

The Fortunes of Orientalism in Contemporary Arab Intellectual Discourse: Hassan Hanafi's Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism as a Model

La Fortune de l'orientalisme dans le discours intellectuel arabe contemporain : Introduction à la science de l'occidentalisme de Hassan Hanafi comme modèle

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Abstract

The interest in Orientalism within contemporary Arab thought arises within the framework of extricating the Arab self from its civilizational impasse, despite intense methodological divergences among intellectuals pursuing the same goal. They responded to Orientalism by unveiling mechanisms that refute its fabrications while appreciating its merits, exemplified in Hassan Hanafi's writings, particularly Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism .

This research paper addresses: With what methodological awareness did Hassan Hanafi engage Orientalist writings across their axes within his modernization project?

From a methodological perspective, the study employs descriptive and analytical mechanisms in a manner that accords with the interpretive and hermeneutic nature of the inquiry.

The study concludes that Hassan Hanafi's project remains a highly contested intellectual legacy. Divergent evaluations of his contribution—ranging from its celebration as a pioneering model of heritage renewal to its criticism as an ideologically driven reinterpretation—reveal the continuing debate over the epistemological foundations of modern Arab-Islamic thought.

Keywords: Orientalism; Science of Occidentalism; Hassan Hanafi; Contemporary Arab intellectual discourse.

Resumé (in French)

L'intérêt pour l'orientalisme dans la pensée arabe contemporaine s'inscrit dans le cadre de l'extraction de la subjectivité arabe de son impasse civilisationnelle, malgré l'intensité des divergences méthodologiques – chez les hommes de pensée – dans les voies menant au même objectif. Ils ont répondu à l'orientalisme en révélant le mécanisme garantissant la réfutation de ses calomnies et la valorisation de ses mérites, démarche illustrée dans certains écrits de Hassan Hanafi, notamment son ouvrage *Introduction à la science de l'occidentalisme*.

L'utilité de cette recherche réside dans la tentative de réponse à la problématique suivante : avec quelle conscience méthodique Hassan Hanafi a-t-il abordé l'écriture orientaliste dans ses différents axes, dans le cadre de son projet moderniste ?

D'un point de vue méthodologique, cette étude mobilise des mécanismes descriptifs et analytiques en adéquation avec la nature interprétative et herméneutique de l'investigation.

L'étude conclut que le projet intellectuel de Hassan Hanafi demeure un héritage intellectuel profondément controversé. Les évaluations divergentes de sa contribution — allant de sa célébration comme modèle pionnier de renouvellement du patrimoine à sa critique en tant que réinterprétation à visée

idéologique — mettent en lumière la persistance du débat autour des fondements épistémologiques de la pensée arabo-islamique contemporaine.

Mots clés (in French): orientalisme; science de l'occidentalisme; Hassan Hanafi; discours intellectuel arabe contemporain.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Discussing Orientalism with a sense of definitiveness and absolutism—as acknowledged by critical practices that have encompassed Arab and Islamic thought—appears nearly impossible, given its such profound ramification and expansion that it compels us to revisit its spheres of operation more than once. It defies reason to confine it to what some Orientalists said, or even to the defenders who confronted them within the bounds of mobilization rhetoric and biased advocacy for binary oppositions: self versus other, East versus West, progress versus backwardness, and so forth. The scientific objectivity required in addressing Orientalism mandates a historical scrutiny to trace the historical relationship between East and West (Hanafi, 1981). Orientalism is not homogeneous in a way that allows us to issue wholesale judgments for or against it, nor does it permit encompassing its vastness unless we identify the common thread in the stance of

Orientalists who did not all agree on what prevails in their writings about Easterners rendered reactive by the impact of the other's actions upon them. Thus, images of Orientalism served as a scene reflecting the reality of the East and referring it to something in the Orientalists' perspective, through which they revealed their view of us, clarifying our stance toward their view via responses that exposed the

extent to which our researchers were alienated into what the other defined (Said, 1978).

It can be said that what was realized in the discourse of Orientalism with regard to us/the Eastern self does not exceed a distorted image in which we acquiesced to the validity of what the other defined about us. Orientalism came to express, in its mechanisms and performance, the mentality of a deeply rooted culture of dominance in the consciousness of the other/West, which clearly reflects the tension in the historical relationship between East and West. The Orientalist discourse imposed collision blasts on the world against peoples whom these collisions compelled to confront it in defense of themselves and to avert looming dangers (Najdi, 2005).

In the context of protecting the self from the peril of dissolution into the other and losing identity amid the storm of Orientalist studies and the ferocious cultural assault dictated by globalization conditions, Hassan Hanafi's attempt emerged to establish a new science countering an old one embodied in Orientalism—this new science being Occidentalism. Just as we were the object of study in Western thought, the West becomes the object of study in Eastern thought.

The mission Hanafi shouldered sought to awaken the self's consciousness from its slumber and warn it of surrounding dangers, arguing that the self is capable of studying the other's situation just as the West is capable of studying our situation from all its aspects. The complex of Western superiority stems from its study of Eastern civilization, whereas we, to this day, have not benefited from our study of Western civilization (Hanafi, 1981, pp. 50-55).

Thus, in Hanafi's view, the purpose of this study is to transition from a state of assimilation with the West to a state of opposition to it, since the self belongs to a system divergent from the Western system. This is a dilemma to which a group of Arab thinkers aligned with what is termed Occidentalism attended, addressed in two directions:

Occidentalism is the transformation of the other into a studied self and the self into a studying self, meaning rendering the other an object subject to study, treatment through critique, refutation, and analysis—i.e., Occidentalism is the study of Western civilization in terms of its givens, achievements, results, and pioneers. Among the Arab thinkers and researchers who represented this direction: Hassan Hanafi, Mahmoud Madi, Ahmed Al-Sheikh (Hanafi, 1981).

The second direction indicates that Occidentalism is: the cognitive and research behavior entirely influenced by the West, dazzled by its achievements and embracing its givens—meaning the subjugation, defeat, and weakness of the self before the other, which created a traditional orientation that sees the world only through the other's eyes and finds no outlet for its crises except through solutions offered by the other. Among the Arab researchers who represented this direction: Abdullah Al-Sharif and Tayeb Tizini (Najdi, 2005).

Returning to the first axis, we can situate Hassan Hanafi's project, which revolves around an approach to heritage and renewal that constitutes, for him, a lifelong project, an integrated cognitive and philosophical practice, and a dense solidarity strategy. Hanafi aims through this project to renew religion and uplift the nation by working on three fronts: the relationship with heritage, the relationship with the West, and the relationship with reality, using four methodological tools: phenomenological analysis to reconstruct rational and transmissional sciences; liberation theology to reconstruct religious sentiment; and the science of Occidentalism to diminish the West and transform it into an object of reading and transcendence (Hanafi, 1981).

These three fronts scientifically and methodologically frame the primary elements in the renaissance process: the stance on heritage answers the question of

self and being; the stance on Western heritage poses the problem of the other and the issue of modernity; while the stance on reality is a rereading of the interactive relationship between self and reality. Hanafi reduces the three fronts to a single duality: transmission and creativity. The first two fronts appear different in vision and cultural source, but in truth, they share a single identity—that of transmission: "Both are heritage, the heritage of the self or the heritage of the other; Ibn Taymiyyah said or Marx said, Al-Ghazali said or John Stuart Mill said; in this sense, both are Salafist movements that make transmission the basis of reason, as in the contemporary Salafist movement or secular or modern directions" (Hanafi, 1981, p. 25).

Collectively, the three fronts form a coherent holistic structure, as rereading heritage with methodological consciousness, civilizational self-reliance, and arming oneself with modern philosophical givens, methodologies, and human sciences reveals the bright moments in this heritage, highlights its universal and humanistic values, and manifestations of creativity and creation. This contributes to shaping Western consciousness as assumptions (the universality of Western civilization, the inevitable superiority of the Western human, the humanity of Western values...), all of which become subjects of questioning and intellectual revision (Said, 1978).

2. Conceptual Definitions of Orientalism

Numerous definitions of Orientalism have attempted to capture its conceptual boundaries, framed by each researcher's epistemic background and ideological starting points. "Since it is born of multiple and diverse factors varying in time and place, every attempt to define it thus turns into a form of futility, due to its assimilation with the Arab and Islamic self—this assimilation that prevents it from being defined as an object before it, except to simultaneously emerge as a connected and manifested self through and via it" (Hanafi, 1981).

This overlap largely explains the failure of Arab and Muslim intellectuals to agree on a definition of Orientalism. Between the Islamic definition by Muhammad Al-Bahi and other Islamists, equating it with colonialism and missionary work; the liberal Edward Said's confinement of it to teaching the East, writing about it, or researching it; and the Marxist Sadiq Jalal Al-Azm, who saw it merely as a product of modern European bourgeoisie—Orientalism remains multiple in concept, content, and objectives, with diverse historical phases and geographical locales, seeking a definition where all these Arab and Muslim intellectuals converge.

Since Orientalism was neither historically nor geographically singular, we assert that while it is true a large part of it and its representatives—especially since the Crusades, if not long before—found itself in direct or indirect European colonialism over numerous Arab and Islamic regions, strongly supported by such Orientalism and its Orientalists, this should not imply that all Orientalism supported colonialism. We have many names of Orientalists who opposed colonialism in its old form and the hegemony that followed, some even adopting Arab and Islamic causes, going further to embrace its religion and glorify its Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Orientalism is the study of the history, figures, and events of the East as created by the West—a rigorous probing of radical questions in culture and humanity, revolving around concepts of truth and representation, power and power relations, self and other awareness; around the conceptions humans develop of themselves and the world, and the distinctions they establish between self and other. It is also a study of the mechanism by which these conceptions and distinctions harden into knowledge—knowledge that, when formed in a context of power and authority (politically, economically, culturally), becomes a construct claiming the

status of truth, absolutely obscuring the reality of being mere representation, the reality of embodying the self's consciousness of the other more than embodying the other itself—a generative construct for the self, operating under conditions originating primarily from the observed self, and secondarily and tertiarily from the other as the object of knowledge (Said, 1978).

As Edward Said sees it, Orientalism is simply the historical material and distinctive space of Western culture that he analyzes, or the West's conception of the East as a distinct geographical-cultural space. It studies the intellectual problems, conceptual upheavals, real disruptions, and fundamental paradoxes underlying Eastern civilizational development—scientifically, culturally, politically, and militarily—as well as its manner of observing the other and interacting with it, and the patterns of economic, cultural, and political relations it established with the other. These Eastern systems are presented in a critical intellectual exposition practiced by the West to understand itself and the East, culminating in posing the problem of the relationship between self and other as distinct essences in terms of starting points, conceptions, methodologies, and objectives (Said, 1978; Najdi, 2005).

3. Hanafi's Occidentalism as a Counter to Orientalism

Many view one of the most prominent traits of the late Hassan Hanafi as his resistance to classification. When he plunged his pen sharply into the body of heritage and dissected it based on his philosophical vision, he returned to secularism—which he had attempted to implant in the hierarchy of sacred Islamic texts—directing critical arrows at it, especially its Eastern form, calling for a new

foundation for the science of Occidentalism, and criticizing what he saw as the severe detachment of Arab secularism from Eastern heritage and its tight connection to Western heritage (Hanafi, 1981).

Occidentalism literally means "the science of the West," addressed by Arabs and Muslims as a reverse reaction against Orientalism, which means "the science of the East." The core aim of Occidentalism is to conduct research on the West on behalf of Westerners themselves—just as the West did to the East through Orientalism.

Hassan Hanafi established the science of Occidentalism in confrontation with the science of Orientalism, considering that European Orientalism endowed the Western mind with a superiority complex as a studying self, comprehensive in information and analysis about the East—thought, human, and civilization. It also generated an inferiority complex in the Easterner as a studied self. Hanafi studied Occidentalism for its profound impact on Arab memory and taste, where the West became the powerfully influential model in various reform schools. Thus, neither Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's religious reform, nor Rifa'a al-Tahtawi's civil and cultural reform, nor Shibli Shumayyil's secular reform and those who share his view, amount to more than echoes of Eastern fascination with the Western self, its values, culture, and tangible achievements (Hanafi, 1981, pp. 50-55).

Hanafi advocates ridding ourselves of the illusion of Western superiority or treating the West as the sole source of knowledge, deeming this illusion an essential part of cultural colonialism and the inflation of the other in the view of the Arab self. To this end, he rejects notions of integration and similarity between Arab and Western culture; rather, he sees opposition and conflict in their roots, values, and outcomes as the truth that sound intellectual inquiry should reach.

If "Westernization" manifests in attempts to subject Islamic and Arab culture to Western cultural hegemony, then one of the primary goals of Occidentalism is to confront Westernization. According to Hanafi, the science of "Occidentalism" aims to absolve modern revolutions of their stumbles, complete the era of liberation from colonialism, transition from military liberation to economic, political, and cultural liberation—and above all, civilizational liberation. As long as the West resides in the heart of each of us as a source of knowledge and a reference framework to which everything is referred for understanding and evaluation, we will remain deficient and in need of guardians.

The task of the science of Occidentalism is to dismantle European centrism and demonstrate how European consciousness took center stage in modern history within its own civilizational environment. This new science's mission is to return Western culture to its natural boundaries after it spread beyond them during its colonial peak, through control of major publishing houses and scientific research centers. Its task is also to dispel the myth of world culture with which the West unifies itself, equating it with its own culture—a culture every people must adopt to transition from imitation to modernity.

It appears Hanafi sought to understand the West by confining sources of knowledge about it, relying on clarifying its intellectual, religious, and environmental components—the hypothesis from which Hanafi attempted to launch the foundation of Occidentalism. However, the truth overlooked by Hanafi's mind is that Western civilization is built on rationality aimed at continuous progress, representing the thought and civilizational value of the West (Najdi, 2005; Said, 1978).

4.Critical Synthesis

From the foregoing, we can conclude that the science of Occidentalism is not a history of events but a description of essences. Its aim is to elucidate the unity of European consciousness that shaped the unity of the European project, requiring a methodology that combines the generality of analyses with the specificity of evidence—between pure intellectual and conceptual analysis and pure scientific and historical analysis.

Hanafi's attempt to establish the foundations of the science of Occidentalism in this manner is fraught with numerous difficulties and obstacles. Hanafi was self-contradictory in presenting many of his ideas concerning Western heritage, as this contradiction reflected the paradox inherent in Hanafi's memory—not only in his view of our Arab-Islamic civilization but also in his analysis of the structure of Western civilization, its sources, sciences, and culture. Western civilization is founded on rationality, faith in science and values, openness, continuous development—and studying its heritage cannot be done through an interpretive approach launched from the science of "Occidentalism," which is based on the principle of self-centrism, glorification of the ancient, and declaration of assault on the other's heritage. Such an approach would inevitably obstruct civilizational interaction and reciprocity between societies (Hanafi, 1981).

The truth Hanafi overlooked is that the intellectual and civilizational formation of Arab-Islamic civilization necessarily differs from that of Western civilization, a difference imposed by deeply rooted historical factors and circumstances. It is true that our ancient Arab-Islamic civilization was creative, producing thinkers, scientists, and philosophers of originality, and we have every

right to take pride in and celebrate them. However, before turning to pride and reminiscing about the glorious past, we must prioritize building the creative Arab individual capable of outlining the features of renaissance, progress, and development. Herein lies the civilizational stance that the thinker must address when studying heritage.

Confronting the Western challenge in all its dimensions and impacts—including preserving the nation's identity and constants while elevating it civilizational and materially—is a comprehensive, profound, and far-reaching process. Consequently, the issue of Occidentalism and confronting Westernization is not marginal or standalone but a fundamental issue integrated with the nation's major concerns: the nature of ruling regimes in the region and their subservience to new colonizers; their suppression of personal and public freedoms; how these regimes manage their countries' resources and potentials; their relations with dominant foreign powers; and up to the conflict with the Israeli occupying entity in Palestine, which represents the greatest threat to the Islamic nation's identity and future (Najdi, 2005).

There is no doubt that discussion and dialogue about Hassan Hanafi will not end with his departure. Those who saw him as a transcendent Arab mind beyond his time—capable of understanding heritage, liberated in engaging with the sacred, independent in dissecting Occidentalism—will cling to him. Meanwhile, those who viewed him merely as a page from Marxist thought written in Arabic will spare no effort—as they did during his lifetime—in diminishing the value of his heritage and studies, exposing their contradictions, and highlighting the weakness of his scientific documentation and linguistic capacity in engaging with the revelations and primary sources of Islamic culture.

Between these two camps, Hassan Hanafi remains a profound voice among

the voices of the land of the Nile Valley, an enduring pen among the pens of philosophy, and a name impossible to bypass in the history of Cairo and its university (Hanafi, 1981; Said, 1978).

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