. On Hadizada’s work during those years, see notably the biographical article on him by A.M. Khurosoni, in Khurosoni & Amirshohi, ed., *Sharqshinosii tojik*, pp. 611–615; as well as indeed Hadizada’s memoirs: *Khudoio khudro bishnosam*, pp. 293–302.



Soviet historians had previously relied primarily on Russian-language archives, Oriental philologists now started exploring new sources of 'national heritage'. Scholars like Yahya Abdullin in Kazan, Muhammad Abdullaev in Makhachkala, and Rasul Hadizada in Dushanbe all made names for themselves as interpreters of local Islamic reform, which, although it was still regarded as an effort to acculturate to Russia, had rediscovered some of its religious roots of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and came across as a tentative autonomous modernisation of the Muslims societies within the Russian realm.

From 1977 to 1985 the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Moscow was led by the Arabic scholar and future director of the KGB, Evgenii Primakov (b. 1929). From then on, Oriental studies in Moscow became the ideological focal point of the Soviet response to political Islam both inside Russia and the Soviet Union and abroad.<sup>23</sup> Through publications of his institute, Primakov personally made several contributions to this development, asserting a causal connection between Muslim religiosity and Western colonialism. As part of the re-politicization of Oriental studies from the mid-1970s, the emergence of a new generation of intellectuals writing about Islam can be discerned. Often trained in the faculties of Oriental studies created in 1957–1958, these new figures enjoyed among the urban populations long exposed to mass education a higher degree of intellectual and moral prestige than graduates of the Islamic religious institutions created in the wake of Stalin's Muslim Spiritual Directions of 1943. The ideological spectrum of these new authors, although all from the Soviet mould of 1958, was remarkably diverse. They included, for instance, nonconformist intellectuals who were the first to adjust European neo-traditionalism to the Soviet Muslim framework.<sup>24</sup> The Siberian-born philologist Valiahmet Sadur (1939–2006), who

---

23 For the sake of historical accuracy, it is to be noticed that the turning point personified in Moscow by Primakov in 1977 had been largely sketched at least one year before in varied places of the Soviet Union—as shown in Dushanbe by the nomination of Muhammad 'Asimi (on him: *supra*, note 21) as the Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies; Hadizada was then joining the Rudaki Institute of Tajik Language and Literature, which would become in the 1980s a centre of the national movement under guidance of nonconformist poets Layiq Sherali (1941–2001) and Bazar Sabir (b. 1938). For a Tajik view of the new priorities imposed on Oriental studies in the USSR and on the new primacy attached to contemporary matters, notably to economy, see Osimov, "S'ezdi XXV KPSS", pp. 49–50.

24 On this still understudied aspect on the history of ideas in the USSR, see the pioneering work by Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford—New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 222–224 and 257–260.

specialised in Kyrgyz epics, and the philosopher of Azerbaijani origin, Heydar Jemal (b. 1947), would rapidly assert themselves as key ideological inspirers of the Islamic Revival Party which was created in June, 1990.

Azerbaijan too produced a wide array of scholars in Oriental studies who, within a few years, obtained the status of religious leaders in the eyes of the republic's traditionally schooled population. After having served as translators in a variety of posts in the Maghreb and the Near East, back in Azerbaijan these erudite figures joined the university, the academy of sciences, or the religious administration of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Azerbaijan. After the republic's independence in 1991 many held important posts in the new religious administrations, either in those of the *şeyhülislam* or within a variety of state councils for religious affairs. Besides Ziya Bünyadov (1923–1997), a translator of the Qur'an into Azerbaijani, such diverse figureheads as Nəriman Qasımoğlu, an interpreter of the Qur'an in a modern and secular fashion, and Hacı Sabir Həsənlı, the founder of the Progress Islamic Party of Azerbaijan in 1991, should be mentioned.<sup>25</sup> Their large autonomy vis-à-vis the religious boards inherited from the Soviet period sometimes put these Muslim intellectuals in a position of rivalry with the Shiite *şeyhülislam* in Baku or the Sunni muftis in the other Muslim-majority countries of the former southern periphery of the USSR.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, with the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by international coalitions, the expertise of these scholars was very much in demand from the general public in their own countries, as well as their governments and the international community.<sup>26</sup> Since the end of the Soviet period, academics specialising in Oriental studies had never found themselves so prominently at the frontline of the development of public discourses about Islam in the territories of the former USSR. This time, however, contrary to the periods of ideological relaxation of 1958 and 1976, the process has direct implications for international organisations dealing with matters

---

25 Cf. Altay Göyüşov, Naomi Caffee, Robert Denis, "The Transformation of Azerbaijani Orientalists into Islamic Thinkers after 1991", in Kemper & Conermann, eds., *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies*, pp. 306–319, in part. 309–310; Rufat Sattarov, *Islam, State and Society in Independent Azerbaijan: Between Historical Legacy and Post-Soviet Reality* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2009), esp. pp. 192–194 and 212.

26 International demand has singularly risen since occupation of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq from 2003 to 2010 by U.S.-led coalitions has put the Caucasus and Central Asia at a forefront of the 'antiterrorist struggle'. Already in June 2002 the Azerbaijan State Committee for Work with Religious Associations, created in Baku in 2001, organised a seminar on "religious extremism" in partnership with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Sattarov, *Islam, State and Society*, p. 183).

of security. Since 1991, a conceptual apparatus has gradually been set up with the active support of NATO's experts, which focuses on a dichotomy between "traditional" and "non-traditional" religions, chasing every form of cross-border proselytism with the active support of those administrations inherited from the USSR. Although their advice is more sought after than ever before, the manoeuvring space for post-Soviet scholars of Oriental studies appears to remain limited nonetheless.

In this contribution we have identified two turning points in history of the political management of Muslim-background national cultures in the USSR, 1958 and 1976. Neither lasted for very long; after '58, repressions against Islam under Khrushchev resumed in a context of escalating international tension which lasted until the end of the Cuba crisis in 1962, while in 1976 the revision of Islamic reform was rapidly eclipsed by the renewed interest in Stalin's heritage which characterized the epoch of Brezhnev. In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Primakov promoted an ideologically impeccable interpretation centred of a vision of the Orient's lasting political religiosity as a result of its reaction to Western colonialism; in Eastern societies deprived of a proletariat, he prophesized, the alliance of local bourgeoisies with the coloniser had engendered global hostility towards Western culture and civilisation. These counter movements notwithstanding, both 1958 and 1976 should be considered significant steps in the diffusion of Oriental scholarship in mass culture, both contributing to the production of the substratum on which more recent and more extensive rediscoveries and revisions were based. They also made possible gradual rapprochements during the 1980s between secular and Islamic intelligentsias, which have had a profound impact on the political landscapes of countries like Azerbaijan and Tajikistan.

Since the late 1970s the political role of experts on the Orient has been strengthened in the USSR, and since 2001 also within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in which China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan collaborate.<sup>27</sup> One of the SCO's goals is to counter political Islam on China's western borders and to stop the influx in Central Asia of militant Muslim missionary organisations from abroad. The SCO, which mirrors the Council of Europe in its authority to formulate political and legal norms, has established a number of authoritarian norms with regard

---

27 Created on June 14–15, 2001 the SCO is an Asian continental intergovernmental organisation gathering China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with Mongolia (since 2004), India, Pakistan, and Iran (since 2005) as observer states.

to the struggle against allegedly imported, “non-traditional”, forms of Islamic practice.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, explanations for the “radicalisation” of political Islam within the former Soviet space promoted globally in the 2000s continue to assign a key role to the traditional structures of Caucasian or Central Asian societies .... without taking into account the transformations of the Soviet period, nor the impact of policies implemented from Moscow, most particularly in the Caucasus, since the end of the Yeltsin period.<sup>29</sup>

---

28 On these aspects see for instance Thomas Ambrosio, “Catching the ‘Shanghai Spirit’: How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 60/8 (2008), pp. 1321–1344.

29 E.g., on Primakov’s personal posterity, see the article “Neotlozhnaia k resheniiu problema: Eksperty Tsentra situatsionnogo analiza RAN ob islame v Rossii i ugroze ego radikalizatsii” [A Non-Postponed Issue: The Experts of the Centre for Situation Analysis of the Academy of Sciences of Russia about Islam in Russia and the Threat of Its Radicalisation], *Rossiiskaia gazeta* 2012/04/04 ([www.rg.ru/2012/04/04/islam.htm](http://www.rg.ru/2012/04/04/islam.htm)—last consultation on 2012/04/06).

# Minority Nationalities in China: Internal Orientalism\*

*Elisabeth Allès*

Throughout Chinese history, the question of the country's linguistic and cultural diversity and its confrontations with the peoples of the steppe have formed a problem for the elites and the central power, whether imperial or republican. Stevan Harrel was the first to point out the continuity underlying the consecutively Confucian, nationalist and communist civilizing projects applied to those peoples.<sup>1</sup> The current form can be called “internal Orientalism”<sup>2</sup> or even “Oriental Orientalism”.<sup>3</sup> Over the centuries, the populations living at the frontiers of the Empire were continuously classified as “raw barbarians” (*shengman*) or “cooked barbarians” (*shuman*) and were subjected to various assimilation policies depending on the period, before being culturally recognized and institutionalized as “minority nationalities” (*shaoshu minzu*).

The issues of ethnicity and Chinese nationalism were at the core of thinking on China in the 1990s, when minority groups were dialectically constructed as “other” for the purposes of constructing a modern Han identity.<sup>4</sup> Here I analyse the metamorphoses of that “internal Orientalism”, the specific features of which derive from the intentions of and framework established by the Chinese state. I examine the most recent aspects of this construction, in the period starting with the reforms of the 1980s.

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs.

1 Stevan Harrel, ‘Civilizing projects and the reaction to them’, introduction to *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. S. Harrel (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), pp. 3–36.

2 As Louisa Schein put it: “I adopt the phrase ‘*internal Orientalism*’ to describe a relation between imaging and cultural/political domination that takes place inter-ethnically within China”; Schein, ‘Gender and Internal Orientalism in China’, *Modern China* 23, no. 1 (1997), pp. 69–98.

3 Dru C. Gladney, ‘Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 1 (1994), p. 94.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 99–103; Joël Thoraval, ‘Ethnies et nation en Chine’, in *La Chine aujourd'hui*, ed. Yves Michaud (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2003), pp. 47–63.

### Civilizing Projects

Though the populations located on the periphery of China were generally classified as “raw” or “cooked” barbarians in connection with the distance between them and the Empire’s civilizing centre, it was always possible for a “barbarian” to adopt imperial rites and so be integrated into the imperial order. An ancient illustration may be found in *Huaxin* (“The Heart of Being Hua”<sup>5</sup>), an essay written in 847 by Chen An in response to complaints that a Mandarin position had been granted to a “barbarian” who had successfully completed the Mandarin examinations:<sup>6</sup>

If one is born in the central provinces and yet acts contrary to ritual and propriety, then this is to have the look of a Hua but the heart of a barbarian. If one is born in the barbarian lands and yet acts in accordance with ritual and propriety, then this is to have the look of a barbarian and the heart of a Hua.

The last imperial dynasty, the Qing or Manchu, developed a “Confucian civilizing project” and cultural categories that remained in place under the Republic. In his struggle to establish that republic against the dynasty, Sun Yat-sen put forward a vision of the Chinese nation as a federation of five peoples, four of which lived on the frontiers: the Manchu, Mongol, Tibetan and Muslim peoples.<sup>7</sup> He used the term “Han” for people living in the country’s heartland, thereby effectively unifying the populations of northern and southern China with their diverse languages and cultures.

With the arrival of the communist regime, a new civilizing project was put in place. The point now was to lead the populations of the vast frontier lands to social progress; to valorise, emancipate and rally the people settled on the country’s borders—such terms were used so the authorities would not look like colonizers. In the 1950s a vast ethnic identification campaign (*minzu shibie*) was launched based on the concept of *minzu* (nationality, ethnic group), a project inspired in large degree by the Soviets “nationality” model. Researchers and Communist Party officials identified no fewer than 400 distinct groups, defined on a location basis. The political authorities decided to reduce this

5 The term *Hua*, still in use, signifies China; *Huaren* are the Chinese.

6 For the Chinese original of the essay and Charles Hartman’s English translation, see Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005) pp. 1–2.

7 The last term referred primarily to populations speaking Turkic languages.

number to 54 nationalities, grouping some ethnicities together on the basis of linguistic or other affinities. In exchange, it was declared that “equality of nationalities” (*minzu pingdeng*) obtained between the Han majority—today 91% of the population—and minority nationalities. China today is a multi-national state made up of 56 officially recognized “nationalities”, and minority nationalities have been granted individual and collective rights and a specific administrative system in the form of autonomous regions and districts. Though local identities still exist, the unifying notion of “nationality” established more than fifty years ago has been quite fully integrated.

In imitation of the Soviet model, ethnology and sociology were banned in 1952 in China. But the study of national minorities was maintained and even reinforced at the university, the Chinese state maintaining that such differences should be recognized and shown in a favorable light. Study focused primarily on history, language, economic development and “folklore” in the form of festive celebrations, rituals, customs, and of course songs and dances. Many members of the various nationalities were given the opportunity to train as Chinese Communist Party administrators and cadres and to teach in specialized universities and research institutes. Han and minority researchers are still very likely to apply this “folklorized” understanding of nationalities, based on the Soviet example.

This way of structuring minorities went together with feminized representations of them. One suggestive icon presents the country’s minorities as young women in colourful dress dancing, singing or gathering fruit in a wild natural landscape. Posters of the 1960s and 1970s, the map of nationalities, and articles in specialized journals aimed at foreign readers, such as *La Chine* and *China Reconstructs*, attest to this feminization. In direct contrast, the Han are always represented as soldierly men in either peasant or military dress or “Sun Yat-sen jackets”. Minorities, meanwhile, as Louisa Schein points out, were eroticized:

While Chinese internal Orientalism commonly represented minority women as colorful flowers among the natural flora and fauna, it just as often represented them as very human objects of erotic fascination. In many images their bodies appeared voluptuous, more extensively revealed than would be proper for a Han woman, and their expressions were unabashedly inviting. Accounts that bespoke their imagined availability abounded. In whispered lore as well as in bluntly scientific ethnographic reports, tales circulated about minority courtship practices, freedom of choice in marriage partners, and even sexual promiscuity.<sup>8</sup>

---

8 Schein, ‘Gender’, p. 77.

This was of course symmetrical to communist political moralism, as Dru C. Gladney explains:

The repression and control of sexuality among the Han, and its open representation among the minorities, demonstrate the important role that eroticization of the engendered minority Other plays in the Han construction of Self.<sup>9</sup>

From a political perspective things were different. In direct contrast to what happened in the Soviet Union, the establishing of autonomous regions and districts in China did not result in a transfer of power to their populations. What ensued in fact was a particular distribution of roles among those who held real power—that is, party officials, who had always been Han—and regional minorities, whose administrative responsibilities involved little in the way of decision-making power.

### The Reforms and Minority Reactions

Two periods prior to the 1980s were marked by particularly active assimilation policies. They correspond to the great Maoist political campaigns: the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). During those periods, cultural particularities were banned and harshly repressed. For example, Muslims were forced to raise pigs and eat pork.

With the 1980s reforms, minorities recovered a degree of religious freedom and some of the other advantages they had enjoyed.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese state supported the renewal of local traditions by encouraging the writing of monographs, usually by minority-member researchers, and funding spaces for religious practice, etc.

In the same period, many “life stories” were published, especially concerning experiences in border areas such as western China—the “Great West”, made up of Xinjiang, Tibet, Mongolia and the Southwest—where many of the so-called “rightists” banished for political reasons in 1957 as well as young people fleeing the famine of 1960–1961 and *Zhiqing*, “educated youth” sent away to the

9 Gladney, ‘Representing Nationality in China’, p. 108.

10 The one-child policy, which went into effect in 1981, did not apply to members of minority nationalities; they were granted extra points towards university admission, and their right to practice their religions and cultural traditions was fully recognized.



countryside during the Cultural Revolution<sup>11</sup> had ended up. These memoirists, whose writings recall in their own ways Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1945), included Wang Meng, Zhang Xianliang, Jia Pingwa, Zhang Chengzhi and A. Cheng.<sup>12</sup>

These narratives describe the rough life that city dwellers discovered and experienced alongside local populations, also the absurdity of the political system, the surrounding poverty, and the beauty of the landscapes. In *Shorblac*,<sup>13</sup> recounting his stay in Xinjiang, Zhang Xianliang emphasized the feeling of freedom elicited by the vast open spaces, a striking contrast with the overpopulation he was used to. The work revealed that in the 1960s it was easier to travel to Xinjiang than to circulate in the heartland of China because the bureaucratic regulations for traveling within the latter perimeter were much stricter.

In the mid-1980s, another form of literature appeared; a generation of writers and painters in search of inspiration who set out to discover those frontier lands, seeming to them both near and far. Here again, it was the state that determined what could and could not be written within the framework of its nationalities policy. In 1986, a young writer named Ma Jian who had travelled in Tibet wrote a story describing Tibetan funeral rites, including carving up the bodies of the dead to feed them to vultures.<sup>14</sup> The story, which was also one of incest, was deemed improper and defamatory for Tibetans and was banned; the editor of the literary review that had published it, Liu Xinwu, was sacked. In 1989, following demonstrations, a book entitled *Xingfensu* (Sexual mores) was banned at the request of the Islamic Association of China because of a passage considered insulting to Muslims.<sup>15</sup>

As elsewhere, the institutional framework but also the way people view minorities has impacted on how those minorities think of themselves. Many today imagine their unity within the framework of a "nationality" (*minzu*). New

11 Michel Bonnin, *Génération perdue: Le mouvement d'envoi des jeunes instruits à la campagne en Chine, 1968–1980* (Paris: Editions EHESS, 2004).

12 A number of these texts were translated into English by Zhu Hong in *The Chinese Western: Short Fiction from Today's China* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988).

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 117–151.

14 Ma Jian, *La mendiante de Shigatze*, French tr. by Isabelle Bijon (Arles: Actes Sud, 1988). The story in question is included in an anthology in English entitled *Stick out your tongue* (2006).

15 Muslim Chinese demonstrated on Tiananmen Square in 1989 at the same time as students. See Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Council of East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1991), p. viii.

nationalities regularly emerge and start demanding recognition. And nationalities which have been granted a particular territory by the Chinese state—e.g., the Uigurs—are demanding real autonomy and even independence. We can of course also mention the Tibetans and Mongols, who are finding central Chinese domination increasingly difficult to bear.

### Instrumentalizing an Internal Orient?

In the most recent period, tourism and the process of establishing a national material heritage that has been induced by international institutions like UNESCO have also opened the way for developing a rigidly “formatted” internal Orient.

In the 2000s, the extraordinary development of tourism in the peripheral regions, particularly in the south and southwest of the country, induced a kind of enthusiasm for minorities among the Han Chinese population. This phenomenon could be termed popular internal Orientalism. People rushed to visit minority regions, which are relatively easy to reach and inexpensive; they like taking the falsely “dangerous” paths to Miao and Na villages or others. All the classic aspects of tourism for the pleasure of discovering exotic places, including dreams of unbridled sexuality, are operative here. The minorities themselves, meanwhile, attempt to profit from this financial windfall while developing strategies for preserving their family world.

Sandra Teresa Hyde has described the situation in the city of Jinghong,<sup>16</sup> in the southwest of the country on the border with Burma and Laos; specifically, the Thai autonomous prefecture of Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna in Thai). The government’s 1990s economic development policy turned this region into a gateway for trade with Southeast Asia and a major tourist destination for Han. While in the early 1990s most visitors to these regions were young newlyweds on honeymoon and businessmen in search of rest and relaxation, in the mid-2000s most were middle-aged Han men who have come to spend their money in brothels, drinking and dancing with the girls, and gambling. In 1995, more than one and a half million tourists visited this prefecture.

So sexual tourism has developed in Jinghong, in bars, massage parlours, even karaoke bars and hairdressing salons. The paradoxical effect has been to

---

16 Sandra Teresa Hyde, ‘Sex-Tourism Practices on the Periphery: Eroticizing Ethnicity and Pathologizing Sex on the Lancang’, in *China Urban: Ethnographies of Contemporary Culture*, ed. N.N. Chen, C.D. Clark, S.Z. Gottschang and L. Jeffery (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 143–162.

marginalize the Thai in their own villages, for they are not implicated in these primarily Han-run businesses:

In Jinghong, because Han migrants and tourists both claim to appropriate authentic images of Thai cultural, ethnicity has become an especially malleable category ... Consumers, Han men, are driving the market for ethnic women, who are in fact Han women (from Sichuan and Guizhou) who mimic Thai culture for profit.<sup>17</sup>

Wearing the Thai costume of a long sarong—the rule in such establishments—may enable these women to pass for Thai in the eyes of tourists but exchanging a few words with them suffices to make it clear they are not from there. Generally speaking, the process of appropriating Thai culture has gone together with “Hanization” of the region, particularly through the purchase of Thai businesses.

The increased presence of Han in peripheral regions, as reflected in the example of Jinghong, represents a kind of turning point—Sinicization “dressed up” in the traditional attributes specific to minorities. Of course, the issue of authenticity is not a major concern in China. Han Sinicization of the periphery actually began as early as the late Qing Empire, though it has usually encountered local resistance. It has been continuously increasing since then.

Another instance of Han appropriation of minority culture may be observed in Xinjiang, in the autonomous Uigur region of northwest China, where, according to local statistics, the Turkic-speaking and Muslim populations (Uigur, Kazakh, Kirghiz) are in the majority. Since the 1950s and particularly over the last twenty years, great numbers of Han have been settling in this economically attractive region. The zones around its petrochemical facilities have been urbanized. The Chinese Communist Party created “construction and production corps” (*bingtuan*) made up mainly of Han. The first settlement was Shihezi, where with little in the way of resources the major components of a city were built as early as winter 1949. Today Shihezi has a renowned university, particularly strong in all fields related to the oil industry. The inhabitants descend from peasant-soldiers who came there in 1949–1950 and a few Uigur families who were integrated into the *bingtuan*. As in many Chinese cities, there is an immense public park where residents came to walk in the cool of evening. Today they come there to dance. While everywhere else in China people gather in small groups to dance to disco music, pasodoble or “Oriental” dances—i.e.,

---

17 Ibid., p. 152.

belly dancing—in Xinjiang the rage is Uigur dances. On an evening in July 2010, one year after the Urumqi riots of 2009,<sup>18</sup> I observed about one hundred Han dancing alone or with a partner to Uigur music. Their visible pleasure and ease showed that the practice was not a recent one.

While for the time being the Chinese Communist Party has not called into question the “multinational state” idea, it has considerably diminished its role—to the benefit of Han Chinese nationalism. However, the trend toward homogenization is not unequivocal. While the new migratory fluidity and intensified communications systems have made it possible for the Han to actively appropriate fragments of non-Han culture, they do so in the framework of a more diverse notion of a shared cultural world nonetheless perceived as fully “Chinese”. In this respect, a recent, highly significant change in terminology may be noted. *Zhongyang minzudaxue*, which used to be translated into English as “Central University for Nationalities”, is now “translated” as “*Minzu* Central University”.

---

18 Which resulted in nearly 200 casualties and more than 1000 injured, most of them Han.



PART 3

*Recovering Non-indigenous Heritages*





# The Museum of Arab Art in Cairo (1869–2014): A Disoriented Heritage?

*Jean-Gabriel Leturcq\**

In 1869, the Khedive Ismail (r. 1863–1879) founded a national museum in Cairo to coincide with the lavish ceremonies of the inauguration of the Suez Canal. This museum did not have a name or collection at the time; but in 1881, it became the National Museum of Arab Art (*dar al-athar al-arabyia*) after a circle of European connoisseurs salvaged and stored artifacts from Cairo's Islamic monuments. It was renamed the Museum of Islamic Art (*mathaf al-funnun al-islamiya*) in 1952 at the time of the Arab nationalist revolution headed by Gamal Abdel-Nasser. After remaining closed for almost a decade, the museum was finally re-inaugurated in 2010.

The museum is unique because of its location in the land of Orientalism.<sup>1</sup> This location questions the reciprocity of the East–West relation of Orientalism: can displaying Arab art in an Arab country constitute an “oriental” answer to Orientalism? Beginning with the idea that the museum is a place of representations, I will analyze how this institution reflects, confronts, and contests the very definition of Arab art and its evolution as Islamic art. I will also examine how the collection was constituted and displayed, in order to highlight how the conceptualization of the Museum of Arab Art in 1881 influenced the Museum of Islamic Art in 2010.

## Orientalism and Display

The concept of ‘Arab art’ needs to be deconstructed to fully grasp the nature of an Orientalist institution in the Middle East. The meaning of the words themselves have evolved considerably during the period covered by this article. The term Arab art was coined at the 1878 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris

---

\* I am grateful to Clara Rivas Alonso for the translation of this article and to Iman R. Abdulfattah and Ruadhan Hayes for editing, critical review, and constructive comments.

1 I consider ‘Orientalism’ to be the study of the Orient, i.e. the East from Spain to China, as it was named in the 19th century. I also use the word in reference to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and its denunciation of the discipline.



at the Galerie Orientale at Trocadero, along with ‘Persian’ and ‘Turk’ arts—categories that stressed racial definitions of these arts. The 1893 *Exposition des Arts Musulmans* in Paris inaugurated a broader and transversal definition of the arts from the land “ruled by the law of Islam.”<sup>2</sup> This definition was confirmed by the 1903 exhibition in Paris, which can be considered the foundation of Islamic art history as a discipline. Its development is witnessed by the 1910 exhibition *Meisterwerk muhammedanischer Kunst* in Munich, where the artifacts displayed were the same as in Paris, but the display aimed at breaking with the Orientalist schemes.

The current study should be seen against the background of the debates on the historiography of Islamic art history that developed after 1990, at a moment when the discipline was celebrating its centennial. This coincided with the renovation of museums of Islamic art around the world—in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. Two trends emerged in the dialogue with the works of Edward Said. The first was led by Rémi Labrusse (1998) and David R. Roxburgh (2000) and leaned towards European collectionism. Both their works contextualized the discovery of Islamic art within a history of taste and of private and public collections. They demonstrated that at the turn of the 19th century, the taste for Oriental arts (Japanese, Chinese, Islamic) was closely associated with a type of activism in favor of artistic modernity.<sup>3</sup> Labrusse highlighted how Paris was a center of Orientalism where the taste as well as knowledge of Islamic art could develop.<sup>4</sup>

The second trend, embodied in the works of Zeynep Çelik (1992), Stephen Vernoit (2000), and Mercedes Volait (2009), aimed to study the invention of the academic field of Islamic art and assessed the taste for the Orient within the domain of Orientalism.<sup>5</sup> In line with the work of Said, this way of conceiving the historiography of Islamic art tended to absorb the specific field of Islamic

2 Georges Marye, “L’exposition des arts musulmans au Pavillon de l’industrie”, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, x, p. 491.

3 Rémi Labrusse, “Paris, capitale des arts de l’Islam?”, *Bulletin de la Société d’histoire de l’art français*, 1998, pp. 275–311; David J. Roxburgh, “Au Bonheur des Amateurs: Collecting and Exhibiting Islamic Art, ca. 1880–1910,” *Ars Orientalis. Exhibiting the Middle East. Collections and Perceptions of Islamic Art* 30 (2000), pp. 9–38. Also refer to entries for collectors, amateurs, and art dealers in François Pouillon (ed.), *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* (Paris: IISMM-Karthala, 2012), 2nd revised and augmented edition.

4 Friedrich Sarre, the organizer of the 1910 Exhibition in Munich, confessed to Ernst Herzfeld that he “... discovered much more artifacts in Paris than in the Orient” (quoted in Labrusse, op. cit., 1997, p. 275).

5 Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Displaying the Orient in the Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Stephen Vernoit (ed.) *Discovering Islamic*

art within broader cultural studies. In general, cultural studies fail to understand collections and display as independent research topics. The exhibition *Purs décors?* in Paris (2007) attempted to deconstruct the dialectical relation between Orientalism and artistic modernity.<sup>6</sup> Paradoxically, it barely explored the meaning and impact of displaying Islamic art in the West. Similarly, only a few contributions to *After One Hundred Years* (2010), the volume celebrating the centennial of the 1910 exhibition of Islamic art in Munich, provided a reflection on issues of display and museum contextualization.<sup>7</sup>

This partial vacuum calls for an analysis of the making of the museum as a cultural process. The examination of the mediation between collections, institutions, and public space allows an analysis of political issues in the display of Islamic art. The basis of the methodology used below entails studying the artifacts and the collection rather than the discourses; it aims at dissecting the methods of acquisition and the way they are altered. The anatomy of a museum collection thus makes it possible to disentangle sets and layers of representation with which this Orientalist institution is intertwined. It will demonstrate that the same collection could be ambivalent and serve the purpose of different kinds of antagonistic discourses. The history of Arab and Islamic art highlights the relationship of so-called centers and peripheries in the academic field of Orientalism: a conceptualization of Arab art that conformed to the academic models developed in the centers of Orientalism like Paris and Berlin intersected with a local, Egyptian knowledge and definition of this art.

---

*Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections 1850–1950*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000); *Ars Orientalis*, “Exhibiting the Middle East. Collections and Perceptions of Islamic Art”; Special issue on “Historiography and Ideology,” *Muqarnas*, 24, 2007. For Mercedes Volait’s work on collectors and *dilettanti* in Egypt, see Volait, *Fous du Caire: Excentriques, architectes et amateurs d’art en Egypte, 1863–1914*, (Montpellier: L’Archange Minotaure, 2009).

- 6 Rémi Labrusse (ed.), *Purs décors? Arts de l’Islam, regards du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle* (Paris: Les Arts décoratifs /Musée du Louvre, 2007). Catalogue of the temporary exhibition, which was also titled “*Chefs d’œuvre des arts de l’Islam au Musée des arts décoratifs*,” 11 October 2007–13 January 2008.
- 7 Eva Maria Troelenberg, “Framing the Artwork: Munich 1910 and the image of Islamic art?” in Andrea Lermer & Avinoam Shalem (eds.), *After one hundred years: the 1910 exhibition ‘Meisterwerk muhammedanischer Kunst’ reconsidered* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 37–64.

## Importing a Tradition

The modernization and destruction of Cairo's Old City during the reign of Khedive Ismail and his successors inspired a movement of vehement opposition among connoisseurs of the Orient. In 1881, the columnists Gabriel Charmes and Arthur Rhoné orchestrated a media campaign modeled on those conducted by Victor Hugo and Jules Michelet in Paris a few decades earlier.<sup>8</sup> Rhoné and Charmes denounced the disappearance of the authentic city of Cairo and the vanishing of its memory. The ancient capital became a battleground of the Old and the New, the imported and exported, the authentic and the deceptive.

However, these distinctions were not as clear as they may appear at first sight. The concept of Arab art invented at the *Expositions Universelles* was associated with artistic modernity in Europe: amateurs conceived it as a tradition meant to inspire industrial arts. This was attested by the wave of neo-Arab art and architecture that followed the publication of collections of ornaments by Owen Jones (1856), Emile Prisse d'Avennes (1869), and Jules Bourgoïn (1889). In a type of boomerang effect, the newly built neighborhoods of Cairo were influenced by this idea of neo-Arab ornamental modernity. In Cairo, Western fashion seemed to mediate the ancient tradition and the imported modernity.

By 1870, the French archaeologist Auguste Salzmänn (1824–1872) had written a report on the conservation of Arab monuments in Cairo, in which he advocated the formation of an Arab museum and the creation of a curator position with the responsibility of preserving historical monuments.<sup>9</sup> Salzmänn entrusted the Austrian Franz Julius (1831–1915), the architect of the *waqfs* (pious endowments) administration, with the task of finding a space to store the valuable artifacts collected from the ancient mosques of Cairo. Nothing materialized until 1880, when the embryo of an Arab museum finally emerged thanks to the efforts of Western amateurs and collectors who resided in Egypt and worked for the French–English Dual Control (1879–1882).<sup>10</sup> They installed a small collection of objects in the courtyard of the then-abandoned Fatimid Mosque of

8 Arthur Rhoné, “Coup d’œil sur l’état présent du Caire ancien et moderne?”, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* [1881–1882], pp. 420–432; XXV, pp. 55–67, pp. 144–153; Gabriel Charmes, “L’art Arabe au Caire”, *Journal des Débats*, August, 2, 3, 4, 1881.

9 Mercedes Volait, “Amateurs français et dynamique patrimoniale: aux origines du Comité de conservation de l’art arabe?” in Robert Hilbert (ed.), *L’Égypte et la France à l’époque des khédives* (Paris: 2002), pp. 319–320.

10 See Volait, 2009, op. cit.

al-Hakim (990–1013) and proceeded to collect items from every derelict monument that had escaped merchants and collectors.<sup>11</sup>

The museum was officially opened in 1881 with the establishment of the *Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe*.<sup>12</sup> The Khedivial Decree of 18 December 1881 established the museum as one of the fundamental missions of the *Comité*: "... [to] ensure, in the archives of the Ministry of Waqfs, the conservation plans of all works performed and to report to the department the remains from buildings that should be transferred, in the interest of conservation, to the National Museum" (Article 2).<sup>13</sup> The birth of the museum arose from the marriage of a Western representation of the vanishing past with a search for modernity in Arab art, combining the dedicated passion of private collectors of Arab art with the drive to institutionalize the conservation of cultural heritage in Egypt.

### *The Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe:* A Cultural Institution

The *Comité* combined a newly imported concept, the conservation of cultural heritage, with the ancient administration of *waqfs*, following the Egyptian administration's trend of reforms and modernization that had started at the beginning of the century. The formal relation to the *waqfs* solved the problem of inventing a legal status that combined national interest with art, history, and private property.<sup>14</sup> In any case, the *waqfs* system was not a prefiguration of modern heritage practices; the relationship of the *Comité* with the *waqfs* was limited to technical management. The establishment of the *Comité*

11 Max Herz, *Catalogue Sommaire des monuments exposés dans le musée national de l'Art arabe* (Cairo: G. Lekegian et Cie, 1895), p. 111, translated into English in 1896 with an introduction by Stanley Lane-Poole: *Catalogue of the National Museum of Arab Art* (London: B. Quaritch, 1896).

12 *Committee for the Preservation of the monuments of Arab art*, hereafter referred as the *Comité*.

13 *Bulletin*, 1882–1883, p. 9. The reference *Bulletin* refers to the publication of the usual works of the *Comité* which was the primary source of this research: *Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe, Comptes rendus et procès verbaux des séances* (Cairo: Imprimerie Nationale [up to 1898], Imprimerie de l'IFAO, 1881–1954).

14 Galila El-Kadi, "La genèse du patrimoine en Egypte: du monument au centre historique," in Gravari-Barbas M. & Guichard-Anguis S. (eds.), *Regards croisés sur le patrimoine dans le monde à l'aube du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Presses de l'université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), pp. 99–116.

opened the way to understanding religious buildings by labeling them as historical and architectural monuments.

The *Comité* functioned as a scholarly society consisting of prominent cultural and political figures in Cairo, rather than as a colonial institution. However, the colonial context was still omnipresent, while a subtle balance was maintained between the different political forces. A distance was maintained between nationals from European powers, French and British alike, and Egyptian members, Armenians, Copts, Arabs, Turks, etc.<sup>15</sup> Despite the wide network of members and their political affiliations, the *Comité* activities were carried out by a dozen active members working intensively with other heritage institutions in Egypt, such as the Antiquities Service in charge of Pharaonic archaeology. Even though the members themselves developed real expertise in Arab art, the regular duties of the *Comité* and the management of the museum were led by two internationally renowned experts in Arab art: Max Herz (1856–1919) and Ali Bahgat (1858–1924). Herz was an Austro-Hungarian architect who succeeded Franz Pasha in 1890, and he was appointed museum director (*nazir*) in 1900.<sup>16</sup> Bahgat, his assistant (*wakil*), was an Egyptian linguist and epigraphist, a member of the Institut d’Égypte and allegedly related to nationalist circles. Thanks to their skills and tenacity, the institution was able to gain international recognition.<sup>17</sup> In spite of a persistent rivalry,<sup>18</sup> the two men seemed to be united by the objective of their mission to enrich the museum’s collections. Their goal was to develop an exemplary public collection that would be unique and unequalled in the world.

15 Donald Malcolm Reid, “Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism: The Struggle to Define and Control the Heritage of Arab Art in Egypt”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, 1 (1992), pp. 62–64.

16 István Ormos, *Max Herz Pasha (1859–1919): His life and career*, 2 volumes (Cairo: IFAO, 2009). See also idem, “Preservation and Restoration: The Method of Max Herz Pasha, Chief Architect of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe,” in Jill Edwards (ed.), *Historians in Cairo. Essays in Honor of George Scanlon* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002).

17 See travel guides, e.g. Baedeker, *Egypte et Soudan, Manuel du voyageur*, Leipzig, Karl Baedeker, 1908 (3rd edition), or Gaston Migeon, *Le Caire, le Nil et Memphis*, Paris, H. Laurens (collection *Les villes d’art célèbres*), 1906. See also articles written by Herz and published in international journals: “Le Musée national du Caire,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, xxviii, pp. 45–59, 1902, pp. 498–505 et xxx, 1903, pp. 223–234.

18 For instance, in 1901, Herz opposed Bahgat’s nomination as director of the museum. See Jean-Gabriel Leturcq, entries “Bahgat Ali Bey” and “Herz Miska dit Max” in F. Pouillon (ed.), *op. cit.*, 2012, pp. 39–40 and pp. 493–494.

### Museum Dynamics: Collecting and Purchasing

Inventories show the magnitude of the increase in the collections. Between 1880 and 1915, over 4,000 items were registered, and during the same period more than 2,000 additional items were extracted from excavations in Fustat. Nevertheless, the analysis of the nature of artifacts and their way of entering the collection (collecting, purchases, gifts, excavations) reveals the main paradox of this institution. As the definition of Arab art evolved into a definition of Islamic art at the turn of the century, both conceptualizations of the collection's Arab and Islamic art coexisted. This duality reveals the several types of collection and the different levels of discourse that were understood differently by locals, tourists, and collectors.

Collecting was the primary drive of an institution created in the urgency to save the furniture and decoration of destroyed mosques and ancient buildings in Cairo. This most celebrated characteristic of the institution constituted the basis of the collecting. The development of the collection directly depended on the work carried out by the *Comité* on the *waqfs* monuments, whose juridical-religious inalienability was perfectly suited to the museum's mission to "transfer [remains], in the interest of conservation, to the National Museum"—as stated in the 1881 Khedivial Decree.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1880 and 1888, nearly 1,000 objects entered the collection. These objects gave the collection one of its fundamental characteristics: architectural elements (wood, carved stones, glass lamps) overshadowed other media. By the end of the 1880s, the Old City as a source of artifacts had dried up owing to the efforts of the *Comité*, which had managed to stop the destruction of monuments. From 1887, the *Comité* considered purchasing artifacts, but the museum was not to have its own budget until 1900.<sup>20</sup> Herz extended the collecting to outside of Cairo, thus acquiring, for instance, the complete interior of a house from Rosetta,<sup>21</sup> and removing some 2,000 headstones from a cemetery in Aswan

19 The principle of *waqfs* also led to the creation of the Museum of Islamic Art in Istanbul, the *Evkaf' Islamiye Müzesi*, in 1914, thirty years after the museum of Cairo. See "Halil Edhem on the Museum of Pious foundations," in Z. Bahrani, Z. Çelik, E. Eldem (eds.), *Scramble for the Past: A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753–1914* (Istanbul: Salt, 2011), p. 417.

20 Before 1892, only one artifact was purchased (in 1887 by Artin Pacha). The budget allocated to purchase artifacts was limited from 1892 (125 LE) until 1907, when a budget was allocated by the governorate (1054 LE). In this period, annual expenses for a purchase did not exceed 170 LE in 1901, when the curators bought wood panels from the antique dealer Kyticas which had come from the Mamluk Al-Maridani Mosque. *Bulletin*, 1901.

21 *Bulletin*, 1896, p. 68.

which was serving as a quarry for construction.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, the conservation of these monuments was used as a pretext to enrich the collections of the museum.

The constitution of the museum's collections was performed at the borderline between safeguarding heritage and the antiquities business. The Khedive's public works had resulted in supplying the boutiques of the bazaar with valuable antiquities. Antique dealers such as Panayotis Kyticas, Michael Casira, the Syrian dealer Elias Hatoun, and the Armenian Dikran Kevorkian had opened galleries in the late 1870s, away from the bazaar's souvenirs shops.<sup>23</sup> By 1900, these antiquarians had become real institutions and developed with the museum's curators a relationship of reciprocity based on common interests: the valuation of Arab heritage increased the value of the artifacts—and vice versa. The *Comité* had initially prevented artifacts from being sold and exported to the international art market by claiming the inalienability of *waqf* objects. By 1887, however, when there were no more artifacts to be retrieved from the *waqf* monuments, the curators had no choice but to purchase items. As they were financially limited until 1908, the curators acquired objects randomly at the bazaar, looking for inexpensive and, as much as possible, rare items.

A new period began in 1908 when the curators obtained funds from the *Comité*, enabling them to carry out a policy of acquisition from antique dealers to augment the collections. Textiles, carpets, ceramics, and weapons entered the collection, leading to the first disputes about the definition of Arab art between curators and members of the *Comité*. Herz and Bahgat, who participated in the Congresses of Orientalists and were connected to the milieu of experts and curators of Islamic art in Paris and Berlin, were fully up-to-date with the latest developments in the discipline. Rather than 'Arab' art, they defended the concept of 'Muslim' art as developed in the great exhibitions in Paris (1893, 1903) and Munich (1910). For instance, in 1909, they proposed purchasing a Syrian enameled glass goblet with Persian influence; the members of the *Comité* opposed the acquisition, arguing that it was not 'Arab' enough—while the curators argued in favor of its 'Muslim' definition.<sup>24</sup> These differences of opinion about the definition of Arab or Muslim art revealed a gap in the relationship to the norms of Orientalism developed in Paris, Berlin, and London. The gap became more obvious with the rise of Islamic archaeology in Cairo.

<sup>22</sup> *Bulletin*, 1896, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> J. Berque, *L'Égypte, entre impérialisme et révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 84, n. 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Bulletin*, 1909, p. 82 et passim.

### Decentralizing Orientalism: Archaeology and Donations

Archaeological excavations highlighted contrasting interests, those that emphasized the supposedly progressive positions in the center of Orientalism in Europe, and those that emphasized the conservative positions in its peripheries. In this regard, the position of Cairo's experts and *Comité* was ambivalent.

In 1907, in the preface to his *Handbook of Muslim Art*, Gaston Migeon called for the development of 'Muslim archaeology' in the same way as ancient archaeology had developed, regretting that Muslim archaeology was still "... a branch of modern science lingering in its childhood."<sup>25</sup> In Cairo, the Egyptologist Gaston Maspero supported this call for the development of Muslim archaeology, in contrast to the limited interest of the *Comité* itself. Was this disregard for archaeology related to religious matters? The reasons may have been primarily scientific, as shown by the old-school position of Herz, who considered epigraphy as the only reliably scientific method of dating objects. On the contrary, Maspero attempted to instill the most modern methods of ancient archaeology, to bring a 'real' scientific contribution to the history of Arab art, by asking the *Comité* to "... expand its skills to the limit".<sup>26</sup>

Delineating the limits of the field of Arab art became the core of the problem. In terms of archaeology, boundaries were more blurred than in architecture, and Hellenistic or Pharaonic foundations often took precedence over a site identified as Arab or Muslim. In Maspero's view, civilizations were related: Greek and Arab civilizations intersected, and the Arab conquest was not a major break in terms of cultural flows. In political terms, archaeology would have minimized the impact of the Arab conquest—and thus the Muslim identity of Egypt—by highlighting the continuities between civilizations. From an administrative point of view, the *Comité* was puzzled: how far and to which historical time periods should they extend their work and oversight? If the *Comité* was responsible for the artifacts located in the monuments, did they have to take control of the artifacts that were still to be unearthed? The legal issue of safeguarding the national interest had constituted the basis of protecting Pharaonic antiquities since the creation of the *Service des Antiquités* in 1858. In contrast, the law protecting Arab archaeological antiquities was adopted only after the nationalist revolution of 1919, following a ten-year delay due to the scandals caused by Bahgat's excavations.

25 Migeon, 1907, p. VIII.

26 Maspero, in *Bulletin*, 1907, PV 153, 4/6/1907.



In 1910, Bahgat obtained permission to carry out archaeological excavations on fields located in Fustat in Old Cairo, in the south of the city. For the first time, archaeologists excavated a site known as exclusively Islamic. Lacking financial resources, Bahgat devised an ingenious system: he leased the land to *sebakh* (natural fertilizer) extractors who used to dig in the area. The museum monitored the extracted material in order to recover artifacts, which were then transferred to the museum. Thousands of fragments of pottery and coins were discovered using this method, but soon afterwards Bahgat was accused of various improprieties.<sup>27</sup> First, his understanding of archaeology was thought by his European peers to be outdated; since the excavations of Flinders Petrie in the 1880s, the goal of archaeology was not to collect artifacts but to record them in their stratigraphic context.<sup>28</sup> In this regard, Bahgat's method was an anachronism, because his main aim was to enrich the museum's collection rather than to understand the past. Furthermore, Bahgat was accused of corruption and was forced to resign in 1919. However, he went on to publish two books on the excavations of Fustat that earned him a place in the history of Islamic archaeology.<sup>29</sup> He argued that his excavations had enriched the museum's collections with a large number of objects and that they had helped particularly to answer the question of the origins of Islamic art that had inspired his predecessors' research.<sup>30</sup> The Bahgat scandal shows that the relationship between an Orientalist center and its periphery was neither geographic nor based on race;<sup>31</sup> it was rather a matter of scientific techniques, and Bahgat was eventually ousted by his peers because of his research methods.

The gap between the center and the periphery was also a matter of taste, as revealed by the donations made by the Egyptian elite to the museum. In contrast to the situation with European museums, donations played a small part in constituting the collections of the Museum of Arab Art. As was the case with purchases, donations initially multiplied as the museum became more visible. They peaked in 1904 at the inauguration of a brand new palace in Bab al-Khalq, one of the finest neighborhoods of Cairo. Numbers increased again after 1908, possibly as a response to the curators' repeated calls.<sup>32</sup> Neverthe-

27 *Bulletin*, 1915–1919, “Polémiques de presse au sujet des fouilles à Foustât, recueil et traduction de M.H. Farnall,” pp. 279–300.

28 *Ibid.*: A.H. Sayce, *Egyptian Gazette*, 30 May 1918.

29 Ali Bahgat, Albert Gabriel, 1921, 1928; Ali Bahgat, Albert Gabriel, *Les ruines d'Al-Foustât* (Cairo: Musée de l'art arabe, 1921), Ali Bahgat & Félix Massoul, *La céramique musulmane de l'Égypte* (Cairo: IFAO, 1930).

30 Bahgat, Gabriel, 1921, “Preface,” p. VIII.

31 M. Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 213 *et passim*.

32 *Bulletin*, 1918, “Rapport sur le Musée arabe,” p. 38.

less, the relative lack of the donations reveals the virtual absence of Egyptian private collections compared with European collections for the period 1880–1910. More importantly, donations made by European nationals and Egyptians were somewhat different and highlighted differences in taste and in the understanding of Islamic art. For Europeans, who usually exported their collections, donations served as an unavoidable contribution in part—restitution for the loss of Egyptian cultural heritage. The process was reversed in the case of Egyptian collectors: they donated artifacts in exchange for the mention of their names on the museum’s display cases, to guarantee their social status. European collections composed primarily of wood, stone carvings, enameled glass, and metalwork, reflected the conceptualization of classical Arab Cairene art as represented in the museum. Egyptians’ collections consisted of later Islamic objects, such as weapons, *firman*s, *kiswa* (curtains covering the Kaaba), and souvenirs and diplomatic gifts related to the memory of the Muhammad Ali dynasty, in place since 1805. It is precisely these 19th-century artifacts, influenced by Western styles that were excluded from the scope of Islamic art as defined by the exhibitions held in Paris (1903) and Munich (1910).<sup>33</sup> Their acceptance within the museum’s collection marked an important turning point in the conceptualization of Islamic art. This aspect of the collection was to be highlighted on two occasions: a failed exhibition project in 1914, and the new edition of the catalogue that was interrupted by World War I. By this time, an alternative conceptualization of Arab and Islamic art was being developed in the Museum of Arab Art to that of the normative conceptualization promoted in Paris and Berlin—the meaning of the art was contextualized as its definition was extended to include objects that dated to almost the then-present time.

To summarize, Arab art was a European Orientalist invention, and the museum in Cairo was its exhibiting space. The development of the collections through different means—collecting, purchasing, excavating, donating—showed how the concept of Arab art had split into two concepts: an Egyptian concept (‘Arab’ art) and a European one (‘Muslim’ art), which came together within the museum displays. This duality of the collections contributed to their redefinition, as demonstrated by the issues raised in the search for a legal

---

33 For the 1903 exhibition in Paris, see Sophie Makariou, “L’enfance de l’art: un siècle d’étude de l’art islamique,” in R. Labrusse (ed.), *op. cit.*, 2007, pp. 56–57. For the 1910 exhibition in Munich, see Jens Kröger, “The 1910 Exhibition ‘Meisterwerke muhammadanischer Kunst’: Its Protagonists and its Consequences for the Display of Islamic Art in Berlin,” in Lerner & Shalem (ed.), *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 71. *et passim*.

framework to protect Arab/Islamic antiquities in 1913.<sup>34</sup> A draft bill, which was finally passed only in 1919, extended the limit of Arab Art "... to the contemporary epoch until today,"<sup>35</sup> thus widening the gap between the understandings of Arab/Islamic art in Egypt and in the West, where Islamic art was considered finished at the end of the 18th century.<sup>36</sup>

### Arab Nationalism and Islamic Art

In 1919, Egypt obtained legal independence; it would have to wait, however, until 1952 and the Free Officers' revolution to reach actual independence. Several major changes occurred during this interval, which led to a rethinking of the institution without changing the structure of the collections.

In the 1920s, King Fuad (r. 1922–1936) appealed to Louis Hautecoeur (1884–1973) and Gaston Wiet (1887–1971) to reform the Department of Antiquities in charge of the conservation of Pharaonic, Coptic, and Arab heritages. Wiet was appointed director of the museum in 1926 and remained in the position until 1951. During this period, the museum was placed under the authority of the Ministry of Education, following the French heritage model, and thus promoted a secular concept of Islamic art. The museum lost its structural link to the Ministry of Waqfs, but the structure of the collection remained unchanged and was enriched with artifacts of Islamic art from other countries. Wiet published a series of scholarly catalogues, ensuring international recognition of the pre-existing collection.<sup>37</sup>

In 1952, the government of Nasser officially changed the name of the museum to the Museum of Islamic Art "... owing to the presence of objects of

34 *Bulletin*, 1913, PV 199, 4/02/1913, "Projet de loi de 1913 sur la protection des monuments arabes."

35 "Loi n°9 sur la protection des monuments de l'époque arabe et ses annexes," in *Bulletin*, 1915–1919, pp. 241–249.

36 See for instance, Sheila S. Blair & Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam (1250–1800)* (Yale–New York: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 203: "The European conquests that end the period that volume covers are sometimes marked by precise events, such as Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 and French seizure of Algeria in 1832."

37 For the multi-volume *Catalogue général du Musée arabe*, see Gaston Wiet, *Lampes et bouteilles en verre émaillé* (Cairo: Musée arabe, 1929); *Les objets mobiliers en cuivre et en bronze à inscriptions historiques* (Cairo, Musée arabe, 1932); see also *Album du Musée arabe* (Cairo: Musée arabe, 1930); *Musée National de l'art arabe, Guide Sommaire* (Cairo: Ministère de l'Instruction publique, 1939).

Islamic art produced not only in Arab countries but in other countries such as Turkey and Persia, where Islamic art has had an overwhelming influence.”<sup>38</sup> Was this simply a belated update of the museum’s name almost fifty years after the concept of Islamic art emerged in Europe? Did the change of name reveal a shift from a reference to Arab culture to one of the *umma islamiyya* (the broad Muslim community)? In fact, the National Museum of Arab Art created in 1881 could be renamed because the nation it referred to was reconstructed: the museum was no longer an image of the Egyptian nation—the collections of a Museum of Islamic Art in Fuad I University created in 1945 had assumed this role.<sup>39</sup> With the disappearance of the word ‘national’ from its official name, the Museum of Islamic Art justified the presentation of the Egyptian nation as the heir to every piece of artwork made in the name of beauty. The new name symbolically placed the Arab Republic of Egypt at the forefront of both Islamic civilization and the arts, sciences, and *belles lettres*.

### 2010 Reopening: Challenges, Appropriations

The Museum of Islamic Art was re-inaugurated in 2010 after almost a decade of restoration. This was widely welcomed and celebrated by the national and international press.<sup>40</sup> The reopening of the museum ought to be placed in an international context where Islamic art has been given a mediating role to counteract the impact of the theory of the clash of civilizations.<sup>41</sup> In this perspective, displaying Islamic arts was supposed to promote understanding between contemporary civilizations: museums aimed to promote a positive

---

38 Nehad Khouloussy, “Musées Egyptiens: Musées du Caire”, *Museum* 9, 1956, p. 189. See also Mohamed Mostafa, *The Museum of Islamic Art: a short guide* (Cairo: Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, General Egyptian Book Organization, 1979) [1st edition 1953].

39 Paradoxically, the museum at the Fuad I University bears the name of Muslim art, although it displays only artifacts found in Egypt. See Muhammad Hasan Zaky, *Moslem Art in the Fouad I University Museum* (Cairo: Fouad I University Press, 1950).

40 See for instance, Tom Pfeiffer, “Long Wait Over As Cairo Islamic Art Museum Re-opens,” Reuters, Arab News, 4 August 2010; Julie Viroulaud, “Réouverture du musée d’art islamique du Caire”, *Connaissance des arts*, 16 August 2010; CNN, “Exclusive Preview of Cairo’s New Museum of Islamic Art,” 7 September 2010.

41 See Edward Said’s response to S. Huntington’s theory in E. Said, “The Clash of Ignorance”, *The Nation*, 22 October 2002, <http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance?page=0,0> (last accessed 7 May 2014).

and unified image of a so-called contemporary culture of Islam, highlighting the aesthetic qualities of a brilliant historical civilization whose artifacts functioned as ambassadors. Culturally, these events were based on certain historical reductions, together with some political opportunism.<sup>42</sup> The term *Islamophile*, used to describe collectors' curiosity at the turn of the 20th century, was supposed to neutralize the implications of *Islamophobia*, a neologism referring to the contemporary context of intolerance towards—and irrational fear of—Islam and Muslim societies. Despite the good will of its promoters, this approach led to the creation of a historical distance that pushed the glories of Islamic civilization into a distant past. Moreover, the curiosity about Islam by these Orientalist collectors, formerly despised, has now become somehow benevolent. It is difficult not to see in this process the endorsement of *Islamophilia* as a by-product of the current *Islamophobic* atmosphere and a reaction to it. It seems that the demons of Orientalism that Edward Said was supposed to have exorcized are reappearing—if they were not, in fact, always present.

This context derived largely from the events of 11 September 2001, which brought about a particular investment in museums of Islamic art around the world. The reopening of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (scheduled for 2019) will follow those at the Louvre (2012), the Metropolitan Museum in New York (2011), the David Collection in Copenhagen (2009), the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (2006), and the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon (2004). The opening of the museums of Islamic art in Cairo (2010) and Doha (2008) complement these Western institutions. Some shifts in paradigms were expected to result from this intense architectural and museographic activity, but quite the opposite happened. Old *clichés* were recycled; for instance, the 'luminescent' veil covering the new department at the Louvre is supposed to evoke a Bedouin tent or a flying carpet.<sup>43</sup> Architectural modernity is not able to hide the flavor of traditionalism. In the case of Doha's museum, despite the architectural marvel and the self-proclaimed "... world's largest collection of Islamic art in a Muslim country,"<sup>44</sup> the museum design as well as the substance of the collections does not differ from any museum in Paris, New York, or Berlin. Can neo-Orientalist models be confronted? Was it legitimate

42 David J. Roxburgh, "After Munich: Reflection on recent exhibitions," in Lerner & Shalem (eds), op. cit., 2010, pp. 359–386.

43 This image was widely used in the extensive coverage of the opening of the Département des Arts de l'Islam in November 2012. It appears as early as 2005, when the project was released by the Communication Department of the Musée du Louvre, July 2005 (cannot be accessed on the Internet).

44 See their website: [www.qma.com.qa/en/collection/mia](http://www.qma.com.qa/en/collection/mia) (last accessed 21 April 2013).

to expect a renewal of the definitions of Islamic art by the museum's curators or their ambitious Arab sponsors?

In Cairo, the problem seems more pernicious. The restoration of the museum was the result of cooperation between French curators from the Louvre and their Egyptian counterparts.<sup>45</sup> The cooperation in this regard was difficult, as it seems that both teams were rarely able to communicate with each other without confrontation, the French condemning the Egyptians' incompetence and vice versa.<sup>46</sup> The reopened museum bears the scars of this confrontation; for instance, the notes and explanations accompanying the artifacts differ in English from those in Arabic.

The duality of the collection as seen a century earlier continues; the roles, however, have been redistributed. The 19th-century Arab art then promoted by the Egyptian elite has disappeared from the exhibition rooms. On the one hand, Egyptian curators defended a certain vision of Islamic art by dedicating rooms to Iraqi Abbasid artifacts, which are few in number in the collection. On the other hand, the French curators wanted to highlight the Egyptian Fatimid art collection for which the museum is world-renowned, but their Egyptian counterparts could not accept an emphasis on the Shia dynasty. These two understandings of the collection opposed each other: the French considered the first collection of local Arab art as a link between the museum and the city of Cairo; the Egyptians defended the concept of a universal Islamic art. Unfortunately, these two readings reduce the potential of the display of the collection—which is exceptionally rich—and raise a debate on the actual state of the museum. Inventories account for nearly 100,000 items, but a proportion of these artifacts disappeared after a fire in the storage area in September 2005 and was de-accessioned from the museum's collection. They are now in other museums in Egypt. There were also reports of numerous acts of negligence and theft. The museum of 2010 showed the decay of the aging Egyptian regime, the extent of financial corruption, and the mediocrity of the cultural debate. Even though the team who finalized the renewal tried to minimize it, the museum seemed to attest to the provincialization of Egypt on the international cultural scene.

---

45 See Iman R. Abdulfattah, "The Museum of Islamic Art Revisited" in Susan Kamel, Christine Gerbich (eds.), *Experimentierfeld Museum, Internationale Perspektiven auf Museum, Islam und Inklusion* (Berlin: Transcript Verlag, 2014).

46 Personal information from conversation with Egyptian and French project managers. See also the CEDEJ-IFAO seminar "Patrimoines en Partages: mécanismes et enjeux de la patrimonialisation," 15 January 2006, session dedicated to the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art.

The restoration and continued existence of the Museum of Islamic Art renders the appropriation of the Orientalist models problematic, just as is the case in Islamic art museums in Europe: it clearly reveals the lack of contestation of these models. The Egyptian revolution of 25 January 2011—described in an Orientalist outburst as an ‘Arab Spring’—did not reach the Museum of Islamic Art as it did the venerable Egyptian Museum. During the occupation of Tahrir Square, the alleged looting of the Egyptian Museum became a propaganda tool for the regime.<sup>47</sup> Unlike Pharaonic art, Islamic art does not present the image of an exclusive nation. The nationalist impulses associated with a more obvious Islamist discourse after the 2012 election do not suggest a radical paradigm shift in this regard. In addition, there is still no clear answer to the question of what ‘Arab’ or ‘Islamic’ art is.

On 24 January 2014, the Cairo Museum of Islamic Art was severely damaged in a suicide car bomb attack that may have been targeted at a nearby State Security premises.<sup>48</sup> The extent of the damage to the artifacts of the collection was immediately assessed.<sup>49</sup> Of the 1,471 objects on display, 164 were destroyed or badly damaged, including 61 ceramics (vessels and tiles), 54 glass objects from the acclaimed collection of glass lamps, 20 metal works, 18 wood works, and some stone objects, pieces of jewelry, and a gold coin.<sup>50</sup> The museography was entirely destroyed. The doors and windows have since been walled up. Until the authorities decide to refurbish it, the museum is closed and there are no plans yet to open it soon.<sup>51</sup>

---

47 Mohammed Elshahed, “The Case against the Grand Egyptian Museum”, 16 June 2011, [www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2152/the-case-against-the-grand-egyptian-museum](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2152/the-case-against-the-grand-egyptian-museum) (last accessed 21 April 2013)

48 This tragic event was more extensively covered by the international press than the 2010 opening. See for instance, BBC, “Cairo Islamic art museum hit in blast”, 24 January 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25877201> (last accessed 7 May 2014).

49 Omar El Adl, “Minister of Antiquities reveals full account of damage to Museum of Islamic Art”, *Daily News of Egypt*, 2 February 2014, <http://www.dailynewsegyp.com/2014/02/02/minister-antiquities-reveals-full-account-damage-museum-islamic-art/> (last accessed 7 May 2014).

50 “An ICOM / UNESCO / Blue Shield emergency mission to assess the damage to the National Library of Egypt and Islamic Museum in Cairo,” 7 February 2014, <http://icom.museum/press-releases/press-release/article/an-icom-unesco-blue-shield-emergency-mission-to-assess-the-damage-to-the-national-library-of-egy/> (last accessed 7 May 2014).

51 As this article goes to press, some hopes are arising: “The United Arab Emirates is to restore the MIA”, 27 August 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/109339.aspx> (Last accessed 3 September 2014).

It seems the museum was not the primary target but a collateral victim of a wave of terrorist attacks on the eve of the third anniversary of the 25 January Revolution. Although Islamist groups were suspected, no one has claimed responsibility for the attack. Rumor has it, however, that Islamist terrorists specifically targeted the Museum of Islamic Art. If true, this would represent the latest in the long line of misunderstandings connected to the museum. After more than a century of its history, this Orientalist institution in the Orient continues to embody a reciprocal disenchantment—regarding both the Orientalist search for an artistic tradition in the Orient and the quest for modernity within that tradition.



# A Genealogy of Egyptian Folklore: Ahmad Amîn as a Reader of Edward Lane\*

*Emmanuelle Perrin*

As the carcass [of the embalmed dog] was dragged off, the glass eyes stared at her with the humble reproach of things discarded in the hope of final riddance. A few minutes later what was left of Bendico was flung into a corner of the yard visited every day by the dustman. During the flight down from window its form recomposed itself for an instant: in the air there seemed to be dancing a quadruped with long whiskers, its right foreleg raised in imprecation. Then all found peace in a little heap of livid dust.

GIUSEPPE TOMASI DI LAMPEDUSA, *The Leopard*



In the twilight of his life, the Egyptian man of letters Ahmad Amîn (1886–1954) delivered a singular work, the genesis of which was complicated by its controversial, innovative subject: a dictionary (or encyclopedia)—and critical inventory—of the mores and customs of the Egyptians.<sup>1</sup> In so doing, aspects of contemporary daily “popular” life, a way of life generally looked down upon by lettered culture, had been deemed worthy of preservation in writing. Ahmad Amîn explained that his motive for collecting customs was historical: they were already extinct or on the verge of extinction, and it was important to preserve the memory of the ways of the past so as to integrate that memory into Egypt’s history. He also asserted the national character of the so-called traditional way of life; in this way, the traditions he enumerated became the crucible, as it were, of national identity. Lastly, he viewed traditions from the critical perspective

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs.

1 Ahmad Amîn, *Qâmûs al-‘âdât wa-l-taqâlid wa-l-ta‘âbir al-miṣriyya* [*Dictionary of Egyptian Customs, Traditions, and Expressions*] (al-Qâhira [Cairo]: Lajnat al-ta‘lif wa-l-tarjama wa-l-nashr, 1953). All quotations are from the first edition of the *Dictionary*.

by which they amount to superstitions. This normative approach also worked to formalize what he called a body of “folklore.” However, traditions are not transparent information that can always be “collected and known.”<sup>2</sup> They are simultaneously “found and invented,”<sup>3</sup> lost and abolished; as representations they are strongly over-determined by the aesthetic, scholarly, normative and social criteria that helped define them.

In a genealogy of Egyptian folk practices, it is important to investigate the over-determination induced by Orientalist productions. My aim here is to examine and explain possible relations between Amîn's *Dictionary* and an illustrious text published more than a century earlier whose aim was likewise to produce a systematic description of Egyptian society: the English Orientalist Edward Lane's 1836 work entitled *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*.<sup>4</sup> Lane, who spoke Arabic, dressed in the Oriental style and claimed to be Turkish, mixed with Egyptians and adopted their customs, pretending to be a Muslim. For Edward Said, Lane's classic text is the perfect example of using a sojourn in the Orient to produce a work conceived as the fruit of scientific observation, a work in which the author effaces himself and strives for an impersonal style. Institutionalized in the Orientalist field of knowledge, this definitive description of Egypt enjoyed great authority.<sup>5</sup> Lane

---

2 Gérard Lenclud, 'La tradition n'est plus ce qu'elle était ...: Sur les notions de tradition et de société traditionnelle en ethnologie', *Terrain* 9 (1987), p. 117. In addition to this stimulating article, see Michel de Certeau with Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel, 'La beauté du mort', in *La culture au pluriel* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 3rd ed., 1993), pp. 45–72. On the construction of traditions in Ahmad Amîn's *Dictionary* see Emmanuelle Perrin, 'Un patrimoine ambivalent: la définition des traditions dans le *Dictionnaire des coutumes et des traditions égyptiennes* de Ahmad Amîn', *Egypte/Monde arabe* 5–6 (2009), pp. 161–187.

3 Wolfgang Brückner, 'Histoire de la Volkskunde', in Isac Chiva and Utz Jeggle (eds), *Ethnologien en miroir: la France et les pays de langues allemandes* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1987), p. 226.

4 Edward W. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians. Written in Egypt during the years 1833–1834 and 35, partly from notes made during a former visit to that country in the years 1825, 26, 27 and 28* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1836), 2 vols.

5 Lane concluded his introduction thus: “What I have principally aimed at, in this work, is correctness; and I do not scruple to assert, that I am not conscious of having endeavoured to render interesting any matter that I have related by the slightest sacrifice of truth” (p. xviii). Hereafter, unless the first 1836 edition is indicated, all quotations are from the 1989 re-edition of a 1895 edition of Lane's work entitled *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: East-West Publications). See also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Vintage Books, 1979) and Ann Thompson, 'Les Égyptiens d'Edward Lane', *Egypte/Monde arabe* 24 (1995), pp. 59–74.

offered Ahmad Amîn an illustrious precedent. The titles and subject of the two works already suggest a filial, inter-textual relationship.

### Genesis and Sources of Amîn's *Dictionary*

Ahmad Amîn was a law professor and judge who also taught Arabic literature and literary criticism at Cairo University from 1926 to 1948. His work fits into the Nahda movement and *islâh*, a reformist Muslim current of thought and opinion initiated by Muhammad 'Abduh, of whom Amîn was a loyal disciple. Amîn's many responsibilities in the publishing and education fields tell us much about the moral and cultural authority he incarnated.<sup>6</sup>

The *Dictionary*, a singular component of Ahmad Amîn's bibliography, may even seem like a work of entertainment. However, Amîn himself considered it an integral part of his *oeuvre*, all of which he thought of as written from the perspective of reform. The fact that he ceased working on the *Dictionary* for a period of ten years makes it clear that handling such a subject was no simple undertaking. Amîn began the *Dictionary* in 1938 after being commissioned to write a series of articles on a subject of his own choosing. The following year he was appointed Dean of Cairo's College of Letters and advised by certain persons to interrupt the work, deemed incompatible with the dignity of his position. Ahmad Amîn only returned to the *Dictionary* in 1948, after retiring from the university. He worked on it for four years, publishing it a year before his death. This was the last of his works to be published during his lifetime.

Ahmad Amîn described his work as both new and incomplete. Ethnographic works on Egypt were hardly legion before the *Dictionary* was published, and all of them besides those by Lane and Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (1784–1817),<sup>7</sup> both of which purported to provide systematic descriptions of Egyptian ways of life, had been restricted to a single region such as Upper Egypt, a particular group such as peasants, or a specific aspect of Egyptian culture such as funerary rites, medicine, tales and legends, etc. Moreover, before the Centre for the Study of Popular Arts (Markaz dirâsât al-funûn al-sha'biyya) was founded in 1957, thereby institutionalizing ethnographic studies, ethnographic descriptions of Egypt were exclusively the work of mavericks, isolated individuals working on

6 See Emmanuelle Perrin, 'Le creuset et l'orfèvre: le parcours de Ahmad Amîn (1886–1954)', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 95–98 (2002), pp. 307–335.

7 Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, *Arabic Proverbs, or The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians: Illustrated from their Proverbial Sayings Current at Cairo, Translated and Explained by the Late John Lewis Burckhardt*, ed. William Ouseley (London: John Murray, 1830).

the margins of other disciplines such as Egyptology and outside any theoretical framework. Ahmad Amîn's *Dictionary* is unique in scope, as it is the first work by an Egyptian author on his compatriots at large.

Ahmad Amîn claimed to have based the *Dictionary* on his own childhood memories; this original feature of the work tinges it with a certain generic ambiguity. As an individual initiative by an amateur, the work's value is founded on its author's personal account, in which he notes having grown up in a "popular" neighbourhood of Cairo—a guarantee, as he saw it, of the authenticity of the customs he observed there. But Amîn's childhood memories are not the *Dictionary's* only source. He also used accounts by quite a variety of historians and traveller-writers. Herodotus (circa 484–420 B.C.), for example, is cited to attest to the antiquity and permanence of certain customs, and Amîn refers to medieval authors such as Ibn Khaldûn (1332–1382) and al-Maqrîzî (1364–1442) to establish the lasting nature of certain traits he deems distinctive of the Egyptian personality, such as playfulness and insouciance about the future. Using such sources undoubtedly lent historical consistency to the customs described in the work.

### Amîn's Re-use of Lane

Edward Lane (1801–1876) is cited by name only four times in the 480 pages of the *Dictionary*. It appears in the entry on Muhammad 'Ali, viceroy of Egypt from 1805–1849, in connection with the poor opinion the English had of that personage in contrast to the French.<sup>8</sup> It is also cited in the entry on manifestations of joy, including fainting, the highest degree of that emotion according to Ahmad Amîn. He illustrated this with an anecdote about Ibrâhîm al-Dasûqî (1811–1883), who worked with Lane on the latter's Arabic-English dictionary:<sup>9</sup> Lane bequeathed the sum of one thousand Egyptian pounds to al-Dasûqî, who nearly fainted when he saw the banker counting the money in front of him.<sup>10</sup> Lane's name also occurs in the entry on *mandal*, a divination method in which a child chosen by a seer has visions while contemplating a reflecting liquid such as ink or oil.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, Lane is cited on the *Dictionary's* title page in a brief note on the work's illustrations, indicating that some have been borrowed from

8 Entry "Muhammad 'Alî bâshâ", pp. 359–360.

9 Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–1893), 8 vols.

10 Entry "El-farah", pp. 306–307.

11 Entry "Al-mandal", pp. 381–382.

Lane's *Account*. Within the *Dictionary* itself, illustration authors and dates are not indicated, and the only way to determine which illustrations Ahmad Amîn took from Lane's work is to compare the two. Of the *Dictionary's* 51 illustrations, more than half (27, or 53%) are reproductions of engravings from Lane's book, themselves done from Lane's own drawings. Twelve of the 27 (44%) concern women's clothing, jewellery and finery. There are also engravings of four musical instruments, two trades (a liquorice juice seller and a chibouk cleaner), a perfume flask with a censer and a narghile alongside a chibouk, a *shâduf*<sup>12</sup> and an embroidery loom, an amulet, a wedding procession, the *dûsa*<sup>13</sup> and a *mahmal*.<sup>14</sup> Clearly Lane's iconography is much more present in Ahmad Amîn's work than his name.

The entry on *mandal* is the only place in the *Dictionary* with an explicit, literal quotation from Lane. Whereas Ahmad Amîn persistently lambasted magic and divining practices, he was less categorical in the 65-line entry on *mandal*,<sup>15</sup> a partial summary of Lane's description.<sup>16</sup> Lane's text accounts for three-quarters of Amîn's. During a *mandal* session, Lane asked the seer to make Admiral Nelson appear, and when the child looked in the ink mirror he saw a man in blue European dress who had lost his arms. Ahmad Amîn concludes the entry thus: "Lane found this astonishing, and he was no storyteller (*mukharriif*). He had the child and the magician fetched every time he wanted to show the English something extraordinary".<sup>17</sup>

It may be that Lane's interest in this divining method moved Ahmad Amîn to devote a long entry to it. The above quotation is also the only image of Lane in the *Dictionary*, an image of an English scholar yielding to his passion for spiritism and having "unsettling" experiences, including feeling compelled to run after the *mahmal*.<sup>18</sup> But might not Ahmad Amîn have been putting Lane up for mockery here—a supposed representative of Western science and

12 A lifting machine used in irrigation.

13 A procession in which the shaykh of the Sa'diyya brotherhood rode on horseback over the body of his disciples without injuring them. Lane was very impressed by it and mentions it several times (pp. 244, 444–449 with an illustration, 463–464). The *dûsa* was abolished in 1881.

14 Richly decorated palanquin at the head of a pilgrimage caravan on its way to Mecca, and the name of an official celebration held upon departure and return from the pilgrimage, discontinued in 1952.

15 Entry "Al-mandal", pp. 381–382.

16 Lane, *Account*, pp. 272–275.

17 Entry "Al-mandal", p. 382.

18 In *Orientalism*, Edward Said refers to the "unsettling influences" that "wore away the European discreteness and rationality of time, space and personal identity" (pp. 166–167).

rationalism giving in to the “magic” of a sort of “Arabian Nights” Orient? Ahmad Amîn chose a paradoxical passage where Lane depicts himself in action—quite the opposite of the impersonal, objective tone Lane assumed in the rest of his work. A Westerner who moved about in disguise in the Egyptian society he described is thus seen here without his mask. It is this image of Lane as both generally self-concealing and occasionally self-revealing that we find in Amîn’s *Dictionary*.

Other entries are directly inspired by Lane’s work but do not cite him. Above all, Ahmad Amîn used Lane as a source for nineteenth-century history, as illustrated by his entry on market inspectors.<sup>19</sup> The entry on embroidery looms shows how Ahmad Amîn could take up and flesh out a remark by Lane:

Lane: “Their [women’s] leisure hours are mostly spent in working with the needle, particularly in embroidering handkerchiefs, head-veils, etc., upon a frame called “menseg” with coloured silks and gold. Many women, even in the houses of the wealthy, replenish their private purses by ornamenting handkerchiefs and other things in this manner, and employing a “dellâleh” (or female broker) to take them to market, or to other hareems, for sale”.<sup>20</sup>

Ahmad Amîn: “The embroidery loom was a frame on which women at home spent most of their leisure time. They worked with needles or else they embroidered scarves and head-scarves with golden silk. Poor [women] and even those of middle condition sold their works, giving them to the woman peddler (*dallâla*) to sell at the market or in another harem. Young girls often gathered around the embroidery loom to entertain themselves and pass the time, speaking together mischievously”.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Ahmad Amîn occasionally summarized at length and even deformed the original text he was using. Of a passage by Lane on dervishes, for example,<sup>22</sup> Amîn deliberately kept only information on the spectacular self-

---

Earlier in the book he specifies, “A nineteenth-century Orientalist was ... either a scholar ... or a gifted enthusiast ... or both” (p. 51), putting Lane in this last category. On Lane’s running after the mahmal, see *Account*, pp. 435–436.

19 Entry “Al-muhtasib,” pp. 356–357; Lane, *Account*, pp. 128–129.

20 Lane, *Account*, pp. 190–191

21 Entry “Al-minsaj,” p. 383.

22 Entry, “Al-darâwish,” p. 199.

mutilation practices of the Rifā'iyya brotherhood. Lane had called those procedures into doubt, mentioning the artifice used by persons wishing to obtain a reputation for holiness. Ahmad Amîn, on the other hand, at least in this entry, presents the practices hyperbolically, expressing no reservations about them. Lane's interest in the eccentricities of the Sufi brotherhoods thus seems to have been reused by Ahmad Amîn to discredit such behavior, when in fact those practices had already begun to be monitored and supervised in Lane's time.

Other re-uses of Lane concern things that Amîn is very likely to have seen with his own eyes. This applies to his descriptions of the *mahmal*<sup>23</sup> and *khôl*:

Edward Lane: "... more beautiful eyes can hardly be conceived. Their charming effect ... is rendered still more striking by a practice universal among the females of the higher and middle classes and very common among those of the lower orders, which is that of blackening the edge of the eyelids both above and below the eye with a black powder called "kohl." This is a collyrium commonly composed of the smoke-black, which is produced by burning a kind of 'liban'—an aromatic resin—a species of frankincense, used, I am told, in preference to the better kind of frankincense, as being cheaper and equally good for this purpose. Kohl is also prepared of the smoke-black produced by burning the shells of almonds. These two kinds, though believed to be beneficial to the eyes, are used merely for ornament; but there are several kinds used for their real or supposed medical properties, particularly the powder of several kinds of lead ore, to which are often added sarcocolla, long pepper, sugar-candy, fine dust of a Venitian sequin, and sometimes powdered pearls. Antimony, it is said, was formerly used for painting the edges of the eyelids. The kohl is applied with a small probe of wood, ivory or silver, tapering towards the end, but blunt. This is moistened, sometimes with rose-water, then dipped in the powder, and drawn along the edges of the eyelids. It is called "mirwed," and the glass vessel in which the kohl is kept "muk-hul'ah." The custom of thus ornamenting the eyes prevailed among both sexes in Egypt in very ancient times. This is shown by the sculptures and paintings in the temples and tombs of this country; and kohl vessels, with the probes, and even with the remains of the black powder, have often been found in the ancient tombs."<sup>24</sup>

23 Entry "Al-mahmal", p. 360.

24 Lane, *Account*, pp. 44–45.

Ahmad Amîn: “This is the soot of scented, burnt resin. It is also made with the soot of almond shells. Khôl is used to treat the eyes and even more often as make-up. For remedies only, lead powder is used, to which have been added *manzût* (sarcocolla?), long pepper, sugar candy and gold dust from a Venetian sequin. The eye[lid]s are coated with khôl by means of a short wooden, ivory, silver or glass stick (*mirwad*) with a tapered, blunt point that may or may not be dipped in rose-water, then in the powder, after which the stick is drawn along the lids. The glass or crystal vessel for the khôl is called *mukhela* and it [is part] of what subsists of the ancient Egyptians. Indeed, khôl vessels and sticks have been found in the ancient tombs. [Outlining] the lovely eyes of Egyptian women, it [khôl] further enhances their beauty. Their proverbs include the following: “Short sticks annihilate mountains of khôl”; that is, things in great quantity are doomed to annihilation as soon as even a miniscule part of them is removed”.<sup>25</sup>

Here Ahmad Amîn summarizes Lane, shifting the reference to Egyptian women’s eyes to the end of the entry and adding a proverb. Moreover, Lane’s own words occasionally appear—a form of intertextuality?—in Amîn’s narration of a personal memory:

“I once watched the *dhikr* of the whirling dervishes in a “monastery” (*takiyya*) in Cairo on al-Muzaffar Street, a clean *takiyya* with a well-kept garden. The whirling dervishes gathered after Friday prayers and formed a large circle. They were wearing high felt toques and baggy trousers (*sirwâl*) belted around the waist. They played the flute to perfection, with lovely resonance. They began invoking God, bowing their heads each time. One of them began turning in the middle of the ring to the sound of the flute, generating the movement with his feet, arms extended. Then his foot movements became faster and his *sirwâl* spread out like a parasol. He continued whirling for about ten minutes. Then he bowed his head to the shaykh who was sitting there and joined the ring of other dervishes invoking God. Thus they formed a ring, each man placing his hands on another’s shoulders and invoking God very rapidly. Then they took a rest. After a quarter of an hour they began a second *dhikr* and continued this way for an hour to an hour and a half. It was a strange sight, pleasant to hear because of the flute [music] and to watch for the astounding movements of those extraordinary trousers.”<sup>26</sup>

25 Entry “Al-kuhl”, p. 336.

26 Entry “Al-mawlawiyya”, p. 389.



Edward Lane: “The darweeshes who formed the large ring ... now commenced their zikr, exclaiming over and over again “Allah!” and at each exclamation bowing the head and the body, and taking a step to the right so that the whole ring moved rapidly round. As soon as they commenced this exercise, another darweesh, a Turk, of the order of the Mowlawees, in the middle of the circle, began to whirl, using both his feet to effect the motion, and extending his arm: the motion increased in velocity until his dress spread out like an umbrella. He continued whirling thus for about ten minutes, after which he bowed to his superior who stood within the great ring, and then, without showing any signs of fatigue or giddiness, joined the darweeshes in the great ring, who had now begun to ejaculate the name of God with greater vehemence, and to jump to the right instead of stepping. After the whirling, six other darweeshes, within the great ring, formed another ring, but a very small one, each placing his arms upon the shoulders of those next him, and thus disposed, they performed a revolution similar to that of the larger ring, excepting in being much more rapid, repeating also the same exclamation of “Allah!” but with a rapidity proportionately greater. This motion they maintained for about the length of time that the whirling of the single darweesh before had occupied, after which the whole party sat down to rest. They rose again, after the lapse of about a quarter of an hour, and performed the same exercise a second time.”<sup>27</sup>

These re-uses show the resonance of Lane’s text: he was an “inventor of traditions,” or at least of an academic formulation of them, a presentation that was not only true but also impersonal and timeless. Lane thus greatly helped formalize Egyptian traditions, recording beliefs and practices that partook of oral culture. Receiving the sanction of the written word, Egyptians ways were fixed in stable if not definitive form, a description of them that could then be re-used later.

The fact that Ahmad Amîn discovered his childhood memories in Lane’s book may have given those memories a certain legitimacy, endowing them with historical depth and a collective character. As explained, the nationalization of Egyptian culture is a fundamental aspect of the *Dictionary*. Ahmad Amîn justified collecting traditions for the indications they provide “on the nature of various peoples’ manners (*akhlâa*) and mentality (*‘aqliyya*).”<sup>28</sup> He

---

27 Lane, *Account*, pp. 426–427.

28 Introduction, p. iv.

legitimated the study of so-called popular culture by integrating it into the definition of Egyptian identity as the crucible and preserver of that identity. Through its traditions, a group “recognizes that it has or imagines itself to have an enduring collective identity.”<sup>29</sup> And because traditions seem immemorial and timeless, they can be said to refer to origins and therefore to what is eternal. The vast majority of the traditions described in the *Dictionary* are attributed to all Egyptians; very few regional, social or religious particularisms are signalled. However, very few customs uniformly apply or belong to everyone regardless of age, sex, place, social milieu or religion.<sup>30</sup> Ahmad Amîn tends to claim cohesion for the national community: its members speak the same language, share the same customs and exhibit the same distinctive qualities of character. Thus, the image projected in this work is of a people ideally united by unanimous practices. Several of the general descriptions in the *Dictionary* concern Cairo’s small Muslim middle class, the author’s milieu. This may attest to an aspiration on the part of the middle class to represent the real Egypt. One original feature is that the “popular” and peasant strata of society are not presented as the unique depositories of Egyptian identity. No great value is attached here to markedly “popular” aspects of Egyptian ways. Poetry, for example, is said to reveal the Egyptian character and bear its stamp, but not to derive from a way of speaking or “popular genius”; it remains—like humour, also presented as a characteristic of the Egyptians—the preserve of educated men.

It is important to draw a parallel between the positions and perspectives of the two authors. A Westerner studying Arabs and an intellectual interested in the so-called popular mores and customs may both be described as external and superior to their object of study. Ahmad Amîn cannot be thought of as a foreign observer of the culture he describes because his childhood was linked to that “traditional” way of life, yet his social situation conveys the distance between him and his object of study: he belonged to the cultured elite, and as a university professor was a representative of modern academic knowledge. This combined internal and external position tells us a great deal about the relationship between intellectuals of the time and the “traditional” cultural matter of their society. Ahmad Amîn’s combined position at the top of and inside that society comes through clearly in the *Dictionary*, where we move back and forth between impersonal description of the Egyptians, referred to

29 Jean Pouillon, ‘Tradition’, in Pierre Bonte and Michel Izard (eds), *Dictionnaire de l’ethnologie et de l’anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2nd ed., 1992), p. 710.

30 Jean Cuisenier, *La tradition populaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, ‘Que sais-je?’, 1995), p. 85.

in the third-person plural, and the author's personal memories. However, it should be noted that between the shifts from "they" to "I," there is little in the way of "we."

### The *Dictionary's* Time Frames

Amîn's various re-uses of Lane's work raise questions of how the customs described in the *Dictionary* were attributed and dated. Because of its many, often unidentified sources, it is hard to establish whether, for example, a particular medical remedy, magic incantation, tale or proverb is common knowledge (and therefore known to the author) or was identified through research. This then raises the question of whether the customs described were still practiced at the time Ahmad Amîn was writing. Though in the introduction he writes that he will confine himself to describing contemporary customs, several of the customs described in connection with peasant life and living conditions date from the early nineteenth, eighteenth, even the seventeenth century. Ahmad Amîn mentions many customs that have not been practiced for a long time without always stating clearly that they have disappeared. This timelessness is of course the defining characteristic of traditions as he presents them: beneath a swarm of details that make them seem extremely real, little is said of their origins, meaning, or sociology. These time distortions—and the fact that he took inspiration from a nineteenth-century text while claiming to describe Egyptian life in the first half of the twentieth—reveal a complex, ambiguous attitude toward time that is part of the *Dictionary's* very substance.

Ahmad Amîn gave a historical motive for collecting traditions and addressed his *Dictionary* to the children of the new generations. This is consistent with the fact that folklore is usually codified in contexts of social and cultural change, the point being to preserve material attesting to a past that seems entirely over before it is definitively effaced. Folklore is always defined in emergency situations and its substance always seems to take shape at the very moment the practices it refers to are disappearing. The very fact of probing traditions suggests that change is under way. Such probing occurs at precisely the moment that those doing it no longer consider themselves bearers of tradition: the writer perceives the past as a world from which he or she is definitively cut off. This shift from memory to history presupposes a critical distancing, and this in turn explains ambiguous attitudes toward traditions: the writer recognizes traditions as his or her own but with the sense that they can no longer be experienced—lived—as such. Ahmad Amîn's view was sharply critical. In a work that thoroughly examines ways of life, social practices

and beliefs in light of the demands of reformed Islam and the implications of “modern civilization,” he regularly stressed the harm caused by certain practices and customs, such as servile attitudes toward the powers-that-be, the status of women, childrearing, hygiene problems, and fatalism. This relentlessly pursued critical inventory no doubt explains why the *Dictionary* is devoid of both nostalgia and *passéisme*.

The *Dictionary's* explicit purpose, then, was to describe the past. According to the author himself the main criticism that can be made of the work is that it seems to attribute the value of national heritage to “popular” culture and thus to discredit Egyptians by setting down a whole set of traditions that partake of the irrational. The so-called popular traditions’ approach to culture does run up against the strange and occasionally illicit nature of certain beliefs and practices. These customs have often been termed superstitions, and this in turn explains contemptuous attitudes toward such studies, whose subject is not considered worthy of exploration. As shown by the birth of folklore studies in Europe, such studies only became acceptable when restricted to a given population or distanced in the past. To justify his subject matter—customs and mores that he claim extended to all Egyptians—Ahmad Amîn downplayed its implications, re-situating it in history. It is important here to emphasize his emotional ambivalence to so-called popular culture, the fact that he was caught between attraction and repulsion. The same ambivalence can be detected with regard to “the people,” a social entity which appears as both the “passive guardian of a heritage and an active obstacle to progress,”<sup>31</sup> an “enigmatically creative social world,”<sup>32</sup> and a child-like people that needed to be introduced to rationality.

The norms implicated in defining practices as superstitions help circumscribe the area covered by folklore in Ahmad Amîn’s *Dictionary*. While the “party line” of reformed Islam is implicit in the work the author himself never refers to religious prohibitions in his criticisms. Rather he demystifies such beliefs through rational explanation, also exposing the harm they can cause and the charlatanism of seers, magicians and supposed saints. This didactic aspect of the work does not fit well with the readership he designated, i.e., children of the new generations. Despite the historical framework, the work seems a response to current concerns. Ahmad Amîn’s normative, pedagogic discourse

---

31 Marie-Noëlle Bourguet, ‘Des préfets aux champs: Une ethnographie administrative de la France en 1800’, in Britta Rupp-Eisenreich (ed.), *Histoires de l’anthropologie XVIIe–XIXe siècles* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1984), p. 268.

32 Daniel Fabre, ‘Proverbes, contes et chansons’, in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire* (vol. 3) (Paris: Gallimard “Quarto”, 1997), p. 3570.

attests to the work's educational purpose: it was to serve as a tool in educating "the people," as is shown by the very choice of the dictionary or encyclopedia form. It also fits with the mission that intellectuals of the time wished to assume of educating "their" people.

Ethnographic writing is a painful undertaking for Egyptian authors, one that generates multiple tensions because of the above-mentioned dual position—from within and from without, a position in which a feeling of belonging and emotional attachment are combined with critical detachment. Such authors are seeking the sources of "Egyptian-ness" in a world that is relatively foreign to them, the point being to reveal the technical know-how, social balance, and types of cultural inventiveness characterizing Egyptians and that exist above and beyond aspects of their culture that may appear irrational and archaic. The practices those authors describe are more than just another folk dance; they constitute the very texture of Egyptian social life. This engagement distinguishes such authors from European Orientalists, who had an infinitely more external relationship to their object of study. It is perhaps simpler to take back from the Orientalists a "scientific" object that has already been constructed and neutralized.

Orientalist works did of course help to define authenticity norms for traditional and popular Egyptian cultural heritage, but the impact of Egyptology seems to have been stronger than that of Orientalism: ethnographic studies of Egypt have continually focused on vestiges of ancient customs and mores. In the genealogy of Egyptian folklore, the influence of Orientalist writings seems to have been operative above all through the act of cataloguing and differentiating objects. It cannot be denied that Western scholars' attention to this or that thing worked to increase its value, if only because they left written descriptions of it. And the act of preservation is neither unconstrained nor banal: it forces a society to confront its past. Ahmad Amîn may seem to have made only fragmentary, heterogeneous, anecdotal reuse of Lane's work in his *Dictionary*, yet much of the material he did reuse in the mirror of Orientalism pertained to women and religion, cornerstones in the construction of Western representations of the Orient.

# Mohamed Galal (1906–1943): A Pioneering Egyptian Anthropologist

*Nicholas S. Hopkins*

Anthropology is a descriptive and analytic science which attempts to observe the enormous variety of the human condition in space and time. It developed independently of Orientalism in the second half of the 19th century, in both Europe and North America. The goal was to build a body of knowledge on the customs and lives of the world's peoples in order to develop a scientific and conceptual apparatus under the heading of a human science. Anthropologists early took an interest in contemporary Egypt, both for itself and in order to trace the development of civilization from one of its principal sources. In the 1930s Egyptians came to anthropology, and one of the first Egyptian anthropologists was Mohamed Galal (1906–1943) whose achievements we examine here.

Galal was born in 1906 in the Sharqiya village of Sendenhour, where his family owned land, and continued to regard Sendenhour as his home. His father passed away when he was a child, and his immediate family consisted of his mother and sister. He completed his secondary education in Zagazig, the capital of Sharqiya. His French was excellent, doubtless learned partly in Egypt then perfected during his lengthy stay in Paris from 1931 to 1938. His full name was Mohamed-Galal Abdelhamid Saleh el-Hadary. For professional purposes in France he went by Mohamed Galal. He studied and published in France, and his epoch is separated from the next generation of anthropologists by the turbulence of the Second World War. Galal's education and research form a chapter in the intellectual history of Egypt.

Mohamed Galal was arguably the first professional Egyptian anthropologist in the sense that he had academic training, carried out fieldwork, and published an anthropological study. Unfortunately he died prematurely. His early death and the relative inaccessibility of his major publication mean that he is largely unknown to the present generation of social scientists in Egypt or the Middle East. In this paper I try to retrieve the name and accomplishments of Mohamed Galal and situate them within the anthropology of the interwar period. First I summarize his academic career before turning to his accomplishments.

His anthropological legacy consists of a book-length study and a pair of museum collections in Paris. The study is entitled "Essai d'observations sur les rites funéraires en Egypte actuelle relevées dans certaines régions campag-

nardes” [“Observations of present-day funerary rituals in Egypt recorded in some rural areas”].<sup>1</sup> Galal dedicated his piece “A mes maîtres, les professeurs M. Mauss et L. Massignon.” Marcel Mauss was the leading French anthropologist of his day, and Louis Massignon was a prominent Orientalist. They were not only his academic mentors, but helped him administratively and financially.

Galal was fortunate enough to study anthropology in Paris during a period of intense intellectual excitement and institutional creation. To appreciate his achievement we must see how he combined the various elements of his training. Galal found a complex of interlocked institutions including the Institut d’Ethnologie, the Fifth Section (for “religious sciences”) of the Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), the rejuvenated anthropology museum (Musée de l’Homme), and the Collège de France. Together these provided the framework for the teaching of anthropology in Paris. Most of these were new or had been renewed during the 1920s and 1930s.

The key figure was Marcel Mauss, then at the peak of his powers, teaching at the Institut d’Ethnologie, at the EPHE and in the Collège de France.<sup>2</sup> Mauss was appointed to the EPHE in 1901, and became president of the Fifth Section in 1938; helped found the Institut d’Ethnologie in 1925, and was elected to the Collège de France in 1930.<sup>3</sup> Many students followed him from one teaching venue to the next.<sup>4</sup>

The Institut d’Ethnologie was intended to provide introductory training in anthropology to a range of students, colonial officials, and others. It offered few courses of its own, but encouraged students to enroll in relevant courses in the École pratique des Hautes Études, the École coloniale, the University of Paris, the Collège de France, and elsewhere. One course it did offer was Mauss’s course on theory and methodology intended as a preparation for field research; this was at a high level (reflected in Mauss’s *Essai sur le don*)<sup>5</sup> and attracted a rich variety of students. In addition, he offered specialized ethnography

1 Galal, Mohamed, “Essai d’observations sur les rites funéraires en Egypte actuelle relevées dans certain régions campagnardes,” *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, Cahiers II and III (1937), pp. 131–299 (with 18 plates of photographs and drawings in addition to numerous sketches in the text—83 figures, 57 photos and 26 drawings).

2 Fournier, Marcel, *Marcel Mauss, a biography*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006.

3 Galal’s other adviser Massignon began teaching at the Collège de France in 1926 and in the EPHE in 1933.

4 See Dumont, Louis, “Une science en devenir,” *L’Arc* 48, 1972, p. 12; Tillion, Germaine, *Il était une fois l’ethnographie*, Paris, Seuil, 2000, p. 15

5 “Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques,” *L’Année Sociologique*, 1923 (Translated by Ian Cunnison as *The Gift*, New York, Norton, 1967).

courses in the other two institutions. The Institut d'Ethnologie was authorized to award a certificate of ethnology in the faculty of Arts (1927) and in the faculty of Sciences (1928). The EPHE was authorized to award graduate degrees, a "diploma" and a doctorate. The Collège de France offered no degrees but like the EPHE its courses were free and open to all, and even those without the prior secondary and university degrees could attend and participate.

The old Musée d'Ethnographie was reorganized into the Musée de l'Homme, between 1929 and 1937, under the leadership of Paul Rivet and Georges-Henri Rivièrè. Its guiding principle was to focus on everyday objects rather than the ones considered esthetically superior, or simply curious, and so to create the material archives of disappearing or assimilating societies. In the late 1930s they were thus interested in aggressively expanding the museum's collections.<sup>6</sup>

Another part of the institutional structure in which Galal participated was the Société des Africanistes, housed at the Musée de l'Homme. The *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* twice reported on Galal's progress in the Sudan, based on his letters. The link between the Musée de l'Homme and the Société des Africanistes was the anthropologist and surrealist Michel Leiris.

Galal was registered as a student in Paris in two places: the École pratique des Hautes Études and the Institut d'Ethnologie. He came from Egypt after completing his secondary education, but had apparently been in Paris for some time before his appearance in the archival record, so may have studied elsewhere first. He was a self-funded student, and he never got more than modest support from the "Mission scolaire égyptien." There is no record of when he began his studies.<sup>7</sup> The first available document to indicate Galal's presence in Paris is a note from October 1936 to Mauss asking for advice on reading Fraser's *Golden Bough* (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 5.1], letter of October 22, 1936, from Galal to Mauss).<sup>8</sup> The tone of the note makes it sound like a preliminary contact, the kind of question a student would ask to attract some attention from a professor. On the other hand, Massignon wrote in April 1937 that Galal had done his fieldwork the previous summer, i.e., 1936, which implies that he might have been enrolled at least the previous year to absorb the teaching of Mauss and others, and to identify a research topic (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 8.74], letter of April 16, 1937, from Massignon to Mauss).

6 Laurière, Christine, "Paul Rivet, 1876–1958, le savant et le politique", thèse d'Anthropologie, Paris, EHESS, 2006.

7 It seems that French institutions keep poor records on their former students.

8 The Mauss archive only includes incoming letters.



In December 1936, Massignon wrote Mauss concerning the need for financial support for Galal (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 8.74], letter of December 3, 1936). Later he persuaded the Egyptian authorities to provide a modest stipend: 700 francs a month paid irregularly (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 5.1], letter of October 29, 1937, from Galal to Mauss). At several other points the Egyptian government refused to support Galal—either for printing his thesis, or for additional support for his fieldwork in the Sudan, for instance.

Galal apparently spent the winter of 1936–1937 working on the text of “Rites funéraires” since by April Massignon wrote to Mauss that he had read the first part of the *Mémoire* (thesis) and found it good, though in need of editing, adding, “I congratulate you on your success in teaching him methods.” (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 8.74], letter of April 16, 1937, from Massignon to Mauss). Then on June 22, 1937, Massignon notified Mauss that the *mémoire* had been accepted (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 5.1], letter of June 22 1937, from Massignon to Galal, copy to Mauss).<sup>9</sup> Galal was awarded a “diploma” from the Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes for his thesis on Egyptian funeral rituals.<sup>10</sup> However, for the degree to be fully accredited the thesis had to be published in whole or in part, and there ensued further discussion on how to cover the publication costs. Mauss helped in finding a small subsidy for the printing costs (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 5.1], receipt dated November 30, 1937). Eventually by October 1937 Massignon wrote that it could be published in the *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* of which he was the director (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 8.74], letter of October 11, 1937, from Massignon to Mauss). And so it was.

Massignon had reservations about Galal’s work because he feared the reactions of religious conservatives in Egypt. This affected the publication strategy he proposed. He counseled Galal to modify some of the observations he made of customs and beliefs that seemed unorthodox. In a letter to Galal reporting on the committee meeting that had approved the thesis, Massignon worried that there might be repercussions to the publication of the text from strict Muslims irritated by the reported deviations from Muslim orthodoxy (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 8.74], letter of June 22, 1937 from Massignon to Galal, copy to Mauss). Massignon therefore suggested that the thesis be published in France rather than Egypt, and that Galal should confer with Taha Hussein, due to arrive shortly in Paris, on some key rephrasings, and should draft a preface that would allow Mostafa Abderraziq, who had helped him in the past, to continue to

9 The second reader was Charles Viroilleaud, archeologist and Semiticist.

10 Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes, ve section (sciences religieuses), *Annuaire 1937–1938*, p. 23.

defend him. In October Massignon added in a letter to Mauss (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 8.74], letter of October 6, 1937) that he was worried about a new uproar in Cairo where several recent events concerning Islam had agitated people, and suggested that it was in Galal's best interest to be prudent. Massignon does not spell out what troubled him. We do not know whether Galal followed through on this advice, though indeed the text was published in France. Since Massignon was not only the advisor but also the editor of the journal that would publish the text, his opinions clearly had some weight. Massignon had told Mauss he would work with Galal on language issues, and there is no telling how far that went.

During the academic year 1937–1938 Galal continued to attend courses as an “élève diplômé”<sup>11</sup> while supervising the publication of his thesis and planning his next step (presumably research on Sudan toward a doctorate). In June 1938 he was awarded a “certificat” from the Institut d’Ethnologie, in a group that included Louis Dumont (MNHN, Bibliothèque Centrale, archives, file 2 AM 2 B 4). Galal was a member of a particularly rich cohort of anthropology students in Paris in the late 1930s.

### Rites funéraires

Galal does not explicitly situate his work in any intellectual tradition, but the influence of Mauss and his associates is evident. Thus he notes that in addition to presenting data on death rituals, he intends to show the relationship between these and social, religious, and moral “facts”, and to show to what feelings and beliefs these facts might be attributed. Both the structure and the vocabulary reflect the teaching of Mauss, notably in his course at the Institut d’Ethnologie, just as the focus on transcribed texts reflects the interests of Massignon.

The text itself contains relatively few indications of the research process that produced it.<sup>12</sup> Mohamed Galal notes that he did his research in certain representative areas of Egypt, particularly Sharqiya, but also Beheira, Asyut, Aswan, and Cairo. He further stresses that he relied on observations and direct contact with the rural population, knowing that local officials would give him a sanitized view, and that only direct contact would provide reliable detail.<sup>13</sup> The

11 Essentially the equivalent of a doctoral candidate.

12 That art form was a later development.

13 See p. 131 in Galal, Mohamed, “Essai d’observations sur les rites funéraires en Egypte

emphasis is thus on the observable facts. He notes that in order to establish rapport with the people, it was necessary to show that he already knew a good deal about the subject, and thus he could enter into good relations with people and be able to observe directly without disturbing people.

The book's structure is revealed in the chapter headings. The stages are first laid out as: illness, including the moment of death; preparing the corpse for burial; the funeral; the architecture of tombs and cemeteries; visits to the dead in the cemetery. Then in the second part, Galal discusses the religious, moral (cultural), and social aspects, and the beliefs and feelings relating to funerals. In an appendix he includes the texts of mourning laments, and there is also a photo essay. Galal links the physical practices of caring for the body to Egyptian ideas of the causes of illness and death and the passage of the soul after death; it is important that the body present itself to God in beautiful shape. To borrow the language of van Gennep (which Galal does not) we could say that the study covers the entire liminal period from the onset of illness to the final disposition of the soul.<sup>14</sup>

The data presented by Galal are taken to characterize the society rather than the individual actions within a cultural framework; they are 'social facts.' Thus individual variation is absorbed within the social pattern, and the interplay of diverse actors is not addressed. Galal presents first the ethnographic observation, then the interpretation given by the people. In this Galal was true to his times and also reflective of his teacher, Mauss.

Galal does indicate where there are differences by region or religion. Upper and Lower Egypt are occasionally contrasted. Some features are said to be true only of urban areas. He indicates a few points where Coptic or Jewish practice differs from his model, but also many where they were similar. Despite the ambition to extend the study to all (rural) Egypt, I think one can infer that the case of Galal's native village of Sendenhour<sup>15</sup> provides the reference point; other cases are seen in contrast.

The influence of Mauss can be traced back to several of his writings. First of all, the attention given to the stages of the preparation of the body for burial reflects Mauss's interest in how motor habits ("techniques du corps") are

---

actuelle relevées dans certaines régions campagnardes", *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, Cahiers II–III, 1937, pp. 131–299.

14 Van Gennep, Arnold, *Les rites de passage*, Paris, Nourry, 1909 (Translated as *The rites of passages*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1960)

15 Sendenhour is located between Bilbeis and Zagazig in Sharqiya governorate. In the 1930s it had a population of about 3000.

learned and repeated.<sup>16</sup> The extensive and subtle analysis of prestations and counterprestations occasioned by a death is of course reminiscent of "The Gift". The discussion of the burial of the corpse, the reaction of the mourners, and the fate of the soul echoes the work of Mauss's associate Robert Hertz.<sup>17</sup> Throughout Galal focuses on the obligatory and social expression of sentiments, linked to the family's social status, rather than individual reactions.

Both with regard to class status and to family, death and funerals reinforce social distinctions. Galal's analysis is sensitive to class and social distinctions: the rich can carry out the ideal but the poor have to compromise. At the same time the rich have to live up to their role even if they can't afford it: they sometimes borrow money very discreetly to cover funeral expenses. When there is a death in a well-to-do family, there are many compensated roles for the poor. He also highlights the different roles of the families involved (spouse's or mother's family, for instance), and describes gender differences in the reaction to a death. The roles of the different members of the family shift as they receive mourners and accommodate to the shifting pattern of social relations resulting from the death. There are also certain ritual specialists, notably the "lahhad" who supervises or carries out the preparation of the body for burial and its placement in the tomb, and leads the final prayers. In the funeral procession there may be drummers and professional mourners, and in the condolence receptions and subsequent visits to the tomb there are Koran reciters.

Sections within the text detail analyses of particular cultural aspects that are related to the links between this physical world and the immaterial one: the evil eye, the zar, the appeals to saints at their tombs, the beliefs concerning the last judgment. In the first two cases people seek the cure of an ill person by countering the affliction brought by the evil eye or the zar spirit. The second two examples occur after the death of the individual and concern the efforts of the living to ensure the well-being of the soul in the afterlife. The visits to saints' tombs are presented as an extension of visits to family tombs. In each case Galal includes the Arabic texts of the conventional prayers and appeals, with translations. Here again it is the actions of the living that can be observed, and the texts reflect the beliefs.

---

16 Mauss, Marcel. "Les techniques du corps" in *Journal de Psychologie* 32 (3-4), 1936 (Translated as "Body techniques", in *Sociology and Psychology* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 95-123)

17 Hertz, Robert, "Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort", *L'Année sociologique*, 10, 1907, pp. 48-137.

## Museum Collections and Material Culture

During this period Galal twice prepared ethnographic collections for the Musée de l'Homme. This interest in material culture was considered an integral part of anthropological research, and was encouraged by the Museum. The first one in 1937 included objects related to the funeral ceremonies, and the second one in 1938 consisted of everyday objects—some of them quite large such as a wooden water wheel or a threshing sledge. The items from the first collection (71.1937.26) are listed as a gift from Galal, while those from the second collection (71.1938.115) were collected on commission from the Museum, but at the initiative of Galal. He was advanced 2,500 francs, and later was reimbursed for another 1,000 francs he spent over budget. Many of these objects are still in the collections of the Musée de l'Homme, now the “Musée du Quai Branly” (MQB).

The combined collection includes 481 objects, ranging from a small vial containing perfume used in preparing the corpse to the water wheel. Objects from the funeral collection were displayed for many years in the Musée de l'Homme at Trocadéro, but have since been taken off display. The museum records include his annotation of some of the objects, ranging from a word or two to a short paragraph. An overview of the inventory is presented at [www.culture.fr/recherche](http://www.culture.fr/recherche) but the museum files themselves contain additional information, including sketches of the larger agricultural tools such as the water wheel and the threshing sledge, intended to help the curators reassemble them.

One example where the museum records contain information going beyond the brief description in the online inventory is a banner used in religious ceremonies. This illustrates Galal's sensitive recording of ethnographic information, reflecting the worldview of the actors.

Banner: Muslims, peasants, city dwellers, shaykhs. Only the tentmakers have the right to make these banners. The banners provide the means to enter heaven. They are from the city. The banner is carried by the followers of the shaykh in the ceremonies of the order to which the shaykh belongs, or in mourning for an important member of the order. Anyone who carries it falls into trance while dancing. One says, “he is taken by the spirit of the shaykh,” or “he is taken by ecstasy.” People believe that at this point the spirit of the shaykh is in the banner and simultaneously in the carrier. A carrier who does not fall into trance is accepted neither by the people nor by the shaykh himself.

All the shaykhs in Egypt must have such banners which differ by color, decoration, inscription, or size. The banner symbolizes the order. It is only

carried on instructions from the shakyh. An ordinary person would fall sick if he touches it.

MQB 71.1937.26.8

A report written by Galal at the end of 1938 for the Musée de l'Homme attempts to situate the second collection in the geography of Sharqiya, and enumerates the different elements: pottery, basketwork, woodwork for agricultural equipment, mat-making, and weaving. Galal notes that some of these traditional crafts of Egypt are now disappearing.<sup>18</sup>

### Research in Sudan

After his first research in his home area, Galal next set off adventurously for a contrasting field site. In May 1938 Galal was awarded a grant of 20,600 francs from the Institut d'Ethnologie for research in Sudan (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 5.1], letter from Galal to Mauss.).<sup>19</sup> Mauss was instrumental in this. The grant was a significant amount of money, and apparently comparable to that which French researchers under the auspices of the Institut d'Ethnologie were receiving. Galal planned to travel to the extreme south of Sudan along the Ugandan border, and later went to the area along the Ethiopian border. The southern Sudan might have seemed an obvious choice for an Egyptian seeking a different cultural setting.

However, before traveling to Sudan, in July 1938 Galal made a trip to Oxford to visit Evans-Pritchard and Seligman for advice and orientation on the southern Sudan where both had done research (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 12.2], letter of July 21, 1938, from Seligman to Mauss).<sup>20</sup> Seligman in turn sent him to the Sudan office in London to see A.B.B. Howell, who wrote a letter of introduction for him, while stressing the need to work closely with the authorities in the Sudan (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 12.2], letter of July 18, 1938, from Howell to Seligman, enclosed in the preceding. Seligman had written a letter of introduction for

18 "Rapport sur la collection ethnographique faite dans la région de Sharkieh, Basse-Egypte, et destinée au Musée de l'Homme à Paris, 12/8/38–15/9/38", MQB, 38–115.

19 There must have been a proposal for this, even with the support from Mauss and Massignon, and even considering that the French were casual about such matters, but I did not find such a document.

20 Mauss was certainly the link here as he corresponded regularly with Seligman and Evans-Pritchard.

Galal to Howell on July 16, 1938).<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, Evans-Pritchard confirmed that Galal was doing research in the Sudan.<sup>22</sup>

Following this trip to Oxford, Galal returned to Egypt and collected the artifacts for his second collection from Sendenhour, and arranged for packing and shipment—August 12–September 15, 1938 (Musée de l’Homme, 38–115, letter of August 29, 1938, from Galal to Director Musée de l’Homme). In September Galal met Rivet who was passing through the Suez Canal, and they discussed anthropology and the need for more research in Egypt (MQB, 38–115, letter of September 18, 1938 from Galal to “M. le Professeur.”). This was his last direct contact with his French advisors.

Mohammed Galal left Egypt for the Sudan at the end of September 1938. By November, he had reached his destination, Nimule, where the Nile crosses from Uganda into Sudan, and he was able to write Mauss and his other Paris correspondents on November 29. His immediate goal was to study the Madi people who are divided between Sudan and Uganda.<sup>23</sup> To Mauss he recounted his contacts with the British colonial administration in Juba and Torit (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 5.1], letter of November 29, 1938). He reported that the Governor of Juba had introduced him to the governor of the Northern Province of Uganda who was traveling in the area. Galal was able to pass on the recommendations he had received from Seligman and Howell. He noted that he had begun to learn the Madi language, describing it as fairly easy and the people as simple and calm. He was writing in the dry season, and so it was easy to get around, though to travel any distance was still complicated and expensive. His health was good, and he was eating onions, lentils, and fish. Temporarily he was living in his tent. He was armed with three rifles, to protect himself from wild animals.<sup>24</sup> He noted that he was affected by the worries of his family, especially his mother and sister, since the family had already lost a member in the Bahr el Ghazal, an uncle allegedly eaten by the Niam Niam cannibals.<sup>25</sup>

On the same day Galal wrote from Nimule to a colleague, Thérèse Rivière, the daughter of Georges-Henri Rivière (MQB, 38–115, letter of November 29, 1938). To her, somewhat more informally, he wrote that he was learning Madi, was still

21 Seligman had written a letter of introduction for Galal to Howell on July 16, 1938.

22 Evans-Pritchard, E.E. “Bibliographical note on the ethnology of the southern Sudan” in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 13, 1937, 62–67.

23 The Madi are similar to the Lugbara. See John Middleton, “Notes on the political organization of the Madi of Uganda”, *African Studies*, 14, 1955, 29–36.

24 The rifles failed to protect him from the most dangerous of all: the anopheles mosquito.

25 “Niam-niam” is both an alternative name for the Azande, and a mythical name for cannibals.

living in a tent, and was being devoured by flies and mosquitoes. He implored her to write often as he was very isolated, only receiving mail once a month. She responded on Dec. 9, 1938, adding somewhat skeptically, "I certainly hope the Niam Niam won't eat you" (MQB, 38–115).

Five months later (May 1, 1939) he wrote again to Mauss with a brief update, pointing out that his research among the Madi was almost complete (IMEC, Fonds Mauss [MAS 5.1], letter from Galal in Nimule (but actually probably in Meturu, Uganda) to Mauss).<sup>26</sup> He had spent 4 months in Uganda and 2 months among the Sudanese Madi, collecting information on "morphology" (social organization), and also some on prehistory. He would soon go to the eastern Sudan for a further 18 months. His health was good apart from occasional attacks of malaria, and his money could last another 6 months. Again on the same date he wrote from Meturu, Uganda, to colleagues in Paris to request news of the recent developments in French anthropology (MQB 38–115, letter of May 1, 1939, to Mlle. Rivet, Paris).<sup>27</sup>

On May 16, 1939, Massignon wrote to Mauss that the informative letters he had received from Galal nonetheless worried him. While he could not himself orient Galal, he suggested that Mauss could send him further instructions (IMEC Fonds Mauss [MAS 8.74], letter of May 16, 1939). The letters Galal sent to Massignon were doubtless similar to those that he sent to Mauss, Rivet, Thérèse Rivière and others, which also resemble each other. Something in them was causing concern to Massignon, and it was probably not the malaria. But we are missing too many letters in this set to say more.

The last letter we have is from Galal in Roseires to Paul Rivet, November 6, 1939 (MNHN, Fonds d'archives Paul Rivet, 2 AP 1 C). As the head of the Institut d'Ethnologie, Rivet was probably the responsible person for Galal's grant. This is the closest we have to a formal report on Galal's fieldwork. But France was already at war, and Rivet could only instruct that the letter should be filed away. The letter was however used as the basis for a note in the *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, under the heading "Mélanges et nouvelles africanistes".<sup>28</sup> In this letter Galal first describes how the rainy season of 1939 had interfered with his movement and thus his work. Then he proceeds to report that he

26 Galal refers to sending a formal report but I found no trace of this.

27 She was the daughter and assistant of Paul Rivet. The reference must be to Delafosse's "Les civilisations négro-africaines" (1925). Delafosse was an expert on the anthropology and the linguistics of West Africa. Leiris responded on June 24, 1939 that no copy was available.

28 *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 9 (1939), p. 217. The earlier note, *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 8 (1938):208, reported on Galal's stay among the Madi, and was submitted by Michel Leiris.



had finished his work with the Madi before leaving southern Sudan, having collected valuable information on ethnography, physical anthropology, and linguistics. He had made a genealogical study of 250 families belonging to 60 clans. He had studied the physical aspects of 300 subjects belonging to ten different age categories and chosen from eight different localities. He had determined the blood group of 100 subjects. He had examined the prehistoric traits of five places. In a stream near Dufile (Uganda) he found two stone tools. At Laroppi (Uganda) he had found a cave with some potsherds. And at Nimule (Sudan) he had found a rock shelter on a mountain with some traces of smoke on the walls. In linguistics, he used the questionnaire of the Institut d'Ethnologie, and also used the questionnaire of Mr. Tucker, Professor of Sudanese languages at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. He also collected many songs.

Roseires is in Fung Province, and that is where he intended to do the second of the three parts of his study in the Sudan. There are many poorly known ethnic groups, and some interesting prehistoric sites. In fact, Galal stated that two days later he was going to travel to the important prehistoric site of Gule Mountain. He also mentioned his intention of spending time with the Burun, the Koura, the Udok, and the Berta, as well as the situation in the Ingessana Hills. The third phase of the study would be among the Beja living along the Red Sea, both in Sudan and in Egypt, and should last 6 months. All in all, he had planned research activities for about two years—if his health and money held out.

This gives the best idea of what Galal hoped to accomplish in the Sudan, but it does not provide an overall sense of direction and problem. It is an exploratory survey of a very broad and variegated area, and resembles the work of Seligman<sup>29</sup> as much as anything. Perhaps he intended to do some kind of ethno-history of the non-Arab parts of the Sudan south and east of the center. Its range does however reflect the emphasis of Mauss on a broad study including prehistory, linguistics, and technology along with social anthropology.<sup>30</sup> However, after the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, France was on a war footing, even if combat did not start until the following June. The thin thread of communication between Galal and his French sponsors snapped.

Once war broke out, Galal was evacuated by the colonial authorities to Egypt where he eventually taught at Cairo University. He then contracted an inopera-

29 C.G. Seligman, *Pagan tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, pp. 489–492.

30 Denise Paulme, "Avertissement à la deuxième édition", in Marcel Mauss, *Manuel d'Ethnographie*, Paris, Payot, 1967, pp. 5–6.

ble brain tumor, and died and was buried in the Sendenhour cemetery in 1943, leaving a wife and two daughters. Galal's pioneering efforts were not followed up in Egypt because of his early death, and because of the interruption occasioned by the war. The fact that his main written work was published outside anthropology in a journal of Islamic studies, and in French, may have discouraged successors from taking it into account. Galal's work on funerals was noted appreciatively by Hocart,<sup>31</sup> Berque,<sup>32</sup> and Massignon.<sup>33</sup> Although his career was cut short by illness, the record shows a conscientious and adventurous scholar with a promising career ahead of him. The record also illustrates the productive relationship between teacher and student in 1930s France.

If anthropology represents a path towards a self-conscious understanding of one's own society, or society in general, Galal's interrupted efforts represent no more than a sketchy if worthy beginning. The decade of the 1930s in Egypt saw other social science beginnings, a full understanding of which would contextualize Galal's work. It was a fruitful period. One can note the writings of Henry Ayrout and of Abbas Ammar, both more reformists than anthropologists, and the unpublished masters' work of Ali Ahmed Issa who did not follow up with field research on Egypt. Sayyid Uways also began his studies at this time but did not publish until after 1945.<sup>34</sup> The intellectual history continues, with the debate between reformism and science, even until today.

### Archives Consulted

Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), abbaye d'Ardenne, 14280 St Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe (near Caen, Normandy).

Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes (ve section, Sciences religieuses), 46 rue de Lille, 75007 Paris.

Musée du Quai Branly (MQB), 222 rue de l'Université 75343 Paris Cedex 07. Département Patrimoine et Collections, Archives scientifiques.

Bibliothèque Central du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle. Service du Patrimoine. 38 rue Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire 75005 Paris.

31 A.M. Hocart, "Ritual and emotion" in *The life-giving myth and other essays*, London, Methuen, 1952, p. 60. Hocart was professor of anthropology at Cairo University from 1934 until his death in 1939.

32 Jacques Berque, *Histoire sociale d'un village égyptien au xxe siècle*, Paris, Mouton, 1957, p. 51.

33 Louis Massignon, "La cité des morts au Caire" in *Parole Donnée*, Paris, Juilliard, 1962, p. 376.

34 For more details, see Hopkins, Nicholas S. "Anthropology in Egypt, 1900–1967" in *Cairo Papers in Social Science*, forthcoming, 2015.

# Italian Colonial Knowledge and Identity-Shaping in Libya: A Dual Instrumentalization of Endogenous Anthropological Knowledge\*

*Mouldi Lahmar*

In contrast to its neighbors, Libya obtained independence without having a strong, structured ideological or organizational national movement. The modern independent Libyan state came into being shortly after World War II when the United Nations Assembly proclaimed the birth of the Kingdom of Libya.<sup>1</sup> The new state had no intellectual elite to undertake the task of rewriting the country's history in accordance with modern methodological standards. To compensate for this, some Libyans chose to translate colonial writings about their country<sup>2</sup> (most of their fellow Libyans knew no foreign languages and so could not read those texts in the original).<sup>3</sup> In this context, the act of translating was not merely an intellectual or aesthetic one but could also be perceived either as a political act or as a move likely to provoke a political reaction. This has led to an unexpected result: the endogenous origins of the information contained in the “colonial knowledge” have been proved, and the problems they pose to Libyans were less on their colonial appearance than on their local history and on the application for which were made, especially one related to the question of identity.

Here I examine how Mohammed Khalifa Tillisi (1930–2010), a Libyan intellectual also known outside Libya,<sup>4</sup> perceived studies of his country by its Italian colonizers. I focus on Tillisi's criticisms of the empirical accuracy of those studies and his judgments about what in these studies could be reused to write the “true” history of his country.

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs.

1 The crown was entrusted to the leading family of the Sanusiyya brotherhood, in the person of Idriss, the founder's grandson, because of the role played by that reform-minded religious movement in resisting the Italian colonial conquest of Libya and the Fascist forces on the same front in World War II.

2 King Idriss, also head of the Sanusiyya, encouraged publication of a number of historiographical studies of his brotherhood. See works by the Palestinian Ahmed Sidqi Dajani, who was close to the king at the time.

3 The brutality of the Italian Fascist occupation of Libya is reflected in the extremely small number of indigenous inhabitants who reached Higher Education level during that period.

4 Tillisi received academic awards in Libya, Italy, Tunisia and Morocco.

Of course the problem did not come up in the same way for all translations because Libyans were sensitive only to studies of their country's political history and anthropology, specifically those dealing with their society's so-called tribal structures, relations between tribal groups and relations between those groups and the colonizers producing the knowledge being translated. Ultimately this raised the problem for Libyans of their relationship to the independent state, which had itself become the producer of official memory; namely, the memory determining the position of each group and to some extent of each individual within the new political society.

### A Translation Project Fraught with Risk

All these problems were condensed in the experience of Mohammed Khalifa Tillisi as he was translating two studies of Libya written by the famous Italian officer Enrico De Agostini. Tillisi's translation of De Agostini's first volume, *Le popolazioni della Tripolitania*, was criticized so heavily and from so many quarters when it was published in 1975 that the translator was forced to delay publication of the second volume, on Cyrenaica, until 1990. One year later he also published a *new* Arabic version of De Agostini's two volumes, this time condensed into a single work which he called *Dictionary of the Inhabitants of Libya*. In this second version the "translator" adopted a quite different method, appropriating De Agostini's work while adapting it to the Libyan national context. Tillisi thus produced two Arabic versions of the same work with significantly different national uses. To grasp the issues that these two versions raise today in connection with the question of re-appropriation of Orientalist knowledge it is important to review the characteristics of De Agostini's *Le popolazioni della Tripolitania et Le popolazioni della Cirenaica* and the respective identities of the Italian author and the Libyan translator.

Enrico De Agostini (1878–1973) was an officer involved in the Italian occupation of Libya from 1911. After fighting in Europe during World War I he returned to Tripoli, leaving active duty in 1916 to head the "research department" that had been set up to serve the Italian Government of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. De Agostini was put in charge of mapping the country and reporting on the local ethnic groups and their history. Back in Italy in 1935, he became an editor of the Italian Royal Geographical Society and honorary member of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

---

5 De Agostini's published studies of Libya include *Le popolazioni della Tripolitania*, *Notizie*

Mohammed Khalifa Tillisi was a Libyan scholar, novelist, poet, historian and translator. Born to a fisherman in 1930, he studied in Tripoli and later became a school teacher there. In 1962 he became Secretary-General of Libya's National Assembly; in 1967 he was appointed Minister of Information. He held a number of other public positions, including that of ambassador, and founded several journals and cultural associations. But his preferred activities were writing history and translating. He wrote at least nineteen works and translated fifteen, primarily from Italian to Arabic.

De Agostini's two books were a kind of inventory of the Libyan population by region, ethnic group and tribe, with entries describing some of their cultural characteristics while providing precise information on their land, their particular histories, their relations with the Ottoman state, and the attitude of each group toward the Italian colonial authorities in the early years of the occupation. Most importantly, De Agostini claimed that he had collected this information directly from local populations—community figures and other local informers—and received help in this task from Libyan collaborators, including Ismail Kemali, at the army research department he headed.<sup>6</sup>

### Who Did Tillisi Actually Translate?

In his first Arabic translation of *Le Popolazioni della Tripolitania*, published in 1975, Tillisi was careful to stay close to the original text.<sup>7</sup> He did censor some passages; for example, sentences in which certain groups were designated as “slaves” of another named group, particularly in connection with the Saharan oasis of Ghadamis in the south, were omitted in the published translation.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere, he added footnotes to warn the reader that De Agostini's

---

*Etniche e Storiche* (Tripoli: Tipografia Pirotta e Bersciano, 1917); *Le popolazioni della Cirenaica* (Benghazi, 1922–1923); *Repertorio dei nomi di località contenuti nella carta dimostrativa in 5 fogli alla scala 1:400 000* (Benghazi: Ufficio Studi del Governo della Cirenaica, 1926).

- 6 In 1916 Ismail Kemali published his own inventory, in Italian, of the Libyan population, but it was far from complete; see Ismail Kemali, *Gli abitanti della Tripolitania, Memoria presentata all' Ufficio Politico Militare di Tripoli* (Tripoli: Tipo-Litografia del Governo della Tripolitania, 1916).
- 7 The mention of Tripolitania in the original title is absent from the Arabic title *Môjam Sûkkan Libya* (The inhabitants of Libya), though it does figure in the subtitle.
- 8 De Agostini, *Le popolazioni della Tripolitania*, p. 339. Tillisi, *Môjam Sûkkan Libya*, p. 534. In his translation of the volume on Cyrenaica, Tillisi deleted an entire paragraph on the origins of black people.

remarks on the Berbers were sheer invention.<sup>9</sup> But generally speaking Tillisi remained quite faithful to the original.

This is precisely why his work soon raised problems, as he himself pointed out in his introduction to the second translation. During an interview he granted me<sup>10</sup> he explained that members of lineage groups assumed to possess the prestigious status of *shorfa*<sup>11</sup> had protested because the work did not attribute that quality to them and failed to rank them in that category. Meanwhile neighbours of some of the groups that De Agostini did identify as *shorfa* claimed the latter had no legitimate claim to that origin, while some tribal groups, including Gadhafi's, the Gdadfa, accused Tillisi of reproducing De Agostini's "mistake" about them: De Agostini had described the Gdadfa as a small marabout tribe dependent for protection on their more powerful neighbors, the Warfalla and Ouled Sliman tribes.<sup>12</sup> Above all, some critics claimed that De Agostini had been deliberately misled by his Libyan informers, who had given an image of the ethnic groups of their respective regions that served their own interests; in this case, Tillisi's mistake was to have reproduced those errors and falsifications.<sup>13</sup> Worse still, according to some critics De Agostini's informers were pro-Italian; they had used the study to settle scores with enemies who were genuine opponents of colonial domination.

From this flood of controversy and protest Tillisi learned that he had to handle De Agostini's second volume, *Le popolazioni della Cirenaica*, quite differently. To begin with, he brought out his translation of that text much later—fifteen years after publication of the volume on Tripolitania. Tillisi seems to have finished his translation of De Agostini's work on Cyrenaica in 1974, just a few months after completing his translation of the volume on Tripolitania. But whereas the latter volume was published in 1975, his translation of the Cyrenaica volume only came out in 1990.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, he introduced many more changes to the second volume, deleting rather than adding information;

9 See also Tillisi's warnings to readers in the introduction to *Môjam Sûkkan Libya*, pp. 15–16; also p. 310.

10 In Tripoli on October 20, 2008.

11 Descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

12 In the second version of Tillisi's translation of De Agostini's work, the Gdadfa are described as a "great tribe".

13 In my interview with him, Tillisi mentioned his concern not to fan the flames, saying they should be left to die out.

14 It remains unclear whether there was a first version of the translation which was closer to De Agostini's text.

for example, he omitted several long paragraphs on the relations that developed between the Italian authorities and the various tribal groups of Cyrenaica during the war of occupation. Thirdly, he did not reproduce the territorial boundaries that De Agostini had indicated for the region's different tribes. He was also careful not to translate literally the terms De Agostini used to designate certain types of political relations obtaining in Cyrenaica at the time he did his research. For example, whereas De Agostini used the Italian words *legati* (tied) and *soggetti* (subjected to) to designate established relations of dependence between members of dominant Bedouin tribes and dominated tributary groups (the latter locally termed *al-mrâbtîn as-sedgân*), Tillisi used such euphemistic Arabic expressions as “mutual link” (*mitrabtîn*), “allegiance” (*muâln*) and “assemblies” (*mûndhammîn*).<sup>15</sup>

### The Heart of the Problem

To get to the heart of the problem and bring to light the complexity of Orientalist knowledge we need to re-examine Tillisi's criticisms of De Agostini and those that Tillisi's readers made of *him*.

In the introduction to the first version of his translation of *Le popolazioni della Tripolitania* Tillisi praised De Agostini for being far ahead of other researchers of his time on several points; namely the wealth of information he provided on tribal genealogies and the distant history of the Berbers, whose origins De Agostini located in ancient Arabia. He also expressed approval of De Agostini's critical view of the commonly-held belief that the tribes and their genealogical trees as he recorded them corresponded well to empirical reality. Lastly, Tillisi seems to have had little doubt about the accuracy of De Agostini's information on the Libyan population of the early twentieth century.

However, he criticized De Agostini for failing to be neutral and for conducting his study with the aim of facilitating the Italian occupation of Libya—a point which De Agostini himself openly acknowledged in his introduction.<sup>16</sup> This attitude led Tillisi to formulate an epistemological criticism: De Agostini's approach could have extremely dangerous practical implications for the unity and political future of Libya. As he saw it, De Agostini had focused throughout the work on differences, conflicts and hierarchical rankings in the Libyan society of the time, thereby instilling the idea of division in the people's histor-

15 Enrico De Agostini, *Le popolazioni della Cirenaica*, p. 14; Tillisi's translation, p. 22.

16 *Ibid.*; author's presentation of his book to the governor of Cyrenaica (1923).

ical memory and sowing the seeds of rancour among tribes and ethnic groups, together with the feeling that neighbours were always potential enemies.

But readers of De Agostini's work as made accessible to them in Arabic by Tillisi did not criticize the translator on these points. Their criticisms concerned much more practical, down-to-earth issues related to their present time. As explained, they criticized Tillisi for having translated a book laden with information that the colonizers had demanded and provided by informers who had taken advantage of the opportunity to improve their position in the society of the time and discredit local competitors or enemies. But what current issues underlie these criticisms, criticisms referring to facts and events that took place in a quite distant past?

At issue is the opportunity to reuse the content of De Agostini's book in connection with Libya's present-day political and social struggles. A major implication of the publication in Arabic of De Agostini's research was to transform Libyans' oral memory into written history and their vague representations into "stable" classificatory prescriptions available for use by any individual or social group seeking to construct, consolidate or dynamically modify his or its own history and identity in accordance with their own ethnic, cultural, political, geographic and demographic concerns.

For example, a writer appointed to a professional association in 2009 was reminded by his competitors that his ancestors were Jewish and had converted to Islam quite late—information they could claim was accurate and indeed necessarily true because it was in print. Candidates for "elections" to local councils have been accused by their adversaries of being foreign to the local population due to their origin. Worse yet, after banning all independent political-ideological organizations—i.e., political parties—Colonel Gadhafi's Libyan state made tribal groups the basic unit of social organization while using those groups as a framework for "local popular committees" and relays of their action.<sup>17</sup> The fact is that the "dictionary" Gadhafi used as a reference and the tool that representatives of competing committees referred to was nothing other than De Agostini's book, available in Arabic thanks to Tillisi.<sup>18</sup>

---

17 In *The Green Book* Muammar Gadhafi said the following about tribes: "The tribe is a natural social-security umbrella." (*al-Kitab al-Akhdar*, Tripoli, undated, p. 134; my translation).

18 According to Ali Fahmy Khchim, former national education minister of Libya (1972–1975), Tillisi's translation of De Agostini made possible the reproduction of tribalism (interview, Tripoli, October 2008).



### Tillisi's Solution: Re-appropriating "Colonial-Indigenous" Knowledge

To grasp the socio-political meaning of the problems raised by Tillisi's translations it is useful to examine the solution he proposed and the guidelines he applied to achieve it. As noted, Tillisi decided to publish a new version of De Agostini's research only one year after publishing his Arabic version of *Le popolazioni della Cirenaica*. This time his primary concern was to reduce as much as possible the dangers he had presented in his introduction to the more faithful version, namely those associated with De Agostini's statements about relations between tribes and ethnic groups. Tillisi identified the guiding principles of his new approach as follows:

The method I have followed combines dictionary and encyclopedia methods. This way of proceeding has enabled me to achieve results that differ from De Agostini's. De Agostini counted and classified the population on the basis of place of residence, ethnic origin and social class ... while giving free reign to his own interpretations and prejudices. I have worked to protect the reader from those prejudices.<sup>19</sup>

[In my method] kinship ties, crossings, affinities and the solidarity implicated in social ties are identified by means of family and place of residence. This also makes it possible to go back to shared roots, the great tree representing a whole whose branches extend in all directions, and thus to attach east to west, north to south, at the local, national and human scales ... This approach will surely be noted by any informed scholar: applying two different methods to the same material produced different results.<sup>20</sup>

What did Tillisi's method actually lead to? As he explicitly acknowledged,<sup>21</sup> he took up the content of De Agostini's work and rewrote it differently, following the method presented above. He made it into a single book, a single volume in which Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan constitute a whole, and gave it a new title: *Dictionary of the Inhabitants of Libya*. The regional dimension—

19 Mohammed Khalifa Tillisi, *Môjam Sûkkan Libya* [Dictionary of the inhabitants of Libya], p. 9 (my translation).

20 Ibid.

21 In the opening sentence of *Môjam Sûkkan Libya*, Tillisi writes: "There is nothing to hide: this book is entirely based on the material provided to us by De Agostini's two books" (my translation).

the Tripolitania/Cyrenaica duality—has disappeared, and the whole is signed Mohammed Khalifa Tillisi, who has thus become an author in his own right and not merely a translator. Tillisi's new method enables any Libyan to discover his origins on the basis of family name alone, without having to identify himself in colonial fashion as belonging to a hierarchically connoted group (*murabtin*, *ahrar*, *kulughli*, *shorfa*, and even Arab, Berber, Black).

This inquiry allows for presenting some conclusions on the question of Orientalism. The social sciences proceed not so much by perceiving the other through a representation of self—that being the classic ethnocentric situation—as by perceiving self through a representation of the other. It is this ever-problematic way of proceeding that motivated Edward Said as he wrote *Orientalism*.

But while we can agree with Said that Orientalism invented the Orient, we can also say that this invention was not entirely external but also endogenous and contextual, and that at a local scale Orientals were a party to it. That invention reflects the relations that developed—all in *local* situations—between the dominant and the dominated.

Orientalist knowledge will not die, for its heirs, who are doing their best to move beyond it methodologically, do not exist outside history. In my recent study of what the French saw in Fezzan during the early years of their occupation of that region (1942 to 1946), I observed that they proceeded like De Agostini (which is hardly surprising) but also that some French geographers *currently* studying the Sahara tend to think of their subject approximately the same way he did. Only their language and style are different.<sup>22</sup>

One of the most productive approaches to Orientalism (rather than studying its history) is to consider its relevance for the present in connection with the issue of identity. De Agostini's and Tillisi's works are used more than ever in today's Libya, but now the aim is to instrumentalize issues of identity and political aims that have assumed importance in the early twenty-first century.

One characteristic of postcolonial Libyan intellectual history is that it is not attentive to the universal theoretical dimensions and ambitions of colonial knowledge but has instead shifted the focus of debate from the *truth* of the information collected by the colonial administration (information acknowledged to have come from indigenous informers) to colonial *use* of "indigenous"

---

22 Mouldi Lahmar, *Le Fezzan vu par les Français au lendemain de son occupation* (Tunis: IRMC, forthcoming).

knowledge, thereby calling into question the widespread, long-accepted idea that the “reality” of the Orient was a purely Western production. This fact may be observed in the area of Libyan translations of colonial “literature” and more generally in “indigenous” reworkings of Orientalist productions.

PART 4

*Inventing Orientalist Traditions*





# Arab Receptions of the *Arabian Nights*: Between Contemptuous Dismissal and Recognition\*

*Sylvette Larzul*

The continual success of the *Arabian Nights* in the West has often been contrasted to what seems to have been the less than enthusiastic reception of it in the Arab world. However, few studies have actually been done of its reception in the Orient, probably in part because of the difficulty of getting a clear picture of the long and in large measure hypothetical history of the text. But as the twentieth-century discovery of a few folios from the ninth century showed, the original *Nights*, drawn from a collection of Persian narratives called *Hazâr afsânè* (“A Thousand Tales”), which was comparable to a “Mirror for Princes” and was likely to have been translated into Arabic in the late eighth century, evolved quickly. The Galland manuscript, now generally agreed to date from the second half of the fifteenth century, is the earliest existing version from which to assess the radical change the collection underwent in the intervening centuries, becoming as it did a work of mid-level entertainment literature deeply rooted in Arab rather than Persian culture; a work, then, in which only a few Indo-Persian vestiges are understood to subsist, the first of which is the framing tale known as the “Story of Sheherazade”.<sup>1</sup> Up to the nineteenth century, when the printing process fixed the text, the work existed in several different manuscripts, and though its history in the modern period is still debated, it would seem that the text was not standardized to any significant degree before the late eighteenth century.

It is not my purpose here to return to the pre-history of a book that in all likelihood has borne the title *Alf layla wa-layla* (“A Thousand and One Nights”) since the tenth century, but rather to consider the history of its reception from the early eighteenth century, when it was introduced to Europe in the form of Antoine Galland’s “translation.” In Europe, Galland’s work, in part pure creation, turned a collection of tales that Arab scholars had excluded from the pantheon of Arabic *belles-lettres* into an emblematic work of Oriental

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs.

1 See Aboubakr Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une nuits: Histoire du texte et classification des contes* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008).

literature. And this success in Europe does not seem to have been without repercussions in the Arab world; indeed, it seems to have led “editors” or “compilers” from that world to compose manuscripts that actually contained 1001 “nights” and more generally to have given the work a prestige it had never enjoyed before. Taking account of recent studies of the text’s history as well as the relatively well-documented circulation of men of letters between Paris and Cairo, I re-examine the impact that the success of European translations had on an Arabic text that had not been fully “delivered” into its native world, and how that text seems to have been perceived in that world in the later period. Though a detailed study of the reception of the *Arabian Nights* in the Arab world is not possible here, it is important to present late twentieth-century assessments of a text whose legacy has long been associated with its Western-language versions.

### A Worthless Book?

First of all, it is important to clarify what *Alf layla wa-layla* amounted to in the Arabic tradition. The narratives belong to what may be called mid-level literature, a category in between scholarly and oral literature, transmitted both through the spoken and written word and encompassing other collections of tales as well as epic sagas (*siyar*) such as *Sîrat Baybars*, *Sîrat Banî Hilâl* and *Sîrat Sayf ibn Dhî Yazan*. Men of letters had no real esteem for this literature. It was not pure written Arabic but a mixed language influenced by dialects and long thought of as faulty—what contemporary linguists call “Middle Arabic.” And these tales in particular were perceived as futile: *khurâfât* (nonsense, twaddle), composed with no concern for that balance between pleasure and seriousness known as *al-jidd wa-l-hazl*, so prized in *adab* or classic prose. They were also anonymous—that is, they did not fit into the tradition as defined by the sayings of the Prophet (*hadîth*) transmitted through a chain of guarantors. Moreover, such tales were not so much the work of an author in the ordinary sense of that term as of “redactors” who gave them their final form in particular manuscripts or printed texts.<sup>2</sup> Lastly, mid-level literature did not appear in fixed form, and there was neither a perfectly stable text of *Alf layla wa-layla* nor a canonical corpus of tales, except perhaps the first narratives which, from a given date, had come to constitute a stable core of approximately thirty tales. Indeed, the collection seems to have been continuously deconstructed

---

2 Cf. David Pinault, *Story-telling in the Arabian Nights* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 16.

and reconstructed down the centuries, incorporating extremely diverse sorts of material at random and often ephemerally. This explains why narratives understood today to belong to the *Arabian Nights* are also likely to be found individually or as components of collections with different titles or no title at all. The appearance of printed editions in the first half of the nineteenth century at least determined a definitive corpus, if not a definitive text, at that time.

This “worthless, flatly written book” (*kitâb ghatthh bârid al-hadîth*), as the ninth-century Baghdad bookseller Ibn al-Nadîm characterized it, ranking it virtually last in his *al-Fihrist* (The Catalogue)—just before works on alchemy—nonetheless seems to have been much appreciated within its own category of mid-level literature, a category which obviously received little attention from scholars. The fifteenth-century historian al-Maqrîzî does allude to *Alf layla wa-layla* in his *Khitat* as a relatively well-known work, basing his opinion on that of the thirteenth-century author Ibn Sa‘îd, who in turn had based his on that of the twelfth-century historian al-Qurtî. Is this sufficient evidence to conclude that the work enjoyed continuous success in the Arab world? The decision by al-Qalyûbî (d. 1659) to republish Ibn al-Nadîm’s summary of the framing tale of *Alf layla wa-layla* in his own *Nawâdir* is incontrovertible proof that approximately forty years before Galland’s translation the text had won a certain readership.<sup>3</sup> And copyists would probably not have continued to produce manuscripts of the work from one century to the next if there had been no demand. The manuscripts were used by professional storytellers but were also leased out to readers by booksellers, as attested by marginal notes in a British Library manuscript indicating that a certain Ahmad al-Rabbât, practising his trade in the eighteenth century in Aleppo, occasionally introduced new narratives when called upon to replace pages damaged by borrowers.<sup>4</sup>

Paradoxically, however, it was from the early eighteenth century in Europe, and under such titles as *Les Mille et Une Nuits* and *The Arabian Nights Entertainments*, that the work received its greatest recognition, attaining the status of an emblematic work of Arabic literature. This unforeseen destiny is directly linked to the 1704–1717 publication of a French translation of *Alf layla wa-layla* by Antoine Galland (1646–1715), a “scholar of Oriental languages” who spent nearly fifteen years in the Levant working as an antiquarian and secretary at the French embassy in Constantinople, later devoting himself to numismatics and the translation of works from Arabic, Turkish and Persian. Only toward the

3 See Chraïbi’s analyses in *Les Mille et une nuits: Histoire du texte*, pp. 45–49.

4 Cf. Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2005 [1994]), p. 58.



end of his life, when the “tale” genre had won legitimacy and acclaim, namely through the works of Perrault, did Galland discover *Alf layla wa-layla*, by way of the “Tale of Sindbad the Sailor”. Much taken with the original Arabic *Nights*, he undertook to “put them into French,” as he put it.<sup>5</sup> His *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (“The Thousand and One Nights”) enjoyed immediate and enduring success in France and throughout Europe, where it was soon translated into several languages. The English were particularly enthusiastic, and an anonymous Grub Street version, first published in 1706, was reprinted for the nineteenth time in 1798. Only in the early nineteenth century did new English versions of Galland’s translation begin to appear; at that time the French translation itself was competing with new translations directly from Arabic.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, it was Galland’s work, either in French or translated from it, that accounted for the *Nights’* fame in Europe throughout the eighteenth century.

Galland gave little explicit information on his sources,<sup>7</sup> and only one three-volume manuscript (BNF ms arabe 3609–3611), containing a mere 282 nights, was found, suggesting that the collection he had translated did not contain nearly as many “nights” as in his title. Staff from various European consulates and travellers to the Levant began searching for manuscripts containing the tales missing from Galland’s “translation”—and above all for a text composed of a thousand and one nights.

In the late eighteenth century a “complete” recension known as *ZER—Zotenberg’s Egyptian Recension*—appeared in Cairo. It would play a major role in the text’s history as the basis for the extensive printed editions of the first half of the nineteenth century. Several specialists have suggested the likelihood of a direct connection between European demand and the appearance of this

---

5 On Galland’s recreation of the *Nights*, see my *Les Traductions françaises des Mille et une nuits: Etude des versions Galland, Trébutien et Mardrus* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996) and ‘Further considerations on Galland’s *Mille et une nuits*’, in Ulrich Marzolph (ed.), *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), pp. 17–31.

6 See Duncan B. Macdonald, ‘A Bibliographical and Literary Study of the First Appearance of the *Arabian Nights* in Europe’, *Library Quarterly* 2 (1932), pp. 387–420 and C. Knipp, ‘The *Arabian Nights* in England: Galland’s translation and its successors’, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 5 (1974), pp. 44–54.

7 Only in the late nineteenth century was it discovered that Galland had in fact used Syrian tales recounted to him by Hannâ Diyâb of Aleppo during his 1709 visit to Paris; Galland jotted down summaries of them in his *Journal*. The Syrian tales included “Aladdin” and “Ali Baba”. Cf. Hermann Zotenberg, ‘Notice sur quelques manuscrits des *Mille et une nuits* et la traduction de Galland’, *Notices et extraits de manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques* 28 (1887), pp. 167–320.

compilation, though this has never been proven. Recent studies counsel caution: the German philologist Heinz Grotzfeld suggests that in the framework of what he posits as the collection's cyclical reconstruction process, a conclusion to the "Story of Sheherazade" was circulating as early as the fifteenth century, and that the number one thousand represented *from the outset* a sort of challenge for compilers. While "complete" versions were doomed to being broken up quickly, Grotzfeld argues, later demand elicited moves to reconstruct just such versions, and this in turn implied aggregating new material to older material from several different recensions.<sup>8</sup> This endogenous dynamic might itself be enough to explain the late eighteenth-century appearance of a "complete" text of *Alf layla wa-layla* in Cairo. Still, there is no reason to exclude the possibility that European demand was what helped bring about the "appearance" of *ZER* and, especially, of the many copies made in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; this is supported by the fact that Egyptian manuscripts of the same "family," exhibiting identical physical particularities and clearly in some cases the work of the same copyist, are to be found in several European libraries.<sup>9</sup>

By the late eighteenth century, thanks to initiatives by Silvestre de Sacy, Paris had become Europe's centre of Orientalist scholarship, and with the help of visiting or permanently settled Levantines, Oriental manuscripts were being produced in the French capital itself. *Alf layla wa-layla* manuscripts, which responded perfectly to the aforementioned demand, began to be produced there. In 1787, for example, Denis Chavis, originally from Saint John of Acre, who was a priest for the Congregation of Saint Basil and a translator at the Bibliothèque Royale, created a "4th volume of *Alf layla wa-layla*" (BNF, ms arabe 3616; indication on the colophon), claiming it to be a copy of a manuscript used by Galland that had since disappeared. Alongside a few tales taken from an untitled collection that Chavis brought back from Syria (BNF, ms arabe 3637), this manuscript actually includes Arabic translations of Galland's French text,

8 Cf. Heinz Grotzfeld, 'The Manuscript Tradition of the *Arabian Nights*', in Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen (eds), *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), pp. 17–21; 'Les traditions manuscrites des *Mille et une nuits* jusqu'à l'édition de Boulaq (1835)', in Aboubakr Chraïbi (ed.), *Les Mille et une nuits en partage* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2004), pp. 456–464; 'Creativity, Random Selection, and *pia fraus*: Observations on Compilation and Transmission of the *Arabian Nights*', in Ulrich Marzolph (ed.), *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), pp. 51–63.

9 On these works, see Frédéric Bauden, 'Un manuscrit inédit des *Mille et une nuits*: À propos de l'exemplaire de l'Université de Liège (ms. 2241)', in Aboubakr Chraïbi (ed.), *Les Mille et une nuits en partage*, pp. 465–475.

namely his “Story of Aladdin”. Chavis seems to have composed this “4th volume of *Alf layla wa-layla*” to prove the authenticity of his sources to the publisher of the (French) sequel to Galland’s tales he was working on with Cazotte for the *Cabinet des fées* series.<sup>10</sup>

In the first years of the nineteenth century, Michel Sabbagh (1775–1816), a member of an important Saint John of Acre family who had taken refuge in France in 1801 after Napoleon’s Egyptian Expedition and was working as a copyist at the Bibliothèque Impériale, took up the work where Chavis had left off. Sabbagh skilfully drew up a “complete” text of *Alf layla wa-layla* (BNF ms arabe 3612) based on the few available sources, a version that in addition to the content of the Galland and Chavis manuscripts also integrated a version of the long “Umar al-Nu‘mân” gest figuring in the Benoît de Maillet manuscript (BNF ms arabe 3612), which had become part of France’s national collection in 1738.<sup>11</sup> Jean-Jacques Antoine Caussin de Perceval, a professor of Arabic at the Collège de France and author of a “sequel” to Galland’s *Mille et Une Nuits* published in 1806, became the first owner of Sabbagh’s manuscript; he may well also have commissioned it. Clearly, then, in the eyes of these two Arab scholars and men of letters who were seeking to supplement their resources by copying manuscripts for private individuals, *Alf layla wa-layla* was second-rate literature that lent itself to all sorts of manipulations, including the slipping in of material the compilers had themselves translated from European languages. In the late nineteenth century, Hermann Zotenberg authenticated Sabbagh’s version of the Aladdin tale and published it.<sup>12</sup> And even before the tale was published, Richard Francis Burton was using it for the third volume of his *Supplemental Nights* (1886), which included tales from the Galland translation that Galland had heard from an Aleppan Maronite, Hannâ Diyâb. For some of those tales there is no known Arabic text dating from before Galland’s translation. Clearly, then, the long history of the *Arabian Nights* contains some surprises, not the least of which is that the works Chavis and Sabbagh produced to make ends meet—including such texts as the story of Aladdin, which never

10 *Continuation des Mille et une nuits: Contes arabes traduits littéralement en français par Dom Denis Chavis ... et rédigés par M. Cazotte* (Geneva: Barde, Manget et Cie., vols. 38–41, 1788–1789).

11 It was Muhsin Mahdi who demonstrated that the Chavis and Sabbagh manuscripts, which had always appeared suspect, were actually forgeries, as was a text of “Ali Baba,” which had been translated from French into Arabic by Jean Varsy, who belonged to the same Paris circles as the two Oriental copyists; cf. *The Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden-New York-Cologne: Brill, 1995), pp. 51–86.

12 Op. cit.

figured in *Alf layla wa-layla*—ultimately served as foundation and guarantor for the Western *Nights* tradition. For their part, Arab scholars continued to consider *Alf layla wa-layla* second-rate literature up to the first decades of the nineteenth century. But the fact that at that time some such scholars began keeping company with Parisian Orientalist society—a milieu with a great fondness for the *Mille et Une Nuits*—certainly had something to do with the change in Arab perception of the text observable in Cairo a few years later.

### Late Official Recognition

Arab assessment of *Alf layla wa-layla* showed signs of changing in the Egyptian capital as early as the 1830s. The Bûlâq printing press went into operation in 1821, ensuring wide diffusion of texts in Arabic for the very first time; *Alf layla wa-layla* was printed in 1835. This was not yet the moment for publishing mid-level literature: Cairo publication of *sîyars* only began in the late 1860s,<sup>13</sup> and according to an account by Edward William Lane, Cairo storytellers had dropped *Alf layla wa-layla* from their repertoire some years earlier.<sup>14</sup> Nor had the time come for publishing the great works of the Arabic tradition, which was undertaken only in the 1850s and 1860s at the prompting of Rifâ'a al-Tahtâwî (1801–1874): the *Maqâmât* of al-Harîrî was printed in 1850; al-Maqrîzî's *Khitat* in 1853–1854; Ibn Khaldûn's *Kitâb al-'Ibar* in 1857 and al-Isfahânî's *K. al-Aghânî* in 1868–1869.<sup>15</sup> *Alf layla wa-layla*, then, was among the very first works of Arab literature to be set by the Bûlâq printers, coming out before nearly all of the more prestigious texts and the same year as *Kalîla wa-Dimna*, a jewel of classical prose. Indeed, the only text published at Bûlâq before *Alf layla wa-layla* was a modest collection of poetry entitled *Kitab Iltiqât al-azhâr fî mahâsin al-*

13 In Cairo, the *sîyar* of 'Antar was published in 1867; of *Sayf ibn Dhî al-Yazan* in 1877; of *Dhât al-Himma* in 1881, and of *Baybars* in 1908–1909; the *Sîrat Banî Hilâl* was published in Beirut in 1871–1872.

14 *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: C. Knight, 1836), vol. 2, p. 150. According to Lane, this situation was due to the lack of copies on the market and the high price of those available. He too translated *Alf Layla wa-layla* (*The Thousand and One Nights, commonly called in England The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, London, 3 vols., 1839–1842), producing a version suitable for all readers—it omitted some tales and most verse—based on the extended corpus of the 1835 Bûlâq edition.

15 Cf. Richard N. Verdery, 'The Publications of the Bûlâq Press under Muhammad 'Alî of Egypt', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar. 1971), pp. 129–132.

*ach'âr* (1827).<sup>16</sup> The fact that *Alf layla wa-layla* was published so early attests that contrary to appearances it had in fact won recognition. And this early publication was probably facilitated by men who had spent time in Paris a few years earlier, such as Dom Raphaël de Monachis (1759–1831), teacher of vernacular Arabic at the École des Langues Orientales from 1803 to 1816, who transmitted a version of the tale of Sindbad the sailor in “grammatical, cadenced style” to Louis-Mathieu Langlès, a professor working on his own Arabic edition.<sup>17</sup> When Dom Raphaël returned to Egypt he went into the service of Muhammad ‘Alî and so contributed to the publication of the first work to come off the Bûlâq press, the *Dizionario Arabo-Italiano* (1822). He went on to translate technical works from French and Italian, before helping to found a medical school at Abû Za’bal near Cairo, where he took on the task of Arabicizing physiology.<sup>18</sup> The existence of cultural mediators of this sort probably suffices to explain why, with the exception of *Alf layla wa-layla*, the texts of Arabic literature published at Bûlâq through 1850 had already been published in Paris: i.e., an *Anthologie arabe* compiled by the Genevan Jean Humbert in 1819,<sup>19</sup> al-Harîrî’s *Maqâmât* and a collection of animal fables entitled *Kalîla wa-Dimna*, respectively published in 1810 and 1822 in Paris by Silvestre de Sacy. And because Muhammad ‘Alî’s Egypt was very much turned toward Europe, it hardly seems surprising that a text which elicited so much enthusiasm on the northern shores of the Mediterranean should have had the honour of being put into print in Cairo.

The reasons for this move became fully clear if we bear in mind that the English and Germans had already undertaken publications of the *Nights* in Arabic. In 1814 and 1818, under the patronage of the College of Fort William,

16 Cf. T.-X. Bianchi, ‘Catalogue général des livres arabes, persans et turcs, imprimés à Boulaq en Egypte depuis l’introduction de l’imprimerie dans ce pays’, *Journal asiatique* (Jul.-Aug. 1843), pp. 24–61.

17 *Les Voyages de Sind-bâd le marin, et la Ruse des femmes, traduction littérale accompagnée du texte et de notes* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1814), p. xxiii. The same text was published the preceding year, though without the preface containing information on the manuscripts the publisher had used, in Claude-Etienne Savary’s *Grammaire vulgaire et littérale*, a posthumous work also published by Langlès.

18 Cf. Alain Messaoudi, ‘Dom Raphaël’, in François Pouillon (ed.), *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* (Paris: IISMM/Karthala, 2008), pp. 307–308.

19 *Anthologie arabe, ou Choix de poésies arabes inédites, traduites en français avec le texte en regard et accompagnées d’une version latine littérale* (K. iltiqât al-azhâr fî mahâsin al-ach’âr) (Paris: Treuttel and Wûrtz, 1819). Half of the work is made up of verses from the manuscript Galland used for his *Mille et une nuits*; a few excerpts from the *Hamâsa* are the only examples given of great Arabic poetry.

two volumes comprising 200 nights and a few additional tales were published in Calcutta. Designed for use in teaching Arabic to British officers, this edition was the work of Shaykh Ahmad ibn Muhammad Shîrwânî al-Yamanî.<sup>20</sup> In Germany, Maximilian Habicht, professor of Arabic at Breslau (today Wrocław) began publishing an Arabic edition of the *Nights* in 1825; having access to no extensive manuscript, he proceeded by assembling fragments of various origins. When the Bûlâq edition came out in 1835, Habicht had published only half the volumes of his *Tausend und Eine Nacht Arabisch*.<sup>21</sup> In the end, it was the Egyptians who published the first “complete” version of *Alf layla wa-layla*.

The move to appropriate the work in Muhammad ‘Alî’s Egypt and make it part of the official heritage resulted in a significant formal change: the mixed Arabic used to transmit the tales in manuscript versions was converted to standard Arabic, the only variety of the language that scholars of the time and ‘Abd al-Rahmân al-Sharqâwî, editor of the Bûlâq edition, deemed compatible with the printed word. This choice put a stop to the reiterated renewal of the work’s content, for it fixed the corpus. The Bûlâq edition, which came out slightly before the European editions and provided a “complete” text based on a *ZER* manuscript, nonetheless had to share the favors of translators with the Macnaghten edition (1849–1852), based in part on texts other than those in *ZER*; i.e., the first Calcutta edition and the Habicht edition.<sup>22</sup> Sales of the Egyptian edition of *Alf layla wa-layla* were nonetheless guaranteed as it was repeatedly published in several Arab capitals—Cairo and Beirut, as well as Baghdad, Algiers and others—clear proof of the work’s success. As in European languages, Arabic editions for children were drawn up that gave pride of place to tales about genies. Bowdlerized versions also appeared, notably one by a Jesuit priest, Antûn Sâlihânî, published in Beirut in 1888–1890. The text of

20 *The Arabian Nights Entertainments in the Original Arabic. Published under the patronage of the College of Fort William* (known as the 1st Calcutta edition).

21 Maximilian Habicht produced two additional volumes before his death in 1839; the last four were published by Heinrich Fleischer in 1842–1843. Habicht’s work was actually more of a new recension than a full-fledged edition; it contains a few more tales than the Bûlâq edition and the language is more vernacular. See Duncan B. Macdonald, ‘Maximilian Habicht and his recension of the *Thousand and One Nights*’, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1909), pp. 685–704.

22 *The Alif Laila or Book of the Thousand and One Nights*, ed. Maximilian William Hay Macnaghten, 4 vols (Calcutta, 1839–1842 [also known as the 2nd Calcutta edition]). Much of the work was done by a team of Indian collaborators; see Muhsin Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden-New York-Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 101–104. This was the edition used by John Payne and Richard Burton in their respective translations (1882–1884; 1885).

*Alf layla wa-layla* has also been known to incur the censors' wrath: in 1980 it was banned in Cairo, and as recently as 2010 it came under attack there once again.

The fact remains that since the nineteenth century the *Nights* have been a source of inspiration for writers in Arabic, be they playwrights, prose writers, poets, or pioneers like Mârûn al-Naqqâsh, famous writers like Tawfiq al-Hakîm, or more contemporary authors such as Hânî l-Râhib.<sup>23</sup> The work has also become a focus of academic research. It seems that Taha Husayn (1889–1973) initiated this development in the Arab world when he directed Suhayr al-Qalamâwî's thesis in 1940 and wrote the foreword for the published version.<sup>24</sup> Though later studies of the *Arabian Nights* in Arab countries or by researchers in the diaspora are much more likely to be published in French or English than Arabic,<sup>25</sup> the increasing number of such studies nonetheless reflects a significant change in the way the work is judged by Arab intellectuals. But as authors who are themselves convinced of the value of the *Nights* are quick to point out,<sup>26</sup> the work has never managed to figure in the canon of classic Arabic works. Only exceptionally is it included in school textbooks and histories of literature, and always as a work that falls outside the great genres.

While winning greater recognition from Arab intellectuals and writers, the *Arabian Nights* pursued an international career. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, new European translations based on printed Arabic versions made an extensive *Arabian Nights* corpus available to European readers for the first time. These versions—and occasionally Galland's as well—were then translated into non-European languages—Indian languages, Japanese, Chinese, and others—thereby diffusing the work throughout the world.

23 For instance, from Mârûn al-Naqqâsh, *Abû l-Hasan al-Mughaffal wa-mâ jarâ la-hu ma'a Hârûn al-Rashîd* (performed in Beirut in 1849–50, edited in 1869), from Tawfiq al-Hakîm, *Shahrazâd* (Cairo, 1934) and from Hânî l-Râhib, *Alf layla wa-laylatân* (Damascus, 1977). For an extensive view, see Wiebke Walther, 'Modern Arabic Literature and the *Arabian Nights*', in Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen (eds.), vol. 1, pp. 54–61

24 *Alf layla wa-layla* (Cairo: Dâr al-Ma'ârif, 1976; 4th ed.). See Ferial J. Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Comparative Context* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1996), p. 135.

25 See Ulrich Marzolph's bibliography of studies on the *Arabian Nights*, updated on November 28, 2013: <http://www.user.gwdg.de/~enzmaer/arabiannights-engl-elekt.html> (consulted on May 3, 2014).

26 Abdelfattah Kilito, 'Les Nuits, un livre ennuyeux?' in *Les Mille et une nuits en partage*, pp. 516–524; Katia Zakharia and Heidi Toelle, *A la découverte de la littérature arabe du viè siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), p. 164.

### 'Inauthentic' Tales? An 'Orientalist' Work?

In the 1980s intellectuals in the diaspora, many of them applying a "post-colonial studies" approach, began producing new readings of the ever more cosmopolitan *Arabian Nights*, adopting a critical attitude toward the more positive Arab assessment of the work that had held sway since the nineteenth century.

Some viewed both the Arabic text and its translations as worthless, calling it an "Orientalist" invention. One such reader was Rana Kabbani who, in her highly successful book, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1986),<sup>27</sup> subscribed to the judgment of Arab men of letters of centuries earlier, saying that *Alflayla wa-layla* amounted to "the TV soap-operas of their day" and insisting on the collection's sub-literary quality. Kabbani also founded her condemnation on more modern argumentation, however, citing ethnic discrimination and sexism:

The tales of the Arabian Nights were originally recounted to an all-male audience desiring bawdy entertainment. They were purposefully crude, and pandered to the prejudices of the uneducated men who listened to them being narrated. They provided wish-fulfilling descriptions of endless riches to a humble listener. They reaffirmed particular xenophobic biases and denigrated local minorities. But above all, they reflected a certain mode of apprehending women prevalent in the repressively patriarchal societies of which they were the product.

KABBANI 1986, p. 48

If *Alflayla wa-layla* was worthless, argued Kabbani, then the fame of the *Arabian Nights* could only mean that "the *Nights* in many respects are a Western text, a manufactured product of Orientalism."<sup>28</sup> Had not Antoine Galland, whose translation stood alone, without competitors, for more than a century, definitively determined the corpus before the Arabs themselves did? Above all, did not Galland's text reflect and convey a Western rather than Oriental imaginary? The early eighteenth-century French translation was surely influenced

27 The book was reprinted the same year and republished in 1988. In 1994 the title was changed to *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (London: Pandora); it was republished again in 2008 (London: Saqi). See also Kabbani's "The *Arabian Nights* as an Orientalist Text," in Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen (eds), vol. 1, pp. 25–29.

28 Kabbani, "The *Arabian Nights* as an Orientalist Text," p. 25.



not only by the decorum of the French royal court but also by the period's received ideas about the Islamic world, especially its supposedly intrinsic violence, particularly active in harems. Rana Kabbani offers no close analysis of Galland's translation on this point, only one or two quotations from his *Journal de Constantinople* and references to Chardin's *Voyage*. In the nineteenth century, she continues, new, heavily annotated translations were an opportunity for publishing long anthropological-like comments, a "colonialist cataloguing"<sup>29</sup> fuelled by the rise of the European empires, and while Edward William Lane (1801–1876) undertook to diffuse extended, varied knowledge, Richard Burton (1821–1890) focused on the many different manifestations of sexuality.

Other academic readers not only did not question the overall value of the *Nights* but set out to re-appropriate the Arabic text by redefining its contours. Consistent with this purpose, they had harsh words for the later recensions. René Khawam (1917–2004), a writer of Syrian origin known for his French translation of the work,<sup>30</sup> claimed that only the most ancient manuscripts were truly representative of *Alf layla wa-layla* and that "no serious edition at all" existed; he was highly critical of the Bûlâq edition:

The Boulaq printer, under close scrutiny from Islamic university clerics, chose to use recent manuscripts (from the late eighteenth century, among others) to establish his text, manuscripts that had already been massively expurgated. For in the early nineteenth century a Puritan wind was blowing on the Muslim world, a phenomenon whose importance has been underestimated by all historians ... and whose effects are still perceptible today. The Boulaq edition text was severely affected by this. Passages were arranged so that the pious reader would not see a caliph disguised as an ordinary man and being threatened with a beating; men sensibly keep to fruit juice instead of getting drunk on wine, etc. Lastly, concerned to reach the number of "nights," ... the publisher had no scruples about swelling the book with unwarranted additions shamelessly borrowed from other works.

KHAWAM 1986, I, pp. 15–16

29 Ibid., p. 29.

30 *Les Mille et une nuits: Traduction nouvelle ... faite directement sur les manuscrits* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1965–1967; 4 vols). In the second, "entirely revised" version, entitled *Les Mille et une nuits: Texte établi sur les manuscrits originaux* (Paris: Phébus, 1986–1987; 4 vols), both the corpus and introductions were changed and the text became definitive.

According to Khawam, later versions of *Alf layla wa-layla* were corrupted with tales foreign to it and expurgations of passages depicting the pleasures of life or deemed too irreverent. However, as explained above, the many recensions of *Alf layla wa-layla* had been continually integrating new narratives from outside manuscripts and other collections, and that process itself had come to seem a founder process of the collection. And though the beginning of the Bûlâq edition, much terser than that of the Mahdi's one, had probably been expurgated, this does not necessarily mean that the entire nineteenth-century work was systematically revised; among other things, two tales of bestiality went uncensored. Khawam seems to have had a tendency to over-interpret the censorship demanded by the clerics, and this makes sense if we recall that his primary purpose was to show a facet of Islam that runs directly counter to its presumed religious rigorosness.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, as Khawam explained in the introduction to his second volume, the process by which *Alf layla wa-layla* was degraded began fairly early on in its history:

The Arabic text of the work as determined in the thirteenth century had been considerably transformed by the copyists, usually on orders from the nobles commissioning the copy; they sought to mitigate the crudeness or dissident insolence discernible in the text. This or that shocking passage was omitted; an episode showing a certain caliph in a less than flattering light was retouched; pious remarks were inserted here and there to placate the religious, always eager to detect blasphemy ... These misplaced "embellishments" ... were initially undertaken to please the new powers that had set themselves up on the ruins of the Abbasid caliphs' empire: Mongols who had settled in Baghdad, Turks in Syria, Egypt's Mamluks. But it was with the rise of religious fundamentalism in the eighteenth century that the censors had a field day, as reflected in the various manuscripts of the so-called Egyptian Recension of the *Nights* (most produced in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century); sad to say, it was these manuscripts that furnished the texts for the famous Boulaq edition (1835) and, at approximately the same time, the second Calcutta edition.

KHAWAM 1986, II, pp. 15–16

31 See Sylvette Larzul, 'René Rizqallah Khawam', in François Pouillon (ed.), *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* 3th edition (Paris: IISM/Karthala, 2012), pp. 572–573. This entry is available online at <http://dictionnairedesorientalistes.ehess.fr/document.php?id=139>.

According to Khawam, then, the process by which the *Nights* was corrupted began when non-Arabs—Mongols, Mamluks, and Turks—erupted onto the scene and took over significant regions of the Arab-Muslim empire. As for the authentic text, it had been entirely preserved until the thirteenth century. In his view, the *Nights* were written by a single author who “lived, very probably, between the late twelfth and mid-thirteenth century,” possibly “one of those Orientals from the furthestmost bounds of the Muslim world, forced to flee the Mongolian invasion”—Khawam based this last deduction on the observation that he “enjoyed depicting cities of Chinese Turkestan.”<sup>32</sup> But Khawam’s commentary fails to convince because at no point does he support his assertions with references to precise historical studies or specific manuscripts. The reader has the feeling that the only reason he preferred the date of the thirteenth century put forward by Paul Casanova for the Galland manuscript<sup>33</sup> over the fourteenth century, generally accepted at the time he was writing, is that it fit better with the script he had constructed. For Khawam seems to have invented a history of *Alf layla wa-layla* that concurs with Arabist positions: in place of the extensive versions he claimed had been corrupted by foreign and religious influences, Khawam put forward a corpus that was, he asserted, authentically Arab, and it was on these “original manuscripts” that he based his translation.

Muhsin Mahdi (1926–2007), a Harvard academic originally from Iraq, also disqualified the more recent texts of *Alf layla wa-layla*. In 1984 he published the first critical edition of *Alf layla wa-layla*, namely, the text of the Galland manuscript.<sup>34</sup> In an essay published ten years later,<sup>35</sup> Mahdi further developed the viewpoint he had put forward in his introduction to that edition: some *Alf layla wa-layla* texts were “authentic” while others were not. Like Khawam he rejected the most recent versions, but he did so from a different perspective and using arguments that differed in part from Khawam’s.

32 René Khawam, ed. 1986, vol. 2, p. 12.

33 Paul Casanova, ‘Notes sur les voyages de Sindbâd le marin’, *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’Archéologie orientale du Caire* 20 (1922), p. 127, n. 1.

34 Muhsin Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf layla wa-layla) from the Earliest Known Sources; Arabic Text Edited with Introduction and Notes; Part I: Arabic text; Part II: Critical Apparatus, Description of Manuscripts* (Leiden-New York-Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1984).

35 Muhsin Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf layla wa-layla) from the Earliest Known Sources; Arabic Text, Edited with Introduction and Notes; Part III: Introduction and Indexes* (Leiden-New York-Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1994). The same text without the index was republished in *The Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden-New York-Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1995).

Applying classic philological methods to *Alf layla wa-layla* Mahdi sought to construct their *stemma* on the hypothesis that the tales went back to a single source. While refusing to speculate on the ancient form of the Iraqi version of the *Nights*, he posited the existence of an original text (*al-nuskha al-umm*) from which all manuscripts derived, a text produced in Syria in the thirteenth or early fourteenth century. In the absence of known earlier texts, the Galland manuscript, which he dates from the early fourteenth century, is understood to come closest to that work. In Mahdi's view, the Galland manuscript, made up of 281 nights,<sup>36</sup> exhibits unity of style and word choice<sup>37</sup> and a highly coherent structure, due among other things to the ironic embedding of exemplary narratives.<sup>38</sup> All later works that did not belong to the same Syrian branch as the Galland manuscript were falsifications, he argued; they had been lengthened with narratives external to the original corpus and compiled without any concern for the original structure of the work. Mahdi was also firmly opposed to the idea that at some moment in time the text might have comprised 1001 nights. Galland was primarily to blame for the corruption of the work, as his translation gave rise to the "myth" of a work divided into 1001 nights—a work the Europeans then avidly sought and ultimately obtained.

Without engaging in a philological discussion, which would far exceed the scope of this chapter,<sup>39</sup> it is worth noting that Mahdi had little to say about pre-eighteenth-century manuscripts. Though the Galland manuscript is undoubtedly of rare quality and attests to the inventiveness of the editor-compiler who clearly did intervene in the tales and the way they were embedded,<sup>40</sup> its text breaks off at the beginning of the "Story of Qamar al-Zamân" and it seems highly likely that more extensive versions of the text existed.<sup>41</sup> Mahdi considered the Galland manuscript the "original" text of *Alf layla wa-layla*, disqualifying all others, which he deemed mere compilations created by anachronistically adding tales from outside the collection. In his 1994 essay, he specified the chronology of those additions:

36 The 282nd night, from a different hand, had been added later.

37 Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights* (1995), pp. 8–9.

38 Muhsin Mahdi, 'Exemplary Tales in the 1001 Nights', in Kay Hardy Campbell, Ferial J. Ghazoul, Andras Hamori et al. (eds), *The 1001 Nights: Critical Essays and Annotated Bibliography* (Cambridge, MA.: Dar Mahjar, 1985), pp. 1–24; republished in Mahdi, 1994 and 1995.

39 See, for example, Irwin, pp. 51–62, and Aboubakr Chraïbi, 'Notes et commentaires sur l'édition des *Mille et une nuits* de M. Mahdi, Leyde, 1984,' *Studia islamica* 72 (1990), pp. 172–187.

40 See Heinz Grotzfeld, 'Creativity, Random Selection', p. 52 and p. 62, n. 8.

41 Grotzfeld, 'Les traditions manuscrites des *Mille et une nuits* jusqu'à l'édition de Boulaq (1835)', pp. 458–462.

The collections of stories that nowadays are presented under the umbrella of the *Nights* consist of every possible story of genuine or pretended Arabic origin ... Some of these stories found their way to the Egyptian branch of the tradition slightly before Galland's time. Most entered the collection after his time and due to the publication of his translation.

p. 9

Mahdi thus understood the initial move to extend the corpus as a personal initiative on the part of the Arab scribes, whereas later moves to do so derived from the myth invented by Galland of a work divided into 1001 nights. However, this interpretation does not seem to account for the history of the text. According to Mahdi, the text went unchanged for four centuries—i.e., from the early fourteenth, the date he attributes to the Galland manuscript, to the early eighteenth—or was modified only “slightly, before Galland's time.” The history of the text during this period does appear complex, of course, and currently we know little about it, but in addition to fragmentary manuscripts going back at least to the sixteenth century we do have one or two texts from the seventeenth that include at least twice as many nights as the Galland manuscript,<sup>42</sup> attesting to an *endogenous* dynamic that was changing the collection. How can we understand Mahdi's position if not as being influenced by postcolonial studies? Like Edward Said, who declared that “the Orient” did not exist but was a fiction developed by Westerners in the nineteenth century, Mahdi seems to have claimed that extended Arabic versions of the *Arabian Nights* could only be a fiction invented by the West in the eighteenth century.

Researchers from the Arab diaspora interested in the *Arabian Nights* have certainly not been unanimous in approving these positions. Some began by supporting them but later came to reject them and now recognize a wider corpus than the one that can be established on the basis of the most ancient existing manuscripts. In 1990 Husain Haddawy published a much noted English translation based on Muhsin Mahdi's Arabic edition, describing it as the most authentic version of the tales. Omitting the “Story of Qamar al-Zaman,” which is incomplete in the Galland manuscript, his 1990 translation contains only

---

42 Reference is to the Benoît de Maillet manuscript (BNF ms arabe 3612), in which different compilations are combined, but not entirely, and the nights are divided up and numbered but not completely; this manuscript contains a 28th section with nights numbered 872 to 905. To this may be added a translation into Turkish (BNF, Turkish ms., earlier collection, 356) that goes as far as the 765th night but with gaps amounting to approximately 100 nights (cf. Zotenberg, pp. 183–189).

271 nights.<sup>43</sup> However, a few years later, Haddawy turned to other sources, such as the Bûlâq edition, for a second volume, most of whose tales had been disqualified by proponents of the “authentic” *Alf layla wa-layla* corpus. Haddawy’s second volume includes not only the “Story of Qamar al-Zaman” but also those of “Sindbad the Sailor,” “Aladdin” and “Ali Baba”.<sup>44</sup>

Jamel Eddine Bencheikh (1930–2005), a researcher of Algerian origin who began teaching in the Paris university system in the 1970s, underwent a similar change in attitude.<sup>45</sup> Radically departing from the philological approach of classical Orientalism, Bencheikh’s research was resolutely literary; he set about rehabilitating non-canonical medieval Arabic texts in which he detected “a way of writing that creates beauty and lets the imagination invest the real and alone decide its truth.”<sup>46</sup> It was primarily from this perspective that he studied the *Arabian Nights*, locating the coherence of the collection in the spoken word of Sheherazade, which expressed desire to the law that for its part was continually combating desire.<sup>47</sup> Bencheikh was particularly attentive to the poetry and its structuring function, focusing on stories belonging to the initial core such as “Sheherazade” and “Alî ibn Bakkâr and Shams al-Nahâr”; as well as stories from the remaining Arabic corpus, such as “Azîz and ‘Azîza” and “Masrûr and Zayn”. Considering it regrettable that the Mahdi edition contained so few components of the entire *Nights* corpus Bencheikh, together with André Miquel, undertook a new French translation of the *Nights* based on the Bûlâq and Macnaghten editions. Bencheikh and Miquel’s four volumes, published from 1991 to 2001, offer a wide selection of tales.<sup>48</sup> Bencheikh and Miquel’s complete version, the

43 *The Arabian Nights*, translated by Husain Haddawy; based on the text of the fourteenth-century Syrian manuscript edited by Muhsin Mahdi (New York: Norton, 1990).

44 *The Arabian Nights 11: Sinbad and other popular stories*, translated by Husain Haddawy (New York: Norton, 1995).

45 Jamel Eddine Bencheikh passed France’s competitive *agrégation* examination for teachers of Arabic in 1961; his first teaching post was at the Faculté de Lettres of Algiers. From 1969 he pursued a career in Paris: after a brief period at the CNRS, he was appointed to a professorship at the University of Paris VIII, later becoming Professor of medieval Arabic literature at the University of Paris IV. Cf. Thomas Brisson, ‘Bencheikh, Jamel Eddine’, in François Pouillon (ed.), *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française*, 1st ed., 2008, pp. 77–78.

46 ‘La littérature arabe médiévale’ in *Le grand atlas des littératures* (Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1990), pp. 202–203.

47 Cf. *Les Mille et une nuits ou la parole prisonnière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988) and ‘La volupté d’en mourir’, in Jamel Eddine Bencheikh, Claude Bremond and André Miquel, *Mille et un contes de la nuit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), pp. 259–362.

48 *Les Mille et une nuits: Contes choisis* (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Folio’ series).

one that offered French-language readers the long awaited complete translation, was published in 2005–2006 in the prestigious Bibliothèque de la Pléiade collection. A labor of over a decade, this version clearly reflects the change in the translator's definition of the text. In his preface to the first volume (1991), Bencheikh had written: "Here the reader will find no Aladdin nor Ali Baba nor Sindbâd, all-too-familiar representatives of a fictional Orient of flying carpets and magic lamps. We will be forgiven for not complying with that ritual. What is offered here are admirable love stories".<sup>49</sup> But in 2001, in the fourth and final volume of that edition, he signed a translation of "Sindbâd de la mer" (of the sea). And in their introduction to the 2005 Pléiade edition, the translators refer the reader to the appendix for the "Story of Aladdin" and the "Story of Ali Baba," "tales that do not figure in our version but have long been integrated into the collection by what can only be called universal consensus, including in book and film adaptations".<sup>50</sup>

Although Bencheikh initially intended his work to break with the Orientalist tradition of the *Nights*, the remarks cited above show that he ultimately accepted that heritage—or most of it. The fact is that Bencheikh and Miquel chose to include only two of the Hannâ Diyâb narratives included by Galland; specifically, they left out the "Story of Prince Ahmed and the fairy Paribanou", the only one in the corpus that mentions a "flying carpet". The position of Aboubakr Chraïbi, a researcher originally from Morocco who teaches medieval Arabic literature at France's Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) and is one of today's eminent specialists on the *Arabian Nights*, is without ambiguity: since there is currently no available work containing all of what can today be ranked under the title *The Arabian Nights*, it is crucial to bring together several such works so as to cover the entire "current corpus".<sup>51</sup> Chraïbi thus suggests starting with the Mahdi edition, supplementing it with tales from the Bûlâq and Habicht editions (the latter offers 22 additional tales), and then adding the 11 narratives left over from the Galland translation.<sup>52</sup> This extensive notion of the corpus is widely shared by the most highly qualified and fully informed *Arabian Nights* research specialists.

The present study has shown how reception of a literary work may be linked

49 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 19.

50 'Note sur la présente édition', *Les Mille et une nuits*, vol. 1 (Paris: Pléiade, 2005), p. LVII.

51 As Chraïbi sees it, tales from *Alf layla wa-layla* manuscripts belonging neither to the Syrian branch represented by the Galland manuscript nor to the Egyptian branch corresponding to ZER, texts that are more or less well-known today, may later legitimately be added to this corpus.

52 Aboubakr Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une nuits: Histoire du texte*, pp. 68–80.

less to its intrinsic value than to the thinking dominant among those most directly implicated in assessing it. In the Arab world, the *Arabian Nights* were first disapproved and denigrated, in accordance with the medieval *doxa* of that world; later, when that world came into contact with Europe, which for its part greatly esteemed the work, the Arabic text was rehabilitated; then, in the 1980s and 1990s, under the influence of postcolonial thought and its critical wariness of Orientalism, the work once again came in for criticism and disparagement. This examination of the history of reception of the *Nights* has therefore also indirectly accounted for how the work was constructed from the eighteenth to twentieth century through a sort of double mirroring relationship between the Arab and Western worlds: at the origin, an excellent manuscript of the *Alf layla wa-layla* composed of 281 nights was sent from Syria to Antoine Galland, who in the early eighteenth century derived a “translation” of/from that manuscript which enjoyed immense success in Europe; the reputation of this first French version, *Les Mille et Une Nuits*, in turn reached Cairo where, in the early nineteenth century, a long version of *Alf layla wa-layla* was produced, and this new Arabic *Nights* was then translated several times into several European languages, translations that in turn ensured worldwide diffusion of the work. Though at the end of the twentieth century some researchers were still debating whether the *Arabian Nights* was or was not an Orientalist work, the work itself had already begun a new phase of its history, thus rendering those debates obsolete. And the fact that in the 2007 edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* the entry name was changed from “*Alf layla wa-layla*” to “*Arabian Nights*” makes instantly clear the immense distance covered by a modest work in Arabic that became a worldwide phenomenon.



# The Invention of the Moroccan Carpet\*

*Alain de Pommereau*

In *The Invention of Tradition* (1983),<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger showed how much the nineteenth-century boom in Turkish carpets/carpet production and popularity owed to the English. The Turkish carpet industry developed in city workshops everywhere from Greece to India. It was after decolonization that production of this article became domestic and rural, which is what makes it seem like a tradition today. The history of Moroccan carpet-making followed a similar path. Here I examine how these richly colored, eastern-influenced weavings insinuated themselves into the Sharifian Empire as an object associated with western modernity. The process began in the nineteenth century by way of what is known as the Rabat rug, involving a revolutionary aesthetic and production technique, and continued in the framework of the French colonial weaving industry, orchestrated by an impassioned, stubborn civil servant named Prosper Ricard. Ultimately, the rugs came to be produced as a popular “national” creation, stimulated in this last stage by the tourist market. Hobsbawm linked the invention of the “traditions” he was interested in with the advent of the nation-state in the nineteenth century. We shall see how, at the various stages running from “Moroccan” to “Berber,” the carpets we are interested in served in the construction of a national identity. The present chronological and historical study contradicts abundant literature claiming that Moroccan weaving practices originated in local traditions.

## The First Fruits of a Colonial Crafts Policy

What were sold as carpets in the nineteenth century were generally knotted pile rugs, also called “high pile,” a weave thickened by knotting the yarns on the warp. The technique is amenable to all sorts of patterns and motifs. The colonial context provided a cheap labor force as well as a new global sales network. By 1850, great numbers of mid-level bourgeois households in Europe had graced their floors with these brightly colored rugs, usually made in Asia

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs.

1 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Minor. The object became affordable thanks to the arrival on the market of chemical dyes, which from 1875 sent dyeing costs plummeting; now households across the planet could purchase one. Emblematic of this success was the Oriental Carpet Manufactures Limited, a British company with factories in Istanbul and Smyrna, workshops all the way to India and sales counters in all the major metropolises, including Sydney, Toronto and Buenos Aires.<sup>2</sup> Soon France's *Chambre Syndicale du Tapis à Points Noués de France et les Colonies* was working to set up a similar-sized operation in the French colonial territories.

In fact, the French general government in Algeria was fairly late in implementing a policy to this effect. The carpet-weaving activity set up in the nineteenth century by the *Sœurs Blanches*<sup>3</sup> was for educational purposes and long remained so; it only reached industrial proportions in the early twentieth century, when a vocational education inspector named Prosper Ricard arranged for training school-workshops to be set up.<sup>4</sup>

Ricard knew both Arabic and Berber and belonged to the "indigenist" circles seeking to reassert the value of the autochthonous culture, which was seriously threatened by the particularly destructive presence of the French in Algeria. It was to counteract the murderous effects of that presence that in 1908 an Indigenous Arts Bureau was set up, with Ricard at its head, and set out to inventory craft activities practiced by the Muslim populations. The aim was to develop a cultural base that would unify the country, which was itself shaken by inter-community tensions. This project, which may be described as rear-guard, was no doubt implemented too late, and though it was partially realized it never attained the dimensions Prosper Ricard had hoped for.

Morocco was a new French colony, constituted under different auspices from Algeria and in a perfect position to benefit from "indigenist" thinking thanks to the heritage policy undertaken just after the Protectorate was instated in 1912. Though the first task of the new Service des Beaux-Arts et des Monuments Historiques was urban planning, Lyautey almost immediately ordered Ricard to do a survey of local industries for the purpose of "revitalizing the indigenous arts." There was of course a political strategy at work here: in order

2 The company's capital tripled from 1907 to 1920. Cf. Ricard, 'Note au sujet de la fabrication des tapis dans le Proche Orient', *Hesperis* 4th quarter (1926), pp. 430–438.

3 Otherwise known as the *Sœurs Missionnaires de Notre Dame d'Afrique*, a religious order founded by Cardinal Lavignerie.

4 In 1929, sixteen Algerian cities had a workshop school and there were nine weaving rooms. Marie-Anne de Bovet, *Monographie du tapis algérien* (Algiers: Gouvernement général de l'Algérie, 1929), p. 5.

to ensure peace in the medinas, considered the nuclei of colonization, the Résidence Générale had to win the support of the crafts guilds, which had fallen into decrepitude when European imports began undermining local craft production. In 1915 a policy was undertaken in Fès and Rabat to put indigenous crafts back on their feet. Until then the clientele had been primarily rural; the point now was to attract and produce items for a new urban clientele of Moroccans and Europeans settled in Morocco. The undertaking would cover both production and sales: objects had to be selected that could serve as models, craft centers had to be created and publicity fairs organized.<sup>5</sup> A new category of objects, neither indigenous nor western, gradually came to replace traditional utensils. Quite naturally, Resident General Lyautey turned to Prosper Ricard to carry out this mission. He had taken note of him when he was commanding the Oran division: "That little redhead is a genuine artist; he's got the faith and he knows how to instil it in others."

In Fès, where Ricard started work, the main activity sectors were pottery, leatherwork, woodworking and, more recently, copper work. At that time the medina had no substantial weaving industry, just a few stalls set up to sell long-pile weavings, all from the same village. Traditionally, they were laid between mattress and blanket on winter nights as further protection from the cold ground. These thick, undyed woolen squares/rectangles, soft and hairy, could hardly be called rugs.

The policy of "restoring" indigenous crafts ran up against the fact that there was no weaving industry guild and the knotting technique was not an ancestral practice in the Sharifian Empire. In fact, there is nothing North African about ornamental knotted rugs; they are strictly Oriental.

Though historians have worked to show the presence in Morocco of fine knotted pile carpets since the medieval period, mentions of such carpets are too few and too brief to attest to the existence of any such local practice.<sup>6</sup> And not a single specimen has come down to us, whereas we do have fifteenth-century carpets known to have been made in Spain, Egypt and Asia Minor. Moreover, there is no Berber word for such an object; the vernacular has to

---

5 In Casablanca in 1915, in Fès in 1916, in Rabat in 1917, etc.

6 Two references pertain to the Merinid period: the knotted carpet appears in a description of a *zaouia* in Fès and as a gift from the sovereign to his Egyptian counterpart. A third, without specifying the nature of the carpet in question, touts the beauty and refinement of those to be found in al-Badia palace of Marrakech in the sixteenth century. Ali Amahan, 'Le tapis marocain, mémoire, imaginaire et savoir', *al-Qantara* 20 (July–Sept. 1996), pp. 34–36. See also Albelkrim Katibi and Ali Amahan, *Du signe à l'image: Le tapis marocain* (Casablanca: Lak International, 1995).

borrow from Arabic and uses either *tazerbit*, derived from the Koranic word *zerbiya*, or *tafrashit*, from the root *frash*, meaning “couch/bench.”<sup>7</sup>

Historiography does note that pile rugs were produced and used in the Maghreb/North Africa for bedding. There are a few terse references dating back to the sixteenth century; the absence of aesthetic commentary in them suggests these were utilitarian pieces rather than precious colored weavings. Leo Africanus mentions a “deep-pile woolen carpet” as one object to be found in a bride’s trousseau in Fès.<sup>8</sup> The Spanish traveller Marmol mentions “Turkish rugs of various sorts” woven by women of quality in Marrakech “for the household service.”<sup>9</sup> In the business correspondence of a Portuguese merchant we find a list of commodities to be shipped from Safi that includes *alcatifas* (from the Arabic word *qtifa*)<sup>10</sup>—probably knotted rugs.

Only later did the Ottomans introduce their weaving technique in a few locations in the Maghreb, and the practice does not seem to have been taken up. We do find evidence of craftsmen using it in El Kala, a slave-trading port on the coast near Oran. Delacroix’s *Femmes d’Alger* (1834) are shown sitting on a rug from that town.<sup>11</sup> But this local industry did not survive the arrival of the French.

It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the western fashion of the Turkish rug began to spread in North Africa.<sup>12</sup> Turkish rugs were prestigious pieces of work attesting to Oriental refinement; *kaidas* brought home from Mecca to be copied in their kasbahs.<sup>13</sup> Made with wool from local herds, this style of rug was a guarantee that the household was being run as it should and that its women knew what they needed to know, as they had been specially trained in the technique. The rugs were a valued adornment for the palaces under construction at the time in Kairouan, Tunis, Algiers, Fès and Marrakech.

7 Tunisians also call it *qtifa*, a word that has moved away from the meanings suggested by its root *q.t.f.* gather, pluck. Jacques Berque, *Tapis maghrébin*, p. 548.

8 Jean Léon l’Africain, *Description de l’Afrique* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1956), vol. 1, p. 210.

9 Marmol, *L’Afrique* vol. 3 (1667), p. 50.

10 Denise Jacques-Meunié, *Le Maroc saharien, des origines à 1670* (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1982), vol. 2, p. 848.

11 *Monographie du tapis algérien* (1929), p. 19. Lucienne Bonnet defended a doctoral thesis in law in 1929 entitled ‘L’industrie du tapis à la Klaa des Beni-Rached’.

12 According to Prosper Ricard, it was at this time that Turkish carpets were first copied. However, there is still uncertainty about the date it was made. The year inscribed on the oldest carpet found in Morocco is difficult to read; it might be 1202H (1798AD). Prosper Ricard, *Corpus des tapis marocains* (Paris: Geuthner, 1934), vol. 4, p. 68.

13 Ricard, *Les arts indigènes du Nord de l’Afrique* (1918), p. 37.

Tribal leaders offered them to the sultan as a sign of allegiance. When Hassan I ascended the throne in 1874 he sent such carpets to European heads of state as diplomatic gifts.<sup>14</sup> Little by little the bourgeois elites, partial to western furnishings, sought to purchase them for themselves. To respond to this new demand, workshops were set up in three places in the Maghreb: Kairouan, in Tunisia; the Setif region of Algeria; and Rabat.

### The “Rabat” Prefigured Urban Modernity

The desire for Rabat rugs in the Sharifian Empire was due above all to their cool colors, which ranged from green to purple, and their unusual color schemes. The Rabat-Salé conglomeration was well-equipped for this craft as it boasted Morocco's first dyeing center, which European manufacturers were already using to dye their stocks of woollen cloth and silks before shipping them to Senegal.<sup>15</sup> The dyes, initially natural and of vegetable origin, before being synthetic, were imported from Europe, which was producing massive quantities of them at the time. The work required some knowledge of chemistry, a degree of technical know-how and specific equipment—the necessary components for creating a guild.<sup>16</sup> But the authorities were reluctant to allow the kind of dyeing done for Europeans to be done in turn for a local clientele. A *dahir* of the Sultan Moulay Abderrahman (1822–1859) is said to have forbidden public criers to sell rugs dyed “rumia” colors (i.e., colors from the Christian world), threatening to have their merchandise destroyed by the *mohtaseb* (provost of merchants).<sup>17</sup> A main thoroughfare of the medina ran with colours whenever the dyeing vats were emptied, noted an observer in 1913.<sup>18</sup> The war brought an end to this port industry.

The modernity of the Rabat carpet was also due to its composition, a complicated design requiring master weavers (all women at the time) who knew

14 Queen Victoria, the French president Mac-Mahon, the Belgian king Léopold II and the Italian king Victor Emmanuel II seem each to have received six carpets, and their heads of government and foreign affairs ministers each two. Prosper Ricard, *Tapis Marocain* (1952), p. 16.

15 Victor Champion, ‘Enquête sur la situation des métiers et des industries indigènes à Rabat’, *Bulletin Officiel du Maroc* (Jan. 29, 1917), p. 133.

16 Prosper Ricard and Mohamed Kouadri, *Procédés marocains de teinture des laines* (Rabat: École du livre, 1938).

17 Champion, p. 181.

18 Louis Botte, *Au coeur du Maroc* (Paris: Hachette et Cie., 1913), p. 55.

how to count and follow predefined patterns. In contrast to the traditional *hanbel*, a flat-weave of indeterminate length with no borders, the Rabat's doubly symmetrical design was organized around the centre. For Moroccans the medallion, imposingly placed at the centre of a field outlined by a wide band on all four sides, evoked a garden and was a metaphor for the Garden of Eden; namely, a prayer room in the centre of a luxuriant, walled field.<sup>19</sup> If we stretch the allegory, the composition of the rug can be seen to figure the nation-state emerging at the time in the Sharifian Empire: a central power radiating out over a territory freshly delimited by a border—Morocco's first border treaty dates from 1845. The star polygon, a recurrent pattern in Muslim art and in Jacques Berque's interpretation the symbol of a persistent desire for territorial expansion, had at last been circumscribed.<sup>20</sup>

The workshops proliferated, and in 1900 the "Rabat" was being sold in even the remotest villages of Morocco. It was the sign of successful *embourgeoisement*, particularly for salesmen of imported products whose purchasing power now exceeded that of the *fellahs* and who were quite ready to buy a carpet woven far away rather than homemade products. Along with the wrought iron beds, buffets, tables, sewing machines, etc., the Rabat, a mark of urbanity—a "bourgeois masterpiece", as Jacques Berque described it<sup>21</sup>—gave a certain vibrancy to the living room where the family took tea, the new national drink. The price fell, but so did the quality. Standardized at approximately eight square meters, it was not as tightly woven as before and the gaudy colors did not wear well. Soon the preference shifted to mechanically woven carpets from Manchester. For his part, Prosper Ricard saw this incarnation of the Rabat as a crude imitation of the Turkish carpet.

A survey of Rabat guilds commissioned in November 1916 noted the hierarchical organization of each.<sup>22</sup> In the weaving industry, master craftswomen (*maallemat*) paid their weavers by the day and trained apprentices in exchange for payment (all such weavers and apprentices being female, of course). The city's 80 looms each employed three to six weavers, depending on carpet size, or five to six apprentices working on secondary pieces. Weavers were paid from 1 to 1.25 *peseta hassaniya* a day according to their skill—approximately half the wages a male day-labourer might earn making braided mats (between 2

19 On the patterns of Rabat carpets see the doctoral dissertation by Sophie Chanut, 'Le Tapis de Rabat: Étude ethnologique', Université d'Aix-Marseille 1, 2010.

20 "Les mystères du polygone étoilé", interview with Kateb Yacine and Jean Duvignaud, *Afrique-Action*, Paris-Tunis, no. 37 (June 26, 1961).

21 'Tapis maghrébin', in *De l'Euphrate à l'Atlas*, vol. 2 (Paris: Sinbad, 1978), p. 551.

22 Champion.

and 5 p.h.s). They were fed breakfast and lunch and given tea twice daily. Apprentices were given breakfast and tea while paying their mistress a peseta at the end of every month. Ritual taboos such as having two looms under the same roof were now sacrificed in the interest of productivity. The situation for apprentices at that time was similar to the one denounced today by humanitarian organizations.<sup>23</sup>

Despite its economic importance for the city this exclusively female occupation was not organized into a guild nor was it practiced on premises registered for the activity, making it difficult for Sharifian or colonial authorities to supervise it. Sales activity was more visible because the rule was that all factory-made products were to be sold by criers in a fixed location and in the presence of two notary publics/officials (*adouls*) who would draw up sales agreements and levy a tax—one-tenth of the object's value. The open outcry markets where carpet salesmen bought their merchandise were located in the same squares where western-style goods were sold: gold and silver jewellery, ready-made clothes, etc. Another open outcry centre was restricted to traditional crafts (skins, *babouches* [leather slippers] and spun yarn), while a third was for horses and old clothes. Most carpet boutiques were in Casablanca.

### The “Moroccan Rug” Industry between the Wars

In spite of everything, both the Muslim and European populations continued to think of the Rabat carpet as a Turkish import. In 1922 Henri Basset noted a legend in which a stork arriving from the east drops a section of carpet into the house of a weaver in Rabat.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, French Indigenous Arts Bureau inspectors thought the “Rabat” had been demeaned by its popularity and would make Morocco look to foreigners like a corrupt Oriental province. They wanted to revive properly Moroccan creations, including some of the most popular and rural among them, those that ethnography had decreed as being authentic. This meant hunting about in far-flung locales. But these investigations, conducted with the assistance of Intelligence officers in the “pacified” territories, only revealed that the heavy white weavings marked out with diamond shapes, furry as fleeces with threads more than eight centimetres long and so big that an entire family could sleep on one, were woven out of wool in its natural state.

23 ‘Le travail des enfants dans l’industrie marocaine du tapis’, report by the Anti-Slavery Society. See also ‘Enfance: les mille et une petites mains’, *Le Nouvel observateur* no. 721 (Sept. 1978).

24 Henri Basset, ‘Les rites du travail de la laine à Rabat’, *Hesperis* 2 (1922), p. 147.

So it was that a new model using this weaving technique was discovered and dubbed “the Middle Atlas rug.” Small, with a white background, minimalist diamond patterns, and a thicker weft than in the Rabat, this carpet was as crude as that one was refined. Little did its inventors/discoverers know that their find would give rise to a new type of rug that would sweep a certain Parisian clientele off its feet.

In 1917 a selection of objects from the craft centres was sent to the Musée d’Arts Décoratifs in Paris for an exhibition of “Moroccan art,” a show whose reference was the prestigious exhibition of Muslim art held in the same Pavillon de Marsan in 1903. Held right in the middle of the First World War, this was a move to promote the colonial undertaking, particularly Morocco. “The Morocco Renaissance is a war action,” wrote Lyautey in his preface to the catalogue.<sup>25</sup>

The so-called “Middle Atlas” rug was so popular that a second exhibition, devoted exclusively to that article, was commissioned in the same place in 1919. Three hundred pieces had to be produced in less than two years. To this end, the Office des Industries d’Arts Indigènes was set up in February 1918. It had a director, two inspectors, European supervisors, and female supervisors in charge of relations with the indigenous women. The painter Joseph de la Nézière was appointed to head the project, and staff were recruited from among a group of Orientalist painters just coming together in Rabat, which later (in the mid-20s) took the name “Kasbah.” The Kasbah des Oudayas was equipped with dyeing vats and weaving looms and transformed into “a picturesque apprenticeship school.”<sup>26</sup> The exhibition confirmed the success of the weaving project: the entire collection was sold in three days and orders flooded in.<sup>27</sup>

In Paris, the Middle Atlas rug became the “Moroccan rug”—“profoundly Moroccan,” as Prosper Ricard, appointed head of the Indigenous Arts Bureau in 1920, liked to repeat. This national label corresponded to no indigenous reality. It was meant to counter the kind of adjectives used in Algeria: “Moorish,” “Arab,” “Oriental,” and even “Kabyle” or “Berber” but never “Algerian.” So it was that the Moroccan rug pulled free of the familiar Oriental referent and helped shape a specific identity for a new country. The image it projected was

25 ‘Le Maroc artistique’, special issue of *L’art et les artistes* published in connection with the exhibition.

26 Raymond Koechlin, vice-president of the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs, *Le Maroc artistique* (1917), p. 17.

27 Ricard, ‘Pour la sauvegarde des tapis marocains’, *Bulletin économique et social du Maroc* 8, no. 29 (April 1946).



of an agrarian, African world. It might have been called “Berber” even then given the Protectorate’s Berber policy, especially in connection with crafts.<sup>28</sup> But the adjective “Moroccan” was chosen deliberately. In direct contrast to the city carpet of Rabat, the Moroccan rug’s clean, geometric style, rough finish and earthy look fit in perfectly with the cubist vogue and its enthusiasm for “*l’art nègre*,” of great appeal to a young Parisian set that styled itself avant-garde.

As soon as the war was over, mills in the north of France such as Wibaux & Compagnie set up workshops for producing Rabat rugs. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of the port cities then under construction, such as Casablanca, Salé and Safi, attracted merchants—most of them French, many Jewish, some from Algeria—who set out to produce the rugs at an industrial scale. Was this industrial relocation? In a way. Already the rural exodus was making cheap labor available to urban industry. The number of “exported” square meters increased to such an extent that it affected the country’s trade balance, as attested by the statistics published quarterly by the *Bulletin Economique du Maroc*. In 1927, at Lyautey’s request, Ricard was awarded a gold medal by the Société d’Encouragement pour l’Industrie Nationale.

Success at this scale ensured the survival of the Indigenous Arts Bureau after Lyautey’s departure in 1925, but it exceeded the Bureau’s own monitoring capacities. The small administrative entity nonetheless made strenuous efforts to impose its own artistic line. Ricard increased facilities for manufacturers: documentation, exhibitions in museums and craft centers, and the like. Rugs that passed Indigenous Art Bureau inspection were given the official French/colonial state stamp (granted by official decree since 1919) and thus enjoyed optimal customs conditions. Above all, the stamp guaranteed the “authentic origin and indigenous character” of the object while ensuring the integrity of all persons implicated in it—weavers and salesmen—thereby assuming the certification role formerly performed by the *motahseb*. Any rug bearing this “utopian” seal was guaranteed to be entirely made of wool and to have “no trace of any dyes that are neither vegetable nor animal.” A less restrictive decree adopted in 1921 tolerated the use of cotton warps and wefts as well as “fine” dyes—meaning “of high quality.” Stamping stations furnished with a catalogue of patterns established by the Indigenous Arts Bureau drawing service were set up here and there in the major cities. Ricard’s *Corpus des Tapis*

---

28 Muriel Girard, ‘Invention de la tradition et authenticité sous le Protectorat au Maroc’, *Socio-anthropologie* 19 (2006); on-line at <http://socio-anthropologie.revues.org/index563.html>.

*Marocains*, published from 1923 to 1934 in four consecutive volumes, was conceived of as a foundational work—the absolute reference.<sup>29</sup>

But the industrial manufacturers had no intention of complying with the stylistic rigors the state wished to impose. The result was a long war of wills. In 1924 a campaign was launched to get the stamp granted to rugs that did not comply with the *Corpus* and Ricard had to yield. The production elicited by the prototypes that had so pleased Parisian interior decorators could only be called low-grade. And in European living rooms the Moroccan rug, a product of colonial industry, proved no rival for Turkish carpets.

The documentation used in state workshops also served in education programs, education being former elementary school teacher Ricard's first area of competence. Indigenous Art schools taught girls in Moroccan embroidery, lace-making and, of course, the knotted pile carpet. At the Marrakech school they learned how to weave carpets to be put up for sale. "Mogador and Marrakech did not use to have a rug making industry. Today the school's graduates make rugs from the neighbouring regions for the/a wide public," reported an inspector of indigenous training.<sup>30</sup> In rural communities, cooperatives and charity institutions also taught knotted rug-making, in this case for social welfare and peacekeeping purposes. In Ouarzazate, where a garrison was stationed in 1928 and a few pockets of resistance remained, the Commander of the Circle created a craft cooperative in 1934 with material assistance from Ricard. In 1937, Ricard's successor, Captain Balmigère, added a craft school for orphan survivors of a typhus epidemic in the upper Drâa. He could not decide whether to name it "Carpets of the Jebel Siroua", or "Ouaouzguite carpets."<sup>31</sup> In 1946, François Bonjean described yet another cooperative that employed and provided wools and dyes to a hundred women working at home.<sup>32</sup>

Ricard set about touting in innumerable publications the craft renewal he had put in motion in Morocco. His dialectic was ambiguous because he had to be sure that the aesthetic diktat he wanted to impose would not in any way undermine the supposed authenticity of the products. The idea at the time was that the colonizers had arrived just in time to save imperilled traditions or accurately establish how they had developed. This was not entirely untrue,

29 The four volumes, all published by Frontispiece, Geuthner, are entitled *Tapis de Rabat* (1923), *Tapis du Moyen Atlas* (1926), *Tapis du Haut-Atlas* (1927) and "*tapis divers*" (1934).

30 Louis Brunot (chief inspector of the Bureau de l'Enseignement des Indigènes), 'Les Ecoles d'arts indigènes', *Le Sud-Ouest Economique* (April 1927).

31 Anne Barthelémy, *Tazra: Tapis et bijoux de Ouarzazate* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1990), p. 82. The author is the daughter of Captain Balmigère, who instigated the project.

32 François Bonjean, *Au Maroc en roulotte* (Paris: Hachette, 1950).

but by alleging that canonical techniques had fallen into oblivion and that the avatars of the new age had caused tastes to degenerate, the Indigenous Arts Bureau was claiming a monopoly on knowledge of how things should be done. To avoid suspicions of conservatism while maintaining the colonized populations in their archaic position, Ricard underlined the originality of his crafts policy: the Moroccan carpet represented a paradoxical, context-determined fusing of tradition and modernity and could therefore claim to disseminate an image of successful colonial syncretism throughout the world.

Ricard's approach was widely imitated. As early as the 1919 World's Fair, British authorities in India consulted the French Foreign Affairs minister on its methods. Ricard, meanwhile, undertook consulting missions in Tripoli (1925) and Tunisia (1931). When he retired in 1935 he was made honorary director of the Indigenous Arts Bureau and continued to labor for craft synergy in the Maghreb.<sup>33</sup> He was succeeded as head of the Bureau by two close collaborators, Jean Baldoui and, later, Marcel Vicaire (1946), both painters.

The Second World War marked the end of this era of urban and rural rug making. The wool was requisitioned for soldiers' uniforms; few weaving workshops survived the war. However, from 1945 to 1951, Radio Maroc broadcast the "Causeries de Prosper Ricard" in which the founder sought to pursue his mediating mission. In 1952, the year of his death, Ricard published his last opusculé, *Tapis Marocain*, a colour-illustrated repertoire.<sup>34</sup> The following year, a plaque reading "Musée Prosper Ricard" was put up in a ceremony in the Kasbah des Oudayas, in the presence of Mme Ricard. It did not remain there long: four years later independent Morocco renamed the museum. Ricard's fame faded in the following decades on both sides of the Mediterranean. Should we then forget what the Moroccan rug owes to colonization?

### The "Berber Rug," Half-Indigenous, Half a Creation for Tourists

Knotted rugs continued to be produced in rural areas between the wars. We know little about the emergence of this practice, as it escaped Indigenous Arts Bureau supervision. The countryside was not readily accessible, and in any case these creations were too big, too gaudy and not irregularly shaped enough to

33 In 1949 Ricard organized the first conference on North African crafts at Fès and Rabat, and in May 1951 he organized a week-long conference in Algiers entitled 'Arts et techniques d'Afrique du Nord'.

34 Office Marocain du Tourisme and the Office Chérifien de Contrôle et d'Exportation, Casablanca, 1952.

be sold in Europe. They ended up where dyes were sold, in the customer catchment areas around ports: Melilla supplied eastern Morocco while Essaouira (formerly Mogador) supplied the Haouz around Marrakech. Indigenous Jews had a near-monopoly on dyeing. They would transport their equipment from one market to the next, marking out their stalls with bright-coloured skeins of yarn.

Agro-pastoral groups—Bedouins—seem to have been among the first to purchase these rugs. They were not averse to ostentation and considered the new-style carpet a ceremonial object and a noble attribute. Weaving them required a vertical high-warp loom, too big to be carried around by nomads; they could only be made in a sedentary base. Saturated with color and so heavy that it took several persons to carry one, these carpets were made for weddings, laid out on cold nights, feast days, or to honour important guests. Some ended up being sold.

In the fourth volume of his *Corpus*, published in 1934, Prosper Ricard mentions the carpets of the Beni Bou Yahi, in the region of Berkane, where the women worked under a male *reggam*, in charge of tracing out the design, who was housed and paid during the four to eight weeks it took to complete the carpet. These carpets were not meant to be sold and few were woven. The practice recalled the *frach* used in the late 1800s in the tents of the *kaid*s of Jebel Amour in southern Algeria, to which Père Giacobetti dedicated a monograph.<sup>35</sup>

We know little of the genesis of the rugs made by the Oulad Bou Sbaa, a branch of a Saharan tribe settled near the *zaouia* of Sidi Moktar, mid-way between Essaouira and Marrakech, a region not known for its wool. These rugs acquired a certain renown, as they were traded internally all the way to the western Sahara, a commerce described by Odette Puigauudeau in the 1930s.<sup>36</sup> Prosper Ricard named them “Chichaoua,” after the neighboring wadi.

With the decline of nomadism in the 1950s and 1960s knotted rugs came to be used throughout Morocco, echoing urbanization. Now that Moroccans were buying ready-made clothes women had time to weave carpets and the wool to make them. The prestige of these weavings, which had reached its apogee when they appeared for sale on the market—in the form of saddle and packsaddle blankets, grain sacks, saddlebags—was now restricted to reception rooms. The carpet was a fundamental feature of that room, and was now formatted to cover precisely the floor space left free by the couches/benches that lined the walls.

35 R.P. Giacobetti, *Les tapis et tissages du Djebel Amour* (Paris: Librairie Ernest Leroux, 1932).

36 ‘Arts et coutumes des Maures’, *Hesperis* vols. 8 (1967), pp. 111–230, esp. 153; 9 (1968), pp. 329–458; and 11 (1970), pp. 5–82.

A chandelier hanging from the ceiling echoed the carpet's central medallion. This was no mere decorative novelty but a structural component in the layout of the living room. So it was that an object belonging by its essence to nomadic life now occupied the room called upon to project an image of sedentary stability.

This new rug fostered an aesthetic with no ties to convention and allowed weavers to follow their fancy. The knotting technique opened the way for all sorts of abstract or figurative inventions. A variety of materials—cotton threads, unravelled knitting yarn, strips of fabric—were now being slipped into or alongside the homespun wool. This was permissible because these carpets were no longer connected with specific customs. A generation of carpets that could not be classified in “tribal” terms—pure products of the weavers’ imaginations—are now much sought after by collectors. “Mad carpets,” say the merchants. Trends can be glimpsed here and there, influenced by passing local fashions and entirely dependent on what materials were available at the moment, the colors the village dyer had on offer and the carpets circulating at the time that might have inspired the female weavers. A few decades later, these trends were named after a tribe or region.

Out of this spontaneous, diffuse creation emerged the “Berber carpet,” which came to rival city-made carpets in the bazaars. Indeed, the competition slowly shifted in favour of the countryside, labour there being cheaper. The work was gradually organized—weavers became linked to shopkeepers through a long chain of intermediaries—in two regions with longstanding wool-making traditions. Peddlers, wholesalers, criers—everyone skimmed off what was due them and had their say in the dialogue between manufacturers and bazaar stallholders, two groups who never actually met face to face. In this way the product was groomed to suit proprieties aligned with Western demand. While production was homogenized, regional styles came to be distinguished from each other by color, design, and particular weaving techniques. Two intense poles of activity furnished most of the carpets: the Zemmour region between Rabat and Meknès supplied the market in Rabat and the Jebel Siroua near Ouarzazate supplied Marrakech. Each had its weekly market—one at Khemisset, the other at Tazenakht—where the carpets were “centralized.”

An Indigenous Arts Bureau study of Zemmour weavings published in 1954 notes that knotted rug-making was just getting started in the region and had not yet become a business.<sup>37</sup> The technique was used above all for packsaddles and dubbed “à la turque” (*tatorkit* in Berber). Chemical dyes predominated,

---

37 Alexandre Delpy, ‘Note sur le tissage des Zemmour’ (Tunis: Imprimerie Essor, 1954), p. 10.

and the rugs were already acquiring the features that would make them so popular, a regular checkerboard pattern saturated with red and orange that resembled neither a Rabat nor a Middle Atlas carpet. Women in Zemmour actively participated in sales, either at the weekly market in Khemisset on Tuesdays or the wholesale market in Rabat, much further away, on Mondays. Female master weavers in Kemessit began setting up workshops in the carriage houses/sheds of their homes and hiring weavers.

In the Siroua Mountains on the southern slopes of the High Atlas the boom in carpet-weaving owed much to the tastes of the pasha of Marrakech, the renowned Glaoui, who ordered many of them to decorate his palaces. Adopting the ways of nineteenth-century tribal chieftains, he was said to grant “heavy gratuities” to craftswomen from Rabat who would come to teach the technique in his fiefdom of Télouët, perched near the Tishka mountain pass.<sup>38</sup> Glaoui also encouraged the use of synthetic dyes. To express French gratitude to this fervent partisan of colonization, Ricard named these High Atlas weavings “Glaoua.” Soon they were being sold by the Ouarzazate cooperative. However, local memory reports that women in the *douars* only began learning this technique after the pasha died in 1956 and his harem was freed; it was those women who began to teach the families.<sup>39</sup> So it was that the “Rabat” technique and design came to be grafted onto the weft of local weavings, and a typology of patterns appeared reflecting the weavers’ creative fancy. The renown of these rugs is due to the lustrous wool of the local herds, and it coincided with the rise of tourism in Marrakech.

Carpet sales enabled—and continue to enable—households to substantiate their income. Carpet-making continues to keep girls in the village busy and men occupied in selling what they produce. And it means that all wool produced can be sold. This was the real change. As soon as carpets came to be thought of as an object to be sold far away from the group, they lost their finely codified role as an article of ostentation and became little more than “folklore.” However, before being put up for sale, a rug might have a long life in the household that had brought it into existence. Such rugs are unique, personalized works that continue to be associated with the women who designed them and oversaw their manufacture. They are thought of as savings and property to be transmitted through inheritance; the wealthiest families have a stock of them that they lay out for collective feasts and ceremonies.

38 Ricard, *Corpus*, vol. 4, p. 37.

39 Yvonne Samama, *Le tissage dans l'Atlas marocain: Miroir de la terre et de la vie* (Ibi Press-UNESCO, 2000).

In the trade today the Moroccan rug has become the “Berber” rug. Implicitly this gives it rural uniqueness and links it to an extremely remote local history—with reference and in contrast to the Arab Orient. It is a kind a reaffirmation of what was induced by the Protectorate’s crafts policy. But this new appellation, “Berber,” whether it be found on shop signs or theorized in craft books, has such power that it must be understood as more than a quaint touch aimed at pulling the wool over the customer’s eyes, particularly since it developed at precisely the same time as Amazigh demands for recognition, which have been threatening to break up national cohesion since the 1990s. The Palace has responded institutionally to this popular movement and its demand,<sup>40</sup> officially recognizing the country’s Berber roots. But despite the political gestures, claims to “Berber-ness” continue to reveal intercultural tensions in the country, namely the vast divide that subsists between the backward countryside and urban conglomerations with futurist aspirations. In Casablanca, Berber-ness is worrisome as it suggests both a kind of a third-world threat at the city gates and the pride attached to a preserved authenticity that has managed to win recognition beyond national borders—a sort of postcolonial indigenoussness. Carpets labelled “Berber” are both a product of the rural world and a refined piece of merchandise that tourists carry home in their suitcases as precious acquisitions. They incarnate this ambivalence better than any other object. This is why the Berber carpet deserves to be considered a standard of national unity.

### Impossible Ethnography

Following the model of the Turkish carpet, Prosper Ricard created a regional typology and assigned names to carpets according to where they were made: “Chichaoua,” “Glaoua,” “Middle-Atlas,” and others are names chosen more or less at random but meant to proclaim an authentic origin. However, with the rise of rural carpet-making most products such as these escaped the colonial stamp, while today’s typologies are invented by authors of coffee-table books, who name carpets just as arbitrarily as Ricard ever did, constantly refining their classifications. Their lexicon draws on region and city names but also those of tribes and even tribal sub-divisions that no longer have any sociological reality.

Siroua is a case in point. Carpets there were first called Glaoua, then Ait Ouauzguit, both of which are names of tribal confederations. But in the

---

40 The Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe (or IRCAM), an academic institute in charge of preserving and promoting Amazigh culture, was created in 2001.

1970s the collector Bert Flint published a book whose photo captions specify in parentheses the names of a few kin group sub-divisions corresponding to mountain areas from which the carpets supposedly came.<sup>41</sup> It is important to know that such tribal distinctions are neither impermeable nor immutable. But with the multiplication of such books the phenomenon grows. In 1999 Kurt Rainer, author of a luxurious work on weaving in the region, generated a new flowering of ethnonyms: Znaga, Ait Ouagharda, Ait Douchen, Ait Semgane, etc.<sup>42</sup> The fact is that the populations referred to and local “weavers and dealers” know nothing of this scholarly nomenclature, while weavers themselves are not the least concerned to give their carpets a name. Boutique-owners make use of these European publications, setting them out in their shops to give their merchandise an erudite label.

This literature for tourists is therefore inventing a body of ethnographic knowledge. And in so doing it is filling a void, as there are virtually no ethnographic studies of Moroccan rugs. (Carpets from Asia Minor suffer from the same lack of information.<sup>43</sup>) The knotted rug’s very modernity “saved” it from the prolific ethnographic study that Morocco elicited in the first half of the twentieth century. Ricard himself acknowledged inconsistencies in information gleaned from merchants or Intelligence officers and admitted that his *Corpus des tapis marocains* was more a handbook for weavers than a mass of information that would help in understanding the history of a popular practice. There were further obstacles to learning more: weavers were highly unlikely to speak French and never spoke much about their creations, while looms were few and far between. Investigators were therefore much more likely to get their information from merchants.<sup>44</sup> But merchants have a greater interest in developing relations with foreign customers than combing the countryside to document how carpets are made.<sup>45</sup> Their comments and testimony, biased by their business activity, are therefore much more likely to be clichés than ethnological

---

41 Bert Flint, *Formes et symboles dans les arts du Maroc* (Tanger, 1974).

42 Kurt Rainer, *Tasnacht: Teppichkunst und Traditionelles Handwerk des Berber Südmarrokkos* (Graz: Adeva, 1999).

43 Brian Spooner, ‘Weavers and dealers: the authenticity of the Oriental carpet’ in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 199.

44 Francis Ramirez and Christian Rolot, *Tapis et tissages du Maroc* (Paris: ACR Editions, 1995). The authors admit that their information, like that of most of their predecessors, comes from one Marrakech family involved in the trade.

45 Alain de Pommereau, ‘La criée au tapis de Marrakech: L’économie du bazar revivifiée’, *Hespéris Tamuda* 41 (2006), p. 83.



realities in which they have a symbolic investment and which it is in their interest not to reveal.<sup>46</sup> This explains the existence of myth-sustaining and entirely self-fuelling comprehensive surveys such as Flint's and Rainer's, disconnected from the reality of their subject and the lived experience of weaving these carpets.

Moreover, the authors indulge in groundless interpretations—particularly easy to do since they are dealing with a world of women, a world apart, one assumed to be archaic and superstitious and thought to use un-decodable languages. The main subject of commentary is rug patterns. Supposed specialists discover symbols of female life and remote influences, whereas these carpets are usually just a pretext for weavers to use their creativity in ways devoid of particular meaning. How they are dyed is another recurrent theme, interpreted as the women's own exclusive, impenetrable choice. The dyes are generally said to be of natural, vegetable origin—madder, henna, indigo—and produced by some secret alchemy.

Today the era of the knotted rug is over. The Rabat survives thanks to encouragement from the Palace, which wishes it to remain an emblem of the national heritage. In the Marrakech medina, the largest market centre in Morocco, the trend is now toward lighter-weight, flat-weave carpets, in keeping with the 1990s Turkish "kilim" mode—that term is now used in Morocco. But trends change all the time of course. New weaves, materials and patterns succeed each other on the market, changing and renewing supply in the ever ongoing effort to please foreign customers.

Prosper Ricard is gradually emerging from oblivion. The Bibliothèque des Oudayas, founded thanks to funding he bequeathed, reopened in 2002. Ricard's works sell for high prices on the internet, and the first biographical sketch of him was published in 2008.<sup>47</sup> However, there is as yet no "Prosper Ricard" Wikipedia entry.

As for the tradition of the Moroccan carpet, it cannot be said to have been invented either at a given moment in history or by a specific social group being instead, as I have sought to show here, the result a long, multi-dimensional process in which both sides of the Mediterranean played a part. This construction in stages corresponded to a quest for the foundations of a national identity. The

---

46 On the sale of carpets to tourists see Corinne Cauvin-Verner, 'Les objets du tourisme, entre tradition et folklore: l'impasse des catégories', *Journal des Africanistes* 76 no. 1 (2006), pp. 189–203.

47 See my entry in *Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue française* (Paris: IISMM/Karthala, 2008), p. 826.

“Rabat” carpet prefigured the choice of capital city for a new state in the Shari-fian Empire. Though for Moroccans it has never ceased being a Turkish import, it has ended up a jewel in the country’s crafts industry. This contrasts with the story of the “Moroccan carpet”: created nearly *ex nihilo* by the colonial work-shops, it was deliberately produced for a non-Moroccan clientele and helped forge an image abroad of a country where “tradition and modernity” cohabited. Later came the “Berber rug,” which became part of local ways while remaining strongly connected to the tourist market. The market for Berber rugs makes use of a dialectic in which the “tradition” argument has been pushed to an extreme for the common understanding today is that carpet making in Morocco is a Berber tradition.

# Creative Differences, Creating Difference: Imagining the Producers of Moroccan Fashion and Textiles

*Claire Nicholas*

“She draws her inspiration from all the artisanal heritage of Morocco, not hesitating to divert forms and objects from their original purpose, readapting them for dress ... She is equally attentive to other cultures, opening herself to Incan, Egyptian and Indian influences”.<sup>1</sup> The press release for the 2007 Nokia Mod’ Art fashion show in Rabat thus introduces the young designer Siham El Habti. The description of El Habti’s sources of inspiration draws attention to the central concerns of this chapter: namely, the valorisation of Moroccan cultural difference amidst appeals to a cosmopolitan ethos, and the construction of local status distinctions in the context of the burgeoning Moroccan fashion and cultural tourism industries. Two figures or cultural stereotypes emerge as key boundary markers in representations and performances of difference and identity amongst the producers of “traditional” Moroccan clothing and handicrafts: the “*ma’allem*,” or master craftsman,<sup>2</sup> and the “styliste” or “designer”. These collectivities, and the goods they produce, position themselves, or are positioned, differently to symbols of and references to national or collective “traditions” and the innovative spirit of the “modern” or cosmopolitan “universals”.

The following discussion concentrates primarily on identity and status distinctions claimed or contested by contemporary Moroccan fashion designers (and those who aspire to this status). However, I also demonstrate how many of these distinctions rely on the creation of social or creative distance from designers’ proximate or “traditional” cultural equivalents: the *ma’allem* (fem. *ma’allma*), or master artisan. This is accomplished in part through the re-deployment of what we might call the discursive residues of colonial knowledge production. Indeed, the extensive French Protectorate project of ethnographic documentation and description included the work of mapping out craft “guild” structures, handicraft techniques, object types and regional styles

---

1 The original text of the press release is in French. The English translation and all subsequent translations are my own. *Nokia Mod’ Art*, Press Release, (Rabat, 2007).

2 Specifically, traditional Moroccan tailors or seamstresses are usually referred to as *kheyyat(a)*.

of dress.<sup>3</sup> These earlier French models treat handicrafts as expressions of collective identities, categorized in terms of gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, residency, and tribe.

Post-colonial representations of the master artisan as an anonymous guardian of Moroccan traditions, and therefore a figure who must be spoken for, thus reprise earlier colonial modes of representation. In the present-day Moroccan social and symbolic landscape these representations sustain the emergence of other “modern” occupations which increasingly dominate the social and economic domain once occupied solely by the “traditional” craftsman. In this way, the vocational exemplars of *ma'alle*m and designer or *styliste*<sup>4</sup> exist within a cultural system, and are therefore mutually constitutive, dependent on one another and at the same time employed to assert differences. The category of the folkloric and anonymous artisan serves as a foil, a productive contrast sustaining the symbolic capital of its Other, the fashion designer. The dynamic of this symbolic economy recalls Edward Said's<sup>5</sup> caution against the dangers of re-appropriated Orientalist discourse and iconography by those of the “Orient”. In the Moroccan case, the boundary lines of the marginalized or “spoken for” continue to encompass the “traditional” craftsman, even as their re-mapping now provides other Moroccan actors with key symbolic resources.

Contemporary designers invoke their own “cultural heritage” (and traditional alter-egos) through various expressive media, within the context of a fledgling Moroccan fashion scene seeking legitimacy and recognition on an international stage, in an industry that defines itself in terms of difference, renewal, and change. In these circumstances, Moroccan designers find themselves caught in somewhat of a paradox: their marketability lies partly in their association with cultural difference, but this same cultural difference threatens their full membership in an ostensibly global, even universal artistic community, composed of individual designers who transcend the creative constraints of a single cultural tradition.

---

3 See Claire Nicholas, “Sur les traces des objets anthropologiques: le façonnement du patrimoine vestimentaire marocain,” *Maghreb et Sciences Sociales* (Tunis: IRMC, 2012), for a discussion of Jean Besancenot's seminal *Costumes du Maroc* (Paris: Edisud, 2000 [1942]), an ethnographic and artistic survey of “traditional” dress conducted in the 1930s.

4 In the Moroccan context, the terms “designer”, “*styliste*,” and “*créateur*” are frequently used interchangeably, though in English the terms “designer” and “stylist” tend to distinguish different occupations or roles in the industry. The terminological permeability of these distinctions in Morocco indexes the fluidity of creative and technical practices in the nascent Moroccan fashion industry.

5 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, [1994] 1978).

The consequences of this delicate positioning surface in an ambivalent and sometimes contradictory relationship with forms of dress and decorative motifs and techniques marked as “traditional.” This tension manifests on both the discursive level—in the words and images of Moroccan designers, industry professionals, and the media—and materially—in the cuts, fabrics, and details of the garments themselves. It also surfaces in the discursive and structural positioning of designers vis-à-vis their close cultural equivalents, the *ma‘allmīn*, or master artisans. With this in view, my discussion traces how contemporary Moroccan fashion designers and other professionals invested in the fashion and cultural tourism industries negotiate the reproduction of essentializing or Orientalizing displays or evocations of Moroccan “traditional” dress and its producers, even as they claim cosmopolitan inspiration drawn from other traditions similarly simplified: those of India, Africa, Asia, and the West.

My approach considers a wide variety of visual sources, drawn from the mass media, expressed in the framing of cultural policy, performed in public spaces, and present in the discourse of the designers themselves. In most cases, these texts and images have been generated by actors and institutions with direct economic investments in the spheres of craft production or the fashion and tourism industries. This includes fashion, entertainment and lifestyle magazines, postcards, tourist guides and promotional materials, television programming, governmental and non-governmental documents, the Internet, and sites of public display.

### The Other’s Other: Naturalized Labor in Colonial and Post-colonial Contexts

The historical basis for the key representational features of the folklorized Moroccan artisan extends at least as far back as postcards and colonial ethnography of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Postcards of the genre “*scènes et types*” juxtaposed ethnic or racial types, seductive women and fierce warriors, exotic landscapes, and artisans at work in a unified visual sphere of circulation. Both rural and urban artisans appeared as integral parts of the colonial scenery. Colonial ethnography and the initiatives of the *Service des Arts Indigènes* (the Native Handicrafts Agency) compiled taxonomies of trades accompanied by terminological lists of tools and techniques and conducted censuses of workshops and guilds in urban centers.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary representations recapitulate

---

6 Besancenot, *Costumes du Maroc*; Prosper Ricard, *Corpus des Tapis Marocains*, vol. 1–4 (Paris:

these early definitions and standardizations of trades in multiple ways. This is especially apparent in the mise-en-scene of artisans against the backdrop of Moroccan built heritage.

For example, the old city (*medina*) of Fez, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981, today serves as a sort of living history museum: tour guides refer constantly to the fact that the organization and activities of the city remain relatively unchanged from medieval times. The visibility of active craft production contributes in no small part to the legitimacy of these claims. State-approved guides conduct walking tours through different quarters of the city, pausing for photograph opportunities of artisans in their workshops. Trips to the *Chouara* tanneries include observations of the tanners at work below from the balconies of leather goods shops. A staff member of the shop narrates the activities taking place before the eyes of the tourists: descriptions of the materials used and the steps of the leather tanning and dyeing processes are animated by living visual aides. These quasi-performative representations serve to explicitly embed local artisans within the urban landscape, in this sense naturalizing their labor.

No tour is complete without a visit to at least one carpet shop, ideally located in an old palace of the ancient city. These shops frequently feature a carpet loom with a female weaver or a horizontal loom operated by a man or youth. The presence of the artisan “at work” certifies by proximity the handcrafted production of the surrounding carpets or textiles. This same mode of display played out in the projects initiated by the colonial government, which set up workshop spaces and local and international expositions showcasing the best craftsmen employing “traditional” techniques.<sup>7</sup> The authenticating marker of

---

Geuthner, 1923–1934), Louis Massignon, “Enquête sur les Corporations Musulmanes d’Artisans et de Commerçants au Maroc,” *Revue du Monde Musulman* Tome 58 (Paris: Editions Ernest Leroux, 1924), J. Lapanne-Joinville, “Les métiers à tisser de Fès,” *Héspéris* Tome XXVII, fascicule unique (1940): 21–65, Roger Le Tourneau, *Fès Avant le Protectorat: Etude Economique et Sociale d’une Ville de l’Occident Musulman* (Casablanca: Société marocaine de librairie et d’édition, 1949), Roger Le Tourneau and Lucien Paye, “La corporation des tanneurs et l’industrie de la tannerie à Fès,” *Héspéris* Tome XXI, fascicule 1–11 (1935): 167–240, L. Golvin, “Le métier à la tire des fabricants de brocards de Fès,” *Héspéris* Tome XXXVII, 1st–2nd trimesters (1950): 21–52.

7 Said Chikhaoui, *Politique publique et société: essai d’analyse de l’impact des politiques publiques sur l’artisanat au Maroc* (Rabat: Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, 2002), Alain De Pommereau, “L’invention du tapis marocain,” in F. Pouillon and J.-Cl. Vatin (eds.), *Après l’orientalisme: L’Orient créé par l’Orient* (Paris: IISMM, Karthala, 2011: 517–532), Hamid Irbouh, *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco 1912–1956* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

the artisan at work also features strongly in recent state strategies to create so-called “artisanal villages” and “eco-museums” to draw tourists to more remote areas.

Visual representations of “traditional” Moroccan artisans emphasize the process and techniques of manual labor over the particular history or creativity of the artisan. This mode of display reinforces the notion that the artisan is a metonym for the larger trade which he or she practices, the living embodiment of an ancestral *savoir-faire*. Thus, more often than not, images of the artisan purport to catch him or her in the midst of the productive process. He or she is always situated along with the tools of the trade and the object of his or her labor is usually in a state of becoming.

Both internal Moroccan governmental documents and promotional materials prepared by the Handicrafts Agency contribute to this trend through complex interactions of text and image. For example, the booklet *Le Tissage de Saïss*,<sup>8</sup> produced to endorse the *jellaba saïssia*, a textile of national repute, tracks the weaving process sequentially, juxtaposing images of unnamed women demonstrating various steps with drawings illustrating technical details and descriptions outlining key terms. The process is broken down into named and visually bounded units, described in French. The emphasis is clearly on the cataloguing of a national heritage and the specificity of its techniques, rather than showcasing the talents of individual weavers or innovations deviating from this normalized process. A similar poetics structures the promotional video produced for the 2009 Marrakech handicrafts exhibition *Min Yadina* (From Our Hands), sponsored by the *Maison de l'Artisan* (the agency responsible for shaping and policing the “brand” image of Moroccan handicrafts domestically and abroad) and held in the gallery-like spaces of a luxury *riad* in the chic neighborhood of l'Hivernage. The video features an anonymous *ma'alle*m or master craftsman, working silently to trace an elaborate floral arabesque onto metal sheeting while a voice-over in French narrates a homage to his art. The name of the artisan is never mentioned.

---

8 Mohamed Messaoudi, *Le Tissage de Saïss* (Chambre de l'Artisanat d'El Jadida en collaboration avec l'Association des Doukkala, 2006). The *jellaba saïssia* cloth is traditionally used in the fabrication of formal men's *jellabas*, or hooded tunics, worn almost exclusively by the Moroccan elite.

### From Fashions to Fashion: An Economy and Its Symbols under Construction

Unlike the folklorized artisan, the fashion designer is a relatively recent vocational category in Morocco, dating back only as far as the latter third of the twentieth century<sup>9</sup>. Within the past twenty years, the representational presence of the designer has intensified. This correlates with an expansion of the market for haute couture Moroccan dress in the wider North African and Middle Eastern context as well as amongst elite domestic and European clientele. The Moroccan fashion industry is in the process of constituting itself as such, and as a contender on the international fashion scene. In furtherance of this project, industry actors exploit the promotional capacities of the media, the possibilities it offers of making visible, to full effect.

Contemporary Moroccan fashion foregrounds a key article of traditional women's dress: the *caftan* (*qaftān*); though in today's usage the term functions as a catch-all for a host of garments more-or-less inspired from traditional urban clothing, like the two or three piece *lbsa*, or *taksheïta*, the *jellaba*, *serwāl*, *hẓām*, etc. In this context, cultural identity, inseparable from cultural heritage and sartorial traditions, constitutes a valuable symbolic resource to be cashed out in material and economic terms in the global fashion industry, though, as we shall see, it also carries certain risks. The sometimes-eclectic mélange of Moroccan terminology and decorative elements (drawn in part from historical documentation from the colonial period<sup>10</sup>) with patterns of Euro-American fashion language and forms hangs together tenuously. This uneasy combination underscores the playing out of complex identity games for actors in the Moroccan fashion scene, where claims to specifically Moroccan national, regional, and ethnic identities intermingle with appeals to ostensibly univer-

9 For a thorough analysis of a local fashion industry in the making—its history, principal actors and institutions—see Angela Jansen, *Moroccan Fashion: Design, Tradition and Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

10 For representative examples, see Besancenot, *Costumes du Maroc*; Louis Brunot, "Noms des vêtements masculins à Rabat," in *Mélanges René Basset*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Institut des Hautes Etudes Marocaines, 1924); Prosper Ricard, *Arts Marocains: Broderies (Rabat, Salé, Meknès, Fès, Azemour, Tétouan)* (Algiers: Carbonel, 1918); idem, *Dentelles Algériennes et Marocaines* (Paris: Librairie Larose, 1928); Jeanne Jouin, "Les Thèmes Décoratifs des Broderies Marocaines. Leur Caractère et leurs Origines", *Hesperis* Tome xv, fascicule 1 (1932): 11–30, Tome XXI, fascicule 1–2 (1935): 149–161; Christiane Brunot-David, *Les Broderies de Rabat*, Vol. 1–2 (Rabat: Institut des Hautes Etudes Marocaines, 1943); Anne-Marie Goichon, "La Broderie au Fil d'Or à Fèz", *Hesperis* Tome XXIV, 3rd trimestre (1939): 49–98.



sal aesthetic forms, ideals of beauty, and modes of creativity, as well as references to cultural and historical Others, through the use of sub-Saharan African motifs, the Indian sari, and Euro-American cuts and materials. Indeed, too much reliance on the foregrounding of cultural specificity can ultimately limit or devalue the Moroccan designer. Pushed too far it threatens his or her status as an “artist”: unlike the artisan, an anonymous perpetuator of a collective tradition, the fashion designer is conceptualized and represented as a unique creator who imbues his or her objects with a personal ethos. The apparent contradiction for designers claiming ties with both local and global communities only makes sense if we accept a static and essentialized notion of identity and authorship. Following James Clifford,<sup>11</sup> we might instead assert that hybridity or cosmopolitan amalgamations are not solely concepts attributed to cultural forms and identities by social scientists. Moroccan designers themselves possess critical distance vis-à-vis their sartorial and cultural heritage, as well as that of other cultural traditions, both hegemonic and marginal. This distance creates room to manoeuvre, to play, with garment forms, materials, and their descriptions.

### Historical Antecedents: Moroccan Fashion, the Early Days

At the risk of reducing complex cultural, economic, and social change to oversimplified generalizations, we might point to the rough trajectory of Morocco's entrée into and growing presence on the international fashion scene, beginning with several key frontrunners of the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Broadly, the emergence and recognition of Moroccan fashion designers hinged initially on the assertion and promotion of cultural difference (of the designers, of the garments). Though it has never completely discarded this form of identity politics, the Moroccan industry discourse has more recently moved towards affirming a cosmopolitan subject, whose sources for creative inspiration include other “Others,” and shifted from a “Moroccan designer” to a “designer” tout court. That said, the category marked as Moroccan Fashion (and to a lesser extent “fashions”) has always already been in dialogue with European designers, aesthetic forms, and fashion industry infrastructure.

Thus, designers starting out in the 1960s and 70s, like Zina Guessous, Zhor Sebti, and Tamy Tazi, often benefitted from ties with Europe and the United States for the promotion of their designs: in fashion publications like *Vogue*,

---

11 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

and in fashion shows in New York, Washington, and Paris. This visibility fostered connections with high profile clientele, including Jackie Kennedy, Nancy Reagan, the Queen Mother of England, and the Moroccan *haute bourgeoisie*.<sup>12</sup> These early designers retained the core features and terms of traditional garments, like the *jellaba*, the *qafṭān*, and the *gandoura*, but incorporated simpler, more streamlined cuts, softer materials, new hemlines, and reinterpreted decorative elements like beading, embroidery and *chebka*, or *rranda* (a kind of needlework finishing). In short, the comfort and simple elegance of traditional Moroccan garments retained an air of cultural difference, but also appealed to European and American tastes and lifestyles. Alaoui confirms the nature of the attraction for Guessous' reworked designs: "... her models allowed clients the world over, particularly Americans, to cultivate the exoticism then in fashion during the 1970s".<sup>13</sup> Tamy Tazi, daughter of Maréchal Mezian, raised and educated in Spain, was herself the representative of the Maison Yves St. Laurent in Morocco before creating her own collections in the mid-70s. Her longevity, confirmed by her participation in two prominent Parisian fashion shows in the late 90s (Institut du Monde Arabe 1996, in conjunction with the exhibition *De Soie et d'Or*, Carousel du Louvre 1999,<sup>14</sup> with five other Moroccan designers), would seem to solidify her status as the grand dame of Moroccan haute couture. Known especially for their innovative use of Moroccan embroidery and needlework motifs and techniques, Tazi's designs reflect the careful study and collection of traditional embroidery pieces, found in antique shops and bazaars in both Morocco and Europe.

Similar to other designers of the Moroccan first wave, Tazi's collections and the discourse surrounding her work strike a tone oft imitated by later generations: a foregrounding of the legacy of Moroccan cultural heritage and identity, inflected by a resolute orientation towards contemporary Fashion, especially European. The prelude to her show at l'Institut du Monde Arabe, presented by Tazi's daughter, captures this rhetorical balancing act, emphasizing Tazi's work as both a protector of endangered traditions (a theme which echoes colonial rhetoric to some extent), and creative innovation:

12 Rachida Alaoui, *Costumes et Parures du Maroc* (Courbevoie: ACR, 2003); Angela Jansen, "Three Generations of Moroccan Fashion Designers", In S. Heaton (ed.), *Fashioning Identities: Cultures of exchange* (Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press, 2013).

13 Alaoui, *Costumes et Parures*, 225.

14 *De Soie et d'Or: Broderies du Maghreb*, Exhibition Catalog, Institut du Monde Arabe in partnership with the Musée national des arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, 11 June–29 September 1996 (Paris: Editions de l'Institut du Monde Arabe, 1996).

They were impoverished, stiff, heavy embroideries; many techniques had been lost. Initially, all of Tami Tazi's work consisted in rediscovering them: archival research and documentation, guesswork and the slow recovery in her studio of forgotten gestures and embroidery points. Then came the work of adding a refined touch here, a more sophisticated treatment there, moving or introducing elements: in short, to interpret, to invent motifs, treatments, uses ... Suddenly Tami Tazi liberated the caftan.<sup>15</sup>

### Diversifying Discourses: The 1990s Onward

The mid-1990s witnessed an important intensification in the mediatization and formalization of the Moroccan fashion industry, with the emergence of several key women's lifestyle and fashion magazines, in both the Francophone and Arabic press, and a nationally and internationally recognized runway show, *Caftan*, sponsored by the magazine *Femmes du Maroc*, which dominated the high visibility runway scene from 1996 until the mid-2000s. A significant percentage of participants in this fashion show hail from private fashion design and management schools. Two institutions in particular, modeled on European or North American formats, have had a key impact on the training of emergent designers: College LaSalle, headquartered in Montreal, and ESMOD (l'Ecole Supérieure des Arts et techniques de la Mode), headquartered in Paris, whose Moroccan satellite shut its doors in 2002. Both are located in Casablanca and demand significant financial resources and a high school diploma (the baccalaureate or completion of equivalent schooling), which automatically excludes certain socioeconomic strata of Moroccan society.<sup>16</sup>

In visual media production surrounding events like *Caftan*, in the classrooms and curriculum of rapidly proliferating fashion schools, and in the forms, colors, patterns, and decorations of the garments themselves, we find an overall emphasis on the designer's voice and the incorporation of global influences and

15 Nadia Mezian, *Introduction to Tami Tazi fashion show*, unpublished presentation (Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe 1996).

16 Casa Moda Academy is the most recently established major European-style fashion school, founded in Casablanca in 2010. The academy is a joint public-private partnership between AMITH (Association Marocaine des Industries du Textile et de l'Habillement) and the Moroccan Ministries of Employment and Professional Training; Industry, Commerce and New Technologies; National Education, Higher Education, and Scientific Research; and the Ministry of the Economy and Finance. The school is also supported by the French Agency for Development (AFD).

materials. Mastery of a particular kind of rhetoric, similar to the contemporary “artist’s statement”, and familiarity with foreign references point to a certain socio-economic and educational background shared by many. The majority of high profile designers possess at least a high school diploma and some formal training in private fashion schools, either in Europe or in Moroccan establishments modeled after European or North American institutions, including the aforementioned College LaSalle and ESMOD.

In contemporary fashion schools like College LaSalle, training programs in *stylisme* and *modélisme* seek to differentiate their expertise from the practical, situated knowledge of the anonymous artisan. This reproduces a hierarchical ranking where “modern” technical and design knowledge taught in formal institutions is valorized over the experience-based tailoring and cutting techniques practiced by minimally educated artisans. Thus, while the patterning and cut for traditional garments constitute one aspect of the curriculum, according to the program director of College LaSalle, they are taught from a “modern point of view.” In her words, the orientation leans towards an “interpretation of the traditional cut,” implying critical distance from tradition. However, for the time-consuming decorative hand-finishing of garments, students continue to rely on artisans. These techniques are commonly referred to as “*façon ma’allem*” in the Moroccan fashion press (traditional trim and appliqué decoration). In our conversation, the program director immediately qualified her description of this division of labor: “But you have to watch them closely, because they are just ‘artisans’—illiterate people who don’t know the principles of garment construction”.<sup>17</sup>

The symbolic work of marking designers as individualized artists, different from their traditional counterparts, plays out in other representational domains as well. Lifestyle and women’s magazines present the designer alongside his or her finished product: oftentimes a headshot is accompanied by various images taken from runway shows, or in some instances the name alone may suffice, along with a thematic tagline and an evocative characterization of a unique style. In the rare instances where we see the designer “at work” he or she may be making the final adjustments of the ensemble on the fashion model, or supervising the work of craftsmen. Television specials devoted to individual designers focus on reconstructing life histories and the artist’s “sources of inspiration,” including trips back to natal villages or engagements with specifically Moroccan materials including henna painted textiles and Berber jewellery. Most notably, the programs foreground the voice of the designer, called upon to narrate his or her creative process extensively in one-on-one interviews. This is

---

17 Personal communication, 2004.

in striking contrast with the relative silence and anonymity of the artisan, who is rarely seen outside of the context of her workspace.

### Traditional Dress at Arm's Length

Since the mid-2000s, the virtual monopoly of *Caftan* and its associated sponsors, designers, and institutions on the promotion and constitution of the Moroccan fashion industry has deteriorated with the launch of alternative annual runway events organized by an increasingly diverse spectrum of Moroccan and foreign actors. Most notably, the emergence of two fashion events less firmly attached to the promotion of “traditional Moroccan dress”—Festimode (Casablanca 2006) and Mode Made in Morocco (2007, oscillating between Casablanca and El Jadida)—reflects the opening up of new discursive space and material possibilities. This emergent space exhibits a progressive distancing of Moroccan designers from explicit references, both in language and in garment form, to the category of “traditional Moroccan dress,” and greater license to experiment with design elements drawn from the palette of global cultural references.

The runway show “Mode Made in Morocco,” presided over by prominent French designer Jean-Louis Scherrer and sponsored by the magazine *Maroc Premium*, a high end lifestyle and leisure publication in French, represents a subtle shift away from the coupling of Moroccan fashion with “a national dress heritage.”<sup>18</sup> It does seek to retain, however, some of the ethnic or exotic appeal which garnered attention for Moroccan fashion on the international scene in the first place—a residual affiliation organizers define as “*une touche marocaine*” (a Moroccan touch).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the cooking metaphor fits quite well with the eclectic and cosmopolitan concoction that characterizes both the garments themselves and the language of their descriptions. The participants in this event overlap to a degree with the *Caftan* runway show designers and to a lesser degree with those of Festimode. Mode Made in Morocco also includes an occasional European designer and very often those who foreground their own cultural hybridity. In his personal biography, Adil Soo, a participant in the Spring 2010 runway show, privileges his internal diversity, born of a Moroccan

18 The most recent, and possibly final edition of the show took place in April 2012.

19 Similar in flavor, the event “Fashion Days Maroc” (2009), established by the Fédération de la Couture Traditionnelle Marocaine, features bi-annual runway shows for established and emerging Moroccan designers, as well as a handful of invited foreign designers in Marrakech and Casablanca.

father and a Portuguese-Brazilian mother, inferring the intimate connection between his personal ethos and the aesthetic of his designs: “His style, he defines it like he defines himself: *métis*.”<sup>20</sup> For those lacking a mixed ethnic or national background, another approach consists in conjuring the figure of the cosmopolitan traveler. In his “artist’s statement,” Nabil Dahani, a Rabat born designer living between Marrakech and Paris, describes the ideal wearer of his designs, echoing elements of his own self-image:

Following a year of travel, I imagined the ideal wardrobe of the globe-trotting woman. From Bali to Istanbul, from Venice to Amsterdam, from Paris to Casablanca or even Hong Kong, I observed my traveling companions always looking perfect and elegant. So I thought about creating these twelve models for them. First, four casual ensembles for the day in light colored satin. Easy to wear, these outfits are perfect for strolling through the grand bazaar of Istanbul or the luxurious galleries of the Centrum in Hong Kong. Next comes four tailored dresses in silk satin duchess to visit the Pinot foundation at the Palais Grazia or the glassblowers’ workshops in Murano ...<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the garments produced for this particular collection resemble more closely a series of evening gowns, corseted or flowing jumpsuits, and even a sort of trench coat dress, none of whose forms evoke an association with essentialized images of Moroccan traditional garments. But, as Roland Barthes might point out, the devil is in the details.<sup>22</sup> Upon closer look, much of the finishing techniques and decorative elements draw from Moroccan handwork and tailoring traditions, in contemporary Moroccan fashion parlance: “*façon ma’allem*.” Here again Moroccan fashion relies on the symbolic anchoring to Moroccan artisans, while simultaneously drawing on shapes, fabrics, and language that evoke other places, aesthetics, and cultural forms.

Situated at the opposite end of the spectrum of a more or less vociferous promotion of Moroccan sartorial heritage, Festimode goes further in rejecting the need for overt national or ethnic identity claims to legitimate the tal-

20 Adil Soo for Dominique Sirop, Biography, *Maroc Premium* website, Accessed May 15, 2012, <http://www.marocpremium.org/mode-made-in-morocco/sixieme-edition/haute-couture-moderne/adil-soo.php> (2010).

21 Nabil Dahani, Biography, *Maroc Premium* website, Accessed May 15, 2012, <http://www.marocpremium.org/mode-made-in-morocco/sixieme-edition/haute-couture-moderne/nabil-dahani.php> (2010).

22 Roland Barthes, *Système de la mode* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967).

ents of Moroccan designers.<sup>23</sup> The creators of Festimode, Moroccan designer Bechar el Mahfoudi (a former instructor at College LaSalle and currently teaching at the new Casa Moda Academy) and event organizer Jamal Abdennassar, styled the event from the very beginning as a move away from the limits of cultural stereotypes, with a focus on high quality, handmade prêt-à-porter garments and an aesthetic they define as “*avant-gardiste marocaine*”.<sup>24</sup> Participating designers include Said Mahrouf, Amina Agueznay, Noureddine Amir, and Salima Abdel Wahab, all of whom resist characterizations, both of their collections and their personal creative sources and styles, as exclusively Moroccan. Indeed, appearances of specifically Moroccan materials and forms tend to unsettle traditional placements, treatments, and uses. Noureddine Amir’s use of the hand-woven, lightweight, semi-transparent Bzioui cloth—historically used for men’s formal *jellabas*—in women’s column-style dresses, painted with abstract henna characters recalls traditional Berber practices of henna-dyed garments and head-veils. Amir’s work presents one example of the deconstructed and re-configured relationship to traditional forms and practices. Others, like Mahrouf, eschew almost completely material or discursive references to traditional Moroccan garments. Mahrouf instead articulates a theoretical and critical discourse on form, space, the body, and movement, a language which in some sense reproduces the designer’s style, characterized by the promotional brochure for the 2010 event “*Briser la Glace: Absolument Artiste*” (sponsored by Absolut Vodka) as: “minimalist and conceptual”. Likewise, Mahrouf’s collections are tailored, with clean lines, and little decorative finishing, but often employ bold sculptural assemblages or draping around the neckline and subtle, simple colour palettes.

### Creating Difference: Orientalism Revisited

The previous discussion of the Moroccan fashion and cultural tourism industries clearly demonstrates that certain inhabitants of the “Orient” are skilfully

23 The long-term viability of these initiatives is not at all to be assumed: a 2014 article announces the risk that Festimode will not continue due to flagging support—public and private (Habib Hemche, *Casablanca, capitale de mode ou le rêve inoxydable de Jamal Abdennassar*, Medias24.com 28 January 2014, Accessed August 27, 2014, <http://www.medias24.com/CULTURE-LOISIRS/8590-Casablanca-capitale-de-mode-ou-le-reve-inoxydable-de-Jamal-Abdennassar.html>).

24 “L’Association Marocaine des Créateurs de Mode,” Website, Accessed May 15, 2012, <http://www.amcmode.com/lassociation/presentation>.

engaged in self-representation, at a critical distance from and in dialogue with the categories and forms of traditional dress. However, while contemporary Moroccan fashion designers and industry professionals deftly navigate a course through the designs and discourse of a global fashion system and the language of cultural difference, some voices are notably absent from the conversation. In this respect, post-colonial and colonial representational media and knowledge production coincide: both effectively speak in the place of the anonymous artisan. Without ignoring the potentially limiting and marginalizing power of essentialized representations, I would argue that for contemporary Moroccan designers, these stereotypes have also proven to be useful resources for their own projects and attempts to gain recognition, though they increasingly coexist alongside appeals to cosmopolitan values and other universalisms.

The rhetorical repertoire mobilized by Moroccan designers is a discursive arsenal increasingly available to other Moroccan cultural entrepreneurs, particularly those working in the interior decor and tourism sectors. The past decade has witnessed the destabilization of the boundaries between the social and creative categories of *ma'alle*m and designer in the emergence of a third figure: the *artisan d'art* or *artisan entrepreneur*. This still diffuse category incorporates elements of both *ma'alle*m and designer, producing a named virtuoso who nevertheless epitomizes a collective craft tradition. The rhetoric surrounding *artisans d'art* and *artisans entrepreneurs* emphasizes personal stories and appears throughout francophone lifestyle and design magazines, travel and shopping guides, and Handicrafts Agency media campaigns, including the popular reality television show “*ṣanat blādī*” (Handicrafts of My Country).

The *artisan d'art* or *artisan entrepreneur* is particularly apparent in cities like Marrakech, where the tourism industry, real estate development, and a large expatriate community undergird the artisanal sector. Promoted vigorously by state-supported trade shows like the Riad Art Expo in Marrakech, and abroad, at the salon *Maison et Objets* in Paris, *artisans entrepreneurs* tend to possess sizable production or distribution capacities. Unlike the anonymous “mono-artisan”<sup>25</sup> (working by himself or with one or two assistants), *artisans entrepreneurs* speak for themselves (at least in ways legible to foreign and elite Moroccan clients): they are often comfortable speaking French and/or have a relatively high degree of formal education. The aesthetic of their crafted objects is characterized by a certain “ethnic-chic” style tailored to European and North

---

25 The term “mono-artisan” is a category defined in the Moroccan Handicrafts Agency’s Vision 2015 sectorial development plan as the smallest-scale artisanal operation. The other categories are “PME” (small and medium-sized business), and “acteur de référence” (market leader).



American tastes. Not unlike Moroccan fashion designers positioning themselves within an international fashion system, they are culture brokers of a sort, trading in Moroccan cultural identity in a global market hungry for novelty and difference.

# Middle Eastern Collections of Orientalist Painting at the Turn of the 21st Century: Paradoxical Reversal or Persistent Misunderstanding?\*

*Mercedes Volait*

Collectors—those mythical figures about whom there are still sometimes so many assumptions, approximations, uncertainties, misunderstandings.<sup>1</sup>



In a recent talk, the art historian Marc Gotlieb mischievously credited Edward Said with the rediscovery of Jean-Léon Gérôme: Who had ever heard of this prolific *pompier* painter, cast into oblivion by the death of academicism, before his 1880 *Charmeur de serpents* was chosen for the cover of an early edition of Said's *Orientalism*?<sup>2</sup> Though we can be fairly certain the Palestinian intellectual was not himself responsible for that iconographic choice, there can be no doubt that Orientalist paintings' return to fashion owes much to the Middle East. This is of course not the only facet of the phenomenon: pictorial Orientalism came to be re-assessed in the larger framework of a rehabilitation of the nineteenth century as a whole. A major milestone in that process was the October 20, 1977 decision of the French inter-ministerial council, acting on the

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs. Part of the documentation used in this article was collected during my 2010 stay at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; my thanks to the Center for the opportunities it offered.

1 Suzanne Pagé, preface to *Passions privées: collections particulières d'art moderne et contemporain en France* (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1995), p. 11.

2 'Drame pictural et rôle du spectateur dans l'art de Jean-Léon Gérôme', lecture by Marc Gotlieb (Williams College, Clark Art Institute) delivered at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, February 26, 2010.

initiative of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, to create the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. In its galleries, the enlightened public learned to take a different view of academicism and nineteenth-century official or *pompier* painting, to discover its visual qualities and skilful execution. But as all art professionals—experts, museum curators, exhibition organizers—in contact with the market for Orientalist painting can attest and indeed have attested,<sup>3</sup> it has long been the case that most transactions are made by private or institutional buyers originally from or based in the Middle East, and to a lesser degree North Africa. It is these buyers who are responsible for the record prices of Orientalist painting after nearly half a century of art world indifference. With regard to Said's critique this situation may seem paradoxical, as Roger Benjamin quite rightly pointed out in one of the first texts on the subject.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, if we subscribe to the radical critique of this pictorial genre developed in recent decades, how are we to explain the fact that Turkish, Iranian and Arab collectors have been spending fortunes—an 1876 canvas by Gérôme entitled *Femme circassienne voilée* went for 2.5 million Euros in 2008, a record for the painter to this day<sup>5</sup>—to acquire stereotypical, supposedly disparaging representations of their own societies?<sup>6</sup> More prosaically, how are we to make sense of a phenomenon confined primarily to the closed world of art dealing and the equally closed interiors of powerful private owners, spaces that are by definition not really accessible to researchers? What heuristic and societal value are we to grant to the Middle Eastern devotion to collecting Orientalist paintings once we have acknowledged that the phenomenon concerns no more than a few handfuls of individuals representing a very small segment of their societies?

---

3 Lynne Thornton, 'Le marché des orientalistes', *Les Cahiers de l'Orient* 19 (1990), pp. 259–265; Roger Benjamin, 'Post-colonial taste: non-Western markets for Orientalist art' in Roger Benjamin (ed.), *Orientalism, Delacroix to Klee* (Sydney: The Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2001 [1997]), pp. 32–40; Nicholas Tromans, 'Bringing it home? Orientalist Painting and the Art Market' in Zeynep Inankur, Reina Lewis and Mary Roberts (eds), *The Poetics and Politics of Place: Ottoman Istanbul and British Orientalism* (Istanbul: Pera Museum, 2011), pp. 65–74 (extensive bibliography).

4 Benjamin, 'Post-colonial taste'.

5 Auction, Christie's London, July 2, 2008, lot 42; acquired by the Doha Orientalist Museum (inventory OM 696). Shown in 2011 in Paris (*Jean-Léon Gérôme [1824–1904], L'histoire en spectacle* [Paris: ESFP, 2010, cat. no. 158], p. 276), the work has belonged to a collection in Jordan since 1997.

6 Linda Nochlin, 'The imaginary Orient', in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-century Art and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), pp. 33–59 (first published as Linda Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient', *Art in America* vol. 71, issue no. 5, [May 1983], pp. 119–131, 187, 189, 191).

Museum studies dispel these reservations by recalling the high degree of porosity between private art choices and the shaping of public tastes. Lying dormant in every private collection is a possible common good. Public collections, meanwhile, amount to random groupings of private collections that entered the public domain in the form of donations and acquisitions.<sup>7</sup> We know that the donations to the Louvre that followed on the pillaging of the Napoleonic period were instrumental in shaping the content and contours of the museum's collections, and that acquisition choices are strongly influenced by donors and art dealers (who are sometimes the same individuals).<sup>8</sup> My study of nineteenth-century collectors in Egypt, *Fous du Caire*, shows how the "private passions" of French and Egyptian art lovers, the domestic, everyday "commerce" with Islamic art objects in Orientalist interiors created with architectural salvages, and activities aimed at preserving Egypt's cultural heritage were not only not antinomic but actually worked together to create a whole, ultimately helping to change the way Islamic art was viewed by providing access to the collected artefacts and endowing them with value.<sup>9</sup> My hypothesis here is that we have only to pay serious attention to the objects acquired, who acquires them and what the acquirers say about what they do for the practice of collecting Orientalist art in order to gain a useful perspective for observing a phenomenon of much greater scope; namely, the ambivalences, selective sorting systems and misunderstandings at the core of all cultural interaction.

### A Well-Guarded Secret?

First it should be recalled that Middle Eastern collections of Orientalist paintings have existed for some time, though the phenomenon has not been studied in any detail. The case of the diplomat Khalil-Bey (1831–1879), for whom Courbet painted *L'Origine du monde* (1866) and who caused quite a stir in Paris for his love of gambling, women and erotic imagery, is an exception.<sup>10</sup>

7 Krzysztof Pomian, 'L'art vivant, les collectionneurs et les musées', in *Passions privées*, pp. 31–38; Dominique Poulot, 'Musées, collections, collectionneurs', in 'Musées et collections: pour une histoire de la patrimonialité', *Histoire de l'art* 62 (2008), pp. 3–9.

8 Musée du Louvre (ed.), *Les donateurs du Louvre* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989).

9 Mercedes Volait, *Fous du Caire: excentriques, architectes and amateurs d'art en Égypte (1867–1914)* (Forcalquier: L'archange minotaure, 2009).

10 Michèle Haddad, *Khalil-bey, un homme, une collection* (Paris: Les éditions de l'Amateur, 2000); Roderick Davison, 'Halil Serif Pasha, Ottoman diplomat and statesman', *Journal of*

The ancient and modern art collection assembled from 1865 to 1868 in Paris by this “*parfait honnête homme*,” in Courbet’s words,<sup>11</sup> contained no fewer than 108 objects; it was dispersed by public auction on January 16, 1868, to pay the owner’s gambling debts. The collection contained a few Orientalist works of the first order, including Ingres’ *Bain turc* (1862), now in the Louvre. Together with exhibition loans, auctions are extremely welcome information sources, affording us a peek into otherwise hermetically sealed worlds. The recent obsession with provenance (information now almost systematically indicated in museum text labels and data bases), together with the fact that a great number of sale and exhibition catalogues and inventories can now be consulted online, has changed the situation: practices that used to be difficult to research have become more transparent.

The fact remains that in the nineteenth century the elites and reigning dynasties of the eastern Mediterranean proved good customers for “Orientalist” painting, which at the time had the virtue of being “contemporary art.” The fairly simple, direct relations between the Pasha of Egypt Mehmet-Ali (1769–1849) and the fine arts inspired Gaston Wiet to write a voluminous monograph attesting to the pasha’s frequent contacts with the Orientalist school and his regular commissions.<sup>12</sup> In 1876 the art dealer Goupil furnished a series of French paintings to the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul, among them Fromentin’s *Bords du Nil* (1872) and other works with Oriental subjects. The go-between was an aide-de-camp of the sultan Abdülaziz, Şeker Ahmed Pasha, who had spent some time in Paris and prided himself on his knowledge of painting.<sup>13</sup> The purchases are said to have been recommended by Gérôme himself. Orientalist paintings were also well-represented in Egyptian palaces, alongside eighteenth-century minor masters, Aubusson tapestries and Sèvres porcelain. Each new exhibition or inventory makes it clear how widespread the phenomenon was. The *Oubliés du Caire* exhibition (1994) showed paintings belonging to the prince-regent Muhammed Ali Tawfiq (1875–1955) that were kept in his Manyal Palace in Cairo (now a museum open to the pub-

---

*Ottoman Studies* 2 (1981), pp. 203–221; Francis Haskell, ‘Un Turc et ses tableaux dans le Paris du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *De l’art et du goût, jadis et naguère* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), pp. 362–383.

11 Letter to Gustave Chandey of March 29, 1867, in Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu (ed.), *Correspondance de Courbet* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), p. 273.

12 Gaston Wiet, *Mohammed Ali et les beaux-arts* (Cairo: Dar al-Maaref, 1951).

13 Semra Germaner and Zeynep Inankur, *Constantinople and the Orientalists* (Istanbul: Türkiye bankası, 2002), pp. 117–118; *Osmanlı Saray Koleksiyonundan—From the Ottoman Court Collection*, exhibition catalogue (Dolmabahçe, 2006), p. 80.

lic);<sup>14</sup> they included *L'exécution du janissaire* by Henri Regnault and Gérôme's *La prière*. Special rooms created by the prince-regent in 1938 within his palace also contained paintings by Brest, Belly, Clairin, Girardet and others.<sup>15</sup> A recent publication on the Khedival palace of 'Abdîn, built in Cairo between 1863 and 1874, indicates that most of its painting collection was Orientalist, including works by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, Théodore Frère, Henri Riou, the Briton Horsley and the American George Yevell.<sup>16</sup>

A selection of Orientalist works from the Gazîra museum (closed to the public) that used to figure in Cairo's Modern Art Museum collections (that museum opened in 1931 and closed in 1963), together with works impounded in the 1950s, was shown in 1998 for the opening of the Cairo Palace of Arts, devoted to modern art. This exhibition yielded a precious glimpse into the rich collections of Orientalist paintings of Egyptian subjects assembled by the local elite in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: oil canvases by Carl Vernet, Eugène Fromentin, Théodore Frère, Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, Narcisse Berchère, Théodore Chassériau, Henri Regnault, James Tissot, the Belgian painter Jean Portaels (*Caravane de bédouïns*, 1849), "archaeological" drawings by Adrien Dauzats, and others.<sup>17</sup> Most had not been shown in decades, if ever. The exhibition was presented as a sign of "an uncontested Cultural Apogee in Egypt," and the catalogue stressed the vital role these painters had played in the genesis of modern Egyptian art.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the paintings shown in 1998 were from a sizeable collection assembled by Muhammad Mahmûd Khalîl (1877–1953), a jurist and politician who began buying Impressionist and Orientalist art on the Paris and Cairo markets in the 1920s and considerably increased his acquisitions after the 1940s. We know little of this man, who was not very loquacious, except that he organized the Egypt pavilion at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris, that he later became a senator and president of the Egyptian senate, and that he was elected to France's Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1949 in gratitude for his successful organizing of an exhibition of Orientalist and Egyptian painting in Paris that same year.<sup>19</sup> Educated at Cairo's *Lycée français* and therefore fluent in French, an avid collector

14 Though temporarily closed since December 2010, like most museums in Egypt.

15 Geneviève Lacambre, *Les Oubliés du Caire: chefs-d'oeuvre des musées du Caire* (Paris: Afaa/Rmn, 1994), p. 185.

16 *Abdeen Palace* (Cairo: Cultnat, 2007).

17 *Orientalists*, exhibition catalogue, Cairo, 1998.

18 Ahmed Nawar, Introduction to the *Orientalists* exhibition catalogue, p. 7.

19 *Exposition Égypte-France*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, October–November 1949, catalogue.

who was advised in his purchases by his French wife, Emilienne Luce, whom he had met while studying law at the Sorbonne, Muhammad Mahmûd Khalîl was a founding member of the Société des Amis de l' Art, which organized an annual painting salon in Cairo from 1925. At his death he left behind an impressive collection of over 300 paintings including works by Van Gogh, Gauguin, Degas and others, and approximately 50 sculptures, which he had had installed in a special gallery annex to his Cairo home. Emilienne Luce donated the collection to the Egyptian state in 1960. After a series of vicissitudes, and after being shown in Paris as part of the *Oubliés du Caire* exhibition, the collection was opened to the public in 1995 upon the creation of the Mahmûd Khalîl and His Wife Museum.<sup>20</sup>

The Orientalist paintings from the Mahmûd Khalîl collection shown in 1998 illustrate two *topoi* of the genre that are particularly appreciated today in Egypt and elsewhere: the nude and the Oriental landscape. The first of these was represented by an Ingres odalisque—*Odalisque-Fatima*—and the second by a Marilhat landscape entitled *Vieux-Caire* in the Egyptian exhibition and *Mosquée du Sultan Hasan et bazar au Caire* in *Oubliés du Caire*. The landscape is one of Marilhat's most "topographical" compositions, as he was also given to painting imaginary landscapes. Nude and *veduta* are combined in Fromentin's *Nil* (1876), which is also in the Mahmûd Khalîl collection; in this, a bare-breasted peasant woman occupies the foreground. Mahmûd Khalîl also owned paintings by Chassériau, Frère, Delacroix, Gérôme, Berchère, Crapelet, Belly, Dauzats and Émile Bernard.<sup>21</sup>

What explains the presence of Orientalist paintings in an otherwise primarily Impressionist collection? A concern for balance? Acquisition opportunities? Though prized by new American fortunes in the late nineteenth century, the academic style no longer had many customers in Europe after the 1920s. Were Mahmûd Khalîl's purchases due to national sentiment, a system of identification? We know that the vast majority of Orientalist paintings in the Mahmûd Khalîl Museum are of Egyptian subjects; indeed, national "tropism" is a feature of many collections. The British have a tendency to buy John Frederick Lewis and David Roberts; Italians, Alberto Pasini and Fabio Fabbri; Americans, Frederick Bridgman, and so forth. It is hard to get beyond the "national school" idea, the conventional basis for pictorial classifications. In the Middle East, the

20 Mohamed Salmawy and Mustafa El-Razaz, *Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil: l'homme et le musée* (Cairo: 1995); Geneviève Lacambre, Introduction to *Les Oubliés du Caire*, pp. 17–24; Volait, *Fous du Caire*, p. 197.

21 Muhammad Sidqî al-Gabâkhangî, *Muqtanayyât Muhammad Mahmûd Khalîl al-fannîyya* [The art acquisitions of Muhammad Mahmûd Khalîl] (Cairo: 1995).

painting's subject is what "nationalizes" a work and makes it seem to belong to the country's visual heritage. Egyptians buy views of Cairo; Turks, images of the Bosphorus; Moroccans, landscapes by Majorelle; Algerians, Étienne Dinet's Bou-Saada *baigneuses*.<sup>22</sup> When the collections of Algiers' Musée des Beaux-Arts were being shared out after independence, the Algerian government laid claim to Orientalist paintings as full-fledged components of the national iconography.<sup>23</sup> And in Egypt the taste for Orientalism was not limited to painting. There are several examples of Orientalist architecture in which precise references to Cairo's Mamluk and Ottoman architecture, rather than to a purely fictional Orient, abound. Strict archaeological historicism is often preferred to the extravagances of eclecticism.<sup>24</sup>

### Geographical and Semantic Shifts

With decolonization, the world of Egyptian art lovers—the persons themselves and their *objets d'arts*—collapsed. The 1950s, the years of Bandung and Suez, were dismal years for buying paintings, even of the Orientalist genre. Confiscations and nationalizations dispossessed the reigning families and the established fortunes; limited access to hard currency reduced transactions and circulation altogether. It was only with the 1970s' oil crisis that the market took off again. The end of Europe's thirty-year economic boom sent European countries hunting for new sources of wealth. Great Britain organized an ongoing cultural event to introduce the British public to Islamic civilization in all its facets, mobilizing the support of 32 Muslim countries. The protean World of Islam Festival of 1976 combined exhibitions—of a total of 6000 objects from 250 public and private collections, ranging from Islamic crafts to up-to-the-minute contemporary painting—with public lectures, scholarly presentations and events. Gallery owners discovered the existence of interests—and pecuniary resources—they had never suspected. Brian MacDermot (1930), a financier in contact with new Gulf State fortunes, opened a gallery called the Mathaf (Arabic for "museum") in London in 1975 to take full advantage of the festival dynamic. Initially planning to promote contemporary Arab art, what

22 Benjamin, 'Post-colonial taste'; François Pouillon, *Les deux vies d'Étienne Dinet, peintre en Islam* (Paris: Balland, 1997), pp. 29–30.

23 Jean-Pierre Péroncel-Hugoz, 'Le Musée national des Beaux-arts rénové retrouve l'ensemble de ses collections', *Le Monde*, Apr. 16, 1970.

24 Volait, *Fous du Caire*; Mercedes Volait and Nabila Oulebsir (eds), *L'orientalisme architectural, entre imaginaires et savoirs* (Paris: Picard, 2009).



the Mathaf Gallery encountered was immense Middle Eastern demand for Orientalist art. Arab collections are said to have furnished forty percent of loans to the first major Orientalist painting exhibition, *Eastern Encounters: Orientalist Painters of the Nineteenth Century*, held in London in July 1978 at The Fine Art Society.<sup>25</sup> The 1999 dispersion of the Akram Ojje collection (1918–1991, a Saudi arms dealer of Syrian birth), offered an idea of what these first non-Western collections contained. Acquired between 1975 and 1986 either at auction or directly from Paris gallery owners, the collection's works included paintings by two Austrian artists whose realist brushwork would later fetch handsome prices: Ludwig Deutsch (*The Chess Game* [1896], purchased in 1977) and Rudolf Ernst (*Lessons of the Koran* [undated], purchased in 1981).<sup>26</sup>

Mathaf quickly became the leader in the field but was not the only gallery to move into the niche. In 1976, Patrick and Viviane Berko opened a gallery in Belgium specializing in Orientalist painting that was also quite successful.<sup>27</sup> The Paris art auctioneer Henri Gros, a French specialist of the genre, says he began selling Orientalist art in 1985 and has since organized no fewer than 45 sales.<sup>28</sup> Museums soon followed suit. *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse. European Painters in North Africa and the Near East* was held at London's Royal Academy of the Arts in 1984, then travelled to Washington, D.C.'s National Gallery of Art—the prelude to a long series of cultural events, the latest being *De Delacroix à Kandinsky: l'orientalisme en Europe*, an exhibition which opened in Brussels in 2010 and travelled throughout Europe in 2011.<sup>29</sup> Collector taste turns out to have been a driving force, fuelling business enterprises, exhibition projects, museum acquisitions, and even epistemological transfer. For while the art market changes in accordance with buyer demand and the supply that dealers, experts and auctioneers manage to keep coming even as the vein is being exhausted and the number of fakes rise, that market in turn affects how Orientalist art is understood, to the point of actually altering historiographical categorizations. Pictorial Orientalism was long sold at auctions of nineteenth-century European art as a sub-category of such art. Today, however, most “Islamic art” sales have an “Orientalism” section—the term “Arts of

25 Benjamin, 'Post-colonial taste'.

26 Auction sale no. 9248, Christie's New York, November 1, 1999.

27 Patrick and Viviane Berko and Philippe Cruysmans, *Orientalist Painting-Peinture Orientaliste* (foreword by Philippe Roberts-Jones, head curator at the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Brussels) (Brussels: Editions Laconti, 1982).

28 Preface to the 'Orientalisme et art islamique' sale of December 15, 2008, Gros et Deletréz, Paris (no page number).

29 *De Delacroix à Kandinsky: l'orientalisme en Europe* (Paris: Hazan, 2010).

the Orient” was invented to accommodate this addition. Conversely, “Orientalism” sales are increasingly likely to have an “Islamic art” section, and even a modern Arab, Turkish and Iranian art section, in a broad continuum dictated by the direct relations that exist today between Europe and the space of the Orient and encompassing anything related to that geography.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, Orientalism is moving out of the European field and into the “non-Western” one—the latest neologism produced by postcolonial theory—thereby following art market demand (buyers for the two segments are the same), much to the displeasure of specialists at pains to argue the need for a strict separation between “Islamic art,” “Contemporary art,” and “Orientalism” on the grounds that only the first of these is “authentic.”<sup>31</sup> We can predict with some confidence that market restructuring of this sort will lead to changes in the academic field.

Moreover, trade in Orientalist painting has recently relocated to the eastern Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula, to get closer to its clientele. In 2009 Sotheby’s opened a branch in Istanbul, and that same year (March 18–19, 2009) held its first auction of Islamic, contemporary and Orientalist art in Qatar. Other major houses have developed similar strategies: Christie’s has been operating in Dubai since 2006; Bonhams since 2007. And there is the more recent invention of the acronym MENASA (Middle East, North Africa, South Asia), used now by gallery owners to promote their quest for emerging markets. The first MENASA art fair was held in Beirut from July 11 to 13, 2011.<sup>32</sup>

### The Emergence of a New Public Space?

Even more striking is how Middle Eastern collecting of Orientalist painting has come out into the light of day in the last few years. There is no dearth of signs that Middle Eastern collectors are making multiform moves into the public sphere. In 2008 the Egyptian Shafik Gabr, one of the biggest buyers of Orientalist painting in the Middle East, brought out a complete catalogue of his collection, a luxury edition published by ACR,<sup>33</sup> which refers to the initials

30 For example, the Gros et Delettrez sale of June 21–22, 2010, in Paris, which brought together Islamic objects, Orientalist paintings and paintings by Turkish and Algerian artists.

31 Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, ‘The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field’, *The Art Bulletin* 85 no. 1 (Mar. 2003), pp. 152–184.

32 Information kindly transmitted to me by Marie-Hélène Bayle.

33 Dina Nasser-Khadivi (ed.), *The Shafik Gabr Collection* (Paris: ACR, 2008). A new augmented edition was released in 2012 under the title *Masterpieces of Orientalist Art: The Shafik Gabr Collection*.

of the publisher, Ahmed Chaouki Rafif, a Moroccan expert to whom we owe most of the monographs on Orientalist painting published in the last three decades.<sup>34</sup> When Thames and Hudson undertook to publish the names of the Top 100 Arab, Turkish, and Iranian personalities involved in art patronage in all its forms at home as well as in diaspora (102 names actually), few collectors or patrons chose to remain anonymous.<sup>35</sup> It became possible to put a name and a face to some of the individuals responsible for the prices of Orientalist art, and to appreciate the paintings *in situ*; for example, in the apartments of Sheikha Salama bint Hamdan al-Nahyan, first lady of Abu Dhabi, where a Picasso may be seen in close proximity to a Rudolf Ernst (*La Cueillette des roses*), Islamic ceramics and modern Egyptian painting.<sup>36</sup> During the 2010 celebrations of Doha as capital of Arab culture—just as Istanbul was assuming the same role for Europe—came the momentous opening of Qatar’s Orientalist Museum. The institution claims to be the only one of its kind in the world. In the short decade leading up to the opening it assembled around 900 first-order works, ranging from the early sixteenth century and encompassing all ramifications of Orientalism up to the twenty-first. The Qatar museums include precious photography collections (daguerreotypes, original prints by the great photography “primitives”) that strongly emphasize the Middle East. These two initiatives (the Orientalist museum and the photographic collection) manifest not only the Qatari strategy of achieving economic development through culture but also the desire to regain control of the discourse on self. In the words of an advisor to the Emir of Qatar, Yusuf Ahmad Al-Homaid, “All in all, the presentation of these works comes off as a reclamation of history, a way of ‘de-Orientalizing’ the exotic scenes. We’re recapturing the culture and trying to present it again.”<sup>37</sup>

Provenance indications for paintings loaned in 2011 to the G r me retrospective at the Mus e d’Orsay or the traveling *De Delacroix   Kandinsky* exhibition offer tangible evidence of this new willingness to be known. Lenders’ names now figure not only in catalogue acknowledgments but in painting identifica-

34 Adrian Dannatt, ‘Orientalism and the art market’, *Artnet Magazine*, March 17, 2009; <http://www.artnet.com/magazines/features/dannatt/dannatt3-17-09.asp>, accessed on April 5, 2010.

35 Hossein Amirsadeghi (ed.), *Art and Patronage: The Middle East* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010).

36 Ibid., pp. 122–123.

37 Quoted in Michael Wise, ‘Bridging the Gulf: Is Doha, Qatar, the New Cultural Capital of the Middle East?’ *Travel + Leisure*, July 2007; [http://www.michaelzwise.com/articleDisplay.php?article\\_id=96](http://www.michaelzwise.com/articleDisplay.php?article_id=96), accessed on Aug. 10, 2011.

tion information: “New York, Wassim Rassamny” for *The Dream* by Fabio Fabbi (c. 1880–1914) or “Doha, Orientalist Museum” for another *Dream* (1875), this one by José Villegas y Cordero. And private collectors are preoccupied by the question of their social role. On January 15, 2011, a few great collectors of the region, including the Iranian Farhat Farjam and the Emirati Sultan Saoud al-Qassemi, held a roundtable discussion in Sharjah on the social responsibility of art collectors in contexts where there are no public structures for presenting art. Is a kind of public space emerging out of the wings of auction rooms, galleries and artistic foundations, all structures whose numbers are growing in the Middle East?

### What the Collectors Have to Say: the Najd, Dahesh, Gabr Collections

Now that collectors have made their identities known, what do they have to say? Or rather, what are they said to have to say, since others often speak for them? One of the oldest substantial Orientalist painting collections assembled after the market took off is the Najd collection, today stored in Geneva. The owner is a Saudi businessman whose identity has never been made public; the collection was developed by the Mathaf Gallery in the 1980s. According to the 1991 *catalogue raisonné*, the Najd contains 156 works, including 24 by Gérôme, 28 by Ludwig Deutsch and another 28 by Rudolf Ernst.<sup>38</sup> Brian MacDermot, founder and director of the Mathaf, sheds some light on the *raison d'être* of this collection in his preface to the catalogue. The owner's aim was to choose paintings representing “true customs and traditions of the Arab peoples.” The author of the catalogue notes specifies that Deutsch's *The Chess players* (1904), of which the Najd collection contains one of many existing versions, is “probably a mixture of personal experience and clever reconstruction from objects and photographs collected at home.”<sup>39</sup> “Surely these paintings executed in such splendid detail by European artists form part of Arab heritage,” MacDermot adds.<sup>40</sup> In the end it matters little whether this is pure sales hype or expresses the owner-client's profound conviction. What counts is that it is a commonly held view of art lovers and connoisseurs today, outside the narrow academic circles of postcolonial critique. Orientalist painting captivates by what it restores, indi-

38 Caroline Juler, *Najd collection of Orientalist paintings* (London: Manara, 1991).

39 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

rectly, of the Middle Eastern past. The Arabic stamp used to mark Najd collection pieces is quite explicit: “Madjmû’a al-Najd lil-Lawhât al-Charqiyya” (“The Najd collection of Oriental paintings”). Orientalism has been Orientalized.

The most extreme example of external mediation in assembling a set of Orientalist works is the Dahesh collection, located in New York City. The Dahesh Museum of Art is named after Salim Moussa Achi (1909–1984), a curious figure born in Jerusalem and raised in Beirut who discovered at a very young age that he was endowed with supernatural powers, a conviction that led him to take the pseudonym “Dahesh”—“inspiring wonder” in Arabic—in the 1930s and to develop a universalistic, trans-denominational spiritual doctrine that provoked the hostility of the Catholic Church, which led to the loss of his Lebanese citizenship in 1944 and forced him into exile. When he recovered his citizenship in 1953, Dr Dahesh was able to return to Lebanon, but he continued to travel a great deal. He died in an accident in New York, where he still has followers. The traditional account is that in the 1930s he began acquiring paintings by nineteenth-century academic artists and other material concerning them, continuing to do so throughout his life thanks to the resources brought in by his spiritual publications. The idea of creating a fine arts museum in Lebanon seems to have taken shape in the 1940s, at a time when Beirut had only a Museum of Oriental Antiquities. The outbreak of civil war in the country precluded realizing this project. In 1975 the collection was sold to close relatives, the Zahid family. Mervat Zahid, who is of Turkish origin and married to a Saudi businessman, was living with her children in Beirut at the time. The family migrated to the United States the following year, taking the collection with it. In 1984 Dr Dahesh died, leaving Mervat Zahid a substantial enough inheritance to carry out his museum project. The Dahesh Museum of Art was legally created in 1987 but did not open to the public until 1995. With its 1792 artworks and 50,000 books, the collection did not readily lend itself to exhibition, especially in a city already saturated with museums. Most of the paintings are modest not to say poorly executed, since price was a primary acquisition criteria. Another constraint was Dr Dahesh’s interests. Centered as it was around realism, mythological subjects, and works whose moral teaching was consistent with his own spirituality, the collection did not have much aesthetic coherence. The task of finding a clear and attractive main theme for the new institution fell to the American anthropologist Flora Kaplan, head of New York University’s museum studies program.<sup>41</sup> The Museum’s first publication, dating from 1993, set the tone:

---

41 This information, obtained in the interview-based investigation into the institution (see Alia Nour-Elsayed, “The Making of the Dahesh Museum of Art: an Account of its Founding,

The Dahesh Museum is rooted in European and Middle Eastern humanist tradition. Its collections ... are intended to express the notion of art as universal truth ... In a period of conflicts and divisiveness around the world, it is both a labor of love and a demonstration of responsibility to honor a promise given, and to offer the public an oasis for quiet contemplation and renewed faith in the human spirit expressed through art.<sup>42</sup>

That same year the curator David Farmer, a specialist on the Renaissance but with significant museum experience, was hired to head the Dahesh Museum, identify the collection's strong points, and figure out how to develop it further. Only 47 works in the collection were of any value (including Orientalist paintings by Frère, Clairin and Carl Vernet). A possible niche was identified—European academic art, including Orientalism—and it was this acquisition strategy that was pursued. From 1995 to 2005, acquisitions and donations (which the museum began receiving in 2001) enriched the collection by 200 works, including paintings by Alma-Tadema, Bouguereau, Cabanel, Delaroche, Doré, Fabre, Gérôme, Lecomte de Nouÿ, Leighton, Merson, Troyon, Vernet, and others. These new holdings fuelled a rich program of exhibitions of French and British art as well as academic symposia, thus fully legitimizing the enterprise. When at last the museum opened in 1995 it won praise from the public and critics alike, but it closed in 2007 when no long-term solution could be found for housing the collection. Traveling exhibitions continue to be organized and a store in Manhattan sells derivative products while the collection waits for permanent premises.

The Shafik Gabr collection, installed in a vast residence in the stylish Qatamiyya Heights section of Cairo, presents quite another configuration. Gabr speaks in his own name and wrote a long preface to his collection catalogue, published in 2008. He regularly has himself photographed and gives interviews to journalists. His is among the profiles in Thames and Hudson's *Art and Patronage: The Middle East* (2010), and the internet abounds with portraits of him. We can assume that these are all part of a carefully devised public relations program.<sup>43</sup> Shafik Gabr, born in 1954, currently heads a powerful investment group present in 32 countries and involved in such diverse enterprises as steel, oil, real estate, publishing and retail. His diplomat father made him pay for his higher education, and he calls himself a self-made man. Gabr's first art

---

Ten-Year History, Academic Art Collection and Exhibitions', Master's thesis in Museum professions, Seton Hall University, 2005), rectifies information available on internet.

42 Ibid., p. 16

43 See <http://gabr.com/art/index.html> for a press kit on the collection.

purchases, made at the age of 20, were of historical photographs of Egyptian subjects. He himself practices photography during trips to his home country, elsewhere in Africa and in Asia. He bought his first painting in Paris in 1993 for a few thousand dollars, a work by the hyperrealist painter Ludwig Deutsch—a logical choice for someone interested in photography of Egypt. By 2010 his collection contained 100 pieces and was estimated at \$62 million. The catalogue relates the order in which pieces were acquired and explicitly identifies realism as a fundamental choice criterion.

### Celebrating Private Experience

For Gabr, in whose understanding the Orientalist movement continued up to the 1950s, there are two types of Orientalists: those who carefully painted what they saw and those who gave their imagination free range without ever leaving the studio. He is only really interested in promoting the first variety, and likes to say they were “global artists.” Next to views of the Nile (by Crapelet, Frère, Roberts, Weeks and Pasini), the collection’s major focus is street scenes and images of Cairo crafts, particularly as captured by Deutsch, Ernst, Rudolf Weiss, Paul Joanovitch and Swoboda. One obsession of Gabr’s is representations of curiosity shops—a direct allusion to his own past-time? The clear priority given to Egyptian subjects does not preclude an interest in painters of North African realities: Dinet, Bridgman, Tornai, Deckers, and Styka also figure in his collection.

For me it is more than a collection of paintings; it represents a personal journey I have made, a passion I have, and a message I want to pass on.

There are several components to that message. The first is to celebrate artistic experience of the Middle East rather than scholarly uses of that experience:

The Middle East has always been a crossroads between East and West. But it is a meeting place that is so often stained with blood. It is a place that some visitors have chosen to exploit. Today it is oil. In the 19th century it was our artistic heritage. Important though the work of those early Egyptologists was, very often their explorations were carried out with dubious intentions. At the same time, their fellow countrymen were carrying heavy easels and cameras around the country. Maybe this is why I feel a deep respect for, and affinity with, the artists of my collection. They were respectful onlookers. They could sit at a street corner and find

in an everyday scene (that you can still see in Cairo's streets today, as in Deutsch's *A Gathering Around the Morning News*) something that touches the essence of our culture.<sup>44</sup>

The second is to urge cultures to respect each other:

Whatever they chose to paint, these artists were fascinated by and anxious to record our world, our customs, our architecture, our habits. We owe them a great debt, because although much of what they saw lives on today in our streets and villages, we constantly need to be reminded of the richness and value of our culture.

There is no doubt in my mind that the artworks in my collection are more than superb examples of the painters' art—they have been carefully selected to contribute to the message that pervades my life's work, which is a lesson I first learnt from my grandfather who taught me the importance of working for and helping your own community; we should be proud of our heritage, we ignore our roots at our peril, and above all, we should, as these artists did, respect the cultures of the others.<sup>45</sup>

From this follows the third component: to instil pride. One of Shafik Gabr's favorite paintings is Deutsch's *The Palace Guard* (c. 1900–1902), which he acquired in 2006 in New York for a mere \$1.6 million. "Head aloft, shoulders thrust back, a Nubian soldier stands fearsome sentry in front of a towering carved-wood entrance, his vein-laced forearms gripping a lustrous spear." "It has intricate detail, great light," Gabr muses, pointing to the guard's imperious gaze. "That's pride."<sup>46</sup> The 2008 acquisition of Gérôme's chaste *Jeune fille égyptienne* (1877) is part of the same plan to restore Arab dignity.<sup>47</sup>

Lofty considerations such as these do not preclude humor from having a place in the collection, for Gabr has also been taken with the facetious canvases of the Hungarian Gyula Tornai, namely *Connoisseurs*, painted in Tangier in 1892. According to the catalogue note, this oil canvas shows "a group of Arab men look in wonder and consternation at an Orientalist painting before

44 *The Shafik Gabr Collection*, pp. 6–7.

45 *Ibid.*

46 Devon Pendleton, 'Why Orientalist Art Is Hot', *Forbes Magazine*, April; 13, 2009; <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2009/0413/062-oriental-art-embracing-the-past.html>, accessed on 5 April 2010.

47 Auction, Christie's London, July 2, 2008, lot 92.



them.”<sup>48</sup> The painting depicts a stall full of copper objects and several figures—another allusion to Gabr’s taste for images of merchants? Amused curiosity and perplexity seem the best words to describe the expressions on the faces of the five men as they discover and examine the painting on its easel; a box of paints lies open on the ground below. Are they intrigued to see a representation of themselves? They seem to be checking the accuracy of every detail. Depicting what might have been the end of a pose session, the painter has turned his models into live subjects, depicting in the painting itself what is “behind its scene,” brilliantly capturing an extraordinary moment of truth. Realist “snapshots” such as these, the tribute rendered to local “connoisseurship” and of course the *mise-en-abyme* of the subject (the painting within a painting that in turn refers to other paintings in the collection) are the sort of things that delight new collectors of this pictorial genre.

The taste for ethnographic, narrative painting with a photographic substratum has probably something in it of Proust’s madeleine. How could Gabr’s acquisition of Gustav Bauernfeind’s *A Street Scene, Damascus* not also owe something to memory of his own experience? That painting is one of the rare Orientalist works to depict Europeans: the painter has represented himself in the centre of the crowd as if he wished to share his personal experience of the Syrian capital. Gabr says he chose this painting not only because it is an Orientalist work but also because it features the only self-portrait of the artist known to this day. I am tempted to add that the painting spoke to him with particular force because he himself has surely seen such sudden gatherings, in response to the presence of a camera or a display of pages in a drawing notebook. Multi-level identification games are also perceptible in a photograph of Shafik Gabr posing in front of a painting by Emile Deckers (1943) entitled *Portrait of Three Men, Algiers*, showing men in turbans depicted as Algerian tribal chieftains. The similarity of the *four* men is striking—how could the *rapprochement* thus effected not be intentional? So it would seem possible to resemble an Algerian chieftain, identify with a German artist in the streets of Damascus and exalt the proud bearing of an ebony-skinned palace guard. In doing these things, Gabr is playing with—and winning out against—stereotypes, which he also does in recalling the ambiguity of his own name (in Egypt he is readily assumed to be a Christian though he is in fact a Muslim) or noting that his favorite artist, Ludwig Deutsch, was probably a Jew.<sup>49</sup>

Mean spirits will be quick to mock the naiveté of Gabr’s intercultural agenda and the split he establishes between art and science (between the scholarly use

48 *The Shafik Gabr Collection*, p. 255.

49 Dannatt, ‘Orientalism and the Art Market’.

and artistic valorisation of Middle Eastern resources); quick to point out the narcissism of this exhibition of self and the distinction strategies of which it is a part. In any case, the coherence of his undertaking is remarkable. Acquisition by acquisition, his collection comes to filter and model the way Arab reality was looked at and, by ricochet, the way Western art can be looked at, thereby giving new meaning to the paintings collected. The corrections now made to painting identifications are a side effect of Middle Eastern collectionism, with its love of veracity. A fine example is Deutsch's *A Gathering around the Morning News* (1885), initially sold in 1974 as titled *A Cairo Mosque* (sic) before being renamed two years later *A Cairo Scene*, and finally receiving its present title in 2006—while waiting to be given some new meaning?

### Dialogue of the Deaf

Shafik Gabr is not the only collector in Egypt to defend Orientalist painting as a kind of visual ethnography capable of capturing and magnifying a cultural essence. As the great Cairo art dealer Sherwet Shafei, specialist of painters of Egyptian modernity, put it in 2010:

It was through the Orientalists that we became aware of the essence and magic of the Orient and the way in which they discovered and translated that essence to their works. They were enchanted by the light of the Orient, and the civilization, traditions, and architecture of Egypt whether it was pharaonic, Coptic, or Islamic. They recorded their work in magnificent paintings, sculptures, and lithographs. The works by Orientalist and foreign painters who lived in Egypt include some by Ervand Demirdjian, Pierre Beppi-Martin, Roger Bréval, Charles Boeglin, Nicola Forcella, and Milo De Ross. Their works recorded scenes from everyday life in Cairo, Alexandria, Luxor, and Aswan as well as the Nilotic scenery that was predominant in their work. Scenes of café life and market places provide examples of how Egyptians as well as foreigners lived in Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century. These artists ... depicted the various parts of Fatimid Cairo, its souks, mosques, *wikalas*, and alleyways, in an enchanting manner that remains their most enduring legacy to the world of modern Egyptian art, at both the local and international levels.<sup>50</sup>

---

50 Mona Abaza, *Twentieth-Century Egyptian Art: The Private Collection of Sherwet Shafei* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2011), p. 187.

No doubt this ode to Orientalist painting and European artists living in Egypt in the twentieth century (Bréval lived in Cairo from 1920 to 1945, Beppi-Martin from 1922 to 1954) is characteristic of the nostalgia for the “Belle Epoque” that made itself felt in the 1980s and constituted a major component of the discourse of broad if marginal swathes of Egyptian society all the way up to the Arab spring of 2011. A reaction to Nasserism and the authoritarianism that ensued; nostalgia for some lost “golden age” of the Middle East corresponding, for those who feel it, to precisely that *fin de siècle* period.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, what it expresses is a clear view of Orientalism as a kind of historical veracity and a means of transmitting Oriental culture. One smiles to see European art history and criticism engaging in contortions of quite the opposite sort in their attempt to renew Orientalism’s virginity after the attacks it was subjected to at the hands of “critical theory” enthusiasts; i.e., working to reconstruct ties between Orientalism and the avant-garde, putting forward the notion that the painting of Matisse, Klee or Kandinsky is characterized by “modernist” Orientalism, an Orientalism tending toward abstraction and perhaps the very source of that artistic development.<sup>52</sup> This point of view has also led to magnifying the mediating role played by the discovery of Islamic art in the shaping of Abstraction seen as a genre resulting from artistic encounters with the East, whether that encounter is called Orientalist or not.<sup>53</sup> But whatever one thinks of these aesthetic revisions, the fact remains that they are quite remote from the motivating concerns of Middle Eastern collectors smitten with Orientalism.

Current events in pictorial Orientalism thus represent a new dialogue of the deaf between the two shores of the Mediterranean. The question of the nude in painting and its place in these collections is another illustration. Who has not heard it said that the taboo of immodesty cannot be overcome in the Arab world and that nudes are simply not painted there, much less shown? Officials at the Louvre Abu Dhabi are ritually questioned on the supposed impossibility of such acquisitions for the future collection, and on the importance of keeping Christian iconography to a minimum—two received ideas that simply are not borne out by the purchases made.<sup>54</sup> It is true that

51 Mercedes Volait, ‘La “Belle Epoque” en Égypte: registres, rhétoriques et ressorts d’une invention patrimoniale’, *Egypte-Monde arabe* 5–6 (2009), pp. 35–67.

52 Roger Benjamin, ‘Le voyage en Orient: de l’orientalisme moderniste’, in *De Delacroix à Kandinsky*, pp. 205–224.

53 Rémi Labrusse, “‘Révélations,’ Selon Matisse; selon Klee” in Rémi Labrusse (ed) *Islamophilies* (Paris: Somogy, 2011), pp. 287–294.

54 Talk by Laurence des Cars at the EHESS, May 31, 2011. This does not mean, however, that the Louvre Abu Dhabi has no specific arrangements for presenting such works.

cloths may be tied around sculptures of nudes in Egypt—in a school context, for example.<sup>55</sup> Private parts may be blurred in published material.<sup>56</sup> But all the major Middle Eastern collections include and have included nudes. Akram Ojeh had a nude by Bouguereau (*La Vague*, 1896) in his collection, dispersed, as mentioned above, in 1999. Gérôme's comely *Almeah*<sup>57</sup> (1873; now at the New York Metropolitan Museum on long-term loan), her breasts not exactly concealed by a swath of transparent muslin, is part of the Najd collection. And as Kirsten Scheid has shown for Lebanon from the 1920s to 1940s, paintings of nudes were not hidden from Beirutis or eschewed as shameful.<sup>58</sup>

Mohammed Saïd Farsi (1935), a Saudi architect and urbanist who was mayor of Jeddah from 1972 to 1986, also had paintings of nude women in his collections, as attested by catalogues on pieces put up for sale in 2010.<sup>59</sup> Dr Farsi (given name Mohammad Salah al-Farès but he finds the shorter version more convenient), who commissioned great public works from European and Arab sculptors—including Joan Miro, Henry Moore, Hans Arp, Alexander Calder, Salah Abdulkarim and Aref El-Rayess—for Jeddah's public squares,<sup>60</sup> was a great lover of modern Egyptian art,<sup>61</sup> particularly the works of Mahmoud Said, a painter who worked in Alexandria from 1956 to 1963, where, like many young Arab men of his generation, Farsi had come to study architecture. "Experiencing the enchanted atmosphere of 1950s Alexandria deeply influenced my

55 Personal observation in 2004 in a secondary school for girls located in a former sultan's palace in Heliopolis: two female nude sculptures by Tito Angelini (1806–1878, a Neapolitan sculptor in vogue in the Ottoman empire), impossible to remove, were "dressed" instead.

56 See, for example, *Al Tahra Palace, a Gem in a Majestic Garden* (Cultnat, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2009), p. 164. Such censorship is not applied very conscientiously because other nudes in the same work escaped it (see p. 195).

57 Also called *Jeune femme à la pipe* and *Jeune femme arabe sur un seuil de porte*.

58 Kirsten Scheid, 'Necessary nudes: *Hadâtha* and *Mu'âshira* in the lives of modern Lebanese', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010), pp. 203–230. My thanks to François Pouillon for informing me of this article.

59 Collections of Islamic art, European art and modern Egyptian art sold in three sessions: Christie's Dubai on April 27, 2010, and October 26, 2010, and Christie's Paris on November 9, 2010. The Paris branch specializes in modern Middle Eastern art and the nudes were auctioned in that session.

60 A total of 400 commissioned works; see Hani Mohammed Said Farsi, *Jeddah, City of Art* (London: Stacey, 1991).

61 Sobhy Al-Sharouny, *A Museum in a Book: The Farsi Art Collection, the Egyptian Works Owned by Dr. Mohammed Saïd Farsi* (Cairo, 1998).

artistic sensibility,” he recently explained.<sup>62</sup> Is the “carnal Egypt”<sup>63</sup> he fell in love with then still a reality or already only a memory? In fact, the voluptuous nudes by Mahmoud Said that figure in Dr Farsi’s collection—*Nu sur sofa vert* (1938), *Nu accoudé au divan vert* (1943), *Nu aux bracelets en or* (1946)<sup>64</sup>—date from before his stay in Alexandria, whereas Said’s Egyptian landscapes and popular iconography were strictly contemporaneous with that stay. Nonetheless, this man who would later become a patron of the arts and messenger of cultural tolerance and universalism<sup>65</sup> was willing to include nudes in his collection. It is amusing to note that for today’s European experts this set of paintings by Said attests to “the universal language of 1930s international modernism,” whereas yesterday’s art critics in Egypt found it to be finely executed Orientalism—rather than the junky variety.<sup>66</sup>

A “revolution” in the sense of “circle” has taken place in the eastern Mediterranean with regard to Orientalist painting, and the rotation has been in virtually the opposite direction from the one in Europe. Disqualified after independence, the genre has made a come-back in many ways, propelled by new readings. The way Orientalist painting is currently received in the Middle East may be perceived as a kind of well-deserved return to the lands that inspired it—a civilized version of the restoration of antiques clamorously demanded by the political authorities. Meanwhile, the young Egyptian artist Youssef Nabil’s colorized photographs, with their wink at Orientalism and their controversial subjects (nude *men*, unorthodox uses of Christian iconography), collected today by Tunisian, Australian and Emirati art lovers, are clear examples of the kitsch and “queer” aesthetics that the taste for Orientalism is currently assimilating.

It is important to “listen” to all these voices, to “take them seriously,” as the historian Bernard Lepetit suggested in one of his last texts,<sup>67</sup> instead of disqualifying them from the outset for not meeting our expectations. It is also important to probe the resistances they awaken in us, the discomfort and uneasiness

62 *Tableaux orientalistes et art moderne arabe et iranien*, auction at Christie’s Paris, November 9, 2010, presentation of the Farsi collection.

63 Gabriel Boctor, *Mahmoud Saïd* (Cairo: Editions Aladin, 1952), p. 14.

64 In 1952 this last painting belonged to another architect, Abou Bakr Khairat; *ibid.*, reproduction n.p.

65 In 1996 Dr Farsi left funds to Washington, D.C.’s American University to endow a Chair of Islamic Peace.

66 Valérie Saportas, ‘Raretés du Moyen-Orient’, *Le Figaro*, Nov. 4, 2011; Gabriel Boctor, p. 14.

67 Bernard Lepetit, ‘L’histoire prend-elle les acteurs au sérieux?’ *Espaces-Temps* 59–60–61 (1995), pp. 112–122.

they provoke. This new “taste for Orientalism” is not dissimilar (though admittedly the scales are different) from the “colonial nostalgia” so brilliantly analysed by the anthropologist William Bissell.<sup>68</sup> We find it compelling because it goes against our received ideas, however politically correct—and profitable on the academic market—they may be. Received ideas and distastes are both worthy of investigation.

---

68 William Cunningham Bissell, ‘Engaging colonial nostalgia’, *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2005), pp. 215–248.

# After Orientalism: Returning the Orient to the Orientals\*

*Jean-Claude Vatin*

## Moving beyond Orientalism

Though we have now supposedly moved beyond Orientalism, we are still paying liabilities on that particular estate. Nonetheless, perspectives have changed. We no longer think of the old Orientalism as a uniform phenomenon consisting exclusively of productions by Western writers, artists and scholars. We have learned to differentiate between the contributions of explorers and sailors, merchants and churchmen, soldiers and politicians, writers and painters, travelers of many different stations, collectors and amateurs, pilgrims and tourists, researchers, journalists, emigrants and immigrants. Coming from Europe (and America), they all partook in constructing various Orients, an activity that was for some scientific, for others artistic, while for still others it was conceived in terms of criteria that pertain above all to the demands of the imaginary. They all had a calling, either to discover the worlds they observed or to eroticise them by ascribing fictional characteristics to them. The fact is that we have been led to revise our hypotheses and to conclude that the paradigms that applied in past times—paradigms such as domination and sectorization, the need to separate the various disciplines implicated in Orientalism, the notion that aesthetic and scholarly views, noble and popular ones, were disparate and out of synch with each other—are no longer relevant. They have yielded to a broader understanding that both sees and seeks to account for interconnections, combinations, and anastomoses.

Moreover, we are aware that what has been playing the role of counter-Orientalism (or anti-Orientalism) for the last half-century has many features in common with the Orientalist practices and discourses of the past. The two are different but also connected to each other to a greater or lesser extent by way of adventitious roots and subterranean transmission—what Gilles Deleuze called “rhizomes.” But what has probably changed the most since the earlier ways and mores were condemned is that those who in traditional Orientalist thinking—and until quite recently—were considered both *subjects*—that is, subject to

---

\* Translation by Amy Jacobs.

a foreign power—and *objects*—“objects” of study—have now been brought back into the picture. The point is to give Oriental actors back their role in past and present perceptions and interpretations of their worlds and to take into account their own interventions in those worlds and in the spaces of dialogue that have been created between Orientals and Occidentals and amongst Orientals themselves. We must therefore rethink Western typologies of the Orient in relation to what these local interlocutors—too long ignored or thought of as simple auxiliaries—have to say. A new construction site is open, and it should allow for the taking into account of an entire range of reactions and recreations, including all the materials of a Western pseudo-heritage, one that has been variously accepted (at least partially), assimilated or overcome, a heritage integrated into the work of identification and the development of an indigenous “patrimony”, a heritage that has involved not only critical revisions and new explorations but also borrowings and re-appropriation, and moves not only to Orientalize but also to Westernize.

Returning today to Orientalism and its critique means taking up the task of reconstructing, casing and dressing, and *inventing* several Orients—“overlapping territories,” as Edward Said phrased it—with vague borders, territories whose specificities cannot really be analysed using a single comparative system. It means taking on separate and “entangled” histories of a number of places, histories, narratives, and encounters with subsets of the Oriental world: of historiographical interpretations derived from pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial experiences; of competitive trading; of conflicts and wars; and of chronologies likely to run parallel to each other rather than intersect. It also means assessing primarily European schools of thought and foreign language training, all of which involved the use of particular methods and which focused on societies and territories belonging to a particular sphere of dependence or influence: the Dutch in Indonesia, the British in India, and the French in North Africa, to mention only the most obvious. And it means returning to a mass of scholarly and less scholarly studies, starting with the first conference of Orientalists in Paris in 1873.

Lastly, it means moving on to the various stages of counter-Orientalism, a phenomenon itself divided into differing approaches and circles, which itself has been forced to confront other types of diversity. Orientalists’ views on the multifaceted Orient have been denounced from many quarters for the viewers’ collusion with colonialism, but those same perspectives have also been re-appropriated by nations in the East and West, in the former colonies as well as the former empires. The Third World-ism that dominated in the 1960s and 1970s and was celebrated in Bandung as early as April 1955 accompanied the last major decolonization processes. A short time later, what had been political



condemnations became critiques of writings with claims to scientificity. Those writings came to be thought of as genetically tainted by the colonial situation and the relations of dependence between the locales and populations which were studied on the one hand and the colonizers on the other. And it was in Europe itself—in Great Britain and France at nearly the same time<sup>1</sup>—that retrospective critique of colonial productions was first manifested, before it was systematized. A new generation of researchers from both West and East undertook to reread and reinterpret works now understood to bear the stain of colonial original sin. *Orientalism*, published in 1978, marked that earlier generation as much if not more than the succeeding one.

### The Critique Expands

In the 1990s this critical re-reading, this deconstruction and disenchantment, began affecting Western higher education systems and research. In North America the discipline known as area studies lost much of its legitimacy to gender and cultural studies, not to mention postcolonial and subaltern studies. In Europe, particularly in France, the great and noble disciplines of philology, linguistics, the history of civilizations and some sectors of archaeology, to name but a few, seemed to withdraw at a time when it was urgent to understand the societies of the Near, Middle and Far East. The social sciences, particularly sociology and political science, were propelled to centre stage, whereas anthropology and geography seemed still to bear the defamatory marks of colonization.

For two decades now we in France seem to have been stagnating in post Saidism—a false impression judging from the vast amount of literature that has been produced in postcolonial studies and a from debate that has gone far beyond internal French battles<sup>2</sup> and which is hardly confined to squabbles between schools and cliques or between Said's heirs apparent and his opponents.

On the English-speaking side, the harvest has been even richer.<sup>3</sup> In English, people have written of the “postcolonial predicament,” “post-Orientalism” and

---

1 Before the phenomenon reached the United States.

2 See the contradictory texts of Jean-François Bayard and Achille Mbembe: Bayard, *Les Études postcoloniales: Un carnaval académique* (Paris: Karthala, 2010); Mbembe et al., *Ruptures postcoloniales: Les nouveaux visages de la société française* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

3 English-language literature, in which the Indian experience looms large, includes the following: Ahmed Aijazi, ‘Between Orientalism and historicism: an anthropological knowledge of

even “the invention of decolonization.” This time the focus was not so much on the “great Middle East” in George W. Bush’s sense but rather the Indian subcontinent. India has become a major focus of interest, and the people who have made their views heard and felt in North American and British (as well as Indian) universities and research centres have been increasingly likely to be Indian nationals. Their thinking has fueled subaltern studies, and most have taken a stance either for or against Raymond Schwab’s *Oriental Renaissance*,<sup>4</sup> and in the former case to have further developed that idea. This reminds us French of a recent past phenomenon that is nonetheless definitely over and behind us, when North African intellectuals such as Abdallah Laroui, Hichem Djait, and Mohamed Arkoun noisily entered debates on colonial productions, debates whose epicentre was North Africa. Suddenly we found ourselves face

---

India’, *Studies in History* 7 no. 1 (1991), pp. 35–163; *Orientalism and the Post-colonial Predicament*, ed. Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, ed. Partha Chatterjee (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and its Impact on Indian and Cross Cultural Studies*, ed. Eli Franco and Karin Preisendanz (Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi/Poznan: Studies in the Philosophy of Sciences and the Humanities, vol. 59, 1997) and Halbfass’s own work, *India and Europe: an Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Ronald Inden, ‘Orientalist Constructions of India’, *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (1986), pp. 401–446; Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory and the Mystic East* (London: Routledge, 1999); David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969); Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996); Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Richard Minear, ‘Orientalism and the Study of Japan’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 3 (1980), pp. 507–517; Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, ‘After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, Politics in the Third World’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (Jan. 1994), pp. 141–167; Amit Rai, ‘The King is Dead: a Review of Breckenridge and van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Post-colonial Predicament*’, *Oxford Literary Review* 16 (1994), pp. 295–301; *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Gayatri Spivak and Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Bryan Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism* (London: Routledge, 1994); Katherine Verdery, ‘Whither Postcolonialism?’ in C. Hann (ed.), *Postcolonialism, Ideologies and Practice in Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2002).

4 Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), foreword by Edward Said. Those disagreeing with this approach have written on Halbfass’s ideas on the Bengal Renaissance; see Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*; Franco and Preisendanz, *Beyond Orientalism*; David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*.

to face with interlocutors who contested the visions and versions of themselves that colonial observers had put forward, refused to recognize themselves in the mirror the West had held up to them,<sup>5</sup> and in general refused to conceive of the world—and their world—as it had been described by people from without.

In this regard—and when we see that European and American centres of analysis and thought are quite unable to identify, name, analyse a certain number of major contemporary phenomena—we may legitimately wonder whether it is in the West that the right questions are now being asked. The “anti-” fashion (anti-imperialism, anti-monarchism, anti-nationalism), the “neo-” fashion (neo-Marxism, neo-capitalism, neoliberalism) and above all the “post-” fashion (postcolonialism, post-socialism, postmodernism), terms flung about in all sorts of circumstances, actually cover extremely varied commodities. Current use of them reveals an inability to wield language and concepts as well as a type of intellectual and scientific deficiency, an incapability to grasp the various local “present times” that correspond to current world events<sup>6</sup> other than in reference to named, listed and labelled pasts. Meanwhile, on other continents, in Oriental spaces once subjugated and still often viewed condescendingly, new discourses and politics of modernity are being developed that apprehend both the global and community levels, the world market and cultural diversity. Here again what may be under way is the invention of an original form of democracy, a new kind of civil society.

### Overturing the Perspective

A few words are needed to explain the quintessence of this book. In no way are we seeking to rehabilitate “grandad’s” Orientalism; nor are we at all interested in undertaking one more deconstruction of knowledge inherited from the past. The point is to lay out the conditions for reversing existing perspectives in Western post-Orientalism. Our imperatives in doing so are threefold:

- to give history back its plethoric diversity
- to come back to the primary interested parties; that is, people who were members of local societies and whose attitudes, positions and reactions

---

5 See Jean-Jacques Waardenburg’s premonitory title, *L’Islam dans le miroir de l’Occident: Comment quelques orientalistes occidentaux se sont penchés sur l’Islam et se sont formé une image de cette religion* (Paris-The Hague: Mouton, 1962).

6 See, for example, what has been happening in Arab countries reputed to be congenitally impermeable to democracy.

to foreign intervention and later decolonization (of societies, established knowledge, people's minds) were extraordinarily varied, with the understanding that *their* attitudes, positions and reactions were determining ones – to practice a kind of dual asceticism, however contradictory its terms may be; that is, to *separate* or disconnect practices and expressions of Orientalism from each other while being able to *discover* how they interacted and overlapped.

In no way are we attempting to reconstruct networks after the fact but rather to recognize correspondences, affinities and correlations, to observe discontinuities and breaks, to accept the idea that some phenomena are permanent, to locate intercostal zones where the focus of one form of Orientalism recedes, yielding to another, such as when artistic curiosity won out over scientific interest or the so-called indigenous arts themselves hesitated between being exotic and for tourists on one hand or renationalized-re-acculturated and made a part of the indigenous heritage on the other. We are sorely in need of new conceptual tools, appropriate analytic instruments and a new grammar—even a paradigm shift. It is not our point here to “decipher,” to focus once again on the fetishism and aestheticism of the Orientalism of the past, to once again disentangle scholarly observations from pure inventions of the imagination or imitations, to comment on Western imaginaries of the recent past. What we have to do now is turn those visions around and (re-)construct new knowledge by thinking through not only how foreign models have been rejected but how they have been adopted and made an official part of indigenous heritages as well. Alongside this analysis of how fractions of external, earlier scientific acquisitions are being reused, we need to come back to local agents of old, discredited knowledge in Oriental fields and to study manifestations of Westernism, without forgetting those that involve inter-Orientalism.

Would this not be a way of returning the (multifaceted) Orient to Orientals, at a time when their worlds, to which our own is not alien, are experiencing major changes to which we may bear witness?



# List of Contributors

*Elisabeth Allès*

(1952–2012) Anthropologist of Muslim communities in China and Research Director at the CNRS\*, Paris (Centre d'Études sur la Chine Moderne et Contemporaine).

*Léon Buskens*

Anthropologist, research on Islamic law and society in Morocco and Indonesia, professor at Leiden University.

*Stéphane A. Dudoignon*

Historian of the Middle East and Central Asia, and Senior Research Fellow at the CNRS, Paris (Centre d'Études Turques, Ottomanes, Balkaniques et Centrasiatiques).

*Baudouin Dupret*

Political scientist and anthropologist of law in the Middle East and North Africa and Research Director at the CNRS (Centre Jacques-Berque, Rabat, Morocco).

*Edhem Eldem*

Historian of Ottoman society and culture, and Professor at Bogaziçi University, Istanbul.

*Olivier Herrenschmidt*

Anthropologist of India and Emeritus Professor at Nanterre University, Paris (Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative).

*Nicholas S. Hopkins*

Anthropologist of North Africa (Tunisia and Egypt) and Emeritus Professor at the American University in Cairo, Egypt.

*Robert Irwin*

Historian of the Arab world and Senior Research Associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

---

\* Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

*Mouldi Lahmar*

Sociologist of North Africa (Tunisia and Libya) and Professor at the 9 Avril University, Tunis, Tunisia (Laboratoire Diraset).

*Sylvette Larzul*

Historian of Arabism in Modern Europe and Research Fellow at the EHESS\*\*, Paris (Centre d'Histoire Sociale de l'Islam Méditerranéen).

*Jean-Gabriel Leturcq*

Anthropologist of art in the Arab World and Research Fellow at the Centre Français d'Études Éthiopiennes, Addis Ababa.

*Jessica Marglin*

Historian of Jews in North Africa and Assistant Professor at the University of Southern California.

*Claire Nicholas*

Anthropologist of Moroccan clothing and textile producers and Post-doctoral Fellow at Princeton University (Department of Anthropology).

*Emmanuelle Perrin*

Historian of the anthropology of Egypt and Research Fellow at the CNRS, Paris (Laboratoire InVisu).

*Alain de Pommereau*

Anthropologist of craft in Morocco and Research Fellow at the EHESS, Paris (Centre d'Histoire Sociale de l'Islam Méditerranéen).

*François Pouillon*

Anthropologist of the Arab World in relation to Europe and Emeritus Professor at the EHESS, Paris (Centre d'Histoire Sociale de l'Islam Méditerranéen).

*Zakaria Rhani*

Anthropologist of the Arab World and Islamic Culture and Assistant Professor at Mohammed v University, Rabat, Morocco (Institut Universitaire de la Recherche Scientifique).

---

\*\* Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.

*Emmanuel Szurek*

Historian of cultural movements in Turkey and Post-doctoral Fellow at Princeton University (Transregional Institute & Department of Near Eastern Studies).

*Jean-Claude Vatin*

Political scientist of the Arab World and Emeritus Research Director at the CNRS, Paris (Groupe de Sociologie des Religions et de la Laïcité).

*Mercedes Volait*

Historian of architecture and visual representations related to modern Egypt, and Research Director at the CNRS, Paris (Laboratoire InVisu).



# Index

- agency xi, 73, 104
- Algeria/Algiers 6, 15, 43–44, 48, 67, 78, 219, 221  
as Moorish/Arab/Oriental, Kabyle/Berber 225  
native/customary law in 32, 43
- anthropologist(s)/anthropology xiii, 3, 17, 24, 49, 59, 61, 74, 77–79, 80 n. 14, 81, 83, 175–176, 179, 184–187, 189, 274  
studies 16, 89, 175–176, 182
- Arabian Nights (Alf layla wa-layla)* 20, 22, 51–54, 56, 167, 199–201, 203–206, 209–215, 217  
Arabic texts of 207, 209, 211  
editions of 202, 207, 210–211, 215–216  
as fiction invented by West 214, 216  
French translation (*Les Mille et Une Nuits*) 201–202, 204–205, 215, 217  
Galland manuscript 199, 204, 212–214  
history of text 199, 203, 217  
individual stories of 202, 204, 206, 214–216
- Arabic  
calligraphy 128  
language 19–20, 22–23, 34, 43, 127, 159, 200, 207  
literature 201, 206, 208  
script 116  
studies 20–21, 25, 127
- Arabs 57–59, 90, 96–97, 99, 102, 150, 195, 261  
orientalist image of 91  
portrayal of 27–29  
stereotypes of 50  
study of 24–25, 171
- Armenians 90, 94–95, 97, 118, 150
- artifacts 26, 147–148, 151–155, 158–159, 184  
damage/destruction of 159–160
- artisans 236–239, 242, 245, 247, 249  
anonymous 237, 246, 249  
and apprentices 223–224  
vs. artists 242  
traditional/folklorized 240–241
- artistic modernity 147–148
- art(s) 157, 260, 267, 269, 277  
acquisition of 147, 152, 154, 253, 263, 267
- Arab/Islamic 96, 145–147, 152–153, 240, 253, 258–259, 268  
concept/definition of 148, 151–152, 155–157, 159–160  
objects 155, 253, 260
- Oriental 146, 256
- Orientalist 16, 28, 89, 253, 258–260, 263  
Middle Eastern collecting of 252–253, 258–259  
painting 5–6, 15, 21, 27–28, 99, 107, 251–252, 254–257, 259–261, 265, 267–268, 270  
*pompier* painting 251–252  
Turkish 109, 146, 259
- Bedouins 96, 98–99, 158, 192, 229  
Bedouinism (*bedeviyet*) 97
- Berber(s) 191–192, 195, 226  
practices 248  
rugs 230, 232, 235
- Berque, Jacques 3, 14, 57–58, 187, 223
- British 22, 150, 165–166, 256–257  
academics/scholars 24–25, 32, 36  
and the *Arabian Nights* 202, 206, 208, 214  
in India 18, 43, 273  
and Oriental carpets 218  
Orientalists 19, 21, 163  
universities 19, 275
- caricatures 7, 16, 100
- centers, and peripheries xi, 13, 147, 153–154
- Central Asia 121–122, 129, 132
- China xi, xii, 78, 89, 103, 132, 135–136
- civilization(s) 84, 91, 96, 102, 110–113, 118, 153, 267  
“clash of” xi, 13, 157  
contemporary/modern 112, 125, 157, 173  
Islamic/Muslim 28, 113, 117, 157, 257, 267  
Oriental 110, 113, 118  
Western 91–92, 99–100, 110, 113
- clergy  
Christian/churchmen 8–9, 20, 22, 25–26, 90, 272  
Muslim 108, 113, 210–211
- collaborators, local/oriental 38–43, 190.  
*See also* informers/informants

- collections/collectors/collectionism 15–16,  
147, 149, 151, 155, 158, 252–253, 258, 260–261  
European 146  
Middle Eastern 267–268
- colonial/colonialism/colonizations x,  
xiii, 7, 21, 31, 44, 55, 59, 62, 72, 74 n. 2, 96,  
104, 189, 193, 220, 227–228, 231, 243, 271,  
273–274  
administrators/civil servants 18, 31,  
33–35, 38, 224  
context 47, 150, 218  
experience 43, 273–274  
French 67–69, 78  
governments/administrations 33, 37–41,  
43, 195, 239  
history 3–4, 7  
ideology 16, 76  
knowledge 188, 195, 236  
period xii, 13, 50, 63, 241  
perspectives 82, 195  
power(s) 6, 9–10, 62, 70 n. 27, 91, 191  
productions 274–275  
representations 237, 239, 249  
science x, 4, 6, 9  
subjects 96–97  
texts/writings 6, 59, 188, 196, 210  
Western 72, 76, 132
- Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)  
121, 123–124
- communist(s)  
civilizing projects 134  
party (Chinese) 140–141  
propaganda 106
- Copts 150  
heritage of 156, 267  
practices of 180
- cosmopolitan 7, 55, 112, 117–118, 236, 238, 242,  
247, 249
- craft(s)/craftsmen 59, 219, 223, 226, 231, 237,  
240, 245, 249, 257  
of Egypt 183  
guilds 220, 236  
local/indigenous 220–221  
policy 232  
production/industry 235, 238–239
- cultural  
mediators 206  
studies 7, 147, 274  
tolerance 270
- Cultural Revolution  
Chinese (1966–1976) 137–138  
Soviet (1927–1928) 121–122
- culture(s) 265  
autochthonous, value of 219  
contemporary Arab 24  
Egyptian 164, 170  
high/lettered 49, 162  
of Islam 124, 158  
material 182  
minority 140  
national 123–124, 132  
oral 170  
Oriental 124, 268  
popular 50, 59–60, 162, 171, 173  
of terror 77  
Western 91, 116
- customs 25, 28, 32 n. 5, 34, 74 n. 2, 136, 162–  
163, 165, 171–175, 178, 230, 261, 265  
Islamic 98  
local 34–35, 38, 41, 43  
*mahmal* 166, 168
- decolonization x, 3–4, 6, 50, 57–59, 62–63,  
218, 257, 273, 275, 277
- designers 244–246, 249–250. *See also*  
fashion industry  
haute couture 241  
Moroccan 238, 242
- dictionaries/encyclopedias 162, 165, 174,  
194  
*Dictionary of the Inhabitants of Libya*  
189  
*Dictionnaire des orientalistes de langue*  
*française* x, 12–14, 30  
*Dizionario Arabo-Italiano* 206
- difference 9, 84, 192  
cultural 236–237, 242–243, 249  
study of 78–79
- discourse(s) 30, 58, 62, 76, 81, 99, 113, 120, 147,  
151, 173, 267, 271, 275  
of designers 238, 242–243, 248  
of empire 112  
essentialist 89  
hegemonic xii, 79  
on Islam 122, 131  
Islamist 160  
Kemalist 103, 114  
on Orient 50, 105

- of Oriental societies 56
- Orientalist 21, 57, 89, 237
- on self 260
- Western colonial 96–97
- dragomans 23, 29, 38–39, 42
- dress. *See also* headgear
  - caftan (qafṭān)* 241, 243–244
  - Oriental 101
  - regional styles of 236–237
  - traditional 237 n. 3, 238, 243, 246–248
- dyes/dyeing 222, 226, 229, 234, 239
  - chemical 219, 230–231
- East 93, 104, 111–112, 115
  - and West 52, 145
  - West axiology 103–104
- Egypt 15, 21, 29, 44–45, 50, 89, 153, 157, 164, 175, 178, 180, 186, 220, 253, 267–268
  - 25 January Revolution 160–161
  - Khedivial Decree of 18 December 1881 149, 151
  - Napoleon's invasion of 18, 29, 42
- Egyptology 18, 26, 174, 264
- elite(s) 27, 91, 101, 105, 115, 119, 171, 254
  - Egyptian 154
  - Indonesian 37
  - local 41, 255
- Enlightenment
  - philosophy/philosophers 57, 76
  - thought 67
  - Western, *vs.* backwardness 103
- essentialism 50, 79, 97, 119, 238
  - Western Orientalist 52
- ethnic/ethnicity 90, 134–135, 140, 237–238, 247
  - appeal/style 246, 249
  - discrimination 209
  - groups 59, 81, 136, 186, 189–190, 194
  - identity 90, 135, 241, 247
- ethnocentrism 35, 56–58, 77, 195
- ethnography/ethnographic 14, 24, 59–61, 78, 83, 136, 176–177, 186, 224, 238, 267
  - approaches/methods 59–60, 79
  - collections 182
  - data/fieldwork 36–37, 39, 48
  - ethno-history 186
  - painting 266
  - studies 17, 62, 75, 80, 89, 136, 164, 174, 180, 233, 236
- Europe 64, 94, 103, 146, 148, 242
  - and *Arabian Nights* text 199–200, 202–203
  - compared to Ottoman Empire 93
- exhibitions 225, 240, 257, 258
  - Exposition des Arts Musulmans* (Paris, 1893) 146, 152
  - Exposition Universelle* (Paris, 1878) 145, 148
  - Meisterwerk muhammedanischer Kunst* (Munich, 1910) 146, 152, 155
  - Paris 1903 146, 152, 155
  - Purs décors?* (Paris, 2007) 147
- exotic/exoticism 48–50, 55, 243
  - appeal 246
  - places 139, 238
  - scenes 260
- fashion industry 238, 242. *See also* designers
  - global influences on 244, 246
  - Moroccan 236–237, 241–244, 246, 248
- folklore 60–61, 136, 163, 172–173, 231, 237–238
- French x, 22, 36, 150
  - colonial territories 219
  - mission civilisatrice* 68
  - orientalist school (of painting) 99
  - Revolution 113
- Fromentin, Eugène 21, 26–27, 254–255
- Galland, Antoine (1646–1715) 22–23, 199, 201–202, 209, 216–217
  - manuscript of *Arabian Nights* 199, 204, 212–214
  - translation of *Arabian Nights* 201–204, 208, 210, 216
- Gérôme, Jean Léon 15, 26, 28, 251–252, 254–256, 260–261, 263, 265, 269
- handicraft(s) 220
  - Moroccan 240
  - techniques 236–237
- harems 51–53, 110, 167, 210, 231
- headgear 101, 108
  - sharshaf* 107
  - turbans 112
- heritage 152, 156
  - colonial 63
  - cultural 174, 237, 239, 241–243

- indigenous 277  
 national 139, 173, 234, 239–240
- history/historiography xii, 12, 14, 66 n. 9,  
 72–74, 77, 81, 146, 188, 190, 193  
 books 16  
 of civilizations 8, 274  
 and memory 172  
 postcolonial 195
- Husayn, Taha (1889–1973) 178, 208
- Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1382) 165, 205
- identity 8–9, 11, 13, 16, 80–81, 96, 119, 188, 193,  
 195, 225, 236  
 collective 171, 237  
 cultural 241, 250  
 Egyptian 171, 174  
 games 241, 266  
 Han 134  
 Moroccan 243  
 Muslim 153  
 national xiii, 100, 123, 162, 171, 218, 234,  
 241, 247  
 politics 242  
 religious 90  
 Turkish 96, 102
- ideology(ies) 10, 13, 77, 82  
 colonial 16, 76  
 of French imperialism 28  
 nationalist 17, 63  
 postcolonial 50, 74
- imperialism/imperialists xii–xiii, 13, 27, 58,  
 104, 108, 111–112, 119  
 American 6, 10  
 French 28, 69  
 Western x, 72–73
- independence 59, 90–91, 139, 156
- India/Indian/Indianists xi, 18, 75 n. 3, 77, 82,  
 84–85, 89, 219, 238, 273, 275  
 Anglo-Muhammadan law in 43  
 culture 25, 242  
 studies 18–19, 77
- indigenous  
 individuals/groups 14  
 knowledge 195–196  
 production(s) xiii, 15
- Indigenous Arts Bureau 224–228, 230, 238,  
 240
- Indonesia 36–37, 40, 44, 273  
*adatrecht* (customary law) 37, 43
- colonisation of 33–34  
 indigenous/“oriental” inhabitants of 32
- industry(ies)  
 colonial 227  
 crafts 235  
 fashion 236–238, 241–242, 244, 246,  
 248  
 tourism 236, 238, 248–249  
 urban 226  
 weaving/rug 218–221, 223, 227
- informers/informants 9, 38, 191, 193, 195
- Ingres, [Jean-Auguste-Dominique] 26, 56,  
 254, 256
- intellectuals 5, 106, 174  
 Arab 208  
 communist 127  
 elite 188  
 on Islam 130  
 Kemalist 109  
 local/native 17, 29, 50  
 power of 10–11
- Iran/Persia/Persian 29, 44, 123, 157  
 arts 20, 146, 259  
 Iranian Revolution of 1979 121, 129, 132  
 language 116, 127  
 studies 18, 20
- Islam/Islamic 24, 32, 49, 58, 96, 102, 103, 113,  
 115, 127, 158, 179, 211  
 Arab heritage (*turath*) 56–57  
 authority of 45–46  
 conversions to 36, 193  
 criticism of 97  
 cultures of 124, 158  
 image of 29, 50–51, 67, 210  
 Jews under 64  
 knowledge/scholarship of 34, 41  
 lands of 93–94  
 and legislative systems 45–46  
 normative categories 37–38  
 in North Africa 71  
 pagan survivals 49, 55, 58, 97  
 political 130, 132–133  
 reforms/reformists 45, 123, 125, 129–130,  
 132, 164, 173  
 religious institutions 130  
 repressions against 132  
 society 65, 71, 73  
 studies 20–21, 24–25  
 texts of 121, 123

- Islamism/Islamists 22, 32, 45  
 Istanbul 107, 112, 114, 117, 219, 260
- Jews 25, 37, 42, 90, 118, 180, 193  
 under Islamic rule 64, 69–70, 72–73  
 Maghribi/North African 64, 66–67, 70–72, 229  
 as Oriental 68  
 status of 69, 71
- knowledge 9, 56, 76 n. 6, 228, 245  
 academic 47, 171  
 acquisition 14  
 construction of xiii  
 deconstruction of 276  
 ethnographic 233  
 local/indigenous 76, 82, 195–196  
 and normativity 33, 47  
 Orientalist 163, 189, 192, 195  
 and power 5  
 production/formation 31, 189, 249
- Koran. *See* Qur'an/Koran
- Lane, Edward (1801–1876) 24–26, 29, 163–167, 172, 174, 205, 210  
 on dervishes 170  
 on khôl 168–169
- language(s)  
 of community 80  
 European 43  
 learning 6, 8  
 local/native 34, 38  
 revolution (in Turkey) 116
- law/legislation  
 customary 34, 39, 44, 47  
 Islamic 33–35, 37–38, 40–41, 43–46, 70  
 concept of 31–32, 41–43, 47  
 local/indigenous 31, 33–34  
 national 35  
 and order, maintenance of 33, 38  
 personal status 36, 44–45  
 positive 45–47
- legal positivism 33, 35–36, 40–44
- literature 121, 138. *See also* *Arabian Nights*  
 gnostic/Sufi texts 123  
 mid-level, *Arabian Nights* as 200–201, 204–205  
 Oriental(ist) 22, 89, 199  
 for tourists 233
- Loti, Pierre (1850–1923) 20–21, 107
- manuscripts 20, 42, 125, 200–202, 207, 210–214  
 Galland, *Arabian Nights* 199, 202, 204, 212–214, 217  
 Oriental 26, 203
- Marx 10, 13, 57  
 Marxism-Leninism 106 n. 11
- Massignon, Louis 9, 176–179, 185, 187
- materials  
 of garments 238–239, 242–245, 248  
 in rugs/carpet 230, 234  
 wool 229, 231
- Matisse 16, 268
- Mauss, Marcel 77, 81, 176–181, 184–185
- merchants 149, 226, 233, 266, 272
- Middle East 103, 145–146, 252  
 studies 24
- minorities 9, 17, 42, 80, 82, 136–137, 139–140, 209
- modernism/modernity/modernization  
 61, 67, 74 n. 2, 85, 92, 95, 97, 99–102, 123, 148–149, 161, 218, 228, 233, 235, 270, 276
- Mongolia/Mongols 50, 135, 139, 211–212
- monuments 152–153  
 in Cairo, conservation of 148, 150–151
- Morocco 15, 39, 41, 43, 50, 55, 60, 66–67, 71, 219, 237  
 and Jews 72–73  
 Marrakech 221, 229–231, 234, 249  
 medinas of 220, 222, 234, 239  
 Rabat 43, 220, 222–223, 230, 236  
 Salé 226  
 Sharifian Empire 218, 220, 222–223, 235
- museography 15, 160, 175, 177
- museum(s) 16, 147–149, 152, 154, 228, 240, 253  
 of Arab Art (Fuad I University) 157  
 of Arab Art/Islamic Art (Cairo) 145, 154–157, 160–161  
 donations 253, 263  
 Gazira (museum) 255  
 of Islamic art 146, 158  
 Musée d'Arts Décoratifs 225  
 Musée de l'Homme 176–177, 182–183  
 Musée d'Ethnographie 177

- Musée d'Orsay 252, 260  
 Musée du Quai Branly 182  
 National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.)  
     258  
 of Oriental Antiquities (Beirut) 262  
 Orientalist (Qatar) 260  
 Victoria and Albert (London) 158  
 Muslim art 15, 152, 155, 223. *See also* art(s)  
 Muslims 72, 90, 94, 135, 137–138, 140, 182  
     clergy 108, 113, 210–211  
     Orientalist image of 91  
 Napoleon Bonaparte  
     expedition to/invasion of Egypt 18, 23,  
         29, 42  
     period of 253  
 nationalism 82, 118–119, 129  
     Chinese 134, 141  
     Kemalist 105, 119  
     postcolonial 104  
     Turkish 101, 113  
 nationality(ies) 123, 136–138  
     minority 134, 136  
     Soviet model 135–136  
 nation-states 82, 110  
     building/formation of xiii, 35, 59, 120  
     emergence of 47, 218, 223  
 North Africa 48, 252, 275  
     French presence in 18, 89, 273  
 Obeyesekere, Gananath 76–77, 82, 86  
 objects 261, 266  
     collections of 15–16, 148, 151–156, 160, 182,  
         253–254, 257  
     crafted/made 219–220, 225–226, 240, 242,  
         249  
     everyday 177, 182  
     meanings of 60, 99, 229–232, 236  
     of study 171, 174, 218, 273  
 Occidentalism 103, 119  
     Occidentals 52, 273  
 Orientalism x–xii, 4, 13–14, 29, 32, 42, 57, 74,  
     95, 97, 99–100, 103–104, 109, 145, 152, 174,  
     175, 195, 209, 217, 257, 260, 268, 270–271, 272,  
     276–277  
     academic/scholarly 21, 25, 27, 123, 147  
     Arabo-centric 19  
     classical 215  
     counter- (or anti-Orientalism) 272–273  
     critics/critique of 56, 63  
     debate on 3, 8, 12  
     defining/thesis of 7, 15  
     European 96–97, 104 n. 3, 113, 119–120  
     external 104  
     history of xii, 18  
     internal 42, 103, 120, 134, 136  
     Kemalist 101, 104–105, 111–114, 116, 118–120  
     literary 21  
     Oriental 112, 120, 134  
     pictorial 258, 268  
     Red Orientalism 122  
     Russian/Soviet 32 n. 5, 123–124  
     vernacular/local form of 105, 114  
 Orientalist(s)/Orientalization x, 13, 19, 27,  
     30, 31, 39, 63, 96, 160, 174, 176, 225, 238, 267,  
     273  
     and *Arabian Nights*, as inventions 209  
     congresses of 152  
     ‘de-Orientalizing’ 260  
     institution(s) 145  
     Orientalism 262  
     productions 7, 163  
     relationship to institution and powers 12  
     scholarship 9, 29, 43, 89  
     thought 264, 272  
     travelogues 107  
     tropes 89, 91, 94, 96  
     works 174, 217, 254–255, 262, 266  
 Oriental(s) 13, 100, 108, 195, 212, 273  
     assistants 38 (*See also* informers/infor-  
         mants)  
     dance 55, 140–141  
     sections and faculties (Rus. *vostfaks*) 127  
     studies 24, 26  
         in USSR 121–123, 128, 130  
 Orient(s) xi, xii, 30, 52, 56, 90, 100–101, 105,  
     107, 109, 161, 167, 196, 199, 232, 248, 267, 272  
     as fiction/invention 216, 273  
     internal 139  
     vs. Occident 115  
     representations of 7, 174  
     visions of 89, 116  
 other/Other/otherization 8, 50, 74 n. 2, 96,  
     137, 237, 242  
     representation of 195  
 Ottoman Empire xii, 21, 28, 39, 66 n. 9,  
     89–91, 93, 101, 103, 107–108, 112, 114, 190  
 Ottomanism 118

- Ottoman(s) 93, 95, 113, 221  
*ancien régime* 113, 119  
 archaeology and museology 97  
 art and architecture 96, 257  
 colonialism/imperialism of 111  
 elite 93, 96–97, 100  
*Mecelle* 44  
 orientalism 95–97, 100–101, 111–113  
 as Orientals 96  
 and response (to West) 92–93  
 traditions/customs 98  
 Oxford University 20, 23, 25
- Persia. *See* Iran/Persia  
 philology 25, 36, 213, 215, 274  
 photography 28, 106–107, 260, 264  
 poetry 171  
 pre-Islamic 19–20, 58  
 Sufi 128  
 postcards 6, 29, 238  
 postcolonial(s)/postcolonialism xii, 5, 9, 63,  
 75, 79, 273, 276  
 critique 261  
 Orientalism as 120  
 representational media 249  
 studies 4, 6–8, 10, 111, 209, 214, 274  
 thought 109, 217, 259  
 primitiveness 97, 100  
 primitive(s) 48, 260  
 vs. developed 61  
 societies 80–81  
 print technology/printed texts 42, 199,  
 201  
 progress 50, 59, 61, 99, 111  
 vs. reaction 115
- Qurʾan/Koran 19, 22, 45, 55, 69 n. 23, 122–123,  
 125, 131, 181
- race(s)/racism 27, 96, 115, 119, 238  
 reform(s)/reformists 91, 97, 116–118, 123–125,  
 149  
 in 1980s China 134, 137  
 Islamic 45, 123, 125, 129–130, 132, 164, 173  
 Ottoman 101, 111–112  
 religion/religious 60, 97, 130, 174, 180, 237  
 buildings 150  
 ceremonies 182  
 conservatives 178  
 dress 108  
 freedom 137  
 prohibitions 173  
 representation(s) 14, 56, 147, 163, 252, 266  
 essentialized 249  
 performative 239  
 self- 29, 249  
 Ricard, Prosper 16, 218–220, 223, 225–229,  
 231–234  
 rugs 223–224, 230, 239  
 knotted pile 218, 220–221, 227–228,  
 233–234  
 of Middle Atlas 225, 231  
 Moroccan 218, 225–228, 232–235  
 Oriental 220  
 patterns/colors of 222–223, 230–231,  
 234  
 Rabat rugs 218, 222, 224, 226, 231, 235  
 regional styles/typology of 230, 232  
 Turkish 218, 221, 223–224, 227, 234
- Said, Edward 10, 15–16, 18, 23–24, 27, 30, 42,  
 103–104, 109, 120, 146, 163, 237, 252, 273  
 arguments/position of x, xii, 3–5, 7–8,  
 12–14, 158, 214, 252  
 on Berque 57  
 criticism of xi, 5–6, 8  
*Orientalism* x, xii, 5, 7–8, 18, 30, 74, 195,  
 251, 274  
 on Ottomans/Turks 89, 92  
 on role of natives 29  
 saint(s) 48–49, 59, 173, 181  
 Scheherazade 51–55, 215. *See also Arabian  
 Nights*  
 Schwab, Raymond 19–20, 275  
 science(s) 12, 76 n. 6, 157. *See also knowl-  
 edge*  
 colonial x  
 Orientalist 12  
 Western 166–167  
 secularism 22, 44, 97, 101, 115, 119  
 self-knowledge, production of xi  
 self/Self 50, 137, 260  
 construction of, by other xiii  
 exhibition of 267  
 representation of 195  
 social class/status 155, 181, 193–194, 236, 244  
 mobility 42  
 order 31

- social sciences x, 3, 14, 58, 77, 79, 82, 85, 187, 195, 274  
 and colonialism 3–5, 62
- sociology/sociologist(s) 50–51, 53–56, 58, 61, 63, 80, 83, 136, 172, 274
- stereotypes/*clichés* 64, 158, 216, 236, 248, 266
- storyteller(s)/storytelling 52–54, 56, 60, 201, 205
- subaltern  
 mode 13  
 studies xii, 274–275  
 subculture 60
- Sudan 21, 177–179, 183–184, 186
- superstition 112, 115, 163, 173, 234  
 evil eye 107, 181
- terms/terminology 41, 141  
 essentializing of 14  
 Western 116
- tourism 139, 218, 231, 238–240, 249  
 cultural 236, 248  
 sexual 139–140  
 tourists 232, 272
- tradition(s)/traditional/traditionalism 100, 113, 158, 162–163, 170–173, 218, 228, 235, 245, 261, 267  
 craft techniques 238–239  
 as endangered 243  
 invention of 170, 218  
 vs. modern/western 59, 61, 100  
 national/collective 236, 242  
 vs. non-traditional religions 132  
 sartorial 241–242  
 timelessness of 171–172
- travel/travellers 29, 272  
 narratives 70 n. 27, 72 n. 33  
 writers 165
- tribes/tribal groups 59, 189, 191–194, 232, 237
- Turks/Turkey 15, 20–21, 27–28, 50, 89–90, 101, 105, 110, 150, 157, 211–212  
 European view of 106–107  
 vs. European/Western (character) 91  
 language(s) 116, 127  
 race of 118  
 studies 18
- urban 182, 239  
 populations 130  
 vs. rural 49, 232  
 urbanity 223  
 urbanization 229
- vernacular 22, 36, 117, 207 n. 21, 220. *See also* language(s)
- weaving 229–230  
 industry 218, 220, 223  
 looms 229, 233, 239
- westernization 68–69, 91, 95–97, 99, 102, 118
- West/Western 101, 104–105, 115, 238  
 domination by 9  
 logo-centrism 56, 58  
 perceptions of 93  
 researchers 76  
 typologies 273  
 Westernism 277
- women 36, 114, 119, 136, 167–169, 174, 209, 225, 231, 234, 241  
 as anonymous 240  
 odalisques 52, 55, 98, 256  
 Oriental 51–54  
 as seductive 238  
 status of 173  
 as subversive 53  
 weavers 222–223, 229–231, 239