

Exploring the Trends and Methods of Neo-Orientalism

Dr. Asma Aziz

Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, GCWUF, asmaaziz@gcwuf.edu.pk

Shiza Munawer Mehmood

MPhil Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, GCWUF

Received: 15 Sep | Revised: 6 Nov | Accepted: 16 December | Available Online: 31 December

ABSTRACT

Neo-Orientalism signifies a contemporary reconfiguration of classical Orientalist discourse, operating through modern political, cultural, and artistic matrices. This study critically investigates how visual culture including painting, photography, fashion imagery, filmic representations, and digital media continues to circulate Orientalist tropes through nuanced strategies of exoticism, symbolic reduction, and the commodification of Muslim identities. In the post-9/11 global landscape, such representations frequently recast Muslims as exotic, regressive, or inherently threatening, thereby sustaining a visual vocabulary rooted in colonial epistemologies. Employing a qualitative and comparative visual analysis of selected artistic works and media outputs, the research delineates the methodological patterns, aesthetic mechanisms, and ideological functions underpinning Neo-Orientalist imagery. The scope encompasses dominant Western artistic productions alongside counter-narratives generated by contemporary Muslim, diaspora, and decolonial artists. These counter-practices challenge hegemonic framings by reclaiming visual agency, confronting misrepresentation, and constructing alternative epistemic spaces. The findings demonstrate that Neo-Orientalism persists through renewed aesthetic techniques and globalized modes of dissemination; however, it is increasingly met with powerful artistic interventions that destabilize, reinterpret, and contest Orientalist assumptions. Consequently, the study reveals a dynamic visual field in which colonial residues and critical resistances coexist, shaping the evolving discourse of representation in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Neo-Orientalism, Orientalism, Art, Painting, Visual Culture, Representation, Exoticism, Postcolonial Art, Muslim Identity.

Correspondence Author: asmaaziz@gcwuf.edu.pk

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article, and that the data presented have not been fabricated or falsified.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Participant Consent: The authors confirm that Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was duly maintained.

Data Fabrication/ Falsification Statement: The author(s) declare that no data have been fabricated, falsified, or manipulated in this study.

Copyright: Author(s) retains the Copyright of this article.

Introduction

Orientalists tried to undermine Islam in every era. For this, they first objected to *The Holy Qur'an*, and then they targeted other aspects of Islam. Currently, Orientalists are trying to destroy Islam in new and different ways. They are making films, cartoons, and paintings to present Islam in a negative way to the world. The research of Orientalism came out to academicians after archival work in 1978 of Edward Said. In this, he explained the works of Orientalists such as Michael Foucault & other Orientals. He decoded that; Orientalists have constructed a narrative and evolved a converse about the orientals that is based on delusions and misinterpretations. According to Said, it is a constructed narrative where the orientalist see their supremacy, while they portray the image of Orientals as aberrant, & impoverished. The stereotype of Orientalism is quietly as pertinent as 50 years ago, but their methods of research now changed. Nowadays, West creates more information about Islam & Middle East that is, tendentious & based on their version of interpretations. After the collapse of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the defeat of socialism, the West needed another global issue and a new narrative to rule the world. For this ambition, they portrayed Islam as a new enemy. The recent developments like globalization have adulterated the concept of orientalism and the world is ready for a new ideological battle and that would be the clash among the civilizations. This article would shed light on the different and unique method and trend of orientalist.

Exploring Orientalism

Orientalism refers to a Western mode of perception that imagines, emphasizes, and often exaggerates differences between Arab societies and those of Europe and the United States. It constructs the East particularly the Middle East as exotic, backward, uncivilized, and even dangerous¹. Although the discourse claims to describe the “East” as a whole, its focus consistently narrows to Middle Eastern societies, which are portrayed by Orientalists as inherently inferior². Within this framework, Western states position themselves as dominant, rational, and progressive, while depicting Arab cultures as irrational, indolent, and stagnant³. According to this view, concepts such as democracy, modernity, and civilization are assumed to be incompatible with Middle Eastern societies⁴. In essence, Orientalism functions as a stereotypical portrayal of Eastern cultures in the Western imagination, reinforcing a hierarchical relationship in which the West is superior and the Arab world is marginalized and diminished^{5,6}.

Work of Edward Said's on orientalism

Edward Said recognized a fundamental tension within his own work, a point first highlighted by James Clifford. Said explained that his research was shaped by a deep commitment to humanism, yet the theoretical framework he relied upon particularly

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 1–3; 32–49; 56–73; 104–110.

² Ibid, pp. 56–73; 104–110.

³ Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam* (1981), pp. 1–32; 41–68.

⁴ Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (1996), pp. 3–7; 9–27.

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), pp. 1–30; 67–100.

⁶ Anouar Abdel-Malek, “Orientalism in Crisis” (1963), pp. 109–118; 120–129; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994), pp. 66–84; 85–92.

Michel Foucault's antihumanism approach stood in contrast to that commitment. As he put it, the challenge lay in reconciling "my avowed and unmistakable humanistic bias and the antihumanism of my subject and my approach toward it."⁷ Said acknowledged that Clifford had perceptively noted how Foucault's system of thought had largely dismantled the essentializing and totalizing tendencies of traditional humanism, thus complicating Said's own methodological positions.

Building on this intellectual tension, Said's publication of *Orientalism* in 1978 marked a turning point in modern scholarship. For the first time, a comprehensive critique of Western depictions of the East particularly the Middle East and the Muslim world became central to university curricula and academic debate⁹. Said challenged the deeply entrenched prejudices found in Western writings, arguing that many authors constructed their views of the East without direct familiarity with its societies, histories, or traditions¹⁰. He further criticized the manner in which major thinkers, including Foucault and Clifford, formulated their ideas about the Middle East through abstract theoretical models rather than empirical engagement¹¹. Although *Orientalism* itself received substantial criticism, it nevertheless became one of the most influential and widely studied works on Middle Eastern representation, colonial discourse, and cultural studies¹².

Relevance of Orientalist Discourse in Today's World

The concept of Orientalism used by west to introduce the east to the world. This concept was academically discussed by Said as disinformation against the east, and he rejected it in his book, written in 1978 almost 55 years ago, but still exists and remains the same in the twenty-one century.

Orientalism as theorized by Edward Said¹³ (1978) refers to the West's systematic construction of the "Orient" as exotic, backward, sensual, and fundamentally different from the rational and modern "Occident." Within this discourse, artistic and pictorial representation occupied a central place: 18th and 19th-Century European painters such as Jean-Léon Gérôme, Eugène Delacroix, and John Frederick Lewis produced highly romanticized images of harems, bazaars, and desert landscapes that reinforced colonial imaginations of the East as timeless and passive.¹⁴

In the contemporary world, these visual strategies persist in what scholars have termed Neo-Orientalism a reconfiguration of classical Orientalist tropes under new political

⁷Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism.*, pp. v–xxviii.

⁸ Clifford, J. (1980). *History and theory*. History and Theory, (Blackwell Publishing for Wesleyan University) 19(2), 204–223.

⁹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 1–15.

¹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978), pp. 1–28, 32–49.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), pp. 15–35.

¹² Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), pp. x–xxvii; 1–30.

¹³ Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*, p-1.

¹⁴ Ziauddin, S. (2021). "Neo-Orientalism in Contemporary Visual Culture." *Journal of Islamic Art and Culture*, 9(2), pg45–62

and cultural contexts. Post-9/11 art and visual culture frequently reproduced stereotypical images of Muslims and the Islamic world, presenting them either as threats to security or as exotic subjects for consumption.¹⁵ In painting, photography, fashion, and digital design, familiar motifs such as veiled women, mosques, camels, and markets continue to circulate, symbolizing Islam and Muslim societies through reductive and essentialist imagery.¹⁶

At the same time, a significant counter-movement has emerged. Contemporary Muslim and diasporic artists such as Shirin Neshat and Lalla Essaydi critically engaged with and subvert Orientalist aesthetics by reclaiming agency and re-inscribing meaning into visual representations.¹⁷ Their work highlights how Neo-Orientalism functions not only as a continuation of consociation aesthetics but also as a disputed space where identity, power, and resistance are visually negotiated. Thus, exploring the artistic and pictorial dimensions of Neo-Orientalism is vital for understanding how colonial legacies endure within global cultural production and how synchronic artistic practices challenge and transform them. The study therefore, aims to explore Orientalism in its artistic and pictorial dimensions, tracing how stereotypes of slavery, sensuality, and moral corruption were visually constructed in classical Orientalist paintings, and how these legacies persevere under the label of Neo-Orientalism in modern art and visual culture.

Objectives of research

The objective of this research is as under:

- I. To analyse the historical roots of Orientalism and its transition into Neo-Orientalism, with a specific focus on artistic and pictorial representations.
- II. To identify the recurring visual tropes and symbolic motifs used in Neo-Orientalist art, painting, and media that shape perceptions of Islam and Muslim societies.
- III. To explore the socio-political implications of Neo-Orientalist artistic methods on intercultural relations, identity construction, and global perceptions of Islam.
- IV. To provide a critical framework for understanding how art and pictorial dimensions function as powerful tools in the continuity and transformation of Orientalist discourse.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach. Primary data consists of selected artworks, paintings, and visual media reflecting Neo-Orientalist trends, while secondary data includes books, journal articles, and critical essays on

¹⁵ Behdad, A. (2013). *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute), pp 45-48.

Dallal, A. (2004). *Neo-Orientalism and the Study of Islamic Art*. (Middle East Studies Association Bulletin), 38(1), pg22–28.

¹⁶ Ziauddin, Sardar. (2021). “*Neo-Orientalism in Contemporary Visual Culture*.” (Open University Press, The University of Michigan), pg 69-72.

¹⁷Neshat, S. (1997). *Women of Allah*. (New York: Art Books International), pp. 12–45.

Essaydi, L. (2006). *Les Femmes du Maroc*. (New York: Power House Books), pp. 15–50.

Orientalism and art history. The analysis is conducted through critical discourse analysis and visual semiotics to examine recurring motifs, stereotypes, and representational strategies. A comparative framework is also applied to trace the transformation from classical Orientalist art to contemporary Neo-Orientalist expressions.

Literature Review

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) laid the foundation for understanding how the West constructed the East through distorted images and stereotypes. Linda Nochlin (1983) highlighted the role of Orientalist painting in reinforcing colonial imagination. Behdad (2013) and Dallal (2004) discussed the transformation of these narratives into Neo-Orientalism, particularly in visual and artistic domains after 9/11. Contemporary artists such as Shirin Neshat and Lalla Essaydi have been examined for their subversive responses to Orientalist aesthetics, reclaiming agency within visual representation (Neshat, 1997; Essaydi, 2006). Recent scholarship (Ziauddin, 2021) emphasizes that Neo-Orientalism persists in modern media and art, though contested by critical Muslim voices.

Research Gap

While extensive scholarship exists on classical Orientalism (e.g., Edward Said, Linda Nochlin) and its literary/political dimensions, relatively little research has systematically addressed Neo-Orientalism in visual and artistic domains. Most studies focus on media, literature, and cinema, while the artistic and pictorial dimensions of Neo-Orientalism remain underexplored. Furthermore, there is limited comparative analysis between classical Orientalist paintings and their Neo-Orientalist continuities in modern art and visual culture. This study seeks to fill this gap by offering a critical exploration of artistic representations, their ideological underpinnings, and the counter-narratives produced by Muslim artists.

Research Questions

1. How do Neo-Orientalist artworks perpetuate stereotypes about Islam and Muslim societies?
2. In what ways do Neo-Orientalist artistic methods differ from classical Orientalist paintings?
3. How are Muslim artists challenging and reconstructing these representations through their creative work?

Discussion

Introduction of Neo-Orientalism

Orientalism derives from the Latin word 'Orient', means 'rising sun' and refers to East as opposed to the Occident or West.¹⁸ The person whose work to gathers information

¹⁸Dr. Muhammad Shafiq, Dr. Muhammad Ikramullah Khan. (2021). Notion and features of Orientalism in Historiography, *Pakistan Social Sciences Review (PSSR)*, 5(4), 780

and objections about Muslims is known as an “Orientalist”.

"Orientalism is a definitive approach to the Orient taken by Western historians in an attempt to build a common knowledge base about the region. The study of Eastern ideas, history, religion, culture, language, and social systems is included in this endeavor.¹⁹"

Orientalists face criticism; that’s why they change their methods to convey their research to people. Hence a new term “Neo-Orientalism” emerged. The phenomenon ‘Neo-Orientalism’, however, has gained much prominence in academic literature in the post-9/11 era after Said’s death. Basing their arguments on Said’s footing, Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams argue that Neo-Orientalism is a ‘mode of representation that, while indebted to classical Orientalism, engenders new tropes of othering’.²⁰ It is a conversion of old methods of research or objections about Muslims into modern methods of the research.

Background of Neo-Orientalism

“In the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the United States, American policymakers started to wage what they called the “War on Terror” against a non-state actor called Al Qaida, and its satellites and affiliate movements throughout the world. Since then, more and more Western intellectuals and academics have been looking into the ideologies that inspire those non-state actors in their attempt to comprehend what actually happened, why it happened, and how to deal with it.”²¹

After this incident world politics, as well as the relationship between Arabs and America, changed. Arabs started seeing America as selfish and greedy; on the other hand, America thinks that Arabs are violent.

Difference between Orientalism and neo-Orientalism

Orientalism is a study or research of non-Muslims or Western countries against Muslims or Eastern countries.

The term “Neo-Orientalism” designates a shift in the discourse of Orientalism that represents a distinct, and in ways novel formation, it nonetheless entails certain discursive repetitions of and conceptual continuities with its precursor.²² Orientalism faces criticism because Muslims give proper answers and explain Orientalists’ objections very well. That’s why Orientalists change their methods and introduce a new term that is Neo-Orientalism. Many other terms are also used for modern orientalism

¹⁹Ibid. pp. 780,781

²⁰ Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams. (2010). ‘*Neo-Orientalism*’, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 284

²¹Intellectual Discourse, Salim Kerouac. (2016). *From Orientalism to neo-Orientalism: Early and contemporary constructions of Islam and the Muslim world*, 24(1), (Malaysia: IIUM Press, International Islamic University), pp. 21

²² Behdad, A., & Williams, J. A. (2010). “Neo-Orientalism.” In *Globalizing American Studies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), pp. 283–299.

like Post-Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism and Self-Orientalism.

Trends and methods adopted by Neo-Orientalism

Today's Orientalists work differently against Islam and Muslims; they change their methods according to the mindsets of people. As people have become more modern, those Orientalists represent their work in a modern way. Some methods of the Neo-Orientalists include art or painting, cinema, digital games, film, cartoons, museum exhibitions, and photography.

Trend of art or painting by Neo-Orientalism

In this method, Orientalists present different arts or paintings; in these, they show different cultures and traditions of Muslims. All the paintings include nudity and vulgarity to criticize Islam.

Nudity and Religions

The examination of nudity in Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam reveals a common theme: all these religions value modesty, dignity, and ethical conduct, and none promote public nudity as a norm. Rather, nudity is regulated according to social, ritual, and moral contexts, emphasizing privacy and the protection of human dignity.

Nudity in Judaism and Christianity

In Judaism, nudity is confined to private or ritual settings, such as bathing in a mikveh, and sexual relations are sanctified within marriage, demonstrating a balance between natural human needs and societal ethics²³. Christianity similarly enforces the principle of modesty, as illustrated in the Biblical account of Adam and Eve, where the awareness of nakedness produces shame, leading to voluntary covering; "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they(were)naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons"²⁴.

Nudity in Hinduism

Hinduism also underscores modesty, despite climate-influenced minimal clothing in some regions. Sacred texts, such as the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, repeatedly depict nudity as a source of shame²⁵, requiring immediate covering

तान्विलोक्याम्बिकादेवीविवासात्रीडिताभृशम्भर्तुरङ्गात्समुत्थायनीवीमाश्वथपर्यधात्²⁶

“When the goddess Ambikā saw the great saintly persons, she was very much ashamed because at that time she was naked. She immediately got up from the lap of her husband and tried to cover her breast.”

Sriman-Bhagavatam has also the following verse in another chapter:

तदृष्ट्वात्रीडितादेव्योविवस्त्राः शापशङ्कितावासांसिपर्यधुः शीघ्रंविवस्त्रौनैवगुह्यकौ,²⁷

²³ Jacob Neusner, *Judaism: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 112–115.

²⁴ The Holy Bible, Genesis 3:7.

²⁵ John A. Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 154–156.

²⁶ *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Canto 9, Chapter 6, Verse 3.

²⁷ *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Canto 9, Chapter 9, Verse 11.

“Upon seeing Nārada, the naked young girls of the demigods were very much ashamed. Afraid of being cursed, they covered their bodies with their garments.”

These religious injunctions reflect a deep-seated cultural ethic that considers exposure of the body inappropriate outside ritual or unavoidable contexts.

Nudity in Islam

Islam, in particular, codifies modesty comprehensively through the concept of *awrah* and through explicit guidance in the Qur’ān and Hadith²⁸, “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts; that is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze, guard their private parts, and not display their adornment except what is apparent thereof, and they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not reveal their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, the fathers of their husbands, their sons, the sons of their husbands, their brothers, the sons of their brothers, the sons of their sisters, their women, those whom their right hands possess, or those male attendants who lack sexual desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed.”²⁹, Reported from ‘Abd Allah ibn Umar that the Muhammad ﷺ said (paraphrased): “Whoever drags his garment out of pride, Allah will not look at him on the Day of Resurrection.”³⁰ Covering the body serves not only as a physical act but as a social, spiritual, and moral principle, fostering dignity, respect, and ethical interaction in society. Veiling and dress codes are thus instruments of protection and self-respect rather than symbols of oppression or shamelessness, contrary to Orientalist depictions.

Across these traditions, nudity is largely regulated and contextual, rather than celebrated or promoted. The Orientalist misrepresentation particularly in Western art and scholarship tends to exaggerate or fabricate public nudity in Islamic and other non-Western societies, portraying them as morally lax or decadent. This distortion is ideologically motivated, serving to construct a hierarchical dichotomy in which the West is framed as rational, civilized, and morally upright, while the East is depicted as exotic, backward, or shameless.

From a comparative perspective, these religious traditions converge in their ethical

²⁸ Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *Islamic Laws of Personal Status* (Karachi: Darul Ishaat, 2002), pp. 45–48.

²⁹ The Holy Qur’ān, Surah An-Nur 24:30–31.

³⁰ Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī, *Kitāb al-libās wa al-zīnah* (The Book of Dress and Adornment), *Sahih Muslim*, (Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī), Vol. 3, pg 1651, Hadith 2085.

regulation of nudity:

- I. Modesty and privacy are central to Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam.
- II. Ritual exceptions exist but are contextually defined and controlled.
- III. Shame and social responsibility are inherent cultural and religious principles.
- IV. Orientalist narratives misrepresent these norms, imposing a Western gaze that exaggerates nudity to support stereotypes of immorality or cultural inferiority.

Thus, the analysis demonstrates that Orientalist portrayals are largely inaccurate and reductive, while each religion maintains clear, morally guided practices concerning nudity. Recognizing these norms challenges stereotypical depictions and promotes a more nuanced understanding of cultural and religious ethics.

The author suggests some important suggestions in the end. It is the need of time to plainly disclose the claim of those deviated people who do not see the importance of Sunnah to the Muslim world. Muslims should treat this claim as a conspiracy against Islam. An awareness campaign should start on this issue. We should hold a series of seminars and conferences in various parts of the Islamic world to disclose this conspiracy against the Sunnah and reach a unanimous verdict through consensus (ijma') among the Muslim scholars of the world in this serious issue, as it is the prophecy of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) that some people will oppose his Sunnah and reject its authority.

Artwork of Orientalists regarding Islam

The Slave Market or Merchants

It's an oil painting by Otto Pilny³¹, he shows the market of slaves in Arabia. He presented this painting in 1910.³²

Pilny's *The Slave Market Presentation* depicts two enslaved women being presented to potential buyers in a desert market, a scene that aligns with the classical Orientalist fascination with exotic, sensationalized images of the East. While the painting is executed with vivid colours, dramatic lighting, and meticulous detail, it perpetuates a distorted and demeaning image of Muslim societies and women. The women are portrayed as passive, despondent, and subject to humiliation, reinforcing a stereotype

³¹ Otto Pilny was a Swiss painter working at the turn of the 20th century. Specializing in exoticized oil paintings of the Middle East, his work often features desert scenes and tableaux of Bedouin men and dancing women. Born on June 28, 1866 in the Czech Republic, he studied in Prague before living in Vienna and ultimately settling in Zürich. He first visited Egypt in 1875, where he remained for two years, travelling with the nomadic Bedouin tribes and painting scenes of evening entertainment. In 1889, he visited again and was this time was decorated with the order of the Medjidie, a knightly honor, by the King of Egypt, Abbas II. He died in Zürich, Switzerland on July 22, 1936. (Bénézit, Emmanuel. *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*, Vol. 11. (Paris: Gründ, 1999). pp. 461–462.)

³² Gérôme, J.-L. (1861). *The Prisoner* [Oil on canvas]. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

of Islamic culture as oppressive, backward, and morally lax a perspective consistent with Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. It is important to recognize, however, that Islamic teachings historically discouraged slavery and sought to elevate the status of women, in ways often ignored or misrepresented by Orientalist narratives:

Slavery in Islam

While slavery existed historically, the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition emphasized the humane treatment of slaves and encouraged their emancipation. Freeing a slave was considered a virtuous act and an expiration of sins³³. Islam established rights and protections for enslaved persons, prohibiting mistreatment, ensuring access to food, clothing, and fair treatment³⁴.

Status of Women in Islam

Women are granted spiritual, legal, and social equality, including rights to inheritance, property, consent in marriage, and participation in social and religious life³⁵. Practices like female infanticide were explicitly prohibited, and women were to be treated with dignity and respect^{36, 37}.

In contrast, Pilny's painting presents women as mere objects of spectacle, disconnected from these ethical and social realities. The image exaggerates their vulnerability and suffering, creating a narrative that Islam inherently oppresses women a misrepresentation that Orientalist art has historically propagated.

While slavery did exist in some historical contexts, Pilny's portrayal distorts the reality by focusing on humiliation and helplessness, rather than acknowledging Islam's efforts to regulate slavery and uplift women. This painting is therefore better understood as an Orientalist construction, reflecting Western fantasies and prejudices rather than historical or religious truth. By juxtaposing Pilny's depiction with Islamic teachings, it becomes clear that such art contributes to misinformation about Islam and the status of women, reinforcing stereotypes that continue in modern visual culture and Neo-Orientalist narratives.

The Snake Charmer³⁸

Jean-Léon Gérôme³⁹'s *The Snake Charmer* (oil on canvas, 82.2 × 121 cm), displayed

³³ Qur'an 90:12–13

³⁴ Lewis, B. (1990). *The Arabs in history*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), pp-113-115.

³⁵ Qur'an 33:35

³⁶ Qur'an 81:8–9

³⁷ Mernissi, F. (1991). *The veil and the male elite: A feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam*. (Boston, MA: Perseus Books), pp-13-27.

³⁸ Gérôme, J.-L. (c. 1879). *The snake charmer (Le Charmeur de serpent)* [Painting]. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, USA.

³⁹ Jean-Léon Gérôme (11th May, 1824–10th January, 1904) was a French painter and sculptor in the style now known as academicism. His paintings were so widely reproduced that he was arguably the world's most famous living artist by 1880. The range of his works includes historical paintings, Greek mythology, Orientalism, portraits, and other subjects. He is considered among the most important painters from the academic period and was, with Meissonier and Cabanel, one of the three most successful artists of the Second Empire. He was also a teacher with a long list of

at London's Royal Academy, and depicts a nude boy handling a python while an elderly man plays a flute, entertaining a group of seated men. The background features Islamic tiles and Arabic calligraphy, suggesting the setting of a masjid or tomb, locations considered sacred in Islam.

The painting represents a sleazy, imperialist vision of "the East", implying that nudity and eroticized performances were commonplace in highly respected Islamic spaces. Gérôme's composition combines historically disparate elements the snake-charmer motif, practiced in ancient Egypt rather than Ottoman society with a sacred Islamic setting, creating a scene the artist could not have witnessed firsthand.

From the perspective of Islamic teachings:

Modesty and Gender Boundaries

Islam prescribes clear limits between men and women, emphasizing modesty (*haya*) and prohibiting the public exposure of naked bodies^{40;41}. Gérôme's depiction of nudity in front of a mixed audience violates these ethical norms.

Masjids are sacred places for prayer and reflection. Entertainments involving nudity or vulgar performances are strictly forbidden within mosques, making the painting's scenario culturally and religiously inaccurate⁴².

Orientalist Misrepresentation

Gérôme's work exoticizes and sexualizes Islamic culture, portraying it as morally lax and decadent. By placing nudity and entertainment in a sacred setting, the painting distorts reality and contributes to longstanding Western stereotypes about Islam and Muslim societies. While visually compelling, *The Snake Charmer* is an Orientalist construct, projecting Western fantasies of eroticism and moral laxity onto Islamic culture. In reality, Islamic law and social practice emphasize modesty, dignity, and the sanctity of sacred spaces, directly contradicting the scene Gérôme presents.

The Turkish Bath

Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Turkish Bath*⁴³, displayed at the Museum of Western and Oriental Art, depicts women in various stages of undress inside a bathhouse (*hammam*), often accompanied by attendants or entertainers. This painting reflects a typical Orientalist fascination with the "hidden" private spaces of Muslim women, portraying

students, including Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins, and Osman Hamdi Bey, among others. (Ackerman, Gerald M. *Jean-Léon Gérôme: Monographie révisée*. (Paris: ACR Édition, 2000), pp. 11–18, 35–42, 201–215.)

⁴⁰ Qur'an 24:30–31

⁴¹ Esposito, J. L. (2011). *Islam: The straight path* (4th ed.). (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), pp.146-148.

⁴² Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp.50-65.

⁴³ Gérôme, J.-L. (1885). *The Moorish bath* [Painting]. The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA.

them as sensual, eroticized, and exotic for a Western audience.

From the perspective of Islamic teachings, this depiction is inaccurate and misleading:

Modesty and Privacy

Islam prescribes strict guidelines of modesty (*haya*) for both men and women, emphasizing private spaces for personal hygiene while maintaining dignity⁴⁴. While bathing and cleanliness are highly valued in Islam, the faith does not permit nudity or sexualized display, even in private gender-segregated spaces⁴⁵.

Bathhouses and Gender Separation

Traditional hammams in Muslim societies were gender-segregated and focused on hygiene and ritual purification, not voyeuristic entertainment. Gérôme's painting exaggerates the sexualized aspect, creating a false narrative of indulgence and immorality.

Orientalist Fantasy and Historical Misrepresentation

The painting capitalizes on Western curiosity about “secret” female spaces, reflecting an imperialist gaze that eroticizes and distorts Islamic social practices. The work is not a documentary of Ottoman or Turkish culture but a fantasy constructed for Western consumption⁴⁶. Gérôme's *The Turkish Bath* misrepresents Islamic norms by depicting nudity and eroticism in a context where modesty, privacy, and ethical conduct are emphasized. While hygiene and baths are culturally important in Islam, they are practiced within clear religious and ethical boundaries, contrasting sharply with the Orientalist fantasy portrayed in the painting.

The dance of the Almeh (Belly dancer)

Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Dance of the Almeh*⁴⁷⁴⁸ (oil on canvas, 63 × 84.5 cm), exhibited at the Dayton Art Institute, Ohio, depicts a belly dancer, often portrayed as an *odalisque*⁴⁹ or *harem*⁵⁰ girl, performing in front of male spectators. The painting

⁴⁴ Qur'an 24:30–31

⁴⁵ Esposito, J. L. (2011). *Islam: The straight path* 4th ed, (Oxford University Press), pp. 146–148.

⁴⁶ Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*, p. 1,

⁴⁷ Gérôme, J.-L. (c. 1870–1875). *The dance of the Almeh* [Painting]. Private collection; reproduced in various Orientalist art catalogues.

⁴⁸ Almeh (plural: Awalim) refers to a class of female entertainers in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire who were trained in music, singing, and dance. Historically, Almeh were often associated with performing at private gatherings, weddings, or social events, and some became known for their artistic skill and sophistication. Fraser, Kathleen W. *Before They Were Belly Dancers: European Accounts of Female Entertainers in Egypt, 1760-1870*. Jefferson, (NC: McFarland & Company, 2015), pp. 31, 145, 260.

⁴⁹ Odalisque is a term that originally comes from the Ottoman Turkish word *odalık*, meaning “chambermaid” or “female attendant” in a sultan's harem, were typically women serving in the private quarters of the sultan or high-ranking officials. Lane, Edward William. *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. (London: John Murray, 1836), pp.383–385.

⁵⁰ Harem (from the Arabic *ḥarīm*, meaning “forbidden” or “sacred”) refers to the private domestic space in a Muslim household reserved for women, particularly in royal or elite households such as those of sultans or wealthy officials. Peirce, Leslie P. *The Imperial*

aligns with classical Orientalist tropes, portraying Muslim women as objects of desire, subservient, or morally lax, and presenting eroticized fantasies of harem life.

From the perspective of Islamic teachings, Gérôme's depiction is highly inaccurate and misleading:

Prohibition of Public Dancing and Sexualized Display

Islam explicitly prohibits women from dancing in front of men who are non-mahram, due to the potential for fitnah (temptation or moral corruption)⁵¹. Women are also advised to maintain modesty even in private gatherings, and dancing for entertainment in front of unrelated men is considered impermissible. Gerome's portrayal of a sexually suggestive dance in front of male spectators directly contradicts these principles, exaggerating the perception of Muslim women as morally lax.

Misrepresentation of Gender Relations

Orientalist art often depicts Muslim women as entirely subservient to male authority, reducing them to passive objects of pleasure. In reality, Islam grants women rights and agency, including respect, protection from exploitation, and social participation.

Orientalist Fantasy

The scene is not documentary; it is a constructed fantasy appealing to Western voyeurism, combining exoticism, eroticism, and imagined "harem life." Gérôme's work reflects Western imperialist imagination rather than historical or cultural reality.

Gérôme's *The Dance of the Almeḥ* perpetuates the Orientalist misrepresentation of Muslim women, portraying them as sexualized and submissive, while ignoring Islamic teachings on modesty, permissible gender interaction, and the ethical conduct of women. Such depictions distort cultural and religious realities, reinforcing stereotypes that continue to shape Western perceptions of Islam.

The Charge of the Mamelukes

Francisco de Goya⁵²'s *The Charge of the Mamelukes*⁵³ (oil on canvas, 266 × 345 cm), displayed at the Prado Museum, depicts Mameluke⁵⁴ cavalry charging during conflict,

Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire. (New York: Oxford University Press), 1993, 3–10.

⁵¹ Ibn Qudamah, *Al-Mughni*, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1997), Vol. 7. Pp. 129–130.

⁵² Francisco Goya (born March 30, 1746, Fuendetodos, Spain died April 16, 1828, Bordeaux, France) was a Spanish artist whose paintings, drawings, and engravings reflected contemporary historical upheavals and influenced important 19th- and 20th-century painters. The series of etchings *The Disasters of War* (1810–14) records the horrors of the Napoleonic invasion. (Hughes, Robert. *Goya*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), pp. 3–12, 267–284, 331–346.)

⁵³ Goya, F. de. (1814). *El dos de mayo de 1808 (The Charge of the Mamelukes)* [Painting]. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

<https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra/> [Accession No. P00753]

⁵⁴ Mameluke (from the Arabic *mamlūk*, meaning "owned" or "slave") refers historically to slave soldiers who were purchased as youths, trained, and employed as elite military units in various Islamic states, particularly in Egypt and the Levant. Over time, many Mamelukes rose to significant military and political power. (e.g., the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt, 1250–1517).

inspired by historical events in Spain in 1808, when Napoleon's forces attempted to seize the Spanish throne. Goya's work captures the violence and chaos of rebellion and occupation, while Orientalist commentary often frames the Mamelukes and enslaved peoples in imperialistic or exoticized terms.

From the perspective of Islamic teachings, certain claims by Orientalists require contextual clarification:

Equality and Human Rights in Islam

Islam teaches that all human beings are equal in the sight of Allah, regardless of social status, ethnicity, or origin⁵⁵. Enslaved individuals are granted dignity and the right to freedom, and Islam encourages the emancipation of slaves as a virtuous act⁵⁶.

Jihad and Warfare Ethics

Wars conducted in Islam, particularly defensive or just wars, are regulated by strict ethical guidelines that emphasize justice, protection of civilians, and proportionality⁵⁷.

The historical expansion of Muslim empires, including campaigns in India or Egypt, must be understood in specific historical, political, and ethical contexts, rather than being generalized as exploitation or oppression.

Critique of Orientalist Misrepresentation

Orientalists often depict enslaved peoples and Mamelukes as mere instruments of imperial power or exotic warriors, ignoring their agency, rights, and social status under Islamic law. Goya's painting, while focused on the visual drama of warfare, can be reinterpreted to highlight the ethical dimension of Islam: the Mamelukes were trained warriors, and their actions in historical conflicts were guided by duty and ethical norms, not inherently by oppression or exploitation.

The Charge of the Mamelukes illustrates historical conflict, but Orientalist narratives often misrepresent Islamic perspectives on slavery, warfare, and human rights. In Islam, every individual possesses dignity and the right to freedom, and military actions are governed by ethical principles. Mischaracterizing Mamelukes or enslaved peoples as inherently oppressive ignores these core teachings and promotes a distorted understanding of Islamic history.

⁵⁵ Qur'an 49:13.

⁵⁶ Qur'an 90:12–13

⁵⁷ Ibn Qudamah, *Al-Mughni*, Vol. 7, pp. 129–130

In the Harem

Stephan Sedlacek⁵⁸'s *In the Harem*⁵⁹ (oil on canvas, 82 × 129 cm, and private collection)

depicts scenes from an Oriental harem, highlighting the opulence of elite social life. The painting portrays women in private spaces, reflecting a Western fascination with harems as exotic and secretive locales. From the perspective of Islamic teachings, several key points arise:

Privacy and Gender Boundaries

In Islamic society, harems (*ḥarīm*) are private spaces reserved for women, particularly wives, female relatives, and female attendants. Male access is restricted to close family members (*mahrams*), ensuring privacy and modesty⁶⁰.

Male painters like Sedlacek could not enter actual harems, meaning these paintings are largely imagined or fictionalized, rather than accurate depictions of everyday life.

Misrepresentation and Voyeurism

The Orientalist portrayal of harems often sexualizes or eroticizes women, emphasizing exoticism and luxury while ignoring Islamic principles of dignity and modesty. Sedlacek's focus on opulence and private female spaces reflects a voyeuristic Western gaze, not historical reality. In reality, Islamic norms safeguard women's rights, privacy, and moral integrity.

Ethical and Cultural Misunderstandings

Islam recognizes the harem as a domestic, familial space with social, educational, and managerial functions, not merely a site of indulgence or entertainment. Western depictions obscure the ethical framework that governed life in these spaces.

In the Harem exemplifies Orientalist imagination, projecting Western fantasies onto private Islamic spaces. While visually appealing, the painting misrepresents the cultural, ethical, and social realities of the harem, failing to reflect the Islamic principles

⁵⁸ Stephan Sedlacek was an Austrian painter who was born in 1868. Stephan Sedlacek's work has been offered at auction multiple times, with realized prices ranging from 231 USD to 35,294 USD, depending on the size and medium of the artwork. Since 1998 the record price for this artist at auction is 35,294 USD for *Tanz im Harem*, sold at Im Kinsky in 2010. The artist died in 1936. (Bénézit, Emmanuel. *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*, Vol. 12. (Paris: Gründ, 1999), p. 187)

⁵⁹ Sedlacek, S. (c. late 19th–early 20th century). *In the harem (Dance in the Harem / Orientalische Haremsszene)* [Painting]. Private collection.

⁶⁰ Qur'an 24:30–31

of modesty, privacy, and women's dignity.

Pasha and his *hareem*

François⁶¹ Gabriel Guillaume Lepaulle's *Pasha and His Hareem*⁶² depicts a Pasha (ruler) surrounded by non-mahram women in his harem, emphasizing luxury and the presence of unveiled women serving the ruler. Such imagery aligns with Western Orientalist tendencies to eroticize Islamic domestic spaces and portray Muslim rulers as morally lax.

From the perspective of Islamic teachings, this representation is inaccurate and misleading:

Prohibition of Non-Mahram Women in Private Spaces

Islam strictly forbids interaction between men and women who are not mahram (unmarriageable kin) in intimate or private settings (*fiqh* rulings)⁶³. If women were present in a ruler's private quarters, they were typically legitimate wives or close female relatives, in line with Islamic law, ensuring modesty and propriety⁶⁴.

Misrepresentation of Islamic Leadership

Orientalist depictions often generalize personal sins or lapses of rulers as reflective of Islam as a whole. Historical examples show that the Rightly Guided Caliphs strictly adhered to ethical conduct, avoiding access of non-mahram women to themselves, upholding Islamic principles of modesty and justice. Associating personal indulgences of some rulers with Islamic law distorts the religion's ethical framework.

Orientalist Fantasy

Lepaulle's painting, like many harem artworks, is a product of imagination rather than observation, designed to appeal to Western curiosity about "exotic" Muslim life. It sexualizes and sensationalizes domestic spaces, contrary to Islamic teachings on privacy, dignity, and women's rights.

Pasha and His Hareem misrepresents Islamic norms by depicting non-mahram women in the ruler's private quarters, creating a misleading narrative about Muslim rulers and society. Islam emphasizes modesty, restricted access to private spaces, and ethical conduct for both rulers and subjects, and the personal transgressions of any individual

⁶¹ François Gabriel Guillaume Lépaule was a French painter, who was born in 1804 at Versailles and died in 1886 at Marne. A student of Henri Regnault and Horace Vernet, Lépaule studied at the Beaux-Arts in 1819 and made his debut at the Paris Salon in 1824. His output was prolific and he exhibited continuously at the Salon, where he was awarded a second class medal in 1831. His paintings are in the collections at Paris (Carnavalet), Valenciennes and Versailles. (Bénézit, Emmanuel. *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*, vol. 8. (Paris: Gründ, 1999), pp. 654–655)

⁶² Lépaule, F.-G. (mid-19th century). *The Pasha and his harem (Le Pacha et son Harem)* [Painting].

⁶³ Ibn Qudamah, *Al-Mughni*, Vol. 7, pp. 129–130.

⁶⁴ Qur'an 33:6.

cannot be generalized as religious practice.

A cultural exchange

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres⁶⁵' painting *A Cultural Exchange*, presented in the exhibition *Inspired by the East*, illustrates interactions and mutual fascination between Eastern and Western cultures, including Ottoman and Persian engagement with European cities and artistic practices. The exhibition highlights cultural borrowing, such as Persian maps of London and Rome and the work of Ottoman photographers like Pascal Sebah, showing how Eastern artists adopted Western visual conventions.

From the perspective of Islamic teachings, this cultural borrowing raises important ethical considerations:

1. Prohibition of Imitating Non-Muslims

Islam discourages Muslims from emulating the customs, dress, or religious practices of non-Muslims in ways that conflict with Islamic principles. This is supported by the Hadith narrated by Hazrat Abdullah ibn Umar (RA):

“He who copies any people is one of them.”⁶⁶ While some Muslims have adopted certain cultural elements from the West (dress, celebrations, singing, dancing), Islam instructs adherents to preserve their religious identity and ethical boundaries, avoiding imitation that compromises Islamic values.

Ethical and Cultural Boundaries

Cultural exchange is permissible as long as it does not contradict Islamic teachings, such as immodest dress, prohibited celebrations, or practices incompatible with Islamic law. Adoption of neutral cultural elements (e.g., architecture, technology) may be acceptable, whereas practices leading to moral or religious compromise are.

Orientalist Misrepresentation vs. Authentic Cultural Interaction

The exhibition title *Inspired by the East* may obscure the dynamics of Orientalist misrepresentation, where Western artists projected exoticism onto Eastern subjects. Islamically, it is essential to distinguish between cultural appreciation and imitation that violates religious principles.

Ingres' painting reflects a historical cultural exchange, yet Islamic teachings emphasize maintaining religious identity and ethical boundaries. While Muslims may engage with global art and culture, practices that imitate non-Muslims in prohibited ways are discouraged, reinforcing the importance of adhering to modesty, morality, and Islamic

⁶⁵ Jean-Auguste (August 29, 1780, France-January 14, 1867, Paris) was a painter and icon of cultural conservatism in 19th-century France. Ingres became the principal proponent of French Neoclassical painting after the death of Jacques-Louis. His cool, meticulously drawn works constituted the stylistic antithesis of the emotionalism and colorism of the contemporary Romantic school. As a monumental history painter, Ingres sought to perpetuate the Classical tradition of Raphael and Nicolas Poussin. The spatial and anatomical distortions that characterize his portraits and nudes, however, anticipate many of the most audacious formal experiments of 20th-century Modernism. (Tinterow, Gary, et al. *Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), pp. 12–25, 78–85)

⁶⁶ Abū Dāwūd, S. ibn al-Ash'ath. (2008). *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, (Darussalam), Vol. 4, p. 380, Hadith no. 4031.

norms.

Hareem in Morocco

Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant⁶⁷'s *Hareem*⁶⁸ in *Morocco* depicts a luxurious harem scene, featuring music, mixed-gender gatherings, and alcohol consumption, reflecting the artist's Orientalist perspective of North African domestic life. Such depictions, common in Western Orientalist art, misrepresent Islamic social and ethical norms.

Prohibition of Music in Certain Contexts

The painting shows musical instruments and performers entertaining the audience. In Islam, music and singing can become a source of distraction from the remembrance of Allah and are discouraged if they lead to moral laxity or immoral behaviour. The Qur'an and Hadith warn against indulging in such diversions that mislead people:

“There are some human beings who purchase an enchanting diversion in order to lead people away from the way of Allah... A humiliating chastisement awaits them”⁶⁹.

1. Prohibition of Mixed-Gender Gatherings and Improper Exposure

The painting depicts men and women mingling freely without observing Islamic modesty guidelines. Islam commands believing women to guard their modesty, cover their adornments, and maintain appropriate interactions with non-mahram men⁷⁰. Such depictions contradict Islamic ethics, as women in Islam would not appear unveiled in the presence of non-mahram men, and private gatherings would follow strict modesty rules.

Prohibition of Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol, shown in the painting as part of the gathering, is strictly forbidden (haram) in Islam, being classified as an intoxicant and a work of Satan⁷¹. Muslims are instructed to avoid intoxicants completely for spiritual, social, and moral well-being.

Benjamin-Constant's *Hareem in Morocco* reflects Orientalist fantasies rather than Islamic reality. The painting misrepresents Islamic domestic life by portraying music, mixed-gender gatherings, and alcohol consumption as normative, whereas Islamic teachings uphold modesty, ethical interaction, and abstention from prohibited activities.

Prayer in the mosque and equality in Muslims

*Prayer in the Mosque*⁷² (1871) is an oil on canvas painting by the French Orientalist

⁶⁷Jean-Joseph was born in Paris in 1845, Benjamin-Constant studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Toulouse where he was the student of Jules Garipuy. He learned anatomy, drawing from the ancient statuary and the composition of history painting. His brilliant studies were rewarded by the great painting prize he shared with his friend the painter Jean-André Rixens. He died in 1902. (Ackerman, Gerald M. *The Life and Work of Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant*. Paris: Arthena, 1983, pp. 13-14, 15-18, 241)

⁶⁸ Gérôme, J.-L. (1871). *The harem* [Oil on canvas]. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary.

⁶⁹ Ibn Qudamah, *Al-Mughni*, Vol. 7, pp. 129–130.

⁷⁰ Qur'an 24:30–31.

⁷¹ Qur'an 5:90–91.

⁷² Gérôme, J.-L. (1871). *Prayer in the mosque* [Oil on canvas]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

artist Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), measuring 88.9 × 74.9 cm. The painting depicts the interior of a mosque, traditionally identified as the Mosque of Amr ibn al-As in Cairo. The painting portrays the interior of the Masjid of Amr ibn al-As in Cairo, built in 641–642 CE, capturing worshippers during one of the five daily prayers. The artist emphasizes balance, order, and unity through architectural elements crossbeams, horseshoe arches, chandeliers and the careful arrangement of worshippers, highlighting the collective nature of Islamic worship. The composition conveys a sense of spiritual equality and communal harmony, reflecting the core values of Islam.

Equality Among Worshippers

Islam emphasizes that all humans are equal before Allah, regardless of wealth, social status, or ethnicity. The Qur'an states:

“Human beings, We created you all from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most Allah-fearing of you. Surely Allah Almighty is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”⁷³

In the painting, worshippers from different social backgrounds wealthy men, scholars, and solitary ascetics are depicted praying together, reflecting Islamic principles of egalitarianism and unity in worship.

Spiritual Superiority vs. Social Status

Material wealth or social position does not confer superiority in Islam. Instead, *taqwa* (God-consciousness) determines honor in the eyes of Allah. This egalitarian principle is visually represented in the painting: all worshippers participate equally, their individual differences rendered secondary to collective devotion.

Communal Practices Like Hajj

The painting echoes broader Islamic practices such as Hajj, where all Muslims regardless of social standing perform rituals together, including stone-throwing at the Jamarat and overnight stays in Mina. These rituals physically and spiritually reinforce equality among believers.

The painting not only highlights the architectural beauty of the Masjid of Amr ibn al-As but also reflects fundamental Islamic teachings of equality, unity, and humility. It serves as a visual representation of how Islam transcends social hierarchies, emphasizing moral and spiritual excellence as the true measure of human worth.

The last Rebels

Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant's *The Last Rebels*⁷⁴ (1880) depicts a scene from Moroccan history in which Muslims are shown killing Moroccan citizens. This painting, typical of Orientalist works, misrepresents Islamic teachings and history,

Gérôme, J.-L. (1871). *Prayer in the Mosque* [Oil on canvas]. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

⁷³ Qur'an 49:13.

⁷⁴ Gérôme, J.-L. (1869). *The Arab Execution* [Oil on canvas]. Private collection.

emphasizing violence without context.

Islamic Principles Regarding War and Civilians

Islam strictly regulates warfare, emphasizing justice, protection of civilians, and ethical conduct, even during conflict. The Qur'an commands:

“Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors.”⁷⁵

Killing innocent civilians or committing atrocities is strictly forbidden. Historical Islamic conquests, such as those led by Uqbah ibn Nafi, were guided by principles of justice, fairness, and the promotion of religion without compulsion⁷⁶.

Historical Context of Islamic Conquests in Morocco

Following the emergence of Islam in the 7th century CE, Muslim armies under leaders like Uqbah ibn Nafi and later rulers such as Idris ibn Abdullah and Yusuf ibn Tashfin expanded into North Africa. These campaigns brought Islamic culture, education, and social reforms to the region, including the founding of cities like Kairouan and Fez⁷⁷. Islam encourages justice and ethical governance; rulers like those of the Idrisid and Almoravid dynasties established stable, ethical administrations that promoted Islamic law, education, and social welfare.

Orientalist Misrepresentation

Benjamin-Constant's painting distorts historical reality by presenting Muslims as indiscriminate killers. Orientalist artists frequently focused on violence or exoticized cruelty to portray Muslim societies as barbaric, ignoring the moral and ethical constraints central to Islam. Islamic teachings emphasize peaceful coexistence, ethical rule, and respect for human life, values that were largely upheld in historical Islamic states in North Africa.

The Last Rebels presents a skewed portrayal of Islamic history. While military campaigns were part of state formation, Islamic teachings strictly regulate conduct in war, forbidding the killing of innocents and emphasizing justice. The painting thus reflects Orientalist sensationalism rather than the ethical and social reality of Islamic governance and conquest.

Conclusion

Throughout history, Orientalists have sought to undermine Islam through various means, yet their efforts have consistently failed. After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, their critiques intensified but also attracted widespread criticism. In response, they rebranded their discourse under the term Neo-Orientalism, shifting from classical writings and paintings to modern forms such as photography, films, cartoons, and visual art. These works often targeted Islamic history, including the Ottoman Empire and the lives of Muslim rulers, while promoting vulgar and distorted images that distracted

⁷⁵ Qur'an 2:190.

⁷⁶ Ahmed, A. S. (1992). *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and promise*. Routledge, pp. 50–65.

⁷⁷ Esposito, J. L. (2011). *Islam: The straight path* (4th ed.). (Oxford University Press), pp. 70–72.

audiences from the true beauty and values of Islam.

The study further reveals that both classical Orientalist artworks and their Neo-Orientalist continuations consistently misrepresented Muslim societies by exaggerating themes of slavery, sensuality, harem life, and corruption. Iconic paintings like *The Slave Market*, *The Snake Charmer*, and *The Turkish Bath* embodied Western fantasies and colonial ideologies rather than authentic realities. By distorting sacred and private spaces, Orientalist art aimed to portray Muslims as backward, immoral, or exotic, ignoring the Qur'ānic principles and Prophetic teachings of dignity, modesty, equality, and justice.

In the contemporary era, Neo-Orientalism has adapted these misrepresentations to modern political contexts, particularly in the post-9/11 world, often depicting Muslims as threatening or regressive. However, a crucial transformation is underway: Muslim and diasporic artists are actively resisting these stereotypes. Through creative expression, they deconstruct biased narratives, reclaim cultural identity, and reconstruct authentic portrayals of Islamic values and societies. This artistic resistance not only challenges Orientalist legacies but also underscores the transformative role of art in fostering intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and the reaffirmation of Islam's universal principles.

Recommendations

Some recommendations from this research are given bellow:

1. **Cultivation of Critical Awareness:** Scholars, students, and the general audience should be trained to critically analyze Orientalist and Neo-Orientalist artworks in their historical, religious, and social contexts, so that the underlying biases become clear.
2. **Promotion of Islamic Arts:** Academic and cultural initiatives should be launched to highlight the aesthetics and values of Islamic art, presenting the true beauty of Islam to the world.
3. **Encouragement of Muslim Artists:** Contemporary Muslim and diasporic artists should be supported with platforms to express their creativity, challenge distorted narratives, and positively represent their identity.
4. **Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue:** Visual culture and art should be utilized as tools to promote dialogue between civilizations, replacing misrepresentation and prejudice with mutual respect and understanding.
5. **Inclusion in Academic Curricula:** Universities and research institutions should integrate topics on Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism, and their artistic dimensions into curricula to provide students with deeper insight into these cultural phenomena.

Bibliography

1. Abu Dawud, S. ibn al-Ash'ath. *Sunan Abu Dawud*. Trans. A. Hasan. Riyadh: Darussalam, 2008.
2. Ali Behdad and J. A. Williams. "Neo-Orientalism." In *Globalizing American Studies*, 283–299. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
3. Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams. *Neo-Orientalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
4. Ali Behdad. *Photography's Orientalism: New Essays on Colonial Representation*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013.
5. Anouar Abdel-Malek. "Orientalism in Crisis." 1963.
6. Bernard S. Cohn. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
7. Dallah. "Neo-Orientalism and the Study of Islamic Art." *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 38, no. 1 (2004).
8. Dr. Muhammad Shafiq and Dr. Muhammad Ikramullah Khan. "Notion and Features of Orientalism in Historiography." *Pakistan Social Sciences Review (PSSR)* 5, no. 4 (2021).
9. F.-G. Lépaulle. *The Pasha and His Harem (Le Pacha et son Harem)*. Mid-19th century. Location unknown.
10. Francisco de Goya. *El dos de mayo de 1808 (The Charge of the Mamelukes)*. 1814. Painting, Museo del Prado, Madrid.
11. Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
12. Jacob Neusner. *Judaism: The Basics*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
13. James Clifford. "On Orientalism." *The New York Review of Books* 27, no. 6 (1980).
14. Jean-Léon Gérôme. *The Dance of the Almeh*. c. 1870–1875. Private collection.
15. Jean-Léon Gérôme. *The Moorish Bath*. 1885. Painting, The Art Institute of Chicago.
16. Jean-Léon Gérôme. *The Prisoner*. 1861. Oil on canvas, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.
17. Jean-Léon Gérôme. *The Snake Charmer (Le Charmeur de serpent)*. c. 1879. Painting, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA.
18. John A. Grimes. *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.
19. Lalla Essaydi. *Les Femmes du Maroc*. New York: Power House Books, 2006.
20. Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.
21. Muhammad Taqi Usmani. *Islamic Laws of Personal Status*. Karachi: Darul

- Ishaat, 2002.
22. Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri al-Naysaburi. *Sahih Muslim*.
 23. S. Ziauddin. “Neo-Orientalism in Contemporary Visual Culture.” *Journal of Islamic Art and Culture* 9, no. 2 (2021).
 24. Salim Kerouac. “From Orientalism to Neo-Orientalism: Early and Contemporary Constructions of Islam and the Muslim World.” *Intellectual Discourse* 24, no. 1 (2016): 21. Malaysia: IIUM Press.
 25. Sedlacek, S. *In the Harem (Orientalische Haremsszene)*. Late 19th–early 20th century. Private collection.
 26. Shirin Neshat. *Women of Allah*. New York: Art Books International, 1997.
 27. Srimad-Bhagavatam.
 28. The Holy Bible. Genesis 3:7.