

Middle east culture and society

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History is important in another way. If Orientalist scholarship looked to the past to define the essence of Arab civilization, anthropology's ahistoricism has tended to produce its own brand of essentialism—the essentialism of Arab culture. " (Abu-Lughod, p. 301) Edward Said thought an orientalist is anyone that teaches or produces scholarship on the orient. Being an orientalist meant having a style of thought based upon an epistemological distinction made between the orient and the occident. His approach was somewhat Foucaudian, practicing the theory that knowledge is gained through social practices and forms of subjectivity. Said also questioned the tangible existence of Orientalist due to its citationary nature, as he believed it is created in texts that refer to other texts. Abu Lughod further touches upon anthropology's link to colonialism.

Some accuse anthropology of being a justification for colonialism. Others believed that anthropologists are against colonial rule and defend the natives. This theory can be further developed by discussing the relationship between Western anthropologists and their third world subjects, posing questions like " who is writing about who?" and discussing the idea that translations in certain languages bend meaning. What I believe the quote is referring to is the absence of history and the disregard for past Orientalism, or Orientalist identity as a whole, and the present study of the Arab culture, which encompasses Orientalist practices, but ultimately becomes a brand of essentialism. Said argues that the failures of orientalism are not due to the inaccurate portrayal of Orientalists by themselves, nor by claiming that Orientalists being westerners makes them unable to understand what the orient is all about.

The middle east just like any other place is constantly evolving, changing, being affected by other ethnographic areas and subjects, which is why Orientalist approaches would ultimately fail methodically, leaving one with the essentialist approach of Arab culture. Clifford Geertz and Pierre Bourdieu were two important anthropologists in the middle east. Geertz was a great contributor of Anthropology. He believed in the interpretation and analysis of essentially cultural humans.

He perceived culture as a text, which can be explored in his essays about his stay in Sefrou, Morocco. Geertz characterized Morocco as extrovert, a Wild West,, fluid, activist and masculine in a variety of works including “ Islam Observed” and “ Meaning and Order in Moroccan Society”. He believed the Moroccan has a conceptual anguish and a quest for an appropriate set of categories for grasping what to the Westerner seems vague and elusive. As a Moroccan, the study and understanding of my own culture and its origins is quite challenging. But I do agree that in my culture, some practices which are deeply engraved in our culture would seem slippery and elusive to the Westerner. “ One approach is to pursue the implications of Anthropology’s Western origins and center the value of works such as Said’s analysis of scholarship on “ the Orient” and Alloula’s analysis of colonial postcards from Algeria, is that they turn back the gaze to which Arabs have been subjected by revealing the patterns and politics of the cultural productions of the West. ” When regarding the Harem theory, the theorization of gender and sexuality became a challenge in the past decade. Scholarship corresponds to its subject: scholars, ethnographers, and anthropologists believe that certain subjects are not confined to the society being studied. Hence, according to

Abu-Lughod, segmentation theorists are usually men, theory about the female gender is written by female theorists. His theory refers to women's spheres as harems to provide a negative foil that shapes anthropological discourse, and sets the negative tone on the subject treated, provoking more theorization, ultimately preceding to change. Hence, anthropology's project.