Arab Representations and Neo-Orientalist Theses: A Critical Analysis

**Abstract**

The research subjects of this study are the Arab representations of the West. The aim is to record the competing views of Arab individuals and intellectuals in order to generate some understanding about the Arab attitudes towards the West. Also, a critical approach is brought by comparing the Arab representations with the neo-Orientalist theses, that presented Muslim representations of the West as rejecting, aggressive and anti-Western.

The analysis is carried out from the viewpoint of social representations, inspired by Serge Moscovici. The method used is discourse analysis that unravels the similarities and differences between the representations to construct a meta-narrative on the Arab Muslim discourse about the West and Westerners. The second phase of the analysis consist of the comparison of the Arab Muslim representations with the neo-orientalist claims. The study is a meta research gathering former studies. The corpus consists of two kinds of data: 1) interviews carried out among different social groups in Egypt, Syria and Morocco; and 2) discourses from secondary sources of prominent Arab intellectuals. Of those figures, within the intellectual movements, that have influenced the Arab intellectual history since early 1820s, I present Rifâ al-Tahtawi, Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad ʿAbduh, Taha Hussein, Sayyid Qutb, MichelʿAflaq, Ayatollah Khomeini, Osama bin Laden, Samir Amin, Mohamed A. Jabiri.

From this study focusing on Arabs, different patterns of representing the West can be outlined. The study attests that among the studied, there is no exclusive evidence of rejecting attitude towards the West. This result differs from the assumptions presented by leading scholars Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, and Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, and it highlights the fact that representations of the West frequently alter among Arab actors, whether religious or secular.

**Keywords**

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