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# Occidental Encounters: Early Nineteenth-Century Egyptian travelers to Europe

Omran Doaa

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**OCCIDENTAL ENCOUNTERS: EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
EGYPTIAN TRAVELERS IN EUROPE**

by

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UNIVERSITY, 2003**

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*To my dear father*

# **Occidental Encounters: Early Nineteenth-Century Egyptian Travelers in Europe**

By

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine nineteenth-century Occidentalism on which little research has been done. Understanding how the East views the West is not just an end in itself, but it can help us better understand post-colonial theory, which has always been more skewed towards Western views. The study will look at some of the tenets of modern Occidentalism, among them powerless discourse, knowledge, ambivalence, emancipation of women and the use of religion in legitimizing the discourse. I will also investigate the erroneous conception that Occidentalism is the opposite of Orientalism. Even though both fields of post-colonial theory share some common features, the stance of each school is different due to the political situation from which it emanates.

I will be focusing on the travel narratives written in the nineteenth century by Egyptian travelers who visited France after the French Campaign in Egypt. I will examine two seminal works representative of *al-Nahḍa* (The

Arab Renaissance) movement which was beginning to take place in the first half of the nineteenth century and then was stifled towards the end of the century with the advent of British colonization. These works are by two reformers with a religious background: Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, who wrote a travel memoir entitled *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī Waṣf Bārīz* (literally, *The Extract of Gold in the Description of Paris*), and translated as *An Imām in Paris: Al-Tahtawi's Visit to France (1826-1831)* and ʿAlī Mubārak's *ʿAlam al-Dīn* (1882), never translated into English or French. Minor writers to be discussed are ʿAbdel-Raḥmān al-Gabartī, Qāsim Amīn and Muḥammād ʿAbdou.

These Arab Occidentalists refer to a Middle Eastern world totally different from that which one encounters in the Orientalist discourse that Edward Said addresses in his *Orientalism*. These reformers were trying very hard to make their countries catch up with Western modernism. The reforms of which they dreamt had to be based on modern European standards that were in keeping with Islamic teachings. Their intention was one of borrowing rather than of mimicry. That very tenet of Occidentalism challenges Bhabha's notion of ambivalence leading to mimicry, then mockery, in Orientalist discourse. These reformers were challenging the cultural hegemony of European superior powers by calling instead for a modern Arabic identity that borrows only what suits its religious beliefs and culture.

I will also be tackling questions such as: How did these reformers view the relationship of the two poles of the globe? How valid are depictions of the East in works written by Orientalists and the West in the writings of the Occidentalists? Is there a meeting ground between Oriental and Occidental writings, and, if so, what is it? How can one understand the theory of Orientalism in terms of Occidentalism?

It will become apparent by the end of this research that we cannot depend on the tenets of Orientalism when looking at Occidentalism because despite their sharing certain tenets, a handful are peculiar to each one as the two enterprises had different purposes in the first place. When Occidentalism is put next to Orientalism, that comparison definitely improves our understanding of post-colonial theory, but one must always be aware that one is dealing with different matrices altogether.

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It occurs to me that nobody writes a book without saying at a later date: if only I had included such and such, the book would have been better. Or, if only I had said such and such earlier in the book, it would have been preferable. Or, if I had omitted such and such, the book would have been more comely. This suggests that imperfection is mankind's lot.

Imād-Aldīn al-Iṣfahānī (1125 – 1201)

## INTRODUCTION

Towards the second half of the last century, when the era of colonialism (but not imperialism) sang its swan song, an interest in studying that *other* started to evolve and that field of knowledge came to be known as “post-colonialism.” Post-colonialism, according to mainstream critical theory, is concerned with studying political, economic and cultural oppression of the non-white races as it examines colonialist agendas and the reaction of the subjugated object, whether the object of study is Middle Eastern, Asian, African, African American, Native American or white settler colonies. However, this definition does not imply how the subjugated views himself, his oppressor, or the home country of his colonizer. Giving precedence of one half over the other ultimately leads to biased findings, hypotheses and theories.

Thus, I propose in this research to examine the Occidentalism of Egyptian discourse in the works of early nineteenth-century travelers as an analogue to the Orientalism of Western travelers in order to contribute a more balanced insight into post-colonial theory. Travel literature is at the heart of post-colonial theory which can be better understood when looking simultaneously at its constitutive halves, Orientalism and Occidentalism. Hence, I will be using travel narratives

Since the debut of the colonialist enterprise in Egypt when Napoleon’s French Campaign (1798-1801) entered the territory, a considerable amount of literature has been dedicated to writing on the Orient. However, it was perhaps with Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1962) and

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's monograph "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), that post-colonialist theory as a field of literary criticism started taking shape. These theorists, however, were concerned with Orientalist writings and minimal attention was given to how the colonized wrote about himself, about his colonizer and how he viewed the colonizing Westerner. The colonizer was not even interested in his subject even when the latter started travelling to the former's abode in the dawn of the colonial era.

A major factor in the paucity of Occidentalism theory lies in the fact that the body of Occidentalism literature is not as voluminous as that of its Orientalist counterpart. The literacy rate in the East was (and still is) lower than the West with the result of fewer published works. By the time of the late middle ages, the gap between the East and West in scientific, intellectual and academic progress was widening. The Occident was following a more systematic trend of data circulation and compilation. The first printing press was used in Europe in the fifteenth-century when Johannes Gutenberg introduced the idea of printing books to Western Europe. On the other hand, Egypt and Syria were only introduced that device three centuries later. Ironically, the press was introduced through the French Campaign (1798-1801). This explains why the number of books, and hence theoretical research, produced in the West has always been much more abundant than what was published in the Middle East. The higher levels of education achieved in the West made its people curious not only about their own culture but also about those of other parts of the globe. The writings of English and French people arise from that overwhelming

curiosity to know more about the world. Then comes the secondary purpose of writing which is sharing that travel knowledge with one's own people back home. In the Middle East, no such attempts were made until decades later and that was when literacy – relatively speaking– started spreading.

The vast majority of early nineteenth-century Egyptian Occidental travel works were written in Arabic as opposed to the greater percentage of Occidental production written in English nowadays. English was still warring with French about which of them will become the “global” language, and the world was not then as “global” as it is nowadays. Moreover, these writers had the hope that their nations would still have the chance to catch up with the West, so no need really arose of total immersion in Western culture and language. Above all, these writers intended that their travel narratives address a national readership rather than an international one. Lately, more interest has begun to grow in the field of Occidentalism and more works started being translated from Arabic into other languages.

Orientalist works have always been circulating in Europe in an attempt to “know” about the Middle East, while little effort was made to see how the Middle East wrote about itself or wrote about Europe, or what the Middle Easterner was actually like and how he viewed himself. Of course, the West, which was more advanced, owned the tools of knowledge and hence was able to express itself in a greater multiplicity of works and to mould discourse in ways that “created” the East and Orientalist discourse. Little attempt was made in addressing the tenets upon which Arabic discourse was based.

Foucault talks about the relationships of knowledge/discourse and Said then borrows that concept from him in his *Orientalism*:

I myself believe that Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridical discourse about the Orient (which is what, in its academic or scholarly form, it claims to be). Nevertheless, what we must respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability. After all, any system of ideas that can remain unchanged as teachable wisdom (in academies, books, congresses, universities, foreign-service institutes) from the period of Ernest Renan in the late 1840s until the present in the United States must be something more formidable than a mere collection of lies. Orientalism, therefore, is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. (*Orientalism* 6)

Colonial literature uses discourse in such a way that makes Europe the center of the civilized world and the other parts are depicted as the less civilized peripheries. I will be attempting to tackle the question in this research as to whether there was such a

thing as Occidental discourse and in what terms does it differ from its Orientalist counterpart.

Orientalist discourse to a great extent vilified the Orient, depicting its people as backward. For example, the *Edinburgh Review* 1802 states that “Europe is the light of the world, and the ark of knowledge: upon the welfare of Europe, hangs the destiny of the most remote and savage people.” However true that the term “savage” was more associated with Sub-Saharan Africa, yet with some stretch of the concept, the Westerner travelers did view the Arab as a less educated and hence a less civilized fellow being and hence was “absent” to a great extent from Orientalist texts . Jan Neverdeen Pieterse argues in his *White on Black*, “the icon of the nineteenth-century savage is determined by *absences*: the absence, or scarcity, of clothing, possessions, attributes of civilization” (35). Similarly, I would claim that for the past two hundred years, the literary, historical, sociological and religious canon compiled in European archives and libraries was primarily focused on the one-sided view of the European colonizer. That of the colonized counted for little if not absent altogether and that explains the scarcity of translation.

It is worth mentioning here that the first English translation of Gustave Flaubert’s letters that he wrote when he left for Egypt in 1894 was published by the first half of the twentieth century under the title, *Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour*. The second half of the last century witnessed an interest in travel narratives written in languages other than English. The interest, however, in Arabic texts came at a later stage. The translation of the memoirs of the Egyptian cleric al-Ṭahṭāwī, first

published in Arabic in 1834, had its first English translation under the title of *An Imām in Paris* only issued in 2002. Similarly, the annals of Abd al-Rahman Al-Jabarti, the chronicler of the French Campaign of Egypt in 1798, were only translated into French almost a century later – in 1892 and were translated into English only in 2005. ‘Alī Mubārak’s *‘Alam al-Dīn*(1882), a work that might be of interest to both the English and the French readers as the protagonist ‘Alam al-Dīn travels in the company of an Englishman to France. The eponymous protagonist holds conversations with an Englishman, engaging in a cultural dialogue based on comparing the situations of both worlds with two different perspectives. Despite the insight that the work sheds on how a man from the East understands the West and vice versa, it was never translated into either English or French. Making these works available in translation would perhaps enhance our understanding of Orientalism, Occidentalism and post-colonial theory in general and would gradually nullify the unilateral European view of the Orient.

A more whole and balanced understanding of Orientalist discourse theory would be possible if we make Occidentalism sit on the other side of the post-colonial theory seesaw. Despite the fact that it was highly acclaimed, even the work of the Palestinian theorist, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, was criticized because it focused on the Western side of the literature and totally avoided looking at the Eastern part. Hence, the importance of examining Occidental texts and giving voice and presence to these voiceless colonized people, thereby helping us achieve a more comprehensive understanding of colonialism and post-colonialism and in due course

of the meaning of Orientalism in general. We do understand things by learning about their opposites and Orientalism and Occidentalism are no exception. Perhaps it is apt at this point to define the term Occidentalism and provide a brief history of research done in that field so far.

However, despite the fact that the term “Occidentalism” existed in the English language in the nineteenth century, the term “Occident” was circulating as early as in the days of fourteenth-century Chaucer<sup>1</sup>. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the term Occidentalism dates back as early as the early nineteenth century and it is to be compared with its French equivalent *Occidentalisme* which is defined as a “tendency to favor Western values over those of the East” (1846). The OED places its first entry of the term on 1839 when *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* reported that “The Sultan Mahmoud and his Turkish subjects . . . have no taste for . . . the Occidentalism, the journalism, the parliamentaryism of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (46, 105).” *The Western Gazette* mentions in 1905 that “the houses are a mixture of Russian, incomplete and untidy Occidentalism, with Caucasian and Turkish Orientalism.” These magazine and newspaper entries show that there has always been an antithesis between the East and the West, between Orientalism and Occidentalism.

Orientalism is part of the post-colonial dichotomy that regards all that is Western as civilized and that which is Eastern inferior to it; despite the Orientalist's having a persisting will to explore and experience it. A vivid example of

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<sup>1</sup> Monk’s Tale: “Iulius the conqueror . . . wan al thoccident by land and see” (3864)



this interest is the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Turkomania. On the other hand, Occidentalism is the field concerned with studying the works written by Arabs, Iranians, Chinese, Japanese and Indians who travelled to the Occident. Occidentalism, then can it be considered as an inversion of Edward Said's "Orientalism," a label for stereotyped inferior Western views of the Near East and Far East, or is it a discipline that has its own set of rules and tenets? It is enough to say, at least for the time being, that Said's *Orientalism* by implication triggered academic curiosity about how the Middle Easterner viewed the Occident, even if Occidentalism was never part of his research.

Research in the relatively nascent field of Occidentalism has been undertaken in myriad fields such as political science, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, human geography and literature. The bird's-eye cursory view that I will be offering here proves that the work done in academia is for the most part Far Eastern. An example of that is Xiaomei Chen's *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (2005) which explores the plurality of Chinese readings of the West. Another Chinese contribution is Shu-mei Shih's *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*. On the Japanese side, the works so far are by English-speaking authors such as Robin D. Gill's *Orientalism & Occidentalism: is mistranslating culture inevitable?* (2005) and Judith Snodgrass's *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Columbian Exposition* (2003). One of the leading works in the field is *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (1995), edited by James Carrier, in

which the essayists explore how the images of the West formed both by Westerners and non-Westerners shape their understanding of the West, themselves and of the world as a whole. In Couze's outstanding *Occidentalism: Modernity and Subjectivity*, he studies the question from a philosophical perspective, drawing from other philosophers such as Derrida, Foucault, Levinas, Lyotard, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur.

On the Near Eastern side of the globe, similar research, even if less voluminous, has also been taking place. This research sometimes took the "clash of civilizations stance" and propagating and viewing the West as a mere enemy. Examples of these works is *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West* (1984) by the Iranian Jalal Ali Ahmad. Works such as these contribute nothing but "othering" the other even more. On the other hand, there were works promoting all that was Western and looking down at everything Eastern, condemning it, calling for radical change such as the works of Wafaa Sultan, Nonie Darwish and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. This latter group of writers are in fact repeating the very monologue of Western superiority/Eastern inferiority Orientalists such as Lane, Burton and Flaubert in the nineteenth-century.

However, my project here is to look at the earlier, equally enlightened and moderate, namely, those from the less researched Egyptian inter-colonization period of eighty-two years between the French Campaign (1798-1801) and British Colonization(1882-1954). This endeavor involves moving back in time to the beginning days of colonization and listening to the voices of these colonized

intellectuals and reformists talking about their experience with the “center” and travelling to Paris and London; the two cities then epitomizing Western civilization. Going two centuries earlier would perhaps make us understand better the movements in the intellectual circles of modern-day Egypt and the way intellectuals observed their relationship to the West, especially at the beginning of the Arabic cultural renaissance, *al-nahḍa*. The Middle Easterner first found the French colonizer on his native lands and two decades later started sailing to his country and engaging even in more intellectual encounters. There is a dearth of research related to that era, the intellectual significance of which sprouts from the fact that the Occidentalist was writing from a purely Arab-Islamic perspective and he was just about to become modern, yet was determined to be proud and tenacious of his culture.

This research examines two seminal nineteenth-century works representative of *al-Nahḍa* movement beginning to take place in the first half of the nineteenth century and then was stifled towards the end of the century with the advent of British colonization. These two works are by two reformers of a clerical background; Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, who wrote a travel memoir entitled *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī Waṣf Bārīz* (literally *The Extract of Gold in the Description of Paris*), then translated as *An Imām in Paris: Al-Tahtawi's Visit to France (1826-1831)* and ʿAlī Mubārak’s *ʿAlam al-Dīn* (1882) which was never translated.

My aim here, apart from introducing the important and yet untranslated work of ʿAlī Mubārak, is to examine both works as Occidentalist texts reflecting the way

the East viewed the West two centuries ago. These are two major travel books of the late nineteenth century that represent Middle Eastern attitudes towards the West and show how these reformers saw the West in relationship to the East. Introducing such studies of and about the Middle East would inevitably restore that distorted balance in the field of post-colonial studies which has been for decades primarily skewed towards Western views. The thought introduced in these two narratives is by no means congruent to the images that the European “translated” version of *The Arabian Nights* –to take an extreme example– that pictured the East as “exotic,” “eccentric” and “sensual.” Arab Occidentalists refer to a totally different Eastern world which was trying very hard to catch up with Western modernism and striving very hard to reform itself. The reform that these scholars were dreaming of had to be based on modern European standards that were in keeping with Islamic teachings.

The following chapters will be looking at these tenets of Occidentalism and how these reformers were advocating their version of modernism. I will be problematizing the erroneous conception that Occidentalism is the opposite of Orientalism. Even though both fields share some common tenets such as the quest for knowledge, the powerful and the powerless, and ambivalence, the stance is different. I will also be addressing questions such as: How did these reformers view the relationship of the two poles of the globe? How valid are depictions of the East in works written by Orientalists and the West in the writings of the Occidentalists? Is

there a meeting ground between Oriental and Occidental writings, and, if yes, what is it? How can one understand Said's theory of Orientalism in terms of Occidentalism?

We cannot depend on the tenets of Orientalism when looking at Occidentalism because despite their sharing a number of tenets, a handful are peculiar to each one as the two enterprises had different purposes in the first place. When Occidentalism is put next to Orientalism, that comparison definitely improves our understanding of post-colonial theory but one has always to be aware that one is dealing with a different matrix.

## CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

### FROM MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC TRAVEL LITERATURE TO NINETEENTH-CENTURY JOURNEYS

In order to build a civilization, you need to be curious about the other cultures in neighboring and distant countries. Hence, the genre of travel literature flourishes in the times of civilization and deteriorates in the times of cultural stupor. Arabic travel literature is no exception; for it was flourishing in the heyday of the Islamic Empire and started deteriorating with the fall of al-Andalus. Then it flourished again after centuries of intellectual numbness when Muḥammad ʿAlī undertakes his ambitious project of modernizing Egypt in the early nineteenth century. The French Campaign on Egypt (1798-1801) whets the appetite for modernization and Muḥammad ʿAlī starts sending scholars like Rifāʿa al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and ʿAlī Mubārak to Europe. These scholars try to fit in a tradition of medieval Arabic civilization when curious Muslim intellectuals wandered the globe in search of knowledge. However, these reformers were now from a periphery travelling to the Occidental cultural center and they wished that their countries could catch up with it. Unlike their progeny who have become part of the vanquished side of the globe, the Arab medieval forefathers belonged to the dominant part of the world.

Arabic travel literature flourished in medieval times when the Islamic state was in its heyday. In the tenth century, the era of the birth of the Islamic empire, Arabic and Persian travel literature was circulating the globe. Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān wrote his *Risāla* as well as *Kitāb ʿilā Mulūk al-Saqāliba* (A Letter to the Kings of al-Saqāliba) which is an account of the caliph's embassy from Baghdad to the King of the Volga Bulghārs. In the eleventh century, Nāṣir Khusraw a Persian traveler, wrote his *Safarnama*, and in the twelfth century Abu ad-Din al-Ḥusayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr offered *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*. The thirteenth century witnessed Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī's *Muʿjam al-Buldān* (Dictionary of Countries) when Marco Polo was working on his *Il Milione* (1298). The fourteenth-century Ibn Baṭūṭa, a Moroccan world traveler issued his *Rihla* (1355) — literally entitled: "A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Traveling," later on known as *The Travels of Ibn Baṭūṭa*. This multi-cultural Andalusian writer was sharing his experiences of his travels to India, China, Russia and Venice with his audience. Other writers such as the twelfth-century Ibn Ṭufayl wrote philosophical travel narratives such as his *Ḥayy Ibn YaqDHān* in which the protagonist finds himself shipwrecked on a desert island and tries to reach the truth about the Creator. Other works in the genre took the form of imaginary journeys such as those of "Sinbad the Sailor" taken from the *One Thousand and One Nights* where the protagonist travels to Asia and North Africa. Europe was not yet a place of interest and travel literature was directed more towards the more eastern parts of the globe.

Later on, with the fall of the Islamic State, in the late Middle Ages, Islamic travel narratives almost come to a halt. The Arabic/Islamic civilization was crumbling and was more occupied solving its internal feuds, and less and less attention was given to the luxury of knowing other cultures. On the other hand, the Elizabethan fleet was competing with the Spanish Armada at the time exhibiting a unquenchable curiosity in knowing more about the globe. Thus, English, Spanish and Portuguese writers enter the travel itinerary canon and dethroned their Arab counterparts. In the sixteenth century, a handful of Portuguese travel works such as Duarte Barbosa's *The Book of Duarte Barbosa: an account of the countries bordering the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants* are produced. Fernão Mendes Pinto's *Peregrinação*, "Pilgrimage", which is a memoir of his travels in the Middle and Far East, Ethiopia, Arabian Sea, India and Japan. Pinto was one of the first Europeans to reach Japan in 1542. Englishmen such as Richard Hakluyt contributed his *The Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589), a foundational text of the travel literature genre. *The Oxford Companion to World Exploration* states that the Hakluyt Society named after him was founded in 1846 by the geographer William Desborough Cooley to print for its members "rare and valuable Voyages, Travels, and Geographical Records". (367).

Europe was travelling more eastwards and the East was growing more stagnant and suffering more from cultural autism until one day it woke up to find Napoleon Bonaparte with his expedition in their lands.



On July 1, 1798, Napoleon landed in Egypt with 400 ships and 54,000 men and proceeded to invade the country, as he had recently invaded Italy. But this Egyptian invasion was to be different. For, in addition to soldiers and sailors, Napoleon brought along 150 *savants* — scientists, engineers and scholars whose responsibility was to capture, not Egyptian soil, but Egyptian culture and history. And while the military invasion was an ultimate failure, the scholarly one was successful beyond anyone's expectations. <sup>2</sup>

According to Bernasek in her essay “Unveiling the Orient, Unmasking Orientalism: Sophia Poole’s *The Englishwoman in Egypt*,” while Bonaparte’s main “military objective was to block the British route to India, he also established the link between Orientalist scholarship and Empire by bringing with him a group of scholars whose objectives were to gather and record information on both ancient and modern Egypt.” Seeing all this progress in front of their eyes, this of course whetted the curiosity of some Egyptians who wanted to discover more about the West, three decades before the Khedive Muḥammad °Alī started sending his missions to Europe. That bewilderment and admiration could be seen for example in the annals of the chronicler of the French campaign °Abd al-Rahmān al-Jabartī (1754-1825).

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.lindahall.org/events\\_exhib/exhibit/exhibits/napoleon/learn.shtml](http://www.lindahall.org/events_exhib/exhibit/exhibits/napoleon/learn.shtml)

And they dedicated the house of Ibāhīm Katkhidā al-Sinārī to a group and these were the painters. They drew pictures of everything. One of them was Arigot the painter who drew pictures of humans, and when one saw (them), he would think that it was a protruding body in a vacuum that was about to speak. He even painted each of the sheikhs with his circle (of students) as well as the rich people and put these pictures in some of the soldiers' lounges. There were other painters taking pictures of animals, insects, another one painting fish and whales and recording their nomenclature. They would also take the whale that did not exist in their country and reserve its body in a preservative made from a chemical so that the animal remains in its prior condition and does not deteriorate even if it is reserved there for a long time.

(al-Jabartī Part III 58 *translation mine*)

This first modern, – rather shocking encounter – with the West on Eastern grounds was primarily cultural in nature. It was, in a way, Occidentalism happening on native lands, before the natives sailed for the West two decades later on scholarly missions.

Muḥammad °Alī Pasha (4 March 1769- 2 August 1849) the Albanian Khedive of Egypt, who was installed *wāli* (ruler) of Egypt in 1805 and established the °Alawī dynasty to rule Egypt and Sudan, wanted to modernize his country along European

lines; mainly English and French. He wanted to reform Egypt economically, scientifically, literarily, religiously, politically and militarily. In order to launch his modernization project, Muḥammad ʿAlī Pasha sent distinguished scholars such as Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1801-1873) and ʿAlī Mubārak (1823-1893) to Europe in the early half of the nineteenth-century. That contributed eventually in what has been considered the dawn of the Arabic literary renaissance; al-*Nahḍa*. These nineteenth-century reformists, modernist men of considerable education, travelled to France and brought back progressive ideas which they wanted to implement in Egypt. And their contribution was remarkable. The modernization that Egypt was able to achieve in just a few decades was so remarkable that even Japan sent envoys to learn from the Egyptian experience.

What perhaps characterizes these reformists is that they had an Islamic education in rural schools and their ideas of modernizing their country emanated from a religious standpoint. They were unlike their later twentieth-century counterparts who put more emphasis on borrowing more from the European experience as the only tangible model for progress. These reformers borrowed from the West as well as maintaining their cultural and religious heritage. When they returned to Egypt these scholars proposed progressive projects both in the sciences and the humanities. For example, ʿAlī Mubārak inaugurated Dār al-kutub Library and Dār al-ʿulūm College. Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī established the Faculty of Alsun (tongues) responsible for teaching languages so that academic relations could be established with the West.

The first educational mission that the Khedive sent to Europe was in 1820 and among its luminaries was Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī[3]; a man of religion, a writer, teacher, translator, Egyptologist, and reformer. He was born in 1801, the same year the French left Egypt, to an educated family from the village of Ṭaḥṭā in Upper Egypt. He received his early education from his father who helped him memorize the Quran. At the age of twelve, he left his village to Cairo and joined al-Azhar in hope of having an education like that of his maternal uncles who were Azharians. His teacher Ḥassan al-°Aṭār was fond of him that when the Khedive asked him to recommend an Imām to accompany the Egyptian students going to Paris, al-°Aṭār recommended Rifā'a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī.

Even though al-Ṭaḥṭāwī went to France as a man of religion accompanying the students and not as a student himself, still the five years (1826-31) were very fruitful for him as a reformer. Despite his religious background, he was able to absorb and be interested in the French culture. He learned the French language in three years by the help of French tutors whom he paid from his own money. That enabled him to read in French history, Greek philosophy, mythology, mathematics and logic. He also read books by Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu and many others. He had a firm belief that the cultural movement in Egypt should be both modern as well as indigenous, which is why he contacted the scholars of the French Campaign while being in France.

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was deeply influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution and related its demands for equality and justice to his religious background and saw no

opposition between Islamic thought and modernization. In an attempt to share these European experiences of his with his countrymen he wrote his *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī Waṣf Bārīz* (literally *The Extract of Gold in the Description of Paris*), translated into English as *An Imām in Paris: Al-Tahtawi's Visit to France (1826-1831)*. Aware that being versed in Islamic theology was not enough to bring progress to a country, and in an attempt to build a cultural bridge between Egypt and the modern world, in addition to establishing the Faculty of al-ʿAlsun, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī started translating Western works in humanities, law as well as parts of the French constitution. This cleric inspired a handful of thinkers who followed him such Moḥammad ʿAbdu (1849-19905) a religious scholar regarded as the founder of Islamic modernism as well as predecessor ʿAli Mubārak.

ʿAli Mubārak (1823–93) is considered the “Father of Education in Egypt” who introduced his countrymen to the progress the West was experiencing in the second half of the century. Mubārak spent his university years in France and returned to Egypt to share with his countrymen the knowledge he had gained in Europe through projects, governmental positions, articles and narrative works. Mubārak is perhaps best remembered for establishing the college of Dār al-ʿulūm, where students were taught mathematics, geometry, physics, geography, history and calligraphy in addition to the sciences taught in al-Azhar such as Arabic, the Quran and the Ḥadīth in addition to Fiqh. Mubārak’s project reflects the nineteenth-century need for introducing the modern European sciences while retaining the sciences of Arabic language and the Islamic religion. That was, as ʿAbd al- Badī ʿAbd-Allah put it, “a

step towards modernizing the Egyptian mentality.” He also established the library of Dār al-Kutub; an aspect of European civilization for which his predecessor, Rifāʿa al-Taḥṭāwī, praised the French and hoped that Egyptians would establish something similar. Initially, Mubārak did not have the budget to establish this library so he depended on the surpluses from the schools in funding his project. He then set the rules for book borrowing and established quiet study areas and included collections of rare manuscripts and books. Perhaps without their travels to France, neither al-Taḥṭāwī nor Mubārak would have been able to introduce to their people these high-quality projects.

Mubārak spent his childhood on the countryside but later on he started mingling with the princes of the royal ʿAlawīs. This experience contributed insight into his later writing, especially those works dealing with the role of education. From early youth, Mubārak expressed a perceptive curiosity about education as seen in his memoirs. ʿAli Mubārak, like most boys from rural backgrounds, underwent traditional religious learning in early childhood: he learnt the rules of the Arabic language and memorized the Quran. In his mid-teens, he worked with a black African agriculturalist – perhaps even a freed slave – ʿAnbar Efendi. The adolescent Mubārak was impressed by his master’s knowledge and wondered at the high status that he was able to attain in society despite the latter’s social rank, since he was an Abyssinian [Ethiopian] slave by origin. In that time of Egyptian history, the Turks were the high-class elite; even the native Egyptians were lower on the social

ladder. ʿAnbar Efendi was something of an enigma to Mubarak who expresses that in his memoirs:

And when I stayed up late with my father, I spoke with him about these matters. I asked him: this *maʿmūr* (officer) is not a Turk because he is black. He answered me that he could be a freed slave. So I said, “Can a slave be a ruler, when the upper class of the country are not rulers? What then if he is a slave? My father continued but I was not convinced by such answers as: “Maybe that is due to his good manners and knowledge.” I would say “and what is his knowledge?” He would say: “Maybe he went to al-Azhar and was educated there,” so I'd say “and does the education in al-Azhar result in making someone a ruler, and which ruler graduated from al-Azhar?” He then said, “My son, we are all the slaves of God, and God the Most High elevates whomever He wills.” So I'd say, "Certainly, but reasons are indispensable." And he continued narrating tales of which I was not convinced.” (al-Khaṭaṭ9/39)  
[translation mine]taken from ‘Ali Mubārak *My Life* introduction by ʿAbd- al- Badīʿ ʿAbd-Allah

He came to know that his master had received his high school education in al-Qasr al-<sup>o</sup>Ayny School that offered secular education. Mubārak decided to attend that school since it taught calligraphy, mathematics and Turkish (<sup>o</sup>Ali Mubārak *My Life* introduction by <sup>o</sup>Abd- al- Badī <sup>o</sup>Abd-Allah). He enrolled there in 1836 despite some difficulties. Mohamed Ali's modern schools were regarded as a sort of military recruitment: one was totally cut off from his family and these schools required references as well. Mubarak took the challenge and was even selected to join al-Qasr al-<sup>o</sup>Aynī for further university education. That was a turning point in Mubārak's life, enabling him to enter engineering school the following year. Being one of the top students in his class, he was selected for the offspring mission of 1844 which included the sons of Mohamed <sup>o</sup>Ali; Ḥussein and Ḥalim and his grandsons Aḥmed and Ismā<sup>o</sup>īl (later on the Khedive Ismā<sup>o</sup>īl). He mentions in his memoirs:

I saw that my travelling with the (royal) Offspring would bring about honor, elevation and acquisition of knowledge, so I persisted in travelling even though I knew that my kinsmen were poor and they awaited a portion of my salary, but I saw that a long-term benefit is preferable to a short-term one (al-Khaṭaṭ9/42-43)  
[translation mine]

Mubārak stayed in France for five years. He had to learn the French language from children's books in order to be able to catch up in the military engineering sciences. He excelled and after his return to Egypt he



held distinguished positions ranging from teaching in Ṭorra School to being an Amirlay, very often working directly with the *wālī*. In addition, he was the director of the Engineering School and head of the irrigation project in al-Qanāṭir al-Khayriyya, and held high posts in the Ministry of Education and the Railway. He was honored by the Ottoman Empire and received as well as the Légion d'honneur from the French government.

It is true that both memoirs share basic tenets of nineteenth-century Occidentalism that I will be exploring in the coming chapters. There are some technical aspects to be discussed here. For example, unlike al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's *An Imam in Paris*, which offers a one-sided perspective expressing only an Easterner's view, *ʿAlam al-Dīn* is structured in the form of *musāmarat*, or conversational exchanges between Mubārak's eponymous Egyptian Azharian mouthpiece, ʿAlam al-Dīn (his name meaning literally the banner of religion) and the English lord whom our protagonist is accompanying to England in order to help the latter edit an Arabic lexicon; *Lisān al-ʿArab*. The journey, as ʿAbd- al- Badī ʿAbd-Allah says, is “based on the comparison between the civilization of the West in France and that of the East in Egypt.” The purpose of the journey is by default educational.

Despite the thematic similarities between the books of Mubārak and al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, I would argue that Mubārak's text is livelier, perhaps more entertaining than that of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī due to the more personal element introduced in his *musāmara* technique. Rasheed El-Enany holds also that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's work is rather impersonal:

... al-Ṭaḥṭāwī remains aloof from French society insofar as the book goes, or to quote the words of ʿAlī Mubārak, a younger, if equally influential, contemporary of his and mission student in Paris too, who commented on Takhlīṣ in his own ʿAlam al-Dīn, . . . ‘He [al-Ṭaḥṭāwī] did not enter [Paris] through its [proper] doors, nor did she upon his description of her reveal her face to him. . . . Did he make any friends (apart from Sylvestre de Sacy and the like)? Did he know any women? etc. (El-Enany 18)

In order to avoid this “aloofness” and to “enter” Europe, ʿAlī Mubārak introduces his book not only in the form of *musāmarāt*, but also as narrative, perhaps a sort of “novel” with some “stretch of the concept,” as El-Enany puts it. These hundred and twenty-five *musāmarāt* are primarily cultural exchanges between ʿAlam al-Dīn, the writer’s persona, and the English lord. That form not only adds life to the book, but perhaps also reflects the kind of relationship that Mubārak expected from both sides: dialogue. Cultural dialogue between the East and the West is an element which most Occidentalists of the nineteenth century addressed in their writings. It becomes a tenet, a feature of the writings of the time. Travel narratives were in fact but early attempts towards introducing ideas about the Orient/Occident relationship to the people back home. Along with these progressive ideas, these writers also contributed to sharing a Western genre: introducing the narrative/novel form to the

Eastern audience and expanding concepts of readership and knowledge and opening vistas to their people back home to be aware of Europe in an entertaining form.

## CHAPTER TWO: POWERLESS DISCOURSE BUT EQUAL HUMANS

*Poverty in our lands is estrangement and money in estrangement is homelands  
and earth is a thing; all of it one whole thing, and people are brethren and  
neighbors. (al-Zubaydī)*

As may be seen from the timeline provided in the introduction, travel writing flourishes in the times of civilization. What distinguishes Arabic travel literature of the Middle Ages from that of the nineteenth-century was that later modern writings were written from a weaker perspective: one impoverished in knowledge. In his *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault talks about the relationship between power, knowledge and discourse. The more advanced societies are the owners of the dominant culture and the best educational institutions and hence can place many books in circulation in comparison to the less-educated nations. Better-educated societies can expand politically since there is always a tendency to conquer after achieving a certain degree of progress in the home country (the Roman and Persian Empires, for example)[1]. Then, there comes a desire to educate the people back home about overseas peoples arises. In the colonial times of the late eighteenth through twentieth centuries, such a penchant was at its peak. Canonical travel writers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Florence Nightingale, John Lloyd Stephens, Alexander William Kinglake, Mary Kingsley, Richard Burton, Edward William Lane, Sophia Poole, E.M Forster, Lawrence Durrell and many others were quite productive.

On the other hand, there was scant travel literature written by the colonized Middle Easterners, partly because of high illiteracy rates and partly because there was no clear national plan that these writers might have found essential to write in fulfilling. If the West wrote from a stance of power, Occidental travel literature then, I would argue, arose as a powerless discourse, a discourse written from the stance of the defensive.

The writings in the nineteenth century express that defensive stance against a European threat that they had definitely seen developing. The scramble to Africa and the British hegemony in Asia due to holding the majority of shares in the East India Company, the fall of Singapore in 1819 and that of Burma in 1924 definitely heralded signs of an upcoming colonization, especially with the fresh experience of the French Campaign. These intellectuals were aware that if their country did not find itself on a par with Europe culturally and scientifically, it might at some point fall into the hands of a European power. The writings of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and Mubārak show a deep desire to learn from the West that had become the beacon of culture and civilization. It is true that these writers state that Egyptians should always stick to their cultural heritage, but they were aware of the importance of learning from the West and the importance of their travels there.

Unlike the Hakluyt Society that underscored the importance of travel writing in order to achieve the ultimate motives of the colonialist agenda, no such organized societies or plans existed in the Middle East. Perhaps the one and only generator triggering these nineteenth-century reformers going to Europe was the *al-Naḥḍa*

(modernization ) movement that Moḥammad ʿAli Pasha wanted to introduce to Egypt in order to catch up with the modernization movements in Europe. What provoked such movements in the Middle East, according to Moḥammad Charfi was that:

In the early nineteenth century, the shock of Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt as well as Tunisia's uninterrupted contact with the northern shores of the Mediterranean encouraged the emergence of the first reformers: Kabadou, Bayram, Bouhajeb and Ibn Abi Dhaif in Tunisia; Moḥammad Alil and Tahtawi in Egypt, who both worked for an opening to the world (especially to the educational institutions). (*Islam and Liberation*136)

Similar modernization movements inspired by the Egyptian *al-Nahḍa* were then initiated in other parts of the Middle East such as the Levant and then, in the twentieth century, Turkey. That cross-pollination eventually led in Turkey, for example, to what came to be known as the "Young Turks." In that respect, too, Moḥammad Charfi states that the new reformists (such as al-Ṭaḥṭāwī) tried:

to grapple with the lag that has accumulated since the fifteenth century, to learn foreign languages, to open up to nations that have outstripped us in science and technology as well as the level of ideas and political

systems, and to advance our culture and philosophical conceptions through an effort of reflection, *ijtihad*, that enables us to adapt to the new times while still remaining ourselves. There is no harm in drawing inspiration from what other countries have done. Did Europeans not do the same thing when their situation required it? (*Islam and Liberation* 20)

These men of reform were definitely aware of the fact that their countries had a lot of work to do in order to catch up with Europe and were stressing throughout that there was much to be learned from the West. They viewed the West as more powerful and advanced at that time but considered that with some effort they could catch up. The question imposes itself here: is it not that by admitting that the East was insufficiently progressive and needed to learn from the West, these Occidentalists were in a sense reiterating the Orientalist argument? That is a tricky area because despite the fact that Occidentalists admitted that the West was more advanced than the East, that did not mean the East was inferior in other aspects. There were never hints of a yearning for Eurocentrism or considering themselves an inferior race or thinking that it was the White Man's Burden to educate and civilize them. They might need to take guidance from the West but they are responsible for educating themselves. In their world picture, the Middle East that was once the cradle of civilization could not be regarded as irredeemably retarded. Hence the classic ontology/phylogeny argument was not really applicable to their situation. And unlike

the sometimes very negative portrayal of the European travelers to the nineteenth-century Middle East, these Eastern reformers looked at their countries as a product of weak rulers who neglected educational institutions and other services that their governments should have introduced so that they could pile up money and gain favor with the European authorities securing their thrones. These thinkers then needed such luminary[???] movements such as *al-Nahḍa* in order to spread modernization among their people and that only could be achieved through writing about the more advanced Occident and opening dialogue with it.

If Orientalist texts attempted throughout to subordinate, Occidentalists texts viewed the relationship between the East and the West as one of equality (despite the East's temporarily lagging behind) and of potential cultural exchange. These clerics even thought that the West really had a lot to learn from the Middle East, the cradle of civilization and religion, though this was something never really expressed in most Orientalist texts. Exchange and dialogue seemed the only possible way to have a healthy relationship with the West. That is perhaps most evident in the structure of *ʿAlam al-Dīn* as the eponymous main character engages in dialogue with the English lord throughout the book. Occidentalists texts do not attempt to silence the Other or to depict him in a cartoonish manner. It is through engaging with him in dialogue they can view him in a more human light, much more than what one witnesses in Orientalist writings where the Other was always silent, exotic and thus to a great extent less human. Whereas Occidentalism regards the West as an equal



human entity which was just more modern, Orientalism uses subordination as a key strategy when referring to the Other.

An Orientalist example of Egyptian sluggishness and lack of interest in politics can be seen in Flaubert's letter to Dr Jules Cloquet in which he makes a point that the Orient needs the Europeans to rescue it.

The European employees will turn against the government here, which they detest, and all will be over. As for the Arab populace, it has no interest in knowing to whom it will belong. Under different names it will always remain the same, and will gain nothing because it has nothing to lose. Abbas Pasha – I whisper in your ears— is a moron, almost a mental case, incapable of understanding anything or doing anything. He is undoing all the work of Mohammed Ali — the little that remains amounts to nothing. The general servility that prevails here is nauseating – and on this score many of the Europeans are more oriental than the orientals...  
*(Flaubert in Egypt 82)*

Another example, particularly extreme, is found in Flaubert's account of his visit "Up the Nile to Wadi Halfa," in which he describes a scene in the countryside where Egyptians and animals are grouped together: "Arabs, donkeys and buffalo going to

the fields” (97). Similarly, Dorothy Wordsworth in her journals comments upon sheep grazing and women working in the fields as equal components of a pleasing landscape!

Nineteenth-century Occidental literature neither subordinated the Westerner nor placed him on a pedestal. It depicted him as an equal human being, even if s/he was privileged with more facilities and a better quality of life. If the Arab world was indeed powerless but not inferior, then the only way for it to catch up with the West was through education. In their eyes, the region was like a student who has been missing homework assignments and needs a tutor, the West in this case, to help him/her catch up. It had absolutely nothing to do with the student's IQ or mental capabilities. It was just some problems (social and/or personal) that caused this delay. Once s/he handed in these late assignments, his or her progress in class would go unimpeded. And it was through education and emulating the European models that the Middle East could save itself from the mire of backwardness and restore a more powerful education, economy, army and discourse.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### TRAVEL, EDUCATION AND CULTURAL DIALOGUE

*God makes the path to paradise easy for him who travels a road in search of knowledge, and the angels spread their wings for the pleasure of the seeker of knowledge. All those in heaven and earth will seek forgiveness from those who pursue knowledge, even the serpents in the water. The learned person is superior to the worshipper just as the moon has precedence over the rest of the stars. (Ḥadīth)*

Travelling is a means of seeking knowledge. Seeking knowledge is at the heart of the theory of Occidentalism, if not the main purpose of sailing to Europe and the West. I will be discussing in this chapter knowledge and education as key tenets of Occidentalism and will demonstrate how these journeys to the West were undertaken with the primary purpose of learning from Western progress. An example is Moḥammad ʿAli's sending his scholars to France in the 1820's. Education, modernization and reform were the main initiatives behind his missions. Because these reformers had an Islamic education by default, they regarded their journeys as a means to fulfill an Islamic duty: seeking knowledge, a quest possible to fulfill through journeying. Although Orientalist literature also considered knowledge as a motivating

factor behind traveling to the East, the ends in both the Arab and European traditions were quite different as they had different status quo's and agendas (as will be discussed later on in this chapter). Ironically, while the powerful discourse of the West was never able to reveal its main purpose, colonialism, the powerless discourse of the Middle East stated its intention clearly: catching up with Europe.

This made the use of knowledge and its definition different in the two schools. Following the more advanced West was at the crux of journeys to Europe. Thus, these reformers were advocating ideas of cultural dialogue and exchange in their writings. These writers were even promoting the notion that the West can learn from the East and education was never a mere one-way process, as will be seen in the writings of Rifā'a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and °Ali Mubārak. I would argue that the travel writings of these nineteenth-century scholars were intended not merely to introduce the Egyptian audience to the marvels the traveler saw in his journey, but also to serve the educational and governmental institutions and the layman with models of modernization, which could only be established through education. Education in Occidentalism is a four-faceted pillar which necessitates the writer himself learning from his experience, sharing his experience with his fellow countrymen, learning from the foreigner and letting the foreigner learn from his experience. As we shall see, the latter two pillars have always been to a great extent missing from Orientalist literature. This chapter also explores cultural exchange in Occidentalist writings and how these reformers viewed their culture in relationship to the West. However,

before delving into this, a definition of knowledge and education and how al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and Mubārak saw it from both modernist as well as Islamic perspectives is apt.

In her *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and western Travelers in Search of Knowledge*, Roxanne L. Euben contends that the search for knowledge was one of the moving forces that have always inspired Muslims to travel. Euben depends on etymological roots in both Greek and Arabic to prove that journeying/ theorizing has always been “the” way to understand about the Other— and one’s self. In the Greek language, Euben states that *theoria*, the etymological precursor of the English “theory,” literally means “to see the world.” According to Euben, “seeing the world” is not without religious implications of understanding more about God.

*Theôria* is itself a compound of different possibilities: the first half of the word suggests both vision (*thea*, meaning sight/ spectacle) and God (*theos*), while *-oros* connotes “one who sees.” Unsurprisingly, then, *theôrein* is the verb meaning “to observe” and is connected to sightseeing and religious emissaries. This etymology posits a link among *theôria*, travel, direct experience and vision, but it is in Herodotus’s *Histories* that such practices are tied specifically to the achievement of knowledge: in one of the earliest known uses of the word *theôria* in the ancient world, Herodotus describes Solon the Lawgiver’s

journey from Athens for (among other reasons) the sake of *theo`ria* and explicitly links theory and wisdom (*sophia*) to travel across vast terrain (1.30.2). (*Journeys to the Other Shore* 21)

This classical etymology is to some extent similar in Arabic, as the root (k-sh-f) which means to uncover and from which the words explorer (*muktashif*), discovery (*Iktishāf*) and inquiry (*kashf*) are derived. These etymological parallels help us understand more deeply how journeying and knowledge were associated in the ancient West as well as in Arabic thought. Euben states that “travel [i]s a metaphor for the search of knowledge” (29). Hence, the very purpose behind Muḥammad ‘Ali’s sending missions to Europe in the 1820’s was that these scholars make use of their experience at the West.

Standing at a distance from a picture enables us see it more clearly and this applies to journeying. Travelling abroad makes one not only know more about the country they are visiting, but also about one's own, placing it more in context. The “language of dislocation” that the traveler uses in writing his memoir makes him see the world with a more critical eye. As a result of traveling to Europe, al-Taḥṭāwī and Mubārāk realize that modernization had become a must and state in the first few pages of their memoirs that the primary purpose of their journeys was education.

al-Taḥṭāwī says that his book serves as a document for Egyptians by which they can learn from the French how to improve their country. He in fact states:

However in order to enhance the usefulness of this travelogue, we should like to present here a treatise related to health and hygiene regulations. I translated this treatise in Paris so that it can be used by all people in Egypt. (*An Imām in Paris* 237)

Similarly, Mubārāk's eponymous hero ʿAlam al-Dīn serves the same purpose. ʿAlam al-Dīn literally means in Arabic "the banner of religion" and the word banner; "ʿAlam" comes from the root (ʿA-L-M) which is the same root for the verb "to know". Alam al-Dīn in a sense becomes the banner of Islam when he travels to Europe and becomes more learned and can share this knowledge he had learned with his fellow citizens through establishing schools.

Nājī Najīb in his *ʿAlam al-Dīn: A Reading in the Thought of Modern Arabic Social History* (1983) argues that it is through the modern school system that peoples and nations can rise socially and establish a new bourgeois society. And that was the mission of scholars coming back from Europe, advocating education. That was, as ʿAbdal-Badī ʿAbd-Allah put it, "a step towards modernizing the Egyptian mentality." I have already talked about the achievements of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and Mubārak in the background; it is evident that their journeys had been undertaken for the purpose of knowledge both worldly and divine.

Because our reformers had initially a religious education, they would always make connections between modernization/worldly knowledge and divine knowledge,

arguing that the two are complementary. Their argument emanates from the fact that search for knowledge, *ṭalab al-ʿilm*, is a requirement for Muslims mandated in the Quran whose first verse to be revealed on the Prophet was “read”/ “recite.” Among the numerous verses in the Quran exhorting the readers to journey in search of knowledge and which these reformers used as a departure point are:

Have they not travelled in the land that they could have the heart to understand, and the ears to hear? [Many] ways of life have passed away before your time. Go, then, about the earth and behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth (Quran 3:137).

Say: “Go all over the earth and behold how [wondrously] He has created [man] in the first instance: and thus, too, will God bring into being your second life for, verily, God has the power to will anything! (Quran 29:20)

A number of ḥadīths encourage the value of education such as:

“When the son of Adam dies his deeds come to a halt except for an ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge and a good son who prays for him,



“Those who go out in search of knowledge will be in the path of God until they return,” and

“Wisdom is the lost property of the believer; it is his, wherever he may find it.” (*Sahīh al-Bukhārī*)

These reformers would often quote such Islamic texts to stress connections between worldly and divine knowledge. They were aware of the fact that it was not enough to state to their readers that modernization coming through knowledge was mandatory for the development of their countries, but religious evidence of the value of knowledge would make their argument stronger. In their world picture, in addition to these Quranic verses and ḥadīths that explicitly state that one has to travel and to journey in quest of knowledge, there are the stories of the prophets who also journeyed the earth in search of knowledge and experience and became inspirations to later Muslim travelers. Stories such as those of Abraham who traveled from Iraq to Egypt and then to the land of Arabia, Moses who traveled from Egypt to Palestine, Solomon who travelled to Yemen to see the kingdom of the Queen of Sheba, and the Virgin Mary who traveled from Palestine to Egypt in order to give birth to Jesus Christ. All these historic stories in addition to the stories in the Sunnah/hadīth of the journeys of the Prophet himself before he received the revelation, then his *Isrāʾ* and *Miʿrāj* (Night Journey), and then his *Hijra* (emigration from Mecca to Medina in the year of 622) were sort of a structural pillar in an Islamic tradition that encouraged the value of travel for knowledge.

Moreover, the metaphor of life as a journey to the hereafter has always been prevalent in the Islamic canon, using the example of verse (5:18) in which the Quran states *ilayhi al-maṣīr* or “to Him is all journey’s end.” This metaphor means that Muslims should participate in discovering the world that they inhabit. Ṭalab al-‘ilm then becomes a lifetime mission. Euben uses the fifth pillar of Islam, *ḥajj*, pilgrimage to Mecca, to emphasize her point and argues that pilgrimage which is a journey enables one not only to become better acquainted with the rituals of his/her religion, but also with foreign lands and people. This is by far the best proof that travel and knowledge are intricately interrelated in Arab culture. Euben says that the request for knowledge;

*talab al-‘ilm* recalls the many connotations of the Greek *theôria* in which religious embassies, pilgrimage, sightseeing, knowledge, and observation of others are closely connected, and may in this sense be continuous with practices of pilgrimage in other cultural traditions, for example, *dars’an* in Hinduism. Indeed, an early meaning of *theôros* was an envoy dispatched to consult the Delphic Oracle and so “from the very beginning the theorist was sent to bring back the word of a god.” The sense in which the Greek practice of *theôria* could in this way become a “divine vocation” is thus mirrored in the identification in Islam of travel with “pious activity,”

the achievement of which was thought to constitute a  
“sign of divine approval and munificence.” (*Journeys to  
the Other Shore* 36)

Divine and worldly knowledge are faces of the same coin in Arabic culture just as they were in ancient Greek culture. Thus, religion was used as a vehicle and an end to education/modernization: a common feature in nineteenth-century reformative texts such as those of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, Mubārak, Muḥammad °Abdou and Qāsim Amīn. It is true that because these reformers shared the same cultural background with their readers, which by default was Islamic, they used religion to legitimize their arguments for progress and modernization (as will be discussed in chapter 5). Someone like °Ali Mubārak would use his protagonist °Alam al-Dīn as a mouthpiece to convince his wife/audience that knowledge, whether divine or secular, is sacred. In trying to convince his wife that his travel to Europe with the English lord by quoting the hadīth; °Alam al-Dīn, uses the ḥadīth: “Seek knowledge as far as China.”

The role of their journeys as quests for ṭalab al-°ilm and the importance of education are stressed from early in the book as the sixth *musāmara* (conversation) goes. In this *musāmara*, °Alam al-Dīn tries to convince his wife that earthly sciences are as important as the divine sciences when she wants him to stay in Egypt and not accompany an English tourist. She even argues that it would be better if they left

Cairo and he gave up his vocation at al-Azhar teaching Arabic and went to the countryside where he would teach the more important religious sciences even if he earned less money. She thinks it would be more beneficial if ʿAlam al-Dīn focused on teaching Muslims the Quran instead of seeking earning money and other worldly pleasures. ʿAlam al-Dīn argues that sharing knowledge (even with non-Muslims) is a trait encouraged in the Islamic tradition since the Prophet Mohamed asked his companions to learn foreign languages and, as the ḥadith says, “ask for knowledge even if in China.” Along these lines of learning foreign languages, ʿAlam al-Dīn continues to argue that:

It is known that the people of China are non-believers and there are numerous examples from this, and the benefits from learning the language of these people cannot be undervalued because that can facilitate our reaching the level they have in arts and beneficial industries. It is through the knowledge of their language that we can communicate with them and explore what they have and understand and check what they have attained in these arts and industries from books and letters and then choose from them what is beneficial for our countries and necessary for us. And that is totally fine for us, as the Prophet of God (peace be upon him), when advised by Salman the Persian that his people—

and they were Zoroastrians—built trenches, he ordered them to build a trench for the foray, known by that name: the Trench Foray. The Prophet (peace be upon him) helped build it with his own hands. So, it is of little use to us if we see something beneficial but do not adopt it simply because its makers do not share our faith. But we should benefit from it as they have their religion and we have our own . . . especially if one's income in his dwelling place is not enough for sustenance. (*°Alam al-Dīn* Musāmara# 5. Translation mine)

°Alam al-Dīn makes it evident for his audience that seeking knowledge is an Islamic must regardless of the faith of the second party. Similarly, we encounter the same idea more directly in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's book when he states directly that his country needs to imitate the French in their libraries and social institutions. These men of reform were definitely aware of the fact that their countries had a lot of work to do in order to catch up with Europe. Writing from the center, they intended to share with their people the European progress so that eventually the less advanced Orient could catch up with the more advanced Occident. However, for them, venturing westward did not evolve from a desire merely to absorb Western knowledge, but was also aimed at a potential cultural dialogue.

If the primary purpose of sailing westward was seeking knowledge, the secondary purpose was sharing Eastern knowledge with the West. Knowledge in

nineteenth-century Arabic Occidentalism writings was not just one way but rather two-sided in a symbiotic relationship. The more modern West had a lot to learn from the more spiritual Middle East, too. That is why these clerics sailed off to Europe with the primary intention of learning from the progress this continent had reached as well as with the secondary intention of introducing Europeans to their language and culture. This is evident in *‘Alam al-Dīn* in which the writer undertakes the journey in order to help the English lord revise and edit his Arabic lexicon. *‘Alam al-Dīn* is by default a traveler concerned with educating the other about himself as well as knowing more about himself in the course of the journey. As far as form and content are concerned, the book is an attempt to create a meeting point between two worlds through positive cultural dialogue.

This cultural educative dialogue is evident in *Musāmara* seven that takes place between *‘Alam al-Dīn* and the English lord in a railway station when our protagonist is shocked as the train pulls out of the station. A history of steam and its use in engines is described. The English lord is always the mouthpiece for industrial progress. They discuss the economic benefits of trains. *‘Alam al-Dīn*'s son, *Burhān al-Dīn*, does not really participate in the conversations, leaving the arena mostly to his father, but *Mubārak* was definitely underscoring the idea that young men should travel and discover the world. He was also delivering a message to his townspeople (and his wife as well) who were afraid of the hazards of traveling, proving through statistics which the English lord mentions that in comparison to other means of transportation, trains are the safest and the most economical.

These railways contributed to a speedier transportation so that the rate of commerce and transportation of merchandise increased. . . . the Shaykh said if my countrymen were aware of this, enormous benefits would have resulted and it would have been more fruitful for people in the countryside...*‘Alam al-Dīn*. (Musāmara # 5 125 and 129 Translation mine)

Like his predecessor al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, Mubārak always refers the contributions of his forebears to the topic under discussion. Here, *‘Alam al-Dīn* refers to the ancient use of steam by the Egyptian Hārūn the Alexandrian. The East as the predecessor of the West is often witnessed in these texts. The writer is telling his audience: “Well, we were able to do it before. Won't we be able to do it now?” He urges them to copy the progress witnessed in Europe. That technique of igniting a spirit of competition more or less reigns over the travel genre of the era. These reformers had a deep admiration for European progress, yet they persistently drew similarities between the Western present and the Middle Eastern past. That is why it is not only the English lord educating *‘Alam al-Dīn* throughout, but the latter too is educating the English lord since he is more knowledgeable about the Arabic language. Mubārak delivers a message to his Arabic readers that they can offer knowledge to the West and by doing this, he boosts their confidence as well in addition, of course, to introducing the concept of dialogue. Education through dialogue becomes the main theme of the book as both men exchange roles throughout the four-volume book where one is the mentor and the other is the mentored and vice versa.

Later on, ʿAlam al-Dīn introduces the English word to the synonyms of the word “wind” in Arabic. When the English word mistakenly uses the wrong term *ʿāṣifa* referring to a sea storm instead of *qāṣifa*, ʿAlam al-Dīn corrects him, saying that the first refers to a storm that makes the *ʿāṣif* for the tree leaves move while the later comes from the root *qṣf* which is related to destruction as sea storms generally cause destruction. The word in Arabic has at least a dozen synonyms depending on the root of the verb that describes the certain kind of wind in question. For example there is, *qawāṣif*, *ʿawāṣif*, *lawāqih*, *ḥawāshik*, *bawāriḥ*, *mubashirāt*, *ʿaʿāṣīr* that refer to kinds of wind that respectively refer to sea wind, land wind, wind that carry pollen grains, rough wind, summer hot wind, wind that precede rain and wind accompanied by rain. He uses that in order to show the richness and variety of meanings that Arabic can offer. In another instance, namely in *musāmara* # 11, ʿAlam al-Dīn gives another lengthy explanation of the six root variations of /ʿa r b/ from which the words related to movement, grammar, car and Arab are all related. All these instances not only put ʿAlam al-Dīn in the place of the more learned Arabist who has mastery over a language of more intricate structures, but also these episodes deliver to the Arabic reader that he should have pride in his/her culture and language - - of which they are most probably ignorant as well -- even if the West is more technologically advanced.

As could be witnessed from post-colonial texts, both Orientalist and Occidentalist texts shared a great tendency to “describe” and list in order to share knowledge with their peoples. However, I would argue that whereas the Orientalist



“created an Orient”— to put it in Said’s words— that was exotic and thus conquerable, the Occidentalist wanted to deliver a more realistic image so that the Middle East could catch up with Europe. Because the purposes were different, the accuracy of the depiction varied. The Orientalist always seemed to be just sharing knowledge with the people of his country just for the sake of “knowledge.” There has always been an evasive tendency on the part of the Orientalist while giving utmost detail of his journey but never mentioning the other “real” purpose that triggered him/her to write his/her memoir, pamphlet, travel guide, novel or even taking a picture of the Pyramids. There was of course a desire for knowledge and a curiosity about the East, but at the other end there was always the question of power. In Capt. Sir Richard Burton’s *Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, published posthumously by his wife Isabella Burton in 1893, Burton dresses like a Muslim and assumes the identity of a Turk and visits Egypt and Saudi Arabia without giving his readers a convincing reason for going through all this. One would wonder, why did not he just translate any book from Arabic on the pilgrimage journey? Towards the end of the preface to the book, his wife writes that her deceased husband “lived only for the benefit and for the welfare of England and his countrymen, and of the human race at large” (Burton xviii ). In what sense would the English reader really relate to a journey to the “holy shrines” in the deserts of Arabia and how would that benefit “the human race”? However, to be fair, Burton had an extraordinary command of many languages and an intense interest in India (including the Muslim North) and spoke Persian as well as Arabic and Turkish. He was fascinated by other cultures and was somewhat distant from fellow officers because of his immersion in these cultures.

Like Flaubert, Poole and Lane, Burton had this fascination with the East, that ancient Pharaonic, Aramaic and Biblical East. They also admired its exoticism and Manicheism that they witnessed in Egypt. One cannot totally blame these Orientalists because they were simply describing what they had been seeing. The problem which these texts impose, however, is that they convince the Western reader that the East is transfixed in that circle of sluggishness and that this was not just the status quo in these countries, but it is something inherent in their DNA. Flaubert, Burton and Lane did really *try* to understand and describe what they saw, and at many times like Flaubert concluded that “Europeans are more oriental than the orientals.” (Flaubert 82)

The main contribution of the Arab reformers in the inter-occupation period (the French Campaign and the British colonization) was actually that they tried to break through that vicious circle drawn in the colonialist canon. Contrary to the Orientalist traveler who would never pronounce his guilty pleasure that he was writing to portray an “inferior” culture so that his countrymen can flock there and subjugate its people, the Occidentalists would always state the reason for his travel: setting positive examples for their countrymen to learn from Western advances. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī concludes that the French advanced because they maintain social justice. That is what moves him to translate the seventy-four articles of the French Charter and dedicate a few pages of his book to it because “justice indeed is the basis of prosperity” (194). Occidentalists literature offering these insights about the importance of knowledge, need for modernization and cultural exchange,

challenges the Orientalist opinions such as those of Bernard Lewis. In his *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, he claims that Muslims “lack a desire for knowledge.” Occidentalists challenge this very notion since more often than not, the Arab Other is depicted as obtuse and lacking any sort of intellectual curiosity. This assumption puts a great part of Orientalist theories at stake and opens vistas for us towards a more objective understanding and evaluation of post-colonial theory.

Both Mubārak and al-Ṭaḥṭāwī talk optimistically at the beginning of their journeys about the importance of traveling and the potential understanding and competition between the two parts of the world. However, the traveler unexpectedly becomes more reserved in attitude when he reaches Europe and witnesses a “dichotomy of faith and admiration of the 'faithless' [which] becomes a recurrent theme” (El-Enany 17) in Occidentalism. Thus, the notion of sharing knowledge with the West becomes problematic. The exchange of knowledge is not such an easy prescription to follow when the question arises as to what extent the Islamic East should borrow from the secular West. This predicament and somewhat uneasy feeling led to the ambivalence that one often encounters in Occidentalists writings and will be discussed in the coming chapter in relation to the concepts of fearing as well as desiring the West.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AMBIVALENCE: THE WESTERN EXPERIENCE OFFERS A MODERN UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAM

*“I went to the West and saw Islam but no Muslims;*

*I got back to the East and saw Muslims but no Islam.” (Moḥammad ʿAbdu)*

Religion is a major element of Middle Eastern culture and upon it other sub-tenets of Occidentalism are based. One such tenet is ambivalence. Centuries of intellectual stupor eventually lead to stagnancy in cultural aspects, including the interpretation by Muslims of their own religion. Having no other model for modernization, paradoxically nineteenth-century reformers started looking at the West as the model that can offer an understanding of Islam in a modern light. The Europeans intrigued these Muslim writers causing them to read their religion with a fresh outlook and to break away from ancient cultural shackles. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and Mubārak admired the European experience yet were in many instances skeptical of it for religious reasons. These reformers focused on the aspects of French life and the comparative cultural context in regard to their Egyptian counterparts. The writers throughout are never reluctant to offer their opinions and judgments on what they see in the country of the Franks and to compare that to the values of their home country.

In this chapter, I will be looking at the values for which these reformers praise the French as opposed to those of which they are critical. I will examine also the dichotomy which the writers place between French institutions which they laud and the French people about whom they are ambivalent.

One of the key words that best describes Occidentalism is ambivalence. The term was first introduced to post-colonial theory through psychoanalysis to describe desiring one thing and in the meantime wanting its opposite. “Ambivalence” has been adapted by Edward Said to describe the complex love-hate relationship that exists between colonizers and colonized. Homi Bhabha develops the theory further by arguing that the British colonizer yearned to make the colonized *partially* imitate his oppressor but never become a full replica of him.

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*. In order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference . . . mimicry is at once resemblance and menace. (*The Location of Culture*86)

This ambivalence resulted in a “flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English” (*The Location of Culture* 87). Bhabha

stipulates his point by mentioning the example of Charles Grant's observation on Lord Macaulay's 1835 *Minute to Parliament* in which he wants to spread a diluted Christianity in India mingled with Hindu practices. Otherwise, these potential "Christian" Indians might overturn the colonial enterprise.

Thus, the notion of "partially" converting the *other* was a top priority on the colonial agenda, especially in the cases of India, China and Sub-Saharan Africa. Patrick Brantlinger, in his article "Victorians and Africans," argues that converting the colonized was among the top priorities of explorers and missionaries in Africa:

Although [the explorers] sometimes individualize their portraits of Africans, explorers usually portray them as amusing or dangerous obstacles or as objects of curiosity, while missionaries usually portray Africans as weak, pitiable inferior mortals who need to be shown the light. . . . Livingstone offers a striking example of how humanitarian aims could contribute to imperialist encroachment. Deeply influenced by Buxton, Livingstone also advocated the "opening up" of Africa by "commerce and Christianity." (Gates, ed. "Race," *Writing, and Difference* 195-7)

Missionary business was not exactly the case in the Middle East since the colonizer definitely knew it was easier to convert the Far East and Sub-Saharan

Africa than to convert Islamic countries. It is a more doable task to make a pagan enter a new religion than to make the gentiles do so. Great parts of Sub-Saharan Africa were Christianized, but that was not the case with the Islamic Middle East where people were dedicated to a faith that asked them to perform religious rituals on a regular basis. Proselytism then becomes next-to-impossible in this case. Plan B then in the Middle East was opening English and French missionary schools teaching students curricula in English and French. Marginal importance was given to the Arabic language in these schools. These schools were often run by nuns and priests and had a monastery or a convent attached to the premises of the school. It is true that the Muslim students who attended such schools were not Christianized, but at least that was a means of installing European values and culture in them. It was a means of getting native students more involved in some sort of cultural mimesis. If this shows anything, it is the religious tension that existed at the time for the Christian colonizer trying to make the non-Christian colonized more accepting of European culture/religion.

However, unlike the men of religion that the colonial powers sent to Africa and Asia, these *imāms* (or men of religion) were not missionaries. These missions did not travel to Europe to convert its people, but rather to learn from its progress. In a sense, they went to absorb from the culture rather than to impose their own. However, the Occidental canon is never devoid of ambivalence, a different category of ambivalence stemming from a deep desire of the Occidental to emulate Western progress in order to catch up with it while at the same time maintaining

his Islamic identity. In that era, and to a great extent later on, Occidentalists views were heavily leaning on religious pillars that looked to the West for inspiration and instruction but not as a model to be copied verbatim. Ironically, the Arab subject was repulsed by the idea of becoming a total hybrid of the West since he wanted to retain his Arab/Islamic identity.

Religion was at the core of nineteenth-century Occidentalism just as it was at the core of the Orientalist colonialist enterprise (Islam in the case of the former and Christianity in the latter) and these reformers were definitely aware of these religious tensions. They tried to look at the West through an Islamic lens to fathom the difference between the extremely advanced West, Christian by default, and the much less-advanced colonized Islamic Middle East. This intellectual riddle is perhaps best witnessed in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's paradoxical lines:

Is there another place like Paris

Where the suns of knowledge never set

Where the night of unbelief has no morning?

Forsooth, is this not the strangest of things? (*An Imām in Paris* 252)

This tension existed because of the gap between the theoretical ritualistic Islam practiced in the East as opposed to the secular application of its values in the non-Muslim West. According to these reformers, their people back home only performed the Islamic rituals while Westerners maintained the values of hard work,



honesty, social justice/responsibility, *ṭalab al-ʿilm* (request for knowledge); values advocated in both the Quran and the Hadīth. In their countries, however, no such application was to be witnessed. Thus, these clerics had to refer to the Western contemporary experience in order to be able to present their people at home with a practical guide for progress, even if the model they were introducing was irreligious. The ambivalence depicted in the works of the period was then an outcome of the tension between the theoretical teachings of Islam that these scholars had learnt in al-Azhar and the actual application of (many of) these teachings in Europe, which according to them was not strictly speaking really “Christian”. Ironically, these scholars were in fact looking at the European model and transferring it to Muslims so that they would know how it would be if they followed strictly the teachings of their religion. This would inevitably lead to an even greater civilization, one that not only improves the quality of this life but allows one to prepare better for the Day of Judgment.

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī attempts throughout his memoirs to analyze French progress, arguing that even if the French did not practice their religion, yet they maintained the essence of good faith through observing values of justice, cleanliness, social responsibility and education. In their arguments, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, ʿAlī Mubārak and ʿAbdu confirm that civilization is the outcome of respecting the idealistic values which religious teaching dictate. Following only the rituals leads ultimately to nothing, but following the ideals (even without the rituals) can lead to progress. Thus, the progress and civilization that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī encounters in Paris is

not in his view due to the fact that the French are Christian and Egyptians are Muslim, as we see from the distinction between the Christian French and the Orthodox Copts of Egypt. Among the traits that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī most lauds among the French is their cleanliness. In this aspect, the French come next to the Dutch. He even compares the French to Egyptian Copts whom he does not consider clean, so it is not then a matter of religion but a matter of civilization and cleanliness leading to each other.

Among the laudable qualities of the Franks that distinguish them from other Christians is their love of external cleanliness. Indeed, all the dirt and filth with which God – may He be praised and exalted – has cursed the Copts of Egypt he gave to the Franks as cleanliness, even when they are on the high seas” (138-

*9 An Imām in Paris)*

He concludes that the French are advanced not because of their faith but because of their dedication to these ideals mentioned above. That is why he reprimands the Copts for the same vices as their Egyptian Muslim counterparts. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī seems to be caught in a fix here between the correlation of cleanliness and religion. He reaches the conclusion that the Pharaohs “were known to be the cleanest people in the world” (219) because they were civilized.

Among the other things for which al-Ṭaḥṭāwī extols the French is their eating habits which are also an expression of the outer cleanness that he sees in their streets, houses and services. He writes about it in a nonchalant descriptive tone yet one can sense his covert admiration for the fact that they do not eat from copper plates but from enamel ones and “sometimes the[se] enamel plates are in the same color as the food served.” (150). Later on, when he talks about French restaurants and coffee houses, he says “they consider a sign of both hygiene and refinement if people do not touch anything by their own hands” (221) and use cutlery instead. He comments on the fact that their meals are divided into more than one course. Good eating habits seem to prevail in homes, restaurants and coffee houses, places “intended for the comfort of the people of the city of Paris” (220). He notes how the Parisians sprinkle water in the streets of their town during the hot season (170) in order to keep the air cleaner and cooler for passers-by. Other means of convenience that he talks about and admires are: their press, journals, postal service, carriages and transportation system, pharmacies and hospitals. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī admires the French because their lives follow a system. These reformers wished that their people had an organized planning of their lives and their institutions which is why they started following these European modern systems on their return home. An example of this was Mubārak's establishing the library of Dār al-Kutub along the European model and introducing borrowings from similar European models.

Despite their criticisms of their own culture, they were not hopeless. They wrote their books with the intention of making their compatriots aware of European

lives and values. Aware that their countries needed a tremendous amount of work in order to draw alongside modern civilization, these reformers never viewed the situation as irredeemable. They considered themselves living in a stage of slumber, a nadir to which their nations were reduced by both ruling and ruled shirking responsibilities toward fellow human beings and God. Orientalist writings always tried to depict backwardness as an inherent feature in the Arab DNA, caricaturing the Oriental Other and thus “justifying any action of the Self” (Hanafi, "From Orientalism To Occidentalism.") Occidentalists writers, on the other hand, reiterated evidence from history that there was a day when the East held the beacon of knowledge and taught the West. Perhaps, it was then the turn of the East to learn from the West. That was also used for the purpose of pushing their people to be creative and to avoid blind imitation. Islamic countries, in the reformers’ opinion, should learn selectively from the Occident. In a sense, it should learn with economy from Europe. These reformers always stressed the need of a Middle Eastern/Western cultural dialogue, reiterating a warning against blind mimicry.

These visitors viewed their relationship with the West as one of exchange rather than mimicry. Their approach was more straightforward; they were ambivalent toward the West in some aspects, yet they were aware that there were myriad things that they could learn from it, especially when it came to understanding their religion in a modern context. Both al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and ʿAbdu viewed the West as a place of culture and progress from which the Middle East needed to learn. Yet the East need not just parrot Western culture, but needed to be creative about borrowings. One of the

illuminating experiences they introduced after their European encounters was the notion of the modern educated Muslim woman, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE OCCIDENTAL GAZE: FEAR, DESIRE OR NONE?

#### *Be Gentle with the Glass Vessels (Hadīth)*

Interestingly enough, in the process of viewing the Occident in a desirable fashion, these writers became ambivalent and skeptical about their own current culture. They admired French institutions and systems and yearned to find similar modern constructs in their country. However, the even more tantalizing aspect to them was that of the French women. They were very ambivalent as to how French society dealt with its women. They admired the education and the intellect this society allowed its weaker sex, yet they were very doubtful of the “looseness” permissible in extra-marital relationships.

While the purpose of the earlier chapters was to depict how Occidentalism interprets the shared tenets of power, discourse, travel, education and ambivalence differently from Orientalism, this chapter aims to prove that the Orientalist tenets of fear and desire are non-existent in Occidental writings. I will explore their great ambivalence toward women and how that led eventually to the liberation of Egyptian women. Then I will analyze how this ambivalence was used positively in eventually liberating women. Then I will briefly discuss that the Orientalist tenets of desire and fear of the European model are different in Occidentalism. It becomes apparent that

through an examination of the Occidental canon, we can deconstruct the Orientalist depictions of the Arab woman as a mere libidinal object of desire and construct a more realistic understanding of how she was viewed by her own countrymen at the time through their depiction of her Western counterpart. The “consistent whole” (discussed below) that Sophia Poole fails to form about the Eastern woman is only possible when we read how Occidentals wrote about the Western woman in relationship to the former.

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī praises French women for the fact that they were educated. It is true that he does not state it openly that Egyptian women should enjoy this same right; however, his comments pave the way for feminists to ask later for the education of women in Egypt. The shock was admirably great to these Occidentals when they realized how educated women were in other societies and it took them some time to reflect that women in the Middle East should start enjoying similar rights. Once more, they were using the European model – about which they were also ambivalent – in order to attain new insights into Islamic values such as education, seeking knowledge and cleanliness and to see a virtual modern application of these values. However, before coming up with a visualization of the modern Muslim woman they had first to inspect and critically examine her French sister.

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī admires the beauty of these French women and does not conceal the fact that he has taken pleasure in looking at them. He describes them as “most beautiful” and admires the simplicity of their clothes. However, he is skeptical of the “immodesty” of their dress and of the “small measure of chastity that they show” to

the extent that “adultery is part of the [human] faults and vices rather than a mortal sin” (178). Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī even excuses that looseness in manner by stating that the French are by nature amorous people who make of love an “art.”

Not every lightning cloud sheds its rain in abundance.  
Among French women there are those with great virtue  
and others who display quite the contrary. The latter are  
in the majority since the hearts of most people in France,  
whether male or female, are in thrall to the art of love.

*(An Imām in Paris 219)*

French women, though, not only have a passion for love but for knowledge as well, and this is one of the traits the Imām admires most about them. He lauds their keenness in knowledge and the fact that they might even travel to foreign countries as men do in acquisition of knowledge (219). They also share their knowledge as there are women translators, writers and poets. It is in France that “people enquire about the mind of a woman, her talent and faculty of comprehension and learning.” (188).

These modernizing trends – admiring the European woman for her intellect and trying to emulate that long-forgotten experience in Islamic countries – started to evolve, to the extent of becoming a movement, in the late nineteenth century. Evidence of that is seen in the writings of Moḥammad ʿAbdu (1849-1905), an Azharian cleric who held very progressive ideas about the education of women.



Another prominent figure calling for the education of women was Qasim Amīn (1863-1904), “the liberator of women.” Amīn was a judge who received a government scholarship to continue his education at the Université de Montpellier (1881-1885). On coming back to Egypt, he wanted to reform Egyptian society and introduce enlightened ideas concerning the education and liberation of women. He published his two monographs: *The Liberation of Women* and *The New Woman* in 1899 and 1900 respectively. Amīn writes convincingly like a lawyer presenting his case in court depending more or less on his argument on Islamic tenets in order to drive his point home. He is aware that his audience is religious in nature, and he therefore, like al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and Mubārak, depends to a great extent on religious evidence in order to give his argument credibility. (That will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.) He uses Ḥadīths and verses from the Quran encouraging women to be transmitters of knowledge and argues that it is only through the education of women that Egyptian society can progress. He depends on Islamic evidence. For example, he quotes Prophet Moḥammad in talking about his wife ʿAʿisha:

Half of your religious principles could be taken from the examples and teachings of ʿAisha, the woman with the red cheeks.” ʿAisha was an ordinary woman who was not given a message through a vision or a miracle, but who listened and understood, taught, and was receptive of what she learned. I wish every Egyptian would realize

that women's proper upbringing is the key to all other problems, and any problem however important, is related to it. (*The Liberation of Women* 27-28 trans. Sidhom)

Amīn wanted to prove that secluding women without educating them is a “value [ ] alien to our religion.” (28) It is true that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, despite the deep admiration he shows for the educated Western woman, never says directly that Muslim women should start taking such steps. However, these earlier travel writings did in fact pave the way for women's liberation movements in the Middle East that were later to be initiated by feminist reformers such as Amīn, ʿAbdu and Hudā Shaʿrāwī in the second half of the twentieth century.

Commenting on such progressive movements, a late twentieth-century Occidental/feminist writer and scholar, Leila Ahmed, who currently teaches at Harvard, mentions in her memoir *A Border Passage: from Cairo to America – a Woman's Journey from Cairo to America* (1999) that:

by mid-nineteenth century, Egypt had indeed already been forging rapidly forward in the adoption of modern ways and technologies, leading the way among Muslim and Eastern Mediterranean countries, ahead even of Turkey. It had begun to make enormous strides in the acquisition of European know-how under its dynamic ruler, Muhammad Ali, who had become governor of

Egypt in 1805. . . . the British invested Egypt's resources in projects, such as irrigation and road construction, that brought prosperity. . . . but conversely the British continued their policy of not allowing Egypt to develop as an industrial nation. . . . [they] cut funding from other projects, such as education, essential for Egypt's long-term prosperity. (*A Border Passage* 37-8)

Lord Cromer, Britain's chief representative in Egypt, hindered the opening of girls' schools, as Ahmed mentions. It seems that while Occidentalists and reformers were struggling to spread ideas of educating the weaker sex, the colonizer on the other hand was also fiercely resisting such attempts. Ahmed states while Cromer noted that Egyptian women were suppressed, he raised girl school fees:

The policies Cromer pursued were detrimental to Egyptian women. The restrictions he placed on government schools and his raising of school fees held back girls' education as well as boys'. He also discouraged the training of women doctors. Under the British, the School of Hakimas, which had given women as many years of medical training as the men received in the School of Medicine, was restricted to midwifery. On the local preference among women for being treated by women Cromer said, "I am aware that in exceptional

cases women like to be treated by female doctors, but I conceive that throughout the civilized world, attendance by medical men is still the rule.” (*Women and Gender in Islam* 153)

Ahmed goes on to state that ironically Cromer, “the champion of unveiling the Egyptian women was, in England, a founding member and sometime president of the Men’s League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage.” (153) In fact, it was a war on two sides: trying to convince Egyptian families to educate their daughters (and that is why people like Qāsim Amīn started writing in that respect) and on the other hand, attempting to stifle such attempts initiated before the British protectorate of Egypt. However, the claim that served imperialist feminist ends was the persistent view that the Eastern woman was backward and needed “white men saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 50).. In Orientalist texts, there was also an unflinching attempt to represent the colonized woman in a concubine-like light. That is evident in Flaubert’s memoirs of Egypt. Flaubert talks extensively about his encounter with Kuchuck Hanem, an odalisque with whom he spent a few days. The rest of the memoir does not deal with women at all, as if the Orient was just a place for harlotry. Similarly, Edward William Lane in his *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836), and his sister Sophia Poole in her *The Englishwoman in Egypt: Letters from Cairo*, written during a residence there in 1842, show an utter unawareness of the modern woman ideal that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, ‘Abdu and Amīn were talking about.

In her article, “Unveiling the Orient, Unmasking Orientalism: Sophia Poole’s *The English Woman in Egypt*,” Lisa Bernasek argues that when someone like Poole visited the harem, she was not able to understand totally the place in question and she realizes that she can only give “detached sketches” which will not fit together into a “consistent whole.” Bernasek describes Poole’s observations as “related in a more subjective and individual voice” (65) and she is not convinced that Poole’s opinions in Volume Three are more honest or accurate expressions of her feelings about Egyptian life.”

Instead of challenging Western ideas of the harem or Oriental women’s lives, in this volume Poole more often confirms them in a harsh attack on Islam and Eastern ways. (*Egyptian Encounters* ed. Jason Thompson 65)

That is in fact no different in outlook from Flaubert’s portrayal of an exotic libidinal Egypt whose women were: “Bayaderes. — All the women of the Orient are bayaderes. This word carries the imagination very far” (*Dictionary of Received Ideas*). Malek Alloula, in his *The Colonial Harem* studies the way the French colonizer produced postcards that made the East a libidinal place by focusing on the sexuality of the Eastern women and creating of her body/country a place of desire.

in its customarily brutal idiom, the colonial postcard says this: these women, who were reputedly invisible or hidden, and, until now, beyond sight, are henceforth

public; for a few pennies, and at any time, their intimacy can be broken into and violated. They have nothing to hide anymore, and what they show of their anatomy—"eroticized" by the "art" of the photographer—is offered in direct invitation. *They offer their body to view as a body-to-be- possessed*, to be assailed with the "heavy desire" characteristic of pornography. (*Colonial Harem* 118)

Paradoxically, while the camera of the photographer was trying to penetrate the covered body of the Eastern woman, these clerics, who came from backgrounds that encouraged the covering up of women, were able to see a lot of women who led more liberated lives than what they were used to. There was ambivalence towards the French, especially as far as women were concerned, but that never took the dimension of desire until in later stages of Occidentalism such as *Season of Migration*, when the European became officially the colonizer.

Whereas the West was engaged in a process of sub/conscious *othering* that depicted the Eastern woman in an inferior and sensual light, these men of intellect were trying to modernize an Egypt that was by no means similar to that which Flaubert's Kishuk Hanem inhabited. The Eastern woman, whom they wanted to become as well-educated as her European sister, does not live

in a libidinal world of odalisques; perhaps it is true that her world is more secluded and segregated than that of the European woman but it was by no means sensual.

Unlike this sensual vision of the East, the Occident was really *never* created in the Arab imagination in such a fashion. These Arab men of letters travelled to Europe for a few months or years to do research. Their brief sojourns in the land of the colonizer meant that they should understand his culture and transfer it as objectively as possible to their people at home in hope of enabling them to catch up with the progress taking place elsewhere. Thus, whereas the European canon created a blurred image about the East in order to control it, the East was trying to use a magnifying lens. There was a relatively more “objective” attempt (writing is subjective by nature) in describing the Occident in order to be able to understand the West as it was in order to be able to put up with it. Thus, unlike the created Orient that Edward Said talks about in his *Orientalism* which was mostly Orientalized or made Oriental in order to fulfill the colonial propensities of the West, the West was not “Occidentalized.” Said argues that European writers “imagined” the Orient and depicted it as such in their writings:

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. (*Orientalism* 1)

The Occident viewed that Orient, as Said put it, as an “object of desire”; a world inhabited by odalisques and ‘alamma’s mere simple housewives and the prospect of emulating the West and modernizing the woman in an Islamic framework was actually never addressed as the sexuality of the female was underscored instead.

One cannot talk about desire without talking about its other fetish, fear. The discourse of Otherness in terms of savagery, barbarism, exoticism and libidinousness was not even in the dictionary of Occidentalists writers. When packing for their journeys northward, these writers never were thinking of the Westerners as people to be feared. They never considered themselves launching in a journey to meet either subhuman or superhuman people. They were just travelling to meet people, ordinary people like you and me who worked much harder and thus reached that level of progress. These reformers really needed to do something about that backwardness in their countries and had to learn from these Western experiences. So, these writers straightened their masts and sailed from Alexandria to Europe not fearful of encountering the more modern Other. The idea of fear of the colonized Other often expressed in Orientalist texts barely existed in Occidentalists ones. Unlike the European traveler sailing southbound having in mind that his writing will help his people understand more about these uncivilized people and that will eventually-help his country civilize them, these Arab writers had the more hopeful goal of transferring that modern knowledge to their countries themselves without the help of having their countries colonized. In his *White on Black*, Jan Nederveen Pieterse



theorizes that “superior condescension” (34) and “fear” of the colonized Other were key tenets of colonialism. In depictions of the colonized, there were always elements of otherness always stressing the differences between “us” and “them.” That is why, in their depiction of Sub-Saharan Africans, there were always depictions of them as cursed subhuman apes that needed the white man to “save” them. This process of Othering paved the way later on for depicting that Other as someone to be feared due to non-human qualities; something that one does not ever see in Occidentalist writings. Perhaps they were only fearful of the hazards of nature that may happen during the journey, but were never fearful of an alien nature of the people they would meet on the other shore.

In post-colonial theory, we need not also expect that the terms and tenets that apply for Orientalism, such as Fear and Desire, would fulfill the same function for Occidentalism. The challenge Occidentalism offers to post-colonial theory is that at a certain point we need to understand it just as it is and stop the habit of comparing it with its other self, the Orient. Looking at the Orient, at times, as a separate identity from the West would render more accurate research and that is why I choose to write on fear and desire here because these terms simply would *not* apply to Occidentalism. We are beginning to see how it is a different mode of thought in this particular aspect from Orientalism. One should always remember that Occidentalism and Orientalism are oppositional in geographic terms, but not when it comes to forming scholarly academic opinions. That is why terms such as “seeking

knowledge” and “ambivalence” become more suitable while others such as “fear” and “desire” become dysfunctional.

The sign systems of Orientalism and Occidentalism do overlap in many instances but at others also we cannot understand Occidentalism as the opposite of Orientalism. One has always to remember that, notwithstanding that both schools differ from each other, they are not opposites. Each has its own set of signs and hence understood the world differently. The colonial enterprise was trying to change that set of signs for the East creating in the minds of its readership that the Orient needed to mimic the West and be colonized by it in order to progress. The Occidentalists, on the other hand was looking for the Western model to help him in a modern understanding and interpretation of his life, the condition of women and religion. Mere mimicry was not an option. I will be discussing that in detail in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### LEGITIMIZATION: RELIGION AND WRITING

*SAY: "If all the sea were ink for my Sustainer's words, the sea would indeed be exhausted ere my Sustainer's words are exhausted! And [thus it would be] if we were to add to it sea upon sea." (Quran 18:9)*

I have often wondered when reading post-colonial works whether writers from the Middle East and Europe were aware that they were writing Orientalist or Occidental literature. Were al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and Mubārak responding to Orientalism in writing or was it just the propensity of self-expression in relationship to others that drove these writers to become involved? Or were they just writing in fulfillment of the nascent national agenda of modernizing and reforming Egypt just as the Orientalists were writing in order to help their governments colonize and subdue these weaker governments. Purposes for writing vary, but it remains for the student to group related works in a specific genre written over a particular period, examine their significance and try to make sense out of their interrelations in the context of post-colonial theory. A question that imposes itself on the field of post-colonial literature is whether Orientalism and Occidentalism— as the two main dichotomies of post-colonial theory— are opposites or is each a separate school with its own tenets and interests. I touched upon that point earlier when discussing power,

ambivalence, knowledge, fear and desire, but I will be exploring that in more detail in this chapter with reference to Saussure's theory on the sign, signifier and signified. Where each of the earlier chapters had the purpose of discussing tenets of Occidentalism, this last one is intended to bring them together to examine them in interplay through a common signifier. I will be discussing this signifier; religion and will illustrate that it was the most salient signifier in nineteenth-century travel literature. Then I will discuss the way it was used not only in evaluating the West but in evaluating oneself through the principle of checking. I will also explore how these reformers used Islam in their discourse to legitimize it and how they borrowed new signs from the Western model in order to modernize their country through a more modern interpretation of that most prominent signifier in their Eastern sign system.

Ferdinand de Saussure mapped out a theory stating that languages follow a relationship when expressing the signifier and the signified. Saussure's formula of language is synchronic. The structural nature of language depends on the common psyche human beings share despite the different tongues they actually use. Saussure argues that signs within a system acquire value from neighboring signs. Claude Levi-Strauss uses the same concept when dealing with myth. I propose something similar when dealing with Occidental literature. Despite the fact that the agendas differ (colonization in Orientalism and modernization in Occidentalism), and that each school has its own values and interests, there are elements on the intersecting area where two spheres of Orientalism and Occidentalism overlap.

Both schools deal with the subject matter but in opposing directions. That is to say, Orientalism deals with the Occident while Occidentalism deals with the Orient, so the set of signs in operation and the meaning generated are different. Because each theory has its own signifiers and signified, the result is an individual discourse in each case. Orientalist discourse tended to “invent” an imaginary Orient which was by default backward. Hence, it needed the West to rescue it from these so-called mires of backwardness. This disconnection in Orientalism between the signifier (discourse) and the signified (colonized) who was always silent or absent and whose deep interest in modernization has never been expressed ultimately led to a distorted understanding of the colonized.

In the Middle East, where spirituality is a cultural cornerstone, it is entirely expected that religion is an important signifier in understanding the individual’s life in relation to his world and the sign matrix in which he functions. The other neighboring signs, signifiers and signified objects and concepts in the sign system thus acquire their meanings from the strong presence of religious concepts. Religion becomes a “sign” generated in a language/cultural system that lays great emphasis on the relationship between the spiritual and the moral.

These reformers were using the power which their religious knowledge bestowed upon them to give their writing legitimacy and authority. That makes itself evident not only when they were sharing their written work with their Arab audience, but when they were writing about the West as well. They were writing from the position of power that enabled them to judge the West which – according to them —

lacked the earthly and spiritual knowledge at their command. True, they lauded the French for values such as discipline, appreciation of work, education as they were impressed that the French educated their women. But when it came to moral issues strictly prohibited in the “Ten Commandments” or regarded as “Seven Deadly Sins” or as *Kabāʿir* (major sins in Islam), they could by no means compromise on the illicit relationships outside wedlock in French society and the widespread acceptance of usury transactions. In that instance, they became extremely castigating and spoke from a judgmental pedestal berating the West. These reformers were also extremely critical of the Western praise of materialism to the extent of denying the existence of a Creator basing that on evidence from philosophical works which they considered a major deficit in the French rationale/sign. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī condemns the French rationale in that aspect in his book .

They believe that things inexorably take their natural course; that religions appeared merely to guide man to do good things, and to eschew the opposite; that the civilization of countries, the striving of people and their progress in breeding and refinement will replace religions, after which in civilized countries political issues will take over the role of religious laws. Another of their bad customs is their claim that the intellect of their philosophers and physicists is greater and more perceptive than that of prophets. They have a great many

abominable customs. Some among them even deny fate and divine decree, even though there is a maxim stating that *'the wise man is he who believes in fate and acts with resolution in all things.'* At the same time, man should not attribute all things to fate or advance it as an excuse or pretext before something has happened. According to a popular saying, *'to leave many things to fate is a sign of weakness'* . . . Others among them believe that God the Almighty created humankind, imposed a wonderful order upon it, completed it and has not ceased to observe it through one of His qualities called 'Providence', which relates to all possible things, i.e. it prevents any imbalance from distributing the order of Creation. (*An Imām in Paris 179-80*)

It is perhaps only in this aspect that the rationality of the French fails them. He talks about their use of heathen thoughts in their literature which he does not consider bad:

They talk about the God of beauty, the God of love, the God of this and of that. Sometimes, their expressions are clearly heathen, even if they do not believe in what they are saying and if this is only by way of metaphor (*An Imām in Paris 188-9*)

Where Islamic tradition would not really encourage using pagan deities even in the metaphorical sense, these clerics were rather lenient in their judgment of the French in that aspect and they exhibited a rather understanding stance. They were not judging the West by Quranic standards but rather on Biblical ones.

In a way, that seems at face value to be inflicting the same accusation which the West has indicted on the East: the lack of sound rationalism that resulted in the absence of religion as a signifier from their value system. The irrationality of which Edward Said accused the West of wreaking on the East was being flipped back at the West. However, the main question that really comes to the fore here is how accusing each other of “irrationality” plays a role in the two dialectical schools of Orientalism and Occidentalism. In his *Arab Representations of the Occident East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* (2006), Rasheed El-Enany hypothesizes about this question, arguing that a culture that produced him, Edward Said and countless others “cannot be possibly anti-Western” because:

Unlike their Western counterparts of the colonial age, studies by Edward Said, Arab intellectuals have displayed a very rational and appreciative attitude towards Western culture despite colonialism of modern times and older clashes. To them the European other was simultaneously an object of love and hate, a shelter and a threat, a usurper and a giver, an enemy to be feared and a friend whose help is to be sought. (*Representations of the Occident East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction 2*)



Thus, the West from which the East seeks knowledge and is the latter's intellectual mentor in many aspects cannot be totally irrational. It is just that religion becomes the point of contention. But this is to be understood in the light of a knowledge/ignorance dialectic in which the European race is not really by any means accused or judged for what they dis/believe in.

Perhaps a key *deceptive* tenet between Occidentalism and Orientalism is that, whereas the West claims the irrationality of the East to be a general intrinsic trait in the Arab/Islamic racial/religious DNA, these clerics considered the flaw in Western reasoning to be due to some sort of *hamartia* (*ἁμαρτία*) in the Greek sense (literally, a bad shot, missing the target) and not an intentional mistake or racial feature. The argument of these reformists is basically centered on the dialectic of knowledge versus ignorance, where the signifier of religion plays a significant role. By doing this, these reformers were promulgating notions that the West was not to be copied blindly. This is perhaps the meeting the ground where the East can introduce the West to things (such as spirituality) to which it has been oblivious. That is why possibilities of talking with the West about Islam and even converting it was a theme that one more often than not encounters in Occidentalist literature of the era.

Interestingly, later on, in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, there was a divide between literary writing and Islamic writing. In the first days of the Arabic press, that divide was almost non-existent. The focus of men of letters and novelists in the post-British colonization era became to a greater extent one of marginalizing

religion and following the Western secular paradigm in its understanding of civilization. Rasheed El-Enany argues that:

if Orientalism was about the denigration, and the subjugation of the other, much of the Occidental images explored ...here will be seen to have been about the idealization of the other, the quest for the soul of the other, the desire to become the other, or at least become like the other. (*Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* 7)

I would consider his point partially valid in regard to more modern writings, but not in the earlier ones such as those nineteenth-century works of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and Mubārak that devote a fair share to religion. In decades to come, and as the gap between Egypt and Europe widens even more, a more imitative flirting view of the West starts to prevail. Nineteenth-century reformers were able to retain their Arab/Islamic identities, while for some more modern writers the only measure of progress was to become completely westernized. It is worth mentioning here that by the time the role of the *Kutāb* as the staple means of schooling was diminishing, education became more secular in nature and less and less emphasis was given to Arabic and religion in schools. The product then was twentieth- and twenty-first-century writers who were leaning more towards secularization. Nawāl al-Ṣaḍdāwī and ʿAlāʾ al-Aswānī are a case in point. Al-Ṣaḍdāwī shows a deep rebuttal of the Islamic tradition as backward and oppressive, while al-Aswānī in his *Yacoubian*

*Building* gives expression to an uncritical admiration for colonial culture and nostalgia for colonial days. Later on, when this cultural gap between the East and West widened, that spirit of positive rivalry starts to fade from the scene and is replaced by feelings of despair that call for blind mimicry in some extreme cases. The sense of admiration for the West, however, in late nineteenth-century was balanced against a deep conviction that the East can still catch up with the West.

These reformers were applying signifiers of religion to their writings which gave them more validity and authority. They did not depend merely on the fact that they were first-hand witnesses as Orientalists did. Nineteenth-century Occidental reformers also depended on the fact that they had a first-hand experience of Europe, but even depended more heavily on their religious knowledge in order to legitimize their writing. Since they had been educated in the Islamic tradition, their audience would credit the validity of their first-hand experience narrations, especially when put in an Islamic framework. These reformers thus wrote from a position of strength that sprouted from both their religious and secular training, an educational luxury which many of their contemporaries were not able to enjoy. These clerics felt that it was morally/religiously incumbent upon them not only to write travel narratives for the sake of sharing this knowledge but also to introduce the values that they have seen in the West and wished their people to fulfill at home. That enabled them not just to share knowledge at the peer level but from a superior level as well.

Orientalist and Occidental travelogues always stressed the fact that the traveler personally witnessed these foreign people in their lands. The authority over

readership through eye-witnessing is a common point between the complementary halves of post-colonial theory. However, that other element that I would call more pertinent to Occidentalism (specifically to that of the nineteenth-century) was the use of religious standards in judging not only the target culture but the source one as well.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, the religious intelligentsia viewed the West as a triggering reason for the East to start checking its understanding of its own spiritual values. A common belief held among the men of religion – and many nineteenth-century intellectuals— who went to the West is that the divine teachings are an outcome of civilization. Islam is not just a ritualistic religion, but also a lifestyle. Islamic luminaries such as al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, Moḥammad ʿAbdu and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī held the view that while people in the Middle East were Muslims, they are backward because they did not follow the teachings of their religion that primarily enhances the values of *inṣāf* or *ʿadl* (justice), while other non-Muslim Europeans were able to reach that level of civilization because they promoted the values of justice which God calls for, even if they were not practicing the rituals of Christianity or strictly following the Ten Commandments. This is perhaps best summarized in Moḥammad ʿAbdu’s famous saying: “I went to the West and saw Islam, but no Muslims; I got back to the East and saw Muslims, but not Islam.” The people in the East were Muslims as far as performing prayer, fasting for Ramadan, pilgrimage to Mecca and abstaining from the major sins, but by no means did they

follow the other values that Islam strictly ordained such as social justice, education and social solidarity.

Azharian people such as Moḥammad ʿAbdu, Alafghany and Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī expressed an undoubted admiration for the progress they encountered in the West, and believed that the West was there to “check” on their countries. Their writings and views of the West seem to be going in the Islamic direction of “checking” rather than the Huntingtonian one of “clashing.” In his 1996 *Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington proposes a theory in response to Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Huntington refutes Fukuyama’s Hegelian theory that it is the end of the world and proposes instead that major civilizations are now in conflict. These conflicts according to Huntington are going to arise basically between Muslims and non-Muslims. The non-Muslim West is in fact Huntington’s main concern. Huntington’s theory is in fact another example of the East and the West in “othering” terms. Civilizations clash because each party is trying to assert the worth of its identity. This standpoint is not really new. Edward Gibbon in his *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776) talked about the relationship between Christianity and Islam as the “big debate” placing the two Abrahamic religions in an antithetical dichotomy. Huntington borrows the title of his book “*Clash of Civilizations*” from Bernard Lewis’s article entitled the “The Roots of Muslim Rage” that engages in a hostile process of othering. Huntington’s book is an extreme case of the Orientalist discourse that focuses on elucidating differences when

defining the relationship between the East and the West rather than looking for a meeting ground in which both sides can exist symbiotically.

As opposed to that, even when the West was directly oppressing the Middle East, colonizing it and exploiting its resources, one does not see a bloody or bellicose attitude in the writings of these Imāms. They seem to accept that what the colonizer was doing then was a necessary stage in their countries' history because their rulers were not fulfilling the rules of *inṣāf* or social justice. The role of the West then was to “check” on the East.

[They are] those who have been evicted from their homes without right -- only because they say "Our Lord is God." And were it not that God checks the people, some by means of others, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of God is much mentioned. And God will surely support those who support Him. Indeed, God is Powerful and Exalted in Might. (Quran 22:40)

The West was indeed “supporting” God in the sense of being in keeping with the values of social justice. These clerics do not really believe in the inevitability of history where man was disarmed of his free will. Instead, they seemed to be promoting the concept of *Tadāfu*<sup>c</sup> or “checking”. Arabic is a Semitic language where

words can always be traced to their three- or four-letter root, which is the past tense of the verb with the third person masculine conjugation. So, the word Tadāfu<sup>c</sup> comes from the three-letter root *DFA<sup>c</sup>* which literally is “pushed.” It is the idea that some people are in a state of error and others come checking/pushing them in the opposite direction – even if for private interest—and hence that error is eventually redressed.

According to almost all nineteenth-century reformers, the Middle East was in a state of religious, intellectual and scientific stupor and the West was the place to look for inspiration. Manners and civilization are indivisible and al-Ṭaḥṭāwī talks about it:

It is known that the degree of civilization of a town or city is measured by the level of learning and its distance from a state of savagery and barbarism. The countries of Europe are well-endowed with all types of knowledge and refinement, which, no one will deny, are conducive to sociability and embellish civilization. It has been established that the French nation distinguishes itself among European nations. (*An Imām in Paris* 213)

Perhaps the highest moral good that a government can offer its people is social justice, securing that its people live in a dignified way. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī deals more than once with that aspect. He notes that “victory is dependent on justice.” That is why he quotes from their charter, acknowledging that the details of the charter:

[which] cannot be found in the Book of Almighty God, nor in the *sunna* of the Prophet- May God bless him and grant him salvation!-- so that you may see how their intellect has decided that justice(<sup>c</sup>*adl*) and equity (*inṣāf*) are the causes for the civilization of kingdoms. (*An Imām in Paris* 194)

Still, the essence is common even if the details did differ: the value of justice. It is true that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī does accuse the French of materialism and disparages their avarice since they do not really get involved in charitable works. Yet, as a society, the value of justice prevails since that is how their government defines itself. That is why you do not really find many poor Frenchmen when compared to Egyptians. “This is due to the fact that they have complete justice, on which the foundations of their political system rest.” (247) Thus, despite their shortcomings in giving charity and their usuries: “If their earnings were not for the most part sullied by usury, they would surpass all nations in terms of profitability” (274). Even if, according to a man of religion like al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, they do not apply the exact laws of God, Islamic *Shari‘a*, the French still guard the essence of the divine law which is justice-oriented and in that sense they deserve to be more advanced than the Muslims who do not guard these laws. That is why the East had to be colonized and subservient until it learns its lesson.

Because of its stupor, the East needed someone to “check” on it, the West in this case. In order to change this status quo, these reformers had to look for “signs”



outside their Arab system. And they were looking for these new signs in the Western paradigm in order to bring about radical reform. In the Saussurian sense, they were trying to liberate the signifier from shackles of its cultural and behavioral stagnation even if meant using non-Islamic models in order to revive Islamic values. According to Lacan, the unconscious is structured like language and so is culture. Unless the East looks consciously outside the closed box of its culture and its sign system and comes up with a modified system of signs looking at the more modern model, the West, to check on it, the Islamic world will remain mired in backwardness forever. That opens the door later on for *ijtihād* (exerting effort to understand religion in the challenges that face it due to the necessities of modern life) as signifiers can generate effects even when the signified is unknown and having to deal with the West is not without its challenges.

It has always been by going against established sign systems that one can bring about change, whether in real life or in critical theory. In his critique of colonialist discourse, Said questioned the discourse or the unconscious sign system that the Occident was using throughout in its depiction of the East. Barbara Johnson in her seminal essay “Writing” states that:

By reading against the grain of the writers’ intentions,  
[Said] shows how European men of reason and  
benevolence could inscribe a rationale for oppression and  
exploitation within their very discourse of Enlightenment.

(47)

Taking Orientalism a step further to the doorstep of Occidentalism enables us to understand post-colonial theory better. According to Johnson, the West dominated the rest of world through writing /discourse and regarded its “own literacy as a sign of superiority.” The West controlled writing as it was the literate power that produced writing in general and post-colonial writing in specific. That is why post-colonial theory has been leaning more towards Orientalism because: (1) that was the controlling salient genre of post-colonial literature and (2) because of the higher literacy rate in the West. Thus, the West was the universal writing power in control and hence had the louder voice when speaking for the subaltern, even if its judgments were erroneous. Orientalist writings were promulgating nations of logocentrism and graphocentrism in its discourse in order to oppress and exploit non-European peoples. Slaves were not encouraged to read and write as Lord Cromer had inhibiting policies against the literacy of women in Egypt, as discussed earlier.

These clerics were trying to invade that system of hegemony as they were trying to fit into the tradition of creating Middle Eastern literacy in their countries. The first step towards that was borrowing the modern school system from the West in order to come up with a better understanding of values/signs that would eventually render a more modern understanding of the signified. However true that these reformers were borrowing tools (modern schooling) and signs (generated by literacy) from the European model, their model also had its values unique in their own right. The idea of inferiority that the Western discourse tried to impose on the East was totally incomprehensible to these reformers who regarded themselves as equal human

beings superior in spirituality but needing to catch up with the West, which was there to “check” on the East. Occidentalists acknowledged the power of the West and viewed that this power should be used instead as an instigating factor to rouse the easterners from their trance. They seemed not to comply with a Eurocentric notion of the world but of a rather Hegelian dialectic where the less advanced Middle East can catch up with Europe, given that this East starts giving more emphasis to the worldly teaching of its religion.

Good writers know the signifiers that their system best functions and these writers – as opposed to more modern counterparts – were able to use the most effective signs and signifiers when addressing their audience. They utilized the most effective signifier in their thought system to give legitimacy to their observations on both their Islamic society as well as the secular/Christian one they encountered in France. The use of religion in these observations encouraged adapting and warned against blind mimicry. The notion of a modern Islamic identity was always highlighted. It was only through liberating the thoughts and the signifiers that people can develop. According to them, it was only possible through journeying, desiring to learn, not fearing the Others and dialoguing with them that one could improve the status quo by deconstructing and then reconstructing it in a modernized model.

## CONCLUSION

The main contribution of this study is its focus on Occidentalism on which little research has been done. Understanding how the East views the West is not just an end in itself, but it can help us better understand post-colonial theory, which has always been more skewed towards Western views. It seems that even Edward Said was, in a way, unconsciously voicing colonialist discourse in his *Orientalism* which just covered the Western perspective without giving a fair share to the voice of the East. Putting the Occidentalist perspective next to its Orientalist counterpart helps us evaluate post-colonialism and question its assumptions in a more valid way. Examining Orientalism as a field of study primarily concerned with the power of discourse, and its influence on political and cultural hegemony would definitely make more sense when balanced against the tenets of Occidentalism.

Occidental texts do not originate from a stance of power. Early nineteenth-century Egyptian writers, such as al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and Mubārak, were in fact reformers trying to raise their country from backwardness. Thus, the texts of these clerics were an example of *power-less* discourse that was more social than political. Being aware of this, they journeyed to the West to learn from its experience while leaning on the Islamic ideal of seeking knowledge. However, when they set foot in these Occidental lands, they encountered new experiences that made them question their understanding of their religion. However true that they could be bewildered at times, at many others they made the best use of these experiences and started seeing their religion in a new

light. They recorded these experiences with the purpose of showing their people back home how they ought to modernize their countries. Among the things that they talked mostly about were the values of *insāf* (social justice), education, efficient government institutions and women. These scholars were looking for the Western model for inspiration, examining its “signs” and values without advocating by far or near the need for maiming their own beliefs and totally absorbing all Western life norms. When they returned home, they started implementing what they had learned in Europe and contributed to what came to be known as *al-Nahḍa* or the Arabic renaissance movement.

After reading these early nineteenth-century texts, one realizes that, contrary to what the British such as Cromer were claiming, namely that the process of modernization in Egypt was initiated by them, the *al-Nahḍa* movement was actually sparked off by the French and continued till the 1880’s when the British occupied the country. The French Campaign in Egypt (1798-1801) whetted the appetite of the Egyptians for more Western knowledge. The quest for knowledge became a national project during the reign of Muḥammad ‘Alī. From the 1820’s onwards, he and his successors sent Egyptians on educational missions to France for the purpose of acquiring secular knowledge and spreading it among countrymen. Introducing reformative Occidentalists works of these writers not only makes one question British claims to modernizing regions in the Middle East, but corrects erroneous conceptions about the British Empire occupying the Middle East with the sole purpose of waking it from its slumber. It becomes clear that this modernization was more of a national project than a project imposed on Egypt by the colonizing powers and that it is

difficult to impose an Indian paradigm on Egypt, a trap that so many scholars fall into.

Occidental works such as those of al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and Mubārak not only raise questions about our evaluation of the past, but that of the present and future as well. Questions such as whether post-colonial theory still retains that same definition of the Orientalism that Said proposed in the 1970's and whether the West still regards the Middle East as its weaker opposite can only be answered by a modified notion of Orientalism that to a great extent is informed by Occidentalism. At least for the time being, it is evident from this research that Occidentalism and Orientalism are not opposites of each other, but are rather complementary parts of the bigger jigsaw post-colonial puzzle.

One of the more interesting findings I discerned while doing this research is this: that while it is true that Orientalism and Occidentalism share a lot as well as differ a lot, Medieval Occidentalism shares a lot more with Orientalism than does modern Occidentalism. In the middle ages, the Arabs were part of the powerful side and would use a superior discourse quite similar to that of nineteenth-century Orientalist. An example is Ibn Fadlan's haughty tone towards the Vikings in his *Risāla*. Ibn Fadlan's voice comes closest to that of Lord Burton's. Post-colonial theory with its two branches is but a study of the different forms of power dynamics.

I would end up saying that the dichotomies of post-colonial theory are gradually becoming more complementary parts in the global age where people can more easily access knowledge about each other. We need to engage in more

intellectual dialogues in the future, like the one between ʿAlam al-Dīn and his English lord, in order to enable us to understand more about each other— and about ourselves.

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