

The Said and Not-Said: New Grammar of Visual Imperialism

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ABSTRACT

Since the European colonization of the East, stereotypical depictions of their perceived Orient as exotically backward and Muslim women as submissive and lecherous have been appearing as major themes in Western visual discourses. These representations, manifested to justify Western presence in the East, pervade even after the tragic events of 9/11. The West, especially the United States, now has to exercise new strategies to justify their imperial ‘war on terror’ project. The post-9/11 Western mass media and visual discourses are still fraught with stereotypes that consolidate stereotypical representations. Thus, by deconstructing the layers of Western misrepresentations of the Orient and studying the history of visual imperialism, this paper investigates, in the course of post-9/11 contexts, the grammar of visual imperialism in representing the East and Muslims have both negative and positive depictions. However we reveal that even the positive depictions would eventually consolidate the orientalist stereotypes and legitimize racist policies and practices. By drawing on Whitlock’s concept of ‘soft weapon’, we argue that using Muslim women to relate their own stories of oppression and victimhood through memoirs is another new strategy to confirm the pre-existing notions of the East. These Muslim life narratives become soft weapons when they elicit sympathy from Western readers. Therefore, while the rule in the representation of Muslims after 9/11 has changed through the use of different strategies to apparently dispel the stereotypes, they ultimately reinforce the pre-existing notions about the East and Muslims.

Keywords: visual imperialism; Muslim; west; east; representation

INTRODUCTION

Images are visual aspects of culture which surround us in our daily lives and create the visual culture of our world. The term “visual culture” describes a philosophical and epistemological posture that endorses visuality as fundamentally important to the constitution of the world. Images have never been as important as words but the once so logocentric (underscoring the written and spoken words) society has been rapidly changing and developing towards a shift in a society where visual images are of utmost importance. While the shift from lexicality to the visuality popularizes the status of images and enhances engagement with it, it engenders a fear about the potential capability of images to shape and change attitude as they are cultural productions loaded with values, ideologies and taken-for-granted beliefs of the cultures which produce them and the ones which consume them. This visuality is the way in which particular ways of seeing the world are conceived and how conceiving of this sort of seeing is influential as they have dramatic impact upon “how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see”

(Foster 1988, ix, in Rose 2007). This flourishing centrality of the visuality in our daily life, argues Martin Jay (1994, p. 3), is “ocularcentrism” or “scopophilia” where the practice of looking assist people make sense of the world (Cartwright & Sturken, 2001). However, derived and informed by the socio-political and historical changes, this practice of looking is influenced by the “information that exist both prior to and separate from the [visual] text itself” (Howells & Negreiro, 2012, p.17) which forms a ‘visual culture’ of representation. Ceaselessly reproducing visual representations would gradually build a preferred mode of reading and viewing about certain issues, ideas and cultures (Fotouhi & Zeiny, 2015). This constructs what we mean by ‘visual imperialism,’ which is “the colonization of the world’s mind through the use of selective imagery that acts as a representation of a dominant ideology.” (Kuehnast, 1992, p.184)

Although the existence of visual representation dates back to the earliest cave paintings 40,000 years ago, the history of selective imagery of visual imperialism, particularly of Western perspective, can be traced back to the way painters depicted certain regions and areas of the East the way they liked it. For Westerners, the East had been “since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences” (Said, 1978, p. 1). During the colonization era, it became “a major preoccupation of nineteenth-century painting, an East which was, in turn, ‘Imagined, Experienced, [and] Remembered’” (MacKenzie 1995, p. 44). As an obsession for the West, representing the Orient has its roots in the first Westerners’ journey to the Orient in search of exotica and excitement whose travel accounts encouraged many male artists to travel there for painting. The creation of these paintings led to the emergence of an Orient as a source that provides the West the deepest and most recurring images of the Other. These visual representations of the Orient, over the centuries, have continued to bolster the stereotypes of the ‘Other’ and celebrate the differences to sustain the power of the dominant culture. These differences, that are constructed imaginatively as the real ones are being contracted, are the result of what Benedict Anderson (1983) calls “imagined communities.” “Imagined communities” must be formed through invented links and group identities are made by being part of an exclusive identity. The creation of Western identity delineates who is part of the community and who is on the other side. Baily Jones (2007, p. 8) argues that it is precisely “this creation of imaginary difference that separates one group from another.”

Of the groups of people who have been left outside the Western communities and who have been historically and constantly subjected to Orientalist stereotypical depiction are Muslims, especially Muslim women whose body has long been a site of contention. The visual and pictorial representations of these women have been created to reinforce differences and deny the personal experience. Thus people in the West have been presented with the cliché portrayals of Muslim women as veiled and the powerless victims of a patriarchal society in a land of primitive, tribal, and frozen in a hazy past. This depiction continues to date and it became darker after the events of 9/11. The extension of the term ‘grammar’ in the subtitle suggests the idea of rules. What we see in post-9/11 visual contexts is a continuation of colonial strategy and rule in depicting the ‘Other’ but in a new form. The 9/11 events and the following President Bush’s ‘Axis of Evil’ speech gave birth to the explosion of visual discourses about Muslim women’s oppression in an Islamic society. It is now an established rule in the West to represent the East in need of Western liberation. The rule is the same in every medium including painting, photography, news, film, literature and music. What gives power to this stereotype is repetition which associates Muslims and East with ‘veil,’ ‘Orient,’ and ‘Arab,’ all are words with different layers of textual and visual history, and are related to real place and real time but have been weighed down with partial media and cultural meanings.

THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF REPRESENTATION

Playing a very important role in how the West views the East, representation has been vital to Orientalism as it is through the depictions of particular images that such a perspective is developed. Representing the Orient is not a new phenomenon as Westerners, for centuries, have always been interested in learning about the East and Eastern way of living. This interest began to appear during the Roman Empire and it became a common practice in the nineteenth century after the European colonization of some parts of Asia, Africa and the Levant when it became a major obsession of western male artists. What prompted these Westerners to journey eastward was *Arabian Nights* and similar literature that portrayed the East as a place of dream and pleasure; this sort of literature “preconditioned the [Western] traveller even before journeying the Orient and definitely shaped his attitude to things Oriental” (Sha’aban 1991, p. 179). Moreover, these artists were inspired by Napoleon Bonaparte’s account of the East as he loved the East and explored it in search of glory and utopia. About his love of the East, once conversing with his wife, he says:

In Egypt, I found myself freed from the wearisome restraints of civilization. I dreamed all sorts of things, and I saw how all that I dreamed might be realized. I created a religion; I pictured myself on the road to Asia, mounted on an elephant, with a turban on my head, and in my hand a new Koran, which I should compose according to my own ideas. I would have the combined experience of two worlds with which to set about my enterprise; I was to have ransacked, for my own advantage, the whole domain of history; I was to have attacked the English power in India, and renewed my relations with old Europe by my conquest. The time I passed in Egypt was the most delightful part of my life, for it was the most ideal.

(Madame de Remusat 1880. pp. 149-50 quoted in Bagnole, 2005, p. 49)

It was not only inspired artists that traveled to the East but also so many artists were hired to eulogize and propagate Bonaparte’s military achievements and to record the monumental remnants of the old civilization (Mitchelle, 2012). Besides glorifying the military success, they also accentuated the cultural disparities between the West and the East by portraying the East as inferior, lethargic, barbaric and lascivious. Keith (2008, p.1) argues that Napoleon took forty thousand men and one hundred seventy scientists, scholars and artists to civilize Egypt as he thought “France was destined to civilize those who were not only not French, but not European.” The artists, who were labeled as ‘Generals of Painting,’ were recruited to depict that western civilization is needed for the Eastern ferocity and savagery. Art was, indeed, a propaganda to elicit support for the government policy as David O’Brien (2003, p. 389) confirms “The Napoleonic art administration fully intended to use painting instrumentally to shape opinion, but in its most sophisticated maneuvers it recognized the importance of preserving at least the illusion of an open public sphere.” There were also many artists who started to portray it to keep the propaganda mission at work although they had never been to the East.

A painter that illustrates art in the form of propaganda is Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835) who never visited the East and yet won the competition in commemorating Napoleon’s courageous and dazzling deeds during the occupation of Egypt and Syria. His *The Battle of Nazareth* (1801) (figure 1) was the “initial volley launched in the propaganda campaign orchestrated by Bonaparte and his generals” (Porterfield, 1998, p. 46) which celebrates the most prosperous events of the failed Syrian campaign. The painting is the depiction of the

confrontation between Turks and French and it depicts the triumph of five hundred French over six thousands Turks on April 8, 1799. *General Bonaparte Visiting the Pesthouse at Jaffa* (1804) (figure 2) is another painting by Gros which illustrates a major military set back where the French army was stricken by the bubonic plague. The painting shows Napoleon as a merciful and intrepid leader in a land stricken with plague. He is portrayed as being calm as he is touching the French soldiers suffering from the plague. To portray the abstract mood of bravery and calmness, Gros combined light and color in the painting to create attractive brightness surrounding Napoleon. Apparently, Gros is attempting to show Napoleon as a messiah in the East. These paintings were used to persuade and encourage the French grassroots to continue to back France's self-appointed civilizing mission. They were used as the rationale for expanding French Imperialism in the East and instituted the moral superiority of the West for Westerners. To make his paintings look authentic, Gros had to rely on the military notes and records, sketches and paintings of Vivant Denon who was in Egypt with Bonaparte. He also had to make use of "authentic everyday items, such as Eastern clothes and weapons" (Bagnole, 2005, 50). In a letter to Denon, who was then the advisor to the painters painting the events of Bonaparte's exploration in the East, Gros wrote:

I have the greatest need to have in my studio the Eastern cloths, covers, and weapons you so obligingly offered to lend me [...] An artist benefits immensely from painting as close as possible to life [...] May I remind you to send that blue tinged damask sword, which in a well-practiced hand would whisk enemy heads off like as much stubble"

(quoted in Lemaire, 105)



FIGURE 1. *Battle of Nazareth* (1801)

Credit: [The Art Archive / Musée des Beaux Arts Nantes / Gianni Dagli Orti]
Ref: AA377969



FIGURE 2. *Bonaparte Visiting the Pesthouse at Jaffa* (1804)
Credit: [The Art Archive / Musée du Louvre Paris / Collection Dagli Orti]
Ref: AA347789

Thus, these paintings were constructed to look authentic by making use of the information, outlines and goods provided by the government or private collections. All these paintings were of life-size figures to highlight the disparities between the West and the East. Bagnole (2005, p. 51) argues that “exotic iconography and accurate typographic elements were mandatory to establish convincing visual rhetoric.” For instance, in the painting *The Battle of Nazareth*, Nazareth, Mount Tabor and Cana are all depicted but political propaganda was the ulterior motive as well. The typographical element in the painting generated a Christian claim to the land through an invocation of the life of Jesus Christ and his miracles (Poterfield, 1998, p. 47). Such an assumption stresses the significance of expelling the intruders, (in this painting the Arabs and Turks), out of the holy sites of Christianity. It also brings to surface the scheme to widen the gap between the Western and Eastern cultures to justify the presence of the West in the East (Bagnole, 2005). Artists were also encouraged to use the theme of barbarism and violence in their paintings to suggest that the East needs the West for civilization. Violence amongst indigenous tribes, cruel and inhumane punishments, as well as the overt practices of white slavery were all magnified in the paintings of that time to reveal the so-called barbaric culture of the East and contrast them to the supposedly superior, modern and civilized culture of the West. This sentiment is confirmed by Valbjorn (2004, p. 63):

The Orientalist conception of the Middle East functions as a constituting counter image of the European and American identity of a so called Occidental culture whose supposedly democratic, rational and enlightened character is contrasted by depictions of a despotic, irrational and barbaric Orient.

A perfect example that illustrates the barbaric Orient is Theodore Chasseriau's *Arab Chiefs Challenging to Combat under a City Ramparts* (1852) (Figure 3). Highlighting the theme of violence, the painting depicts two Arab chiefs on a horseback ready to confront each other. Between them lies a dead soldier with a dagger in his chest. The confrontation between the natives bolsters the notion that the East needs the West for its civilization. These sorts of paintings which were fraught with biasness and fantasies affected other genres of painting such as the representation of Eastern Muslim women. Westerners were always keen to know about Eastern Muslim women as their lives were shrouded in secrecy. Eastern women became a favorite subject of Western male painters as they were particularly barred from entering the exclusively female quarters and as these women were not allowed to unveil before strangers (Zeiny & Yusof, 2014). Popular images of that era were images of submissive harem girls and exotic interior of harems or of the Muslim veiled women returning the gaze of the artist/viewer which were depicted seductively to tantalize the West. Thus the Western male artists either used their imagination in portraying these images or they had the "power to reveal the coverings and reveal what lies beneath" (Bailey Jones, 2007, p.110). Therefore, these depictions are a result of "fantastic imagination, monetary compensation, or negotiations with male relatives of the woman" (Bailey Jones, 2007, p. 110). The male painters were the controllers of the gaze and produced a "sexualized [and] fetishized form of looking that seeks to make available the women pictured as objects of desire" (Bailey Jones, 2007, p. 109). They fabricated an exoticized and eroticized the Orient in their portrayals to titillate Western audiences with lust and adventure.



FIGURE 3. *Arab Chiefs Challenging to Combat under a City Ramparts* (1852)
Credit: [The Art Archive / Musée d'Orsay Paris / Superstock]
Ref: AA543599

In a century and a half between 1800 and 1950, roughly 60,000 books were published in the West on the Arabs in the Orient (Nader, 1989). The key theme of these books was the depiction of colonized Arabs/ Muslims as uncivilized and inferior in dire need of the progress proffered to them by the superior colonizers. It is in this political context that images of veiled Muslim women and women in harems appeared as a source of captivation and fantasy for western writers (Hoodfar, 1997). Harems were depicted as places where Muslim men jailed their wives to gratify their sexual needs. Women were constantly portrayed as submissive beings, naked or half-naked, in search of sex. All these images of exotic harems, bare-breasted women and the

veiled women lecherously returning the gaze of a male western artist were a form of aesthetic façade and acted as red herrings diverting the attention from the destruction of native people and culture by the colonial rulers. This exclusively Western male representation of Muslim women conceived an inferior and a slave East in the colonial era. The constructed colonial knowledge about the Orient banked on an amalgamation of “real observation, imagined inferiority and artistic fantasy” (Bailey Jones, 2007, p. 113). This created knowledge, according to Said (1978, p. 36), is “what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control.” This was a merging of truth, faith and prejudice that were uttered and willed to take credit as unadulterated fact. Said’s discourse of Orientalism cannot adequately describe the West’s gendered representation of Muslim women as he has been criticized for the androcentric nature of his critique. This colonial knowledge was asserted in a power play to cement Western control by “centering native women and cultural traditions in the argument for cultural superiority” (Bailey Jones, 2007, p. 114). This conjures up Lord Cromer’s detailing of much inferiority of the natives of Egypt:

Whereas Christianity teaches respect for women, and European men ‘elevate’ women because of the teachings of their religion, Islam degraded them, and it was to this degradation, most evident in the practice of veiling and segregation, that the inferiority of Muslim men could be traced.

(1908, p. 153)

What is, oftentimes, unsaid about the visual representation of Muslim women by the West is that the transmutations in the nineteenth century representation of Muslim women did not occur in isolation from other modifications happening in the colonial land. Concurrent with the colonization of the East, the notion of femininity and what later became Victorian morality was shaped and flourished in Britain and emerged in various parts of the West (Poovey, 1989). The strict Victorian morality which laid the framework for acceptable social conduct restricted the Western women to the domestic domain where they had to be obedient wives and dedicated mothers. Both Muslims in the Orient and Christians in the Occident were thought to be in inferior position to that of men and they were thought to be “in need of male protection and intellectually and biologically destined for the domestic domain (Hoodfar, 1997, p. 8). Both Oriental and Occidental women were morally obliged to obey and honor their husbands. Never did Western scholars draw parallels between the maltreatment of women in their own countries and that of women in the East. Western women of the nineteenth century had the same position as that of Eastern women regarding mobility and travelling. Whereas many Western artists depicted the distressed situation of women in polygamous marriages in the East, never once did they portray the predicament of being “mistresses” in their own societies and the great number of illegitimate children who not only were not entitled to economic support but also were stigmatized as ‘bastards’ who had to be miserable because of the sins of their father for the rest of their lives (Hoodfar, 1997). Thus, it is transparent that patriarchy in both Orient and Occident were developed to pander to men’s desire and preserve their authority. Ahmed (1992, p. 152) asserts:

The Victorian colonial paternalistic establishment appropriated the language of feminism in the service of its assault on the religions and cultures of Other men, and in particular on Islam, in order to give moral justification to that assault at the very same time as it combated feminism within its own society.

The anxiety of unveiling the unrevealed world of Muslim women is the motive behind the visual discourse of Western representation of Muslim women. Orientalist artists made use of the already shaped ideas of Islam, harem and the veiled Muslim women and consolidated these stereotypes through colorful and sensual paintings. One of these artists who chose women as the subject matter of his paintings was Jean-Leon Gerome (1824-1904). His *Dance of the Almeh* (1863) (figure 4) perfectly illustrates the Orientalist painting of Eastern Muslim women as submissive. It depicts an attractive young woman dancing in a coffee shop while the native musicians are playing the violin, drum and flute. Wearing low slung harem style pantaloons and a headscarf, her belly, naval, breasts and arms are visible through her sheer white and gold top. Her head is directed towards the audience who are all men wearing different attires. The group on the right is in colorful attire while the group on the left is made up of local musicians attired in the native garbs. The colorful attired people are located at the carved door that opens to the city of Cairo; and is probably the exit of the enclosed café. The local people are sitting at the inner part of the building and the woman is placed at the center of the two groups and her passageway to the back and front is blocked which hints that the woman is trapped and has no way to escape. While the audience seems to enjoy the dance, the woman's face is devoid of expression as she is entrapped and seems unhappy with her situation (Bagnole, 2005). As a symbol of coercion, the gun on the wall can be a cause of her gloomy face. The fact that she is encircled by men indicates Muslim women's victimhood.



FIGURE 4. Jean-Leon Gerome (1824-1904) French
Dance of the Almeh, (1863)
Oil on wood panel
19 3/4 x 32 inches (50.2 x 81.3 cm)
The Dayton Art Institute, Gift of Mr. Robert Badenhop, 1951. 15

Concomitant with portraying Oriental Muslim women as submissive or lascivious, Western artists started to highlight the theme of lassitude in their Orientalist paintings as well to justify their presence. To show the East as a land of sluggishness and lack of energy, images that

depicted the stereotypes of Eastern stagnant and primitive life were becoming popular. Eugene Fromentin's *A Street in El-Aghouat* (1859) is one of these images that depict a group of Arab turbaned men resting in the shade of a building while birds are hovering overhead. The street looks deserted except for the men who seemed to be having a mid-day nap, a dog and a woman. Charles Baudelaire, an art critic, argues that "the men reclining in these blue shadows, and whose eyes, neither awake nor asleep, express only, if indeed they express anything, a love of rest..." (Peltre, 1997, p. 141).

This kind of Orientalist paintings began to fade in the 1960's and in its place photography began to pick up many of the themes used by Orientalist painters (Alloula, 1986, p. 4). Early Western photographers produced images that were in tandem with Orientalist paintings. To cater to their audiences back home, they had to piece together and manipulate the subjects and props (Mitchell, 1989 & Stone, 1998). Akin to its predecessor genre, the primary themes of photography were the intimate scenes of the internal section of the harem and the lifted veil. However, unlike Orientalist painters, photographers had to replace the artistic imagination with either "staged scenes of women unveiling or with women who were uncovered through the use of force" (Bailey Jones, 2007, p. 126). What was absent in the photography was the social and domestic lives of Eastern women which were greatly overlooked in the interest of presenting a world replete with differences and sexual desire.

To represent the East to the West, photographers were "creating their own confections of dress and ornament, while the caption on the resulting photograph would announce authoritatively that this was a 'Bedouin girl' or an 'Arab peasant'" (Graham-Brown, 1988, pp. 119-120). As photographers had the same restriction as the painters had in accessing the veiled women, they had to use the same woman for their different photographs (Graham-Brown, 1988; Lewis and MacMaster, 1998).

The debate over the veiled woman relies on the notions of visibility and power. Bailey Jones (2007, p. 126) argues that a "visual expression of the unequal power is the role of the gaze; part of the power of colonialism was the gaze of the colonizer." A specifically exoticized and sexualized gaze was aimed at the veiled women in the colonial era. To illustrate his theory of the "colonial phantasm," Malek Alloula (1986, p. 3) uses an instance of French postcards of Algerian women. The colonial phantasm is the "sexualized vision, in which the European colonialist is the definition of masculine domination looking to the feminized East for submission" (Bailey Jones, 2007, p. 126). To be continually accessible for the gaze of others is a form of servitude and subjugation. In the case of postcard photographs of Algerian women, the photographer endeavors to gratify his longing through re-creation and staging. Photographs of the covered yet sexually available women, where the only visible parts of the women's body are her eyes returning the gaze of the artist/viewer and her uncovered breasts (figure 5), were becoming common images on the postcards. These photographs were used as images on the postcards sent to Westerners as a piece of exotic East. These sorts of photographs are clearly set-ups and fabricated to fulfill Western fantasy since these women would cover her face and body in public and would never willingly reveal her breast to a Western photograph. Therefore these photographs are the result of the sexual nature of colonial control, the feminization of the indigenous, and the patriarchal illusion of coerced accessibility.



FIGURE 5. Typical image of an Algerian woman on a postcard. Taken from Alloula's *Colonial Harem* (1986) University of Minnesota Press

It is evident that the practice of representation is only feasible in the context of colonialism because of the difference of power between the colonizer and the colonized. According to Bhabha colonial discourse which “employs a system of representation” is a “form of governmentality that in making out a ‘subject nation’, appropriates, directs, and dominates its various sphere of activity” (1994, p. 101). It is specifically the representation of the colonized constructed by the colonizers that “justifies conquest and establishes systems of administration and instruction” (1994, p. 101). The practice of representation is “an apparatus of power” (1994, p. 100) which constricts the dependency of the colonized; it is a means of having a comprehensive control over the colonized. Representation per se cannot make the colonized inferior; rather, when it is only practiced as stereotypical it can be used as a means of bereaving one of authority. Colonial discourse as a system of representation “seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledge of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 101). As Bhabha argues “the stereotype ... [is] the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West” (1994, p. 104). These stereotypes gain their power from repetition, especially repetitions of representation of difference.

Stuart Hall (1997) comes up with an approach to analyze the repetition of media representations of difference and stereotype. Extending the semiotics of cultural texts to a system of representation, he believes that meanings construct and communicate with other images and in turn would be influenced by the caption or text. The verbal and visual discourses work together to bolster or shift the meaning of overall representation. On how ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ is being represented in a particular culture, he asserts “we can see similar representational practices and figures being repeated, with variations, from one text or site of representation to another” (1997, p. 232). The play of meaning in a multitude of texts and intertextuality constructs what Hall calls a regime of representation. Whereas meaning of visual discourses might alter, the repetition of loaded insignias of difference makes a “layering and sedimentation of meaning” (Bailey Jones, 2007, p. 20). This is a “racialized regime of

representation” which is conceived through repetitive representation of cultural or racial disparities that is used to naturalize difference and maintain groups of people in a place of inferiority. Very little has changed since the time of the earliest visual representation of East and Muslims, especially Muslim women. The Western representation of the East in post-9/11 contexts still carries stereotypical and exotic depictions but in a different way; the images are cautiously hand-picked to highlight the differences between “us” and “them.”

VISUAL IMPERIALISM AFTER 9/11

As we are in the second decade after 9/11, it has become a public property that the catastrophe of that day has been hijacked into a *casus belli* for the neocolonial and neo-oriental geopolitics and other furtive operations led by the US and its allies around the world. Critics believe that taken together the 9/11 tragic events and the consequent ‘war on terror’ have effectively substituted the major historical incidents of the 20th century such as the World War II and the Cold War (Kumar, 2012). While the political ramifications of the 9/11 events emerged promptly, the construction of the discourse of ‘war on terror’ had been in the making for years. The ‘war on terror’ discourse assisted the Bush Administration to justify the need for waging war in Muslim countries to defend human rights, especially women’s right. The events of 9/11 and the consequent President Bush’s ‘Axis of Evil’ series of speech brought about a dramatic change in the West/East relationship. Suddenly, many people in the West who used to be sure of their “safety, invulnerability and supremacy” (Zeiny & Yusof, 2014, p. 68) lost their sense of confidence which led to the emergence of xenophobia, a “crisis of identity that led to a sealing off from everything perceived as different and foreign” (Bailey Jones, 2007, p. 9). Thoughts such as ‘Muslims are all terrorists and they are going to terrorize our society’ became rife in the West. The discourse of xenophobia created a national unity and patriotism which were soon followed by the notions that “everything had changed” (McAlister, 2005, p 266). The national unity and heroism/patriotism found their significance in military prowess in the discourse of ‘war on terror’

Since the events of September 11, the stereotypes about Islam and Muslims popularized by the classical orientalist have made a sad comeback in the current Western representation of the Orient. The orientalist and colonial gaze has resurfaced with a new strength and strategy in the ‘war on terror’ discourse. The Western-fear mongering media has formed a fear of anything Muslim in the rank and file in the West. Thus, antagonism towards anything Islamic and Muslim has augmented considerably. The new strategy of the representation of the East is the sympathetic and positive portrayals of Muslims in the media to offset the negative depiction. If a Muslim is represented negatively in the western media, the story line usually includes a positive portrayal of another Muslim to indicate that the representation is unbiased. Given the fact that Muslims have been stereotyped for over a century, that 9/11 created a favorable condition to stereotype Muslims further, the U.S Patriotic Act of November 2001 and the domestic and foreign policies regarding the rights of Muslims and given the fact that diabolizing the enemy has been typical during times of war, the question to be raised here is why would sympathetic and positive depictions develop during such a fraught moment? The answer could be because the war propaganda is now obviously not that much effective (although still in use), the producing and dissemination of positive representation of the enemy, in this case Islam and Muslims, is essential in projecting the West, particularly the United States of America as benevolent, especially in the course of ‘war on terror’ and its discriminatory acts against Muslims (Alsultany, 2013).

Positive depictions of Muslims have certainly assisted in creating a new sort of racism which brings antiracism and multiculturalism to the surface but concurrently engenders the logics and affects vital to “legitimize racist policies and practices” (Alsultany, 2013, p. 162). Therefore it is no longer the case that the Other is clearly only diabolized to justify ‘war on terror.’ Currently, the ‘Other’ is depicted sympathetically as well to demonstrate that the United States and consequently the West have entered a post-race era where they could be seen as enlightened societies. This way of representation which is now a standard version of representation of Islam and Muslims since 9/11 is what Alsultany (2013, p.163) names as “simplified complex representation.” This mode of representation seeks to keep the equilibrium between the negative and positive representations. Filmmakers, television producers and authors usually make use of this strategy to give the impression that they are dealing with a complex representation but they do it in a very simplified manner. Often challenging the earlier stereotypes, this mode of representation forms and enhances a multinational and multicultural or post-race fantasy. Seemingly sensitive to negative stereotyping, common positive portrayals of Muslims depicted by the current western authors or filmmakers and television producers are limited only to a patriotic Muslim-American, a Muslim who is keen to help the United States in its war with terrorism, an innocent Muslim-American who is the victim of post-9/11 hate crimes, or a Muslim that loves the culture of the West.

Another post-9/11 strategy in representing the Eastern Muslim is using the Muslims themselves to narrate their stories of victimhood in their Islamic society so that they persuade people in the West that the Middle East and its people, especially women, are in need of the Westerners for liberation. This genre of literature is cogent enough to make the readers want to put themselves in the victims’ shoes (Maarof, Hashim & Yusof, 2012). The sudden increase in publication of Muslim memoirs by and about Muslim women after the events of 9/11 can be best described as a strategy to justify the ‘war on terror.’ This extraordinary blooming canon of memoirs by and about Muslim women has monopolized the literary and art market of the post-9/11 West. The events of 9/11, the following President Bush’s speech and the media representation of women raised the curiosity of the West to know more about Islam and Muslim women. These memoirs which are supposed to unravel the lives of Muslim women for the Western audience provide the readers with Orientalist descriptions of Muslim women as veiled, silent and submissive, and victims of a patriarchal society. Following the post-9/11 standard strategy of representation of Muslims, these memoirs also possess a positive character to dispel the negative stereotypes. The positive character is usually a Western educated woman who loves the culture of the West and stands in stark opposition with other people around her. As Western films about the Middle East usually begins with the known sound of the *adhan* in a dusty desert rooftops at dawn or dusk, many Muslim memoirs about the Middle Eastern women starts with featuring a woman’s half-veiled face, only her eyes showing, either piercing and staring at the audience or looking down evading the gaze of readers/viewers (figure 6).

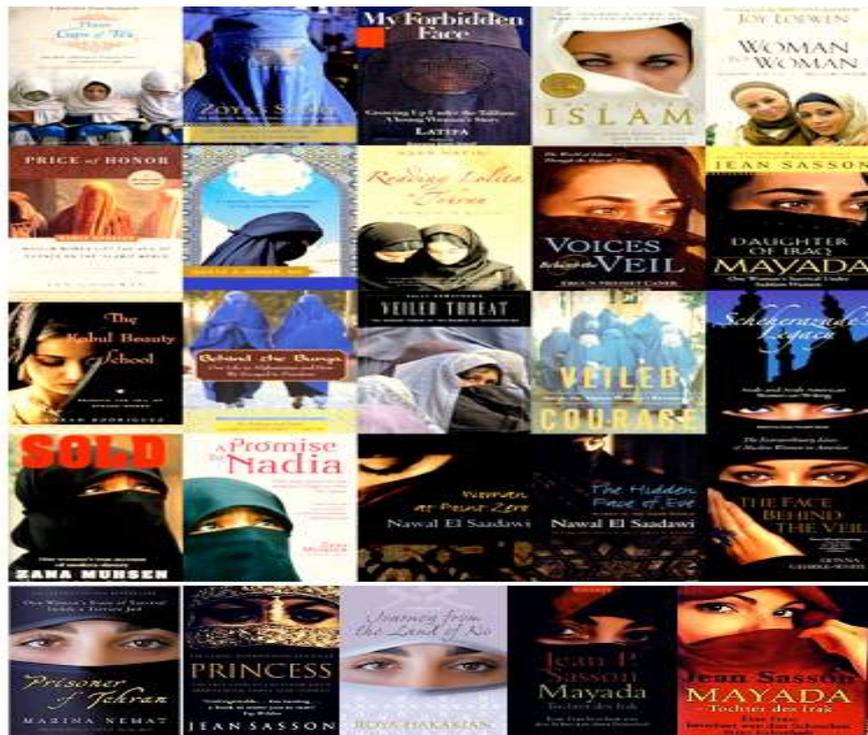


FIGURE 6. The Covers of Muslim Memoirs

These images on the cover seem to simultaneously invite and challenge the prospective reader to pick up the book in order to enter into the mysterious and hidden sanctuary of the authors. This is a stratagem for positioning them in a cosmopolitan market (Whitlock, 2007). This featuring of veiled women on the covers of the Muslim memoirs can be called “Orientalisation through Paratexts” (Zeiny & Yusof, 2013). According to Genette (1991), paratexts are the features that surround and cover the texts which include “peritext” that contains everything between and on the covers and “epitext” that involves the elements outside the volume such as interviews, correspondence, reviews, and commentaries. These images on the cover produce a two-pronged effect; the first one is reinforcing the notion of exotic East and the second one is bolstering the idea that Muslim women are submissive and victims of the Islamic and patriarchal culture. As peritexts, the depictions, the titles, and subtitles of these life narratives are all devised to capture the Western eye with a glance of absolute difference, of the exotic. The influx of these memoirs not only marks the agency of the Muslim women in narrating their life stories but also reveals the imperialistic package in dominating the Muslim countries. As a consequence, an “imperial project is disguised as concern for the condition of women coming from the Third World” (Pazargadi, 2012, p. 33).

Life narratives from the Middle East are being read avidly by the Western readers in a time of crisis when knowing the voice in the public domain has become a crucial issue. Bookstores in the West are replete with Muslim life narratives; stretched across a wall of bookstores are several portrayals of veiled Muslim women as the images on the covers (Whitlock, 2007). This exotic show of a great number of Muslim life narratives, all published from 2002-2003 onwards, is foreboding. Whitlock’s question might be helpful here to mention: “How can a reader resist interpellation as a liberal Western consumer who desires to liberate and recognize” Muslim women “by lifting the burka and bringing” her “barefaced in the West?”

(2007, p. 47). Pulling the Western eyes behind the *chador* or under the *burka* is a successful rhetorical strategy which draws out both “sympathy and advocacy” that can be put to quite “various political and strategic uses” (Whitlock, 2007, p. 47). The Muslim life narratives can be co-opted to regenerate the neo-liberal advocacy of imperialism when it simultaneously seems to circulate disinterestedly. These Muslim life narratives are what Whitlock (2007) terms as “soft weapon” as they are manufacturing the consent and providing the justification for expanding the jurisdiction of Imperialism by claiming that the war on terror is a humanitarian mission. Whitlock asserts that a memoir:

...can personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard. To attend to a nauseated body at risk in Baghdad, or to hear a militant feminist body beneath a *burka*, to attach a face and recognize a refugee is to make powerful interventions in debates about social justice, sovereignty, and human rights. Life narratives can do these things. But it is a “soft” weapon because it is easily co-opted into propaganda. In modern democratic societies propaganda is frequently not the violent and coercive imposition of ideas but a careful manipulation of opinion and emotion in the public sphere and a management of information in the engineering of consent. Life narratives can be complicit in these processes.

(2007, p. 3)

This piled up batch of veiled Muslim women are a potent and smart practice of imperialism when there is a desire in the West to learn more about the Muslim communities, and it also suggests a one of a kind change in the publication of Muslim memoirs since 2001. Life narratives from the Middle East produced and circulated in the West within the ‘war on terror’ discourse are invaluable commodities. When readers in the West read these contemporary Muslim life narratives from the Middle East, they feel sympathetic for the people residing in the Muslim countries. The fact that Muslim women’s autobiographies from the Middle East have the power to affect the worldwide reader explains why these memoirs have been accepted by neoliberal ideology of the West. Since 2001, the enlarged market for representations of a changeless, threatening, and spreading Islam forms the terms and conditions that lead to a myriad of memoirs about Muslim societies into bookstores in the West. The speed is remarkable; the Western publishing industry produce and market print copies of these Muslim life narratives for the popular consumption so rapidly in response to current affairs and popular tastes. This indicates something about life narrative: “it is porous, it is open to fashion, and it maneuvers in networks of power in complex ways” (Whitlock, 2007, p. 54). These life narratives which are distributed in networks are vulnerable to ‘soft power,’ the cautiously orchestrated engineering of information across different contemporary media.

CONCLUSION

Images, as cultural productions, are replete with values and ideologies of the cultures that generate them and the ones that consume them. Derived and informed by the sociopolitical events, these images have a strong influence on shaping people’s perception. The constantly reproduced images, particularly stereotypical images, usually yield to a preferred mode of viewing and reading of certain subjects which can be called visual imperialism. Visual imperialism can be traced back to the way painters depicted the East and its people during the European colonization. It began with painters glorifying Bonaparte’s military success and

romanticizing the East to erase the colonial brutality. Images of a submissive young woman gazing at the artist/viewer became prevalent in that era. It has become a rule in representing Muslims to depict the East as exotic and its women as submissive. This sort of images which were the result of artistic rendition and created fantasies of the artists affected other genres of the art such as photography. Photographers were quick to pick up the major themes from the earlier paintings. They continued depicting stereotypical images like that of a submissive Muslim woman. These stereotypical representations which gained its power from repetition were to justify the colonial presence in the East.

The orientalist and colonial gaze has resurfaced with a new grammar and strategy in the 'war on terror' discourse in post-9/11 context. Now, it is no longer the case of depicting negative stereotypes to justify the imperial war on terror, rather an unusual practice emerged in the representation of Muslims in the Western visual discourses. The new grammar is to have a positive depiction along with the negative one to diffuse it and probably to show that the U.S is an enlightened country and that the Muslims representations are not biased. Soon there was an increase in sympathetic depictions of Muslims apparently to diffuse the negative stereotypes. However, these positive depictions of Muslims are just limited to a Muslims-American patriot or an Arab-Muslim who is willing to help the U.S. government to fight terrorism. However even the positive depictions of Muslims have helped to create a new sort of racism which produces the logics and effects essential to legitimization of racist policies and practices. Another post-9/11 strategy to expand Imperialism is using Muslim women to relate their stories through life narratives as it sounds more believable this way, and, hence, the sudden increase in publications of Muslim memoirs by and about Muslim women. These Muslim life narratives can be best described as soft weapons as they elicit sympathy from the Western readers and they create the justification for Imperialism that war is needed in the Muslim countries to liberate Muslim women from the brutalities of the patriarchal societies.

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