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WYDAWNICTWO UMCS

ANNALES
UNIVERSITATIS MARIAE CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA
LUBLIN – POLONIA

VOL. X SECTIO N 2025

ISSN: 2451-0491 • e-ISSN: 2543-9340 • CC-BY 4.0 • DOI: 10.17951/en.2025.10.23-44

# Deconstructing Orientalist Stereotypes in Isabelle Eberhardt's Travelogues

# Dekonstrukcja orientalistycznych stereotypów w dziennikach z podróży Isabelle Eberhardt

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**Abstract.** The article examines the role of Orientalist stereotypes in Isabelle Eberhardt's travel short stories. It questions the oversimplified view which considers stereotyping as an individual cognitive process that helps individuals simplify their understanding of people from different cultures. It also shows that this is an ideological construct overloaded with racial attitudes, sexist, and gender issues. The author emphasizes that stereotypes reveal a cognitive bias due to generalizations, out-group homogeneity, and categorizations, and cannot be isolated from their ideological motivations, especially in the context of colonialism. Selected travel short stories by Eberhardt are analyzed: *Le Magicien*, *Le Meddah*, *Criminel*, *Fiancée*, *Le portrait de l'Ouled-Naïl*, and *La Derouïcha*, in accordance with the theory of Palestinian-American philosopher Edward Said, expressed in his book *Orientalism*, so as to demonstrate the major tropes of Orientalist stereotypes and their functioning in the aforementioned texts. Said asserts that the European prejudiced perspective on the East is the result of stereotypical images, which were built in a context of domination of the Orient. Other theorists are also relied upon, such as Frantz Fanon and Achille Mbembe, Gayatri C. Spivak, Ania Loomba, and Meyda Yeğenoğlu, in order to consider the link between Orientalist discourse and issues of ethnicity and gender. The intersectional

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approach allows us to examine the Orientalist stereotypes and to deconstruct the racist and sexist constructions underlying Eberhardt's texts. It also provides a broader conception of stereotyping, which considers the nexus between Orientalist discourse, race, gender, and sexuality. The research shows that the author adopts the scrutinizing gaze of the colonizer and creates binary oppositions between Western, civilized personas and their uncivilized, Oriental counterparts. Moreover, it uses degrading and dehumanizing stereotypes which implicitly justify the "civilizing mission" undertaken by the Occident.

**Keywords:** Eberhardt; stereotypes; orientalism; race; gender

**Abstrakt.** W artykule zbadano rolę stereotypów orientalistycznych w opowiadaniach podróżniczych Isabelle Eberhardt. Podważono uproszczony pogląd, który traktuje stereotypy jako indywidualny proces poznawczy, pomagający jednostkom uprościć ich rozumienie ludzi z różnych kultur. Jednocześnie wykazano, że jest to ideologiczna konstrukcja przeciążona postawami rasowymi, seksizmem i kwestiami płci. Autorka podkreśla, że stereotypy ujawniają uprzedzenia poznawcze z powodu uogólnień, jednorodności i kategoryzacji grup zewnętrznych i nie można ich odizolować od ich ideologicznych motywacji, zwłaszcza w kontekście kolonializmu. Analizie poddano wybrane opowiadania Eberhardt: *Le Magicien*, *Le Meddah*, *Criminel*, *Fiancée*, *Le portrait de l'Ouled-Naïl* oraz *La Derouïcha*, zgodnie z teorią palestyńsko-amerykańskiego filozofa Edwarda Saida wyrażoną w książce *Orientalizm*, aby zademonstrować główne tropy stereotypów orientalistycznych i ich funkcjonowanie w tych tekstach. Said twierdzi, że europejska uprzedzona perspektywa na Wschód jest wynikiem stereotypowych obrazów, które zostały zbudowane w kontekście dominacji Orientu. Powołuje się również na innych teoretyków, takich jak Frantz Fanon i Achille Mbembe, Gayatri C. Spivak, Ania Loomba i Meyda Yeğenoğlu, aby rozważyć związek między dyskursem orientalistycznym oraz kwestiami etnicznymi i płciowymi. Podejście interseksjonalne pozwala badać stereotypy orientalistyczne oraz dekonstruować rasistowskie i seksistowskie konstrukcje leżące u podstaw tekstów Eberhardt, a także zapewnia szerszą koncepcję stereotypizacji, w której uwzględniany jest związek między dyskursem orientalistycznym, rasą, płcią i seksualnością. Autorka ta przyjmuje badawcze spojrzenie kolonizatora oraz tworzy binarne opozycje między zachodnimi cywilizowanymi personami a ich nieokrzesanymi orientalnymi odpowiednikami. Ponadto posługuje się poniżającymi i nieludzkimi stereotypami, które *implicite* usprawiedliwiają „misję cywilizacyjną" podjętą przez Okcydent.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Eberhardt; stereotypy; orientalizm; rasa; płeć

## INTRODUCTION

European travel writers operated stereotypical discursive modes of depicting indigenous peoples, and this descriptive and figurative practice led to what is called "othering" in the postcolonial theory. These travel writers put two distinct cultures against each other by reinforcing pejorative associations against the Oriental culture while glorifying the Western one. In other words, the act of "othering" employed in the travel texts shapes a superior cultural and ethnic identity for the European travel writers while reducing the ethnic identity of the indigenous peoples represented in their texts.

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European travel writers manifested a colonial wit in justifying colonial expansion in their texts. The depiction of overseas lands as primeval and empty explained the need for these far-off lands to be developed and populated by "civilized populations". Travel writers also permeated propagandist constructions in their literary works due to their subjective biases as well as to the pervasiveness of "othering" in the 19th century, which provided a powerful discourse that legitimized the European occupation of Eastern territories. The 18th-century portrayal of the Orient as an exotic, uncivilized foil of Europe was a crucial manifestation of the discourses that constructed representations of the Occident as civilized and superior. Travel narratives transmitted these stereotypical images to the European populations in the metropolis by depicting foreign cultures with strange and primitive practices and traditions. Hence, they established cultural norms in the context of heterogeneity to create binary oppositions and maintain otherness. In such wise, European travel writing expresses the rhetoric of imperialism and propagates an orientalist discourse purposed to vindicate the overtaking of overseas territories.

The Swiss-born writer Isabelle Eberhardt (1877–1904) spent the last seven years of her life wandering in the Algerian Sahara. She wrote many short stories, sketches of novels, letters, and articles, but most were published posthumously because she died at 27. Some of her writings include *Au pays des sables* (1914), *Journaliers* (1929), *Dans l'ombre chaude de l'Islam* (1906), *Contes et paysages* (1925), and a collection of short stories titled *Yasmina et autres nouvelles algériennes*. In the present article, we focus on the representational process of indigenous male and female characters in six travel short stories titled *Le Magicien*, *Le Meddah*, *Criminel*, *Fiancée*, *Le Portrait de l'Ouled-Naïl*, and *La Derouïcha* in order to examine Orientalist stereotypes associated with the Algerian natives. However, before starting the analysis, it is important to define the theoretical framework of our work by introducing Orientalism and identifying its nexus with other notions such as colonialism, race, and gender.

## STEREOTYPING, RACE AND GENDER

While social psychology ignores stereotypes' social and ideological aspects[1], post-colonialism focuses on ideology, discourse, and social representations to explore stereotypes more deeply and critically. The postcolonial perspective is

[1] According to the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2018), "a stereotype is a set of cognitive generalizations about the qualities and characteristics of the members of a group or social category". In other words, stereotyping is to make generalizations by attributing a set of characteristics and features to all members of a social or ethnic group and ignoring all the differences

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relevant to the work of Eberhardt because it helps us show that stereotypes constitute ideological constructions that are used to justify power relations between imperialists and indigenous societies and legitimize the colonial enterprise as a whole. Hence, in this article, stereotypes are understood not as the product of cognitive activity but as shared and ideological products that serve political agendas.

The postcolonial theory questions the stereotypical borders set between the West and the East. Edward Said emphasizes the racist characteristics of Orientalist stereotypes and their role in creating a discredited image of the Orient and Orientals. In *Orientalism* (Said: 1977: 322), he attempts to show that "the real Orient is different from Orientalist portraits" and that colonialist Orientalism uses racist anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stereotypes to convey ahistorical and willful political assertions in the form of academic argument intended to convince the European populations of the necessity of defining these radically different, indigenous populations on the basis of racial essence, religion or culture (ibidem: 344). This ideological Orientalist system promotes racist attitudes and amalgamates cultural, ethnic and feminist stereotypes with political imperialism to establish a dehumanizing ideology representing the Oriental in general, and the black, the Arab, or the Muslim in particular. Said argues that "the nexus of knowledge and power creating "the 'Oriental' obliterates him as a human being" (ibidem: 28), and reinforces cultural stereotyping by means of which the Orient is viewed.

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between the individuals belonging to that group. Stereotypes simplify and expedite perceptions and judgments, though they are often exaggerated and negative. According to Saul McLeod (2023), stereotypes simplify our social world because they help us know new people without much thinking, thanks to processes of generalizations, categorizations, and out-group homogeneity. Some psychologists hold an oversimplified perspective on stereotypes since they consider them as "natural" aspects of human behavior and a human tendency that originates from a fundamental cognitive need to categorize and oversimplify the complex social world (ibidem). According to the psychological standpoint, stereotypes may be beneficial in helping to identify with one's ethnic or cultural group, get security and favor the feeling of accomplishment in the group. Though some social psychologists have criticized the discriminatory effects of stereotyping, stereotypes have been considered beneficent by social cognitive and self-categorization perspectives since they both consider it as an unavoidable outcome of the psychological and cognitive need to classify and simplify the social world. The social cognitive perspective (Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor) conceptualizes stereotyping as a "necessary evil" associated with the human cognitive need for simplicity and order, and the self-categorization perspective (Jacques-Philippe Leyens, John C. Turner) views it as a psychologically justifiable way of recognizing and understanding the psychological realities related to intergroup life (Augoustinos, Walker 1998: 631–632). In other words, the process of stereotyping is seen as a natural and normal cognitive activity that performs beneficial cognitive work.

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The Said's perspective goes a step further than the social psychological perspective in defining stereotypes because it examines their relationship with ethnic and cultural racism as well as colonialist Orientalism, and highlights the mechanisms adopted by Orientalist writers and travelers in order to construct a biased representation that consolidates the intellectual subordination of the Orient to the West. Said argues:

> Every one of them [Orientalist writers] kept intact the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability; this is why every writer on the Orient, from Renan to Marx (ideologically speaking), or from the most rigorous scholars (Lane and Sacy) to the most powerful imaginations (Flaubert and Nerval), saw the Orient as a locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption. The Orient existed as a place isolated from the mainstream of European progress in the sciences, arts, and commerce. (ibidem: 207)

Orientalist writers draw on the advanced/backward binarism in their narratives and link Orientals to elements in Western society, such as delinquents, insane, womanized, and savages (ibidem: 208). In other words, Orientals were not looked at but seen through and analyzed because they were subject to the imperial gaze, which led to the denial of the integral cultures defining the identities of non-Western peoples. In short, Orientals were "othered" and considered the opposite of the civilized Europeans based on racial characteristics, and the Orient was seen as a place whose peoples and cultures were reduced to a homogenous mass, populated by exotic, strange, and savage creatures. Thus, Orientalist stereotypes led to anti-Oriental racism and to the devaluation of the Oriental's particularity, as well as to the social categorization of Orientalists into superior, dominant in-groups and Orientals into inferior, dominated out-groups.

However, Said limits his criticism to male Orientalists, overlooking gender issues and the role of European female writers in producing Orientalist discourse. Though he mentions the link between Orientalist stereotypes and sexuality, particularly apparent in the representation of Orientalist men's lewdness and females' prostitution and objectification, Said does not invoke the role of these obscene, sexually-related stereotypes in producing a representative knowledge about the Orientals in general and the Arabs in particular. Meyda Yeğenoğlu (1998: 26) emphasizes, however, the intrinsic relationship between sexuality and Orientalist discourse as one that "governs and structures the subject's every relation with the other". Indeed, Said's theory stipulates that Orientalism is the creation of male intellectuals, ignoring the crucial role played by Western female

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writers in the construction and dissemination of discourse. However, European women writers contribute in creating discourse about Eastern women. Eberhardt is a European female writer who constructed racist and sexist stereotypes about Orientals, creating persistent female and male archetypes about Arabs. The present article is meant to invoke the relationship between gender, sexuality, and Orientalism since we investigate texts written by a European female writer whose Orientalist imagery confines Arab women to passivity, submissiveness, and male oppression.

I rely on Said's conception of Orientalism as the authoritative definition, while I rely on other texts, such as Meyda Yeğenoğlu's and Gayatri C. Spivak's, which revolve around the relationship between Orientalism and gender and their consequences. Frantz Fanon's theory allows the deconstruction of racist discourse and hence explains how the Western colonizer creates the other in order to validate his own superiority over the Oriental. These critics offer interpretations that complement Said's analysis of Orientalism.

The central focus of the present article is the way female and male Arabs were shaped and constituted in European discourse. How European discourses constructed stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims to insist upon hierarchies and legitimize the dichotomous relationship between Arabs and Europeans. In other words, this article demonstrates how stereotyped constructions of the Arabs inform the colonial discourse and support the European imperial powers in maintaining control over the Arab region.

The methodology of this article relies on interpretive modes of reading texts and discourses. The textual analysis of the six travel short stories focuses on the exploration of the Western misrepresentations of Arabs and Muslims. The analysis is conducted through different lenses offered by scholars regarding the notion of gendering Orientalism and postcolonial feminist literature, exploring the Arabs' representations or misrepresentations. These readings explore how Said's *Orientalism* works to unveil the relationship between Orientalist knowledge production and European power's imperial ambitions in the Arab world. Indeed, I examine how the use of gender has contributed to the sexualized representation and objectification of Arab women and the use of women as a site of colonial rhetoric that subsists in European political and academic discourses.

The aim is to understand the relation between gendering and authority over the other and how these notions, men, women, masculinities, and feminities are used in dominant discourses. In other words, gender is interwoven into the political discourse where women's situation is used to reinforce power relationships to inherent authority. Ultimately, this allows for the normalization and acceptance of violence; the Europeans are given moral legitimacy to use violence against the

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so-called "barbaric Eastern men" and the so-called "oppressed Eastern women" who need to be liberated.

## DECONSTRUCTING ORIENTALIST MALE STEREOTYPES IN *LE MAGICIEN*, *LE MEDDAH*, AND *CRIMINEL*

The construction and spread of the stereotypical images about the Oriental individual had constituted one of the main controlling strategies of the colonial European powers since they were a constituent part of most of the 18th- and 19th-century military correspondences, scientific texts, and colonial travel writings. Said emphasizes the power of Orientalist stereotypes in administering colonial control in the Orient because they consolidate the colonizers' moral domination of the colonized people by generating an inferiority complex among them. In other words, stereotyping as an activity was part of the colonial enterprise because it set moral domination and control, which in turn represented a surviving mechanism for the European empire.

Orientalist stereotypes create a discourse that enables the West to deal with and produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively (Said 1977: 3). Consequently, the Oriental subject was not a free agent capable of action and thought but an object of study that is observed and looked through in a dehumanizing way. The indigenous persons are analyzed and are subject to the imperial gaze practiced by European travel writers. They are considered objects of study due to their "strangeness", "primitiveness", and different physical characteristics.

The Swiss-Russian traveler and writer Eberhardt visited Algeria between 1897 and 1904 during the French colonization. She blended in with the Algerian crowd by marrying an Algerian and disguising herself as a man to live among the Arabs and discover their attitudes, culture, behaviors, traditions, and social practices. Disguising herself as a man was a strategy that helped her integrate into the Algerian society and escape the indigenous people's curiosity, which could have prevented her moves and travels throughout the Algerian Sahara. Consequently, she explored Saharan life, which she reported in her short stories by describing indigenous men and women, natural landscapes, and Bedouin life.

Like all Orientalist travel writers, Eberhardt was inescapably subservient to the predetermined Orientalist discourse. Her travel narratives contain traces of colonial and Orientalist discourse since she informed her travelogues with fixed images and standardized representations of indigenous peoples. The detrimental portrayal of the Arab figures is conditioned by political and ideological factors

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since this stereotyped representation provides the required knowledge to control the Arabs. The resulting dominant discourse aims at maintaining power and control over the Arab region.

Said emphasizes the relationship between knowledge production and power, which produces notions about both the self and the other, contributing to the creation of the superior identity of the colonizer and the inferior identity of the colonized. Western scholars and intellectuals produced a hegemonic knowledge about the East. The West "generated discursive scientific practices and has set up interpretive frames that make it challenging to think outside of these frames" (Mbembe 2015: 10). In other words, the colonizer's possession of knowledge always serves to strengthen various colonialist systems. It was apparent in Africa, from the beginning to the middle of the 20th century, that imperialism and knowledge production go hand in hand and were, in fact, "mutually reinforcing and causally interrelated forms of domination" (ibidem). Likewise, Said argues that the "systematic knowledge of the Orient" also results in a binary division between the European and the Arab, opposing the civilized European to the backward Arab. Hence, the political and ideological purposes lying behind the stereotyped representations of indigenous figures consist of legitimating the European imperial project in Africa.

*Le Magicien*, *Le Meddah*, and *Criminel* represent portraits of indigenous male figures, which the writer creates by means of categorization and generalization, revealing an Orientalist attitude and a prejudicial view of the indigenous character. In *Le Magicien*, Eberhardt adopts an imperial gaze to portray the male protagonist. Si Abd-es-Sélèm is described as a pious Muslim and a poor man living in a decrepit house. Yet, he is a sorcerer and superstitious, which implies that he is a malicious person who uses sorcery to harm people. As the story unfolds, the writer tells us that he meets a desperate, beautiful Jewish woman who wants to know her future, but he ends up raping her just after doing the Icha prayer. This evil act reveals the hypocrisy of the indigenous man who claims to be a devout Muslim but is, in fact, an evil person, a rapist, a sorcerer, and a misogynist. He is also depicted as a heartless and pitiless person because he is not moved by seeing the woman's dead corpse lying on a deserted beach: "Il regarda le cadavre pendant un instant et (…) du même pas tranquille, il reprit sa promenade" (Eberhardt 2015: 108). His attitude uncovers his atrocity and brutality, which, by means of generalization, encompasses all Arab men.

The story demonstrates a distorted Arab reality based on the use of violent, oppressive, misogynistic, hypocritical, and evil personas as a prototype of Arab men. Producing narratives that reduce and stereotype Arabs is an exercise of the authority granted to European writers by colonial powers in order to create

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a dominant discourse that propagates a particularly pejorative knowledge of Arabs. This reveals the nexus that exists between power and the knowledge produced, as well as between this knowledge and the imperial project. In other words, European academics generate a set of anti-Oriental assumptions that help divide the world into insiders and outsiders and differentiate between the West and the East. Accordingly, it appears that the representation of Arabs is politicized and is put at the service of the imperial powers' interests.

Like most European travel writers of the 19th century, Eberhardt seeks confirmation of the knowledge she already had about the Orient, and which was transmitted to her via earlier travel texts, since the Orient had always been described as an exotic place, even in ancient times. The misconceptions and misrepresentations of the Orientals held by the Europeans originated centuries ago and have had a persistent impact on the Western mindset. Accordingly, 19th- and 20th-century travel writers attempted only to validate the Orientalist stereotypes fixed and spread in previous books.

In *Le Meddah*, Eberhardt draws another negative portrait of the indigenous man that is not very different from that of the magician. He is described as a vagrant, uneducated, lethargic, and hedonistic, living in prostitution. These descriptions are based on racial stereotypes that distinguish between the Western and the Eastern individual. Said (1977: 287) argues that in Orientalist representations, "the Arab male is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed degenerate, clever, devious, involved continuously in intrigue, inherently sadistic and treacherous". Eberhardt's male figures correspond to the profile described by Said. Both the magician and the meddah are depicted as lustful, devious, and amoral. These downgrading descriptions of the Arab characters are systematic and governed by imperial concerns.

According to Said, these stereotypical representations serve as a means to homogenize Oriental cultures and peoples, and this homogenization, in turn, defines the Orient as the opposite of the Occident. Hence, the concept of representation as it is used by Western Orientalist writers draws from their cultural, social, and ethical values, and results in Eurocentric and ethnocentric representations which hierarchize the world into a dominant, superior self and a dominated, inferior other.

Eberhardt attempts to show *Le Meddah* as a highly respected figure among the natives, hinting at the Algerian society's moral and intellectual deterioration. This is evident in the contrast she establishes between the Bedouins and him. She starts the story by referring to the indigenous persons as a mass under generalized stereotypical images, such as dirty, messy, disordered, and poor: "La foule, en burnous terreux, s'entasse bruyamment (…). Les Bédouins ne sont

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pas installés (…) calent leurs sacs et leurs baluchons en loques (…)" (Eberhardt 2015: 199). However, in the next paragraph, she refers to El Hadj Abdelkader in a rather more positive way: "(…) jeune, grand, robuste, fièrement drapé dans son burnous dont la propreté blanche contraste avec le ton terreux des autres (…)" (ibidem). This description, which comes into contradiction with the negative descriptions concerning the other indigenous characters, is the only positive one of El Hadj Abdelkader.

In the rest of the story, El Hadj Abdelkader is referred to as a vagabond, lazy, emotional, and a pleasure seeker. Fanon argues that the French colonial authority creates a biased discourse based on race and views the Arabs as stupid, lethargic, and ignorant. These attitudes shape a discourse of Western domination that reinforces the superiority of the European identity and validates the colonial occupation (Fanon 1967: 41). Likewise, Eberhardt insinuates the indigenous peoples' primitiveness and their urgent need for European enlightenment and education embodied in the "civilizing mission". In short, she confirms the European theorem that black men are "the white man's burden".

Eberhardt portrays the meddah as a poor, degenerate person who is illiterate, ignorant, incompetent, and incapable of doing a decent job except moving from one place to another, singing and telling stories in public for a few cents. He is "Illettré (…). Indolent, satisfait de peu, aimant par-dessus tout ses aises" (Eberhardt 2015: 202). In this and many other passages, the author operates a systematic dehumanization of the Arab persona and insists on portraying them as a kind of dangerous sub-humans. Ultimately, the meddah becomes an old blind beggar who keeps wandering and asking for alms until he dies lonely in the streets. Eberhardt shows the tragic end of indigenous men because of their ignorance and miserable life, implying the necessity of the Europeans' interference to bring development and progress to the natives' wretched existence.

An imperial "othering" persists in Eberhardt's travelogues, which operate as part of the colonial domination in Algeria. "Othering" is a strategy that informs the Western construction of the East in multiple ways, including stereotypical representations of the Orientals. For instance, Eberhardt refers to the indigenous characters as a mass, such as "les bédouins, la foule, les fellahs". They are never distinguished or individualized but are "othered" and put in a homogenized out-group. They are similar to each other in behaviors, practices, degenerate qualities such as laziness, and physical traits like having an earthy complexion: "Une foule se meut, houleuse, aux groupes sans cesse changeants et d'une teinte uniforme d'un fauve très clair (…). Les Bédouins vont et viennent (…) discutent, rient, se querellent (…)" (ibidem: 201). This homogenization is a dehumanization of Arabs who are "assigned the lowest value" (Fanon 1967: 189).

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Eberhardt paints another negative masculine portrait for the indigenous man in *Criminel*, wherein she tells the story of the protagonist, Mohamed Achouri, who sold his land to the French administration but was surprised by a few cents given to him in exchange of the vast lands he inherited from his ancestors. He was upset and tried to claim his due right, but was chased by the French settlers and administrators. He felt that his land had been robbed and decided to take revenge by burning the harvest. However, he was qualified as a criminal because he refused to be scammed. The question that the reader wonders about is the real identity of the criminal; whether it is the native whose land was overtaken from him or the colonizer, the French settler, who took the land of a native illegally.

Achouri was depicted as a stupid person, ignorant, poor, ungrateful, and criminal. He is stupid because he agreed to sell his land to the French settlers and weak. After all, he was unable to take it back and became a criminal because he revenged against them. The indigenous character is condemned by the writer and is presented as evil at different levels. Said (1977: 27) asserts that the Arab is not allowed to exist, and the only way he does is either as evil or as an Oriental who is subject to racist, cultural stereotypes, and dehumanizing ideology. Eberhardt puts the Arabs in weak positions and never in positive situations where they are shown as intelligent or strong.

Eberhardt depicts the other characters as homogenized, referred to as a mass, dressed in rags and dirty. She says: "La troupe grise des Ouled-Bounaga s'entassait. Accroupis à terre, enveloppés dans leurs burnous d'une teinte uniformément terreuse, ils attendaient, résignés, passifs" (Eberhardt 2015: 126). They are revealed as frightened, passive, suspicious, humiliated, weak, and hostile. On the other hand, the French characters or the caids are described in a positive way. Mr. Gaillard, the French man who bought most of the lands belonging to Achouri's tribe, is described as "un brave homme, un peu rude d'ailleurs, énergétique, et au fond, bon et honnête" (ibidem: 130). Eberhardt's descriptions create a binary division between the natives and the Europeans. According to Said, the typology of advanced and backward binarism was promoted by late 19$^{th}$-century Orientalists and aimed at legitimizing imperialist agendas. Latent Orientalism propagated ideas that reinforced the binarism between the Orient and the Occident and made use of stereotypical representations and fixed images in order to categorize the West as civilized and superior and the East as backward and inferior.

Like most Orientalist writers, Eberhardt amplifies the Arabs' failings for the sake of justifying the colonial enterprise. This strategy invents the Western hegemonic culture through influential ideas and reiterated clichés within what Antonio Gramsci calls the "civil society", leading to the superiority of the Western

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cultures, races, and identities and the downgrading of the Oriental cultures, ethnicities, and identities (Said 1977: 7). Eberhardt qualifies the setting as archaic and outdated and compares the Arabs' houses to slaughterhouse sheep, implying the primitiveness of the country and the barbarism of the natives. The dominant discourse underlying Eberhardt's text creates an opposition between the colonial Self and the colonized Others. The gulf between the two entities is so huge that there is no possibility of change whatsoever. Said (ibidem: 49) emphasizes that

> the zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity (…). The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute.

As a matter of fact, Eberhardt depends in her descriptions of Arabs on radical categorizations and generalizations as well as on the flexible positional superiority that puts the Europeans in a high-ranking position and systematically inferiorizes the Arabs. These fixed images, which inform Eberhardt's travelogues, characterized most 18th- and 19th-century travel narratives. Said says (ibidem: 2): "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences". He explains that the Orient had always been defined by the Europeans in the same denigrating way.

Stereotyping the East shaped the perception of Westerners and formed the intercultural encounter between the Oriental and the Western man. As Said states, stereotypes contributed to creating the Orient, which had become an integral part of European material civilization and culture (ibidem). Orientalist stereotypes express and represent that part racially, culturally, and even ideologically as a form of discourse with propagandist institutions that created a specific vocabulary and imagery to define and refer to the Orient and Orientals. Through repetition, these images become stereotypes and are generalized to represent the Oriental man from an Orientalist point of view. They constitute a "universal knowledge" across the borders of the Western empire and are approved and disseminated worldwide. Said argues that these stereotypes have the force of ontological and empirical truth behind them, especially since they are featured in scientific texts based on race theory (ibidem: 233).

In the selected short stories, the Arabs are described as second-class citizens and considered inferior to the French settlers. Eberhardt establishes a binary

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opposition between the French characters and the Arabs. Thus, the French are portrayed as superior, rational, good-looking, and educated, while the indigenous characters are always depicted as inferior, emotional, ugly, and ignorant. This binary division, reinforced by negative stereotypes, creates, in the unconscious of the European readers, fixed images and knowledge that they consider obvious and authentic.

Stereotypes shape the Orientalist discourse and help disseminate biased knowledge among Westerners about the Arabs. These partial discourses gave way to binary divisions between the Orient and the Occident. In his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Fanon explores how the French colonial government used to look at the indigenous Arabs as mindless, irrational, backward, and indolent. These attitudes are formed by the Orientalist tradition in an attempt to reinforce the sense of cultural and racial superiority necessary for maintaining colonial expansion. The superiority that came with the European identity provided them with the basic validation for colonial occupation was of a discursive and not primarily of a military or economic nature. Rather, it is Western knowledge-superiority that allows for the use of knowledge of language, cultures, and customs to sustain political power. Fanon (ibidem) questions Eurocentric knowledge's objective to claim Western superiority as an excuse to dominate the others. He argues that the indigenous population under colonialism is essentially dehumanized:

> The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense, he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces. (ibidem: 41)

The obtained knowledge shows an imbalance in the relationship between superior colonizers and inferior colonized. The myths of the "bad Arabs" and the evil black persons are false representations and may be considered as a politicized discourse aimed at vindicating the European colonizers' practices. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Fanon describes the binarism in a racist discourse as a phobic reaction wherein a person exaggerates the potential danger of an object. The European produces the Arabs as evil, following the same process by which they constructed the black as "negro" (ibidem: 189). These misrepresentations are based on a reiterated prototype that associates blackness to evil. Fanon concludes that by defining themselves in opposition to fabricated representations about others, Europeans inferiorised others in order to attain a sense of superiority. As

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we can see, the holder of this knowledge thereby acquires authority with which to control the Other. The latter is not real but a European creation that was needed to validate how Europeans perceive and behave with the Other.

Stereotypes are not only individual cognitive products because they are closely linked to social reality. They are social and collective practices that operate ideologically by vindicating and legitimating social and power relations within the imperial society. In other words, they are connotative of negative attributes that are used as strategies of identity formation since they shape the colonized peoples' perceptions of themselves and influence their thoughts and behaviors. Accordingly, racial and cultural stereotypes that are dehumanizing and degrading lead to an inferiority complex among the colonized stereotyped community and help foreground their position as the "Other", the inferior, the uncivilized, and the uneducated. By the same token, the binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident created by the process of "othering" consolidates the European identity as the colonizer, the "self", the superior, the civilized, and the educated, on whom falls the burden of enlightening these "backward" populations. In this sense, Said (1977: 1–2) says: "The Orient has helped to define Europe as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience". Accordingly, the Orient acts as a reverse of the Occident, meaning that the West represents all the positive characteristics that the East is not, including civilized, good, strong, developed, independent, capable, and rational.

Orientalist stereotypes are used as a consolidation of power within colonial frameworks and represent a mechanism by which the Orient is represented as inferior to the West. By stigmatizing Oriental men as savage, evil, sensual, superstitious, lustful, and uncivilized, Europeans had the possibility to legitimize their imperial schemes while pretending to bring civilization, education, and order to the chaotic Eastern societies.

## DECONSTRUCTING ORIENTALIST FEMALE STEREOTYPES IN *FIANCÉE, LE PORTRAIT DE L'OULED-NAÏL,* AND *LA DEROUÏCHA*

Orientalism consists of Western depictions of non-Westerners and the effects of these portrayals on the Orientals as well as on the power relations between "the West" and "the East". In fact, the Orientalist discourse is a gendered process which had been instrumentalized to confirm European supremacy. For example, the relationship between the Europeans and the Arabs is expressed in earlier travel narratives to be understood in terms of empowering the submissive, oppressed Oriental women, as well as of controlling them to maintain European supremacy. Colonial European literature represented Arab women as powerless creatures and sexual objects, subjugated by men.

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Gender is an important facet of Orientalist discourse because it constructs a repertoire of sexist, gendered imagery describing the Oriental women. Eberhardt's short stories reflect the relationship between Orientalism and gender. The protagonists are presented as prototypes of Arab female figures, "representative" of Algerian women during that time period. In this part, I attempt to show how Western discourse was closely related to gender in order to establish the identity of the Arab females as oppressed creatures that need to be saved from their barbarian male counterparts. Indeed, it shows that gender is politicized as it contributes to the prevalent discourse that justifies colonialism and military intervention in overseas territories.

The biases underpinning Western knowledge about the Arabs are highly projected in European representations of Arab women. The stereotypes characterizing them weaken their position and uphold their Western counterparts. A system of binary oppositions is created between the developed, liberated, civilized European women and the backward, subjugated, savage Arab women, reinforcing in turn the colonial enterprise and legitimating European violent practices against the Arabs. Accordingly, gendered discourse was instrumentalized to represent the Oriental Other in relation to the Occidental Self.

In *Fiancée*, *Le Portrait de l'Ouled-Naïl*, and *La Derouïcha*, Eberhardt portrays women as oppressed, voiceless, submissive, subservient, seductive, and promiscuous. Female characters are considered "female subalterns" who endure the cruelty, the barbarism, and the atrocity of the Oriental men. The image of the oppressed Arab woman in need of saving prevails over colonial literature and shows that gender is instrumentalized to create a discourse that motivates military intervention in the Arab region and legitimate colonial practices, such as the overtaking of territories and the use of violence against the colonized men.

Orientalist writers reflected a prejudicial view of doubly inferior women, being both females and Orientals. Orientalist representations of the indigenous woman consisted of exposing her as seductive and sexually immoral. Indeed, the exoticized Arab woman had always been depicted nude or partially clothed in many European colonial artworks. In short, she was presented as indecent and a source of erotic pleasure. Ania Loomba (1998: 154) argues that "The non-European woman also appears in an intractable version, as 'Amazonian' or deviant femininity (…) provide images of insatiable sexuality and brutality". In this quote, Loomba summarizes the European perception of the Oriental woman as savage, objectified, and sexualized.

In his discussion of the Oriental women's representation in Gustav Flaubert's narratives, Said points out the Westerners' attitude toward establishing a link between the Orient and sex. He says: "The Orient seems still to suggest not only

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fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies" (Said 1977: 188). After having a sexual relationship with an Egyptian woman, Flaubert sketches a model of the Oriental woman as "a machine; she makes no distinction between one man and another man" (ibidem: 187). According to Flaubert, Said argues, she was "less a woman than a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity" (ibidem). Flaubert's encounter with the Egyptian woman generated a prototype of the Oriental woman as voiceless, submissive, weak, physically dominated, and sexually exploited. In his discussion, Said explores Orientalist stereotypes related to the issue of sexual difference, but fails to connect gender to Orientalism. Accordingly, there is no investigation in the role of sexuality in the process of producing knowledge about other cultures.

The Orientalist discourse consists of gendered stereotypes, including the licentious erotic oriental female. It reflects women as sexually and physically abused and inferior to men since they are considered a sub-group by their community's men, which explains their subservient status. Accordingly, negative images of Oriental women as naïve, ignorant prostitutes and victims of cruel Oriental men are recurrent in Orientalist and European colonial texts. The postcolonial critic Gayatri C. Spivak (1988) summarizes the process of reducing Arab women in Orientalist imagery to better serve imperialist occupation. She argues: "White men save brown women from brown men" (ibidem: 93). Consequently, the European powers had to send their military forces to free native African and Arab women from their oppressive men and patriarchal systems, revealing that gender is deep-rooted in the dominant discourse about the Orient and that it is used as a practice of symbolic politics.

The ideological facet of the gendered Orientalist stereotypes uncovers their aim, which was not to describe and discover the Orientals but to dehumanize and degrade them for the sake of justifying the European presence in the region. Hence, different and multiple artworks construct a model for the Oriental woman, revealing her exotic beauty and erotic nature, which consorts with the hedonism and the monstrous promiscuity of the Arab men. In her travelogues, Eberhardt confirms the prototype of the Oriental woman constructed by earlier European travel artists such as Flaubert. In the selected short stories, *Fiancée*, *Le Portrait de l'Ouled-Naïl*, and *La Derouïcha*, Eberhardt emphasizes the representation of Oriental women from social, physical, mental, and ideological dimensions. Woven together, these dimensions create a distorted image that highlights the patriarchal structure of Arab society and its oppressive attitudes towards women.

In *Fiancée*, Eberhardt describes Emmbarka as a charming girl who is in a love relationship with Mohammed, an Arab of noble blood. Mohammed was obliged,

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by his uncle, to move to the south of Oran in order to put an end to his love affair with Emmbarka. Eberhardt describes Emmbarka as a prostitute who sits on the threshold of her house to seduce the men passing by. She embodies the native woman who is abused morally and sexually by the Arab men, and is revealed as having no role in life except being a sexual object at the disposal of men.

Emmbarka's representation is a gendered Orientalist one, which degrades her and exposes her exploitation by the patriarchal power structure. These stereotypical representations of the Arab woman are ideological constructs that aim to spread the idea that she is oppressed and is in need of a strong European man to defend and liberate her from the grips of the barbarian Arabs. Khalid (2011: 18) explains that Orientalism depends on frames, such as "civilization versus barbarism", in order to propagate the image of Arab women as powerless sufferers whose emancipation and release depend on the European colonial "civilizing mission". He argues that the Orientalist discourse is organized as a gendering process which constructs an identity for the Oriental woman as helpless, oppressed, and need to be saved from the savage, barbarian Oriental men (ibidem). Orientalism's representation of Arab women as Others, "a male power fantasy" (Said 1977: 116) constitutes a motive for the maintenance of colonialism and fosters the idea of Europe's supremacy.

In *Le Portrait de l'Ouled-Naïl*, Eberhardt redraws the portrait of the Oriental woman as a passive and submissive prostitute exploited by Arab men. Achoura was oppressed by her father and later, her husband, who divorced her very early. Then, she settled in a crumbling shack in the negro-village to prostitute herself. She used to sit on her doorstep, drinking absinthe and smoking cigarettes while waiting for customers. Eberhardt (2015: 71) says that prostitution was for Achoura and all Arab women a means of emancipation from the domestic confinement imposed by men: "Achoura, comme toutes les filles de sa race, regardait le traffic de son corps comme le seul gage d'affranchissement accessible à la femme". By reading these representations, she implies that patriarchy leads to debauchery since all these women were sequestered and confined in their houses by their fathers or husbands, and their craving for freedom drives them to prostitution. The Orientalist discourse links the Orient to sex and patriarchy to prostitution and introduces women in eroticized terms.

Prostitution is naturalized in the setting of these stories and is presented as an unpunished public phenomenon. Achoura is portrayed as a metonym for sexual otherness and is described as a shameless, degenerate woman who humiliates herself by becoming a prostitute. There is an insistence on depicting Arab women as sex symbols and erotic creatures, and hence morally debased. By contrasting them with European women, the latter appear superior. Binarism and contrast,

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Said (1977: 1–2) explains, help the West identify itself through time: "The Orient has helped define Europe as its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience". This Said's perspective exposes the colonial mindset of the West, which defines itself as moralistic and lofty, with the required capacities to impose its civilization on Eastern backward creatures.

Achoura fell in love with Si Mohammed el Arbi, a young man of noble ancestry and the son of an Agha. She was submissive to him, but he was violent with her because of his jealousy of all the men she received while he was away. Their relationship lasted until Mohammed was called for an opulent leading in the south. Achoura was let down by the Arab man, who was finally not different from her clients who paid money for a night with her. This relationship exposes the dominating status that men have over women in patriarchal societies, wherein females are put in a subaltern position and are considered sexual objects. The gendered stereotypes defining Achoura confirm the model of the Oriental woman who is subservient to men and sexually and morally exploited by the patriarchal authority.

*Le Portrait de l'Ouled-Naïl* exposes the inevitable connection between Orientalist discourse and the objectification and sexualization of Oriental women. Eberhardt seems to be perpetuating a discourse that is ingrained in the Western fantasies about the Orient demonstrated in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, where the Arab woman is considered as a sexual object put at the service of men. Likewise, the writer's female figures replicate the same traditional role assigned to females in the Arab world, according to Orientalists. The use of these gendered stereotypes produces a discourse that validates prototypes of Arab women as oppressed, physically and sexually exploited, and in need of protection by Europeans. The European discourse concerning Arabs depends chiefly on the idea of protecting Oriental women from Oriental men. Eberhardt's narratives rely on representing Arabs as oppressive, violent, and brutal towards women. Mirriam Cooke (2002: 468) explains that the idea of rescuing Muslim women depends on "the negative stereotyping of the religion as inherently misogynist provides ammunition for the attack on the uncivilized brown men" (quoted after Alghamdi 2020: 108).

Through her stories, Eberhardt challenges Said's conception that Orientalist discourse is essentially male. She shows that between male and female Orientalism, there exists no difference as to the representation of Oriental women since both lead to omitting their agency and free will to act in appropriate ways conforming to their society's conservative standards. Arab women are depicted as nude, prostitutes who look for their freedom from their patriarchal society by prostituting themselves. Portraying Arab women as half-dressed prostitutes is, as Yeğenoğlu suggested, an attempt to unveil Muslim women. Indeed, the veil

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comes in contradiction with the idea of the powerless Arab woman because it challenges the colonial power by turning away the scrutiny of the Western male observers, and hence hinders their domination. Yeğenoğlu (1998: 12) explains:

> The colonial feminist discourse to unveil Muslim women in the name of liberation was linked not only to the discourse of Enlightenment but also to the scopic regime of modernity which is characterized by a desire to master, control, and reshape the body of the subjects by making them visible. Since the veil prevents the colonial gaze from attaining such a visibility and hence mastery, its lifting becomes essential.

The veil prevents the Western colonizer from observing the Arab women's bodies, and hence has no control over them because colonial dominance is based on knowledge, and the latter relies on visibility, which the veil prevents. The Orientalist feminist discourse altered the symbolism of the veil, which became a sign of inferior, oppressed, and disempowered women.

Representation creates a distorted image of the reality existing in the Arab world, and female Orientalists contribute, consciously or unconsciously, in the European imperial enterprise and in the domination of Orientals through disseminating a Eurocentric discourse. This discursive practice adopted by female Orientalists stems from their conviction in the superiority of their culture and the privileges that they have concerning their status in Western societies. This indeed might have motivated Eberhardt to disguise as a man not only to facilitate her moves, but to escape the degenerate image given to Arab women as oppressed and prostitutes especially after integrating the Arab society by marrying an Arab man. Yeğenoğlu argues that European female writers automatically replicate the same dynamics of power, control, and submissiveness as in the discursive practices of their male equivalents (ibidem: 163).

Female European writers like Eberhardt were not interested in the differences existing between the cultures, but reproduced a discourse of white supremacy while presenting an Oriental woman as downtrodden, submissive, and sexually objectified. Eberhardt constructed a discourse that legitimized the colonial paradigm instead of giving a voice and a positive representation to indigenous women. Distorting their image by prototyping them as partly nude, prostitutes, and oppressed served the French colonial power, that was given motives to interfere militarily in Algeria to spread its "civilizing mission".

*La Derouïcha* tells the story of an old woman called Kheira. She is a beggar who wanders the streets day and night searching for food. We are told, in the story, that she was beautiful and loved by many young men, and two of them

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exchanged knife blows. One died, and the other escaped the revenge of his victim's parents. Her father was ashamed and married her to a poor farm worker who already had two other wives. She was mistreated, overwhelmed with household chores, beaten, and as a consequence, she aged quickly. After her husband's death, she returned to her father's house, but then, one day, she decided to go along the roads begging for alms in the name of God.

*La Derouïcha* reveals the destiny of the Arab woman who endures male domination. Kheira was oppressed by her father and mistreated by her husband. She was locked up and exploited both physically and morally, and ultimately, she became an old, foul beggar wandering in the streets in search for food. Her story tells the subordination of Oriental women and their exploitation by Oriental men. The Orientalist discourse that informs Eberhardt's story represents indigenous women in pejorative terms and stereotypical images. It leads to misrepresentation, which is a colonialist ideology aiming to whiten the image of colonialism by revealing it as a savior of women from the oppressive, savage indigenous men.

A significant feature of European colonialist literature consists of representing other peoples by using clichés and stereotypes, forming otherness as a subaltern identity, and creating the European man as a master and superior over other ethnic groups. The strategy of "othering" functioned as a justification of the colonial enterprise, which was propagandized as a "civilizing mission". This strategy was celebrated in Eberhardt's travelogues, wherein she systematically put Arabs in a lower position compared to the French. She relies on racial, gendered, and cultural stereotypes as well as on strategies of categorization and generalization to dehumanize and demonize the Orientals. Arab men are presented as morally corrupt, physically ugly, ignorant, savage, and uncivilized, while women are shown as licentious, immoral, and oppressed, implying that Arab men need to be civilized and educated by the Europeans, and women need to be enlightened and liberated from subjugation by Western men. "Othering" reinforces Western civilization's claim to superiority and enables Europeans to identify themselves as superior to the Eastern world.

Eberhardt relies on the process of Orientalism, whereby she internalizes the Western system of thought. She uses a narrative that lines up with the European colonial ideology in order to construct Europe as the ideal, universal entity, while positioning the Orient as Europe's foil. Consequently, the Orient is represented as exotic, barbaric, violent, and inferior. This discourse creates a chasm both conceptually and morally between the European Self and the Oriental Other. Said's concept of representation uncovers the function of the Orientalists' discursive practices to justify the colonization, the exotic depiction, the sexualization of men, and the objectification of women.

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## CONCLUSION

The investigation of Orientalist stereotypes in Eberhardt's travelogues has revealed that they are not innocent and cannot be reduced to a simple cognitive activity meant to oversimplify the complex social world, as it is argued by most psychologists and social cognitive theorists. They are, however, ideological constructions meant to legitimize the takeover of overseas colonies. In other words, the orientalist stereotypes' aim is not to describe the Orientals but to reshape the identity of the colonized people and redefine them according to Western beliefs, motives, and perceptions. The stereotypical images were repeated in colonial orientalist texts and became fixed images accepted worldwide, and whose content was considered "universal knowledge". As a result, the Europeans' domination of the Orientals was considered legitimate and seen as a "civilizing mission".

The imperial ideology is implicated in Orientalist texts that serve the hegemonic culture. Eberhardt, consciously or unconsciously, represented the Orient as an exotic place and the Orientals as inferior others by the use of recurring stereotypical images and clichés. Her travelogues contribute in one way or another to the systematic construction of Orientalist discourse and the misrepresentation of the Orient by adopting a Eurocentric imperialist point of view and practicing the imperial gaze on the Orientals.

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