

Hester du Plessis Oriental Africa

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Oriental Africa

Arab culture and the religion of Islam permeated the traditions and customs of the African sub-Saharan for centuries. When the early colonizers from Europe arrived in Africa they encountered these influences and spontaneously perceived the African cultures to be ideologically hybridized and more compatible with Islam than with the ideologies of the west. This difference progressively endorsed a perception of Africa and the east being “exotic” and was as such depicted in early paintings and writings. This depiction contributed to a cultural misunderstanding of Africa and facilitated colonialism. This article briefly explores some of the facets of these early texts and paintings. In the first place the scripts by early Muslim scholars, who critically analyzed early western perceptions, were discussed against the textual interpretation of east-west perceptions such as the construction of “the other”. Secondly, the travel writers and painters between 1860 and 1930, who created a visual embodiment of the exotic, were discussed against the politics behind the French Realist movement that developed in France during that same period. This included the construction of a perception of exoticness as represented by literature descriptions and visual art depictions of the women of the Orient. These perceptions rendered Africa as oriental with African subjects depicted as “exotic others”. **Key words:** Oriental Art, Africa, Orientalism, cultural perceptions.

Introduction

The alluring mix of cultures that followed Muslim infiltration of Africa not only transformed indigenous cultures but it profoundly changed the way in which Europe (literally as well as metaphorically) looked at and perceived Africa. Africa readily became part of the notion of the “orient” when the colonizers focused on its Islamic iconography to bring together the disparate elements they encountered amongst these unknown cultures – thereby “the west acquired and developed a stance, a body of ideas and a means of operation to interpret, represent, construct, interact with and deploy the idea of the Orient” (Sardar 1999: 54). North Africa, because of its proximity to Europe, attracted travel writers and artists from a very early time. They did not differentiate between Asian, African or Arab subject matter and their visual and literature descriptions of Africa fused the continent conceptually with the rest of the Oriental world. Visual representation of the colonized “exotic” Africa was gradually absorbed as “accepted” imagery in

the history of art. Supported by a like-minded literature this fascination with the orient gradually developed into two distinct academic branches. The first was a school of painting called Oriental Art, visually in/formed by perceptions of Arabia, Africa and the East by artists from the west. The second became a branch of scholarship referred to as Orientalism, supported by a vast body of academic writing and travel literature that created and recreated the orient as a world of fantasy and exoticness.

The west lived with their concept of the “orient as Islam” for some 800 years before they became aware of the complex nature of what they originally perceived to be the Orient. This came about through growing exposure to the variety of cultures spanning the different continents. Orientalism, however, persisted as a handy vehicle for the imaginative appropriation of these cultures and supported the development of an enduring system of representation. This was possible because perceptions rooted in the ideas of the colonial occupiers controlled depictions of “Africa as the Orient” and was presented to audiences, ignorant of indigenous symbols, as interpretations of African cultures. These mis/perceptions applied both ways as ignorance served as a feeding ground for ideas on Orientalism. Muslim travellers brought back to their world glimpses of the west and created stereotypes of western materialism and blatant promiscuity. Western travellers, on the other hand, saw the east, the Arabs and Africans as one identity that embraced one religion – Islam – that consisted, according to their perceptions, of lazy, deceitful and lascivious people.

West and East meet

Orientalism provided the sublime platform for intellectual debate, prompted by Edward Said’s (1995) concept of “the other”. This concept facilitated a continuous exploration of the conceptually linked objective and subjective worlds as well as the complex relationships between divergent east and west cultures and identities. One could argue that the Orient is a European invention and find the support for this argument in the works of Muslim scholars such as Ziauddin Sardar, Abdul Latief Tibawi and Syed Hussein Alatas. They queried the extent of European notions of superiority and power that formulated fundamental concepts about the orient and argued that we need to extend our understanding of the Orient to liberate it from staying a European invention.

The most influential ideas undoubtedly came from Said whose *Orientalism* was first published in 1978. *Orientalism* became the definitive book in the debate about the Orient and it created an awareness of the concept of the other as a necessary ingredient in forging identity of the self. *Orientalism* provided us with clear and well-conceptualized terms/definitions whereby the Orient can be in-

voked. According to Said, the classical tradition of studying the east as a region, by means of its language and writings, automatically rendered the study as Oriental and the researcher as an Orientalist. Academic value, added through the study of doctrines and new thesis, rendered the researcher or author an authoritative Orientalist. Orientalism served, firstly, as an academic term. Said (1995: 2) stated that "one that teaches, writes about or researches; the sociologist, historian or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects – is an Orientalist." Secondly, Said (1995: 2) saw Orientalism as having a more general meaning and highlighted that it is "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'." Thirdly, he considered such studies to be more historically and materially defined which made it possible for the region to "be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution dealing with the Orient" (Said 1995: 3).

This introduction of the notion "the other" became fundamental to postcolonial deliberations on similarities and differences between the East and the West. These representations and ideas were further explicated by scholars who refined the notion of Orientalism by deconstructing existing texts and perceptions about the Orient. Though they sometimes included misleading concepts, these texts contributed to the explanation of the *practice* of Oriental art and added new perceptions about the multi-cultures known as the Orient. Sardar (1999: vii), for instance, explored the term Orientalism as "an incomplete partisan subject" as well as "an artificial construction by the west." On the other hand, it has also been argued that "the Orient provided Europe with contrasting images, ideas, personalities and experiences" (Said 1995: 1–2). Both Sardar (1999) and Said (1995) studied routine comparisons made throughout the ages of the differences between East and West whereby, "in the hands of the philosophes, and all who shared their intellectual temper, the Orient was a treasury of ideas for rethinking and remodelling European attitudes and understanding" (Sardar 1999: 37). They both concluded that the Orient, perceived to be a constant source of ideas to feed political needs and aims, became, as a result, conceptually influenced by the current politics of the time. When Almond (2007: 1) noted that "nothing changes our relationship to the unfamiliar Other more than the activity of self-critique: any attempt to re-evaluate the familiar inevitably involves a reassessment of the alien", he reaffirmed the argument of Said (1995) and Sardar (1999) and echoed the yearning to acquire what Nietzsche called a trans-European eye that will save one from senile short-sightedness (Almond 2007: 8).

Homi Bhabha (1994: 71) mentioned Said's conflicting perceptions of Orientalism as a "topic of learning, discovery and practice" and, on the other hand, as a "site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements." He introduced a certain feeling of ambivalence toward Said's treatment of Orientalism; an

Orientalism originally divided into (a) an “unconscious positivity” and which was termed as “latent Orientalism” and (b) the “stated knowledges and views” about the Orient that he called “manifest Orientalism”. According to Bhabha (1994: 72), Said “undermines the effectivity of discourse by his polarities of intentionality” and this resulted in gender misconceptions that were formulated within the crack opened up by such polarisation.

Writers from the Orient

Nonetheless, texts by Muslim and Arab writers critically explored perceived similarities and differences between East and West. They used these explorations as a vehicle for self-examination – something the West rarely did. Their work was not readily absorbed into mainstream literature but eventually proved to be highly informative; one such author was the Arab Muslim historian, A. L. Tibawi. In the latter’s classic study, *English speaking Orientalists: A critique of their approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism* (1964), on the English colonial approach to Islam and Arab nationalism, he strived to be historically objective and accurate when looking at the Orientalists. Tibawi formulated three highly critical conclusions about Orientalism:

- Modern Orientalism, despite its academic advances, continued to rely substantially on the medieval images of Islam;
- Orientalist scholarship lacked clear thinking, objective standards and basic courtesy, tolerance and moderation towards Muslim points of view. In most cases the religious and political affiliations of the Orientalists got the better of their scholarly judgment;
- There was no concrete or conclusive proof in the voluminous output of Orientalist scholars on the origins of Islam that Islam borrowed from the Bible or the Jewish scriptures (Tibawi quoted by Sardar 1999: 58).

Other authors were less critically inclined to compare the Orient with the West. Instead, they tried to analyze Orientalism’s essence. An author worth mentioning in this regard was Syed Hussein Alatas who wrote *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977). Being considered one of the more fascinating Muslim contemporary authors, Alatas exposed the social grounds that led to the constitution of this myth. By using Orientalism as the platform for his argument he blamed the colonial administrators for documenting misconceptions about the natives as “lazy” when measured against the western notion of work. Work, in this regard, was considered to be any activity linked to capitalist endeavour. The colonial powers were mostly inclined to only reward “natives” who were employed to make their lives more comfortable in the colonies. Alatas stated that Malaysians, who provided “un-

seen labour” to the British – their work happened independently from formal colonial employment structures – were not seen as lazy. This is in contrast to that of the Indians who were “employed” in slave labour – as for instance in “estate labour” on the British controlled tea plantations. Here the plantation natives were seen as not working hard – hence the label of laziness as their work was not beneficial to the British capitalist system. Paradoxically, those compelled to work in British houses were considered to be the most insolent and lazy. This perception of the lazy native travelled well wherever British colonisation took root, including the British colonies in Africa.

Alatas’ work provided us with an excellent example of how the colonial powers were participants in the construction of an oriental identity. Homi Bhabha (1994: 70) in his *The Location of Culture* saw Orientalism as an apparatus of power, created to provide space to control the knowledge production of the subjects by the colonizer and to construe “the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.” Frank Cassand Hichem Djait, who wrote *Europe and Islam* (1985) and a fairly unknown, neglected classical paper by Anouar Abdel-Malek “Orientalism in crisis” (1963) are also noteworthy on the subject (Sardar 1999: 61–62). Abdel-Malek (quoted by Sardar 1999: 59), for example, distinguished between “traditional Orientalism” and “neo-Orientalism” and considered both groups to be guilty of treating the Orient as an “object of study inscribed by Otherness”.

French writers

Once the European “management” of the term Orientalism entered the literary and liberal arts debate, a more comprehensive deliberation on the dialogue around its complexity and diverse nature became possible. In this regard the valuable literature contribution of Silvestre de Sacy who, as a great scholar became the resident Orientalist at the French Foreign Ministry in 1805 and a professor at the Collège de France in 1806 is worth mentioning. He was involved with the French occupation of Algeria and at the end of his career he was the secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions as well as the curator of the Oriental manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Royale. He produced “a systematic body of texts, a pedagogic practice, a scholarly tradition and an important link between Oriental scholarship and public policy” (Said 1995: 124). He succeeded in deliberately taking from the Orient what its distance and eccentricity have hitherto kept hidden “because these examples have the semiotic power in them (or imparted to them by the Orientalists) to signify the Orient” (Said 1995: 125–126). De Sacy not only produced volumes of material about the Orient but he was able to gather information that even the Orientals did not have.

Against these scholarly deliberations on Orientalism, it was possible for later scholars to reconsider the notion of the Orient. The French, for instance, considered the orient as “a geographical space to be cultivated, harvested and guarded. The images of agricultural care and those of frank sexual attention to the Orient proliferated accordingly” (Said 1995: 219). The Orient as a site of artistic curiosity interested French writers for centuries and the “scholars, administrators, geographers and commercial agents poured out their exuberant activity into the fairly supine, feminine Orient” (Said 1995: 220). Ever since Charles Baudelaire, spurred on by his obsession for his Creole lover Jeanne Duval, wrote with such nostalgia about the East as a place to replace the deficiencies of life in modern France, this “other” world was seen as a place of sensual pleasure and leisure, filled with bright sun and harsh colours (Benjamin 2003: 11).¹

The Orient therefore introduced to the French psyche a sensual world filled with desire and devoid of human realities. It replaced the known and sophisticated world of Europe with a romantic world of lush foliage, colourful fruit and warm oceans. The fantasy of the Orient pervaded the erotic dreams of writers like Chateaubriand (after whom, in the culinary arts, a thick piece of fillet or beef steak was named). Upon falling in love with a neighbour of the Combourg domain in France his imagination created a creature made up from the Greek mythology: “the shades of Morven’s daughters, the sultanas of Baghdad and Granada, the ladies of medieval castles, baths, perfumes, dances, Asiatic delights were all evoked for me by a magic wand” (Baldick 1965: 91). He confessed to have stayed in the grip of this fantasy – tied to his phantom creature – for two years and eventually acknowledged that he was not able to “enjoy what did not exist” (Baldick 1965: 93). It was decided, as a cure, to send him off by ship to Pondicherry in India – a place he, ironically, never reached. He did, however, visit Egypt.²

Art, politics and the Orient

The influential role played by politics in the creation of perceptions about the Orient –both visual and textual – was best illustrated during the period 1860 to 1930 with French colonial interest sharpened by visits of artists and writers to North Africa. Members of the French Realist movement visited Africa during this period and their artworks were instrumental in fuelling patriotic propaganda in France. They cultivated the notion that women of the orient are exotic (unobtainable) oriental beauties who provided sexual and retinal titillation and fed the western imagination with dreams of beauty. However, the political and philosophical reality that informed this reciprocal relationship between the orient and the west ran deeper than mere surface decoration and adventurous travel writing. A deeper look at the main art movement in France, the French Realists, is

required as their political agenda could well introduce a different perception to this debate. Embracement of the exotic Orient by the French took place amongst a highly selective group of painters. At the same time a large number of painters deliberately resisted the lure of the Orient. The biggest resistance came from the French Realist painters and the French landscape painters such as Gustave Courbet. The Orient became to these French Realists a world to be frowned upon. The works of the French Realists were seen as “both opponents of the academic order and critics of the social order” (Benjamin 2003: 23). The Socialists in France, at that time, resisted what they saw as the capitalist exploitation of workers amongst both international and European proletariat and the French realist movement suited their political agenda. Though the French kept on travelling to the East and to Africa, perceptions about colonialism started to change and in France piercing political questions were asked about the real economic benefit of occupation of foreign countries. The artists and writers who justified colonialism on cultural grounds counteracted such questions (Benjamin 2003: 23). Gautier, who was originally instrumental in writing about “Africanist” and “ethnographic painting”, highlighted the perceived threat of modernisation (read colonialism) and urbanisation to the colonies and valued the East for its difference (Benjamin 2003: 23).

Antione Castagnary discussed the orient in derogative terms, declared Orientalism “dead”, and unknowingly introduced the term *Orientalism* as “defining a tendency in art in a pejorative sense, isolating and decrying what he considered a negative development” (Benjamin 2003: 24).³ For the Realists, painting was a concrete art concerned with the real world – a world linked to growing French nationalism. Therefore Castagnary, who was quoted by Benjamin (2003: 24), declared that works depicting palm trees and camels “may astonish my intelligence, but will never produce the sweet and peaceful emotion given me by the sight of cows in a meadow edged with poplars”. The French started to prefer paintings depicting French subjects and illustrating French identity. Painters such as Léon Belly and Narcisse Berchère, who favoured the Orient, were branded as unpatriotic and produced works “from which one recoiled”.

The French Realists, between 1860 and 1930, were confronted by numerous depictions of exotic Oriental images. The pressing influence of the French Realist movement, supported by the writings of Antione Castagnary – who launched a vitriolic attack on Orientalism and declared it dead – created an opportunity to use the orient as the politically “other” (Benjamin 2003: 24–25). An ideological chasm was created. Castagnary was supported by his hero Courbet who argued in his letter in 1861 that painting is an essentially concrete art that should deal with the real and existing world (Benjamin 2003: 24–25). Though Bhabha (1994) considered such assertion of geographical place/space and European identity as almost xenophobic, this attitude succeeded in excluding the French colonies from qual-

ifying as suitable subject for painting. The French travel painters merged this sublime idea on difference, otherness and ultimately the unobtainable with their creative imaginations. Through their paintings the orient became fixed as the marginalized feminine – subjected to eternal (colonial) dominance. This feminization of the orient, it is argued, justified colonial “possession” of Africa and the East and thereby validated the notion of the orient as the unmanly and unpatriotic “other”. Oriental art thereby became as much a manufactured political tool, dependant on the whims of governments and ideologies, as it was an art movement.

Oriental women

One of the most significant arguments about the Orient is the rendering of the Orient as embodiment of the feminine. Though the visual representation of the orient stemmed from (colonial) curiosity about exotic worlds, it fostered a visual depiction of reality that ran deeper than mere retinal titillation. Through use of the metaphor of Africa as the “dark continent” these paintings posited a more sinister component to notions of the orient. When the African explorer John Rowlands Stanley described the “dark continent” as “virgin, hostile and impenetrable”, his words somehow evoked images of female sexuality. His description was taken up by Freud who used the metaphor “the dark continent” to refer to female sexuality. By adoption of this phrase Freud signified his own explorative curiosity of female sexuality (akin to exploration of the dark African continent) and, at the same time, revealed the obscure and incomplete nature of clinical material available on female sexuality to the psychoanalyst. Most importantly, his appropriation of this term created the perception of the east and, by proxy Africa, as embodiment of the female.

Visual and textual interpretations of the east progressively became overtly feminine. French painters travelled in growing numbers to the East for sensual inspiration, inspired by the imagination of writers such as Richard Burton and his translation of the *Kama Sutra*, Chateaubriand’s memoirs, Alexander Dumas’s travel writing, Byron’s *Turkish tales* as well as Eugene Delacroix’s paintings such as *La Mort de Sardanapale* (1827). Texts and paintings contributed to the visualization of this change in perception. In 1814 Auguste Dominique Ingres painted his *Odalisque*, *Odalisque and slave* (1839) and his *Turkish bath* (1862). The idea of an exotic harem filled with women who willingly “become the perfect object of consumption and the subject of a gaze” and who were able to provide ecstasy became fixed (Sardar 1999: 47) In contrast, the Oriental male (mostly Muslim) was seen as violent, terrifying and barbaric or as extremely feminine – thereby easy to subjugate. These assumptions of violent barbarians were casually applied to African men

(being black and Muslim) and the feminine traits were well illustrated by Sinha (1995) who did a study on the gender dynamics that developed in India under British rule in the 1880's. To define (and redefine) the role of the colonizer and the colonized the concept of colonial masculinity was articulated as the "manly Englishman" and the "effeminate Bengali". These figures were "constituted in relation to colonial Indian society as well as to some of the aspects of late nineteenth century British society: the emergence of the 'New Woman', the remaking of the working class, the legacy of internal colonialism and the anti-feminist backlash of the 1880s" (Sinha 1995: 1–3). Both sexes were considered inferior when European philosophers like Hegel (1770–1831) considered Islam to personify "a nightmare of depredation" whereby, according to Sardar (1999: 49), "Hegel's Islam had nothing to offer except fanaticism, sexual enjoyment and despotism."

Feminist author Denise Thompson supported a link perceived to exist between femininity/masculinity and imperialism/racism. She found that, when Said alluded to these aspects and mentioned the connection, he did not give it finer attention. This suggested that even he was unwittingly not conscious of his own lack of awareness (Thompson 2001: 137). She used a number of examples in which Said failed to draw out the male supremacist implications – mostly in references to the feminisation of Orientalism. She postulated that Said's text "provides an unexpected substantiation of the early radical feminist insight that the domination of women by men is the model for all forms of domination" (Thompson 2001: 137).

The Orient was experienced through the lenses of "the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, and the polemical confrontation" (Said 1995: 58–59). When one is confronted with a foreign world, the trend is to see the foreign as just a version of a previously known entity and thereby becoming not so much new information but "a method of controlling what seems to be a thread to some established view of things" (Said 1995: 58–59). The threat to one's own world becomes muted and familiar values impose upon these new values – thereby, as Said (1995: 59) presents it so eloquently: "the Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in – or fear of – novelty". Women, as such objects of unfamiliarity, were placed in this position and to look at them as objects of novelty produced these shivers of delight. To illustrate this position one could look at the *Portrait of a Young North African Woman* by Jean Portaels (1874). This woman is white skinned, wear gold jewelry and is draped with a white shawl. By rendering her to appear almost European she became a more familiar woman with only a hint of the allure of the exotic through her adornment.

In the same category one found the work of Félix Clément's *The daughter of Sheikh El Balahede playing the tambourine* (1862–75). She was fair skinned and exotically dressed. She sat on the floor within an overtly Oriental setting but, apart



Jean Portaels, *Portrait of a Young North African Woman* (1874).



Félix Clément, *The daughter of Sheikh El Balahede playing the tambourine* (1862–75).

from her dress and the setting, she could be easily considered as European. This painting has interesting undertones. The Palestinian freedom fighter Leila Khaled visited South Africa in July 2006. During her visit the newspapers reproduced images of Leila as a young and beautiful terrorist (see Jacobson 2006). Information about her past political activities was juxtaposed with detailed information about the plastic surgery she underwent (without the use of anaesthetics) to make her "less beautiful" and more "acceptable" as a female militant. Most interesting, however, were the pictures shown of her as a young girl with a strikingly similar pose and similar features to those of the tambourine player. The difference was that Leila's headscarf was overtly and symbolically Islamic. She held a gun in the same position as the tambourine held by the Sheikh's daughter. Khaled most probably resisted this overt "feminization" of the Oriental female and mutilated herself as an act of defiance. One can only speculate whether Khaled was conscious of the painting of her "double".

Conclusion

Today's travel writers who visit the world of the so-called Orient inevitably travel on the footpaths of war in a world devoid of sexual fantasy and filled with human realities. Their accounts leave little space for erotic fantasies. Jason Burke (2007), for instance, reported that he rarely encountered women in Afghanistan and on the rare occasions when he did, he cryptically described her as tall, slim with large eyes and a straight nose, slightly down turned lips which had drawn long lines in her cheeks and the mother of seven children (Burke 2007: 159). In his earlier factual book on al-Qaeda he unravels the view of women that is upheld by political Islamists who considers women essential to education and society and traditionalist Taliban who see women as the repository of the honour of a male individual and the family. "Both provide useful resources to articulate a range of concerns or grievances. The Taliban were thus genuinely bewildered and aggrieved by the international reaction to their treatment of women. They felt that they were merely fulfilling their duty as Muslims, Pashtuns and men to protect the honour of women and the best way to do this, in an environment of insecurity, was to get them, by force if necessary, to behave in a particular way" (Burke 2003: 122). The Oriental woman, in this way, was transformed into a veiled invisibility to serve a political/religious purpose.

Just before his death in September 2003, Said reflected on some of the ideas he expressed 25 years ago in *Orientalism*. He lamented the continuous misunderstanding between the US and the Middle East, the Arabs and Islam. He criticized the comments of US high officials who still impose their own superiority on the lesser people "as if ancient societies and myriad peoples can be shaken up like so

many peanuts in a jar. But, he wrote, "this has often happened with the 'orient' – that semi-mythical construct which, since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in the late 18th century, has been made and remade countless times." He mentioned that the original debates he introduced 25 years ago still plague Orientalism and the same clichés, demeaning stereotypes and justifications for power and violence are repeated by scholars enlisted by imperialists to further their cause. He highlighted yet again the difference between knowledge of other peoples as a result of understanding and compassion and knowledge that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation.

The concept of the orient has shifted to the cultures of the Middle East, Arab and Asian countries. Current reports on Africa focus on violence, abuse and rape of women and their terrible suffering as refugees or as war victims. No-one will posit these women as sexually alluring females who feed the imagination of the so-called west. While the women in Darfur, for instance, still dress traditionally, their shrivelled breasts are presented as symbols of suffering to the western media. The visual references of African women now require a more exact cultural and racial context. The arts, therefore, provided a fairly brief opportunity during the late nineteenth century for imagination, a most powerful instrument in the hands of the colonizers, to flourish. The real and the imaginary were elaborated into a fantastic fantasy to fulfil their own emotional needs and lead to the development of an Oriental lore with its exoticness depicted on elaborately decorated canvasses. Little difference was then perceived between African and Oriental subjects and people were reduced to similar images of women in veils and *djellabas* and men wearing turbans and draped in shawls. Rendering colonized Africa as oriental and feminine provided a brief opportunity, it was argued, for the foreign rulers to subjugate their subjects.

Criticism against Oriental art included accusations of escapism, lack of patriotism, abhorrence of social realities and technical conservatism. It made the work of the French realists easier to promote and when Courbet considered his subjects to be depicting "reality" (such as seen in *Burial at Ornans*, 1849) the Orient was effortlessly juxtaposed as the frivolous "other". Paintings of Oriental women, then, conformed to the notion of European beauty and exposed these women to an eternal male gaze. Awareness of the political and ideological repercussions of such depictions is echoed in the modern day self-mutilation of Leila Khaled.

As an area of study Orientalism still has much to offer. By placing the ideas of Orientalism within a socio-economic context the contributions of secular scholars can be evoked. The inclusion of Africa in this notion of the orient needs further exploration and concepts of political propaganda and Orientalist dogma should inform this investigation. There is, after all, a difference between knowledge of other cultures and knowledge that is part of self-affirmation.

Notes

1. Benjamin (2003: 11) made reference to Baudelaire's "The salon of 1859".
2. Such ideas are still current. A fine example comes from John Barth's *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (1992) discussed in Sardar (1998: 177) when the main character came across an Arab restaurant it provoked an extremely negative notion of "Islam" such as "an Ingres harem scene, muskmarine vulva", "copper-fleeced armpits" and "unprecedentedly sustained erections".
3. There was nothing new about the term as such and, according to Said (1995), it was regularly used to refer to scholars of the Near and Middle East.

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