

HOMOEROTICISM AND ORIENTALISM

The ‘oriental’ men in Western ethno-pornographic photography, 1850s to
1900s

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ABSTRACT: In the recent years, the field of Colonial Middle East has seen a great revision. Taking outset from Edward Said’s seminal work on ‘Orientalism’, this paper aims to explore the sexual – or rather the homoerotic – implications of this scholarly debate. By examining ethnographic photography depicting supposedly ‘Oriental’ men, I argue that the portrayals of these models – which are characterised by a feminine and highly sexualised modelling – emphasise the colonial implications of the ‘Westernised’ perspective on ‘the Orient’. The feminine portrayal of the ‘Oriental’ models mirrors the conception of a subaltern ‘Orient’ from the perspectives of the European consumers.

KEYWORDS: Orientalism, homoeroticism, middle east, sexuality, effeminacy.



Introduction¹

Just as the various colonial possessions—quite apart from their economic benefit to metropolitan Europe—were useful as places to send wayward sons, superfluous populations of delinquents, poor people, and other undesirables, so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe (Said 1978: 190).

This quote from E. Said's *Orientalism* is one of few places he dwells on the role of sexuality in colonialism and 'Orientalism'. Here, 'the Orient' serves almost as a haven for 'free sex', which were impossibly obtained 'at home'. For Said, 'the Orient' thus became a place where colonisers and Europeans sought out their sexual desires (whatever those might have been), and "[v]irtually no European writer who wrote on or travelled to 'the Orient' in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest" (Said 1978: 190). Problematic as this generalisation might be, I aim to examine this 'Oriental sexuality'.

From the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century, European colonial regimes gained considerable influence over the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Consequently, there was a substantial rise in 'Orientalist' academic and literary writing, as well as in artworks and other depictions of 'the Orient'. In this cultural landscape, writers, painters, and scholars became obsessed with 'the Orient' and depicting what they considered its 'true form' to Europeans back at home (cf. Alkabani 2024: 17-22; Said 1978). In this essay, I will focus on this 'Orientalist' tradition which erupted during the increasing European dominance in discourses concerning the Middle East. More specifically, I will study the visual images that spewed out of a European fascination of 'the Other', which had significant homoerotic implications. This choice in sources is partly due to a general scarcity of textual sources on homoerotic depictions of 'the Orient', as well as visual sources being highly influential for a discussion of the colonial perceptions of 'the Orient'. As will be clear, visual sources display

¹ Thanks are due to Daniel Steinbach, who not only gave a very inspiring and fruitful course on colonialism in the Middle East but also supervised the essay that preceded this article.

the common conceptions of ‘the Orient’ by Europeans by emphasising how those representations display the colonised Other and, as such, becomes manifestations of ‘Orientalist’ discourses.

Historiography

Traditionally, the historiography on eroticism and sexualisation of ‘the Orient’ has focussed on the sexualities of ‘Oriental’ women, rather than those of men and boys (e.g. Alloula 1986). My study is therefore an important extension of the field in nuancing an understanding of the sexualisation of ‘the Orient’, and the ways it plays into the power structures of colonialism.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is seminal for discussions on the notion of ‘the Orient’, in which the term itself emerged. Although Said, as stated above, only sporadically examines the question of sexuality in an ‘Orientalist’ perspective, his use and assertion of the term ‘Orientalism’ will prove important for the coming analysis. As Said argues, ‘Orientalism’ is the style of thought in which ‘the Orient’ is being displayed as culturally different to ‘the West’. ‘Orientalism’, to Said, is a discourse of cultural dominion; a way ‘the West’ – in trying to come to terms with ‘the Orient’ – distinguishes itself from ‘the Orient’ to exercise (cultural) power over ‘the Other’. ‘The Orient’, therefore, does not necessarily reflect reality but is a way Europeans (particularly Britain and France) display and represents ‘the Other’ (Said 1978: 1-48). Important for this study is that these representations should be understood “*as representations*, not as ‘natural’ depictions of the Orient” (Said 1978: 21, author’s italics). In terms of sexuality, Said argues that there existed an assumption that ‘Oriental people’ were more promiscuous and sexually available to the European colonialists (see e.g. the introductory quote; Said 1978: 190).

Although influential, Said paradoxically generalises about ‘the Orient’ and ‘the West’, and these generalisations make it difficult to assert the relationship between the so-called ‘Orientals’ and ‘Westerners’ (Hallaq 2018: 27-64). Such generalisations potentially create a narrative of ‘colonisers’ who collectively colonise a collective entity, thus leaving out variations, nuances and (most important of all) leads to a one-sided way to study ‘Orientalist’ depictions. I aim to examine a specific

case within the field of 'Orientalist' depictions, in order to show that these discourses were created by specific individuals rather than by a collective entity, and that they subsequently resonated and were consumed throughout 'the West' (especially Europe). Being conscious of the problematic features of the term 'Orientalism', such word is still useful for the present study, since what I essentially examine is exactly the generalising nature of the homoerotic depictions of 'the Orient'.

In terms of homoeroticism and colonialism, Robert Aldrich's monograph *Colonialism and Homosexuality* is seminal. He argues that 'the Orient' was perceived by Europeans as especially homoerotic and, therefore, contrary to the moral features of Europe. This, in turn, framed 'the Orient' as especially exotic and interesting to 'the West'. I, however, find Aldrich's study problematic in various areas: firstly, his study is conducted from a very wide variety of source materials, periods, people and geographical places. Therefore, he often comes off as generalising and does not examine his cases fully. Secondly, his study seems highly influenced by a presupposition that most of his historical actors were homosexual, which I often find difficult to argue for (this is e.g. visible on Aldrich 2003: 1-11; 302-26). This is both a very tendentious assumption as well as a very binary way of understanding sexuality. Nonetheless, Aldrich is an important starting point with essential observations that, in reference to others, are imperative for the present study.

Another source for examining the implications of sexuality in an 'Orientalist' gaze is Joseph Boone's *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*. Through a study of different depictions and portrayals of 'Oriental people' in homoerotic settings, Boone shows that 'Orientalist homoeroticism' has various effects. Boone argues that 'homoerotic Orientalism' destabilises Western conceptions of gender and sexuality; they result from trying to understand the 'Other's' sexuality and, as such, cause a questioning of their masculinity (Boone 2014: 16-8). Although his analytical study suffers similar problems as Aldrich's, Boone's arguments concerning the political and cultural implications of homoeroticism are very important for the coming discussion of the colonialist implications of homoerotic portrayals of 'Oriental people'. Especially his contention that such representations are never one-dimensional but rather moveable along multiple vectors of social, cultural, and political influence will be used as a fundamental assumption (Boone 2014: 18).

Recently, Feras Alkabani has conducted a study of the 'Orientalist' perception of homoerotic desire. Although specifically focusing on the travelogues of R. Burton and T. E. Lawrence, his conclusions and arguments will be an important perspective of the last chapter. Namely, I will use Alkabani's contention that 'Orientalist' descriptions of 'the Orient' rarely correlate with reality, both because 'the Orient' is itself a problematic generalisation and because such depictions are prejudiced and do not reflect reality (Alkabani 2024: 17-21). Alkabani states that an 'Orientalist' construction of reality is connected to an 'Orientalist' 'enchantment', with a strong desire and attraction to a mysterious and exotic 'Orient' (Alkabani 2024: 17). I will use these contentions as a prerequisite for analysing the visual images, in order to discuss their contexts and reasons, as well as the effects of such generalising depictions.

Sources and theoretical prerequisites

The sources in question are, as previously mentioned, visual depictions of 'the Orient' by European artists. They are vastly different source material than textual sources, in that what we 'read' is an artistic rendering of reality; the content has often been greatly tampered with. As will be clear, the artists took elements of what they either knew or thought apparent in 'Oriental culture' and created an imaginary reality. These visual works were also commercial; they needed to be sold. Therefore, we must think of these constructed images as an attempt by the creator to facilitate and visualise 'the Orient' as their audience perceived it.

This should not mean, however, that I argue for a collective European/Westernised/colonialist perception of an 'Orient'. Such a hegemonic perception of a collective, homogenous entity called 'the Orient' is impossible to discern and can hardly be said to have existed, since it is an oversimplification of a very diverse region. Furthermore, as scholars have argued, labels such as 'the Orient' or 'the Middle East' are problematic by nature, since they are stereotypical and homogenising perceptions of a commonality, which essentialises a place of vastly different people, cultures, and societies (Foliard 2017: 57-72; Yilmaz 2011). What I aim to show is that certain groups (i.e. consumers and producers of ethno-pornographic photography) had noticeable presuppositions and generalisations of 'the Orient', which the photographers tried to mimic. Furthermore, I do not, as Aldrich often

does, try to claim any specific traits of either the consumers or creators. I refrain from assuming they were or were not homosexual, paedophilic etc., since this essentially is unimportant to the present study. The argument pressed in this paper should therefore not be viewed as an encapsulating discussion of either a collective 'Orient' or of 'Europeans'. Even though the photography in question was widespread and commonly consumed in many European countries, I am not arguing that every inhabitant of the European countries is part of this development. Important is that such ethnographic photography was part of a history of normalisation of such discursive portrayals of 'the Orient'. As such, photography in fact emphasises exactly this perception of 'Europeans' and 'the Orient' as historically constructed terms and should hence be viewed as such. Furthermore, I do not operate with a common definition of 'Europeans' or 'Orientals', since this only further essentialises a stereotypical categorisation.

Therefore, by homoeroticism I do not necessarily mean actual homosexuals, or people consciously perceiving themselves as homosexual. By homoeroticism, I subscribe to Boone's use of the term, which connects it with Said's *Orientalism*. Here, the 'homoerotics' refers to ways which 'the Orient' is objectified by a sexualised exoticism. In other words, 'the Orient' is constructed through an 'othering gaze' where the 'homoerotics' does not necessarily describe homosexuality in our modern understanding, but rather the construction of 'the Orient' as homoerotic (Boone 2014; Ze'evi 2006; Massad 2007: 1-5; 73). The 'othering gaze' therefore describes the process of perceiving the 'Other' as inherently different from oneself; thereby Europeans inherently viewed the people of the so-called 'Orient' as innately different, which was further emphasises and facilitated by the homoerotic portrayals on ethnographic photographs.

In the following, I examine the photography two studios: the duo studio of Rudolf Lehnert and Ernst Landrock as well as the one of Wilhelm von Gloeden. First, I will assume their position as historical sources and their capacities as facilitators of an 'Orientalist' visual discourse. Thereafter, I examine the meanings and effects of such portrayals by focusing on contextualising the observations and drawing colonial implications thereof.

Ethno-pornographic photography in the beginning of the 20th-century

In the first decades of the 20th century, with the evolution of print photography, ethnographic photography rose to popularity. Allegedly, this tradition erupted out of a growing fascination of 'the Orient' and an ambition to photograph the 'real and authentic Orientals' from what was at the time deemed a scholarly viewpoint (Siegel 2000: 859-62). The purpose of some of those photographs was, however, pornographic rather than ethnographic, which is indicated by the way these photographs are constructed and used. The photographs could both be reprinted as postcards to send back home from 'the Orient' or be secretly sent, bought and consumed as pornography in the metropolises (Siegel 2000: 859-62). Their use differed according to the consumer, but they all shared a sense of fascination with 'the Orient', with varying degrees of sexual undertones. Therefore, as will be clear from the following, I will use the term 'ethno-pornography', since these photographs both display fetishisations as well as ethnographic 'explanations' of the 'Oriental people' they portray.

Both of the photographic studios examined here use homoerotic motifs and construct a perception of 'Oriental' men as alluring, desirable, and feminine objects of European subjugation. Although they all use 'Orientalist' motives to construct this notion, the two studios greatly differ in whether they are actually taken in the Middle East. The photographs by Wilhelm von Gloeden examined in this paper are all taken in Europe, with most of them taken in his own garden in Italy - despite clearly being meant to give the impression of being in 'the Orient'. His models were mostly Italian men who were dressed up in 'Oriental' clothing and garments. These photographs should therefore be seen as constructed realities, fostered by von Gloeden's own perception and his idea of his audience's perception of 'the Orient'. By examining the photographs, it is possible to discern what ideas, presuppositions and generalisations von Gloeden and his consumers had about 'the Orient'.

On the other hand, Lehnert and Landrock travelled to and set up a studio in Egypt, Palestine and Tunisia. Therefore, their models were locals. This does not mean that their photographs should be considered authentically depicting reality; they are still constructed and modelled to fuel European standards and perceptions of 'the Orient'. Thus, they should be seen as a way to model locals into a European 'Orientalist' discourse that they did not necessarily fit into. In the following section, I

examine a selection of these ethno-pornographic photographs from the studios and home in on different themes and aspects that are apparent throughout the source material.

The Desirable Arab

Across the photographs, one common feature is their far-off, melancholic, almost longing gaze to the side, thus away from the viewer. This is especially apparent in Wilhelm von Gloeden's photographs *Boy dressed as an Arab* (fig. 1), *Youth dressed in Arab garb* and the two variations of *Jeune Araber* (fig. 2). Such sensual, daydream-like looks create a sense of access into the private spheres of the model (Boone 2014: 275). The viewer gains privy to the intimate act of the sensual gaze, which creates a closeness and connectivity to the subject (Boone 2014: 275). It also awakens a sense of wonder in the viewer: What is he longing for? Who or what does the model desire?



Fig. 1: *Boy Dressed as an Arab*, Wilhelm von Gloeden. Boone 2014: 276. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction.

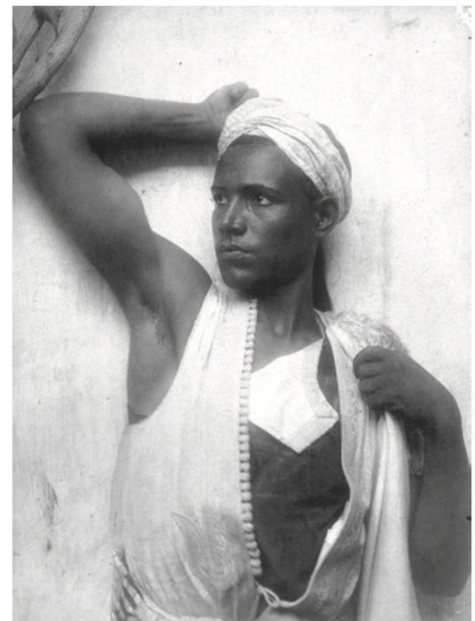


Fig. 2: *Jeuner Araber*, Wilhelm von Gloeden. Boone 2014: 274. The Living Room, Andrei Korymashy Collection.

In *Boy dressed as an Arab* (fig. 1) this gaze is combined with a feminine pose and 'Arab' garments, that alluringly open to his bare chest underneath. The lighting emphasises the opening in his robe, which creates desire for the model by revealing that more bare skin hides under his clothes. The naked neck, which is also emphasised by the lighting, creates a perception of vulnerability, which again constructs a sensation of personal and intimate connection between the viewer and subject. Thus, the consumer of the picture is visually 'undressing' the model – hence resulting in a strong desirability of the 'Oriental' model.

The same tendency shows in various other photographs, where similar motifs of the longing gaze are displayed (see e.g. Boone 2014: 276; 278). Significantly, the von Gloeden photograph *Jeuner Araber* (fig. 2) features both this desirable gaze, as well as implying the model's desirableness. The model, a young man in Arab attire, looks off to the side with one arm raised above his head. This accents his bare, muscular arm and also reveals his armpit and bare skin underneath his clothes. These elements too serve as a way to create a sense of appeal in the viewer.

Such seductiveness is further emphasised by tempting exhibitions of the skin, which is connected to a perception of sexually available and promiscuous 'Oriental people'. In 'European culture', where the exhibition of the skin was considered a feminine promiscuity, such modelling of 'the Other' was clearly meant to stir up sexual desire (cf. Alloula 1986; Siegel 2000). This is further emphasised by the feminine portrayal of these models, which give the impression of a promiscuous and sexually desirable 'Orient' to the European audiences.

Sexual availability and promiscuity

A notion that is apparent in most of the examined photographs is de-clothing, or the illusion thereof, to create an alluring suspense for the viewer. Here, de-clothing is similar to the practice of 'un-veiling' the otherwise veiled women of Harams on colonial photographs (Alloula 1986). Un-veiling makes the naked bodies of 'Oriental women' appear more erotic, intimate and exotic, since it is contrary to Muslim practises of covering the female body. A similar observation can be found on depictions of 'Oriental men' (Boone 2014: 275-7). Their disrobing is sometimes subtle but nevertheless exposing in the use of loose clothing and naked skin. Both beckons the viewer to desire a nakedness underneath the clothes, as well as emphasising the supposedly looser morals and promiscuity of the models.

Especially the photographs of Lehnert and Landrock display this notion. On Lehnert's *Tunis* (fig. 3), he depicts a boy in Arab-looking headwear, completely nude except for a scarf that conveniently lies over his crotch. He has a longing, melancholic gaze upon his face. His position and general appearance displays him as sensual, eroticised, and almost vulnerable, especially in the way in which his arm is positioned, his crossed legs and how his whole body curves. He appears to be in the

process of undressing himself while still wearing a turban-like headwear - undoubtedly to distinguish him as 'Oriental'.



Fig. 3: Tunis 1904-14, Rudolf Lehnert. Boone 2014: 278. Private collection.



Fig. 4: Moorish Boy, Wilhelm von Gloeden. Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gloeden,_Wilhelm_von_\(1856-1931\)_-n._0115A,_renumbered_as_1041._Lad_in_moorish_garb._Cm_1](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gloeden,_Wilhelm_von_(1856-1931)_-n._0115A,_renumbered_as_1041._Lad_in_moorish_garb._Cm_1)

Two of Lehnert and Landrock's photos show so-called 'Oriental' models fully nude. One is an unnamed photo (fig. 5) of a model, leaning over the opening in a wall, thus showing his back to the camera. In this way, the viewer is still left greatly allured by the model's non-visible parts. His pose of bending forward emphasises his behind and, as his sight is directed into the camera, a connection between the viewer and the model is constructed (Boone 2014: 275; cf. 277-8). His face looks startled, surprised or questioning, giving the photograph a voyeuristic connotation, as if the viewer has just caught the model in some act.

These sexual implications of the photographs are ways in which the photographers create an exotic perception of people who they view as 'Oriental'; they are a created impression of a 'Westernised' view of reality. This is especially evident when we consider that many of the models, as previously stated, are in fact not from the 'Middle East'. Remembering that such photographs could be bought, distributed and consumed in Europe, it becomes clear that these representations are a way to foster an already-existing perception of desire or exotic fantasy of 'the Orient' (Siegel 2000; Boone 2014).

If they were to be consumed, they needed to appeal to the consumers, as well as applying to their perceptions, fantasies and notions of an 'Orient'.



Fig. 5: Untitled, Rudolf Lehnert. Boone 2014: 276. The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction.

Effeminacy and androgyny

Another theme spanning across the photographs is their use of feminine and androgynous motifs. On a postcard by Lehnert and Landrock (fig. 6), we see a boy in Arab clothing, which reveals his bare chest underneath. Most noticeable here are two small flowers placed in his turban-like headwear. This is a recurring feature on 'Orientalist' photographs and often appears in the same fashion in their headwear (Boone 2014: 277-8, 273). It is unclear if it represents some local traditions among young men and boys in the Middle East, and thus an appropriation, or part of the European photographer's construction of reality. However, it could be argued that the inclusion of a flower as a decorative element brings a certain feminine character to the model and should thus be considered an effeminate depiction.

Many of the abovementioned pictures also express a feminine version of the population groups they supposedly display, both via said flowers but also with how they pose. On von Gloeden's *Jeune Araber* (fig. 2) and *Boy dressed as an Arab* (fig. 1), he clearly instructs the models as androgenous and sexual. This, in *Jeune Araber* (fig. 2), becomes further mixed with his bare, muscular arm, which creates an amalgamation of different notions of gender and sexuality (Boone 2014: 274). Similarly, Lehnert's *Ahmed Tunisie* (fig. 7) is clearly modelled in the same fashion, both with flowers in his headwear and an effeminate pose. His arms emphasise both his neck/head and hips in similar poses to photographs of colonial women, to draw attention to those areas on the model's body (Siegel 2000; Alloula 1986). Further, his bare chest and direct eye-contact with the camera creates an intimate relationship between the viewer and model (Boone 2014: 275). Overall, the pose, facial expression and general appearance create a perception of the 'Oriental' model as feminine and desira-

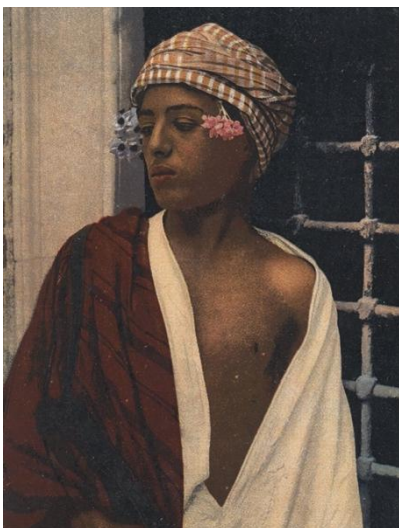


Fig. 6: *Jeune Arabe*, Rudolf Lehnert.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:689_-_Jeune_arabe.jpg

ble.



Fig. 7: *Ahmed Tunisie*, Rudolf Lehnert. 1904. Boone 2014: 277. Musée l'Elysée.



Fig. 8: *Boy dressed as an Odalisque*, Wilhelm von Gloeden. Source: Wikimedia commons. Fondazione Alinari, Florence.

Some of the pictures even display men dressed as women. The same model who was photographed for *Boy dressed as an Arab* (fig. 1) appears in another photo in female attire. While the clothing remains the same as in *Boy dressed as an Arab*, the model appears in a wig to make him woman

(Boone 2014). The same is also apparent on von Gloeden's *Boy dressed as an Odalisque* (fig. 8). Here, von Gloeden has dressed up a model as a Turkish court lady, complete with robes, veil and accessories. Odalisques had a reputation of being concubines for the finer circles of Turkey, which further emphasises the sexual and feminine nature of this picture. The model from *Boy dressed as an Arab* only needed a wig to suddenly appear a girl. So, notions of male/female and masculine/feminine become easily transferable, overlapping and fluid (Krishnaswamy 1998).

In sum, the ethno-pornographic photographs of 'Oriental' men are constructed discourses, deliberately not depicting reality but rather made to foster European exotic fantasies. As such, the photographs depict the 'Orientals' by using effeminacy, sexual desirability and notions of veiling or unveiling; all to cater the European illusion of colonial sexuality and eroticised exoticism. The photographers needed to exhibit 'the Oriental' in ways that correlated with their consumers, which is why these representations of people, who were made to visually fit into this category in photographs, should be viewed as part of the broader 'Orientalist' discourse. The photos are both a product as well as constitutive of a discourse that 'Oriental' men are feminine, erotic beings. They express an ideal, where 'the Oriental' becomes an object of European desire, rather than a self-governing subject, which renders these figures implicitly – and at times visually – subordinate to Europeans.

Homoeroticism and colonialism

The different homoerotic depictions of so-called 'Orientals' display an overall tendency to perceive them as exotic and remarkably different from Europeans. This othering of 'the Orient' draws on tendencies and aspects of a radicalised discourse. As Stuart Hall argues, race is often discursively constructed by different components or signifiers that are perceived as indicators for racial difference (Hall 2021: 364-5). This form of Othering presents itself in the ethno-pornographic photographs by continuously emphasising specific idiosyncrasies that make them appear vastly different to the viewers' life.

Of course, the depictions are not that one-dimensional but, as will be clear from the following, racial aspects of 'Orientals' *vis-à-vis* 'Occidentals' are part of a broader discourse with a clear power structure between colonialist and colonised (Schields and Herzog 2021; cf. Bayly 2002). As I have just

demonstrated, these ‘Orientalist’ depictions are concerned with portraying the Other as vastly different to the norm, ‘the Europeans’. Remembering that ‘Orientalist’ visuals were a product of ‘coming to terms’ with ‘the Orient’ (i.e. understanding it from a European perspective), it becomes clear that these differences were products of a *perceived* racial difference, which further emphasised the social gap between the coloniser and colonised (Said 1978; Hall 2021). Furthermore, by them being exotifications and colonial fantasies also fuelled consumers’ presuppositions of racial indicators. It created a perception or point of reference for features common for ‘Oriental people’, where androgyny and homoeroticism became connected to other notions of racial difference.

Furthermore, ethnographic photography facilitates a perception of cultural, sexual and racial uniformity within what was perceived as ‘the Orient’, defined solely as an opposite to ‘Europeans’. Europeans were certainly aware that European sexual morality was far more heteronormative than those of the non-European societies (Aldrich 2003: 5; cf. Ze’evi 2006: 169). Even though I refrain from arguing for a *de facto* ‘homosexual haven’ as Aldrich does, it is clear that sexuality (in terms of promiscuity and homoeroticism) was a notion which was seen as distinguishing Europe from the colonies (Aldrich 2003). With this as a prerequisite, in the following section I discuss the discourse on racial difference in terms of what implications and effects this had on the colonialism of the Middle East.

Colonising properties of homoerotic Orientalism

Effeminising ‘Oriental’ men was crucial to the way the colonised Other was delegitimised and discursively constructed as non-autonomous. As Krishnaswamy has argued, in the case of the British Raj, British portrayals effeminised Indian men and, in doing so, implicitly represented them as subordinate to British control (Krishnaswamy 1998: 166-7). If projected unto the case of ‘Orientalist’ homoerotic depictions, the effects of the homoerotic ‘Orientalist’ discourse become clear. The photography examined above presents an effeminised portrayal of ‘Oriental’ men, in settings with obvious sexual implications and in erotic poses with clear effeminate connotations. This facilitates a perception of ‘the Orient’ as both culturally and racially distinct from ‘the West’ (Schiels and Herzog 2021).

In this fashion, the 'Europeans' implicitly become the masculine actor, which imply a power relation between them, where the 'Orient' is the subaltern (cf. Krishnaswamy 1998). In a society highly influenced by patriarchy, such associations with gender ultimately connote the power structures inherent in those relationships. This tendency relates, from a Eurocentric perspective, to a supposed inferiority of the Middle East, where the latter is perceived as unmodern and uncivilised (Derengil 2003). Effeminism, therefore, results in a cultural subjugation of the Middle East, where the autonomy of the 'Oriental' men is delegitimised by having them appear feminine. This ultimately reflects the colonial properties of 'homoerotic Orientalism'. As J. Massad contends, 'Western' discourses were often concentrated upon asserting 'the Orient' as perverse and degenerate (Massad 2007: 5). Therefore, depicting the so-called 'Orient' as homoerotic and androgynous could be seen as part of a colonialist discourse where Europeans are being framed as the stronger, civilised people in control of 'the Orient'. This should, however, not be understood as a (necessarily) deliberate portrayal by the artists examined above. Rather, I would argue that they are part of an already existing colonialist-'Orientalist' discourse, which they both are a product of and continue to facilitate. They themselves are formed by this 'Orientalist' discourse, which in turn constructs their pre-conditions to understanding Middle Eastern societies and, hence, they inadvertently continue to produce this perception of 'the Orient' as more homoerotic and androgynous.

If seen in light of a study conducted by Alkabani, it becomes clearer how this discourse is to be understood. According to Alkabani, an 'Orientalist' discourse is concerned with Europeans 'seeking cultural difference' in the Middle East (Alkabani 2024: 21). European scholars and travellers used this cultural difference to foster a story which put the writers themselves as 'heroes of their own stories'. They used elements, stories (fictional or otherwise) to conduct a picture of 'the Orient' that was not necessarily reality, but rather a fantasised or perceived image of 'the Orient' (Alkabani 2024: 17-8). This notion is also evident from the way ethnographic photography was artistically produced.

Not only did European scholars travel to the Middle East to construct their own views of 'the Orient' – so did Arab scholars travel to Europe. Due to a tendency of opposing Ottoman culture, Arab scholars sought out European culture for facilitating an anti-Ottoman nationalism (Alkabani 2024: 19-20). *Nahda*, as this emerging Arab culture is called, was a product of growing European influence

in Middle eastern countries, but it also fostered responses to ‘Western Orientalist’ discourse (Massad 2007). According to Massad, ‘Orientalist’ depictions of Arab desires created a counter-discourse among Arab scholars, which was aimed towards framing Arab and European sexuality as similar - opposed to what ‘Orientalist’ discourse would let believe. Thus, Arab scholars countered ‘Orientalist’ claims of vast difference by stressing cultural similarities, which was done by reframing homoe-roticism as archaic, while, on the other hand, following ‘Western’ conceptions of sexual morals (Massad 2007: 5; 1; 73; cf. Ze’evi 2006). This points to a remarkable effect of European influence in the Middle Eastern societies, where the discourse of a ‘homoe-rotic Orient’ (in addition to other effects) led to the counter discourse of emphasising similarities between the ‘Orient’ and ‘the West’. One might argue that ethnographic photography posed eventual differences to the perception of the so-called ‘Orient’, both by Europeans and Arab scholars.

It is, however, important to understand that this ‘homoe-rotic-Orientalist discourse’ is not a homogenous viewpoint – and definitely not the whole picture. As Alkabani argues, “While such writers, Europeans and Arabs, may have been united in their intellectual desire to seek cultural difference [...] their individual discourses were never unidirectional” (Alkabani 2024: 21). This is contrary to the impressions Aldrich and Boone hold, which clearly present an ‘Orient’ with a shared (Western) perspective (cf. Hallaq 2018: 28-9). As I have stated earlier, Aldrich clearly follows a one-sided view of ‘homoe-rotic Orientalism’, where the ‘colonialism’ of the Middle East becomes synonymous with some supposedly ‘homosexual’ Europeans viewing ‘the Orient’ as a sexually free space for homoe-rotic doings. Even though some of the arguments above could be read as fostering the very same tendency, they should not be seen as such; my contention should solely be viewed as an attempt to display the ways *some* Europeans (such as von Gloeden and Lehnert/Landrock’s studio) have created marginalising descriptions of people whom they considered ‘Oriental’.

Drawing on the conclusions from the visual images of ‘the Orient’, those should not be seen as an argument claiming that this is the full scope of ‘homoe-rotic Orientalism’; the reality is more complex. Rather, they are an example of ways in which the discourse on ‘Orientalism’, projected through homoe-roticism, results in the colonialist and generalised portrayal of the inhabitants of the so-called ‘Orient’. That is not to say that alternative views did not exist, or that opposing interpretations

could not be argued for, but such perspectives would go beyond the scope of this article. What I have tried to show is how 'homoerotic Orientalism' tended to portray 'the Orient' as exotic. Some of these cases might be ways the artists manifest homoerotic fantasies, but since the artists' true sexual orientations are difficult to discern, we simply cannot know for certain. However, what is clear is that these photographs were made with a distinct consumer in mind, and that they demonstrate an aim to cater to their presuppositions of 'the Orient'. As such, they could both be used to facilitate homoerotic fetishisation, but also as a way of placing Europeans as morally and culturally superior to the so-called 'Orient'.

Ultimately, this narrows down to what Alkabani deems a discourse of 'the unchanging East' (Alkabani 2024): what I have shown with the visual images of 'Orientalism' is that they create a specific illusion of the Middle East. They are perceived as internally culturally homogenous while also being simultaneously contrived as vastly different to Europeans, which emphasises the perceptions of racial differences between 'the West' and 'the Orient', as argued above.

Conclusions

Throughout this paper, I have aimed to carry out a study of the colonialist implications of homoerotic portrayals of 'the Orient' by ethnographic photography conducted by the two studios of Wilhelm von Gloeden and of Rudolf Lehnert and Ernest Landrock. In sum, the photographs of so-called 'Oriental men' are arranged by European photographers to foster a perception of 'the Orient' as subordinate to European culture. This is done by portraying the 'Orientals' as effeminate, androgenous and homoerotic, which is especially apparent on the representations where young, 'Oriental'-looking boys are positioned to appear alluring and seductive to the European viewers. As such, 'the Orient' is portrayed as culturally different as well as subordinate to 'the West' - thus displaying the ways some Europeans perceived 'the Orient'.

Effectively, this view of 'the Orient' as culturally subordinate fitted into the European colonialist view of 'the Other' as both socially and racially different. This difference, as I have argued, revolves around effeminacy, as it is evident from the composition of the pictures. Furthermore, such effem-

inacy resulted in a very colonialist power dynamic (at least discursively), where the feminine appearances clearly reflected the perceived worldview. In patriarchal societies such as those of European countries in the 19th and 20th centuries, effeminate portrayals emphasised the subaltern position of the depicted. These effeminate and homoerotic depictions effectively facilitated a conception of ‘the Orient’ as non-autonomous, with the feminine appearances intended to mirror the perceived power dynamic between the colonised and the coloniser. Thus, by displaying ‘Oriental’ models as feminine and homoerotic, such representations legitimised the colonisation of these societies and people.



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