



Allameh Tabataba'i University
Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Language
Department of English Language and Literature

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in
English Literature

**An Orientalist Representation of *Mao II* by Don DeLillo
and *the Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri**

Advisor: Dr. Kamran Ahmadgoli

Reader: Dr. Fazel Asadi

By:
Masoumeh Gholipour

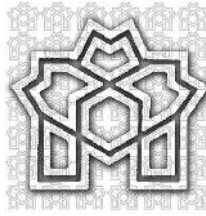
July, 2012

Tehran, Iran

In the Name of Allah,

The Most Merciful,

The Most Beneficent.



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*Dedicated to my amazing,
educated and artist father who
dedicated his precious life to
his country.*

Abstract

This thesis evaluates two books by means of Orientalism. The first one is *Mao II* by *Don DeLillo* and the second is *The Namesake* by *Jhumpa Lahiri*.

As an American author *DeLillo's* novel has signs of Orientalism and the stereotype look that sees the East downgraded. His novel *Mao II* has a close relation with ideas that know East and especially Middle East, home of terrorists and see Islam as the origin of most of the problems and wars in the World.

On the other hand, as an originally Asian, *Lahiri* has also elements in her work that shows how the dominant Orientalist idea in the West can even affect an Asian author. Although as a person who was born in the West, her information about her parent's heritage and country is excellent but she can't help criticizing them and showing how satisfied she is in a western country and culture. To examine those Orientalist ideas in these two different novels this thesis gets helps from major theorists in this field and top of them *Edward Saied*.

Key words: *DeLillo*, *Lahiri*, Orientalism, the Orient, the Oriental, The Orientalized Oriental, Hidden Orientalism, Colonialism, Post-Colonialism, *Edward Saied*.

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Chapter I

Introduction, Definition of the Key Terms and Review of the Related Literature

1.1. Introduction

“Orientalism is the product of circumstances that are fundamentally indeed radically fractions”. (*Said* 7)

"Orientalism" is more widely used to refer to the works of the many 19th century artists, who specialized in "Oriental" subjects, often drawing on their travels to North Africa and Western Asia. Artists as well as scholars were already described as "Orientalists" in the 19th century, especially in France, where the term, with a rather indifferent sense, was largely popularized by the critic *Jules Castagnary*.

In 1978, the Palestinian-American scholar *Edward Said* published his influential and argumentative book, *Orientalism*, which would forever redefine the word; he used the term to describe a universal Western tradition, both academic and artistic, of narrow-minded outsider interpretations of the East, shaped by the attitudes of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries. *Said* was critical of both this scholarly tradition and of some modern scholars, particularly *Bernard Lewis*. *Said* is mainly concerned with literature in the widest sense, especially French literature, and does not cover visual art and Orientalist painting.

Said calls into question the essential suppositions that form the foundation of Orientalist thinking. A rejection of Orientalism entails a rejection of biological generalizations, cultural constructions, and racial and religious prejudices. It is a rejection of greed as a primary motivating factor in intellectual pursuit. It is a removal of the line between 'the West' and 'the Other.' *Said* argues for the use of "narrative" rather than "vision" in interpreting the geographical landscape known as the Orient, meaning that a historian and a scholar would turn not to a panoramic view of half of the globe, but rather to a focused and complex type of history that allows space for the dynamic variety of human experience. Rejection of Orientalist thinking does not entail a denial of the differences between 'the West' and 'the Orient,' but rather an evaluation of such differences in a more critical and objective fashion. 'The Orient' cannot be studied in a non-Orientalist manner; rather, the scholar is obliged to study more focused and smaller culturally consistent regions. The person who has until now been known as 'the Oriental' must be given a voice. Scholarship from afar and second-hand representation must take a back seat to narrative and self-representation on the part of the 'Oriental.'

As *Said* declares in his "*Orientalism*":

“Related to this academic tradition, whose fortunes, transmigrations, specializations, and transmissions are in part the subject of this study, is a more general meaning for Orientalism. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poet, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. . . . the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient. (1-3, 5)”

So he is the most important theorist in this field and his ideas are the most suitable theories for studies due to novels with Orientalist signs. Because in the era that is known as post-colonial and post-oriental, still there are lots of literary works which are full of signs of Orientalist thoughts and ideas or they are written under the influence of situations which were somehow relevant to Orientalism.

These literary works tell stories that through them anger, lack of identity, pessimism and lots of other things can be felt. Some of these works are totally in the service of the dominant powers of the World; those who colonized a great part of the World for a long time. There are usually enormous scenes from the colony or detailed explanation of an oriental culture in them that make the readers believe their hidden ideas.

There are authors who totally belong to the West like *Don DeLillo* that through their works the prejudice toward Orient and non-western countries along with their culture and religion can be perceived. He wrote his long fiction, *Mao II*, under the influence of the modern media based world , *Salman Rushdie's* case that resulted in *Ayatollah Khomeini's* fatwa and western concepts of terrorism, artist and Islamic fundamentalism.

On the other hand, there are writers who are originally eastern or in any way non-western but they were born there or grew up in the West. Most of the time, they cannot accept the differentiations between these two cultures. In fact, they do not identify themselves as Eastern people and at the same time they know that they are not totally Western and they will never be. These contradictions lead to a kind of submission. They will become Orientalized Orientals sooner or later. Sometimes there would be sugar coated but still Orientalist stories about Eastern

people that by more suspicious eyes their essential pessimistic images can be seen. They may just try to find a way to live as normal as a native resident but the heritage their parents brought for them does not allow them to be an indifferent and absolutely western person.

1.2. Definition of the Key Terms

1.2.1. The Orient

One of the most significant constructions of Orientalist scholars is that of the Orient itself. What is considered the Orient is a vast region, one that spreads across a large amount of cultures and countries. It includes most of Asia as well as the Middle East. The depiction of this single 'Orient' which can be studied as a cohesive whole is one of the most powerful accomplishments of Orientalist scholars. It essentializes an image of a prototypical Oriental--a biological inferior that is culturally backward, peculiar, and unchanging--to be depicted in dominating and sexual terms.

The discourse and visual imagery of Orientalism is laced with notions of power and superiority, formulated initially to facilitate a colonizing mission on the part of the West and perpetuated through a wide variety of discourses and policies.

The Orient is almost the most strange and exotic place for western writers. Actually, by writing about Orient or representing their own ideas and conceptions about Orient, some writers and scholars develops the dominant thought of the West.

The Orient signifies a system of representations framed by political forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and Western empire. The Orient exists for the West, and is constructed by and in relation to the West. It is a mirror image of what is inferior and alien to the West.

It is an echo picture of what is lower and strange to the West. *Said* argues “representation” of the Orient in European literary texts, travelogues and other writings contributed to the creation of dichotomy between Europe and its “others”.

1.2.2. Orientalism

Orientalism is a term used for the imitation or portrayal of aspects of Eastern cultures in the West by writers, designers and artists, as well as having other

meanings. *Ziauddin Sardar* in his book *Orientalism* concluded his critical study of this controversial concept by stressing that:

“Orientalism is very much alive in contemporary cultural practice’: ‘All of its main tropes have been seamlessly integrated into modernity. [...] Orientalism [...] has different stylistic moments, diversity of opinions, changing fashions and emphases. Nevertheless, it has reworked itself from one historical epoch to another, from the Middle Ages to the “Age of Discovery” to the enlightenment to colonialism to modernity, maintaining conventional representations of “the Orient” at the forefront of the European mind’ .(107)

According to many references Orientalism refers to the Orient or East, in contrast to the Occident or West”. Since the 18th century, "Orientalist" has been the traditional term for a scholar of Oriental studies, however the use in English of "Orientalism" to describe the academic subject of "Oriental studies" is rare; the Oxford English Dictionary cites only one such usage, by *Lord Byron* in 1812.

Orientalism is a mode of legalized writing, idea, and study, dominated by essentials, viewpoints, and ideological favoritisms apparently matched to the Orient. It is the picture of the 'Orient' uttered as an entire system of thinking and study. *Sardar* declares in his mentioned book that whereas Orientalism is real, it

is still, an artificial construction. It is completely certain and unattached to the East as understood within and by East. “There is no route map, no itinerary locked within the subject to bridge that divide.”(vii)

Or according to *Orientalism* by Said:

“Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient, which until the early nineteenth century had really meant only India and the Bible lands. From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II France and Britain dominated the Orient and Orientalism; since World War II America has dominated the Orient and approaches it as France and Britain once did. Out of the closeness, whose dynamic is enormously productive even if it always demonstrates the comparatively greater strength of the Occident (British, French, or American), comes the large body of texts I call Orientalist”. (5)

1.2.3. The Oriental

The Oriental is the person represented by such thinking. The man is depicted as feminine, weak, yet strangely dangerous because poses a threat to white, Western women. The woman is both eager to be dominated and strikingly exotic.

The Oriental is a single image, a sweeping generalization, a stereotype that crosses countless cultural and national boundaries.

To define the Oriental better *Said* argues in his valuable book *Orientalism* that:

“The choice of "Oriental" was canonical; it had been employed by *Chaucer* and *Mandeville*, by *Shakespeare*, *Dryden*, *Pope*, and *Byron*. It designated Asia or the East, geographically, morally, culturally. One could speak in Europe of an Oriental personality, an Oriental atmosphere, an Oriental tale, Oriental despotism, or an Oriental mode of production, and be understood.”(32)

1.2.4. The Orientalized Oriental

A person would be considered as an Orientalized oriental who physically lives in an Eastern or by any means in Non-Western areas but spiritually and through his/her ideas and thoughts is relevant to the West. This person as *Sardar* declares is called Brown Sahib too. S/he sees the West more rational and identifies it as a supreme power and source of ideology.

1.2.5. The Oriental Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism

In recent years, some Arab- Islamic philosophers wrote some works which can be categorized as Orientalist works, although it is really weird to apply such a

label to the works of scholars from the Orient. But their ideology and works are written under the total influence of Occidentals. A particular feature of Neo-Orientalism is that while its readership remains predominantly Western, its authors are often Indian.

1.2.6. Colonialism

Colonialism is a political-economic event that affects various non-Western nations, and was the consequence of different European powers' materialism for centuries. These greedy countries conquered, settled, and exploited large areas of the world. The rationales of Colonialism included economic utilization of the colony's natural wealth, creation of new markets for the colonizer, and expansion of the colonizer's way of life beyond its national borders. To colonize a region is not just physically (occupation), it would be even stronger culturally and economically even far from the colony, as it is nowadays and is known as Neo-Colonialism.

1.2.7. Neo-Colonialism

It is a policy whereby a major power uses economic and political means to complete or enlarge its influence over underdeveloped nations or areas. Strong