

## The Homeland of Stereotypes

**Hossein Keramatfar**

University of Tehran, IRAN

e-mail: h.keramatfar@ut.ac.ir

### ABSTRACT

Following the vigorous critique of orientalism, orientalist discourse had employed complex strategies to create ambivalent non-Western stereotypes. The earlier fixed oriental characters were often discarded; they were instead accorded certain amounts of flexibility. However, the fact was that despite such changes and these less negative images, orientalist discourse continued producing the Oriental other to perpetuate Western domination. In fact, it simply drew upon old repertoire of stereotypes, recycled them, and produced new ones; only care was taken that they did not sound as markedly negative as the old ones. The present paper sought to investigate how the American TV series *Homeland* (2011-) repeated the imperialist claims of the orientalist discourse by presenting a range of oriental character types, from the classic Muslim terrorist to some less negative characters. It employed “Negative formulas” to produce more ambivalent stereotypes to reinforce the alleged essential superiority of America. The series staged the character of the captive mind as the ideal oriental type to be imitated by all Orientals. The paper also demonstrated that how *Homeland* employed the orientalist theme of nativization, again only to prove the eventual un-contaminability and superiority of the West. Islam and Iran were the particular targets of *Homeland*'s stereotyping.

**Keywords:** Ambivalent character, Captive Mind, Nativization, Negative Formula, Orientalist Discourse

### INTRODUCTION

Orientalist discourse, supposedly a dispassionate academic discipline, has continuously inclined to treat oriental people as indiscriminate masses. Whereas in this discourse the Western world is constantly lauded due to the fact that it respects the individual and puts the interest of the individual before that of the society, Orientals are always denied individuality. In fact, it is a common practice for the discourse to contrast the Western individual with the non-Western collectivity, with the advantageous position almost always reserved for the former. The point here, of course, is not that non-Westerners do or should crave for the Western individualism since it is not as liberating, and democratic, a belief as it promises to be. Angie Sandhu views individualism as a tool at the service of the powerful classes whose aim is to “obscure their considerable hegemony—notably educational, legal, economic and social advantages—through their professed attachment to the values of ‘the’ individual that enables them to be figured as exceeding the confinement of class interest”(2007, p. 24). The point, however, is that such a rejection of individuality of non-Westerners and the collective treatment of them is quite ideological and carries with it certain hidden imperialistic intentions.

It is not difficult to realize how such a denying of individuality helps the orientalist discourse to label

Orientals en bloc and present a false and distorted image of them even when a single Eastern individual or group is involved in a certain event. If the “other” of the Western individual is merely a mass, then it is the mass that must be held accountable regardless of who is involved. In other words, a particular non-western individual's dangerous deeds or wrongdoings are never attributable to him/her as an individual; an entire people should, then, be demonized. Such indiscriminate, collective viewing of Orientals makes *stereotyping* an easy and even a necessary issue within oriental discourse. Orientalist discourse has, in this way, been continuously producing and continues to produce stereotypes.

In fact, this stereotyping of the “other” is so essential to the orientalist discourse that it can even be regarded as its very basis. In other words, treating non-Westerners as stereotypical collectivities is a characteristic of orientalism in a way that the whole oriental discourse will collapse if stereotyping is suspended. Leela Gandhi refers to the same point. For her, the very discursivity of orientalist discourse is an effect of stereotypes. She believes that “orientalism becomes a discourse at the point at which it starts *systematically* to produce stereotypes about Orientals and the Orient” (1998, p. 77; my emphasis). Here, Gandhi's allusion to the *systematic* production of stereotypes is of high significance. At the heart of this system lies the

tension between the Western individual and non-Western collectivity; a tension that generates a host of stereotypes. Individuality is presumed to be superior to and threatened by collectivity. Moreover, this systematicity is the fact that ties Orientalism with imperialist/colonialist power, since by systematically producing stereotypes, orientalism seeks to ensure and *naturalize* the superiority of the West over the East: “Orientalism created a typology of characters, organized around the contrast between the rational Westerner and the lazy Oriental” (Turner, p. 21). To put it differently, the assumption of the Western individual and the non-Western masses motivates stereotyping; according to Gandhi, it is stereotyping that gives orientalism the status of a discourse.

At the same time, discourse, Foucault reminds us, is inevitably implicated in power. Bhabha, for whom stereotyping is the “major discursive strategy” of orientalism and a “mode of knowledge and power,” refers to the interconnection between discourse and politics in the colonial context by reiterating the fact of “the exercise of colonial power through discourse” (p. 95). The way Gandhi defines discourse also alludes to the strong ties that exist between a given discourse and the power relations that it sustains and is, in turn, sustained by: discourses are “modes of utterance or systems of meaning which are both constituted by, and committed to, the perpetuation of dominant social systems” (p. 77). Stereotyping, discourse, and power are, therefore, closely and crucially linked.

## ORIENTALISM AND DISCOURSE

It is generally believed that it was Edward Said who first focused on and drew attention to stereotyping of Easterners by orientalists and how this stereotyping was at the service of colonialist projects. Gandhi, for example, after analyzing Edward Said’s ideas in his celebrated book *Orientalism*, concludes that for Said such stereotypes function to guarantee “the positional superiority of the West over positional inferiority of the East” (p. 77). Turner, drawing upon Said’s ideas, reiterates the same point: “orientalism as a discourse divides the globe unambiguously into Occident and Orient; the latter is essentially strange, exotic and mysterious, but also sensual, irrational and potentially dangerous” (2003, p. 44). Stam et al. (2006) also believe that the West “constructed its self-image on the backs of its equally constructed other” (p. 109). Said’s ideas reveal the close connections that exist between stereotypes, orientalist discourse and imperialist intentions. In this sense, stereotypes are constructions that get constructed by orientalist discourse to serve the imperialist goals of the West

and its hegemonic purposes. Therefore, in order to challenge the orientalist discourse, one needs to have an eye for and challenge the stereotypes that it generates and perpetuates. Thus, in the wake of Said’s *Orientalism*, calling into question the stereotypes of oriental discourse becomes imperative. Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (2009), who look deeply into Said’s ideas about oriental stereotypes in the discourse of orientalism, even argue that orientalist stereotypes can no longer go unchallenged. They believe that “after Said, it is impossible for these stereotypes to go unchallenged, no matter how persistently they appear” (p. 153).

Nevertheless, it is also argued that Said’s arguments in *Orientalism* are inflexible. What he portrays in his book is a constant negative *stereotype* of a Westerner that produces fixed negative Oriental stereotypes. Moreover, for him all the representations of Orientals are necessarily distorted constructions. He chooses to overlook any positive image of Easterners provided by more judicious orientalists. Ziauddin Sardar regards it as “a common criticism of Said... that he has presented Orientalism as an unchanging, monolithic discourse” (p. 70), and believes what Said does is “orientalism in reverse”. Gandhi also sees the same lapse of judgment in Said. She criticizes Said for assuming that orientalist discourse produces fixed stereotypes and therefore for failing to see “that cultural stereotypes are considerably more ambivalent and dynamic” (p. 77). That is, the orientalist discourse constructs cultural stereotypes that portray flexibility of character; characters which are not as rigid as their 19<sup>th</sup> century, and earlier, counterparts. Gandhi comes to an important conclusion which is central to this study. She concludes that after Said’s *Orientalism* the critic’s task is “to demonstrate the ambivalence of the Oriental stereotype” (p. 79). This “ambivalence” is particularly evident in recent cultural production of stereotypes where all-negative stereotypes of earlier times are discarded and attempt is made to create less negative image of non-Westerners.

Ignoring this fact about oriental discourse may lead to serious misinterpretation. However, it should always be taken into consideration that “ambivalent” stereotypes are stereotypes all the same. Furthermore, like Gandhi’s realization that in the orientalist discourse stereotypes are *systematically* produced, it is noticeable that producing ambivalent stereotypes is also methodical and formulaic. In his article *This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine: The Tempest and the Discourse of Colonialism*, Paul Brown presents the idea of “negative formulas” by which he means the strategies whereby a less negative image of the other is produced. These strategies are *negative*

because they do not furnish the Orientals with some positive qualities; rather they cut down on the negative points that have traditionally been associated with non-Westerners. One such strategy requires that instead of representing the other as positively possessing some commendable attributes it should be shown as lacking “those qualities that connote civility” (p. 56). In another strategy, the other is represented as a *tabula rasa* on which the Western man can easily inscribe what he deems true civility. A third strategy involves representing “the other as natural simplicity against which jaded civility might be criticized” (p. 56). What is constructed as the result of “negative formula” is an image of the non-Westerner which is ambivalent and less negative than previous representations of them. However, the idea that Brown seeks to make clear in this article is that the other is produced only for the sake of civility. That is, negative or less negative, stereotypes are constructed by oriental discourse only to serve imperial powers. Once again, it brings us to the fact that challenging the orientalist/imperialist discourse requires challenging the stereotypes it constructs; as King mentions, construction of cultural stereotypes aims to “subordinate, classify and dominate the non-Western world” (P. 92).

Along with the stereotypes generated by the strategies of negative formula, another ambivalent stereotype has featured in the cultural productions of the oriental discourse. “Brown sahib”, or “captive mind”, or “Orientalized Oriental” is that scholar, writer, or thinker who, in the words of Sardar, “is defined by its acute state of intellectual bondage and total dependence on the west... one who physically resides in the ‘East’, and sometimes in the West, yet spiritually feeds on the West... A captive mind is not uncritical; it is critical only on behalf of the West” (p. 85). Captive minds, who are “broadly colonized in their minds... are a very specific Western *creation*, a product of over a century of conscious policy” (p. 86, my emphasis). For Merican, captive minds are mere “imitators ... characterized by a way of thinking that is dominated by Western thought in an imitative and uncritical manner” (p. 52). In his preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre calls them “walking lies.” Originally, captive minds were specifically educated to further the goals of colonial powers even after the independence of former colonies. They were trained in a way to internalize the Western values and principles and act as their guardians. The important thing about captive minds is that they think and act Western-style all unconsciously. In the meantime, while Sardar refers to captive minds merely as *intellectual* figures at the service of imperial power, a glance at recent cultural productions of the Western

world indicates that how the figure of captive mind has also been *culturally* adopted for securing the dominance of Western world. In fact, captive minds have been turned into a new stereotype; it is a stereotype that is essentially ambivalent. Culturally a captive mind is a character from the East that reveals unmistakable stereotypical Eastern traits; yet s/he is presented under more favorable lights. S/he is an *enlightened* character since her/his representative ideas are more Western-like and in contrast with the Eastern traditions. Such an individual “spiritually feeds on the West” and regards the West as the superior (Upstone, p. 109). Great care, however, is taken to obscure this latter point. In this way, the intellectual figure of captive mind is made to feature as a new ambivalent cultural stereotype of Eastern people. The important point in constructing this stereotype of captive mind is that it is presented as a perfect model for all Orientals to follow. Attempt is also made to conceal its “colonized mind,” its intellectual ties with and its dependency upon the West, and its constructed nature so that it would appear as a spontaneous character and personality that ought to be regarded as the typical Eastern identity that may be adopted by all the non-Westerners. This ideal model of Eastern perfection appears commonly in orientalist movies, series, novels, etc.

There is yet another central point in oriental discourse which is brought about by colonial/imperial encounters: the expansion of civility can be the undoing of civil man himself. Imperialism and colonialism have always involved a contact: the contact between the colonizer, the occupier, and the colonized, the native. In colonial encounters, the assumption of the essential superiority of the Western culture of the colonizer has always entailed the fear and anxiety of adulteration of the Western culture as the result of the negative influence of the native culture. Not only have the imperialists had to be studious in planting the seeds of their superior culture, but also they have had to be on their guards against the threat of contamination of their culture by the native culture of the colonized which stereotypically is constructed as inferior. Leela Gandhi chooses the phrase “troubling reciprocity” for this inevitable exchange and believes that “the troubling reciprocity between the metropolitan center and the colonial periphery” (p. 134) continually produces the danger that “the metropolis is not safe from the cultural contagion of its own ‘peripheral’ practices” (p. 134). The principal bearers of this contamination are those who come into direct contact with the natives. It is they who are likely to “go native;” that is, the colonizers face the threat of “going native” which means “losing their distinctiveness and superior identity by contamination from native

practice” and it is this “fear of contamination that is at the heart of colonialist discourse.” (Ashcroft et al, 2013, p. 132). And this “nativization” and its fear loom large as a continuous threat that has to be dealt with effectively in colonial discourse. Native son became a recurrent stereotype in oriental discourse from the onset.

### **HOMELAND AND STEREOTYPING**

Edward Said believes that “one aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed” (2003, p. 26). Although stereotypes are the pivot of oriental discourse and are continually produced, underlying all the points mentioned above is the fact that oriental discourse has always managed to absorb and learn from its critiques. Therefore, it keeps updating itself, subtilizing its strategies and methods; it makes postmodern period the post-orientalist period as well. Another important point to be mentioned here is the fact that imperialist discourse has always been reliant on cultural products for furthering, and also for legitimizing, its goals and practices. In fact, culture and imperialistic practices are closely tied together. This is Said’s thesis in his *Culture and Imperialism*. In this book he attacks the humanist “radical falsification” that “culture is exonerated of any entanglement with power” (1994, p. 57). He sees it as a conspiracy and believes that “cultural process has to be seen as a vital, informing, and invigorating counterpoint to the economic and political machinery at the center of imperialism” (1994, p. 222).

An important component of the complementary “cultural process” that Said refers to is the production and perpetuation of negative and dangerous Eastern stereotypes. That is, the Orientals are “invested with all the demonic terror of US racial and political xenophobia” then “such stereotypes enter into public debate in general and into academic discourse in particular” (Ashcroft et al, 2009, p. 70). And such an entering of stereotypes into public debate engenders a certain bias against non-Westerners within the public sphere that is quite serviceable to the hegemonic goals of the US. Accordingly, American TV series *Homeland* (2011) is regarded as a cultural product within the imperialistic “cultural process” that displays all the features of oriental/imperialist discourse and proves to be part of the imperialistic agenda of the US. It draws upon old, worn-out stereotypes, but it also presents ambivalent stereotypes and captive minds to reveal that it is in line with the latest updates in oriental discourse. Moreover, the question of nativization is central to *Homeland* which requires closer analysis.

Leela Gandhi raises a legitimate question that summarizes the orientalist apprehension of nativization of Westerners: “How... could the metropolitan homeland remain immune to the products of its tyranny abroad?” (p. 133). This notion of nativization of Westerners is so central to *Homeland* that it is not irrelevant to say that it is but a serialized and narrativized rehearsal of the fear of nativization; although in the end this fear is to a large extent gone because the integrity of American individual is presented to be un-contaminable and the faith in American individual is restored. The whole story circles around a US marine who is believed to have gone native. He, who had been held captive for eight years in Iraq, is now free and has returned to America. However, he is now suspected of having “turned” because a CIA officer had been earlier told by an Al-Qaeda member that an American prison of war “has turned.”

At first, no one believes the CIA officer’s claim and the US marine is acclaimed as a hero. But later things change when in a video he confesses that he has “turned” and is involved in plans against America because he believes that US officials have been involved in killing of innocent children. The “turned” or nativized soldier now displays all the traits that are stereotypically reserved for the Orientals. He is emotional, unpredictable, and irrational. However, and most important of all, he is a Muslim now. It is not by any means a coincidence that he is now both a Muslim and a man intending to carry out suicidal attacks. He is the stereotype of the Muslim terrorist. He is the American that has gone native, he has become a Muslim and thus a terrorist. The message is clear; Islam is synonymous with terrorism. It is an example of what Said refers to as the “demeaning stereotypes that lump together Islam and terrorism” (p. 347). The “turned”, that is, the nativized, American now faces a dilemma; he has now a new set of Oriental values that are in conflict with his former values. (The fact that Western and Eastern values are not necessarily conflictual is not the focus of this study).

In the conflict between supposedly Islamic terroristic dogmas and American life-affirming values, it is ultimately the American values that *re-turn* and save him, the nativized Western man is de-nativized. Basically, *Homeland* draws upon the classic idea of nativization only to make it serviceable to imperialistic power in a new way. Commenting on the question of going native Gandhi alludes to the fact that “fears about the disquieting ‘nativization’ of the colonial edifice also feed into speculations about the possible corruption of metropolitan culture itself by the wandering colonizer”(p. 133). *Homeland* seems to

be suggesting that such “fears” and “speculations” might in the last analysis be groundless since although the “wandering colonizer” might, as the result of contact with the inferior culture of non-Westerners, lose his values, it is only temporary and in the end the redeeming American culture will gain the upper hand and rescue him/her.

The turned individual in *Homeland* becomes the space where American values of family and patriotism collide with acquired non-Western beliefs and ultimately manage to exorcise the individual and thus undermine the threat of contamination of the whole metropolitan culture. Interestingly enough, there is no mention of Christianity and Christian values in the series; Islam is depicted as the antithesis not of Christianity but of Americanism. This is what Sardar calls “American Orientalism” (p. 109). In other words, *Homeland* displays the problem of contamination by the other, and, at the same time, employs encoded pleasure that turns this contamination into something serviceable to power; it rehearses the threat in order to contain it. The whole project is meant to promote the Islamophobic sentiments and prejudices. It is done by displacing the fear of Islam on to the already denigrated (the terrorists).

Stereotyping is practiced freely in *Homeland*. It displays a variety of stereotypes, both fixed and ambivalent. The old figures of voluptuous Arabs and also of Muslims as “inherently violent and deranged characters” (Sardar, p. 95) and terrorists abound in *Homeland*. It depicts the post Iraq-war US which is facing unknown threat of terrorist attack. Not surprisingly, Muslim Arabs are behind all these. Any Arab Muslim who appears on the scene is inherently and maliciously evil and dangerous. There is, however, a young Arab who teaches at a small college. Along the lines of negative formula, this Arab is given a less negative image. He is the character of the “natural simplicity” that has married an American girl who has now “turned” against her own country as the result of her stay in Saudi Arabia. He just loves his American wife and his “natural simplicity” is the thing “against which jaded civility” of his wife is criticized. The subtle underlying message is that the ambivalence of this Arab comes from the fact that his life-style is American-like; otherwise, he would have been a terrorist. In other words, if he is not a terrorist it is because he has Americanized himself. Meanwhile, Iran and Iranians are also the target of stereotyping of American Orientalism.

Starting with season 3 and in an arbitrary turn of events, Iran replaces Al-Qaeda as the designer of terrorist attacks on the US. And with such a turn an

anti-Iranian propaganda becomes imperative. To bring about such an anti-Iranian cant, *Homeland* once more draws heavily upon stereotyping. In addition to Iranian people, Iran itself is presented in stereotypically orientalist terms. Those who live in Iran or have visited Iran would readily acknowledge that how far from reality *Homeland*'s representation of Iran is. In the last few episodes, the action of which takes place in Iran, the capital, Tehran, is portrayed as a gang-governed city with mob-infested streets where cars filled with armed people arrive without prior notice and close any place off at will, a city in which a civil, modern way of life is not an option. An image of Iran, in other words, is constructed along the classic orientalist assumption that Oriental places are wild and uncivil. This is an illustration of Sardar's definition of orientalism as a “constructed ignorance” (p. 4). Such an ignorance and false representation in 21<sup>st</sup> century, to say the least, is outrageous. So outrageous indeed that no argument with regard to limitation of location for filming can justify it. That is why Sardar believes that “wilful misunderstanding and knowledgeable ignorance have remained the guiding spirit of orientalism” (p. 19). At the same time, a different stereotype, the figure of an Iranian captive mind, features as another telling character in *Homeland*.

An Iranian young girl who is supposed to act as a “transaction analyst” at the CIA and help trace the source of the money that leads to the bombing of the headquarters of the CIA and who is apparently preferred to other analysts because of her “language skill” manifests the characteristics of a captive mind. She is a novice with only eight days of work experience in the CIA who is chosen to work with a group of experienced CIA old-timers. Therefore, declaring mastery of Persian language as the reason why she has been chosen does not seem to hold water since it turns out that the only thing she does not find a use for in her dealings is her ability to speak Persian. The true reason sounds to be the fact that *Homeland* insists that a captive mind should fill the position so that she could be proposed as the model of a true Iranian. Care is taken that she unmistakably looks like a non-Western girl and in this case an Iranian girl. And what would suit the purpose better than an Islamic dress code? This “lumping together” of Islam, Iran, and terrorism serves American agendas.

Under the questioning Western eyes of American agents she enters the CIA office. Moreover, the very presence of an Iranian girl with the Islamic dress code in the CIA, which is supposedly facing threats from Iranians and Muslims, gets the message of American tolerance across. Care is also taken to reveal this

tolerance in the way that the CIA agents treat the Iranian girl. This is also a promotion of the “view of the CIA as a heaven of liberalism... or the myth that it is well motivated.” (Saunders, p. 3) Soon, however, this simple financial analyst whose only privilege to her counterparts has been her mastery in Persian language, turns out to be a credible intellectual figure whose insights and comments on Iran’s political, and social conditions carry considerable weight.

Despite the fact that she states that “I am American” and the fact that she is living in the US, She has so great a grip on Iran’s affair that she can, in response to the accusation that she is working for the enemy (the Americans), cry loudly and unhesitatingly that “they are not enemy!” As Sardar says “a captive mind is not uncritical; it is critical only on behalf of the West” (p. 85). And of course her insights and comments are only a recycled version of American anti-Iranian propaganda that Iran is a dangerous country with terroristic policy. In addition to her intellectual bonds with the US, she sounds to be devoid of any individuality so that she submits to whatever is decided for her. She even risks the life of her family in Tehran to help an American operation in Iran. Sardar refers to this fact when he argues that in orientalism “submissiveness... is an integral part of the Oriental character which will always submit to greater forces” (p. 10). The captive mind has internalized this submissiveness and *Homeland* aims to present it an “integral part” of Eastern people. In fact, it is by staging the figure of the captive mind that *Homeland* follows its imperialistic agenda. The captive mind, an essentially Western creation, is presented as the ideal Oriental/Iranian character to be imitated. This ideal character does not consider the conduct of the USA questionable even if when s/he is working with the CIA in a plot against his/her own country because s/he believes that America knows the best interests of every country and its intentions are always benevolent. Submissiveness is the inevitable result of such an absolute trust in American agenda. All this aims at naturalizing the alleged superiority of America.

## CONCLUSION

America’s problem in sustaining and expanding its power across the world is the “problem of representation”, i.e. its capability to organize the world in its own terms. To overcome this problem, and also since its alleged superiority does not simply happen but must be continually *produced*, the imperial power relies on the discourse of orientalism which, relying in its turn heavily on cultural products, *constructs* an instrumental knowledge of the Orient and Orientals.

An important part of such an instrumental knowledge is the production and perpetuation of Oriental stereotypes. Mostly through popular fiction, movies, and TV series, orientalist discourse produces a distorted image of the East, representing the Easterners collectively and stereotypically. These products are part of orientalist/imperialist discourse and produce the stereotypes of dangerous Orientals only to decriminalize the US aggressive and expansionist measures in Eastern parts of the world. Therefore, to challenge the American discourse of orientalism challenging the stereotypes that it produces becomes a must.

These cultural products with their tremendous psychological appeal accustom the average Westerner to viewing Easterners collectively and only in stereotypical terms. Stereotypes which more often than not are presented as serious threats to America and dealing with them for the US is a matter of now or never. These stereotypes produce a bias in general public and help the US officials legitimize their questionable quests in the Eastern parts of the world. Since challenging the American imperialistic discourse is never effective without challenging the stereotypes it produces, special attention must be paid to the fact that imperialist discourse has moved from presenting only recognizably negative stereotypes; less negative images of Orientals, like captive minds, have already started to abound in cultural products of the West. They are too constructed for imperialistic goals, only care is taken that they should not appear as blatantly negative as before. This is all seen in *Homeland* which, by drawing upon both fixed and ambivalent stereotypes, seeks to decriminalize US former and future hostile practices against the East in general and against Islam and Iran in particular.

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