

Twice Colonized: Female Orientalism and Oriental Females

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Abstract:

Patriarchal oppression coupled with Orientalist manipulation of native women foregrounded the postcolonial feminist notion of double colonization and gave it theoretical credence. Ever since the beginning of human existence, patriarchal order has greatly impacted on almost everything in the world. Patriarchy is also a part of colonization and imperialism. Women had to fight the double colonization of patriarchal domination in its local as well as its imperial forms. Double colonization refers to how women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. Women are subject to representation in colonial discourses in ways that collude with patriarchal values. One of the most dominant concepts in postcolonial feminism is 'Double Colonization'. It represents a key concept within Postcolonial Feminist discourse, positing that women in colonized and pre-colonized territories confront a dual subjugation wherein they are compelled to adhere to patriarchal norms within their local communities while simultaneously conforming to the dictates of colonial rulers. Thus, women contend with the imposition of both patriarchal and colonial structures, resulting in what is termed as double colonization.

Keywords: Orientalism – Occidental – twice colonized – Othering – post colonial feminism

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: In short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, constructing, restructuring and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1978:3)

Orientalism demonstrates how European culture gained strength and honed its identity by setting it in contrast to the occident. Said argues that men make their history, and in turn, both the geographical and cultural entities of the Orient are “manmade” because the Orient is essentially an idea” (Said 5). By constricting the Orient to an idea, the Europeans regarded it as “not a centre of great cultural achievement but a debased region that consisted of “barbaric people” (Said 172). Thus, in much academic and research oeuvre, the Orient is depicted as the “Other”. Hence, no study of the relationship between the Orient and the Occident can occur without reference to the imperial power.

Imperialism is important to understand the imbalance of power in which cultures and peoples encounter each other. Imperialism plays a significant role in comprehending the contexts by which political, economic and social structures encounter cultures and people. It also helps to understanding the power imbalance that defines the contrast between the East and West. Robert Young has rightly remarked that “history lives on.... its effects are operating now” (Young 75.). Edward Said’s litmus and path-breaking masterpiece *Orientalism* identifies the exercise of power in the context of Imperialism as Orientalism.

This approach enabled the West to come to terms with the East and at the same time to construct the West's identity in contrast to the East.

Ever since the beginning of human existence, patriarchal order has greatly impacted on almost everything in the world. Patriarchy is also a part of colonization and imperialism. Colonization is itself a masculine phenomenon in which the male colonizers victimize native women. The construction of native women in terms of recognizable roles, images, models, and labels occur in Oriental discourses. Colonialism came to be considered in gendered terms and the colonial enterprise suggested "a masculine energy" and consequently the colonized countries were viewed as "feminine, sometimes with a teeming sexuality, waiting to be mastered" (McClintock 117). In Rider Haggard's novel, *King Solomon's Mines* (1980), a map projects the sprawling African continent as a supine female body imparting to the topography of the land and its luxuriant vegetation and hills – all the suggestions of an abundant female sensuality. The land which is also female is mapped in male fluids. Haggard's map hints at "a hidden order underlying industrial modernity and the conquest of the sexual and labour power of colonized women" (McClintock 3). The colonial enterprises always named the land as female: as a passive counterpart to the massive thirst of male knowledge: Caught in his gaze, the woman is naked subservient and vulnerable to his advances. The cult of portraying and presenting land as female began with Columbus who blundered into the Caribbean in search of India He argued that the ancient had erred in considering the earth round. Rather, he contends, "the earth was shaped like a woman's breast with a protuberance upon its submit in the unmistakable shape of a nipple" (McClintock 21). Columbus' image feminizes the earth as a cosmic breast to which the epic male hero is a tiny, lost infant yearning for the Edenic nipple.

Postcolonial studies continually emphasize gender roles, especially when dealing with the impact of the colonial process on women. It is a common notion that women in the colonized society suffer from exploitation by both colonized and Indigenous power structures. For example, Robert Young points out the double exploitation of women by the patriarchal structures of both colonial power and colonized Indigenous societies:

"For women, the problem centred on the fact that the conditions against which they were campaigning were the product of two kinds of oppression which put the antagonists of the nationalist struggle in the same camp: Patriarchal systems of exploitation were common to both colonial regimes and Indigenous societies. Women, therefore, "had to fight the double colonization of patriarchal domination in its local as well as its imperial forms" (Young 379).

Young's remarks refer directly to native women. McLeod in *Beginning Post Colonialism* explains that the term 'a double colonization' refers to how women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. Women are subject to representation in colonial discourses in ways that collude with patriarchal values. Thus, the phrase 'a double colonization' refers to the fact that women are twice colonized – by colonialist realities and representations, and by patriarchal ones too" (McLeod 175). One of the most dominant concepts in postcolonial feminism is 'Double Colonization'. It represents a key concept within Postcolonial Feminist discourse, positing that women in colonized and pre-colonized territories confront a dual subjugation wherein they are compelled to adhere to patriarchal norms within their local communities while simultaneously conforming to the dictates of colonial rulers. Thus, women contend with the imposition of both patriarchal and colonial structures, resulting in what is termed as double colonization. In *Imperial Fictions*, Rana Kabbani considers the Eastern female figure licentiousness, and Western heterosexual male desires. Kabbani argues that Eastern women in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were objectified as exotic creatures that epitomized and promised the assumed excessive sexual delights of the Orient. In the wake of Victorian imperialism, America and Asia were considered the porno tropes for the European imagination – a fantastic magic lantern of the mind to which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears. Thus, colonialism and patriarchy depict Eastern women in eroticized terms. Within the porno tropic culture women were represented as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess. Colonialism operated very differently for women and men. ‘Double colonization’ resulted when women were subject both to general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women. Leela Gandhi points out that some postcolonial theorists regard “the third-world woman as victim par excellence – the forgotten casualty of both imperial ideology, and native and foreign patriarchies” (*Gandhi 83.*).

Thus, the double oppression suffered by native women should be underscored. For, they are in Lois Tyson’s words “the victims of both colonialist ideology, which devalues them because of their race and cultural ancestry, and patriarchal ideology, which devalues them because of their sex. Sadly, these women have suffered patriarchal oppression not only at the hands of colonialists, but within their own patriarchal cultures as well” (Lois **Tyson 421**). Within the colonized societies, where male domination also occurs, the women are further viewed as a subgroup by their men, which in turn justify their continued subservient status. *Burmese Days*, a colonial novel, includes highly relevant passages about the exploitation of native women by both European and native males in the colony placing the females into a subaltern situation. It is the story of the subordination of Eastern women and the domination and exploitation of European and non-European males over native women.

Dividing the world ontologically into two groups, “the Occident” and “Orient”, the Orientalists defined them in an essentializing dichotomy and concept of culture thereby making the West fundamentally opposite to the East. The creation of the Orient is sine qua for the Occident to define itself by involving in such juxtapositions. Edward Said comments that the underpinning of such a demarcation is a line between the Orient and Occident that is “less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production” (Said 2). To the westerner, Said argues, “the Oriental was always like some aspects of the West to some general **romantics**” (Said 67). To the West Orient is a feminized and weak ‘Other’. Furthermore, to have an impact both in the West and in the Orient, Orientalism serves as a means for maintaining and mirroring a constructed Western hegemony in the world. Thus, Orientalism stresses the binaries that represent a privileged term over the other, such as Occident/Orient, logical/sensual, normal/aberrant, civilized/backward and so on. When the Orientalists or the “White Men” speak for the Orientals, they introduce a vision of the Orient that tends to be frozen and monolithic in time, demonstrating the consistency and strength the discourse has and how fixed the female and the inferior traits are in the Orient. Reina Lewis argues, “Orientalism is a homogenous discourse enunciated by a colonial subject that is unified, intentional and irredeemably male” (17).

Edward Said argues that Orientalism is an exclusively male domain because it was the Orientalist male who would create the (negative) identity of the Oriental women and the Orient in general. He completely obviates the role of women in the production of Orientalism as a discourse. The Orientalist male juxtaposed Western women with Oriental women to assert the superiority of the West. Western women, even if they remained an “other-within” were depicted as civilised, educated, modern and free to make their own choice. Both the Orient and Occident stand as subjects leading to the assumption that the Orient is monolithic with an unchanging history while the Occident is dynamic with an active history. Some colonialist feminists also pit the two worlds against

each other in their gender representations. Representing oriental women as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.,” and western women as “educated, modern [...] having control over their bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their decisions” simply widens the already existing huge gap in global sisterhood”(Mohanti 261). This “distinction between western feminist re-presentation of women in non-western cultures, and western feminist self-presentation” ” (Mohanti 261) agrees with the Orientalists’ self-presentation and stereotyping of eastern societies with definitional attributes. A. L. Mcfie in *Orientalism* demonstrates how an Orientalist representation of the West and the “Other” carries an East-West divide in an essentializing and homogenizing move:

Europe (the West, the “self”) is [...] essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, authentic, active, creative, and masculine, while the Orient (the East, the “other”) (a sort of surrogate, underground version of the West or the “self”) is [...] irrational, aberrant, backward, crude, despotic, inferior, inauthentic, passive, feminine, and sexually corrupt. The orientals, unlike occidentals, are by nature mysterious, menacing, irrational, demonic, and sexually corrupt (Mcfie 86).

Colonizers projected a villainous picture of Eastern men who were “traders in female bodies. They are the cruel captors who hold women in their avaricious grasp, who use them as chattels, as trading goods, with little reverence for them as human beings.”(Kabbani 78) Such a negative depiction was designed to construct an artificial contrasting image of Eastern men as barbaric and of Western men as “civilized.” Orientalist representations of women have all along been intended to convey a particular impression of them as passive, incapable of raising their voices, and always waiting for Westerners to advance their causes. Said reviews Flaubert’s treatment of an “Egyptian courtesan” who “never spoke of herself; she never represented her emotions, presence, or history” (Said 6). The representation of women as ‘Oriental other in colonial discourses have increasingly become a hard nut to crack, especially in the field of social history and cultural studies where “wide ranging questions of gender, ethnicity and empire are increasingly being addressed (Chaudari 22).

In *Orientalism* Said claims that European culture grows in strength and identity by setting itself off against an oriental other. The construction of European and British identities for self – representation is everywhere implied in the portrayal of the East. Orientalism produces the unshakable assumption of European superiority: with the East always functioning as the West’s negative foil. To propagate the Western nations’ supposed superiority and the Eastern ones’ putative inferiority, Eastern society was pitted against Western civilization and Eastern women against their Western counterparts. The Orientalist Male, embodied by the colonial subject, constructed the identity of Oriental men as barbaric, women oppressors, unworthy of trust among other negative traits while the European white male considered himself the epitome of civilization. As a result, the Orientalist male depicted Oriental women as ignorant, passive, poor and oppressed by local patriarchy. Interestingly, these same characteristics fuelled the fantasies of Orientalist males as they saw themselves as the liberators of these women from their local oppressors (Hasan 29-30). In Kabbani’s view, the representations of women reflected a standard Victorian prejudice, namely that all women were inferior to men; and that Oriental women were doubly inferior, being both women and Orientals. Women, that is to say, were part of the goods of the empire, the living rewards available to men. They were there to be used sexually. They also suggested since most of the eastern women were inherently licentious; they could be exploited and used as their sex dolls without any qualms. Gender dynamics, thus, formed the

foundation and prop to the security and maintenance of the imperial enterprise. , Edward Said argues that Orientalism is an exclusive male domain because it was the Orientalist male who created the (negative) identity of the Oriental women and the Orient in general. Women's role in the construction of an Oriental Other, however, does not only destabilize but also reinforce Orientalist realism. The contribution of women to the creation of Orientalist knowledge is a phenomenon that both reproduces and disrupts the dominant discourses of masculine Orientalism. This dialectical process, as a result, constitutes the foundation of the imminent feminist critique of Orientalism.

While patriarchy subalternized Western women within metropolitan societies, feminist Orientalists also spread the impression that western/European society is superior to African/Asian society, Western men are superior to Eastern men and Western/white women are superior to black/Asian women. When Western women are considered conscious of their rights, Eastern women are passive, submissive recipients of patriarchal domination. Imperialism always operates by constructing discursive positions for its subjects and works to suppress the voice of the colonized subjects. One of the pillars on which imperialism is built upon is gender: and the divisions of gender mediated the structure of imperialism. This echoes the colonizing project of “suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous **cultures.**” (Ashcroft 1). The European imperial propagandists stifled local languages and wiped out local cultures by exporting “European language, literature and learning as part of a civilizing **mission,**” (Ashcroft 1). Some feminists in the same manner wreak the same havoc on Indigenous women's experiences by imposing Western feminist agendas that are seldom consonant with their societies' material realities. Patriarchal oppression coupled with Orientalist manipulation of native women fore-grounded the postcolonial feminist notion of double colonization and gave it theoretical credence. The Orientalists wrote sensational tales about and depicted Eastern women with a marked vulgarization. The already oppressed women were represented in a demeaning manner by the Orientalists and thus, wore two badges of humiliation: as women and as “Orientals.” Gender to the imperialists is the foundational dynamic that shaped all aspects of the empire from the conduct of war to the drafting of statutes and regularities. The West's already deep-seated fantasy about eastern women was intensified by such representations, for the Orientalists were always on the look out to satisfy the West's preconceived, imaginary perceptions about the East. One specific feature of this representation is the excessive sexual titillation caused by their description, namely, that non-western women in general were preoccupied with sex and that they “spent their time in sexual preparation and in sexual intrigue”(Kabbani 26). Such fanciful representations demonstrated Eastern women's perceived sexual deviancy and rendered them objects of enjoyment for European men, who could enjoy them without any moral qualms, as these women were already possessed with sexual excitement and vehement carnal desires. Katheleen Wilson argues that articulation of Englishness always is linked to “empire building and exploration and colonial wars were gendered (9). Under this dire situation, in certain social contexts, women perform femininity as a necessary ‘masquerade’, they “learn to mimic femininity as a social mask” (Irigary 76). In a world colonized by male desires, women stage heterosexuality as an ironic performance that is no less theatrical for being a strategy for survival. Homi K. Baba calls this mimicry “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge (107). The Oriental depictions of the women deepened the Western belief that Eastern women were nothing more than chattel for men's use and sexual gratification. This distinctive picture of Eastern women, so materially different from Western ones, made them more appealing – always ready for sexual enjoyments. The Europeans always styled

themselves as disciplined, Apollonian, more responsible and masculine, whereas the Eastern women are sensual, childlike, Dionysian, irresponsible and female. The Victorian age reduced them “to body, to possession, to physical object” (Kabbani 64). The colonial presence made native women more vulnerable, as they were objectified and commodified along with other colonial spoils. The harem fantasies that highlighted Eastern women’s putatively excessive carnal nature presented them to the West as promiscuous. Women “were part of the goods of the empire, the living rewards that white men could, if they wished to, reap. They were there to be used sexually, and if it could be suggested that they were inherently licentious, then they could be exploited with no qualms whatsoever” (Kabbani 64).

As Western women were worse than “European prostitute[s]” in promiscuity and sexual dalliance, as Edward William Lane portrays Egyptian women in his *Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* (1836), Eastern lands appeared through Western lenses as brothels, where “sexual desires could be gratified to the hilt” (Kabbani 64), and whose inhabitants were only for enjoyment. So, the colonizers received a free license from the Orientalists to venture upon their (political, economic, and sexual) exploitations of distant lands. Distracting European men’s sexual gaze from Western women to the vulgarized Eastern ones encouraged colonialists to form a relationship of sensual desire with native women, but one of “platonic love” with superior Western women

Orientalism, as a socially constructed discourse, has the consistency and strength necessary to be able to have a long-lasting effect, achieving hegemonic status, but at the same time, it has inherent contradictions within itself. Thus, Orientalism and its masculine nature of depicting Oriental women

as exotic, passive and repressed women – a representation created by the colonial white male - was both reproduced and disrupted by the Female Orientalist gaze. The female Orientalists not only assumed their role as Orientalists - contributing to the creation and colonization of knowledge – to serve the purpose of superiority by creating an Oriental Other (Oriental women), but by doing this, at the same time, they were personifying and creating their identity as “others-within” by being the inferior and less recognized side of the power relations between western male and female that brought disruption to Orientalism.

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