

# THE REPRESENTATION OF ALGERIAN INDIGENOUS CULTURE IN EUGÈNE FROMENTIN'S *UN ÉTÉ DANS LE SAHARA*

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## *Abstract*

This article questions the stereotypical representation of the indigenous Algerian culture in the travelogue of the French writer and painter Eugène Fromentin entitled *Un été dans le Sahara* (1857). It studies how the preconceived images, cultural and ethnic stereotypes of Europeans on colonized indigenous subjects shape the 19<sup>th</sup> century intercultural perceptions. It examines the relationship between the French writers' stereotypical representations of the non-Europeans and the process of colonization, and argues that stereotypes are hidden instruments of the colonial power and a source of alienation for the natives. This article also claims that they constitute "myths" and form a doxic discourse that hinders individual thought and prevents access to the 'episteme', that is, true knowledge. We will proceed by an analysis of discourse in Fromentin's *Un été dans le Sahara* to demonstrate the derogatory and pejorative characteristics of stereotypes and their ideological dimension. We rely on Roland Barthes' ideological critique, which is an approach to discourse analysis that questions the meaning of shared words and images and considers them as signs expressing connotative meanings. In other words, our objective is to show how imperial ideology underpins Fromentin's text and relies on the authority of shared opinions and received ideas to circulate its colonial discourse. Barthes explores doxa as language and presents it as a social discourse, which implies that the beliefs and images circulating in a given community, the mental representations shared by the group, cannot be understood outside of their verbal formulations. Thus, ideology is inscribed at the level of language, and the text reproduces the dominant ideology and insidiously consolidates power.

**Key-words:** *Fromentin, myth, colonial discourse, stereotype, doxa.*

## **Introduction**

Travel narratives about Algeria started with the French colonization, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Different discourses were transmitted through these travelogues, such as the intellectual, military and mythical, making Algeria an object of fantasy and exoticism. These travelogues constitute important historical sources providing useful and practical information about its

geographical landscapes, however, they also reflect stereotypical representations of the indigenous peoples and their cultures. Accordingly, they contributed to shaping the cultural perceptions of the epoch toward other peoples and cultures.

Fromentin's travelogue provides exotic descriptions of the indigenous people, highlighting the cultural distance that separates the African and European civilizations. *Un été dans le Sahara* presents Algeria as an exotic and dangerous site of exploration which arouses the curiosity of more French travelers to visit Algeria and discover the Oriental image created about it especially through depictions of imaginary and supernatural landscapes, indigenous villages and strange men and women. The cultural discourse this travelogue underlies moves readers from picturesque views to stereotypes and from a narrative of geographic and cultural exploration to fixed ideas about the people, the culture and the country as a whole.

The dissemination of received ideas and stereotypes are turned into myths transmitted from one person to another, then from one generation to another. Consequently, a dogmatic discourse based on common opinions, or doxa, takes over in the travel text creating a rhetoric of persuasion which manipulates readers and leads to a confusion between reality and verisimilitude. Stereotypes and received ideas are, therefore, deeply ingrained in the subconscious of European peoples.

This study refers to the modern conception of doxa, which functions as myth according to Barthes. Drawing on the Barthesian approach to discourse analysis, we attempt to challenge the neutrality and innocence of the text, to question the meaning of the signs that circulate within it and the social and historical conditions that they underlie. The aim is to analyse the 'myths' that exist in *Un été dans le Sahara* in order to reveal the false representations and erroneous beliefs common in Europe about Orientals, and to show that they are also ideological constructs at the service of the colonial authorities.

### **1. Roland Barthes' Critical Approach: Stereotypes, Myths, and Doxa as Ideologemes**

In ancient Greek, the word doxa means to seem, to appear, to accept, to think. It is a common belief or popular opinion. In classical rhetoric, doxa is contrasted with episteme, i.e., true knowledge. Aristotle described doxa as that which seems evident and true to all, or to most of the people, or to the wise. It includes the "opinions acceptable enough and they rely on a general or at least representative consensus" (Moos, 1993: 7).

According to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, doxa plays an essential role in matters concerning human reasoning and social interaction. This perspective emphasizes its moral and social nature as well as its function, which is to allow, on the basis of a community of views, for a development of a debate and discussion between participants seeking agreement, or for the unfolding of an argumentation meant to persuade an audience. Doxa is, accordingly, the common ground on the basis of

which people can make rational decisions and build the life of the polis<sup>1</sup>.

However, in modern times, doxa has acquired a negative attribute. From the nineteenth century on, doxa has reappeared under various, mainly pejorative, labels. It has been defined as a lack of thought and of style, as the vulgarity of common opinion and the banality of worn-out language (Amossy, 2002: 373). Democracy and the evolution of technology led to the growing control of the press and the growth of “mercantile literature<sup>2</sup>”. Negative attributes were ascribed to the notion of “commonplace” (topos), and to distinct neologies created by typography, such as “stereotype” and “cliché” (Amossy & Rosen 1982: 6–7). These derivative concepts were used and dispersed in published scripts and they acquired figurative and symbolic meanings, but which were derogative, offending and pejorative. From then on, doxic elements were accepted as uncritical because of their repetitiveness and lack of individual reflection. They were, henceforth, representatives of the dominant ideology that made and used them.

Doxa was related to stereotypes and transmitted an uncritical discourse, devoid of individual thought and represented the power of dominant opinion, mainly related to bourgeois worldview. Doxa has become a concept that demonstrates the rightfulness of the majority in all cases much at the expense of the minority’s opinions henceforth considered as wrong. This principle had a big impact in France and led to the establishing of a whole repertoire of uncritical assumptions, prejudicial convictions, stereotypical imaging and mythical representations. For Roland Barthes, modern doxa is synonymous with public opinion founded on the consensus of the majority, resulting in mythical and stereotypical representations. Doxa is equated today with a set of other notions more or less closely related to its original meaning, amongst which that of myth. In Barthes’ *Mythologies*, myth is defined as false self-evidence, a culture deceitfully presented as nature, social representations confused with the real object. According to him, in images as well as in verbal and textual products, what ‘goes without saying’, or what seems obvious has an ideological impact that the mythologist seeks to denounce.

In *Mythologies*, Barthes undertakes the task of an ideological critic reviewing the products of mass bourgeois culture. He considers that myths are bourgeois constructs which serve as mystifications of reality. Myths are made up of two semiological systems, and the object of the first is language while that of the second is metalanguage. In other words, myths are defined by their denotative and connotative meanings.

We may say that the term myth, as used by Barthes in *Mythologies*, operates

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<sup>1</sup> According to Aristotle, the *polis*, or city-state, is a natural and organized community that serves as the highest form of human association, enabling citizens to achieve virtue and live a fulfilling life.

<sup>2</sup> Mercantile literature refers to the economic writings from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, often in the form of pamphlets, advocating for policies that promoted a favorable balance of trade and the accumulation of precious metals (gold and silver) by a nation to increase its overall wealth. Key themes included economic nationalism, state intervention in the economy to achieve trade surpluses, and the promotion of domestic industries and colonial resource acquisition.

as a synonym of ideology. It stands for a set of representations, convictions and opinions that bolster and legitimate the existing power dynamics. In other words, it enhances the principles and benefits of the prevailing social classes by means of *universalizing* and *naturalizing* order so as to make them inevitable and self-evident (Barthes, 1957). By the same token, it condemns the values which oppose it and eliminates distinct and dissident thoughts, thus leading to a mystification<sup>3</sup> of the existing social reality. (Eagleton, 1993) Doxa is relevant to Barthes' conception of myth and to the Marxist notion of ideology because they both rely on common knowledge and shared beliefs to create their discourse and ensure its acceptance by the public.

Doxa corresponds to a socially constructed fact which is 'naturalized' and hence spread and accepted as authentic. It is in this way that the values of particular social groups are considered as undisputed or as universal truths. The dominant social classes prevent any challenge of this 'naturalization' and 'universalization' so as to maintain their values well spread and uncontested. In other words, to implement a doxic discourse, i.e., to have an influence on readers, writers need to imagine a representation of their readership. They have to visualize the accepted views and shared convictions held by readers so as to establish their discourse on particular points of agreements, called "premises". The writer has to form his own "model reader" and has to depend on his supposed knowledge and common stereotyped scripts taken from daily life (Amossy, 2002: 468). By relying on the readers' views and convictions, an interaction is built between the addresser and addressee. In this perspective, doxa prevents authentic communication and hinders personal thinking and reflection especially because shared values and opinions are considered uncritical and are repeated until they are unconsciously or involuntarily assimilated.

The Barthesian approach is aimed at displacing conforming viewpoints and deconstructing the hegemonic ideological opinions. It emphasizes the ideological dimensions of the doxa. This discourse analysis approach reveals that what is shown as natural and obvious by bourgeois ideology is an implied cultural construction at the service of the governing authority. Common ideas and shared values, upon which stereotypical constructs are built, are based on doxa and therefore, work for a specific ideology, and are a hidden tool of power.

Barthes' approach is a combination of contemporary pragmatics and rhetorics. Both emphasize the significance of the methods and modes through which oral and written discourses work to re-direct and manipulate the readers' opinions. His ideological analysis attempts to expose the underlying premises, or points of agreement, existent in the text, and to interpret the ways the text considers commonplaces. In other terms, this approach is used to expose the relationship between the sign, and, by extension, myth, and its historical and social connotations. It makes explicit the hidden premises on which the text elaborates

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<sup>3</sup> According to Terry Eagleton, mystification is a process by which ideology conceals underlying social power structures, making them appear as natural, inevitable, or universally accepted. It involves using signs, images, and universalizing concepts to normalize unequal power relations, often by masking the material and political roots of social arrangements.

in order to disguise stereotypes and commonplaces as social realities.

## **2. Deconstructing Doxic Discourse in E. Fromentin's *Un été dans le Sahara***

The intersection between travel literature and alterity may be explained by the fact that travelers were the first to bring new knowledge about distant places and exotic people. Travelogues are depictions of intercultural encounters and travel writers are engaged in a process of 'othering'<sup>4</sup> when they stress the difference and contradictions with their own culture. Therewith, they rely on particular rhetorical strategies to reveal the inferiority of the non-western cultures. By so doing, they pave the way for an understanding of Orientals as the negative counterpart<sup>4</sup> of the Westerners (Thompson, 2011: 133).

Travel accounts constitute the background knowledge for the people who intend to travel, and for whom this knowledge is taken as a fact and helps them remove the opacity which hinders familiarity with the 'other' (Thompson, 2011: 134). Readers or future travelers formulate their own imaginary representation of the other, and through repetition this imagining tends to be accepted as an unquestioned truth. This fact leads to the creation of a large list of fixed images, prejudices, pejorative descriptions and fantasies about the other, which means that travelogues in general communicate a sense of cultural and ethnic superiority in the travel writers and their readers alike. They influence other travelers to write in the same tendency, thereby bolstering pejorative images and discriminatory behaviors.

Eugène Fromentin was passionate about traveling and adventures. He visited Algeria for the first time in 1846, then a second time between 1847 and 1848. His journey was beneficial since it provided him with the opportunity to study the Algerian customs meticulously and to fill his sketchbook with North African landscapes. In 1852, he made his third trip to Algeria which resulted in a travelogue, *Un été dans le Sahara*, published in 1854. By virtue of the descriptions of the Algerian landscape and its inhabitants, he inscribed himself in the Orientalist movement.

Fromentin's Orientalist art theory is based on the picturesque, which according to him, refers to the wild, the chaotic, the different and the new (Reeck, 2018: 40). *Un été dans le Sahara* lies within the aesthetics of the picturesque wherein the use of the local color and the reproduction of clichés of Orientalist representations take over. Later on, Fromentin shifted to a less romanticized and a more ethnographic vision of Orientalism due to the emergence of the race science theory and the collaboration of imperial powers for the collection and improvement of knowledge about diverse peoples and cultures (2018: 33). This knowledge was a tool to dominate the populations and to convince people in the metropolis of the necessity of a 'civilizing mission' for the less civilized nations

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<sup>4</sup> According to Edward Said, 'Othering' is the process by which the West creates and portrays the 'Orient' (the East) as a monolithic, inferior, and exotic 'Other' to itself, essential to define its own superiority and justify colonial dominance. This process involves constructing simplified and negative stereotypes, such as the Orientals are savages, barbaric, ignorant and uncivilized compared to the civilized Westerners.

in far off lands. Hence, ethnography brings about a new interest in societies, cultures and humans, leading to an exhaustive and studious investigation and observation. This also means that peoples and their cultural customs are subject to meticulous observations and precise descriptions. Fromentin's theory of Orientalist art is built upon the picturesque and the ethnographic, and both construct his style inspired by observation and mimetic representation, resulting in the exoticization of landscapes, cultures and subjects.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said investigates the Western scholars' demeaning, stereotyped and condescending representations of Arab and Asian cultures. Apart from the fact of being factual or fictional, these representations were repeated and fixed so that Orientals were associated with a whole archive of uncontested and unverifiable assumptions as well as degrading and negative attributes such as: despotic, ignorant, cruel, primitive, unreasonable, savage and sensual. These fixed images and stereotypes were institutionalized in European and American cultures, and came to constitute a doxic discourse that was spread in travelogues.

Like most Orientalist writers, Fromentin is engaged in a process of 'othering' through the use of manifold stereotypes, distortions and myths about the Oriental man. He upholds a Eurocentric imperialist standpoint and creates an Orientalist discourse aimed to construct the Orient and dominate it. He put his travelogue within the frames of false representations of the Arabs. The author of *Un été dans le Sahara* makes use of pejorative words and expressions to form stereotypical images in his depictions of the indigenous subjects' physical appearance, clothes and houses, behaviors and attitudes.

Fromentin's *Un été dans le Sahara* creates a doxic discourse by creating myths and stereotypes about the Oriental subject. He perpetuates the values of the colonial authority for the purpose of creating a bourgeois colonial ideology aimed at legitimating the imperial enterprise and maintaining its domination over the Orientals through the mystification of reality. The latter is possible through conveying false representations and unverifiable assumptions about the Orient.

There are numerous instances in the novel wherein Fromentin describes the indigenous Arab in a very humiliating way. In a passage, he describes a group of riders in words which express his contempt for them: "sombres cavaliers, coiffés de haïks sales, maigres comme leurs chevaux, nourris comme eux de je ne sais quelle rare pitance" (Fromentin, 2014: 54). Likewise, he describes another Algerian character in negative terms, revealing him as horrible and dirty:

C'était bien un tout petit corps ramassé sur lui-même, et qu'on eut dit gonflé; malpropre, difforme, affreux, marchant comme s'il n'eut pas de jambes, la figure étriquée dans son haïk comme dans un serre-tête, coiffé d'un chapeau sans bords, comme d'un énorme cornet... Il portait un bâton noueux dans la main; on ne voyait pas ses pieds, car son burnous traînait à terre (2014:78).

These depictions are also reductive and dehumanizing and help create fixed images and a doxic discourse among the European readers. This discourse

constitutes 'latent' views which reflect the unconscious "where dreams, images, desires, fantasies and fears reside." (Yegenoglu, 1998: 23) In other words, Western travel writers such as Fromentin transpose their preconceived ideas about the East mythologizing an image that misrepresents reality and helps produce the Orient "politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively (Said, 1995: 3).

Fromentin proceeds his instrumentalized depictions of Arabs by drawing upon premises or points of agreement, in that he relies on opinions that are admitted as plausible and consensual, in order to build a cumulative list of stereotypes and clichés which have political connotations. He relies on the common ideas about the Orientals as primitive and uncivilized, unequal and inferior to the Europeans, in order to establish his narrative discourse and perpetuate an Orientalist, pro-colonial discourse aimed at legitimating the French colonial presence in Algeria. In this way, he goes further to take a prejudicial standpoint and generate racist, cultural and ethnic stereotypes aimed at reducing the Arabs and dehumanizing them. He enhances the meanings which bolster the existing power dynamics by means of 'universalization' and 'naturalization' so as to make them self-evident and likely to be accepted as absolute truth.

*Un été dans le Sahara* represents Fromentin's dehumanizing enterprise by which he employs zoological words to describe the indigenous subjects' body parts, voices and postures: des "postures de singe" (2014: 145), "le visage en museau de loup" (2014: 158), "comme un vieux sanglier" (2014: 159), "comme un cheval qui sent l'écurie" (2014: 251), "d'une voix rauque et saccadée comme un aboiement" (2014: 79). The language the author uses is meant to barbarize the indigenous subject. As an Orientalist writer, Fromentin is subservient to the pre-determined pro-imperialist discourse that not only constructs the Orient but the Occident as well. Said differently, his worldview establishes a binary system which produces a discourse that "conceptualized the Orient as feminine, exotic, erotic, and savage, allowing the West to accede to a position of superiority as Christian, civilized, and moral" (Lewis, 1993: 54). It appears that the literary production of travel writers influenced Western colonialism since European travel writers such as Fromentin contributed in shaping a discourse that placed the West in a position of superiority in relation to the East.

As much as the natives are compared to animals, their houses are compared to stables: "Quand on entre dans ces cours vides, souillées d'ordures comme des cours d'étables, d'abord on ne voit personne; tout au plus une femme qui disparaît dans le trou noir d'une porte." (2014: 160) Fromentin highlights the miserable state of their houses, and emphasizes their dirtiness: "Quant à l'état des lieux, imagine des murs élevés, couleur de suie, troués en vingt endroits de brèches béantes; et comme si ce n'était pas assez de tant d'issues, toutes les portes grandes ouvertes, depuis la rue jusqu'à ma chambre." (2014:118-119) In these descriptions, the author creates binary oppositions with the French houses which are well built, well maintained and nice. He focuses on the homelessness of the Arabs and their inability to manage even trivial affairs, and hence, their dependence on the white European becomes a necessity.

The stereotypical images and myths that Fromentin employs in his

travelogue create a doxic discourse with communicative intentions implying a justification of the colonial mission. The words expressing a stereotypical image have a literal meaning but are also signs implying ideological significations which are directly linked to the empire. These signs underlie hidden forms of exploitation and domination, and establish forms of thought based on premises, creating a doxic discourse which shapes the life of the indigenous people.

In Fromentin's travelogue, there also exist manifold stereotypes about the indigenous subjects' behaviors and attitudes. The author of *Un été dans le Sahara* insists on the Arabs' laziness and devotes whole pages to expose their worthlessness. He summarizes the Algerian society in a sentence which defines women as hard-working and doing multiple tasks incessantly, and men as lethargic, lazy persons looking for shadow to sleep all day: "la fontaine où sont les femmes, l'ombre d'une rue où dormant les hommes, voilà des traits bien vulgaires et qui, pourtant, résument tout l'Orient" (2014: 150). The fountain becomes a symbol of women's liveliness and the pavement as a symbol of men's indolence. In Fromentin's novel, men play no significant roles, except gathering outside all day, sleeping or looking at people passing by: "Tu trouveras donc ici les hommes établis dans tous les endroits sombres, sous les voûtes, sur les places, dans les rues, partout excepté chez eux." (2014: 150). He insinuates that these men do not deserve to live in this country, thus legitimating the French presence on the Algerian soil as well as the need for their 'civilizing' mission.

Fromentin considers all Orientals as lethargic and attempts to fix this assumption through his multiple and meticulous descriptions of the indigenous men as sluggish. He compares them to statues kneaded with mud and, like houses, baked in the sun. He portrays their avidity for sleeping everywhere as a habit:

C'est le même repos, dans toutes les attitudes possibles. Les uns dorment rassemblés sur eux même et le menton sur leur genoux; d'autres, la nuque appuyée contre le mur... dans un sommeil violent qui ressemble à de l'apoplexie; d'autres, penchés sur le coude, le menton dans la main (2014: 154).

In the above passage, Fromentin depicts the laziness of Arab men, and their readiness to sleep everywhere in the street. The Orientals' indolence is a myth contrasted with Western productivity and is connotative of Orientals' denigration and worthlessness. It also functions as a tool to maintain Western power and control. Said differently, the false representations perpetuated through myths reflect a determined attempt at subordination and "pave the path for military domination, cultural displacement, and economic exploitation." (Bertens, 2001: 204)

Within this discourse wherein knowledge is entangled with power, the Arab woman was also an object of study and her body was examined in order to construct a knowledge of sexuality. She is subject to devaluation and denigration, and is represented as a sexual object dominated by men. M. Mehdid maintains that writers were "appropriating her body and identity and possessing her in sexual and textual terms" (1993: 38). In *un été dans le Sahara*, Fromentin reveals his



interest in Arab women, he contemplates, observes and describes them scrupulously. He gives special attention to Ouled-Nail<sup>5</sup> and evokes the village of Boghari where a french army outpost takes place. In a letter addressed to his friend Arnaud du Mesnil, he writes:

Tu sauras que Boghari, qui sert de comptoir et d'entrepôt aux nomades, est peuplée de jolies femmes, venues pour la plupart des tribus sahariennes Ouled-Nayl, A'r'azlia, etc., où les mœurs sont faciles, et dont les filles ont l'habitude d'aller chercher fortune dans les tribus environnantes. Les Orientaux ont des noms charmants pour déguiser l'industrie véritable de ce genre de femmes; faute de mieux, j'appellerai celles-ci des danseuses (2014: 50).

In this passage, Fromentin represents women in Ouled-Nail as dancers implying a sexual connotation. This is apparent in depicting their morals as easy and in referring to a real industry hidden under charming names, which is prostitution. He also portrays a woman dancing and describes her movements, her body, her costume and accessories, disclosing his interest in Arab women and his desire to exoticize them to the European readers. He says:

Notre danseuse qui n'était pas jolie, avait ce genre de beauté qui convenait à la danse. Elle portait à merveille son long voile blanc et son haïk rouge étincelait toute une profusion de bijoux; et quand elle étendait ses bras nus ornés de bracelets jusqu'aux coudes et faisait mouvoir ses longues mains un peu maigres avec un air de voluptueux effroi, elle était décidément superbe (2014: 53).

In addition to the objectification and sexualization of Arab women, Fromentin creates a stereotypical model of beauty, characterizing them not as beautiful, but as attractive because of their exoticism apparent in their long, loose-fitting garment and the jewelry adorning their bare arms. He explains that their attractiveness lies in their atypical appearance, not in their physical beauty.

Fromentin also attempts to change the context where the woman's dance takes place. In fact, the woman performs her dance in a particular occasion celebrated by her tribe, while he shows that she is exposing herself to the french travelers. He, consciously, transforms a traditional ritual into an act of seduction of European travelers with the intention of highlighting Arab women's exoticism and their sexualization. Indeed, he reduces the status of the Arab Muslim woman as well as the society's traditions and values by representing women as prostitutes, dancers and the customs as devoid of any cultural or societal standard. Being a pioneer in writing about the Sahara, Fromentin becomes a reference for the future

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<sup>5</sup> Ouled-Nail is an arab tribal confederation that occupy the central highlands of Algeria particularly within the Sahara Atlas mountains. The region spans across the provinces of Laghouat, Djelfa and M'sila with significant tribal populations in towns like Bousaada and Ghardaia.

travelers whose perceptions about the Algerian Other are shaped by his Orientalist ideas and racist attitudes. His misrepresentation of Arab women and the repetition of the same stereotypical images by his successors created a myth of the Arab woman as a prostitute, a dancer, and a sexual object at the service of men.

The stereotype of the prostitution of Arab women of Ouled-Nail was well spread by the french colonizers. Though there were no identifiable source, there was a congruence between Fromentin's descriptions of Arab women and the discourse perpetuated by colonial administrators and military men. Ausone de Chancel, a colonial administrator writes:

Les Ouled-Na'il (sic) sont, dit-on, généralement bons et hospitaliers, mais de mœurs fort dissolues. Leurs femmes et surtout leurs filles, jouissent d'une très grande liberté: ce sont elles qui fournissent à la prostitution dans les villes du désert, en concurrence avec les filles de la tribu des Ar'azalia dans le Sahara (1845: 162).

The french colonial administrators rely on rumors to form a doxic discourse that propagated the idea that women of Ouled-Nail are prostitutes by tradition.

Through all these descriptions and numerous others in the novel, the author of *Un été dans le Sahara* undertakes the task of 'othering' the Arab natives, showing their inferiority and primitiveness vis-à-vis the civilized Europeans, and constructing fixed images and clichés about them. As a matter of fact, these stereotypical representations are recurrent images about the Orient which colonial travel writers used in their travelogues in order to generate stereotypes. Their colonial gaze upholds the conception of the veiled Oriental woman that is oppressed and imprisoned by the Arab, depicted as villain and worthless. The colonial discourse promotes the idea of the Oriental woman being in need of the European gentleman to rescue her from the atrocity of the Arab men and the backwardness of Muslim societies (Keller, 2018: 14).

The words qualifying the indigenous Arabs are not neutral or innocent, but underlie an Orientalist discourse. There is in fact an ideological abuse behind the use of ethnic, racist and cultural stereotypes. These false representations and erroneous descriptions about the Arabs make up a mythological reality wherein the Oriental world is attributed all kinds of negative features: inferior, savage, primitive, lewd, uncivilized, and the Western world is henceforth considered as superior, enlightened and civilized.

Travel texts like Fromentin's are embedded within this framework which is designed to fulfill certain ideological objectives aimed at constructing and perpetuating a purely ideological Orientalist discourse and making it acceptable by the public. It aims also at creating conformity to the bourgeois values as well as denigrating ideas which might challenge it and excluding rival forms of thought, of the ruling authority (the French colonial power).

Stereotypes are signs which support existing power structures and which purport to be natural. In Fromentin's travelogue, we attempted to expose these signs as the artificial ideological constructs, to disclose their workings and show that what appears to be natural is, in fact, determined by history and ideology.

Barthes says that people need to admit that there is an evil, a social, ideological evil, attached to sign systems which do not frankly recognize themselves as sign systems. The French colonial society generates signs and assigns them with specific significations and naturalizes them as reasonable and normal.

In colonial travelogues, native women are depicted either as prostitutes and dancers or as submissive and dominated by men, while the indigenous male characters are stereotyped as silent, stagnant, motionless and disinterested: “sans voix, sans geste, silencieux, sans bruit” (Fromentin, 2014: 47-48). They are reduced to a brutalized condition and are alienated in that they are either portrayed as subaltern or are totally ignored.

### Conclusions

This study demonstrates that Fromentin relies on specific premises to generate stereotypical representations of Arabs and their culture. He creates myths based on doxa, or common opinions, through multiple descriptions of the physical appearance, attitudes and traditions of indigenous subjects. These myths are expressive signs of an Orientalist ideology aimed at reinforcing the dynamics of power, maintaining French domination over the Arabs and justifying the imperial enterprise. By dehumanizing Arabs and reducing them to ugly, primitive, lewd, obscene, lethargic and worthless creatures, Fromentin legitimizes the French civilizing mission and perpetuates a strong colonial discourse based on common opinions accepted as absolute truth by the public.

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