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**Stereotyping and Bias in the Depiction of Algerian
Religious Life Under Ottoman Rule**

التحيز العنصري في تصوير الحياة الدينية للجزائريين اثناء الحكم
العثماني

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Abstract: The reflection on the cultural virtues of others is generally ingrained in the superiority/inferiority binary, given the instinct of difference of human beings, and its ultimate by-products as stereotypes and biases. In that vein, Western writers, above all the category of travelers, religious men, and administrators developed negative stands and judgments as to the African and Asian peoples they encountered. This is glaringly epitomized by the Western chroniclers who dwelt on the religious aspect of the Algerian society under the Ottoman rule, depicting the religious men as fanatical persons who stood as a bar in front of progress. Most notable among them were: R. P. Jean-Baptist Labat (a French reverend), Laugier de Tassy (a Dutch marine officer), Depont.Octave, Coppolani, Xavier and Douté Edmond. The premise of the present paper is to shed light on the writings of those chroniclers, with a view to pinpointing the negative images developed with regard to the religious life of the Algerians, scrutinizing the rate of their exactitude, and deciphering the reasons behind. To pursue that, the study tackles first an elucidation of the concept of racial difference and its psychological corollary. Secondly, the study hinges on the exploration of those black-painted pictures. Finally, the paper assesses the Western allegations on the light of rational historical investigation. The findings indicate that such writers did not necessarily refer to all the truth as they were impressed by the force of racial difference, and the lack of cultural empathy.

Keywords: Stereotype, chroniclers, religious, fanatic, Ottoman, Algerian society; truth; cultural empathy.

الملخص: إن التأمل في الفضائل الثقافية للآخرين هو مغروس بشكل عام في ثنائية التفوق/الدونية، بالنظر إلى غريزة الاختلاف بين البشر، والمنتجات الثانوية النهائية كصور نمطية وتحيزات. من هذا المنطلق، قام الكتاب الغربيون، بخاصة فئة الرحالة، ورجال الدين والإداريين بتطوير مواقف وأحكام سلبية بالنسبة

للسعوب الإفريقية والآسيوية التي واجهوها، ويتجلى ذلك بوضوح من قبل المؤرخين الغربيين الذين كتبوا عن الجانب الديني للمجتمع الجزائري في ظل الحكم العثماني، ويصورون رجال الدين كأشخاص متعصبين وقفوا كعقبة أمام التقدم، ومن أبرزهم: ر. ب. جان بابتيست لابات (رجل فرنسي)، لوجي دي تاسي (ضابط بحري هولندي)، ديونت. وكافيت، كوبولاني، كزافيه ودوتيه إدموند.

يهدف هذا المقال إلى إلقاء الضوء على كتابات هؤلاء المؤرخين، بهدف تحديد الصور السلبية التي تم رسمها فيما يتعلق بالحياة الدينية للجزائريين، وضبط معدل دقتها، وفك رموز الأسباب، ومتابعة ذلك، يتناول هذا البحث توضيحاً لمفهوم الاختلاف العنصري ونتائجه النفسية، تعتمد الدراسة على استكشاف تلك الصور السلبية، كما تقوم الدراسة بتقييم الادعاءات الغربية على ضوء التحقيق التاريخي العقلائي، وتؤكد النتائج أن هؤلاء الكتاب لا يشارون بالضرورة إلى كل الحقيقة لتأثرهم الكبير بقوة الاختلاف العرقي، وانعدام التعاطف الثقافي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النمطية، المؤرخ، رجل الدين، المتعصب، العثمانيين، المجتمع الجزائري، الحقيقة، التعاطف الثقافي.

1. Introduction: Racial relations are generally correlated with the unleashing of biases, prejudice, and stereotypes. This is glaringly true in the case of peoples who consider themselves as superior to the others as is the case with the European/African binary. In fact, the European encounter with the Algerian peoples in the seventeenth century, for the sake both of commerce and religion, generated such an instance of superior/inferior nexus. In this scope, many French travelers, traders, political administrators, diplomats, and religious men dwelt on the description of the Algerian society, particularly its religious side, from a purely biased angle. Most notable among those European chroniclers were R. P. Jean-Baptist Labat (a French reverend), Laugier de Tassy (a Dutch marine officer), Depont Octave (a French colonial administrator), Coppolani Xavier (a French colonial administrator), and Doutté Edmond (a French sociologist, and Orientalist). They depicted the Algerian religious men as fanatical persons who were prone to bizarre and ridiculous practices, that necessarily stood as a bar in front of progress. Before shedding light on those stigmatized images, a concept exploration will first be tackled with a view to delineating the concepts of stereotype.

2- Conceptual Exploration of Stereotypes: Stereotypes are superficial judgments made about all the members of a particular social group. According to Blum 'stereotypes are false or misleading generalizations about groups held in a manner that renders them largely, though not

entirely, immune to counterevidence'¹ Dovidio et al consider stereotypes as 'associations, and attributions of specific characteristics to a group'². Once the stereotypes have been disseminated in a given setting, they linger and extend to other settings. In such a way, stereotypers can hardly snuff out the negative images, and even turn deaf ears to seeing the contrary.

Stereotypes are harbored from a purely human nature. People tend to categorize and classify racial groups in order to render their life simpler. Both the micro and the macro environments affect the way individuals see members of other groups. The stereotypers usually use their previous experience and knowledge to identify those whom they ignore. Stereotypes are automatic stands people adopt vis-à-vis strange individuals. They tend also

to occur in case of competitive groups. According to Blumer, stereotypes, prejudice, and bias are used to enhance one's self esteem from a psychological standpoint³. He further reinforces this idea by asserting: race prejudice is a defensive reaction to such challenging of the sense of group position... As such, race prejudice is a protective device. It functions, however shortsightedly, to preserve the integrity and position of the dominant group.⁴

Some research admits that stereotyping is related to an individual pathology, scapegoating, displacement, resentment, and defensive rigidity⁵. It is not, therefore, surprising that the reliance on stereotypes in interaction makes scarce room for the real appreciation of the other. This may have a dangerous imprint on people as only the external traits are considered, creating thereby a climate of friction, contempt, and animosity.

1- Blum, Lawrence. Stereotypes and stereotyping: a moral analysis in *Philosophical Papers*, vol 33 N° 3, 2004. http://www.faculty.umb.edu/lawrence_blum/publications/publications/A48.pdf

2- Dovidio, John F., Miles Hewstone, Peter Glick, and Victoria M. Esses. Prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination: theoretical and empirical overview in *The Sage Handbook of Prejudice, stereotyping and Discrimination*, 2012, pp 3-28. https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/54590_dovido,_chapter_1.pdf.

3- Cited in ibid

4- Ibid

5- Blum, op.cit

Having outlined the context under which stereotypes occur, it is interesting to see the exactitude or the falseness of stereotypes. Basically, stereotypes represent a sort of generalization whereby one or more specific features are ascribed to the whole group. This means that all the members of the stereotyped group are automatically epitomized according to the peculiar virtues accredited to the group. Yet, whatever the kernel of truth prone to the stereotypes, they do not necessarily express the verity. Those negative representations might be true only for some individuals, but totally misleading for the others. To illustrate that better, one can take the following example: not all the Arabs are lazy, not all the Muslims are terrorists, and not all the Algerians are rude. Consideration will be now given to the consideration of the stereotypical images ascribed to the Algerian religious institutions.

3- Streotypical Images of the Algerian Religious Societies: Travel literature abounded during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. There were different categories of travelers: mathematicians, astrologers, traders, marine agents, diplomats, missionaries. Describing those history chroniclers, l'abbés l'Englet-Dufresnoy says 'plus au moins instruits, plus aux moins observateurs, mais qui se déplacent rarement par simple curiosité'¹. Notable among those writers were R. P. Jean-Baptist Labat (a French reverend), Laugier de Tassy (a Dutch marine officer), Depont Octave (a French colonial administrator), Coppolani Xavier (a French colonial administrator), and Doutté Edmond (a French sociologist, and Orientalist). Those authors dwelt on the history of Algeria, particularly its religious institutions under the Ottoman rule. Their books are cited respectively as follows: *Mémoires du Chevalier D'arvieux*, *Histoire du royaume d'Alger*, *Les Confréries religieuses Musulmanes*, and *Notes sur L'Islam Maghribin*.

The Algerian kingdom, by the times subject to Ottoman colonial rule, was referred to as the Barbary states whose main towns were : Constantine, Bône, Calle, Gigeri, Bougie, Tenos, Esthara, Tadalis, Telmestam, in addition to other less important cities. The Europeans felt a great hostility towards those states as they had been engaged with them in perpetual wars. Thomson clarifies this contempt 'the very word turk

1- Numa , Broc. Voyage et géographie au XVII siècles. *Revue d'histoire des sciences*, Vol.22 , 2, 1969, pp. 137-154

was calculated to strike fear into the hearts of all inhabitants of Christendom, for they had been for centuries its chief enemies, representatives of the Antichrist and the very personification of cruelty and ferocity'¹. Galland uses the terms 'barbarian, rude, and completely ignorant'².

When describing the Algerian religious institutions, the European chroniclers identified different Islamic religious institutions as: marabouts, derouich, khouan, confréries mystiques, zaouia, and sufi. Yet, there is an ambiguity as to the difference between those religious foundations. Depont and Coppolani distinguished 72 religious sects grouped into seven dissident schools: 'Chiites, Kharédjites, Mo'tazélites, Mordjites, Nadjarites, Djabrites, Mochabbihtes and Nadjites'³. The most important religious congregations comprised: Qadrïa, Chadelia, Naqechabendia, Taibia, Senoucia, Tidjania, Rahmania, Hansalia, Naceria, Zeroukia, Ammaria, Darquaoua, Madania, Karzazia, Mokhalia, Chabbia, Yousefia, Aissaouia, Ziania, Cheikhia, and Naceria.

Tracking now the way those religious institutions were epitomized, there seems to be a common consensus with regard to a number of features such as: fanatics, foolish, ridiculous, ignorant, superstitious, and illiterate. The feature of fanatics is discerned in a number of passages that are mentioned in the following extracts 'de la terre donnée à Dieu, surgissaient des fanatiques invulnérables,'⁴ 'on se sentait pris d'admiration pour la grandeur de cette foi, mais aussi d'une immense tristesse pour ces victimes d'un aveuglement fanatique, fruit d'une décadence tombée si bas qu'elle atteint le niveau de la bête rébarbative et méfiante.'⁵

Other uses of the word fanatic are cited as follows : 'les agissements occultes de fanatiques'; 'C'est ce monde mystérieux de vicaires, d'apôtres, de fanatiques'; 'ces pauvres, ces fanatiques, ces mystiques'⁶

1- Thomson, Ann. *Barbary and Enlightenment : European Attitudes Towards the Maghreb in the 18th Century*, Leiden, E.J Brill, 1987, p 6.

2- Ibid, p. 16

3- Ibid, p 231

4- Depont, Octave, Coppolani, Xavier. *Les Confréries religieuses Musulmanes*. Alger: Adolphe Jourdain. 1897, p 230. <https://www.algerie-ancienne.com/>

5- Ibid, p 237.

6- Ibid.

They have also been pictured as enemies to the Western civilised world : 'L'Islam, mû par les confréries religieuses, peut être un grave péril pour l'œuvre de civilisation à entreprendre'. Douté further adds 'ces instruments politico-religieux qui, en organisant la tribu, en l'arrêtant sur la route de la barbarie, pratiques mystiques, la folie et même l'imbécillité peuvent conduire à la dignité de marabout'¹. This danger is conspicuously tied with the belief that Sufi societies want to preach anti-Christian sentiments: 'A chacune des brèches que l'Europe ouvre dans le vieil Orient pour y faire pénétrer la civilisation et la lumière, le musulman frémit de terreur. En face du danger menaçant, les patrons des confréries poussent le cri d'alarme, resserrent les liens de leurs adeptes, prêchent la guerre sainte et érigent en principe l'opposition systématique à toute innovation'².

Muslim saints were also depicted as fool 'Les musulmans croient que la pensée de Dieu habite ces cerveaux laissés vides par la pensée'³. Douté evinces the act of foolishness through the state of their clothes: 'Vêtus de haillons, ces bahloûl, ces boûhâli errent par les rues de toute agglomération'⁴. He adds that those fool Muslims could even commit the most extravagant acts and still be considered as saints, such as the fact of drinking alcohol and eating pork. Tassy asserts that the reason why those 'derouich' were held in high esteem by the people is due to the fact that they were supposed to have divine visions, and to interact with angles who provided them with whatever they asked for⁵. According to Depont and Coppolani those people were tolerated by the Ottoman Sultans, probably to perdure peace and order. The writers also asserted that those foolish were solicited by their people to settle disputes⁶.

In some of the authors' descriptions, one finds clearly cases of irony and contempt: 'dès que le Marabout commence les cris'⁷; 'Il y a un

1- Douté, Edmont. Notes sur l'Islam Maghribin : les marabouts. *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, Vol. 41,1900, p 290.

2- Depont, Octave & Coppolani, Xavier, op.cit, p XVIII.

3- Douté, op, cit, p 291

4- Ibid

5- Ibid, p 292

6- Ibid, p 293

7- Baptist, Labat Jean. *Mémoires du Chevalier d'Arvieux*. cinquième partie. Paris : Charles-Jean-Baptiste Delespine, 1735, p 236. <https://www.algerie-ancienne.com/>

Marabout ou Religieux Mahométan, appelé Cheikh Abdelkader ... C'est un grand homme brun sec, maigre, d'une mauvaise physionomie¹.

The chroniclers also hinged on the Algerians' ignorance, and their superstition: 'Leur religion est la mahométane ; mais elle n'est pas connaissable de la manière qu'ils la pratiquent. Ce n'est qu'un assemblage de superstitions causées par l'ignorance, autorisée par un long usage, & par celle des marabouts qui s'en tiennent à ce qu'ils ont appris par la coutume'².

As to the religious rituals which were featured as 'ridiculous'³, Depont and Coppelani affirmed that they depended on the religious congregations to which the Muslim marabouts belonged (santons, and sunnaquites): 'Les santons sont de différentes règles, suivant l'esprit de leurs fondateurs, il y en a qui sont obligés de courir perpétuellement couverts de haillons, & d'autres tous nus comme des insensés & des fanatiques. Ils croient que les bonnes œuvres, les jeûnes, les austérités & les souffrance les purifient & les rendent semblables aux anges'⁴.

'Les Sunnaquites sont de vrais misanthropes. Ils vivent dans des déserts éloignés de tout commerce avec les hommes, qu'ils fuient avec grand soin. Ils ne se nourrissent que d'herbes & de racines. Ils tiennent du judaïsme, du christianisme, du mahométisme & même du paganisme. Ils sacrifient des animaux. Ils ne se font circoncire qu'à l'âge de 30 ans, après quoi ils se font baptiser au nom du Dieu vivant'⁵. (De Tassy, 91).

'La plupart des habitants de ce royaume portent un chapelet de grains de corail, d'ambre ou d'agate pour s'amuser, & prononcent avec les doigts, & plutôt par habitude que par dévotion, les attributs de la divinité. Mais les dévots se font une si grande habitude de dire le chapelet, qu'ils parcourent même en parlant des affaires les plus intéressantes & les plus sérieuses ; ce qui fait voir que ce n'est qu'une grimace de dévotion, & non pas une véritable dévotion. Cela n'a rien qui doive surprendre puisqu'on voit en Europe des chrétiens, qui se poignardent le rosaire à la main'⁶. (De Tassy, 94).

All in all, the myriad of features ascribed to the Algerian Muslim institutions denotes the interest this aspect of the Algerian history was

1- Ibid, p , 237

2- De Tassy, Laugier. *Histoire du Royaume d'Alger*. Amsterdam, Chez Henri de Sauzet, 1725.
<https://pdfslide.tips/documents/histoire-du-royaume-dalger-avec-letat-present-de-son-gouvernement-de-ses.html>

3- Ibid, p 91

4- Depont, Octave, Coppelani, Xavier. *Les Confréries religieuses Musulmanes*. Alger: Adolphe Jourdain, 1897, p XI. <https://www.algerie-ancienne.com/>

5- De Tassy , op.cit, p 91

6- Ibid, p 94

exercising on those European writers. The evaluation of those representations will form the core of the next section.

4.Evaluation of European Negative Representations of Algerian Religious Institutions: There are plenty of factors that could explain the European stereotypical images of the Algerian religious societies. The first is related to the religious contempt which goes back to the age of the Crusades that took place in 1055. Prior to that time, Islam was viewed both as the spiritual and military enemy of the West. In fact, both Muslims and Christians developed a great sense of animosity vis-à-vis the other, and considered the other's religion as 'less worthy, disordered, and immoral'¹. Those religious antagonisms heightened in magnitude, and nurtured deep feelings of hatred, sources later of prejudice and bias. The ousting of the Moors from Spain in 1492 marked a great victory of the Christians, and a striking defeat for the Muslims. The Crusades had a strong imprint on the balance of power between Europe and the Middle East, triggering the West's re-birth and pre-eminence, and the Muslim world's decadence into reactionary conservatism and retreat to a second position² (Szczepanski). Since then, the Christians' position of superiority entitled them to treat the Muslims as backward, violent, inferior, and unconstructive. No wonder then that this interfaith animosity continued to animate the Christian /Muslim worlds, and in a context of superior/inferior binary, stereotypes of Muslims as degenerate, powerless, ridiculous, superstitious, and fanatics continued to breed the next generations. This is particularly true for European religious monks who chronicled Algerian history, with a plain and a strong contempt for the Muslims.

Another major reason explaining the negative representation of the Algerian religious institutions is what Lippmann goes to, i.e the existence of the stereotype in the culture impresses deeply the stereotyper's stand as to the stereotyped group 'so that the alleged characteristic (aggressiveness, dishonesty, emotionality) is 'seen in the

1- Schonemann, Julie. The Stereotyping of Muslims: an Analysis of the New York Times' and The Washington Times' Coverage of Veiling and the Muhammad Cartoon controversy, MA thesis, University of Oslo, 2013. file:///C:/Users/MICRO/Downloads/Schxnemann-Master.pdf.

2- Ibid

group and its members, whether it is actually present or not'¹. Lippmann further highlights this point: 'for the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture'².

De Tassy himself emphasized the same idea: 'Les préjugés de la plupart des chrétiens sont si terribles contre les Turcs & les autres mahométans, qu'ils n'ont point d'expressions assez fortes pour faire voir le mépris & l'horreur qu'ils en ont puisqu'il suffit à beaucoup de gens d'être d'une religion & d'un pays différent des autres pour les avoir en aversion, sans vouloir convenir qu'ils puissent avoir quelque bonne qualité'³.

This point is also highlighted by Denise Brahimi who remarked that travelers in Barbary states 'failed to discover or understand the essential and interpreted what they saw in terms of preexisting prejudice.'⁴

The other parameter is that as far as non rational historical studies are concerned, there is the tendency to generalize facts and virtues about some members of the observed group over the entirety of the group. General statements can only be expounded if a large representative group has been desiccated, and only if deep analysis has been done. It may be true that there is a kernel of truth in attributing the features of fanatic, superstitious, foolish, backward, and ridiculous to the Algerian religious institutions, but this could be related only to some Muslim marabouts. On the other hand, psychologists assert that stereotypes are cognitive schemas which do not involve great mental thinking. This means that the European chronicles of Algerian history did not torment themselves with a deep investigation of the socio-cultural features of the Algerians. Tassy confesses here how he has secured the information either through asking people about it (convenience sampling), or collecting the mémoires found in the Christian houses⁵, and no one needs here underline the contempt of the Christians vis-à-vis the Muslims. Thomson adds here

1- Quoted in Thornton, Robin. How stereotypes happen.
<http://leaderswest.com/2013/02/25/how-stereotypes-happen/>

2- Quoted in Blum, op.cit

3- De Tassy, op.cit, p 31

4- Thomson, op.cit, p 4

5- De Tassy, op.cit, p 31

that some travel writers simply sufficed themselves with the plagiarization of earlier publications¹.

5- Conclusion: Overwhelmingly, the European travel writers who dwelt on the study of the Algerian Muslim institutions, specifically in this study, comprised authors who were not typically historians. Most of them were administrators; while the others were either officers, or Christian religious men. They mentioned different religious terms, failing to make a clear difference between them (marabouts, derouich, khouan, confréries mystiques, zaouia, and sufi). They also produced a myriad of features of the above peoples such as: fanatics, foolish, ridiculous, ignorant, superstitious, and illiterate. At the outset, those portrayals were clearly imbued with prejudice that goes back to the age of the Crusades. Those authors had, hence, pre-acquired schemata as to the religion of the Algerians. They had been bred and nurtured in a Western Christian culture that had a great contempt and hostility towards the Muslims. No wonder, then, that those beliefs were to impress heavily their judgments. Likewise, they did not dig hard to seek the total verity about those peoples, and instead made shallow appraisements of individuals and groups. Their informants were either based on individuals selected along convenience samples, which is considered as a non random sampling, books written by other travelers, or a stereotype-centered observation. This biased thinking continued to influence future writings and stands to other out-groups. The American president, Thomas Jefferson, for instance subscribed to the idea that the Blacks were biologically inferior to the Whites in spite of the fact that he was the author of the famous saying 'all men are created equal'². Similarly, the Orientalist Edward Said commented the imprint of ethnocentric attitude on history chroniclers as follows: 'it is therefore correct to say that every European, in what he could say about the orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally an ethnocentric'³. There was certainly a kernel of truth in

1- Thomson, op.cit, p 4.

2- Plous, S and Tyrone, Williams. Racial Stereotypes From the Days of American Slavery: a Continuing Legacy in *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 1995.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1995.tb01776.x>

3- Irfan Khawaja. Orientalism racism and Islam: Edward Said Between Race and Doctrine, posted June 2017.

the negative epitomization of the Algerian religious institutions, yet there was much more non-empirical generalization which is held until now.

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