

DECONSTRUCTING ISLAMIC STUDIES

Edited by
Majid Daneshgar and Aaron W. Hughes

Lost Orientalism, Lost Orient, and
Lost Orientals: An Overview¹

Majid Daneshgar

Orientalism Phobia and Its Consequences

Saidean Legacy

LET US BE HONEST and ask how many scholars of Islam are today able to read the main Islamic languages of Arabic, Persian (old, middle, and/or modern), Ottoman Turkish, Malay (Jawi), and Urdu, as practiced by hundreds of Orientalists during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? It is too naïve to say that all of those multilingual Orientalists were puppets of a Royal Court that wished to enslave Muslims. Today, using discourse analysis, with the aid of a third party's knowledge and expertise (for example, a research assistant), to complete an ethnographical and anthropological project is the top priority of a large number of professors and researchers of Islamic studies. In the best-case scenario, Christian-Muslim relationship dialogue is emphasized, in the light of historical and textual analysis, in order to stop the so-called blasphemy and violence that is still active. Yet such advocates of Christian-Muslim relations in the West tend to avoid calling themselves "Orientalist." I also think that "Orientalist" is no longer a true title to be ascribed to a scholar of Islam, because there are, at present, very few scholars like William Jones (d. 1794), Arthur Lumley Davids (d. 1832), Arthur Henry Bleeck (d. 1877), among others, who were proficient in various Islamic languages. However, the "Orientalist" critical function and philological expertise should not stop.

It would be rehashing earlier literature to say how much Muslims have critiqued Orientalists.² Their (mis)understanding of Orientalism pervaded the Muslim world. Many Muslims thought that the first and foremost goal behind "Orientalists' exploring the Orient" was/is to expand their politi-

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2. E.g. Daneshgar 2019.

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MADDE YAYIMLANDIKTAN
SONRA GELEN DOKÜMAN

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