

'Orientalism is a Partisan Book': Applying Edward Said's Insights to Early Modern Travel Writing

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Abstract

Since its publication in 1978, Edward Said's *Orientalism* has had a significant impact on postcolonial studies in a range of fields. This paper assesses his impact on the historiography of Anglophone travel writing concerning Ottoman Empire during the early modern period. Said's analysis of the relationship between representational power and colonial authority remains relevant to our understanding of early modern travel texts.

Said's epistemology raises significant issues for historians of early modern intercultural encounters. This article summarises recent debates surrounding early modern travel narratives. It contrasts doctrinaire applications of Said's theory with more recent, particularistic studies. It provides a much-needed survey of travel writing historiography that considers the continuing impact of Said's postcolonial thought on the study of early modern travel narratives relating to the Ottoman Middle East.

In so doing, it explores the lack of fit between early modern travel narratives and Said's methodology. I explore the methodological problems thrown up by conventional applications of Said's epistemology to precolonial travellers' texts. Based on a wide-ranging survey of Said's oeuvre, the article demonstrates that, more than 30 years on, Said's work remains relevant to the historiographical challenges presented by early modern English travel writing about Islam.

Orientalism is a partisan book, not a theoretical machine.

Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London and New York: Penguin, 1978, 2005), p. 340.

Since its publication in 1978, Edward Said's *Orientalism* has been instrumental in defining the critical remit of postcolonial scholarship across a number of fields. This paper surveys the reception of Said's theories amongst historians of early modern travel writing, focussing specifically on Anglophone scholarship about travel to the Ottoman Empire and its North African vassal states. Said's influence here is undeniable, though subsequent historians and literary critics alike have expended great energy reviewing, refining and reshaping his conclusions.¹ *Orientalism's* influence has persisted even as its particular conclusions and even its epistemological foundations are challenged. Recent research has questioned earlier historiographical paradigms that simply mapped Said's claims about the relationship between imperial and representational authority in the colonial era onto the early modern period.² Current scholarship emphasises the unique ways in which European travellers in previous centuries described other societies. Consequently, it is increasingly acknowledged that early modern representations of other cultures were more complex than Said's binaries allow.

Although travel texts about every continent were produced during the period c. 1500–1750, the Ottoman Empire is my focus here for three principle reasons.³ Firstly, Said established his critique of scholarly Orientalism in relation to Anglo-French colonialism in the Middle East

in subsequent centuries. Consequently, early modern encounters between Christians and Muslims are especially relevant to the prehistory of Said's formulation. Secondly, recent studies of early modern travel writing about Islamic lands have shown how the geopolitical, religious and cultural preoccupations of early modern Europe contrasted with Said's binaries. Finally, there has been significant methodological innovation amongst scholars of early modern Christian–Muslim encounters. Despite questioning many of Said's assumptions, these developments have ensured the continuing relevance of Said's theory to the study of early modern travel texts. His arguments remain relevant even to those scholars who readily acknowledge that doctrinaire Orientalism leaves vital questions about early modern representations of intercultural encounters unanswered.

This essay is divided into four parts. Firstly, I briefly outline Said's argument in *Orientalism*. In the second part, I discuss *Orientalism* within the context of Said's broader canon and subsequent historiographical responses to it. In particular, I discuss the problems associated with applying his theoretical formulae to real-world historical situations. A longer third section reviews post-Saidian methodological innovations by historians of early modern Levantine travel. Finally, the conclusion reflects upon the enduring relevance of Said's work in the era of transnational and interconnected histories. Although there is plenty to be written about theoretical and methodological approaches to historical travel practices, texts and representations more generally, this essay will confine itself to exploring how Said's groundbreaking postcolonial insights have been endorsed, adapted and challenged by historians of early modern travel writing.

1. *What is Orientalism?*

Before Said, Orientalism referred to the study of the history, language and culture of ancient and modern Asiatic societies. Although precise disciplinary boundaries differed across Europe, the field emerged from 18th century antiquarian interest in and artistic appreciation of Asian religions and histories, including Vedic, Buddhist and Chinese traditions. Early Orientalist studies sought to square Asian societies' historical traditions with their own Christian origin myths.⁴ Said challenged this cosy academic consensus by arguing that such endeavours were fundamentally connected to the literal and epistemic violence of colonialism. Said's principal focus was 19th and 20th century British and French works about the Middle East, though he also drew upon ethnographic, literary and related texts produced in relation to those two nations' globally extensive empires.⁵

Said claimed that Orientalism provided the ideological basis for the colonisation of the lives and thoughts of subaltern peoples by representing non-European societies in familiar European terms. The very nature of European forms of knowledge production perpetrated the Othering of non-European cultures, peoples and subjectivities.⁶ European writings about the 'Orient' were the product of actual and imagined power relations that re-present the Oriental/Eastern/Asian as subservient to the Occidental/Western/European. This applied not only to those forms of representation directly implicated in the process of colonial domination (such as administrative, legal and governmental discourses) but also to academic and imaginative works, including those by ethnographers, religious scholars, writers and artists who use the Orient, or individuals, ideas and institutions pertaining to it, in their works.⁷

Orientalism is the product of European assumptions about non-European subjectivities since, in Orientalist discourses, the self-representation of Oriental subjects fails to meet the objective standards of European discourses.⁸ As a result, Orientalist representations of other societies reinforce the dominance and authority of Western ideologies and authorities.⁹ European generalisations about the Orient as whole supplant indigenous representations

since, Said argued, the authority of European representations rest upon the belief that ‘if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job’.¹⁰ By arguing that the ‘Oriental’ was incapable of self-representation, European generalisations stand in the place of genuine, subaltern Oriental voices. Thus, Orientalists set out not to deepen their knowledge of other cultures but instead to increase their ability to control them. Non-European individuals, ideas and institutions are re-presented in Eurocentric ways, effectively neutralising their alterity. The relationship between power and knowledge is at the heart of Said’s theory, a compelling combination that has ensured its enduring influence over postcolonial studies.

2. Responses to Orientalism

Said claims that European culture’s self-representation is – and potentially always has been – defined in opposition to Asia.¹¹ Gyan Prakash described the ‘seditious life’ of Said’s most famous work, noting that it has been ‘denounced as an uncharitable and poisonous attack on the integrity of Orientalist scholarship’ and that it ‘opened the floodgate of postcolonial criticism that has breached the authority of Western scholarship’ to analyse, describe and exercise power over ‘Other societies’. Prakash rightly notes that such criticisms of Orientalism are as old as Oriental studies itself. However, it was Said’s ‘insistent undoing of oppositions between the Orient and the Occident, Western knowledge and Western power, scholarly objectivity and worldly motives’ and ‘representation and reality’ that profoundly unsettled ‘received categories and modes of understanding’. In his ‘Foucaultian conception of Orientalism as a discourse’, Said ‘crosses authoritative writing with political authority’ making the two ‘mutually enabling rather than oppositional’: scholarship, travel writing and other academic endeavours were complicit in discourses of power that reinforced various forms of Western hegemony.¹²

Said’s afterword to the 2005 edition reminded readers that ‘*Orientalism* is a partisan book, not a theoretical machine’.¹³ Elsewhere, Said argued that theoretical formulations, which derive their explanatory power from particular historical conditions, might lose their explanatory power when applied to other contexts. Said noted that ‘the first time a human experience is recorded and then given a theoretical formulation, its force comes from being directly connected to ... real historical circumstances’. ‘Later versions of the theory’ may fail to replicate its ‘original power’ for a number of reasons: ‘the situation’ it pertains to may have altered, or the theory itself may have ‘degraded or subdued’ and been ‘made into a relatively tame academic substitute for the real thing’.¹⁴ Is this what has occurred when Said’s theory is applied to ‘premodern’ travellers’ texts? After all, Said’s principal evidence for the ‘modern iteration’ of Orientalism came from European representations produced after 1750.¹⁵

Recent scholarship has argued that Said’s model is somewhat ahistorical and that Said is inconsistent about the origin of the East/West binary at the heart of *Orientalism*.¹⁶ Although he claimed that ‘modern’ Orientalism first emerged in the decades following Napoleon’s annexation of Egypt in 1798, he also stated that Orientalist modes of thought had been latent in Western thought since the Classical era.¹⁷ In Said’s analysis, the ‘early modern’ centuries – with their territorially vast, culturally and military formidable Islamic empires centred on Turkey, Persia and Mughal India – are marginalised. In her examination of late mediaeval European representations of Asian cultures, Kim Phillips argued that Said’s ideologically loaded view of the East–West binary ‘has had wide utility and applications when treated as a tool for interpreting *certain* western representations of subjected cultures’. However, she cautions that few ‘specialists in Middle Eastern or Asian studies’ have been wholly persuaded by his ‘appraisal of ... academic Orientalism’ in the colonial era or earlier periods.¹⁸ Likewise, Nancy Bisaha

observed that ‘Renaissance humanists ... present some important challenges’ to Saidian assumptions about the East/West binary. This simplistic binary model does not ‘address more open-minded views of a large number’ of colonial-era Orientalists and similarly fails to account for expressions of ‘relativism’ amongst early modern humanist writers.¹⁹

Concerning French Orientalism, Ina McCabe notes that, prior to the French invasion of Egypt in 1798, Francophone relations with and representations of ‘the Orient’ were dominated by ‘the orientalising of France’ and ‘French acculturation and consumption of Oriental goods’ rather than the imperial power–knowledge nexus outlined by Said.²⁰ In the early modern period, a direct connection between French state ‘policy and travel accounts’ was uncommon and rarely overt.²¹ Like France, 18th century British material and intellectual culture were transformed by engagements with ‘Oriental’ goods, economies, histories, literatures and beliefs.²² By investigating the form and extent of such reverse transculturation, we significantly complicate the central contentions of Said’s theory. The hegemonic status of European representations is questioned, and the possibility for counter-Orientalist narratives in the early modern era and beyond becomes apparent.

John Tolan’s study of mediaeval representations of Islam labels 12th century Castillian policy towards Muslims as ‘a clear example of the kind of discourse that ... Said decried in nineteenth-century apologists for British and French empire’.²³ Elsewhere, John Tolan has pointed out the important religious connections between Christianity and Islam and the various ways in which late mediaeval Christian apologists deployed different narratives of Islamic alterity.²⁴ In a similar vein, Ziad Elmarsafy has traced the early modern history of European Qur’anic translation and identified two contrasting discourses: one emphasising Christian exceptionalism and the other tending towards the nascent discipline of comparative religions. These traditions do not reduce easily to the East/West, Christian/Muslim and Orient/Occident binaries of Said’s theory.²⁵ These examples all suggest the value of studying Orientalism within its different ‘historical context[s]’, also highlighting the ‘vast ... gap’ between proto-imperial ‘discourses and reality’.²⁶ In sum, recent studies have shown that *Orientalism’s* conclusions cannot be applied mechanistically to premodern texts, echoing Said’s own concern that theoretical formulae lose their explanatory power when applied to new contexts. Below, I explore in more detail the lack of fit between Said’s epistemology and early modern travel writing.

3. *Early Modern Travel Writing and Orientalism*

Nabil Matar, Richard Barbour, Daniel Viktus and Gerald MacLean have all examined different ways in which Said’s model of Orientalism fails to account for the diversity of early modern travellers’ representational strategies or their resonances in contemporary English culture. I deal with these responses to Said’s ideas in four parts below. Firstly, that the geopolitical strength of the Islamic Ottoman Empire mediated against the sort of binary oppositions that Said described since these require European economic, political, military and cultural hegemonies of various kinds. Secondly, that the perceived disunity of Christian European nations in the aftermath of the Reformations contradicts the homogenous view of European Orientalism given by Said. Thirdly, that early modern representations were not wholly populated by negative stereotypes of Moors, Mahometans and other foreigners. These depictions coexisted alongside more neutral and even positive accounts.²⁷ In acknowledging the diversity of Ottoman identities across their vast empire, early modern travel texts counter the Saidian assertion that European representations necessarily homogenised other cultures. Fourthly, Said’s conception of authoritative European representational power is offset by counterexamples, such as the slavery narratives of European captives enslaved in

North African ports and the reverse Orientalism (or ‘Occidentalism’) found in texts by Muslim visitors to Europe.

Taken together, these four challenges amount to a radical reshaping of Said’s epistemology. By taking a particularistic approach to early modern travel texts, recent research has shown that Christians and Muslims interacted and represented each other in diverse ways during the early modern period. However, whilst this scholarship often makes great play of dismissing certain of Said’s conclusions, the debt to Said’s original formulation is clear. Indeed, historians of early modern travel have been inconsistent in their disavowal of Said’s approach. This is not necessarily a bad thing: Said’s insights into the relationship between tangible and representational power are just as important for the era before formal empires as they are for later centuries.

3.1. STRENGTH OF THE OTTOMANS

The notion of ‘Islam “dominated” ... might be applicable in the post-Napoleonic history of the Middle East’ but to ‘apply it retroactively to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is historically inaccurate’. Matar observed cogently that English trading relations in the Levant during this period ‘did not lead directly to empire’ either in ‘the conventional sense of territorial possession’ or more broadly in terms of ‘imperial spheres of influence’. English writers prior to the 18th century ‘did not express either the authority of possessiveness or the security of domination which later gave rise to what ... Said has termed Orientalism’ since ‘Britain did not enjoy military or industrial power over Islamic countries’. Muslim states were largely seen as powerful empires ‘beyond colonisation and “domination”’.²⁸ Lawrence Danson concurs, arguing that no matter how ‘trenchant’ Said’s account has become ‘for later periods’, it is ‘misleading’ to apply it to early modern accounts since ‘the balance of power – military, cultural and economic – was very far from putting West on top of East’. Thus, Danson concludes that the ‘facts on the ground’ encountered by early modern travellers prevented the ‘quintessential English dream of proto-imperialism’ from being realised.²⁹ Likewise, Linda McJanet noted that although early modernists have ‘benefit[ed] greatly from Said’s insights’, they have increasingly ‘differentiated both the early modern historical context and its discourses from the Orientalism Said described’.³⁰

Despite acknowledging the contrasts between the 17th century and later centuries, this position assumes that later representations were *de facto* manifestations of Saidian Orientalism. This is not such a radical departure from Said’s formulation. Said acknowledged that Islam ‘dominated’ the West until the 16th century and that ‘European interest in Islam derived not from curiosity but from fear of a monotheistic, culturally and militarily formidable competitor to Christianity’.³¹ Matar contrasted this state of affairs with English accounts of indigenous American societies which emphasised their primitive material culture and idolatrous beliefs, though ends up concluding – in Saidian fashion – that these representations became fundamentally interchangeable by the turn of the 18th century.³² This supports Matthew Dimmock’s contention that historians and literary critics alike have become ‘so entangled in Said’s work’ that ‘they often end up reasserting the basic divisions of his thesis in the process of denying them’.³³

Said’s influence on recent historiography and literary criticism persists despite Matar and others’ assertion that the geopolitics of the early modern period do not correspond with Said’s observations of later centuries. In this scholarship, the imaginative conquest of various Others underpins early modern European representations, regardless of the geopolitical circumstances or specific intercultural encounters that occasioned particular texts. In later centuries, European hegemonies flourished, and the teleology of European self-representation was achieved.³⁴ Teleological assumptions aside, there are further reasons why early modern European travellers could not rest on the Orientalist laurels of later generations.

3.2. DISUNITY OF EUROPE

The lack of an 'ideologically unified' Europe contrasted with the "'unity of this great Mahometan Monarchie'" in Danson's analysis.³⁵ In Andrea Pippidi's view, England was unusual amongst Christian, European nations since it was not directly threatened by the Ottoman state, and therefore, English writers represented the Ottoman Empire in a more positive light than their continental neighbours.³⁶ In contrast, Matar argued that Orientalist ideas informed early modern rhetorical denigrations of other societies. This rhetoric went on to be replicated on a global scale in the 18th century and beyond.³⁷ Similarly, MacLean has proposed that before 'Orientalism' came 'Ottomanism'. 'Imperial envy' motivated English writers to revile the Turk as the most territorially successful non-Christian power.³⁸ MacLean argued that the antiquarian Henry Blount's *A Journey* (1634) is 'explicitly concerned with the process of self-construction and self-representation that is revealed' in travel narratives. This process of 'making the Other knowable ... became a mode of knowledge production, driven by both lack and desire' that 'intertwined commercial and cultural interests into a strategy of engagement that tells us rather more about the desiring subject than about the object of knowledge'. Thus, 'Ottomanism precedes and differs from what has become known as Orientalism' even though 'without a doubt, both terms describe an activity or mode of thought engaged in by Westerners for the purpose of defining, shaping and exerting a measure of control over a newly discovered region of the world'.³⁹

However, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Near East was far from a 'newly discovered' region of the world. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam has observed, encounters with other Eurasian peoples did not take place in novel or hitherto unknown lands.⁴⁰ European travellers like Blount and his near contemporary, the diplomat William Trumbull, participated in trade, exchange and diplomatic networks that crossed porous cultural, religious and political frontiers. In so doing, they established affective relationships with Ottoman officials, diplomats and travellers that countermanded Orient–Occident binaries.⁴¹ Caroline Finkel has shown that the rulers of Christian Europe and the Islamic Middle East shared imperial aspirations and cultural products and had done so for centuries. Christian and Muslim rulers valued and collected each other's artistic, scientific and cultural products.⁴² A good example of such an exchange is the gifting of a mechanical organ by Elizabeth I of England to the Ottoman Sultan Murad III. Thomas Dallam, the organ maker despatched to assemble Elizabeth's organ at the Porte, provides a further example of cross-cultural relationships that challenge Saidian binaries.⁴³ Dallam's diary records how he built positive relationships with Muslim and Greek Orthodox Christians of a similar status to himself. Indeed, Dallam's ire was more often provoked by the actions of his English superiors than those of his Muslim hosts.⁴⁴ Dallam's self-presentation challenges assumptions about the homogeneity of 'European' identity. Class, gender, religious factors and the travellers' individual relationships with assorted Muslim individuals all influenced their representations of different facets of Islamic society.⁴⁵

3.3. REAL ENCOUNTERS VS. ORIENTALIST OTHERING

Writing at the turn of the millennium, David Blanks claimed that Saidian Orientalism has its roots in the mediaeval period. He suggested that the 'enduring issue' concerning European attitudes to Islam over the intervening centuries was the 'deliberate misrepresentation' of Islam by 'writers who had access to more accurate information'.⁴⁶ More recently, Matar has concurred with Blanks that 'experience did not alter' English peoples' assessment of the other cultures and peoples they encountered on both sides of the Atlantic.⁴⁷ Likewise, MacLean argued that early modern English accounts of Islam were trenchant in their attachment to

certain anti-Islamic tropes.⁴⁸ Suzanne Conklin Akbari has problematised this view that Orientalism was 'both the necessary precondition of imperialism and its consequence'.⁴⁹ She proposes a specifically 'premodern Orientalism' which emerged from religious oppositions between Christianity and Islam, and mediaeval articulations of 'bodily diversity'. This discourse was continually 'being articulated' and altered through various applications and thus has two advantages over Said's original formulation.⁵⁰ Firstly, it is historically specific and articulated in particular contexts. Secondly, it pays attention to late mediaeval European representations that are largely occluded by Said's contradictory claims about the origins of Orientalism.⁵¹

Carina L. Johnson's research provides another response to Blanks' assertion that European representations of Islam merely replicated hostile mediaeval stereotypes. Drawing on transnational approaches, she examines how different Protestants and Catholics reacted to Ottoman expansion and how Christian theological disputes influenced representations of Turkish religion. For example, Martin Luther only endorsed military resistance to Ottoman military expansion following the 1529 siege of Vienna. Luther had previously argued that the Turkish conquest of southeastern Europe was a just punishment for Catholic and Orthodox doctrinal errors. In contrast to the Saidian view, Johnson showed how individual European perceptions of the Turk varied over time.⁵² Indeed, she persuasively argued that religious changes occasioned a shift in Habsburg representations of Aztec and Ottoman societies during the 16th century. Additionally, military, economic and cultural connections between the Turk and the Habsburgs influenced the latter's representations of the former. This disagreement between 'inclusionary conceptions of the world's peoples' and 'exclusionary denigrations of heterodox Christians and non-Christians' dated back to 'long before' the 16th century. However, the Reformations provoked a significant shift in the 'balance between these different understandings'. As a result, Catholic and Protestant writers both sought 'to define ... true religious practice' in order to demonstrate the truth of their own doctrines against the errors of others.⁵³

Johnson does not conclude, as Blanks had done, that these debates are simply the prehistory of the phenomenon Said labelled as Orientalism. She also contradicts MacLean's assertion that, in the early modern period, 'Ottomanism' and imperial envy signified the embryo stage of late-modern Orientalism. Rather, she makes a convincing case that the religious turmoil of the Reformation and counter-Reformation engendered a further fracturing of pre-existing European discourses concerning various kinds of Others. She connects intra-Christian religious discord with the emergent trend amongst travel writers and religious polemicists to narrowly define acceptable religious belief and practice in opposition to the heterodox practices of other Christian denominations, Muslims and other foreign religions. Johnson's transnational perspective highlights the multipolar nature of early modern conceptions of identity, casting doubt upon the relevance of Said's binaries to early modern travel writing. Like Akbari, Johnson's research emerges from Said's insights yet produces something more than merely an 'opposition to its assumptions'. Both advocate an understanding of how premodern European representations were 'historicised'. That said, Johnson's approach insists more strongly upon the partial and incomplete nature of such representations, rather than suggesting, as Akbari does, that 'periods in its [Orientalism's] development' can and should 'be identified and delimited'.⁵⁴

In a similar manner, Matar has explored the contrast between diplomatic and popular reactions to the arrival in Elizabethan London of an embassy from the Moroccan ruler, Mulay Ahmad al-Mansur. Whilst ballads and popular print displayed suspicion and hostility towards these foreigners from Barbary, diplomatic correspondence reveals mutual respect of each other's religious customs and practices.⁵⁵ Likewise, following the Spanish Armada, William Harborne, the first English ambassador to the Ottoman Porte, spent several years attempting to establish a

naval pact with the Ottomans against the Spanish. In this instance, religious distinctions *within* Christianity were more pertinent to strategic considerations than any East–West, Christian–Muslim divide.⁵⁶ This kind of positive cross-cultural engagement was not limited to elite and diplomatic classes. Linda McJannet and Dimmock have demonstrated the diverse range of early modern representations of Islam. McJannet shows how individual travellers' positive interpersonal encounters were depicted, mediated or silenced on publication, focussing in particular on the role of editors and censors. She identifies several instances of positive encounters being elided in Samuel Purchas' 1625 collection of traveller narratives. Multiple versions of these voyages circulated, and these positive encounters with Muslims were retained in the original pamphlet editions of the tales that McJannet examines.⁵⁷ Competing representations of the same voyage could and did circulate in early modern England.⁵⁸ Thus, it is tricky to find a singular, authoritative version of one traveller's experiences, let alone extrapolate broader English attitudes towards Muslims from that one representation. On attitudes towards the 'Orient' more generally, both Marie Louise Pratt and Homi Bhaba have moved recent scholarship away from the 'binary model', highlighting the multiplicity of perspectives that travellers evinced in their texts.⁵⁹

In a similar vein, Julia Schleck has analysed the reception of the first significant collection of English travel narratives, Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations* (1589, 1598–1601). She demonstrated how poorly understood this significant compendium of travel texts has been. Existing scholarship was divided between literary critics who simply used the *Navigations* as factual 'historical source material' and a more recent trend towards demonstrating Hakluyt's 'complicity in promoting early colonial endeavors [sic]'. Both approaches tend to assume the 'empiricism and factuality' of Hakluyt's text. Schleck breaks new ground by exploring how 'early modern standards of truth in prose travel writing' denoted the 'credibility' or otherwise of the various texts anthologised by Hakluyt.⁶⁰ The truth status and authoritativeness of different texts within Hakluyt's compendium varied.⁶¹ Therefore, it is incorrect to assume, as Said's model does, that a homogenous European perspective existed. Taken together, this research disputes the authoritative status that Said attributes to the canon of Orientalism. By exploring this multiplicity of voices, we gain a more particularistic conception of the how travellers' individual social, religious and political identities influenced their descriptions of the other cultures that they encountered.

3.4. POWER, AUTHORITY AND REPRESENTATION

By situating travel texts in contemporary discourses about different kinds of difference, recent scholarship has brought us some distance from Said's oppositional Orient vs. Occident paradigm. Recent scholarship has increasingly focussed on lower-status travellers, including Europeans enslaved by North African pirates. Additionally, there has been a growing interest in the perspectives of Muslim and other travellers to Europe. I shall focus first on the former group. Schleck and Viktus have both explored how providential beliefs, which were widespread in early modern Europe, informed English slaves' writings about their captivity.⁶² MacLean has complicated our view of such narratives by investigating how one late 17th-century narrative draws upon fictional tropes of romantic fiction, leading him to doubt the reality of the events it describes.⁶³ Meanwhile, Matar has shown how conversations with Muslim individuals provoked some captives to reflect seriously upon their own religious beliefs and practices.⁶⁴

Accounts by freed English slaves raise a number of issues for historians. It could be asserted that the experience of slavery at the hands of a brutal, foreign Other led slaves who returned

and wrote about their experiences to reinforce existing Orientalist biases against Muslims, reconfigured as a race of pirates and slavers. Yet many slaves from non-elite backgrounds were incorporated into Islamic communities throughout North Africa and thus disappeared from the Anglophone historical record. Matar's work on contemporary accounts of slavery has begun to delve into often uncatalogued Ottoman archival sources in the hope of shedding new light on these individuals.⁶⁵ Slaves and their masters around the Mediterranean did not embrace 'the usual stereotype of a clear division between Crescent and Cross'. Rather, 'unstable loyalties' existed throughout the 'Mediterranean contact zone'.⁶⁶

Furthermore, individual slaves clearly had contrasting experiences, and it would be a mistake to generalise too broadly about returnees' experiences abroad or their emancipation and reintegration into English society. Viktus overstated the Saidian case when he argued that publication of Joseph Pitts' 1704 narrative was offered 'in recompense' for reintegration into the English, Christian community.⁶⁷ This view overstates the pressure to publish: Matar's archival research has shown that many returnees did not publish anything of their experiences and therefore simply disappeared from the historical record.⁶⁸ We must therefore acknowledge the intents and desires of individual returnees in our assessment of their accounts. Matar has shown that the Mediterranean offered opportunities to English mariners that were unavailable back home, significantly complicating our understanding of the dominant anti-Islamic tropes found in returned slave narratives.⁶⁹ Likewise, Johnson's research into Balkan captives has suggested that Eastern European experiences of Ottoman captivity in the 15th century did not militate against positive depictions of Islam or individual Muslims.⁷⁰ Regardless, recent approaches to slaves' texts demonstrate the broader shift away from Saidian dichotomies within studies of early modern intercultural encounters.

What of Muslims who travelled to Europe? MacLean and Matar have both recently explored the writings of Ottoman and other Muslim diplomatic visitors to Europe in order to investigate whether their texts contain Occidentalist oppositions.⁷¹ Aziz al-Azmeh has shown that 'representation of the cultural and religious Other' was not 'exclusive to the modern Europeans on whom Said ... chiefly focussed'. Anouar Majid has developed Azmeh's insights, suggesting that Azmeh's generalisation that 'all societies construct an Other paints all societies with the same brush and makes no distinction between the society that constructs a discourse to dominate, as Said showed, and another that constructs a non-coercive and even non-judgmental discourse.' Matar concurs with Majid that early modern Islamic discourses about other societies lack the dehumanising elements found in Said's definition of Orientalism, despite pejorative accounts of Christians proliferating in North African Muslim travellers' texts.⁷² Similarly, Finkel has done valuable work identifying how Ottoman perspectives on their Indian Ocean territories contrasted with the Othering found in Iberian texts about the New World.⁷³

Is it reductionist to assume that shared cultural features amongst Muslims entirely militated against the Othering of subject populations committed by Europeans? In his recent comprehensive survey of critical responses to *Orientalism*, the anthropologist Daniel Martin Varisco argued that Said's depiction of Orientalism as an inherently European attribute tacitly reinforces the very oppositions that he is seeking to deconstruct.⁷⁴ Was Orientalism – in the diluted form of the representation of another society in familiar yet often critical terms – a far more widespread vice than Said's formulation allows? Future transnational scholarship will undoubtedly help us in answering this question. For the present, it is clear that one cannot study early modern travel texts without reference to Said's claims concerning the power-knowledge nexus of imperial power in later generations. Yet, we must continue to be sensitive to the particular 'social and intellectual disjunctions' that separate a 'modern theory' from 'premodern' texts.⁷⁵

4. Conclusion

Orientalism was composed as a polemic and has become a serious manifesto for historical method. Consequently, it has demanded the attention of scholars for over 30 years. Recent scholarship by historians and literary critics alike has proposed a number of ways in which Said's critique of Orientalism can be developed within the field of early modern travel writing studies. Whilst the majority of such scholarship has been respectful to the central tenets of Said's thought, it is increasingly clear that early modern travellers' representations of others do not conveniently conform to Said's binaries. Early modern responses to cultural, religious, political others were diverse and often contradictory: English slaves could praise the faithfulness of their captors, diplomats and merchants dined and shared jokes together and monarchs and Sultans esteemed each other's cultural products and paid homage to their contrasting faiths.⁷⁶

MacLean's notion of 'Ottomanism' provides one solution to this complexity. It lucidly highlights the differences between early modern colonialism *in potentia* and the imperial social, economic, military, religious and political hegemonies critiqued by Said. However, it relies on the assumption that these Orientalist perspectives are intrinsic to European culture. Matar's research has shown fractures between popular and elite notions and identified diverse responses amongst free and unfree travellers. Like MacLean, he endorses Said's conclusion that Orientalism was at once a fundamental element of early modern English representations of Muslims and something that was not yet fully articulated until the 18th century.⁷⁷ In 'Travelling Theory', Said argues that theoretical formulae could lose their explanatory power when they are applied to new contexts and situations.⁷⁸ It is tempting to conclude that much post-Saidian scholarship on early modern English travel writing confirms Said's observations. Regardless, the historical methods developed in response to *Orientalism* have reinvigorated and reinvented the postcolonial history of precolonialism.

Given its polemical overtones, it is unsurprising that Said paints *Orientalism* in broad brushstrokes. Akbari observes that such a strategy was essential in order to counter the prevailing consensus of the late 1970s academic community against which Said was writing.⁷⁹ Microhistorical studies of individual travel texts and the intercultural exchanges that occasioned them have provided new and interesting observations of the range and scope of early modern European responses to Others of various kinds. Johnson explores how Catholic and Protestant writers' view of acceptable and unacceptable religious doctrine and practice evolved in light of the religious ructions of the Reformation. This transnational perspective reveals the more complex polarities overlooked by doctrinaire uses of Said's theory. By drawing on transnational approaches that significantly complicate the Foucaultian binaries between East and West found in Said's epistemology, Johnson, Akbari and others have advanced our understanding of how European perceptions of foreign religious difference evolved in relation to hotly contested Christian doctrines.

All of the scholarship discussed here has deviated in some way from the untenably monolithic conception of East and West found in *Orientalism*. As a result, this growing body of work has unquestionably reinvigorated travel writing studies, not least by focussing our attention on the domestic discourses that travellers drew upon when they described or denigrated other societies. In the decades since *Orientalism* was published, the historiographical emphasis has shifted from the overarching relationship between imperial and representational power to more particular instances of intercultural exchange and encounter. Recent studies have provided nuanced analysis of the specific factors – including status and religious identity – that affected individual travellers' depictions of other societies. Said's model remains influential: as we have seen, postcolonial history continues to define itself in reference to his founding insights. That said, the transnational turn in recent historiography has moved recent research beyond Said's initial frame of reference.

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Short Biography

Hector Roddan's research focuses on how early modern travel writers' religious beliefs informed their depictions of other societies' beliefs and practices. He is currently completing his AHRC-funded Doctoral project entitled 'Defining Differences: The Religious Dimension of Early Modern English Travel Narratives, c. 1550–c. 1800' at Cardiff University. This wide-ranging study considers the relationship between English Protestant beliefs and practices and travel literature by diplomats, traders, missionaries, slaves and antiquarians who travelled in the Near East, North Africa, Russia, India and the Pacific.

Notes

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- ¹ App, *Birth of Orientalism*, x–xi; Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*, xi–xvi, 3–28.
- ² See, for example, Teltscher, *India Inscribed*, 17, 22, 26–7; Cohn, *Colonialism*, 20–2, 25–31.
- ³ Sherman, 'Settings and Searchings', 21.
- ⁴ App, *Birth of Orientalism*, xi–xvii, 1, 3–5, 6–8.
- ⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 31–49.
- ⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 202–26.
- ⁷ Sapra, *Limits of Orientalism*, 31–2, 33–4.
- ⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 260–3, 269–70, 278–80, 296–8, 300–5, 307–21.
- ⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 20–1, 102–3, 105–6, 153–7, 206, 291–3, 325.
- ¹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 21, citing Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonnaparte*. This Marxian element of Said's thought parallels Marx' observations that political representatives of a particular class's socioeconomic interests necessarily represent them without sharing direct experience of their material conditions or interests.
- ¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 72, 73–4; Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*, 47–54; Porter, 'Orientalism and its Problems', 151–3.
- ¹² Prakash, 'Orientalism Now', 199–204; see also: Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*, 43–6; Marchand, *German Orientalism*, xix–xx.
- ¹³ Said, *Orientalism*, 340; Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*, 15.
- ¹⁴ Said, 'Travelling Theory Reconsidered', 436.
- ¹⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 2–3, 52, 54–7; McJannet, *Sultan Speaks*, 1–3; Nayar, 'Marvelous Excesses', 214.
- ¹⁶ Prakash, 'Orientalism Now', 201–3.
- ¹⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 52, 54–7, 155–7; Lim, 'Framing the Issues', 3–6.
- ¹⁸ Phillips, *Before Orientalism*, 21–2. *Emphases in original*. On medieval forms of Orientalism, see Wallace, *Premodern Places*; Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*; Fernandez-Armesto, *Before Columbus*.
- ¹⁹ Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, 6; Johnson, *Cultural Hierarchy*, 27–9, 264.
- ²⁰ McCabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France*, 1, 6–9.
- ²¹ McCabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France*, 2; Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France*, 184.
- ²² McCabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France*, 2, 7–8; Chatterjee, *Representations of India*, 31–83; Franklin, *Orientalist Jones*, 1–42.
- ²³ Tolan, *Saracens*, 57, also xvi, xix, 167–8, 174–5, 275, 280–2.
- ²⁴ Tolan, 'Diabolical Heresy', 356–67.

- ²⁵ Elmarsafy, *Enlightenment Qur'an*, 10, 12–14, 20–6, 29–32, 37–63.
- ²⁶ McCabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France*, 3, 8; Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 5–6, 9–11.
- ²⁷ McJannet, 'Purchas his Pruning', 235–8.
- ²⁸ Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 11–13; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder*, 99; Colley, *Captives*, 35–7.
- ²⁹ Danson, 'Sultan's Organ', 657–8 citing Knolles, *Generall History of the Turkes*, 1.
- ³⁰ McJannet, *Sultan Speaks*, 1–2.
- ³¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 205, 344; Danson, 'Sultan's Organ', 657–8.
- ³² Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen*, 106–7.
- ³³ Dimmock, *New Turkes*, 6.
- ³⁴ Finkel, 'Traacherous Clevermess', 170.
- ³⁵ Danson, 'Sultan's Organ', 657–8.
- ³⁶ Pippidi, *Visions of the Ottoman World*, 117, 142.
- ³⁷ Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen*, 83–107.
- ³⁸ MacLean, 'Ottomanism before Orientalism', 86–7, 93–4.
- ³⁹ Kamps et al, 'Introduction', 9.
- ⁴⁰ Kamps et al, 'Introduction', 9; MacLean, 'Ottomanism before Orientalism', 87; Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to be Alien*, 174–6.
- ⁴¹ Ghobrial, *Whispers of Cities*, 87–8.
- ⁴² Finkel, 'Traacherous Clevermess', 156, see also 159–62; Wallace, *Premodern Places*, 2–3, 183–5, 192, 200, 222.
- ⁴³ Porter, 'Negotiating the Gaze', 54–5.
- ⁴⁴ Danson, 'Sultan's Organ', 650–6.
- ⁴⁵ Hulme et al, 'Introduction', 1–16; Melman, 'The Middle East', 105–21; Williamson, 'Empire to End Empire', 227–56.
- ⁴⁶ Blanks, 'Western Views', 22.
- ⁴⁷ Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen*, 107.
- ⁴⁸ MacLean, *Rise of Oriental Travel*, 49–114.
- ⁴⁹ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 6.
- ⁵⁰ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 9–17.
- ⁵¹ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 5–9; Said, *Orientalism*, 52, 54–7.
- ⁵² Johnson, *Cultural Hierarchy*, 56–65; McJannet, *Sultan Speaks*, 184–5, n. 32.
- ⁵³ Johnson, *Cultural Hierarchy*, 263. See also: Sapra, *Limits of Orientalism*, 33–59; App, *Birth of Orientalism*, 3–4, 6–8.
- ⁵⁴ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 5; Johnson, *Cultural Hierarchy*, 21–4, 127, 263–8.
- ⁵⁵ Matar, *Britain and Barbary*, 13–20, 33–7; Matar, 'Britons and Muslims', 7–25.
- ⁵⁶ Müller, 'Harborne's Embassies', 11–12; Borge, 'Hakluyt's "Discourse" of Spain', 167–76.
- ⁵⁷ McJannet, 'Purchas His Pruning', 232, 236–7, 239–40; Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet*, 1–23, 64–148.
- ⁵⁸ Fuller, 'His Dark Materials', 231–43; Palmer, 'Early English Travel Anthologies', 325–44; Stout, 'Hakluyt and Censorship', 153–63.
- ⁵⁹ McCabe, *Orientalism in Early Modern France*, 6; Cass, 'Introduction', 1–24; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 1–14; Bhabba, *Location of Culture*, 1–27, also 145–198.
- ⁶⁰ Schleck, 'Plain, Broad, Hakluyt', 768–71.
- ⁶¹ Carey, 'Inquiries, Heads and Directions', 31–5; Carey, 'Travel, Identity and Cultural Difference', 39–42; Carey et al, 'Introduction', 95–8; Hadfield, *Travel and Colonial Writing*, 69–134; Stout, 'Hakluyt and Censorship', 153–63.
- ⁶² Schleck, 'Forming the Captivity', 129–38; MacLean, *Rise of Oriental Travel*, 199; Viktus (ed.), *Piracy, Slavery and Redemption*; Matar, 'Introduction', 1–52.
- ⁶³ MacLean, *Rise of Oriental Travel*, 177–220; Sell, *Rhetoric and Wonder*, 2; Thauvette, 'Masculinity and Turkish Captivity', 425–45.
- ⁶⁴ Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen*, 80, citing Spratt, *Travels and Researches*, vol. I, 386.
- ⁶⁵ Matar, 'Introduction', 1–54; Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes*, 29–71 (on slaves accounts), 72–117 (on ambassadorial reports).
- ⁶⁶ Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs*, 3–5.
- ⁶⁷ Viktus, *Piracy, Slavery and Redemption*, 218–19.
- ⁶⁸ Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen*, 74; Rothman, *Brokering Empire*, 30–2, 110–13.
- ⁶⁹ Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen*, 40, 43, 47–8, 52, 55–63, 77–81, 85, 88–93, 95.

- ⁷⁰ Johnson, *Cultural Hierarchy*, 56–8.
- ⁷¹ Matar, ‘Question of Occidentalism’, 153–5; MacLean et al, *Britain and the Islamic World*.
- ⁷² Matar, ‘Question of Occidentalism’, 154–5; Majid, *Unveiling Traditions*, 98, 35; Al Azmeh, ‘Barbarians in Arab Eyes’, 3–18; Ning, ‘Orientalism and Occidentalism’, 57–67.
- ⁷³ Finkel, ‘Treacherous Cleverness’, 168–70; Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs*, 6–7.
- ⁷⁴ Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*, 40–63, esp. 54–5; Lim, ‘Framing the Issues’, 4.
- ⁷⁵ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 6.
- ⁷⁶ Ghobrial, *Whispers of Cities*, 72–3, 87–8.
- ⁷⁷ acLean, ‘Ottomanism before Orientalism’, 86–8; Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 110–17; Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 5–9; Said, *Orientalism*, 52, 54–7
- ⁷⁸ Said, ‘Travelling Theory Reconsidered’, 436.
- ⁷⁹ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 6.

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