

الاستشراق والتمثيل الثقافي الغربي: الحملات الإعلامية ضد المسلمين
**Orientalism and Western Cultural Representation: Media
Campaigns against Muslims**

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<p>ملخص:</p> <p>في الوقت الحاضر، لا يزال ينظر إلى الإسلام من قبل العديد من الغربيين على أنه عنيف ومهدد، لأن الطريقة التي يتم تقديمه وتصويره بها في وسائل الإعلام الغربية، لا تزال تقوم على المفاهيم والصور النمطية التي تم إنشاؤها من قبل المستشرقين في كتبهم وصورهم خلال القرنين الثامن عشر والتاسع عشر. لذلك، فإن التمثيل الثقافي السلبي للإسلام والمسلمين في الإعلام الجماهيري الغربي، وخاصة أفلام هوليوود، لا يزال يسيطر على العقلية والثقافة الغربية والذي أضر بالعلاقة بين المجتمعات الإسلامية والغربية وأشعل الكراهية والعنف.</p>		
<p>الكلمات المفتاحية: الإسلام؛ الاستشراق؛ التمثيل الثقافي؛ الصور النمطية؛ الإعلام الغربي.</p>		
<p>Abstract</p> <p>Nowadays, Islam is still considered by many Westerners as violent and threatening, because the way it is presented and portrayed in the Western media, is still based on the perceptions and stereotypes that were established by Orientalists in their books and pictures during the 18th and 19th centuries. Therefore, the negative cultural representations of Islam and Muslims in the Western mass media, especially Hollywood movies, are still dominating the Western mentality and culture which has troubled the relationship between Muslim and Western societies and ignited hatred and violence.</p>		
<p>Keywords: Islam; Orientalism; Cultural representations; Stereotypes; Western media.</p>		

1- Introduction

Culture is a set of human phenomena and a system of behaviour patterns that are socially acquired through the life of every human being. Although, human beings are biologically similar, but they are socially different in terms of thinking, approaching the world, and especially seeing the others and dealing with them. These differences which are caused by geographical, historical, religious, political and economic factors, can affect greatly societies and cultures and lead eventually to misunderstandings and clashes. Some of these misunderstandings are due to stereotypes and preconceived ideas - which are generally wrong – that are ingrained in people's minds and the misconceptions about the realities of the others' lives and cultures; and that is what happened to the Orientalists.

1. Orientalism's Bad Representations of Arabs and Muslims

Orientalism has always given a bad Western representation about the Orient, especially about Arabs and Muslims. It shows the Orient as inferior, irrational, simple, primitive, exotic and mysterious; whereas the West is given the picture of the superior who has the role of guiding and educating the people of the Orient. These assumptions by the Orientalists have found their right place in justifying the continuous presence of the imperialists and the perpetual colonization of the Orient. This bad representation is not a new fabrication, but it had been operational and deep-rooted in the Western background since the Crusades. Though the present time knows great technological developments concerning transmitting information and news all over the world, this vilification has not changed, and the West is still promoting the same rigid stereotypes and spreading the firmly constructed conceptualization of the Others or Enemies to describe Arabs and Muslims (Ridouani, 2011).

2. Orientalism's Negative Shift

Orientalism first started positively as a scholarship to study the Oriental culture and traditions in order to present them to the West, later, however, it deviated from its scientific purposes and lost its objectivity. It turned its focus from being scientific to hostility, antagonism and evaluative judgement. This negative shift had been thoroughly and critically studied by Edward Said in his book "Orientalism" which was published in 1978 (Samie, 2009). He claimed that Orientalism was never innocent, because the Westerners used it just to show their ideological representations of the Orientals, and justify their colonialism and imperialism. Some of these Westerners who wrote about the Orient, have never travelled to

the East or made any contact whatsoever with people from there; but they had only read some mistaken ideas and stereotypes written by other Orientalists many years ago, and merely repeated them in their writings, ignoring any development of any kind that may have been achieved there. Therefore, Postcolonialism can be considered as the only discipline that was established by former Orientalists and the non-leading civilization (the Orient) in order to speak for itself, question the West's discourse about the Orient as well as to challenge its negative ahistorical experience and ontological problems, trying to find self-determination out of the Western influence.

3. Western Cultural Representations of Muslims

The dualism of Islam and the West had always put a lot of pressure on Muslims, because the Western cultural representation shows them as the Other or the Enemy of the western tradition of Secularism which contradicts with the Islamic principles and beliefs of the political ruling of the state. Moreover, the changes in Orientalism helped to sustain the bad image given to Islam as radicalism and Muslims as terrorists. John L. Esposito (1999:3) claimed that:

“Islam is often equated with holy war and hatred, fanaticism and violence, intolerance and the oppression of women ... Fear of the Green Menace (green being the color of Islam) may well replace that of the Red Menace of world communism.”

However, Jack G. Shaheen (2000:23) replied to him by saying that:

“Research verifies that lurid and insidious depictions of Arabs as alien, violent strangers, intent upon battling non-believers throughout the world, are staple fare. Such erroneous characterizations more accurately reflect the bias of Western reporters and image-makers than they do the realities of Muslim people in the modern world.”

Therefore, these changes made a paradigmatic shift and pushed Orientalism from being Methodical study to become a Popular one. First of all, Methodical Orientalism dealt with scientific discourse and art in which Islamic Moors were depicted carrying arms and knives, especially in the Medieval and Renaissance art, which made them appear to be threatening. Muslims were also represented with many distortions in literature and poetry where they were portrayed as lustful, exotic and dangerous as well as given romanticized,

fascinating, luxurious and frightful pictures (Ridouani, 2011). Then, Popular Orientalism made a shift by focusing on media and politicking discourse. This discourse was directed by experts and scholars from the learned political elite in an objective way, but this tendency had also changed with the interference of Star-Journalists and Pseudo-experts who were influenced by politicians and their ideological ideas, and pushed by the Western states to the public sphere as propaganda instruments to justify their political actions against other nations like wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, and gain more public support for them.

4. Western Media Campaigns against Islam

Nowadays, the West is leading many media campaigns against Islam and Muslims. It is using its wealth, financial resources and new technological tools to present a rough picture of Islam to its public especially after the 9/11 events. This roughness is shown by the distortion of many Islamic concepts like “Jihad” which is confined to Holy War only, whereas in reality, it can mean also refraining oneself from wrongdoings. This distortion of realities has resulted in the emergence of “Islamophobia”. At the same time, Muslims are trying to better their image in the world by using their Islamic channels to convey the right principles and values of Islam and their message of peace; however, their efforts are somehow in vain because of the Western dominance of the global media.

5. Conclusion

The negative representation of Islam and Muslims in the Western media is due to the lack of knowledge of the correct principles of Islam by Westerners and their incapability of overcoming the ideological boundaries between Islam and the West. Furthermore, Islamophobia has waged a movement of hatred and discrimination against Muslims describing them as a threat to Western national security, using a dominant image of Islamic Terrorism. To overcome these problems of misunderstanding of Islam and the inferior cultural representation of Muslims, the West has to reconsider the concept of its own “Self” and the “Other”, and the Western media have to change the misconceptions of Islam and the stereotypes about Muslims replacing Islamophobia with Interculturalism. Finally, Muslims have also a big responsibility of making huge and persistent efforts to improve their image in the whole world by conveying the good Islamic concepts of peace and tolerance, and by appearing as people of culture and civilization.

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