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From Orientalism to neo-Orientalism: Early and contemporary constructions of Islam and the Muslim world

Salim Kerboua*

Abstract: The concept of Orientalism has been widely dealt with in the humanities and social sciences. It helps explain a peculiar construction of the Arab-Muslim world. Orientalism has operated in various historical paradigms but has always emphasised specific Western constructions of the Orient. Nowadays, the concept has metamorphosed to refer to new constructions of the Orient. New representations of Islam and the Muslim world are dominating the Western public space. The aim of this paper is twofold. It explores the historical development and paradigmatic shifts that have affected the concept of Orientalism. It then suggests that a neo-Orientalism has recently emerged, is less territorialised and operating within a new paradigm. It holds a new ideologically motivated agenda, constructs new objects, and feeds the social phenomenon called Islamophobia.

Keywords: Islamophobia; Muslim world; neoconservatism; neo-Orientalism; Orientalism.

Abstrak: Konsep Orientalisme telah banyak diperkatakan dalam sains kemanusiaan dan sains sosial. Ia dapat menerangkan pembentukan tanggapan yang luar biasa terhadap dunia Arab-Islam. Orientalisme telah bertapak dan beroperasi dalam pelbagai paradigma bersejarah, namun ia sentiasa memberikan tumpuan yang khusus kepada pembentukan Barat terhadap Orient. Buat masa sekarang, konsep tersebut telah berubah bentuknya untuk dikaitkan dengan pembentukan baharu terhadap Orient. Representasi yang baharu terhadap Islam dan dunia Islam sedang mendominasi ruang awam Barat. Tujuan kajian

* Salim Kerboua is an Assistant Professor of American Studies in the Department of Foreign Languages, School of Arts and Languages, Mohamed Khider University of Biskra, Algeria. Email: salimkerboua@gmail.com.

ini terbahagi kepada dua. Pertama, ia meneroka perkembangan sejarah dan ganjakan paradigm yang telah berikan kesan terhadap konsep Orientalisme. Justeru itu, ia mencadangkan bahawa neo-Orientalisme, yang baharu sahaja timbul, adalah kurang dijajahi dan masih beroperasi dalam paradigm baharu. Oleh itu, ia memegang agenda yang bermotivasikan ideologi baru, pembentukan objek baharu, dan seterusnya memberikan makanan kepada fenomena sosial yang dikenali sebagai Islamophobia.

Kata Kunci: Islamophobia; dunia Islam; neoconservatisme; neo-Orientalisme; Orientalisme.

Conceptual changes and paradigmatic shifts have affected the different Western constructions of Islam and the Muslim world. Orientalism is not a static concept; rather, it refers to various historical frameworks of thinking. It serves as a system of knowledge which creates and propagates subjective representations of the Other from the Orient.¹

This paper suggests three historical paradigms within which the different kinds of Orientalism were and are being articulated. It briefly recalls the historical contexts of empires and hegemony of empires, as asserted by Said. It also examines Said's main neoconservative critics. The paper then uses Said's theory as a lens to analyse what can be called a twentieth century "American Orientalism" and its sources. Finally, it examines the latest transformation of Orientalism, what can nowadays be called a post 9/11 neo-Orientalism towards Islam and the Arab-Muslim world. This neo-Orientalism is the neoconservative construction of Islam and the Muslim world as a social and existential threat to what neoconservatives and right-wing actors call the Western world and civilisation.² A peculiar aspect of this neo-Orientalism manifests itself in different forms within the Western social world and with regard to how some right-wing circles view countries and peoples of the Arab-Muslim world or Muslim people within Western societies. The most hostile manifestation of neo-Orientalism is a social phenomenon called Islamophobia. Furthermore, this paper contends that the main source of this neo-Orientalist construction of Islam and the Muslim world originates from neoconservative and pro-Israel circles in the Western world.

Early Orientalism: Construction and imperial domination

The concept of Orientalism has been widely discussed in postcolonial research and literature. Said's seminal work, *Orientalism* (1979), is

an important precursor and the most authoritative scholarship in the field. It examines preconceived notions that comprise a wide array of subjective constructs about the peoples of the Orient, their beliefs, and the way they act.

The chief argument of *Orientalism* revolves around questions of knowledge of the Other, the production of this knowledge, and the motivations behind its dissemination in the West. Said (1979) argues that the production and acquisition of knowledge of the Orient, or the Other from the Orient, is neither objective nor unbiased. Rather, it is the end-result of a process that reflects particular interests and a Western-centric worldview. Specifically, Said stresses the point that the West – Europe and the United States – looks at the countries of the Orient through a lens that distorts the reality of those places and the people who live there. He calls that lens through which the West perceives and conceives that part of the world “Orientalism” (Said & Jhally, 1998).

Said’s attention on how the Western academic and intellectual prism constructs and shapes Otherness emerged in the wake of the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 (Said, 2000; Brisson, 2008). The aftermath of the war and Israel’s victory brought, what he calls, a “deafening chorus” in the United States’ public scene on how the Western world views the peoples of the Muslim world. Indeed, a wave of triumphalism swept the West about the West and its values. The United States and Britain’s public scenes enjoyed some kind of euphoria as Israel’s victory was also perceived as the victory of the West (Said, 2000). That was Said’s first experience of how the West constructed the Orient and more specifically the Muslim world; a world some early Western Orientalists portrayed as an exotic, backward, and silent object (Said, 1979). Those first Orientalist views of Islam and the Muslim world have been recaptured and intensified since the symbolic paradigmatic shift that occurred after September 11, 2001. Since then, the neoconservative creed, inspired by Lewis (1990; 2001) and Huntington (1993; 1996), has been constructing a neo-Orientalist image of contemporary Muslims not only as backward and inferior but more importantly as violent and threatening.

In his main line of argument, Said uses the Foucauldian theory of discourse and power, which examines the way in which different texts are constructed, shaped, ordered, and linked in terms of the social and historical contexts in which they are produced (Foucault, 1972).

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis endeavours “to grasp other forms of regularity, other types of relations” (p. 29), i.e. to seize the consistency and the continuity of the relationship between different textual productions and their relationship to a certain reality. Language is not transparent or value-free (Cheek, 2008). Though Foucauldian textual analysis is context-linked, it is also *context-producing*. Texts construct specific social objects and specific realities. They are thus both products of, and in turn, producers of discursive-based understandings of aspects of reality. This kind of analysis implies then that some texts converge to shape particular contexts. It is important to note that this theory is extremely relevant in the comprehension of twenty-first century neo-Orientalism and how it shapes Western public representations of Islam and the Muslim world.

Drawing on Foucault’s theory, Said (1979; 1985) demonstrates that “Orientalism” is a complex concept that entails the production and dissemination of different texts and works of art which seem unrelated but which actually converge in constructing the Orient by “making statement about it, authorising views about it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (1979, p. 3). In that sense, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Orientalism was a network of Western powers and interests which operated to fulfil imperial and colonial agendas. Furthermore, the concept of Orientalism shows that Western culture produced a specific body of knowledge which enabled it to strengthen and gain power in identity “by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Said, 1979, p. 3) in the sense that the relationship between the West and the Orient was that of power and domination of the former over the latter.

It is then important to point out that nineteenth century power and hegemony that led to the European domination of the Other was preceded and accompanied by a system of knowledge of the Other from the Orient, created by some Western academics, institutions, artists, and governments (Said, 1979, p. 94). Said emphasises the active role played by some writers, novelists, and poets in the creation and propagation of that body of knowledge. To him and to the adherents of postcolonial theory, texts produced by some artists and scholars of the West who depicted an imaginary Orient were neither neutral nor innocent. Said (2000) rightly notes that aesthetical works cannot be immune from contamination by ideological connections. Artistic creations as well

as academic productions can be utilised as ideological instruments by and for the interests of Western power structures. Furthermore, Said's suspicion of Western academics of the Orient lies in his belief that "pure" scholarship does not exist. This is why when scholarship on the Orient is institutionalised, culturally built up, hegemonic, and restrictive, Said believes that it should be actively resisted by a "counterknowledge" (Clifford, 1988, p. 286).

Eighteenth and nineteenth century early Orientalism as well as post 9/11 neo-Orientalism were and are based on essentialist constructions and reconstructions of Islam, Muslim societies, and Muslim communities in Western societies. The fact that there exist various Islamic trends and traditions, different religious and secular views and movements, different social and cultural varieties of the Muslim world, means the diversity of political and social actors within Muslim countries are all put aside. They leave a vacuum which is filled with an essentialist and culturalist reading grid of a monolithic and unchanging Muslim world.

From a sociological and anthropological viewpoint, essentialism is a form of reductionism. Essentialist discourse is mainly undertaken through the use of logical fallacies and is usually associated with other semantically closely-related concepts such as reification or gross generalisation (Herzfeld, 2010, p. 234). The process of reification (also known as hypostatization), for example, assumes the treatment of abstractions as actual existing entities. This process enables the simplification of the message to be conveyed. This simplification obliterates rational and objective understanding of the object of the message. The meaning of the message is distorted and perverted by the essentialist framework of discourse within which it is conveyed. Essentialist discourse reduces complex, abstract objects to concrete ones, while it also wrongly maintains the same attributes of those objects.

Abdelmalek (1963) and Said (1979) were the first to undertake a critique of essentialist Western-produced Orientalist scholarships and works of art. However, Said was the first to formulate a quasi-exhaustive analysis of the relationship between Orientalist constructions of the Orient and Western imperial domination of that Orient.

Examples of essentialist portrayals used by Orientalists are Ernest Renan's assertion that "Islam, in order to be best understood should be

reduced to tent and tribe” (quoted in Said, 1979, p. 105), or Huntington’s (1993) reified claims that “Islam has bloody borders” (p. 35). One can also mention the multitude of texts by Bernard Lewis (1990; 1993; 2001) with titles such as “The Roots of the Muslim Rage” (1990) or “The Revolt of Islam” (2001) and in which essentialism and lack of nuances provide a binary, simplistic, Manichean, and thus distorted picture of Islam and/or the Muslim world. More recently Lewis (2001, 2003) attempts to explicate that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were the logical historical outcome of a millenary struggle between a religion and its believers (regardless of the multitude of variants, spiritual, political, and cultural, linguistic diversities) and a geographically situated, culturally heterogeneous, and ideologically constructed Western Civilisation. However, well-documented research and historical evidence (Mazarr, 1996; Monshipouri & Petonito, 1995; Rubenstein & Crocker, 1994) have discarded Lewis’ and Huntington’s theses.

Intellectual versus ideological critique of *Orientalism*

Said’s scholarship paved the way for a myriad of works exploring and interpreting literary, historical, and political texts and issues from a postcolonial perspective. However, Said’s work is also challenged in academia. Two kinds of critiques can be identified. The first has emerged out of the wish to comprehend the dimension of postcolonial scholarships and balance its analysis of Western interpretations of the Orient. The second critique is motivated less by intellectual rigour and more by political and ideological outrage with regard to Said’s personal intellectual trajectory and his political commitment to the Palestinian cause. This second kind of critique originates from influential neo-Orientalist circles.

Pertinent reviews and analyses of Said’s postcolonial thesis comprise many figures from Western academia. McAllister (2005), for example, concurs with Said over the “identity-forging power” of Orientalism (p. 10). However, she contends that he fails to understand the nature of what she calls American “post-Orientalism” of the post-Second World War era, one that directly opposed European Orientalism (pp. 9–10). Halliday (1993) attributes to Said the mistake of representing the West as one and undiversified. Ahmad (1994) claims that Said fails to recognise the Marxist dimension of the historical relationship between

the concepts of knowledge and power (p. 165–68). Clifford (1988) notes that *Orientalism* raises a key theoretical issue: “the status of all forms of thought and representation for dealing with the alien” (p. 261). Clifford also asserts that Said attacks Orientalist discourse from different positions and he generates a set of questions about the legitimacy of scholars and artists on interpreting the cultures and identities of other groups, but does not give answers to the problem.

The second category of critique is principally driven by ideological motivations. Neoconservative intellectuals such as Bernard Lewis and Martin Kramer, are examples of politicised and pro-Israel worldview-linked scholars who assaulted Said not on an academic basis but on political and ideological grounds.

Lewis, whom Ahmad (1994) labels as “one of the doyens of Zionist historiography” (p. 173), is perhaps the most well-known critic of Said’s *Orientalism*, though most of the offensives have often been undertaken by his disciples or followers. Lewis’ contempt for *Orientalism* is perhaps because his scholarship is included in Said’s (1979) critique of Western Orientalism (pp. 315–350). Contrary to his supposed renowned expertise, Lewis’ apparent neutral tone and seemingly erudite text does not address Said’s research agenda. Instead, Lewis (1982) charges him with blaming Europeans for their academic and artistic concern for the Orient. Lewis also assumes that Said undertakes a nominological critique of the word Orientalism. Lewis thus undertakes a long definition of the term, bypassing the core of the scholarship and especially what Said (1979; 1982) recurrently evokes as the “remarkable coincidence between the rise of modern Orientalist scholarship and the acquisition of vast Eastern empires by Britain and France” (1982, par. 3).

More recently, neoconservative scholar Martin Kramer, another harsh critic of Said’s scholarship, and more generally of postcolonial studies, argues (2001; 2007; 2014) that Middle Eastern studies have been contaminated and brought to the brink of ruin by Said’s postcolonial scholarship. A specific characteristic of Kramer’s posture is his *ad hominem* attacks on the Arab-American intellectual. Kramer (2007) labels *Orientalism* as a “dirt thrown by Said” that swept the general field of the humanities and created “the faux-academic discipline now known as post-colonialism” (p. 63), but he does not provide any argument to support his case.

Throughout his writings, Kramer (1993) develops a Zionist-centred vision of Islam and the Muslim world, the one that contends that Islam is antithetical to democracy and human rights and that poses a threat to the Western world. It is out of the scope of this paper to detail all of Kramer's politicised writings about Islam, the Muslim world, and Middle Eastern issues. However, since one of the aims of this work is to point out the link between the Israeli worldview and the neoconservative neo-Orientalist constructions of the Muslim world, examples of Kramer's ideologically oriented work are necessary and can be briefly mentioned.

For instance, Kramer (1984), Pipes (1984), and other neoconservatives such as novelist Saul Bellow and activist Elie Wiesel, were prompt to praise the then best-selling but now proven unscholarly book, Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict Over Palestine* (Campbell, 1985; Chomsky, 2002, pp. 244–248) in which its author uses deformed statistics and out-of-context and irrelevant citations to claim that the Palestinian people do not exist. Finkelstein (1984; 1995) unveiled the inconsistencies of the book, and many historians such as Hourani (1985) and Porath (1986) rebutted its thesis.

Another example is Kramer's call, in a speech at the 2010 Herzliya Conference, for the West to take measures to limit the births of what he labels "superfluous" Palestinians by stopping to help them financially. Kramer's writings exemplify the kind of neo-Orientalism this article is all about. It is an ideologically oriented construction of Islam and the Muslim world and the production of a specific knowledge about it that endeavours to carry out political agendas, the common denominator being the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

In fact, Lewis and Kramer make part of a wide and influential network of US and European neoconservative and pro-Israel pundits turned activists such as Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller, David Horowitz, Phyllis Chesler, Daniel Pipes (the USA), Bat Ye'or, Melanie Phillips, Douglas Murray (Britain), Guy Millière (France), Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and Geert Wilders (The Netherlands). This network even comprises some former Muslims such as Ibn Warraq (2007; 2011) and Sultan (2009) who also develop a Manichean vision of a timeless modernised West and an everlasting awkward and violent Islam. All provide a steadfast

support for Israel and a rough neo-Orientalist construction of Islam and the Muslim world.

Furthermore, it should be noted that neoconservative ideologically-based critique of Said is not limited to the mentioned pundits. Many other pro-Israeli intellectuals such as Alexander (1989), Kurtz (2001), Muravchik (2006; 2013), and Karsh and Miller (2008), have constantly attacked him in their key neoconservative publications such as Podhoretz's *Commentary*, Kristol's *Weekly Standard*, or Daniel Pipes' *Middle East Forum* website and *Middle East Quarterly*. Moreover, those attacks never address the subject and validity of Said's scholarship but are merely *ad hominem* assaults. For example, Teachout labels him as "an intellectual thug who poses as a thoughtful, troubled citizen of the world while simultaneously serving as an apologist for Arab terrorism" (2002, p. 62). Another example is Hollander (2001) who charges Said and other well-known critics of US foreign policy (Noam Chomsky, Susan Sontag, Norman Mailer, Harold Pinter, Paul Kennedy) with anti-Americanism and having a longstanding hatred of American society and culture.

Additionally, Karsh – a former Israeli Defence Forces officer and intelligence analyst, now a professor at King's College, London, regular contributor to neoconservative magazines *Commentary* and Chief Editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*, is another opponent of Said. Karsh (2008) accuses Said of hypocrisy, plagiarism, opportunism, and fabrication of facts. Zionist antagonism towards Said rose to the level of threats to his person and family as well as to violent deeds and murder attempts (Heller, 2004, p. 71; Wright, 2003).

In short, objective critique of the arguments exposed by Said does not seem to be the first concern of neoconservative intellectuals. All out attacks on Said's *Orientalism* can better be explained by the fact that his scholarship brings into focus the sensitive and serious acquaintance between the production of knowledge about the Middle East and the Muslim world, and the political and ideological interests of the pro-Israel lobby in the Western world. Said's seminal work has come to shake the pre-existing representations of the Muslim world and the state of Middle Eastern studies previously dominated by views of neoconservatives and pro-Israel circles. Said (1979) sheds light on this problematic relationship when he asserts that,

[T]he great likelihood that ideas about the Orient drawn from Orientalism can be put to political use, is an important yet extremely sensitive truth. It raises questions about the predisposition towards innocence or guilt, scholarly disinterest or pressure group complicity (p. 96).

It is then comprehensible that those neoconservatives regard *Orientalism*-like scholarship and postcolonial studies research as a threat to their political and ideologically-based agenda.

Cold War American Orientalism

The orientalist constructions of Islam and the Muslim world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries metamorphosed into a new kind of Orientalism. Whereas the first type of studies on the Orient were principally the end products of European scholars and artists, the second emerged and developed in the United States of America. American Orientalism became apparent by the end of the Second World War. It was then that United States officials and academics involved with foreign policy issues started to view the Arab-Muslim world as a region of great importance for the economic interests, and security of the United States (Lockman, 2011, pp.122–23).

During the early moments of the Cold War, a geographical shift of the source of Orientalism took place when the United States supplanted old European imperial powers after their decline, and when it became a superpower struggling to secure its economic interests and ideological credo against the Communist Soviet Union. That geographical shift went along a redistribution of powers in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s and 1960s. America's first footprints in the Near and Middle East, the effective control of the Arabian Peninsula and its oil in 1945 (Lippman, 2005; Yergin, 2008), the creation of Israel in 1948 in the midst of a predominantly Muslim world, the recognition of Israel's strategic value after the 1967 War, all necessitated for the policy makers of the United States to acquire some kind of knowledge of a specific part of an Orient that grew in importance and whose full understanding was necessary. It was then that a new kind of Orientalism started to evolve and operate within the Cold War paradigm, in the second half of the twentieth century.

As early as 1946, a group of businessmen, politicians, and scholars having concern with the Arab and Muslim worlds created the Middle

East Institute. The institute focused primarily on international politics and US business interests with relations to countries of the region. For that purpose, it launched the *Middle East Journal*. The original role of that periodical was to publish analyses on the region's importance to the United States regarding "questions of power politics", and evaluate all the forces and factors affecting that area (Lockman, 2011, p. 128; Mitchell, 2004, p. 74). Many members of the Institute were (and still are) former or would-be top officials in the United States security establishment and former diplomats (<http://www.mei.edu/board>).

It is important to note that the Muslim world was not the sole concern of American academics and policy makers. The Arab and Muslim world was rather part of a broader reconfiguration of the United States' role in the world. Because of their country's new status, American universities and think tanks became more and more concerned with other peoples and nations around the globe. Two fields were greatly affected and thus witnessed dramatic developments: International Studies and Area Studies. In 1946, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) set up the Committee on World Area Research so as to explore and "identify foreign regions of growing American national concern" (Naff, 1993, p. 96). In 1947, one of its reports stated that "[the United States'] national welfare in the post war period more than ever requires a citizenry well-informed as to other peoples, and a creation of vast body of knowledge about them" (Hall, 1947, p. 84). Great interest in the field of Area Studies started to take importance in American academia.

In the midst of that dynamic, the SSRC created a specific committee for the Near and Middle East in 1951. Prestigious and wealthy foundations, such as the Rockefeller, Ford, or Carnegie Foundation, became more and more involved in funding research in the United States, sponsoring conferences, and promoting the American worldview around the globe (Lockman, 2011, pp. 125–127).

Within that context, the weighty task to provide the public and political scenes of the United States with knowledge about the Near and Middle East became the duty of what Jacobs (2011) calls "an informal network of experts" (p. 5). It is then important to notice that scholars of the Orient, who once started their career and evolved in Europe and Britain, moved during the second half of the twentieth century to the United States. This movement made the new superpower's policy makers and academia benefit from the expertise that the British Empire

previously had. Those United States-based experts of the Arab-Muslim world formed a system of scholars who aimed at educating the public and policymakers about their area of study.

Jacobs (2011) describes the twentieth century US-based specialists of the Middle East as a “transnational” network of experts who shared a common worldview, common interests, and common concerns with respect to the Arab-Muslim world (p. 5). The members of this informal network shared a specific “policy-oriented interest in the Middle East.” They communicated with each other and became the authoritative voices on the Middle East. Jacobs mentions renowned British experts, such as the historians Hamilton A. R. Gibb and Bernard Lewis, as the most prominent (pp. 5–6). Gibb and Lewis were among those Orientalists who offered their services to the new superpower. Gibb got a Chair at Harvard whereas Lewis became the expert on Islam and the Middle East at Princeton.

Said (1979) also examines the question of a United States-based Orientalism. He views European and American kinds of Orientalism as two different Western experiences with the Middle East. Though both generated essentialist constructions of the Orient and conveyed negative images of its people, Said draws distinctions between them. One of the characteristics of American Orientalism is “its singular avoidance of [concern for] literature.” To Said (1979), whereas European Orientalists had a background study on philology and thus mastered and did research on the languages and literatures of the Middle and Near East, American experts of the Orient were social scientists who emphasised the study of “facts” and neglected the importance of Oriental arts and literature. The effect was the dehumanisation of the Oriental, his experiences, and his relegation to mere “trends” and “statistics” (pp. 290–291).

Another difference characterising American Orientalism from the European one is in terms of policy. Whereas the latter colonised the Orient, the former’s experience is – according to Said (Said & Jhally, 1998) – much less direct and “much more based on abstractions.” Indeed, the United States has never colonised the countries of the Near or Middle East but has exercised (and still exercises) a powerful political and economic influence on them.

Additionally, Said (Said & Jhally, 1998) notes another much more important feature of American Orientalism. To him, that kind of

Orientalism is much more politicised due to the presence of Israel for which the United States is the chief and unwavering ally. The presence of Israel as a self-declared Western country in the middle of the Muslim world is a central factor that is imported in American Orientalism. This latter espouses the Zionist narrative – especially after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War – and suggests a binary characterisation of the Orient. The American Orientalist discourse views “the Israeli” as part of Western identity while the Arab and the Muslim, “if [he] occupies space enough for attention”, is viewed as “the disrupter of Israel’s and the West’s existence...bloodthirsty...[and as] an oversexed degenerate” (Said, 1979, pp. 285–288). Over a few pages, Said accounts for different crude stereotypes associated with the Oriental in American cinema, course guides, magazines, and news-photos that are backed, not contradicted, by the social scientists experts that are supposed to study the Near and Middle East. Jacobs (2011) raises the same remark while he asserts that Orientalist specialists viewed that their mission was to educate the American public opinion about the “allegedly inherent traits of ‘Arabs’, ‘Moslems’, or ‘Mohammedans’” through “binary characterizations” (p. 10). The discourse and entailing knowledge provided by this American Orientalism makes it virtually impossible for ordinary American citizens to get knowledge about the Near and Middle East which is not shaped by the Arab-Israeli conflict and which is full of images of Arabs and Palestinians as irrational and violent.

Whereas nineteenth century European scholars and artists were the originators of early Orientalism, American Orientalism was not the exclusive creation of intellectual and academic textual production. Another medium contributed to the production and propagation of representations of the Orient in the United States public scene, namely, American cultural and entertainment media and, at its lead, the Hollywood industry of the post-second World War period. This new medium not only provided the American public with a new image of the Orient, but it also constructed and projected a peculiar image of the United States and its new responsibilities on the world stage.

McAlister (2005) argues that Hollywood movies, from the 1950s to the 1980s, were full participants in the positive portrayal of the United States and its “benevolent supremacy” (pp. 43–83). She provides an original interpretation of the central role of Biblical epics and super productions, such as Cecil B. DeMille’s *Ten Commandments* or William

Wyler's *Ben Hur* in providing Western public opinions with tropes about the "benevolent" role of the United States and its foreign policy around the world. McAlister asserts that tropes referring to democracy versus totalitarianism, "liberty-from slavery," and "peoples under God" versus people under "human tyrants," framed images of America's Cold War identity and mission inside and outside the United States (p. 44). The link between those movies and implicit message they convey and American foreign policy was made clear by producer and director DeMille who even presented the *Ten Commandments* in terms of contemporary politics (pp. 44–45).

Shaheen (2009) also links twentieth century American movie industry and representations of the United States and the Orient. Through a systematic and exhaustive inventory and analysis of more than a thousand American-produced movies, Shaheen shows how – via the Arab and Muslim characters they portray – they construct negative stereotypes of Arab and Muslim people. He asserts that fictional narratives have the capacity to alter reality. To him, "Hollywood celluloid mythology" about Arabs and Muslims has been dominating American (and Western) culture (pp. 6–10). Moreover, McAllister, Shaheen, and others such as Giraldi (2013), raise a question that is not limited to the role of the Hollywood industry but invades the general public scene in the United States. Specific frames have been dominating the media and popular culture about what Arab and Muslims are supposed to be and how they are supposed to behave, and what the Arab and Muslim world is alleged to be.

Contrary to nineteenth century Orientalism which was European-based and which created knowledge about the Orient in order to conquer it, American Orientalism aimed at depicting the benign and securing power of the United States on that much precious Orient, with the need to secure American economic and geostrategic interests.

Post-9/11 neo-Orientalism, for its part, is the latest kind of Orientalism. It is quite different from the first two paradigms of Orientalism since it deploys frames that operate within a "Clash of Civilisations" paradigm (see Figure 1). Additionally, neoconservative and pro-Israeli agencies and Zionist discourse are major participants in the creation of those neo-Orientalist frames, the outcome being the emergence of an identity-related social phenomenon called Islamophobia.

	Early Orientalism	American Orientalism	Neo-Orientalism
Temporal Frame	Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries	The Cold War/Post Cold War era (1945–1990s)	Since the 1990s and more specifically since 2001
Paradigm	Colonial/Imperial paradigm	Cold War paradigm	“War on Terror” mutating into a “Clash of Civilisations” paradigm
Source	Britain and France (philologists and artists)	The United States (social scientists and media, and pro-Israeli circles)	Neoconservatives and pro-Israeli circles in the US and in Europe
Constructed Object(s)	The Orient and its peoples	- The USA - Arab and Muslim peoples	- Islam, the Muslim world and its peoples - Muslims in Western societies
Characteristics of the Constructed Objects	- Passive - Inferior - Backward	- USA: benevolent superpower - Orient: backward and violent	- Threat to Israel and the “West”
Agenda	- Domination - Colonisation	- US geostrategic interests - Economic interests - Israel’s security	- Israel’s worldview and interests

Figure 1: Overview of the types of Orientalism

Twenty-first century neo-Orientalism

In the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the United States, American policymakers started to wage what they called the “War on Terror” against a non-state actor called Al Qaida, and its satellites and affiliate movements throughout the world. Since then, more and more Western intellectuals and academics have been looking into the ideologies that inspire those non-state actors in their attempt to comprehend what actually happened, why it happened, and how to deal with it (Asad,

2007; Aslan, 2010; Esposito, 2002). However, simultaneously, another new phenomenon came to the fore and developed during the first decade of the twenty-first century. It is a feeling of apprehension, discomfort, and to some extent fear and hatred about all that deals with Islam and the Muslims. While it is true that violent extremist movements acting on behalf of their peculiar and distorted view of the Islamic faith are one of the sources of some apprehension towards Islam and Muslims, the problem is exacerbated by some ideological re-conceptualisations of Islam and the Muslim world. Those constructions originate from some limited right-wing circles within Western societies, mainly belonging to the neoconservative school of thought.

Twenty-first century neo-Orientalism is a body of knowledge, news, analyses, and current affairs comments, created and propagated by a loose coalition of intellectuals, pundits, opinion makers, and to a lesser extent political figures of Western public life that enjoy a special and affective relationship with Israel and the Zionist cause. In this sense, it is ideologically motivated.

Wajahat et al. (2011) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR, 2013) document the funding and dissemination of Islamophobic propaganda by prestigious and wealthy foundations, think tanks, as well as presumed experts and politicians in the American public scene. Wajahat et al. and CAIR emphasise the domestic dimension of the anti-Muslim campaigns. However, it is worth noting that the actors working within the American public space also contribute to the peculiar constructions of the Muslim world as a whole. Wajahat et al. and CAIR also analyse the role of some neoconservative activists, pundits, and politicians such as Daniel Pipes, Newt Gingrich, Robert Spencer, and David Horowitz in the creation of negative representations of Islam, the Muslim world, and Muslims in the United States. It is important to point out that those representations are produced via a discourse whose main specificity is that it conflates Islam with terrorist-related activities, Muslims and terrorists, and the War on Terror and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, this neo-Orientalist discourse is coupled with a staunch defence of Israel's policy towards Palestinians.

The study of identity-related concepts involving the fear or hatred of the "Other" such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or racism, is complicated to undertake by the fact that there is no or very little

consensus on the terms used to identify those phenomena. The definitions of those terms, like other terms such as “anti-Americanism”, are not agreed upon by scholars in the field of the humanities or the social sciences (Guerlain, 2007).

For the specific term “Islamophobia”, a great deal of debate is open over its definition and use in the public space. Fourest and Venner (2003) and Bruckner (2003) even try to discredit the term and state that its designers and users are “Islamists” whose agenda is to fight secularism in European societies. French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls (2013), holds the same idea and contends that the word “Islamophobia” is a “Trojan Horse” used by “Salafists” to undermine the French secular society and its “republican compact” (*pacte républicain*). In the United States, the term is rejected by neoconservative and pro-Israeli figures such as Pipes (2005) and other contributors to the *Middle East Forum* and *FrontpageMagazine.com*. A great number of print and online articles issued by these neoconservative circles allege that Islamophobia is in fact a myth.

However, a great deal of academic research such as those of CAIR (2010, p. 11; 2013), Mohammed (2014), Asal (2014), or Lopez (2011), and even United Nations’ statements (2001; 2004, p. 18) define Islamophobia in a sense broader than just merely a critique of the Islamic faith. The University of California at Berkley Centre for Race and Gender Studies even created a scholarly journal in 2012 that aims at publishing critical analyses on this phenomenon.

The term “Islamophobia” is thus a neologism constituted from the root of the word “Islam” and “phobia” which means irrational fear. Literally speaking, Islamophobia is the irrational fear of the Muslim faith. By extension, it is then the fear of the people who practise that religion. That animosity can be expressed through different affects: simple apprehension, fear, rejection, contempt, and hatred of Islam and Muslims. This term and the phenomena it signifies reappeared in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 events; but the word was first introduced in the 1910s (Delafosse, 1911, p. 10; Marty, 1919, p. 174; Quellien, 1910, p. 133) and the 1920s (Ben Ibrahim & Dinet, 1925, p. 26). The recent reappearance of that term underscores a new element in the Western relationship with the Muslim world, new constructions of Islam as a whole, and in the intricate relationship between American and European societies with regard to their own Muslim communities.

Islamophobia is then a broad social phenomenon that should not be conflated with Western criticism of religions (*Islamophobia*, 1997; Mohammed, 2014), and that should not be reducible to a mere act of rejection. Mohammed (2014) thinks that the phenomenon is one of the consequences of the artificially constructed “Muslim problem” (*un problème musulman*) in European societies, a “problem” whose fundamental stake is to question “the legitimacy of Muslims presence” (*légitimité présenteielle des musulmans*) there (par. 1). Mohammed thus restricts Islamophobia to a society-related and/or a nation-related issue solely linked to Muslim immigration and presence in Europe. He then views Islamophobia as a phenomenon involving only its xenophobic promoters and Muslims in European societies. The analysis is highly interesting in the sense that constructed elements such as identity and ontological fear are essential neo-Orientalist components that drive Islamophobia. However, as Guerlain (2013) puts it, there is often confusion between whether Islamophobia is about the fear and hatred of Muslims because of their faith or because of their foreign origins, since the term is sometimes confused and coupled with racial prejudice against people of Arabic or Asian descent and cultures in Western societies. Furthermore, Mohammed and Guerlain shed light on only one aspect of the phenomenon: the European domestic one. In fact, through the Western neo-Orientalist prism, Islamophobia also operates towards the Muslim world in general.

Islamophobia is a general term that signifies a complex phenomenon having world-wide echoes and consequences. It involves all the processes that function on a culturalist and reductionist reading grid not only of Islam but also of Muslims, be they in Western societies or in the Muslim world.

Islamophobia operates within a culturalist frame that explains and links an individual’s behaviour to their cultural and religious belongings, in this case Islam and Muslim cultures. This ultimately leads to some kind of essentialisation, targeted stigmatisation, and stereotyping. The Western-centric vision of the Orient, Islam, and the Muslim world is perceived through the lens of a renewed Orientalism or neo-Orientalism, far from giving an accurate representation of Islam and Muslims, emphasises exclusively on what are considered negative dimensions and components of the Islamic faith and culture, or the alleged behaviour of the Muslim. Islamophobia is also a kind of xenophobia since it also represents Islam and

Muslims as elements extraneous and irreconcilable to the societies of the Western world (Islamophobie, 2010; Lowe, 1985, pp. 55–61). American and European neoconservatives and right-wing intellectuals such as Pipes (2003), Caldwell (2009), or Harris (2007) often try to make the case of this alleged incompatibility – and even threat – in their neo-Orientalist discourse. In this discourse, ontological insecurity is then a constitutive component. It is the vision of a Western world under siege and threatened in its culture, way of life, and identity. Examples can be drawn from recent debates over the origin and religion of immigrants and refugees, or trivial Muslim behaviours in American and European societies. Heated disputes over the construction of a mosque for instance, food preferences, veils, or long skirts, have taken disproportionate dimensions and fuelled the subjective constructions of a threatening Muslim Other, one that is threatening Western culture and identity.

It is important to recast Islamophobia in a new theoretical framework being imposed for two decades by the “Clash of Civilisations” thesis elaborated and argued for by Huntington (1996), and exacerbated by the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States and the emergence of a peculiar kind of political violence claiming to act on behalf of the Muslim faith. Since 2001, the subsequent “War on Terror” paradigm has been closely working in relation to different and often distorted understandings of the Muslim faith or the Muslim peoples.

The new structure of thought provided by Huntington (1993; 1996) presupposes that great irreducible cultural antagonisms underline modern societies, and that cultures and religions are doomed to collide. Moreover, it also stresses the essentialist belief that Islam is an awkward, degenerated, and threatening religion. Twenty-first century “War on Terror” paradigm (that may well shift to a “Clash of Civilisations” paradigm) has replaced the imperial/colonial paradigms of the nineteenth-early twentieth century and the Cold War paradigm (1945–1990s). It has thus a new central function to identify and construct a new enemy who comes to take many aspects in the social world: Muslims, the Muslim faith, Islam-related practices, and Qur’anic scripture and their alleged threatening commandments. Muslims in American and European societies and the Muslim world in general are represented as a homogenous and monolithic bloc, the phenomenon of Islamophobia being the social outcome of that distorted reading of Islam and the Muslim in real social world.

Media frames have thus conceptualised Islamophobia as a fundamentally negative “cognitive, affective, or conative” posturing of individuals, groups, and social orders or norms towards Islam and Muslims (Zafar, 2010). Though the image of Islam and the Muslim as a threat is occupying a great part of present-day American and European public debates, as mentioned above, this construction is not recent, and moreover, the attitudes close to it have been widely dealt with in the literature of the social sciences and the humanities. Daniel (1960) for example analysed and commented on how images of Islam had been constructed by Christendom throughout centuries. More recently, studies have shown how images and discourses throughout Western media are framing representations – and misrepresentations – are portraying a negative image of Islam and the Muslim world (Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2013; Poole, 2002; Poole & Richardson, 2006). Islamophobia has even been defined by a Muslim scholar as a “new word for an old fear” (Sajid, 2005). Nonetheless, it is important to mention that if the fear of the different aspects of Islam as political and cultural dogma has a long history, it increased and exacerbated after the end of the Cold War. This phobia of the Muslim, and the distorted conceptual connotations and confusions it entails in Western collective consciousness (Islam, Islamism, Salafism, Jihadism, Terrorism, etc.), or the impression of phobia conveyed by some media and part of the intellectual community, is recaptured by some Western politicians and has replaced the phobia of Communism as a threatening ideology/worldview (Jenkins, 2012; Miller, 2011; Nonneman, 1996).

Twenty-first century neoconservatives and their like-minded fellows, such as Horowitz and his website Frontpage.com, Spencer (2006; 2014), Pipes (2002; 2003), Steyn (2006; 2011), Harris (2004; 2007), and Bat Ye’or (2002; 2011), are among those who place the constructed images of Islam and the Muslim as ontological threats to the Western world at the centre of their discursive architecture. While it is clear that some of the fears that Westerners have of Islam and Muslims is not the exclusive result of neoconservative neo-Orientalism, this latter exacerbates an already delicate and complex relationship between Western societies and Muslims, regardless of their citizenship, ethnicity, or the countries they live in.

Conclusion

Due to historical paradigmatic shifts, three kinds of Orientalism developed and succeeded one another along the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries. Whereas the first two paradigms of Orientalism created a body of knowledge about the peoples of Orient, and more specifically the Arab-Muslim world, the third has a less territorialised dimension. Moreover, the scope, agenda, and sources of what we can call a twenty-first century neo-Orientalism are more different. This latter operates within a “Clash of Civilisations” paradigm in the United States and European public space, and its constructed objects are the Islamic faith and Muslims in the Western and Muslim worlds alike. This neo-Orientalism is the prism through which some intellectual circles produce and disseminate new distorted knowledge about Islam and the Muslim world. Though not alone in doing so, neo-Orientalist knowledge feeds the social phenomenon of Islamophobia within the West and towards the Muslim world.

The conceptual shifts of Orientalism show that interest- and identity-based representations of the Other have always been part of the Western historical dynamics in its relations with the peoples of the Muslim world. However, another conclusion can also be drawn from the latest shift. Indeed, contemporary neo-Orientalism originates from the neoconservative school of thought and other right-wing pro-Israeli circles. This suggests that neo-Orientalist discourse deliberately wishes to impose some kind of distorted, ever hegemonic, and intersubjective representations of Islam and the Muslim world. It is also mainly instrumental for it espouses Israeli interests and the Zionist worldview.

Neo-Orientalism generates an “us versus them” schema that brings the differentiation – and even confrontation – between identities, religions, and civilisations to the fore of any intercultural thinking. Neo-Orientalist discourse and knowledge and their entailing connotations, essentialisation, and Manichean constructions hence aggravate the divide between the West and Islam in the sense that they fail to deliver nuanced and objective understanding of the Muslim faith and peoples. This renewed Orientalist knowledge hides the reality of the existing diverse scholarly Islamic debates within the Muslim world. It also prevents the Western public setting from addressing actual issues such as the Palestinian question and the political and social roots of religious fanaticism. Finally, it forecloses any lucid interreligious and inter-civilisational understanding.

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Endnotes

1. In the present paper, my understanding of what Orientalists and Said call “the Orient” refers to the geographic area that stretches from North Africa to South East Asia, and in which Islam and Muslim cultures prevail, regardless of the variants of Islam and the ethnic attributes of the different peoples who live there.
2. Short of any valid term to designate the broad original sources of Orientalism, in the present paper, I use the terms “the West” to refer to the complex and highly ethnically, socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse historical and geographic areas which are set up in differentiation and even opposition to the Orient by the Orientalist as well as postcolonial research viewpoints.

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