# Southern insights on the Orient and Western Orientalisms[1]

**María CARDEIRA DA SILVA**

smamc@fcsh.unl.pt

CRIA (Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia) Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

**Orientalism?**

This is not another *critique* of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. We know that there is still some space for further discussion on this matter and that there are still people wanting to engage with it, but this is not our concern here. Nevertheless, the term has become inescapable for people like us, researching into and teaching on Arab and Islamic contexts and topics – and even more so when our *strategic location* is constantly under surveillance in times of Islamophobia and Islamophilia, wary eyes asking if we are with *Muslims* or against them, or, in a more sophisticated way, with *good Muslims* or their evil twins, *bad Muslims* (Mamdani 2004). Strangely, and dangerously, our position regarding Islam – as a monolithic and petrified *religion* – is presumed to be part of our own academic identity. Said's book or – as he wrote among other, very insightful things – his *metabook* – is timeless, both for good and for the wrong reasons. Here, however, we will be using the word 'Orientalism' in a narrow sense, referring to the production of humanities and social and cultural sciences on Arab and Islamic contexts and topics and, simply, discarding the nihilistic upshot of some post-Orientalist debates, assuming the political dimension of our researches and outputs. After all, and as Mitchell, appropriately out, Said's main (and often misunderstood) simple question addressed in *Orientalism* was 'How does one know the things that exist?' and 'To what extent are the "things that exist" constituted by the knower?' (Mitchell 2003, referring to

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Said, 1978: 5). And even if he was neither the first to address this nor, for sure, the last, we need to state it for the sake of transparency and, ultimately and paradoxically, for the sake of *science.*

Once we acknowledge the political dimension of our production, we may just keep it tamed, inside academy's walls, or rather, evaluate its potential power. Indeed, this was the conversation topic that inspired what was at first a small group of researchers and subsequently a network instigated by the rise of Islamophobia in southern Europe and then spread to other, more peripheral ones, especially in Latin America. More than debate on Gramsci's (1971), Bourdieu's (1984) or Said's (1996) critiques on intellectuals, our special concern was the prevention of global representations of Islam and political measures tailored and customised elsewhere – that is to say, in traditional, hegemonic contexts of Orientalist production, like France, the United Kingdom and the United States. Our question, still not answered, is 'Can the unrevealed peripheral approaches to the Orient produce or enlighten different frames that might induce different kinds of political representation of Islam and Arabs, or, better, de-centre the political talk from its obsessed focus on Muslims (and, ultimately, from all religious or/and cultural gate-keeping concepts)?' This may seem to be an oxymoron, since we ourselves are replicating that 'centrality' here; however, facing the inevitability of looking at the world without othering – or, at least until we found no alternatives to this – it might be a fruitful exercise to multiply and overlay different lenses.

That said, we are not intending to fight Orientalism from the outside. We are just trying to question, or evaluate, the political potential of peripheral scholarship and knowledge, meaning by this – and granting that the concept of periphery is problematic, if not just inaccurate – research and knowledge produced in politically peripheral countries, contexts and topics, as well as vernacular Orientalisms fashioned sideways. An important remark here is that this does not by any means imply the exclusion of research or researchers coming from other main centres of scholarship, which are obviously welcomed, in the same sense. Far be it for us to replicate the very national maps and cartographies that we are ourselves contesting. But we already know that academies, especially those departments devoted to the topics and areas of concern here, are frequently structured around their own *isnād*[2] (Arab/Muslim genealogy chains legitimizing authenticity, hence authority) and configured by national circumstances and compliances and their specific strategic cultural and political locations. For better or worse, our first conversations stem from a certain *cultural intimacy* (Hertzfeld 2004 [1997]).

**Friendship, cultural intimacy, academic intimacy**

As Dale Eickelman – whom we invited as discussant for our third network meeting, at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Conference in 2015 – notes, until the mid-20th century, scholarly research on North Africa was dominated by France, joined since the 1960s by the US and Britain. The major research centres that included North Africa were located primarily in northern Europe and the US. It was still like that when, and where, Angeles Ramirez – coming from Madrid – and I – coming from Lisbon – met Dale in the nineties in Morocco, as young anthropologists. At that time, and with the energy and thrill of people doing their first fieldwork, we gladly acknowledged the advantages of our peripheral situation, which allowed us to convey the best of the French and of the Anglophone approaches, which wish often disregard each other. Actually, we were often

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[2] «In some ways, historiography takes the same form as the traditions of the Prophet. The authenticity of any proposition is judged by the *isnād* or "chain" by which it descended from the past. Certain chains are deemed more trust-worthy than others. One makes reference to an earlier authority in order to substantiate a statement's authenticity or truth. The truth, therefore, is only as good as the *isnād* (chain) of its "construction"». Abu-Lughod 1987: 155

asked why they do not just talk to each other, and this led us to rethink our own academic worlds and to sharpen our political conscience regarding our own national Orientalisms.

Two (almost three) decades after that, many things have changed in all of these countries and Orientalism has been sufficiently discussed and dissected.[3] Prestige zones of theory and gate-keeping concepts of academic research on the 'Arab and Islamicate world' (Hodgson 1974) moved away, of course, from those proposed in the late eighties by Leila Abu-Lughod (1989), and Dale's The *Middle East. An Anthropological Approach* (1981) and its revised version including Central Asia (1989)[4], which we all make use of in our syllabi, could not keep pace with those changes, notwithstanding their enduring usefulness. New representations and fears invaded the European – and American – Orientalist landscape*,* which was often taken as an *Oriental* strike back. At the end of the 1980s, with the spread into Arab contexts (as well as into many others) of what was known at that time as 'political Islam', the predominant focus of the lenses used for looking at Arabs definitively became that of Islam. In fact, Islam so completely overcame the other obsolete folkloric and Orientalist filters (for example, those of tribes and harems) that the Arabs themselves were erased from people's field of vision or were diluted into a Muslim crowd.

What recovered the earlier form of the Orient was Islamic civilisation, and what was highlighted in this civilisation was the alleged subordination of politics to religion. This largely shaped the political field and interventions as well as frames and trends in scholarship and research. Political Islam, migrations, radicalisation and more recently refugees paved new ways for scholarship on Islam in Europe, and Middle Eastern and north African approaches became tainted by them. Scholarship in Middle East and North Africa, shift to *hot* political themes, and even though *harem* and *Islam*, two of Abu-Lughod's theoretical metonyms, kept their relevance, now, under a post-feminist and post-secular frame (Habermas 2008), old zones of prestige, like North Yemen and Morocco, have been replaced by Lebanon and Egypt (Deeb and Winegar 2012b). This unbounded Middle East, invited anthropology (and, I would say, Orientalism in general) to become less of an area studies project and more a theoretical and global set of projects (Suad 2015:17).

Keeping in mind both the political conscience of our respective academic traditions and genealogies and the sense of advantage we have experienced before, and facing the urgent need to fight increasing Islamophobia in Europe – and to elaborate on Islamophilia, its symmetrical twin – Angeles Ramirez and I restarted informal discussions with other colleagues, in order to unravel the eventual potential of our peripheral position.

In our academic practices – presenting papers in joint conferences, lecturing and networking – we had developed a *habitus* (more in the Maussian sense than in Bourdieu's) and a developing sense of academic intimacy that largely resulted from the marginal location of our departments in the academic field. Our shared history and southerly neighbourhood has led us to share close cultural areas of research and fieldwork (mainly North African and South-Western Mediterranean), which strengthen our ties and joint *savoir faire*. Nevertheless, and paradoxically, this closeness (*qariba*, a Moroccan would say) has sharpened our awareness of the specificities of our own national histories, geographies and political economies (not to mention class and gender) and the role they

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[3] Discussion continues, however, between French and Anglophone academics about who first called attention to this and theorized the risks of Orientalism; in general, the French critique is less prolific.
[4] See Bowman 2012 on Eickelman's justification for this addition.

still play in the representations, constitution and current definition of all academic fields regarding Muslims and Arab contexts.

**Peripheral Orientalisms**

New generations of researchers have emerged in the field, and some, although responding to an increasing cosmopolitanisation of academies, in a more or less activist way embraced this optimistic awareness of peripheral locations. Our informal network soon came to follow the colonial links where Iberian Orientalisms easily ran and came across a flourishing setting of Latin American debate on Orientalism. Crossing the Mediterranean in the same vein, we gathered new voices and new insights from different Mediterranean countries, both south and north.

The present issue builds on the debates developed in a more structured way since 2013 by that informal network of anthropologists, historians, Arabists and political scientists working on what we tentatively identify as *peripheral Orientalisms*. Being aware of the ambiguous location of the Iberian and Ibero-American world as both producer and subject of Orientalism, initial discussions were comparative and led to questions regarding academic production and its political configurations in Portugal, Spain, Brazil and Argentina. A second step engaged scholars working on parallel processes in Morocco, Italy and Mexico. We have now had meetings in Lisbon (2014, *Orientalismos periféricos. Academia e estudos árabes e islâmicos em países do sul europeu e Americano* CRIA /Azimute, TEIM), Rabat (2015, *Autres géographies de l'Orientalisme. Académie et études arabes et islamiques au sud de l'Europe, en Amérique Latine et en Afrique du Nord*. CJB-Rabat, GIAOP-UaM, CRIA-FCSH-UNL), (2015 MESA Annual Meeting), Mexico City (2016 *Semana Arabe in Mexico*, CIDE-Mx), Catania (2016 SeSaMO Conference) and Boston (2016 MESA Annual Meeting). The goal of our meetings has been to identify similarities as well as singularities among these different Orientalisms: their entanglement and their many relations with more central ones, especially the Anglophone and Francophone. However, as mentioned, we have also wanted to question the political potential of this peripheral scholarship, particularly in order to prevent the global spread of Islamophobia. It was also in this sense that it seemed appropriate for our discussion to organise thematic conversations at the MESA Annual Meetings at a moment when several international associations, like MESA and the American Anthropological Association (AAA) are also unequivocally assuming the inevitable political constraints of our collective knowledge production and dealing with its potential and effects[5].

**Structuring**

In our first talks, and in order to better structure our discussions and for a more systematic comparative approach of the Orientalism genealogies in peripheral countries, we have identified some core questions: Was Orientalist scholarship part of a colonial project or of a national one? What role did Orientalism play in each ethnogenetic regional and national configuration? How have class, gender and other social markers configured the national orientalist production? Do Orientalism producers overlap with orientalised subjects? Have these so-called peripheral Orientalisms produced criptorientalisms, or internal Orientalisms (or trans-Orientalisms, as someone sugested)? What are the current functions of national Orientalist scholarship in international affairs? What role does this scholarship play today in managing national religious

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[5] See, for instance, the proposal of Amendment at the 2016 Annual Members Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) for the removal of the word "non-political" in Article 1, Section 2 of the organization's bylaws.

diversity? Which are the national current zones of theory production concerning Arab and Islamic topics?

**A Portuguese insight**

The Portuguese case is perhaps one of the more illuminating of this peripheral localization and may be usefully introduced here to help understand the relevance of these questions.

Despite Eva-Maria von Kemnitz's praise of the pioneering of Portuguese Orientalism, the Portuguese scholarship produced on Arabs and Muslims it is not deeply anchored in a strong academic Orientalism. Although we can talk of a Portuguese Empire, Portuguese Orientalism – both academic and vernacular modern Orientalism, in Said's terms – is mostly part of a national project, one that was more related to the construction of a national identity than to its 'colonies' (Moreira 2000, Cardeira da Silva 2005). Portugal contacts with Arabs and Islam were historically distant. Portuguese colonialism in Arab and/or Islamic contexts is old enough to be tamed and thought of as politically innocuous nowadays, and when Portuguese colonialism took the shape of a modern project in the 19th century and entered into 'late colonialism', it did not have colonies in the Middle East or North Africa.

Portuguese colonialism can be said to have been in a subaltern position vis-à-vis other international and colonial powers. Administered by a small semi-peripheral country with at best a weak economic centre, it was sustained by a dictatorial regime and lasted until 1975, later than other European colonialisms (Vale de Almeida 2004). This is in line with the tributary or affluent character of Portuguese Orientalism, pretty much connected with Paris, and following the French tendencies of Orientalism, which we can take as defining its nature as a spin-off or a subaltern Orientalism. Thus, the Portuguese 'Arabism' – because, there never was actually an institutionalised Islamology in Portugal (Vakil 2004) – plays an important role in national regionalisation; it promotes Portugal's Europeanisation through (as) the sacrifice of its southern and poorest folky and Orientalised provinces. In the same move, the intellectuals engaged in this process are socially promoted in distinguishing (in the Bourdieusian sense) themselves from the people that they themselves have Orientalised and folklorised (see further on this in Cardeira da Silva 2005). Just as others have spoken about a peripheral or subaltern colonialism, therefore, so can we also speak about a peripheral Orientalism and a kind of crypto-Orientalism for Portugal. Ultimately, however, as Vakil put it, one can feel the anxiety of being at the same time a consumer of Western images on the Orient and its victim, aware of being a subject of other forms of Orientalisation (2004), something that, in my view, has increased with the financial crisis in Europe. Just as, in past times, the Orientalist view of the centre turned itself, albeit somewhat timidly, towards the northern shores of the Mediterranean, seeking to establish new cultural frameworks for its incidence and creating, for instance, a sub-discipline of Anthropology of the Mediterranean, so, more recently, has the same central vision, now of the crisis, once more taken hold of the stigmatising frame, again pushing southern Europe towards the side of the Orient (Cardeira da Silva:2012, Herzfeld:2013)

Nevertheless, the paths of decolonisation, and the particular recent history of interaction with some of the Muslim populations coming from the more recent ex-colonies (Guinea, Mozambique), reconfigured Orientalist projections on Muslims which, in any case, maintained the tendency to be romanticised and somehow Islamophile. This was itself made possible due to the resilience and

centrality of Luso-tropicalism. Luso-tropicalism is an underlying rhetoric of Portuguese colonialism that praises the distinctively Portuguese soft form of colonialism, allegedly promoting racial and cultural miscegenation, which still lasts today deeply embedded and barely undisputed in the construct of 'the Portuguese way of being'. It is present both in institutional and individual rhetoric. This concept was proposed by Gilberto Freire – a well-known Brazilian ideologist – to glorify the virtues of Brazilian hybridism and support multiculturalism. According to Freire, the historical roots of Luso-tropicalism were to be found in the multicultural layers of Portugal's own national history: since its origin, Portugal has known how to incorporate difference - namely concerning the Arab presence - into its identity. It was this legacy of genuine tolerance and miscegenation that later on – and especially after the Bandung Conference - softened Portuguese colonialism and produced what he called Luso-tropicalism.

To sum up, Portugal has an ambiguous relationship with Arabs and Islam, and some authors have already reflected the on invisibility of Muslims Portuguese in the public space, or on the particular ways they are staged or exhibited in specific situations in Portuguese cultural landscape (Vakil 2003, 2004, 2012, Tiesler 2008, 2005, 2000, Cardeira da Silva 2005, 2012). Portuguese people *tend to think* that their national identity is special 'tolerant' regarding religious and cultural differences. This is anchored in the Luso-tropicalist trope, which underlines the particularities of Portugal's allegedly *soft* colonialism, which, in turn, finds its roots in a historical *convivenza* similar to that of other Andalusian regions. In modern Portuguese colonialism in Islamic (Occidental and Oriental African) contexts, the issue of race eluded (or erased) Islam. Portugal has always been a country of emigration more than immigration. The first (non-black) Muslims to arrive from the Portuguese ex-colonies had a social and political status and alliances with the Portuguese political apparatus and economical and finances elites, and it was they who built the hegemonic template of the Portuguese Muslim community (*Comunidade Islamica de Lisboa*, the Islamic Community of Lisbon, CIL) that still persists, and which eludes all other Muslim groups in the country.

The invisibility of Muslims in Portugal extends itself to the academic field where there are only a few specialists on Islamic topics and where the social sciences do not take Islam 'as a problem'. If this is good (although often not intentional), it entails a general disregard for micro-policies, which are necessarily being implemented, especially since the beginning of the present century, when Portugal began to host Muslim minorities with whom it had no historical or colonial relationship (mainly people from Pakistan and Bangladesh, Mapril 2012), and when it started following European directives and trends regarding 'minority integration'.

This invisibility or 'pacified' public landscape is attractive and politically relevant not only to national politics and international affairs but also to powerful Muslim institutions, like the Agakhan Foundation which is now moving its headquarters to Lisbon. Meanwhile, the pacified celebration of Luso-tropicalism often turns or it is translated into a Portuguese *convivenza* – for instance in the Islamic festivals that take place in sites like Mértola (which became the icon of Portuguese 'tolerance' through the exhibition and monumentalisation of an archaeological stratigraphy that testifies to Portugal's Arab and Islamic roots) – and became an attraction to Spanish *revertidos* – (the reverted, as they say, not converted), coming especially from Granada, and who authenticate there, through material heritage, their uninterrupted identities as Andalusian Muslims[6].

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[6] See 'Reconquistas patrimoniais: participação e exclusão de muçulmanos na festivalização do Al-Andaluz'. Paper presented at the APA Congress, Coimbra.

On the other hand, it is the same supposed Portuguese 'tolerance' (or ignorance, one may say) that made it possible for some Iranian Shiites to go to the Catholic shrine of Fatima with no big social or political national strain (in fact, it is the Sunni community that reacts more vehemently to this (Cardeira da Silva 2005, Vale de Almeida 2004). Thus, one can say that Portugal's political and economic power in global terms today is innocuous or irrelevant, even though it has a strategic location in the European Union and its Atlantic, so-called vocation, which might be interesting for some neighbouring Arab countries. This irrelevance of Portugal turns it into a privileged landscape to play and re-enact identities and particular models of cultural and political authority that deserve to be investigated.

There are advantages in this Portuguese peripheral way of looking (more as a consumer than as a producer of the Orientalist stuff. The peripheral and subaltern way of looking brings with it a certain candor (as we have seen, for example, in Mértola, that became a *village-museum* by the hand of the archaeologist Cláudio Torres, which is constantly evoked in order to exalt our proverbial tolerance). But it would be naïve to think that it is only this candor that allows a mollified gaze *on* Arabs. Portugal is a peripheral but western country, more or less innocuous in political and economic terms, with a history of colonization that is sufficiently distant to allow for the relatively relaxed recycling of a past full of conflict with the Arabs to be turned into a heritage of sharing and cultural diversity. Internally, the rhetoric of Luso-tropicalism has emerged brand new from this recycling process, and many of our Arab partners have tolerated this. If for no other reason than to provide something in exchange for this recognition, we Portuguese people, armed with the disadvantage of our peripheral situation and, on the other hand, with the 'proximity to the Oriental world' into which we are so often slotted, should be the first to take off the glasses that the central vision provides us We should create our own point of view about people (Arabs or non-Arabs, Muslims and non Muslims), before ostracising them and cataloguing them as *good* or *bad Muslims*, immigrants or terrorists, or subordinating them to our desires, whether they are erotic or salvationist in nature.

This must not be taken, in any way, as a praise of the Luso-tropicalism illusion, which upholds the myth that Portuguese people are not racists or *Islamophobes* so we do not have to worry; actually, this denial might be more dangerous than any revealed discrimination. I want to stress here that the above does not mean that I take Islamophobia as something that is produced somewhere in some central place as a response to a 'particular' and contextualised 'problem' and that spreads from there to other places where, ultimately, this problem does not pertain. There are many examples that oppose this idea.[7] I do not want, moreover, in any way to 'naturalise' Islamophobia, as a 'spontaneous' answer or reaction to a social or economic phenomenon. I rather assume that Islamophobia – like any form of racism – is something with its own, and independent and latent existence, which is politically activated and spreads when the social and economic conditions are favourable. In such circumstances and since history so plainly testifies to its epidemic drift, then all efforts to stop its progression seem valuable. And Portugal is not, of course, immune to this, as much Portuguese people like to say otherwise.

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[7] We can recall here, for instance, the 2009 referendum in Switzerland on the interdiction of Mosque minarets' construction , which votes in favor came exactly from those cantons where people had almost no contact with the Muslim population, while those living in areas with larger Muslim immigrant population opposed the initiative (see Haenni 2005).

As Alberto Bargados distinctively shows in his article on 'New Orientalisms and Jihadist menace in Spain', it is dangerous to anchor current Orientalistic visions and Islamophobia to atavist histories and genealogical representations or some sort of immanent orientalism: epistemologically, this goes directly against our efforts to de-naturalise cultural facts, while politically, it might elude the discursive resources that in each context and period support the current domination strategies.


**Thinking through peripheral Orientalism**

What can we find of interest in this example of genealogical approach for our collective reflection here and to engage in a more participative debate? Not very much, if we take it by itself. But let me pursue this using some other ideas that I have picked up in some of our meetings that might be examples of entangled pathways to think Orientalism out of the box. At the last MESA meeting, for example, I was listening to Cecilia Baesa's paper on Syrian refugees in Brazil[8] and I was struck by the way she complained about the imported Islamophobia following global trends that had not been, until now, usual in Brazil. In Portugal and other peripheral countries of southern Europe and Latin America, exactly the same occurs. Then, I also heard someone from the audience commenting that the small numbers like those presented by Cecilia regarding the refugees Brazil was presently accommodating were irrelevant in thinking about the global 'problem' of the refugee crisis. Our point is precisely to underline the potential of these 'marginal casesand case studies, to enlighten the global discussion on matters like this. Why should it be that small numbers were so scary in some (bad) cases (Appadurai 2006), and irrelevant in other (good) cases?

We want to underscore the importance of different social and political experiences – even if in small numbers – to prevent an acritical spread and diffusion of global directives to fight Islamic radicalisation and the ensuing Islamophobia, as well as to inspire 'out-of-the-box' approaches to Islam. Following that aim, we present here some outputs from our first meeting, in Lisbon, 2014, where various participants on the margins of Orientalism tried to de-centre its maps and go more deeply into its inherent complexities and contradictions. Even if they do not answer straightforwardly the questions referred to above, they do, nevertheless, all engage in an effort to stretch and dismember Orientalism's maps at (from) its margins.

Leonor Losa bring us a case of *schizophonia*[9] that allows a Portuguese fadista (fado singer), Ricardo Ribeiro, and a Lebanese oud player and composer, Rabih Abou-Khalil, to engage in a musical collaboration and to create an orientalist soundscape that emerges from what she designates as a cross cultural empathy. She calls for a reading of 'popular' Orientalism supported by expressive culture as a way of action, rather than subordination. In her view, the new imaginative geography of this soundscape is a subjective and agentive mode of reclaiming and materializing the marginal condition that the 'south' has assumed in Europe, especially after the European economic and political 'crisis'. We can find different types of these vernacular and subjective exploitations of Orientalism in other texts of this issue. Paulo Pinto, for instance, talks about different kinds of Orientalism in Brazil. Among others, he pays attention to the 'native orientalism', a retrieval by Middle Eastern immigrants and their descendants, who, after validating it with their own 'authenticity', used it as a reinforced capital to negotiate their social and cultural position in Brazilian society, thus contribute to and even reinforce the mainstream Oriental stereotypes.

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[8] 'Syrian refugees in Brazil: negotiating identity in times of economic crisis'. MESA Annual Meeting 2016.
[9] The condition of sound or sounds separated from their sources (Schafer 1969).

Faced with these examples (which are replicated in other texts), one could be tempted to emphasize the potential empowerment under this 'Orientalism at large'. But, in the end, this instrumental vision of Orientalism might just as well reinforce its indwelling force as a structure of power. As Alberto Bargados shows us, Orientalist representations can also be used to naturalize Islamophobia, as it is the case in Spain, where historical justifications and configurations of the *moro* as the enemy seem to disguise political motivations and regimes of truth of the present.

In any case, the plasticity of Orientalism – which might well be one of the reasons for its endurance – is not new. It emerges in the way it is appropriated by different agents and for different purposes, and it is sometimes imbued with opposite meanings; it also manifests itself in the way it has been articulated with different structures and narratives, such as nationalism. Mediano, in his review of Gasquet's book 'El llamado de Oriente. Historia Cultural del Orientalismo argentino', illustrates why there is a reason in the Argentinian case to discard Said's Orientalism, as Orientalism was mainly a means to build the nation. But, on the other hand, he also reinforces the power of the Orientalist frame when it elucidates its suitability to depict and structure other landscapes (such as the Pampas and the Argentinian desert) once imported from the Empire. Once again, this underpins the inherent force of Orientalism cage, which even at its core, at the margins of the Empire, acts over a bared and peripheral territory, expanding its imperial impulse and transferring its expertise through colonial maps, unresponsive to culture specificities and landscape: this is what Joana Lucas argues for, in her analyses of the tourist gaze in Mauritania under the French Western Africa mandate.

The possibilities of multiple articulations of Orientalism with different and apparently opposing narratives are splendidly demonstrated by Juan José Vagni through the analysis of the inventive efforts of Rodolfo Gil Benumeya to create new imaginative geographies at the beginning of XX century. Moved by the dream of a civilizational turn mediated by Spain, and leaded by Latin America and the Arab world, Benumeya does not hesitate to make use of Spanish Africanism and Arabism, Panislamism and Panarabism, Moroccan Nationalism, Andaloucism, Hispanism and Arab American diasporas thinking, to convey his plan, framed and seasoned by orientalistic depictions. On a different perspective, Francisco Freire stretches Orientalism beyond modernity and the imperial metropolis, by engaging on an archeology of early Euro-Saharan contacts, taking us to the 15th century in Southwestern Mauritania. Making use of both western historiography and local oral history, he shows us mirrored representations that do not conform with the conventional Orientalist dichotomies. Tracking the same path of the Portuguese history of Arabism, Eva von Kemitz claims for the Portuguese pioneering in the field. Nevertheless, she discards its inclusion in Said's Orientalism, dismissing its political and imperial dimension. In the same vein, Bernabé López García presents Spanish Orientalism as a field build around Spain's 'own domestic Orient', within the strict scope of Andalusian studies, and with late contacts with International circuits of European Orientalist Centres.

Taken together, all these approaches engage in a joint and on-going effort to multiply and overlay various, alternative perspectives – both historical and contemporary – on Arabs and Muslims, hoping to counter, even if in a modest way, the epidemic myopia that is dragging us towards a global Islamophobia.

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