

REVERSE ORIENTALISM? BETWEEN “REPRESENTATION” AND ISLAMOPHOBIA: A THEORETICAL ENQUIRY

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Abstract

Post-9/11 Western literary publications perpetuated Islamophobia by portraying Muslims as violent terrorists and misogynists. A bulk of criticisms that followed situated these novels under Edward Said's structures of Orientalism, facilitating the argument for their Islamophobic implications. These endeavours have been reproached for using Islamophobia to shield away from critical scrutiny. Said's theoretical concept of representation is itself criticised for being inconsistent and unrepresentable of itself. Thus, the criteria for locating post-9/11 texts as Islamophobic within the theoretical and analytical construing of Orientalism is, problematised. The crux of this study, therefore, is to illustrate the limitations of Said's Orientalism while synthesising his theoretical and discursive views of Islamophobia. Thus, this study offers an intervention to the debate surrounding Said's Orientalism and provides a model for theorising Islamophobic literature through Contrapuntal reading. A reading method, with roots in deconstruction, which delves into both textual and contextual examination of the supposed Oriental text.

Keywords: Orientalism, Islamophobia, Representation, Reverse Orientalism, Post-9/11 fiction

A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

Richardson's (2012) study focuses on the different concepts used to label acts similar to Islamophobia. These include 'Anti-Muslim racism', 'Intolerance against Muslims', 'Anti-Islamism', and 'Muslimophobia', among others. These terms and their different varieties also exist in languages other than English, such as French, German, Scandinavian, etc. He argues that the French word, Islamophobie, was first used in print in a book *La politique musulmane dans l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (1910) by Alain Quiélin. The author criticized and condemned French colonial administrators' treatment of their Muslim subjects. He reveals and condemns how the French colonialists victimized the cultures of some Muslim-dominated African countries, including Niger, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Algeria and Mauritania. Alphonse Etienne Dinet (1861-1929), a French Orientalist painter, also used the French word Islamophobie in his book, *The Life of Mohammad the Prophet of Allah* (1918). The English version of his book, however, does not translate Islamophobie as Islamophobia but as "feelings inimical to Islam" (Richardson 2012, 3).

In English, the word Islamophobia was first introduced by Edward Said in 1985. Said used the word while discussing anti-Islamism and anti-Semitism and how both concepts are similar – hostility towards a different religious group. The word appeared again in 1991 in an American journal, *Insight*, referring to the hostile relationship that existed between the government of the Soviet Union and its Muslim citizens and regions. Runnymede Trust was also one of the first organizations to use the term in the 90s. Their usage denotes a hatred against Muslims, which was cited from the Oxford English Dictionary in 1997 (Richardson 2012, 3).

Richardson further adds that Islamophobia first appeared in the UK print media in December 1991 by Modood. The word seems to have been first used by either Fuad Nahdi or Dr Zaki Badawi in the late 1980s. Muslims in the UK went through several harrowing experiences in the early 2000s, and the failure of the National Commission for Race Equality (CRE) and race equality boards locally to take serious action was argued to be Islamophobia in itself. Thus, since 2000, the word has been used more and more significantly in deliberations and publications of public organizations like the UN, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Council of Europe, etc.

Carl Ernst argues regarding the above that the term Islamophobia only became popular when it was employed in a report by Runnymede Trust (a British think tank) in 1997. It contributed to attracting more attention to this form of prejudice as a practical problem (Ernst 2013, 3). However, Robin Richardson, for his part, regrets using the term in his 1997 Runnymede report two decades later. He outlined eight problems with the usage of the term 'Islamophobic' to describe an anti-Islamic person or activity. The term phobia medically "implies a severe mental illness of a kind that affects only a tiny minority of people." The implication of describing somebody as an Islamophobe is that the person in question is "insane or irrational", which is consequently "abusive". This error of judgment, according to Richardson, impedes the rational exchange of ideas and constructive dialogue. Instead, the term "anxiety" best describes this phenomenon because it does not complicate the context-specific pedigrees of the observed hostility. Using the word Islamophobia, therefore, dissociates hostility towards Muslims with other forms of hostilities like tribalism, racism, sectarianism and xenophobia. As such, the contextual influences (such as power, socio-political conflicts, class, etc.) behind an Islamophobic activity become delimited, and different forms of prejudice against Muslims are therefore undifferentiated. Richardson emphasized that using Islamophobia "is inappropriate for describing opinions that are anti-religion as distinct from anti-Islam." This is to say, where do we place critics of religion? Like Atheists who criticize all religions. He concluded that "hostility towards an ethno-religious identity within Western countries" is the main issue to be addressed. Updating the 1997 definition, he notes that Islamophobia is "a shorthand way of referring to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims – and, therefore, dread or hatred of Islam" (Richardson 2012, 4–5).

In view of the above, Sam Harris' response to the question on the meaning of Islamophobia in an interview with Tany Basu reaffirms the problem with the construction of Islamophobia. He says, "Islam is not a race, ethnicity, or nationality: It's a set of ideas,". He added that:

"Criticism of these ideas should never be confused with an animus toward people. And yet it is. I'm convinced that this is often done consciously, strategically, and quite cynically as a means of shutting down conversation [on] important topics." (Basu 2014, para. 3)

It is, however, essential to note that a research by Cesari (2006) shows that while the word Islamophobia previously enjoyed hundreds of instances of usage in Britain's *The Guardian* newspaper, it was only used twenty-six times in the *New York Times* magazine. This vast difference suggests that there has been more usage of the term in Europe than in the US. The trends of usage in both the US and Britain have, however, become similar in recent times. In Britain, Kenan Malik is of the view that there is, in reality, no such thing as Islamophobia. He argues that Muslims use the term to take advantage of anti-racist conviction and assume victimhood, in a bid to avoid legitimate criticism and engage in lazy abuse. The kind of hostile attacks vented on Muslims today have been the same since two to three decades ago, but they were only referred to as racial attacks. "Muslim leaders talk about using Islamophobia in the same way that they perceive Jewish leaders to have exploited fears about antisemitism." He argued (Kenan 2005).

Like Richardson, Cesari (2006) has criticized the use or application of Islamophobia for widely divergent phenomena (pp. 5-6). On the contrary, Jose Pedro Zuquete recalls the demands for "a new definition of Islamophobia" due to the failure to explain its meaning or arrive at a specific constriction (Zúquete 2008, 323). The above instances signify the impreciseness of the meaning and coverage of Islamophobia. In the interest of the above, Zuquete attempted to resolve the whole problem and thus defined Islamophobia as:

[A] widespread mindset and fear-laden discourse in which people make blanket judgments of Islam as the enemy, as the 'other', as a dangerous and unchanged, monolithic bloc that it is the natural subject of well-deserved hostility from Westerners. (Zúquete 2008, 323)

In retrospect to the above, the implication of "fear of Islam" becomes problematic since the faith of Islam is distinctively different from its adherents (Muslims) and since the main problem of Islamophobia is the stereotyping of Muslims (Halliday 1999, 898).

Notwithstanding, the use of the term Islamophobia seems to have gained enough popularity to sustain its continuous use, at least for now. For Carl Ernst (2013), rather than trying to idealise Islam by advocating for Islamophilia (Muslims as friends), it is better to stand against preferential treatment for all religions, as well as criticizing other stereotypes such as racism and bigotry (p. 15). The word Islamophobia is now very commonly used in several parts of the world. The term is hopeful to survive because, just like other forms of movements against discrimination, a unifying label which brings people with similar ideologies together is formed, even before the movements begin (Gottschalk, Greenberg, and Greenberg 2008). In this case, Islamophobia serves as an umbrella term for hostility against Muslims.

On the other hand, the term Islamophobia does not excite Nathan Lean, but the lack of a "better alternative" necessitates its contentious usage. In a conversation with Tanya Basu, he was asked, "[d]o some people use the word 'Islamophobia' irresponsibly? Sure," he added further:

“Does that mean that the word is bad on the whole or that we should ditch it? Not. Doing so denies the existence of a real threat facing Muslim communities by handicapping the way we talk, write, and think about it. It also prevents [us] from finding a more equitable way forward.” (Basu 2014, para. 20)

Edward Said’s Theoretical Oeuvre

Orientalism

In 1978, Edward Said published the book *Orientalism*, his best-known book and one of the most influential scholarly books of the 20th Century which is “on par with Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, Marx’s *Das Capital* and Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*” (Nayar 2010). It, till today, remains the benchmark of Postcolonial studies, the discipline to which Edward Said is hitherto seen as the inaugurator. Research and academic discourse in the field of literary theory and criticism, Muslim or minority studies and Middle East studies have profoundly been influenced and significantly transformed by Said’s classic textual study (Howe 2008). The book *Orientalism* (1978) is the most referred to in postcolonial discourse of representation, domination and resistance. Wherein, Said’s significant contribution to postcolonialism, (in this book) was to see colonialism as rooted in an epistemological enquiry and project; of constructing the Orient (Nayar 2010). Since its publication, *Orientalism* has been regarded as “one of the most influential scholarly books published in English in the humanities in the last quarter of the twentieth century” (Lockman 2004, 190).

Orientalism can simply be defined as a method of Orientalizing the Easterners or non-Westerners – the “Orient”, by the West. In other words, *Orientalism* refers to the manner of using recurring clichés and images which have been acquired from previous knowledge about the Orient, especially from the Nineteenth Century. It is also concerned with how Western colonialists and imperialists utilise this information about the Orient in their activities. Said observes that there is a blatant misrepresentation of the Orient by the Occident, as orchestrated by several Western scholars and Orientalists including Lane, Massignon, Burton and Lyall among others. He further states that Shakespeare, Flaubert, Conrad, Aeschylus, Kipling, Austin and other literary figures also play critical roles in establishing and shaping the discourse of the Orient and situating them in an inferior position as it is seen in some literary works today. Thus, *Orientalism* for Said is all about knowing the Orient in the Western way. He argues here that writings about the Orient do not reflect the real Arab-Muslim “Orient”, they are “merely knowledge conveying dominant ideas, truths, trends and doctrines predominant in a culture.” (Maldonado 2016, 10). Said observes that:

[...] that *Orientalism* makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, “there” in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed- upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient. (Said, 2003, p. 22)

He examined Western scholarship of the “Orient,” specifically of the Arab Islamic world. Although he was an Arab Christian, he argued that early scholarship; literary and historical documentation of the Arabs by Westerners was prejudiced and biased and had always projected a false and stereotyped vision of “otherness” of the Islamic world. Such *Orientalism*, seen as a Western fantasy, only facilitated and justified the Western colonial ambitions and policies. Said defined *Orientalism* from three similar, yet, different perspectives. The academic, institutional and political or imperial forms of *Orientalism* (Güven 2018), are explicitly presented in the first chapter of his book. The second and third definitions of *Orientalism* by Said will be employed in this study, as they are most relevant to this research enquiry. The definitions are as follows:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny and so on. This *Orientalism* can accommodate Aeschylus, say, and Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx (p. 2).

[This *Orientalism*] is something more historically and materially defined than either of the two. Taking the late [E]ighteenth Century as a very roughly defined starting point *Orientalism* can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, *Orientalism* as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (p. 3).

Criticism of Edward Said’s Orientalism

The publication of Edward Said’s book witnessed a mixed reaction from both academic and non-academics, it has been vehemently praised and passionately relied on for interdisciplinary studies and theoretical approaches. It has as well attracted criticism and (academic, non-academic and political) debates – with a variety of claims against Said and his work – since its publication till date (Maldonado 2016, 4; Shatz 2019).

Among the backlash against the book are critical reviews written and published in most reputable journals by professors of History, Middle Eastern studies or Modern Middle East working in reputable universities in both the Middle East and the West. Some of Said’s earliest critics are Albert Hourani, Roger Owen, Malcom H. Kerr, J. H. Plumb, and Maxime Rodinson to mention but a few (Lockman 2004; Brahimi and Fordant 2017). On the other hand, some Middle East experts and scholars like Bryan Turner see the criticisms and debates surrounding Said’s magnum opus as “a dead end ... pernicious or corrosive” (Turner 2012, para. 2). Despite receiving a flood of appreciation from his admirers, and the standard he has set in the history of literary (and social science) studies

of Islam and Middle Eastern studies, he was aggressively attacked both academically and otherwise for this profound publication. Howe notes that:

Not only is Said accused of academic fraud – of factual mistakes, historical ignorance, false claims and pervasive inconsistencies, forged quotations. He is claimed to have lied about his own early life, and much besides. He is also, and above all, blamed for misleading and corrupting a whole generation of intellectuals by his pernicious example, for perverting the entire disciplines of literary and of Middle East studies (Howe 2008, para 2).

Macfie's edited book *Orientalism: A Reader* (2000) collects critical articles on Orientalism by renowned scholars like Stuart Schaar, David Kopf, Michael Richardson, Sadik Jalal al-'Azm, Ernest J. Wilson, Bernard Lewis, B. J. Moore-Gilbert, Ronald Inden, Aijaz Ahmad, Billie Melman, Sheldon Pollock, Lisa Lowe, John MacKenzie and host of others. This study will particularly focus on the most relevant criticism of Said. Aijaz Ahmad's "Between Orientalism and Historicism" (1991) offers a critique of Said that: "foregrounding of Literature in Orientalism facilitates a reading of history primarily from its systems of representations rather than from the history of material production and appropriation... [it] raises the question of postmodernist form of knowledge." (A. Macfie 2000, 12:285).

While Bernard Lewis does not even consider Said as a scholar worthy of speaking about Orientalism, he dismisses Said's views on this pretext wrongly presenting some historical facts and evident ignorance in some matters (Guyen, 2019, p. 424). However, Fred Halliday's article "Orientalism and Its Crisis" (1993) overviews the growing debate on Said's Orientalism and argues that while the debate has made interesting revelations about the study of Middle East, it has also exposed the methodological limitations of "how to analyse Middle Eastern societies, contemporary or historical." Towards solving this seemingly unsolvable issue, Halliday proposed that "Both camps, the Orientalists and their critics, have, to a considerable degree, shied away from this task, focusing more on discourse than on the analysis of reality." (Halliday 1993, 161–62). This study agrees with Halliday's approach and concerns on the overrated debate. While it only acknowledges Lewis' proclamation, it finds Ahmad's positioning much more pertinent to this research inquiry which will be discussed shortly – the question of representation.

Howe, nonetheless, observed that the fiercest of Said's attack on his book *Orientalism* could be found in three major books, which were all published after 9/11: Robert Irwin's *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (2006), Daniel Martin Varisco's *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (2007) and Ibn Warraq's *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (2007) (Howe 2008, para. 4). Ibn Warraq's book is considered the most daring of all, the first book-length criticism of Said's theories and the paradigm shift in postcolonial studies laid by Orientalism. It is also the first non-academic or scholarly criticism to address and rebut Said's opinions "against the background of a more general presentation of salient aspects of Western civilisation." (Berkowitz 2008, para. 10).

In a book review of Ibn Warraq's *Defending the West* (2007), Berkowitz contends that Said's phenomenal text degraded "a generation of historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and political theorists [and seduced intellectuals] into believing falsely that for two centuries Western scholarship devoted to understanding the languages, history, art, and ideas of the Arab and Muslim Middle East" has been distorted by putting them under examination (Berkowitz, 2008, para 3). Sympathising with the conservatives, Berkowitz called for a thorough criticism of Said (like Ibn Warraq did), for a better and objective understanding of the Muslims and the Arab world.

However, before 9/11, Syrian professor of European philosophy, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm in his article "Orientalism and Orientalism in reverse" (1991) criticised Said for his refusal to acknowledge that some Orientalist stereotypes of Muslim/Arabs are true, especially with the case of superstition. He also argued that Said does and encouraged non-Westerners to do "Orientalism in reverse" by producing "essentialising, ahistorical and wildly misleading images of cultural difference, sometimes self-denigrating ones, sometimes self-glorifying" (Howe 2008, para. 9). Similarly, Samir al-Khalil, an Iraqi exile sees Said's Orientalism as a bad influence on Arab scholars for fueling a deep Western resentment among the Arabs. Kanan Mikiya – Khalil's real name, in his book *Cruelty and Silence* (1993) expressed his views which were more inclined towards the political failure of the Middle East and sharply focused on the apologist attitudes of Arab intellectuals towards Saddam Hussein's imperial crimes. This failure, he recounts is a result of Edward Said's negative influence on the Arab's intellectuals. (Viorst 1993).

Edward Said's (along with other postcolonial critics) solidarity with Salman Rushdie during the Rushdie affair – the event that spurred lots of controversy after the publication of his *Satanic Verses* – discouraged many Muslim postcolonial critics. The relationship between postcolonialism and Islam became shady and younger postcolonial critics – with this among other reasons – began to question postcolonialism's coverage of Islamic issues and called for a "theorising of postcolonial limitations". Muslim writers like Anouar Majid in his article "Can the Postcolonial Critic Speak? Orientalism and the Rushdie Affair" critiqued Spivak and Said's support for Rushdie's anti-Islamic publication under the pretext of freedom of expression (Majed 2012), p. 4-5)

Amid praises and venerations surrounding Said's groundbreaking work for its vigorous relevance for 9/11, his ideas were rebranded and mashed up to be misinterpreted and brought down to the object of criticism from various academic (and non-academic) angles. This reproach got credible academic attention, particularly during an international conference in London that focused on Said's positions on his trailblazing work. Zarnett (2008) observes that this is so, mainly because the conference was done in time; amid spurring literature and growing criticisms of his work.

The Courtauld's decision to use Orientalism as their point of departure in studying Western perceptions of the 'Other' comes at an interesting time as a number of scholars are developing a new body of literature that is highly critical of Said's landmark work (Zarnett 2008, 50).

In the same vein, Adam Shatz (2019) argues that the whole body of knowledge which Said's Orientalism renders has been mixed up. The conservatives mistook it for a "nativist denunciation of Western scholarship", while the Islamists took for granted Said's secular political views. However, the Orientalism which Said discussed forty years back is not relatively the same as today's Orientalism. After all the misunderstanding of Said's Orientalism, it remains what it is and for whom it is meant. (Shatz, 2019, para. 6).

The Inconsistencies of Said's "Representation" in Orientalism

Among the critics of Said's Orientalism is Aijaz Ahmad, one of the later postcolonial critics whose critique robustly engaged in the questioning of Said's generalisation and essentialism. Ahmad argues that Said is himself guilty of the same fault of which he accuses the Westerners. In his generalization of Europe as a single body, reveals his agenda to dominate the other – whom he also has generalised and reduced to objects of Western manipulations (Bain-Selbo 2006, 88).

Aijaz Ahmad also criticised Said's concept of representation of the Orient, which is inconsistent and unrepresentable of itself. Said's assertions about Oriental representation seem not to reconcile. After insisting that the Orient has only been represented by Western writers based on assumptions and imaginations, he further posits that not every Oriental writing about the Orient is Orientalism. Said notes:

The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. (Said, 2003, p. 272)

Said's emphasis on the possibility of a "true representation" destabilises his earlier assertions about Oriental representation. The problem with representation, therefore, rests on why the real image is difficult to distinguish from false or Oriental images. Ideally, representation should express things in their concrete forms, as they are, just as a mirror reflection of reality. However, textual representation is usually influenced by some dominant factors, since texts can produce different types of knowledge which agree with existing paradigms and emphasise them (Childs and Williams 1997, 75).

Aijaz Ahmad's criticism of Said's book also highlights Said's inability to give a clear-cut motive for Oriental representation, whether it is due to the absence of authentic representation or done out of willful distortion of the Orient's reality (Ahmad 1992, 193). To sum this up, this study's position in this deliberation is in-betweenness. In between Said's shortcomings and his critics' arguments, there is a gap observed, which is Said's original intentions behind his work. His publication reveals a fountain of theoretical and methodological approaches, yet his critics cannot be ignored for their scholarly observations of his limitations – and inconsistencies. In a conversation between Bill Ashcroft and Edward Said in 1995, Said accepts that his theoretical arguments are inconsistent but does not find that problematic since he is after all, not after being consistent. "I am invariably criticised by younger post-colonialists (Ahmad, etcetera) for being inconsistent and untheoretical, and I find that I like that- who wants to be consistent?" (Said 2004, 90). Thus, the structure of representation, as a productive and relevant part of Said's theoretical argument, will be imbibed in this research inquiry; as Said himself chooses to "remain within a system of representations" (Tekdemir 2017, 149). Where Said's approach falls short of theoretical productivity, this study proposes a model to address such issues, by scrutinising the intention behind authors' representation.

The question for Islamophobia

Edward Said was the first to use the word Islamophobia in the English language and print, after its use in France to denote a similar semantic meaning. Said, in his article "Orientalism Reconsidered" (1985), used the word Islamophobia to refer to Western anti-Muslim sentiment as an equivalent of, and a manifestation of anti-Semitism in the Christian West (Richardson, 2012, p.3).

Since Edward Said has widely been criticised for criticising Western scholarship of Arab Muslim studies without providing an alternative (Turner, 2012, para 3), the need for a substantial reading method becomes vital; to resolve the issues with Oriental representations. However, despite his several efforts to balance his thoughts in theory and practice, his works continue to pave the way to new theoretical underpinnings. Said's theory of Orientalism reached a climax of analytical usage in the aftermath of 9/11.

After several years of using and misusing his theory, the question remains, as Turner also observed, how best can the theory be used better than deconstructive investigation and beyond ordinary textual analysis? Although Edward Said is best known for his book *Orientalism* (1987) which is considered "one of the foundational texts for the study of Islamophobia" (Itaoui and Elsheikh 2018, 7), his theory as a tool of textual analysis of Islamophobia remains contended. Said's theoretical limitations – the inconsistencies of representation – are a hindrance to the appropriation of Islamophobia. Hence, the inefficiency of Orientalism.

As much as writers can be Islamophobic, whether intentionally or not, there should be a limitation to classifying constructive criticism of Islamic cultural limitations as Islamophobic. The question is to what extent is the (mis)representation of Muslims in a novel Islamophobic, how much is an effort of the creative imagination of an author and how much is a deliberate misrepresentation? Any work written about Arabs or Muslims in general as a global citizen is subject to Islamophobic scrutiny and writers are easily associated with bigotry, especially in the period after 9/11. How much should the issue for/about Muslims be put to reality and discussed academically

without being ascribed to Islamophobia in this pressing time? Fred Halliday expresses similar concern in the middle of Saidian debates:

At the core of the argument around ‘Orientalism’ is one central, and enduring, question, namely: in what terms can we as social scientists approach the analysis of contemporary Middle Eastern society, i.e. with what concepts, general theories, values, questions? (Halliday, 1993, p. 145)

The objectivity of writers’ representations of the Orient and the historical accuracy or expertise of the Orientalist as a licensed writer for the Orient remain the crux of Saidian controversy and criticism. The uncertainty of textual classification demonstrates the complexity of a transparent system of theoretical approach. The main problem that has continued to fuel this debate is the “insistence on a strict division of kinds of text.” (Güven 2018, 419).

This study is not a vague attempt to solve all the problems related to Said’s criticism and debate, but an attempt to intervene in the opposing arguments by highlighting and articulating the limitations of ‘representation’ in Orientalism. This way propagates the need for a model of reading post-9/11 novels more correctly. An accurate reading of texts will help to understand their alignment or affiliations with Islamophobia. Not all narratives that negatively portray Islam can be labelled as Islamophobic, as there are various motivations behind each author’s choice of plot. Similarly, this study acknowledges that with the outpour of anti-Islamic sentiments in Western societies, most writers have taken to producing what is best for the literary market, considering the global tension in place with the rise of the so-called Muslim terrorists.

Islamophobia after 9/11

The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks saw an outburst of literary publications in America and the West about Islam and Muslims. Most of these novels reproduced dominant images of Muslims as violent murderers or terrorists and of Islam as a misogynist and intolerant religion. Thus, America witnessed a surge of Islamophobia, thanks to literature, Media and Cinema. Literature, especially, took on a military job of trying to change the world by providing relevant information about the Muslim enemy. Some rightists do not see anything wrong with these outpourings, while some leftists denounce such novels as Islamophobic and Oriental; instead, they accuse Edward Said of misguiding many intellectuals into sympathising with the horrible Muslims. In between these two distant positions is where this study finds the rolling problem worth considering.

After so many years of debates and reconsiderations, the reception of the paradigm shift in Orientalism remains polar between two opposing groups of academics, researchers or Middle Eastern specialist, in that, Said’s method of reading remains questionable and Islamophobic analysis of textual representations is brought under scrutiny.

The intervention of this study will, however, bring together what is presented at the surface of each novel and what is not, to understand the ideological positions of the authors and to provide an appropriate method of reading these (and similar) texts to understand their inclinations towards the reproduction of ideological biases fully. To achieve this goal is to revisit Said’s method of reading, this time with a limited emphasis on textual analysis of Orientalism and more on the contextual study of the text and authors. As Said contends in earlier work, the circumstantial reality of a text is more significant in analysis than ordinary textual interpretation. He critiqued the scholarly attention given to the text alone rather than the circumstance that administers it. He argues that “literary theory has for the most part become isolated, alienated from the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that make it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work.” (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 31). Thus, the authors’ engagements and the socio-political state of affairs that surrounds the texts will be considered since “meaning does not simply reside in the reader’s response but is also understood through the consciousness of the author.” (Burney 2012, 119). Therefore, Said’s contrapuntal reading articulated through his oeuvre will be of relevance to this study.

Contrapuntal reading

Having much affinity and roots in deconstructionists like Jaques Derrida and Micheal Foucault, among others, Said’s contrapuntal examination focuses on colonial/Oriental resistance through a deconstruction of the discourse of colonial texts. The crux of Said’s argument in contrapuntal reading requires not only reading the text in terms of what it includes but also in terms of what has been excluded from it by going beyond the constraints of narration within the terrain of imperialism (Said, 1994, p. 66-67). In this regard, this framework will be sampled to justify the theoretical underpinning of this study. Meanwhile, adopting Said’s approach to underscore the line between the representation of Orient (or Muslims) in Western (here American) canonical writing this study, is to understand their Islamophobic implications.

Textual approach

While reading these texts as representations, this study will take into account some of Said’s methodology of understanding Oriental representations in imaginative narratives. As such, the style of narrative conforming to the selected themes of this study will be given a closer examination, and historical as well as social circumstances will be significantly employed in rereading the texts to reveal the submerged details. According to Said:

My analysis of the Orientalist text therefore emphasizes the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations as representations, not as “natural” depictions of the Orient. This evidence is found just as prominently in the so-called truthful text (histories, philological analyses, political treatises) as in the avowedly artistic (i.e., openly imaginative) text. The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original. The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient. (2003, p. 21)

The internal formations referred to by Said are the Orientalist narratives that imply difference with the use of narrative techniques, styles, figures of speech, setting, etc. to facilitate the ‘othering’ of the Orient. This focuses on the authoritative discourse and poetic license manipulated by the authors. These could therefore explicate the representation of the Muslims as distinctively different from the West through clichés like violent murderers, misogynists, and uncultured and barbaric beings collectively used by Orientalist writers to demonise the Muslims. “Edward Said underscores that the starting point for all Orientalists is to recognise these stereotypes.” (Moosavinia, Niazi, and Ghaforian 2011, 111). This is what this study intends to address; the Muslim “Otherness”, as situated by the authors in their works; the Americans as dominant superiors over the Muslims who are barbaric and uncivilised and whether it, in turn, points towards Islamophobia. The task of reading a text through an Orientalist framework is locating the author’s position in the text. This is because:

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf. (Said 2003, 20)

Contextual Approach

Said’s emphasis on context is demonstrated in his much-discussed “contrapuntal reading” in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1994). To exemplify his proposed reading method, Said provided a contextual reading of a few Nineteenth-Century English novels (that significantly legitimised Western imperialism) by addressing textual representations and revisiting the contextual reality of the text. More importantly, Said enjoins that, critics “must connect the structures of a narrative to the ideas, concepts, experiences from which it draws support.” These related concepts, ideas, or experiences are extrapolated in two primary forms. Consulting the “personal records” and reading to draw out “what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented” (1994, pp. 66-67). Said’s exemplary usage of this method is as follows:

1. Reading about the author’s engagement to understand his/her inclinations towards the supporting ideology. Said steeped into Conrad’s personal record and found that his representation of Africans in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), is influenced mainly by “lore and writings about Africa” which built up much of his impression about Africans. Said concludes here that, Conrad’s submerged motive here is imperial, succumbing to the European scramble for Africa (p. 68)

2. Reading the text contextually. This process puts the text in its historical milieu to understand circumstantial factors that influenced the ideological development of the narrative. Among other texts, Said analysed Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (1901) vis-à-vis the circumstantial reality of the time it was produced. It thereby navigated through the suppressed history of Indian nationalism and resistance at the onset of British colonialism in India. Thus, his contextual reading of *Kim* reveals the “complex negotiations between Englishmen and Indians of what India was, who was to rule it, and how” (Gbazoul 2007, 68). Similarly, in his analysis of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), Said reads the historical context and finds insights into colonialism. These perceptions reveal colonial ideology as seen in the Europeans’ quest for expansion and domination through the overseas plantation narrative, which Austen presents. Despite the under-representation of the West Indies in the character of Barther, the Europeans’ pursuit for economic galvanisation is unveiled which again alludes to British imperialism. Said’s reading method will provide the foundation of contextual reading employed in this study.

Said’s contrapuntal reading is one of the critical frameworks of his theoretical oeuvre (Burney, 2012). It has a strong connection with the work of James C. Scott, an anthropologist who authored the book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) argued by Devadasan and Bhatia (2017). James Scott argued that beneath every discourse presented (of the dominant and marginal) is another transcript which is not shown at the surface level. That, corresponding to the “public transcript” – the indicator of the relationship between the dominant and the marginalised groups – there is always a “hidden transcript” which functions as “subversion” and “resistance”. This transcript operates through “speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript.” (Devadasan & Bhatia, 2017, para. 6).

The convergence between Scott and Said is, therefore, the question of textual inclusion and exclusion thereof, both of which are fundamental constitutions of a narrative. The inclusive narrative allows for the visibility of factual details (or artefacts), whereas the exclusive keeps them hidden or “off-stage”. This excluded or submerged knowledge is “equally important to the existence of the artefact”. The task of contrapuntal reading, therefore, “is to both identify and resurrect what is invisible and excluded.” (Devadasan & Bhatia, 2017, para. 7).

The interest of this study in the above interpolation is the connection between a polished representation and the underlying history within. It intensifies the need for a contrapuntal intervention, rather than ordinary textual analysis. Hence, the experiences and significant events that govern the formation of the selected texts become indisputably worthy of consideration. Said reaffirms this method of his textual analysis:

That is, we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them coexisting and interacting with others. (Said 1994, 32)

Although Orientalism is not only restricted to Muslims, but they have been the primary victims since 9/11. However, what do we call the Orientalism of Asians that have similar features with the Muslims and falls under Edward Said’s demonstration of ‘representation’? Since this misrepresentation is not restricted to Islam or Muslims, on what basis can we justify that it is Islamophobic, i.e. to what extent is Oriental representation of Muslims considered Islamophobia? In this circumstance, this study finds substantial merit in Bleich’s

understanding of Islamophobia as “indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims” (Bleich 2012, 182).

CONCLUSION

Although the term ‘Islamophobia’ might have some etymological issues, it will be illogical to discontinue using it in these pressing times. This study agrees with Lean, irrespective of the problems surrounding the etymology of Islamophobia; it sees it as a phenomenon worthy of scholarly attention. The inconsistencies of Said’s representation should also not be a hindrance to the investigations of Orientalism in contemporary literature. However, generalising acts of oriental misrepresentation as Islamophobia should be approached cautiously. On that note, this study recommends adopting a more suitable reading model that offers a reconciliation of the identified limitations of using Said’s Orientalism about the dissipations of ‘representation’ for Islamophobia.

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