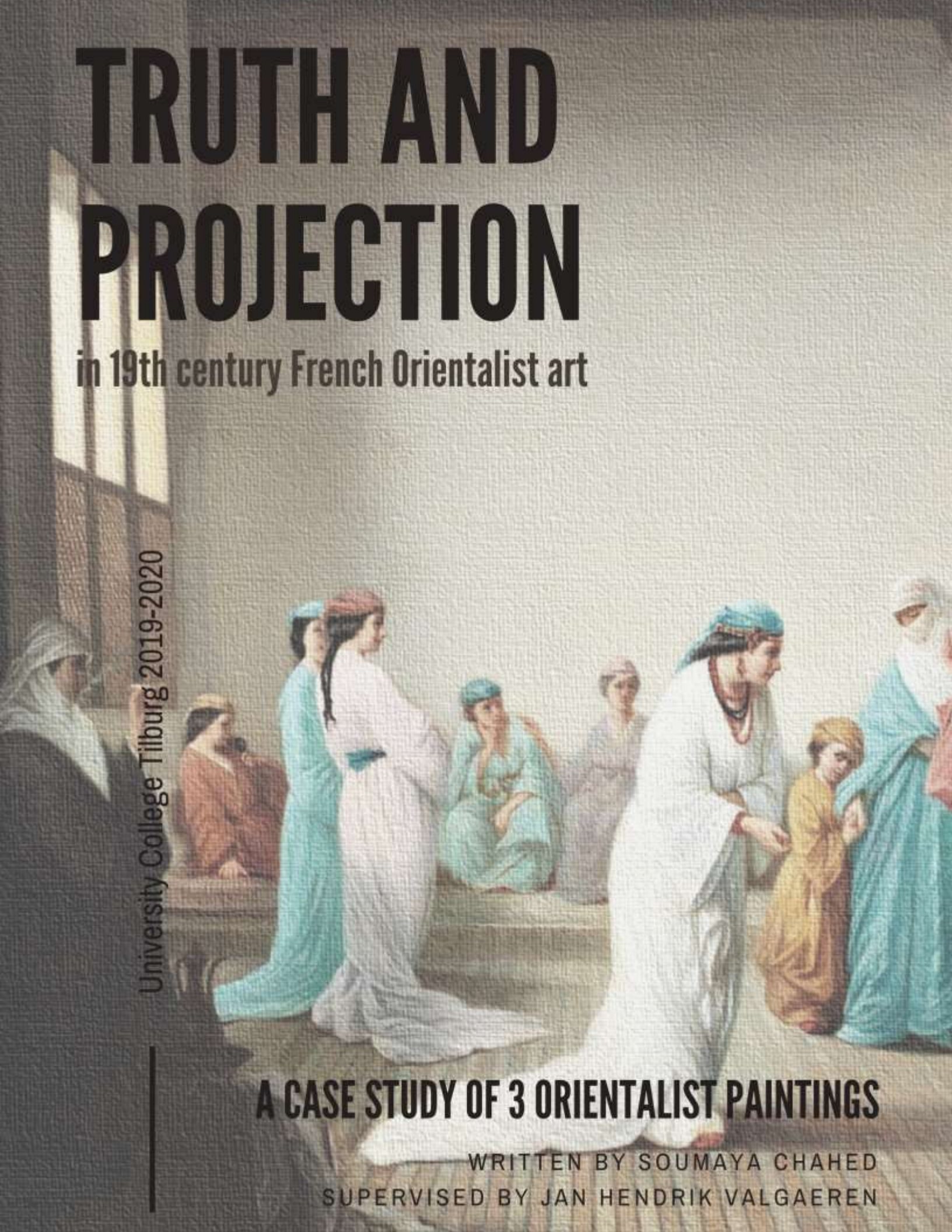
TRUTH AND PROJECTION

in 19th century French Orientalist art



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A CASE STUDY OF 3 ORIENTALIST PAINTINGS

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'From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself.'

Edward Said

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Introduction

The harem is an image most of us can evoke in vivid imagery that satisfies the Oriental fantasy. These images we have seen in movies, artworks and have heard about in stories many times throughout our lives. From Disney productions to paintings hanging on museum walls, they are all part of creating the discourse around the harem. Images of gold jewelry, shiny rubies, silk embroidered robes, voluptuous white and olive-skinned women with long dark locks of hair framing their bodies. Perhaps the sultan is seen in the frame you are imagining, as he is laying on his decorated matrass with a turban wrapped around his head with a pointy beard covering his chin. Like us, he is viewing the women in their patio baths or on Persian carpets while they are entertaining each other, or maybe him. And the black Nubian maids are fully dressed in their robes as they are taking care of the women. They are bathing them and braiding their hair or serving them exotic fruits. When thinking of the imaginary Orient these scenes are often evoked creating a veil of mystery surrounding the Oriental women. Likewise, nineteenth century paintings that depict these scenes are captivating and draw our eyes to the rich scenery they depict time and time again. The scenes seem to come from one and the same world where Egypt and Tunisia are different only in a matter of words. The baths seem to flow from one to the other and the tiles only change in color ever so slightly. The women in these scenes could be the manifestation of one and only one woman, for all we know. Let us wonder, did the Frenchman that painted this scene in the baths of the Harem sit in the corner of the patio, looking at the maid as she brushed the Harem woman's hair. Did he hold his sketchbook and draw charcoal lines as he looked at the way the intricate tiles surrounded this scene? Did he talk to them and ask them to stay longer in that same bend so he could perfect the curve in his sketch. Did he witness this and get back to his atelier in France to color in the scene that would eventually find its place behind glass at the Louvre? Or what if the painter was never there, and what if the only source behind the creation of the harem paintings was an unsatisfied fantasy.

Orientalist art depicts many recognizable scenes of which the harem is one of the most famous themes among them. These paintings were made in a time in history where Orientalist scholarship came into being, consequently during and after the colonization of the Near East. The relation between Orientalist scholarship is widely discussed in relation to colonialism, with some making the case that is was used as a justification of colonialization. Prominent scholar and writer of the book *Orientalism,* Edward Said has notably wrote that "colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact."[1] This Orientalism that Said refers to, arguably also includes the body of knowledge represented in nineteenth century paintings. However, the literature introduced does not go into paintings specifically, and thus this presents an interesting case on post-colonial theory. By means of a case study of three selected nineteenth century paintings, representing the harem theme, the framework of this theory can be applied. This offers a unique approach to the theory and therefore, the research question formulated for this thesis is as follows; ''How do the 3 curated artworks reflect various aspects of post-colonial theory?''

Methodology

For the purpose of this thesis the curated paintings are limited to works of French Orientalist painters in the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the genre of Harem paintings is chosen to facilitate a

[1] Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books., 47

comprehensible analysis of the case studies. In order to answer how the 3 curated artworks, reflect various aspects of post-colonial theory the following methodology is applied:



Contextual Approach



Iconography

Case Studies

For this thesis, a contextual approach is chosen by applying post-colonial theory to the nineteenth century French harem paintings. This research seeks to examine the context that produced the nineteenth century artworks by the nature of the historical and ideological background. Iconography aims to identify symbols in a work to interpret the ideas they represent. It can furthermore expose patters of visual imagery. Therefore, this will be used in the methodology of this thesis. In the first chapter, the background of orientalism will be discussed from a historical context. From this a bridge can, be made to the background of orientalist art specifically, in order to later place this within the post-colonial theory of Orientalism as defined by Edward Said. The second chapter will assess the reality or representation reflected in the orientalist tradition. This will be done by means of post-colonial theory and gender theory. The latter will be contextualized subjacent to post-colonial theory. Finally, in the third chapter, this thesis will make use of 3 artworks as means of case studies that will either reinforce or undermine the discourse presented, by applying the theory to the respective artworks. Because art is produced within the socio, economic and political conditions surrounding the artist it is worthwhile to examine the ideas derived from this discourse reflected in the works. By using the scope of gender and post-colonial theory the layers of the artworks can be explored. Such approach seeks to explain the artworks in terms of a larger context of ideas characteristic of an age. However, this research does not fully account for the Orientalist genre of art as it only considers the socio-political context and does not focus on the artists repertoire or the artwork on itself.

Chapter 1. History of Orientalism

To understand the discourse in which nineteenth century French orientalist art was created, different aspects of the history of orientalism need to be introduced. And from this base, the post-colonial theory of Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said, can be explored and later applied in a new context; being the curated paintings.

1.1 Orientalist Scholarship

Orientalism generally refers to the Western scholarship of the eighteenth and nineteenth century on the (broadest definition of) culture of Asian societies.[2] The East in medieval times was referred to as the Orient and could stretch from Turkey or Egypt all the way to Japan. However, the term orientalism was widely used in art history as a name for artist that included elements from Mediterranean regions, as North Africa but also Western Asia. Academics, scholars, writers, and artists that interested themselves with these subjects were dubbed Orientalists. Orientalism became an academic subject, which means that under the umbrella term of Orientalism, geography, culture, and language became areas of study. The Council Of Vienne in 1312-13 played an important role in this as it developed this academic field and 'established a series of chairs in various subjects at numerous universities'.[3] In the book *French Orientalism* the Council of Vienne is described as 'an appropriately iconic event marking the opening of this problematic movement in European intellectual history'[4]. This is arguably also the marking point of the start of an imaginative history of the Orient. Orientalists gained scholarship from governments and universities to conduct research in the Orient. Colonial bureaucracy was part of the facilitation of these scholarships. For this thesis we will not go back as far as the above mentioned fourteenth century, but we will forward to Napoleon Bonaparte's late eighteenth centuries campaign in Egypt and Syria. Napoleon Bonaparte lead an Egyptian campaign from 1798 until 1801 that was not only military of nature but also scientifically. He send a 'scientific expedition of about 150 scholars and scientists' together with the military forces. [5] This signifies the relevance for this period of time as starting point of the post-colonial theory Orientalism by Edward Said. This is also the base of the history of Orientalism that will be the framework supporting the theory. In the following part the sub history of the coming about of the Orientalism art movement will be discussed within this frame.

1.2 Orientalist Art

The nineteenth century art discourse in Europe was mainly characterized by the art movement of Romanticism, a counter movement of the late eighteenth century Neoclassism.[6] Romanticism was a movement created as a weight against the rationality and order of the Enlightenment era and school of Neoclassism. The school of Romanticism took an interest to the individual and subjective fantasies,

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[2] Thomas, M. C. (2014, November 11). Orientalism. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/science/Orientalism-cultural-field-of-study

[3] Hosford, D., & Wojtkowski, C. J. (2010). *French Orientalism: Culture, Politics, and the Imagined Other*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing., 149

[4] Hosford, *French Orientalism*, 149.

[5] McCalla, A. (1998). *A romantic historiosophy: the philosophy of history of Pierre-Simon Ballanche.* Leiden: Koningklijke Brill N.V., 284.

[6] The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica (Ed.). (2016, November 30). Romanticism. Retrieved December 1, 2017, from https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism

sometimes even to the extremes. Romantic artists rejected the didacticism of neoclassical history painting and expanded their subjects to 'imaginary and exotic subjects'.[7] Both can be seen in relation to colonialism as they were influenced by people 'discovered' through Western colonization. For the Ottoman-Islamic Orient this interest did not start until General Napoleon Bonaparte's first invasion of Egypt in 1798, as mentioned before, which was subsequently followed by French, British and Italian occupation. This European presence in Egypt attracted artists and scholars of which the many paintings and literature formed the Orientalist studies. One of the most influential works was ordered and published by the French government in 1809. It was a twenty-four-volume documenting the culture of the region titled *Description de l'Egypte.* Many of the first nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings in France were part of a propaganda that was meant to bring about support for French imperialism. One of these paintings was the famous *Napoleon in the Plague House at Jaffa,* painted by French Romantic history painter Antoine Jean Gros. The painting shows Napoleon's visiting to prisoners ill with the plague during the siege of Jaffa. Interesting about Antoine Jean Gros is that he never traveled to the Jaffa or anywhere close it. This was not a unique phenomenon as many other European artists relied on works as *Description de l'Egypte,* sketches of other artists and literature to create their impressions of the Orient. However, there are artists that did travel to the region, of which Jean-Leon Gerome was one of the most prominent in the late nineteenth century.[8] One of his most famous works, The Snake Charmer, lends its fame to the cover of a copy of Edward Said's book *Orientalism*. The most reoccurring subjects in Orientalist paintings were images of the souk [market], caravans but most famously the harem. These images became recognizable enough for painters to create images inspired by the Orient without travelling to this 'Orient', as seen with the famous painters Ingres and Gerome. This essentially standardized the themes and changed the requirement of any first-hand encounters with subjects in paintings anymore. The result of this is that some paintings only had the illusion of authenticity but in reality, were products of reference or general discourse. Therefore, the question arises whether this body of knowledge in the paintings are product of reality or representation. This will be discussed more extensively in the following chapter. In the following chapter an overview will be presented of the theory from the book Orientalism by Edward Said, as this will be the theory applied to the case studies in this thesis.

[7] Galitz, Kathryn Calley. "Romanticism." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/roma/hd_roma.htm (October 2004)

[8] Dorkin, M. (n.d.). Four Orientalist Masterpieces by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824 ... Retrieved from https://www.simondickinson.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Gerome-4-Orientalist-Masterpieces.pdf



Antoine Jean Gros (1804), *Bonaparte Visiting the Pesthouse in Jaffa* [oil on canvas], The Louvre, Paris



Jean-Léon Gérôme 1879, *The Snake Charmer* [oil on canvas], Clark Art Institute, Williamstown

Chapter 2. Edward Said's Orientalism

Edward Said (1935 – 2003) was a Palestinian American academic, political activist, and literary critic that earned a prominent place in modern scholarship.[9] He attained his undergrad at Princeton University and postgrad in English literature at Harvard University. He joined the faculty of Columbia University in 1963 and was promoted as full professor in 1969.[10] In 1978, Said published his book Orientalism, one of the most influential books in 20th century academia. When Orientalism (1978) first came out it provoked as much criticism as praise in the academic world. With Edward Said's redefinition of orientalism, he produced one of the most significant texts in the studies of the relation of the East and West. In the introduction to his book, Edward Said defines the term orientalism as 'a way of coming to terms with the Orient based on European experience.[11] He describes it as 'a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and 'the Occident'.[12] Taking the late eighteenth century as a rough starting point, Edward Said approaches Orientalism as an institution that deals with the Orient[13]. In his book he writes that Orientalism is dealt with 'by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: [and] in short. Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.'[14] The representation of the Orient in an inferior position to the Occident becomes a means for domination and gives a justification for it. Orientalism in the nineteenth century was created based on European texts about the Orient and in their turn served as a framework for politics. Said writes that 'it is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries.'[15] All this was based not on interaction with the Orient, as should be according to Said, as 'everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-a-vis the Orient'[16], and not on these mere distorted accounts. Post-colonial theory might imply that colonialism does not exist anymore and there is a time of before, during and after. However, post-colonial theory involves the effects of colonialism that have remained and persisted. Using these theories to reflect on both history as well as present day is necessary to critically examine colonialism.[17] There a few characteristics to the post-colonial theory of Orientalism, namely Orientalism as a geographical division, a system of knowledge, a system of self-projections and othering.

2.1 Geographical division

Orientalism assumes a geographical division between the Orient and the Occident. The Occident here being Western Europe and in later stages North America as well. And the Orient consisting of mostly the Asian continent and North Africa. However, this distinction is not based on physical geography, but rather a

[9] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2019, November 01). Edward Said. Retrieved June 27, 2020, from https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Said
[10] Ibidem.
[11] Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books., 9.
[12] Said, *Orientalism*, 5.
[13] Said, *Orientalism*, 11.
[14] Ibidem.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Ibidem.
[17] "Postcolonial Theory." Obo, www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0069.xml.

human construct that created a discourse of different nations and countries into one collection of ideas and (mis)representations. This distinction, according to Edward Said, developed into a political instrument, one of domination. He writes that ''men have always divided the world up into regions having either real or imagined distinction from each other''. Of which the demarcation between East and West ''had been years, even centuries in the making.''[18] This is a central element in the post-colonial theory of Orientalism and will be reoccurring in all the characteristics.

2.2 System of knowledge

Said's theory defines Orientalism as a system of knowledge, rather than just a collection of misrepresentations about the Orient. He writes that it essentially is 'a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment.'[19] It is a frame that defines what the people in the Orient are and what they aren't with a claimed authority on the subject. The body of Orientalist literature is connected to the ideology of the colonial discourse of its time. Or more so the actual embodiment of the ideology in written form. "Orientalism is not a mere political subject or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions", but rather "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts."[20]

2.3 System of self-projection

The theory also defines Orientalism as a system of self-projection. The Orient ''helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience".[21]The discourse of Orientalism created an image that enforces the differences between the Western world and the Orient, that was regarded as essentially homogenous. Said further writes that the Oriental generally acts, speaks, and thinks in a manner exactly opposite to the European' and that the 'Orientals lived in their world, 'we' lived in ours.'[22] The Orient is therefore essential in defining the Western world.

2.4 Orient as the 'Other'

The system of self-projection also means that the Orient is defined as the 'Other'. Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them").[23] This difference wasn't only a matter of language or geography, but a matter of superiority and inferiority. It depicted this fictional Orient as 'an irrational, psychologically weak, and feminized, non-European Other, which is negatively contrasted with the rational, psychologically strong, and masculine West'. Said further writes that 'along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilized, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked - to elements in Western society (…) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien'.[24]This division forms an inequality between the Orient and the West and essentially

[18] Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 39.
[19] Said, *Orientalism*, 14.
[20] Cain, P. J. (2001*). Imperialism: Critical concepts in historical studies*. London: Routledge., 39.
[21] Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books., 2.
[22] Said, *Orientalism,* 47.
[23] Said, *Orientalism,* 42.
[24] Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 207.

enables the West to dominate the inferior ‘other’ Which is the ultimate relevance of the post-colonial theory and the reason why the heritage of Orientalism cannot be approached as neutral recollection, but should be treated in its colonial discourse.

Chapter 3. Reality or Representation

Edward Said's thesis in simple terms challenges the representation of the Orient as merely disguised as reality. According to Said the belief in true knowledge as fundamentally nonpolitical, and arguably a patent on knowledge, is typical for Orientalist academics. In the domain of art this became apparent in the held belief that paintings came about by first-hand study. For scenes of harems this was by default not possible due to the inaccessibility of male visitors to the harem space. Adding to the reality that some Orientalist artists never visited the *Orient* discredits the works as representation of reality. Orientalism thus challenges the Western tradition of the belief of the capacity of an image to contain reality. Kimberly Pinder, author of *Race-ing art history*, makes critical remarks on convictions of creating reality. She writes on the presenting of Orientalist art as reality rather than 'reflections'. One could argue that it goes further than calling them reflections as they are entirely new creations and interpretations. The following passage from Edward Said's Orientalism elaborately describes that 'the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments. and projections.'[25] A focus can also be brought to language, to which arguably art can be interpreted in the same way as language. An important argument in the assessment of language is that it can never represent reality but is only a *representation* of reality. The way images are used and suggest containing reality is a part of the colonial discourse it was created in.

3.1 Post-colonial theory and gender

The importance of Said's thesis is the statement that Orientalism can be interpreted as a justification of colonialism. Orientalist art can then be categorized as a reinforcement of the image of the Orient as the 'Other'. However, these stereotypes and biases did not only reinforce, but also created a foundation for justifying the colonization to civilize the Orient. Therefore, 'to say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact.'[26] Rather than a mere fact of justification after colonialism, it is a preparation and process in the run-up-to it. Influenced by Foucault, Said suggest we should treat Orientalism as a discourse otherwise, 'one cannot possibly understand the enonnously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage-and even produce-the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.'[27] Therefore, every stroke and decision in creating an image can contain the intentionality of justifying, enforcing or more seriously *creating* an illusion that people believed, and maybe still do.

In choosing the harem theme it is inevitable to explore gender within Orientalism. In the literary critique *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-century British Fiction and Culture,* Piya Pal-Lapinski makes interesting remarks on these interactions. Pal-Lapinski wrote that 'representations of exotic female body in the work of artists like Gerome Ingres opened up questions relating to the fragile barriers between domestic and

[25] Said, E. W. (2003). Orientalism. London: Penguin Books., 47
[26] Ibidem.
[27] Ibidem.

public women, the limitations of the male gaze, the celebration of the libertine female body and the infiltration of domestic space by the courtesan.'[28] These 'limitations of the male gaze' are an important aspect in both nineteenth century art discourse as well as Edward Said's Orientalism. Said critiques and elaborates about this 'gaze' and the role it has in Orientalism. Said writes that the Orient is watched by the European who is 'never involved, always detached.' Describing the Orient as a ''living tableau of queerness.''[29] Edward Said emphasizes the very position of the Western European as a 'watcher' that is detached from the subject and creates their own narrative. The harem was never accessible for male visitors which finds it origins in the religious doctrines of the regions subject in the paintings. Theophile Gautier, a French critic, made a famous remark saying that only women should visit Turkey, for 'what can a man see in this jealous country'[30]. There is an obsession with breaching this very separation of the sexes, and a desire to see what is hidden from their gaze. This further perpetuated the sexualization of the harem and the creation of inaccurate images.[31] Joan DelPlato, co-Editor of *Orientalism, Eroticism and Modern Visuality in Global Cultures* writes that this desire 'marks a point on a continuum of psychosexual colonialism; other points of intensity are marked by the desire to possess, name, and dissect her.'[32] In the travelogues of European male travelers the Orientalist women was both sexualized and at the same time pitied for her lack of freedom. These where then used to create the narrative for the paintings of Orientalists like Gerome, Ingres, and Delacroix. The harem genre continued to reinforce the images that became ingrained in the collective imagination of Europeans' of the 'Oriental' female as, 'exotic', 'sexual', and 'mysterious'.[33] Said writes that this sexualized image of women in the Orientalist narrative were part of the male power fantasy as 'they express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing." [34] And this is the excitement that is in the harem scenes, a universal desire of the sexual and mysterious but always subservient. This is the Oriental woman that lives on linen canvas. In the following chapter three case studies will be used to examine the portrayal of the harem women against this theory.

[28] Pal-Lapinski, Piya. *The Exotic Woman in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction and Culture: a Reconsideration*. University of New Hampshire Press, 2005.
[29] Said, E. W. (1979). Orientalism: Edward W. Said. New York: Vintage Books.
[30] Lewis, R. (1996). Gendering Orientalism: race, femininity and representation. London: Routledge.132
[31] Herath, T. (2016). Women and Orientalism: 19th century Representations of the Harem by European female travellers and Ottoman women. Constellations, 7(1), 10.
[32] DelPlato, J. (2002). Multiple wives, multiple pleasures: representing the harem, 1800-1875. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. 4
[33] Herath, T. (2016). Women and Orientalism: 19th century Representations of the Harem by European female travelers and Ottoman women. Constellations, 7(1), 10.
[34] Said, E. W. (1979). Orientalism: Edward W. Said. New York: Vintage Books. 207

Chapter 4. Case Study

For this chapter three selected will be discussed in uniform formats based on the theory. The chosen artworks are all products of French late eighteenth and/or nineteenth century artists Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Jean-Léon Gérôme and Henriette Browne. All have respectively had a significant influence on the genre of Orientalist art. The paintings chosen for this study are *The Turkish Bath* (1863), *Moorish Bath* (1870) and *A Visit, Harem Interior* (1860). The themes of the paintings are the harem, one of the most depicted scenes of Orientalist art as mentioned before. As discussed earlier the gap in existing literature is the actual application of Edward Said's post-colonial theory on case studies of paintings posing as bodies of knowledge. Looking at the paintings as part of a discourse rather than an isolated works is a worthwhile effort. The aesthetic of each painting is undeniably subject to taste and perspective that depends on the identity of the viewer. However, holding the contents of each painting against the mirror of Orientalism provides different insights. This chapter will therefore go into three questions for each individual case study:



What do we see?



Who is the artist?



What aspects of post-colonial theory does the painting reflect?

The first question, 'What do we see?', will be about the scene of the painting, the composition and the iconography seen. What is essentially visible in the scope of the frame, and where do we as viewers stand in this scene. The second question, 'Who is the artist?', puts the focus on the artist and their background, and especially whether they've had first-hand encounters with the 'Orient'. What is known about the sources they used for their paintings. In the last question, 'What aspects of post-colonial theory does the painting reflect?', the theory will be used to discuss the painting. This will be the mirror we hold in from the painting. After these case studies a conclusion, or rather evaluation will be done. The limitations of this study and the recommendations on further applied research are central to this.

4.1 The Turkish Bath (1863)



Ingres, Jean Auguste Dominique. *The Turkish Bath*. 1863. Louvre Museum, Paris.

4.1.1 What do we see?

The Turkish bath is a round shaped oil painting depicting nude women in a Turkish bath. Almost all women in the scene, apart from two, have white skin and blond toned hair. There are two women in the painting with black skin that are partly dressed. One of these is playing an instrument. These women are likely meant to depict Nubian servants that serve the Harem women. And the harem women are likely to depict Circassian women as their hair is light and skin even lighter. The shape of the painting reminds of a peephole. The viewer is watching the women, but they do not seem to be looking back. Viewing the painting there is a detachment between us and the scene. The image has a highly erotic tone and the viewer is confronted with a scale of nudity. There seem to be suggestions of lesbianism in the way the women in the painting are engaging with each other. It seems that as a viewer there is a breach of privacy and intimacy in watching the women bathing.

4.1.2 Who is the artist?

Jean August Dominique Ingres, one of the greatest artists of nineteenth century France established himself as an 'icon of cultural conservatism in 19th century France'[35]. Paintings in his late repertoire were for a great part focused on the female nude, which still receives contemporary criticism for distorting the female body. One of his most famous paintings, as seen above sis a prime example of the female nudes in the theme of odalisques. What makes Ingres interesting is that he never travelled outside of Europe and therefore is a prime example of the afore mentioned artists.

4.1.3 What aspects of post-colonial theory does the painting reflect?

The aspects of the theory found in this painting are twofold if not multiple. First of all, the created reality in the painting is not derived from reality. It is entirely impossible that Ingres, and most unlikely that any other male painter, would have witnessed the scene in the painting first-hand. Ingres and his other counterparts created their own erotic ideal of the Oriental women. As Jennifer Meagher, MET museum cataloguer, eloquently writes, these scenes 'evoked a sense of cultivated beauty and pampered isolation to which many Westerners aspired'.[36] The harem women in these paintings are often portrayed with white skin as we can see in *The Turkish Bath* painting. These features being predominantly associated with Europeans, contrast the darker colored women portrayed as maids or slaves. However, what Ingres did use to inspire his work to is a letter from Lady Mary Montagu about her visit to the Turkish bathhouse. Her description of the bathhouse has an interesting and notable absence:

'I was in my traveling Habit, which is a riding dress, and certainly appear'd very extraordinary to them, there was not one of 'em that shew'd the least surprise or impertinent Curiosity (…) I know no European Court where the Ladys would have behav'd themselves in so polite a manner to a stranger (…) The first sofas were cover'd with Cushions and rich Carpets, on which sat the Ladys, and on the second their slaves behind 'em, but without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any Beauty or defect conceal'd, yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest

[35] Shelton, A. C. (2017, November 15). J.-A.-D. Ingres. Retrieved November 18, 2017, from https://www.britannica.com/biography/J-A-D-Ingres

[36] Meagher, Jennifer. "Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century Art." *In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/euor/hd_euor.htm (October 2004)

Gesture amongst 'em (…) In short, tis the Women's coffee house, where all the news of the Town is told, Scandal invented, etc.'[37]

Ruth Bernard Yeazell, Professor at Yale, wrote about the Turkish Bath and how Ingres transformed 'a social encounter into a private vision, a dream in which the dreamer himself remains invulnerable to observation.' Continuing that 'what he chose to see in the end was not a collection of living women, but a harem of memory.'[38] The explicit mentioning by Lady Montagu is that there was not the least 'immodest Gesture amongst them', is in stark contrast to the *Turkish Bath'*s eroticism. Taking this back to the post-colonial discourse where the Orient is sexualized, and the women are props of entertainment is very much present in the painting.

Second of all, the way the painting is shaped places the viewer as a watcher, detached from the scene. The roundness of the shape is an interesting element in creating this perspective. The breaching of privacy of the bathhouse is a reoccurring theme in the harem paintings and is extensively discussed in the post-colonial theory of Orientalism. Foucault, one of the French philosophers Said was influenced, among others wrote about the implications of coercion in the gaze. The European assumption, influenced by the Enlightenment, that there is freedom of the gaze to wander anywhere is in stark contrast to the Islamic culture of the Near East. Tahtawi, nineteenth century Egyptian scholar, commented on one of the beliefs of the Europeans that the gaze has no effect.[39] Philosopher Ruud Welten discusses these implication of the gaze, present in many Orientalist and primitive paintings, and continues on the implications of the gaze.. 'One gazes at the other, at another's culture, another's history. But what does this imply? Phenomenology teaches us that perception is never neutral or passive. (...) Seeing and looking are activities rather than 'neutral,' 'passive' impressions. Looking is an activity of a subject, loaded with strategies of how to look. Even looking 'without judgement' is such a strategy. Art is an active way of looking. It paints not only what it sees, but it rearranges reality in order to make it visible. Painting more than any other human activity shows us what perception is.'[40] The neutrality of the gaze is challenged and fits the discourse of colonialization, making the gaze an act of not only intrusion but domination.

[37] Ruth Bernard Yeazell, "Public Baths and Private Harems: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Origins of Ingres' *Bain Turc," The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 1 (1994): 114-115

[38] Ruth Bernard Yeazell, "Public Baths and Private Harems: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Origins of Ingres' *Bain Turc," The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7, no. 1 (1994): 114-115

[39] Bullock, K. (2010). *Rethinking Muslim women and the veil: challenging historical and modern stereotypes*.

[40] Welten, R. (20015), Paul Gauguin and the Complexity of the Primitivist Gaze', in: *Journal of Art Historiography*, https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/welten.pdf

4.2 Moorish Bath (1870)



Gerome, Jean-Leon. *Moorish Bath.* 1870. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

4.2.1 What do we see?

The Moorish Bath shows a traditional bath as seen in palaces in the Near East. We look at the image from a distant, slightly turned to the side. We see a white woman with ginger hair sitting on the tiled seating along the hammam wall. The tiles ae detailed and almost indistinguishable from reality. There seems to be a shyness or timidity in the posture of the woman. She is accompanied by a black skinned woman partly dressed holding a tin basin with water used to wash. Contrasting the white woman, the posture seems strong and muscular. While the woman has a soft and voluptuous shape. It seems that the woman is the Nubian servant bathing the white Harem woman. The description of the painting on the museum website describes the scene in vivid words. 'The pale, red-headed nude—perhaps meant to suggest an enslaved Circassian woman from the far reaches of the Ottoman Empire—forms a striking contrast to her African attendant in the sun-dappled interior of an Islamic bathhouse.'[41] The description offers a description nothing short from the Orientalist discourse the painting is part of. The frame is detached from the viewer and it feels as if we are violating the privacy of their bath. The architectural composition is impeccable and makes it easy to imagine this scene and the echo of the water moved with the servant's hand to rinse the harem woman. The silk cloth hanging down from the edge adds to the richness of the scene, maybe suggesting the previous presence of clothedness or a dividing curtain.

4.2.2 Who is the artist?

French painter and sculptor Jean-Léon Gérôme, born May 11, 1824 in Vesoul France, is considered one of the most prominent late 19th-century academic artists in France and leading figure in the Orientalist movement.[42] The majority of his works was dedicated to depictions of the Orient with his known harem and bathhouse scenes.[43] Gérôme obtained a government commission for a work intended for the World Fair of 1855 exhibition. He started travelling for inspiration for his painting. Between 1856 and 1880 Gérôme visited Egypt seven times, of which four were before he painted the *Moorish Bath* (1870). In 1856 Gérôme spend eight months in Egypt after which he visited six other times in respectively 1862, 1868, 1869, 1871, 1874 and 1880. His first visit however is where his interest for the 'Orient' began. In 1875 and 1879, Gérôme boarded with the Sultan's painter Abdullah Siriez in Egypt which would become the base for many of his Orientalist paintings.[44] However, this visit was only after Gerome painted the *Moorish Bath* in 1870. Nevertheless, even during these his only first-hand studies were that of the architectural details of the baths. 'His bathers, many of them female, populate interior spaces to which Gérôme himself could never have been granted access – but his habit of sketching constantly, in pencil as well as in oil, during his travels, contributed to the sense of authenticity in his interior and exterior settings.'[45] And exactly this is what makes his paintings so real that one can even forget the scene never existed.

[41] Gerome, Jean-Leon. Moorish Bath. 1870. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. www.collections.mfa.org/objects/32124
[42] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2020, January 6). Jean-Léon Gérôme. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Leon-Gerome
[43] Dorkin, M. (n.d.). Four Orientalist Masterpieces by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824 ... Retrieved from https://www.simondickinson.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Gerome-4-Orientalist-Masterpieces.pdf
[44] Ibidem.
[45] Ibidem.

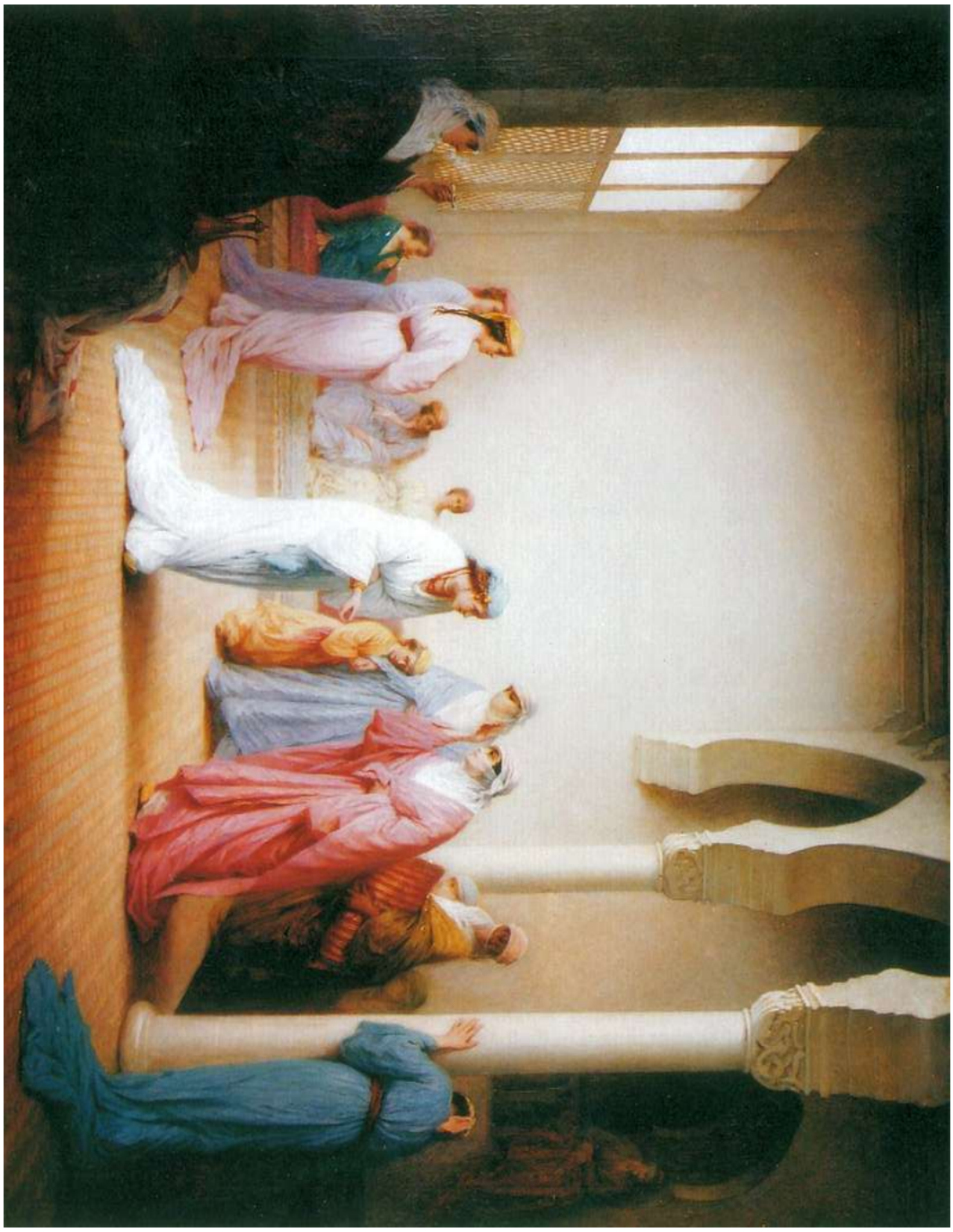
4.2.3 What aspects of post-colonial theory does the painting reflect?

Linda Nochlin, who was an art historian, wrote that painting is a representation that is never a neutral process but rather a selective process that chooses what I visible and what is hidden.[46] Here, the period that Gerome travelled to Egypt is significant, as it was after Napoleon's conquest and therefore in the rise of colonialism making his choices 'deeply informed by these events'.[47] This context is important in finding the aspects of the post-colonial theory in the painting by Gérôme. In the previously discussed Ingres' *Turkish Bath* the shape of the painting contributes to the position of the viewer being that of a secret watcher. In the *Moorish Bath* the perspective places the viewer in that position. The theory on the 'gaze' is relevant both paintings. However, what makes the *Moorish Bath* in interesting case is the architectural detailing of the painting. This suggest an authenticity and seem to derive from reality even more so than paintings by other artists. According to Nochlin, Gerome had a reputation in his own time of being 'dauntingly objective and scientific and [comparable- in this respect with Realist novelists.'[48]

The online description for the 2010-11 exhibition The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904) in Musee d' Orsay describes the attempted realism in his work. 'The purported historical, geographical, or ethnographic settings in most of his paintings do not stand up to close analysis. Gérôme succeeded in painting an image of the Orient that was immutable, untouched, and presented for a western audience. He thus managed to captivate a public that delighted in fixed images of an unchanging "elsewhere". '[49] This creation thus contributed to the belief that such place as the Orient existed, and that what they see in the painting is part of reality rather than fantasy. The implications and underlying notions in the paintings were part of the discourse of othering and creating a world that was not only an opposite but also inferior in its ways.

[46] Nochlin, L. (1989). The Imaginary Orient In The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-century art and soeciety New York: Harper+Row.
[47] Ibidem.
[48] Ibidem.
[49] The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904). (2008, February 07). Retrieved July 02, 2020, from https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/in-the-museums/exhibitions-in-the-musee-dorsay-more/page/5/article/jean-leon-gerome-25691.html?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=649

4.3 A Visit, Harem Interior, Constantinople (1860)



Browne, Henriette. *A Visit, Harem Interior, Constantinople.* 1860. J A. Cooling & Sons, London

4.3.1 What do we see?

Harem Interior depicts a scene of a communal area where harem women are gathered. The scene shows women fully clothed and a child, which is an unusual image compared to the other two harem paintings. There is a variety of hair color visible, ranging from blond to black. Most of the women are depicted veiled, with some wearing sheer face coverings. In the scene the women seem to be engaging in conversation and movement. There is a dynamic in the painting that suggest a natural domesticity. The composition of the painting does not contain much aesthetic detailing but does have an interesting use of light sourcing. The focus is on center of the space and there are no architectural distractions.

4.3.2 Who is the artist?

Henriette Brown, officially named Sophie de Bouteiller, was a French Orientalist painter that travelled to many countries in the regions subject to Orientalism. During her life she travelled to Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, and Syria. As a female painter, she had the unique position to enter the world secluded from male visitors. Browne arguably provides a different narrative for the image of the harem that was not based on a male fantasy. This does not per default entail that female painters did not sexualize the harem or had reality in hand when creating these scenes. However, in the above example this does contrast the thematic predominantly scene in the harem paintings. As a woman Browne was undeniably in a unique position compared to her male counterparts as she was able to enter some places secluded to male strangers they were not. The position of Browne and other female painters or travelers were therefore regarded as 'authentic and authoritative'. [50]

4.3.3 What aspects of post-colonial theory does the painting reflect?

In her work Harem Interior this different narrative from the perspective of a woman is explicitly seen. The woman in the painting are not subjected to sexualization and have an agency as opposed to the bathhouse paintings. In virtue of this, Browne's painting is challenging the discourse in which the harem is usually portrayed. British art historian and author Reina Lewis writes about the work of Browne in her book Gendering Orientalism. She writes that by presenting the harem as a domestic space whose social environment is shaped by the women who live there, Browne minimizes the importance of the absent husband. The presence of a child is further noteworthy in evaluating the painting. 'The incorporation of a child into an utterly respectable and unremarkable domestic and scene dilutes the sexual charge of the harem location, drawing out the parallels between the European and Oriental domestic and challenging Western Orientalist fantasies.'[51] Nevertheless there is critique denoting Browne's work as mistaken depictions. Nineteenth century French academic painter Oliver Merson critiqued that the absence of 'hypersexuality and languorous partially clothed odalisques in the harem' stems from 'sexual naivete´. The fact that Browne and other representations, painted or authored, differ is not a mere decision based on sexual naivety but is derived from the reality in what they have first-hand seen.[52]

However, this does not mean that the painting does not have any underlying misconceptions. The role of the women remains domestic in nature and there is no suggestion of a public life. This finds it roots in the

[50] Lewis, R. (1996). *Gendering Orientalism: race, femininity, and representation*. London: Routledge.132
[51] Ibidem.
[52] Ali, I. (2015). The harem fantasy in nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 39(1), 33-46. doi:10.1007/s10624-015-9372-7

Victorian Society 'which formed their own biases and worldviews ordained the clear demarcation of public and private life into two separate spheres. Thus, seen through the lens of their own lived experiences, it seemed unfathomable to them that women cloistered away in a harem could exert even the smallest degree of influence outside the confines of their prison.'[53] The fact that Browne was a woman does not exclude her from seeing the harem women as exotic, sexual, mysterious and imprisoned. The images and discourse needs to be seen in the context of Orientalism as a system of self-projection and the Orient as the 'Other'. In this many opposites can be identified, polygamy versus monogamy, enslaved versus free, sexual versus chaste and black versus white. All of these have an engrained judgement that demarcates superior from inferior.

[53] Herath, T. (2016). Women and Orientalism: 19th century Representations of the Harem by European female travellers and Ottoman women. *Constellations*, 7(1), 10. doi:10.29173/cons27054

Conclusion and discussion

This thesis started off with the History of Orientalism and Edward Said's book and post-colonial theory *Orientalism.* This brought us to the question on representation and reality in Orientalist works and their relation to the post-colonial theory, including the scope of gender. This enabled the evaluation of this theory. Of the curated paintings, one challenged at least one aspect of post-colonial theory. The last painting discussed *A Visit, Harem Interior, Constantinople* served as a counterweight to the first two paintings. However, as discussed this does not remove the painting from the Orientalist discourse but it does further portray the statement that the genre was based of representation or even a completely imagined reality. As mentioned before Orientalism by Edward Said has been subject to both praise and criticism. Important is to note is that these chosen paintings only form a fraction of the existing body of knowledge represented in nineteenth century Orientalist paintings, leaving a broad scope for research. Furthermore, as the case studies are also subject to interpretation, the results cannot be regarded as pure objective truth but rather an informed point of view. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to continue studying theory in practice, as both traditional media as well as modern media provide us with relevant case studies. Moreover, as this thesis used this theory intended for the case study, there has not been an evaluation of the critique on the theory itself and the implication of the critique. Although this has no main relevance to this thesis, it may be an interesting suggestion for further variation on this case study.

In conclusion, the case studies formed a good base to apply the theory on a different subject than the focus in Orientalism as written by Edward Said. Applying the post-colonial theory enables the magnification of the layers of the art movement and their function. Although this may be considered in part art-historical it is still a relevant subject in understanding contemporary society. Critically examining history, in all Its forms, is important to understand society and the fundament it is built on. The images of an imagined *Orient* remain today and find their origin in a long tradition of manipulating the portrayal of the 'Other'. The images and discourse we create in traditional media, as well as modern media extend further than an imagine that stands by itself. It is a chain of assumptions formed by the dominating population that is being carved in stone rather than written in sand, leaving a mark that can have more than dire results. The very intention behind the choice made in this thesis are reflected in the following passage in *Orientalism* that I would like to conclude this thesis with.

''The worldwide hegemony of Orientalism and all it stands for can now be challenged, if we can benefit properly from the general twentieth century rise to political and historical awareness of so many of the earth's peoples. If this book has any future use, it will be as a modest contribution to that challenge, and as a warning: that systems of thought like Orientalism, discourses of power, ideological fictions—mind-forg'd manacles—are all too easily made, applied, and guarded.''[54]

[54] Said, E. W. (1979). Orientalism: Edward W. Said. New York: Vintage Books. 328

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