7. (Re-)Mediating Orientalism

> If postcolonial studies is to survive in any meaning-
> ful way, it needs to absorb itself far more deeply
> with the contemporary world, and with the local
> circumstances within which colonial institutions
> and ideas are being moulded into the disparate cul-
> tural and socioeconomic practices which define our
> contemporary 'globality.' (Loomba qtd. in Lau and
> Mendes 256-57)

Ania Loomba wrote these lines in 1998. Since then, the world has transformed in unprecedented ways. Wars have erupted; natural disasters occurred; 9/11 has for-ever changed the definition of the word terrorism. These and other events continue to resonate in global discourse fostered by the accelerating speed of mass-mediated communication. Postcolonial literature and life writing in particular are usually not considered main actors in this discourse. As the analysis of contemporary Arab American life writing in this study demonstrates, this notion has to be revised. Autobiographies, even in classical print format, indeed constitute media which specifically address the major issues uniting and dividing the "contemporary world" Loomba mentions. They address "cultural and socioeconomic practices" as well as many other pressing issues by drawing on unique narrative registers. This allows the media audience to notice the "globality" of seemingly local or regional con-flicts. As Loomba also urges her readers, it is high time for postcolonial, cultural, and Literary Studies alike to integrate this function into its theoretical horizon.

7.1 THE (RE-)FRAMED ARAB/MUSLIM

The Arab American writer and literary scholar Gregory Orfalea in his memoir *Angeleno Days* takes a very clear position concerning the intention of writers. "It is not enough for many of us writers to reflect the world, to celebrate or damn it – we want to change it," he forcefully declares (233). Especially postcolonial theory with its political implications shares this view. By writing exhaustively on the topic of counter-discourse and the postcolonial quest for agency, scholars in this field have at length explored the possibilities of rewriting history from the perspective of the formerly suppressed in order to arrive at a less ethnocentric and more balanced stance. The question of how exactly this can be achieved, namely the question of method, though, has been addressed with less vigor. The prefixes "re-" and "counter-" have become most popular to connote the basic assumption that ethnic authors write in opposition to existing and lasting stereotypes. As the analysis of contemporary Arab American life writing from a Media Studies perspective suggests, the mere focus on counter-narration does not fully unveil the complex registers employed by authors to change collective identity definitions. Evelyn Alsultany therefore underlines the need to arrive at more comprehensive theoretical models. In an interview with the author, she explains: "Within broader Cultural Studies, theories are more sophisticated to account for how representations operate beyond assessing whether they are positive or negative. However, in Arab American Studies specifically, there is much work to do in this area." Framing as a novel theory of life writing and reading provides a tool to uncovering how authors mediate alternative schemata of interpretation.

Frame Synthesis

The analysis of the three life narratives by Ansary, Kaldas, and Hamoudi hints at the most obvious similarities and differences found in the respective works. In order to infer more substantial theoretical knowledge about the function of framing as theory of life writing and reading, a coherent synthesis of the framing analyses needs to be conducted. The starting point of this comparative analysis is the overall finding that all authors achieve the effect of constituting alternative interpretative frameworks to look at Arabs, Muslims, and ultimately at Arab Americans. In addition, all narratives also reflect existing frames circulating in the media discourse. Hence, literary reframing can never take place apart from the influence of general media framing. The process of (re-)framing is thus characterized by the reproduction of existing frames while partially complementing these frames with novel and more complex information.

When systematically juxtaposing the frames created by the authors in the present analysis with the ones dominating in news media discourse, the following picture emerges:

Table 6: Comparative Frame Matrix

Frame Level	Frame	Media	Ansary	Kaldas	Hamoudi	
Ideological	Orientalism	··	···	··	··	**(Re-)Framing**
Political	Neo-Orientalism	···	··	··	···	
Issue Level	Religion	···	··	··		
	Race	···	·	···		
	Gender	··				
Frequency, salience	Media		···	··	···	**Reframing**
	Culture		·	···	··	
	Economy			··	··	
	History		···			
	Law				···	
	Literature			··		

Legend: ⟶ = strong framing effect, ⋯➔ = limited framing effect

The comparative table depicts the most important findings of the frame analysis. On the level of issue frames, the chart highlights the limited number of issue frames dominating the media discourse on Arabs, namely religion, gender, and race. Except for the memoir of Hamoudi, all memoirs reproduce the majority of these media frames with varying salience. In Hamoudi's work, these issues do occur selectively as topics, yet, they are not dominant enough to account for interpretative frameworks. The most curious finding with respect to issue frames appears with respect to the gender frame. This frame constitutes one of the most dominant media frames, as the constant debates on veiling and the suppression of Middle Eastern women suggests (see Chapter 3.3). This focus on gender to a large degree also rules the scholarship on Arab American writing which heavily draws on feminist theory (Naber, "New Texts Out"). As the literary examples illustrate, however, gender here plays a subordinate role. None of the memoirs contains a gender issue frame. This also holds true for the frames constituted by Pauline Kaldas who is the only female author chosen in this study. Her work *Letters from Cairo* does contain shorter observations on gender topics. The number and elaborateness of these instances does not reveal a higher interest in the topic than displayed in the memoirs of her male colleagues. Ansary and Hamoudi thus deal with the topic of gender at least to an equal extent. This finding underscores the fundamental gap between artificial

salience created for an issue by the media and the actual relevance of the issue derived from the personal experience of Arabs, Muslims, and Arab Americans.

The fact that the authors are quite resilient to the mass-mediated gender frame furthermore suggests that there are indeed frames that for specific reasons do not transfer to the audience or which are consciously rejected due to oversaturation.[1] Other frames, in contrast, seem to be so pervasive in public discourse that authors automatically adopt and reproduce them. This, for example, applies to the issue frames of race and religion. This finding is largely in line with the hypothesis inferred from the theory of media framing, stating that anybody acting in the media environment is affected by existing media frames. The fact that Hamoudi is most resilient to this framing impact serves as a possible explanation why his narrative stirs such a vital discussion among audience members. Due to the large number of alternative frames created by the author, readers perceive his narrative to present a very different reality from the one they are used to from other literary writings and mainstream news media outlets.

The example of Hamoudi's successful reframing also illustrates the overall logic of (re-)framing as developed in the theoretical section of this study and applied in the analytical chapters. A number of frames identified in the memoirs have been found to overlap with those of the media environment. The model indicates this media influence in the form of the arrow pointing from the discursive environment inward to the narrative frames installed in the memoirs. This confirms the theoretical assumption that media frames act as perceptual constraints on authors. Instead of simply reiterating these frames, the authors use their personal and ethnic position to add information and thus alter pre-existing frames in the public. This limited influence on framing is indicated by the dashed arrow in the model. It illustrates the process of (re-)framing which is characterized by the efforts of reframing while at the same time being framed by external discourse.

The last six items in the frame column show the alternative issue frames found in the frame analysis. As with the previous issue frames, they are listed according to the frequency to which they occur in the memoirs and according to their salience. Obviously, the issues of culture and economy stand out as most important ones from the perspective of the authors. In the case of the cultural issue frame, life writing seems to successfully fill a knowledge gap on the part of the audience. This knowledge gap is a result of the lack of this frame in the media discourse on the Arab world, since cultural content in the era post 9/11 has mostly disappeared from

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1   This would be in line with a finding derived from agenda setting studies which shows that a highly mediated topic after reaching the climax of its coverage experiences no more increase in salience in the media audience unless recurring events fuel the coverage anew. Expressed in graphical terms, this logic transfers to an S-shaped learning curve on the part of the media audience (Dearing and Rogers 65).

the news coverage that dominated the WOT. The issue frame of economy is one that clearly demonstrates the potential of life narratives to reframe the public view in formerly neglected ways. Economic concerns and the detailed contrasting of economic systems of Arab countries and the U.S. do not play a role in the news media apart from natural resource concerns.[2] Equally noteworthy instances of re-framing can be found with respect to the issue frames of history, law, and literature. Obviously, these issues reflect the areas in which the given authors fully play out their professional expertise and thus succeed in opening up alternative interpretative frameworks that the media do not give credit to. Especially in the case of the litera-ture frame in Kaldas's memoir, this also points to the multi-layered knowledge framing can convey. Kaldas reveals the means of her own writing as mechanism of a larger interpretative frame to view the Arab world and identity.

The complexity accompanying some issue frames fully unfolds when looking at the most multi-faceted issue frame found in the analysis – the media. As Table 6 suggests, the media issue frame is not only the most frequent one, for it appears in all of the life narratives, it is also one of the most salient ones. This finding marks one of the most crucial outcomes of this study because since it directly points to the close entanglement between life narrative and journalistic media production. Above all, the media issue frame highlights the strong impact media framing has on the individual consciousness of authors – both in terms of memory recollection and narrative constraints. Even more striking in this context is the high degree of con-sciousness with which the given authors reflect on this mediatic impact to ultimate-ly turn it into an issue frame in their own life narratives. The effect in this case compares to the one of the literature frame in *Letters from Cairo* in the sense that the authors reveal the mechanisms of media framing while at the same time em-ploying them. The reader, while learning about this issue, gains consciousness of his/her own susceptibility to media frames and is simultaneously offered alternative frameworks based on information that is missing from the media coverage.

As the matrix also indicates, all (re-)framing processes on the issue level take place under the larger roof of the ideological and political frame. In this respect, Table 7 speaks a clear language. All narratives can be characterized to reflect the Orientalist and neo-Orientalist frames to a varying extent. The presence of these frames is marked by the language use of binary contrasts between *East* and *West* and related dualisms. This reflection of the Orientalist and neo-Orientalist frame again speaks to the dominance of mass media framing as shaping literary produc-tion. As in the case of the dominant media frames on the issue level, the authors

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2   The neglect of economic circumstances is also characteristic of Ethnic and Arab Ameri-can Studies. The topic of class is especially missing from the analytical radar. Literary production and identity politics continue to be ruled by a middle-class bias that negates intra-group differences and undermines artificial homogeneity (Naber, "New Texts Out").

cannot detach themselves from these omnipresent binary structures resonating in their memory and in their daily life experiences.

This seemingly simplistic dualistic thinking, however, stands in juxtaposition to the complex and obviously successful reframing effects on the public's image of Arab/American/Muslim identity. The reception analysis of Hamoudi's memoir sheds even more light on this seeming paradox. Here, audience members explicitly identified binary thinking and the method of contrasting as valuable aid to their learning experience on the Middle East. This finding puts additional emphasis on the role of life writing as mediator in public discourse well beyond the limited confines of the literary market. Furthermore, the sophisticated way in which the audience reflects on this medium, by openly claiming to derive knowledge and not merely diversion from the reading experience, also underlines the urgent need to grant the audience more room in life writing research.

In addition to these audience-related aspects, the strong visibility of Orientalism opens up a larger and even more urgent debate on Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism. Obviously, the Orientalism found in the narratives corresponds with but also differs from the common notion of Orientalism in many ways. In the auto-biographies under investigation in this study, Orientalism is obviously characterized by the strong prevalence of binary and at times inferior thinking. This seeming essentialism stands in contrast to the non-essentialism of the overlapping frames which this study has brought to the surface. Based on the evidence at hand, it can thus be assumed that the very language of Orientalist thinking creates the necessary ground for the installment of more complex information. As an analysis of the current scholarly literature reveals, the authors of life narratives are not the only ones drawing on Orientalist divisions.

Orientalism Is "Everywhere"

In his study on Arab American life writing, Wail Hassan quotes a provocative but also challenging finding by Rudyard Kipling: "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" ("Arab-American Autobiography" 31). The contempo-rary Arab American life narratives discussed in this study obviously pose a counter-example to this bleak outlook since they make the two worlds meet. Still, this does not dissolve the linguistic binary of *East* and *West* separating the two. As the recur-rent use of this binary by the life writers suggests, this division structures the every-day life of Arabs and Muslims around the world. When taking a close look at the publications in the field of Postcolonial and Autobiography Studies, it turns out that Arab Americans are not alone with their binary thinking.

As Vladimir Braginsky in his thought-provoking study on Orientalism in Eu-rope points out, the literature produced on the relations between *East and West* is

"enormous" (511). The same holds true for the various contexts in which this linguistic binary appears in scholarly writing. Without attempting to provide a comprehensive list of these instances, the following enumeration conveys an impression of the different couplings in which *East* and *West* occur: "The West organizes knowledge" (Shohat and Stam 14), "Western neoliberalism" and the "Western hegemonic perspective" (Mignolo 8) and "Western ignorance" (Said, *Orientalism* 63), "modern (Western) epistemology" (Mignolo 9), "Western memory" (Mignolo 11), "Western intellectuals" (Foucault, Interview 69), "Western viewers" and "Western media" (Whitlock 30), "public and private spheres of the West" (Whitlock 31), "literate Western readership" (Whitlock 35) and the "liberal Western consumer" (Whitlock 47), "Western obsession" (Banerjee, "Between the Burqa" 301), "the Western eye" (Whitlock 59), "Western intervention" (Whitlock 101), "Western views" of autobiography (Golley, *Reading Arab* 76), "Western representationalist discourse" (Bhabha, *Location* 97), the "Western image of the harem" linked to the idea of "Western men" (Hamilton 176) and "Western women" (Hamilton 178) as seen by "non-Western women" (Hamilton 178).

This comprehensive list of formulations using the binary opposition between *East* and *West* could be continued to form a book-length collection of quotations. The given examples are, however, sufficient to derive some major findings. First of all, the fact that the *West* in the previous examples is mostly used without the opposite *East* implies that the *West* still dominates in defining the Other. Most authors do not seem to be aware of this Orienalist bias for they use the terms without quotation marks. This seems to be a minor detail, yet, this detail is symptomatic of the large body of literature found on the topic of Orientalism today. The overwhelming majority of writers uses the terms *West/East*, *Orient/Occident* and related terminologies without bothering to explain their "ambiguous usage" (Williams qtd. in Shohat and Stam 13). Edward Said himself provides a slightly more nuanced example of this ambivalence:

I suggested that studying the relationship between the "West" and its dominated cultural "others" is not just a way of understanding an unequal relationship between unequal interlocutors, but also a point of entry into studying the formation and meaning of Western cultural practices themselves. And the persistent disparity in power between the West and non-West must be taken into account if we are accurately to understand cultural forms […]. (*Culture and Imperialism* 230)

Said's statement adds another example to the long list of binary vocabulary. By using quotation marks in some instances, Said does emphasize the problematic function of words such as "West." As the passage also demonstrates, however, this careful attention to binary vocabulary is not coherent and sometimes arbitrary. Even more striking is the fact that Said uses these prominent binaries while at the same

time pointing to the good intention of cultural and postcolonial scholarship to unveil the dichotomy. Other examples of this counter-intuitive claim to unfold Orientalism while at the same time confirming its language are again manifold. Often, the binary terminology of *West* and *East* covers entire pages. A prime example of this paradox is provided by Whitlock who makes an explicit reference to framing in her discussion of women's autobiographies from Iraq: "These images, the titles, and the subtitles are designed to grab the Western eye with a glimpse of absolute difference, of the exotic. This is a way of positioning them for metropolitan markets […] Here conventions are reversed: it is the Western eye of the viewer that is in an enclosed and framed interior space […]" (Whitlock 59). The use of the dualism between *East* and *West* again dominates in these lines, which is particularly thought-provoking with respect to the critique of framing Whitlock applies. In the very instance of identifying Orientalism as frame of the narrative she analyzes, she also reproduces Orientalism in her own writing by evoking its characteristic language of othering (see Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 9; Shohat and Stam 13; Fritsch-El Alaoui 27).

These numerous examples illustrate that Orientalism as based on binary thinking not only characterizes the life narratives of multi-ethnic life writers but also of the ones who critically reflect on these works (Marrouchi "Counternarratives" 237). This underlines the powerful function of Orientalism as an ideology. One can therefore agree with Naber's conclusion that the influence of Orientalism is practically "everywhere" (Naber, "New Texts Out").[3] Instead of simply lamenting this state, as has been the major occupation of scholars for many decades, the question needs to be raised if these binaries actually serve a non-essentialist function. Obviously, the authors for the most part do not use Orientalist vocabulary to intentionally underline the inferiority of the Other. Instead, they apply respective terms for a particular purpose: to convey *knowledge* not *stereotypes*. In doing so, they not only reframe the image of the Arab and Muslim but also mediate Orientalism in a way that has not been explored so far.

7.2 Mediated Orientalism

There is a very revealing line found in the study of Esra Sandikcioglu on the metaphorical meaning of Orientalism behind the Gulf War. "It is very difficult, if not impossible, to see the world around us with different eyes, since we are literally

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3   While deriving their major motivation from the intention to unveil the constructed nature of Orientalism, these works substantiate the effect of othering. As Arab American scholar Nadine Naber in an interview points out when looking back at her own upbringing in the San Francisco Bay area, she retrospectively notices that "the impact of Orientalism was everywhere" ("New Texts Out").

products of our cultures," he writes. The results of the present interdisciplinary study on contemporary Arab American life narratives confirm one part of this finding while shedding more light on the other. After all, the impact of Orientalism has proven to be strong. This is why it cannot be neglected in the analysis of literature dealing with the representation of Arabs and the Arab world. This highlights that "Orientalism Matters," maybe even more than it did before the current wave of Neo-Orientalism and the creation of new mediated stereotypes post 9/11 (Behdad 709). Leaving it at this short-sighted conclusion, however, would miss the avisaged aim and scope of this study. The framing analysis has revealed novel insights into the way in which Arab Americans adopt Orientalism. This demonstrates that "Orientalism matters" – but it matters in a different way than previously discussed.

Orientalism Revisited

The history of mediated stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims is inherently interwoven with Said's *Orientalism* as the founding manifesto of Postcolonial Studies (Aboul-Ela, "Is there an Arab" 730; El-Haj 539). Orientalism therefore not only represents a single theory but a "tradition" which shapes the mindset of researchers in innumerable academic disciplines (El-Haj 545). Due to this dominance of Orientalism and its various adaptations in present-day Cultural Studies (see Chapter 2.1), scholars hardly ever go back to the conceptual roots of the concept when employing Said's vocabulary. They simply use Orientalism like a household term. Media scholars, in contrast, have so far resisted the inflationary use of the concept. In their field, Orientalism is mostly absent from the methodological toolkit.

The frame analysis presented in this study suggests that neither the blind application of Orientalism as a catch word nor its complete negligence contribute to the advancement of life writing research. Instead, the prominent role which the concept still plays in contemporary discourse requires a reconsideration of Orientalism as overarching ideological frame. It is this critical engagement with seemingly established knowledge that counts as one of the most important effects achieved by the Arab American life narratives investigated in this study. This reframing effect is in line with Said's notion of the "heterodox in theory" that does not merely reproduce the given (Marrouchi, "Counternarratives" 254). When putting this call into practice, Orientalism turns out to be much more than a concept of "Knowledge and Power" (Said, *Covering Islam* 157).

The urgent need to reread many seemingly established facts about Orientalism is underlined by selective and often distorted views ruling in scholarly discourse. Scholars intentionally twist and turn Said's elaborations to justify their own theories. Orientalism, according to this common use of the concept, counts as a more or less fixed concept with a definite *pre*-defined and hardly ever *re*-defined meaning.

This notion of Orientalism as stable concept, however, runs counter to the view Said himself represented. He argued in favor of the dynamic quality of Orientalism. Nadia El-Haj accounts for this dynamic aspect in her definition of Orientalism:

Orientalist discourse is an archive of systematic statements and bodies of knowledge, continuously drawn on and reformulated, that converges with broader prevailing philosophical tendencies at different moments in time […], all the while retaining a powerful trace of itself as Europe reexperiences the Orient but never as something wholly new or alien. (545)

El-Haj in this redefinition of Orientalism raises two crucial issues that lay the groundwork for rethinking the concept in light of the present framing analysis. The first aspect is the significance of Orientalism as an umbrella term which summaryzes "bodies of knowledge." The use of the plural is crucial here since it underlines that various theoretical concepts and practical arguments in total account for Orientalism as phenomenon in public discourse. This categorizing function is linked to the time-dependence of Orientalism which El-Haj also points to. This is related to the second major claim of her definition, namely the dynamic quality of Orientalism. Since knowledge is bound to "different moments in time," Orientalism as a product of this knowledge creation needs to be re-read and reinterpreted continuously. It is this alternation between stability and change, between the familiar and the newly-emerging, which marks the lasting theoretical potential of Orientalism for contemporary discourse analysis.

What has prevented scholars from recognizing this potential is the normative meaning they associate with the term. This normative connotation is rooted in postcolonialism's fundamental neglect of binaries. As Jonathan Culler summarizes this deconstructivist approach in a discussion of Paul de Man's contribution to literary theory: "Deconstruction seeks to undo all oppositions that, in the name of unity, purity, order, and hierarchy, try to eliminate difference" (qtd. in Elbow 51). Postcolonial theory can therefore be characterized as "hostile to dialectics" (Huddart 58). This hostility toward dialectical thinking, however, did not start with the rise of Orientalism as a research object nor with the emergence of Postcolonial Studies. Rather, the deconstruction of dialectics is rooted in the philosophical origin of binary thinking as such.

Binary thinking was largely theorized by the German philosopher Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel. His concept of dialectics is based on the idea that two terms standing in opposition to each other, such as master and slave, can be overcome by introducing a third term or "higher category" (Elbow 52; Morton, "Poststructuralist Formulations" 162). According to this notion, the goal is to dissolve the dichotomy to achieve unity without negating either one of the previous binary components. This process is commonly referred to as discursive method of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (Elbow 52). Hegel's concept, however, despite its epistemological rele-

vance, became the subject of harsh criticism. Aside from his valuable contributions, Hegel linked his insights to racist and Eurocentric ideology (Morton, "Poststructuralist Formulations" 162).

One of the harshest and most influential critics of binary thinking in postcolonial theory was Michel Foucault. While generally agreeing on the existence of the historical continuity suggested by Hegelian dialectics, he proclaimed to resolve it. As he states in his discussion of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze:

The freeing of difference requires thought without contradiction, without dialectics, without negation; thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple – of the nomadic and dispersed multiplicity that is not limited or confined by the constraints of the same; thought that does not conform to a pedagogical model (the fakery of prepared answers) but attacks insoluble problems – that is, a thought which addresses a multiplicity of exceptional points, which is displaced as we distinguish their conditions and which insists upon and subsists in the play of repetitions. ("Theatrum Philosophicum" 358)

This reflection by Foucault indicates a second strategy in response to the perceived problem of binary thinking. The first one is Hegel's suggestion to overcome binaries by synthesis. The second one established by Foucault replaces dialectical thinking by "multiplicity." Although Hegel's own strategy appears somewhat less radical when compared to this idea of total replacement by Foucault, both approaches are united by the ultimate goal of eliminating the dialectical state. Especially Foucault with his deconstructionist opposition to oppositional thinking fostered the overcoming of binary thinking as the major aim of Postcolonial Studies (Said, Orientalism 3; Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 165; Varisco 254).

This philosophical synopsis detects the origins of anti-binary thinking and it underlines the two major methods that can be employed to eliminate binaries in discourse. The lasting antipathy against binaries, however, is not merely a philosophical legacy or a flaw of postcolonialism to deconstruct binaries for its own sake. Rather, the neglect of binaries on normative grounds is linked to the notion that binaries necessarily represent power structures (Merskin 158). Conceptually speaking, binaries are not imagined to stand alongside each other on a horizontal axis. Instead, the implied power relations situate binaries along a vertical axis where one party is always superior to the other. The one who gets to define this Other automatically is the one in power. This "Other Thinking" can therefore never take place without the Other (Mignolo 67). This concept ultimately leads to a tautology of othering. As Ning writes: "Since the Occident is already the 'other' to the Oriental, the 'Orient' in the eyes of Westerners is just an 'other' of this 'other'" (58). Hence, whoever gains the upper hand in the power struggle wins. This logic applies to colonial and to postcolonial discourse alike. Postcolonial Studies' main aim has

always been to reveal the effects of this binary discourse on the basis of the "dynamics of Western ethnocentrism" (Whitlock 48). Just like colonialism relied on the colonizer dominating the colonial subject, Orientalism inherently relies on the notion of Occidental power. As Armstrong strikingly infers: "If the author in Orientalism wins, he becomes the 'us' that succeeds in defining 'them'" (114-15). The result is a "reverse polarization" that seeks to reformulate history and cultural relations from the view of the Other (Aboul-Ela, "Is there an Arab" 731).

This inherent understanding of binaries as power relation also applies to the contemporary discourse on Orientalism. The concept continues to be seen as a major problem as Nadine Naber points out in identifying "new Orientalist discourses that reify and legitimize imperial racism, military violence, and war" (Naber, "New Texts Out"). Orientalism, as this example shows, is used as a synonym of the most unequal binaries history has to offer, among them racism and imperialism. The deconstruction of these "new Orientalist discourses" has become the subject of contemporary scholars employing reformulated Orientalisms such as neo-Orientalism, re-Orientalism and post-Orientalism (see Chapter 3.1). Orientalism of this new period is mostly used in the context of the U.S. actions against terrorism. A chapter title like the one of Ta called "Team America: The War on Terror and the Return of Orientalism" illustratively sums up the supposed relationship between the WOT and the renewed sense of Orientalism (136).

Although these supposed "re"-formulations of Orientalism claim to extend the explanatory capacity of classical Orientalim in unique and novel ways (Lau and Mendes 2), a close look at their theoretical potential makes one question this claim. Khair Tabish therefore ironically states that "Re-Orientalism is genetically modified Orientalism […]" (154). He attributes this genetic modification to the critical finding that "certain aspects of colonial narratives are repeated again and again, consciously or not, with or without irony" (Khair 154). One of these cloned features is the lasting normative definition of Orientalism based on the inherent conviction that binaries are unequal and in need to be dissolved (Jacobson 312). Since this normative understanding dominates the scholarly discourse on the topic, one can call it 'mediated Orientalism' in the sense that it resonates through all major publications. This sheds light on the question of how far these "re-"formulations of Orientalism actually reach. Mediated Orientalist scholarship reproduces the core assumptions of Orientalism as they have axiomatically circulated in academic discourse throughout the decades. This new Orientalism, however, does not actually re-frame the old model in unique ways. By merely taking a normative approach to binaries, post-colonialism has thus successfully colonized Orientalism to an extent that any other definition is not even considered.

When looking at the empirical impact of postcolonialism's efforts to deconstruct binaries, this neglect of novel thinking raises questions. Have Orientalist binaries actually disappeared? In light of the given evidence, the answer is no. As

the memoirs discussed in this study show, the experience of Arabs, Muslims, and Americans alike takes place along Orientalist binaries. One could claim, this is an unfortunate circumstance that should motivate postcolonial scholars even more in their efforts to fight binary thinking. The irony, however, is that the literature of these very scholars is charged with Orientalist binaries. One conclusion to draw from this would be to call Orientalist scholarship a failure. A more constructive approach that actually contributes to the furthering of Orientalist scholarship is to assume that binaries have a function that normative postcolonial scholars have overlooked thus far.

Binaries Revisited

Daniel Varisco in *Reading Orientalism* sums up postcolonialism's obsession with binaries by stating that the motto has always been to get "Beyond the Binary" (290). "Beyond" in this respect has always been defined as the elimination of binary structures. Often, this credo has produced "binary-blinded writers" as Varisco also provocatively puts it (264). For him, Said counts as major example of this group. The previous examination of binary vocabulary found in the majority of postcolonialist writing, however, points to the fact that this lack of eye-sight is by far more widespread among postcolonial scholars. When leaving behind the goal of eliminating binaries in the quest to get "beyond" the present status of research, one encounters that alternative definitions of binaries exist which extend Orientalist scholarship *beyond* its normative confines.

When searching for alternative approaches to the study of binaries, one that is positioned in-between conservative Orientalism and contemporary Postcolonial Studies, a third view emerges that looks back at an even longer philosophical tradition than the ones of Hegel and Foucault. This more inclusive approach originated at the time of Socrates and Plato and can also be found in the concepts of yin and yang propagated by *Eastern* philosophy (Elbow 52). This alternative tradition does not see binaries as fundamental cause of opposition and therefore denies "a dialectical either/or" in favor of embracing a "dialogic both/and" (Bakhtin qtd. in Elbow 52). Although this dialogical view clearly sets the focus on inclusiveness rather than exclusion, it is not synonymous with Foucault's elaborations on multiplicity. Multiplicity, according to this reformed reading of dialectics, is not preferred over binaries with the goal of their ultimate elimination. Rather, binaries are granted a valuable function for human thinking and discourse. Peter Elbow makes an outspoken claim for this revised notion: "Even though binary oppositions tempt people to oversimple, black/white thinking, binary oppositions also present us with uniquely valuable occasions for balance, irresolution, nonclosure, nonconsensus, nonwinning" (54). He thus argues for an "approach to binary oppositions that seems to go

against the grain and require some conscious discipline: affirming both sides of a dichotomy as equally true or important, even if they are contradictory" (Elbow 54).

Going "against the grain" consequently means embracing instead of eliminating binaries. The cause of this appreciation, however, is not rooted in normative considerations only. As Elbow emphasizes, the scientific perspective differs from postcolonialism's focus on identity politics. Whereas Postcolonial Studies demonize binaries based on the negative socio-political consequences they supposedly have, the embracing of binaries and their function relies on a cognitive scientific standpoint. The affirmation of "both sides" is therefore only possibly if both sides are granted a separate and distinct place in the information grid of human cognition. This multiplicity achieved via binary differences allows for diversity without hierarchies. "Having three or more options is great," Peter Elbow states in his support of "framing issues in terms of more than two sides. Just so long as there's *more than one*! If we can see *three* or *five* sides, that's good – so long as that multiplicity isn't a cover for letting one side be the real winner" (Elbow 53).

This alternative approach to dialectics contributes important insights to the theoretical dimension of the present framing study. The crucial link is provided by the relation between binaries and human learning. A cognitive definition of binary discourse thus gives credit to the fact that the human mind functions in a dialectical mode (Elbow 53). These more abstract theoretical insights linked to human learning theory also have very specific implications for key concepts in Postcolonial Studies. As Esra Sandikcioglu points out, thinking in strict dialectics results in a reduction of the complex political reality to contrastive concepts such as "Self and Other."[4] This "thinking and evaluating in oppositions or dualisms" represents a set of strategies which are deeply rooted in "cultural, political, psychological and anthropological" practice (Krause qtd. in Sandikcioglu). Consequently, the cognitive process of dual thinking is necessary for identity creation as well as for political and social order (Wöhlert 64). As Lewis Sego puts it, "[o]ne's identity is established cognitively on the basis of contrast to others. If no others are perceived, identity is neither possible nor necessary" (qtd. in Sandikcioglu). This reformed view also results in a revision of border thinking. Borders become necessary means to differentiate the self from the other and to delineate the "universal" from the "particular" (Mignolo 19; Majaj, "Arab-American Ethnicity" 323).

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4   Sandikcioglu draws on Morillas's cultural model that links Cultural and Cognitivie Studies. It depicts how people construct their own and others' sense of self by relying on public resources as well as on private experiences for self-construction. The concept of self in a given culture is an integral part of the model. "It includes the image-schemata, metaphoric and metonymic mappings, and script-like information with which a culture schematizes cognitive-culturally its members [...]" (Morillas qtd. in Sandikcioglu).

This cognitive definition of binaries allows one to explore the full range of "Uses of Binary Thinking" (Elbow 51). Binaries as "formative binaries" lose their negative, destructive connotation and instead become the crucial preliminaries of human learning and understanding (Hinz). Expressed in the vocabulary of framing, the thinking in black and white opposites facilitates the categorization of incoming information into existing and newly emerging cognitive schemata. The reduction of information is key to this process. Such a rethinking of binaries, however, also shakens related core pillars of Literary and Cultural Studies. Here, the "Fear of Reductionism" has been entangled with the ultimate goal of eliminating essentialism (Slingerland 25). Binaries as preconditions for effective framing consequently also challenge the meaning of essentialism.

Essentialism Revisited

The vilification of Orientalism and the corresponding binary discourse must be seen within the larger context of Literary and Cultural Studies and their inherently anti-essentialist objectives (see Chapter 2.1). Embracing and even calling for the intentional employment of binaries to underline difference, as this study suggests, counts as the "essential unpardonable sin" in the "postmodern intellectual milieu" (Varisco 251). The redefinition of Orientalism as a cognitive binary which embraces both the other and the self, however, cannot merely be neglected based on arguments of essentialism, relativism, or universalism.[5] The very definition of binaries as facilitators of complexity and diversity excludes such a denial. Consequently, the notion of essentialism also needs to be studied from a new perspective. This perspective starts with the cognitive function of binaries and ends with the finding that essentialism facilitates comparison.

In contrast to the examples found in the memoirs discussed in this study which inherently rely on the accentuation of differences and oppositions, contemporary postcolonial discourse proscribes the labeling of other cultures and religions "as fundamentally different from ours" (Sandikcioglu). The separation of *our* culture and *their* culture as well as the focus on *difference* count as markers of essentialism. In how far this anti-essentialist bias rules the scholarly discussion is highlighted by Whitlock in her analysis of Islam in life narratives from the Middle East:

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5   This understanding of Orientalism as a conscious act and an unconscious cognitive activity somewhat corresponds to Said's notion of "latent" and "manifest" Orientalism. Latent to Said refers to "almost unconscious" positivist assumptions of the *East* whereas manifest Orientalism comprises "stated views" and other forms of knowledge distribution (Orientalism 205; El-Haj 543).

[L]ife narratives are constantly caught up in circuits of self-construction, where Islam is objectified as the obverse of Euro-Americans societies that self-identify as "the West," driving a constant creation and re-creation of imaginary boundaries between "we" and "others." "The West" can only be defined relationally. It is not a geographic location but a locus of symbolic and grounded power relations emanating from the United States and Europe; there is no ground for identifying an essential "Western" subject, and […] the "other" can only be relational […]. (7)[6]

Although Whitlock in this passage aims to make a claim against essentialism, she at the same time sets up an important argument for the recognition of essentialism as constructive theoretical concept in postcolonialism. The fact that "East" and "West" are "relational" presupposes the act of comparison. This comparison in life narrative does not take place along "symbolic" and mostly artificial boundaries, as Whitlock suggests. Rather, these borders are perceived as real by members of different cultures. As the importance of truth and authenticity in audience research furthermore reveals, the public's notion of the "real" has little to do with the academic discourse on reality as a constructed concept. The binary of *East* and *West* instead is understood as a social fact that forms the most important cognitive structure to define "a network of relationships" between individuals and cultures (Behdad 711).

When linking the important function of comparativism with the redefined meaning and value of binaries, the human need for essentialist thinking unfolds. Since binaries do not merely represent power structures but two separated entities that stand in contrast to each other, the act of comparison is needed to explore differences and commonalities in equal juxtaposition to each other. Certainly, this cognitive process cannot account for all details, which is why simplification is required to structure new information within known and emerging schemata. Essentialism, defined in cognitive terms as the reduction of complexity, fulfills this purpose. The feminist scholar Vicki Kirby summarizes this form of complexity within a seemingly reductionist pattern by stating that "essentialism is not an entity that can be identified and dissolved by saying yes or no to it" (qtd. in Yeğenoğlu, Colonial Fantasies 37).

This necessity for comparisons that precede value judgements sheds new light on the "how" of essentialism and ultimately leads to a redefinition of the "essence" itself (Kirby qtd. in Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies* 37). This essence is the product of the comparative method. It derives the fact that human understanding and learning are rooted in comparative thinking. Such an altered notion of essentialism even-

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6   Whitlock in these lines quotes from Seyla Benhabib's work *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (2002). Benhabib is professor of political science at Yale University who specializes in democratic theory with a particular focus on cultural change and minority discourse.

tually allows postcolonial scholarship to take a more realistic position; one that accepts "that things have a set of characteristics which make them what they are, and that the task of science and philosophy is their discovery and expression" (*Oxford English Dictionary* qtd. in Varisco 252). Contemporary philosophy already provides a rationale as to how this revised notion of essentialism can benefit humanities scholars in making new discoveries.

From Normative Essentialism to Cognitive Comparativism

The reception analysis of the chosen autobiographies above has illustrated that consumers of ethnic life writing pursue the goal of knowledge acquision as important result of their reading experience. Especially learning processes about other cultures rely on binary comparisons that require essentialist schemata. A contemporary thinker who provides the philosophical rationale for the integration of this comparativist mode of learning into Cultural Studies is Charles Taylor. In his essay "Comparison, History and Truth," he reminds his readers: "[A]re we not always engaged in some sort of comparison when trying to understand another culture?" (*Philosophical Arguments* 147). With his elaborations on the connection between binary thinking and multiculturalism, he builds the bridge from normative essentialism to cognitive comparativism.

The multitude of Orientalist vocabulary in contemporary postcolonial writing has mostly been perceived as the "problem of language" so far (Khair 150). The problem is rooted in the difficulty of writing about alterity while trying to avoid expressions of alterity in language. Taylor also starts his discussion of binary thinking on the basis of language. In his thought construct, however, the "problem of language" turns into an unavoidable necessity and even advantage. To him, one of the fundamental reasons why comparison is substantial for cultural learning is the origin of language in one's cultural surroundings. If culture can only be discussed in one's "own" language, this self-evidently leads to an ethnocentric bias. Yet, there is hardly any other option possible (*Philosophical Arguments* 147).[7] To Taylor, language as internalized component of social interaction is the foundation of exploring cultural difference. It therefore reflects the larger trajectories of how knowledge and evaluation come into being more or less unconsciously.

When read alongside the cognitive preliminaries of comparison, the question of language and its relation to consciousness emerges. Taylor bases his reasoning on

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7   Wang Ning in her critique of the dichotomy of Orientalism and Occidentalism points out that one of the major limitations of Orientalist criticism in Literary Studies remains that the majority of texts only exists in English (61).

Hans-Georg Gadamer[8] in stating that "much of our understanding is quite inarticulate; is in this sense a form of pre-understanding. It shapes our judgements without our being aware of it" (*Philosophical Arguments* 148-49). Instead of concluding that this form of "pre-understanding" automatically leads to an insurmountable self-positioning along hierarchies, as postcolonialism claims, Taylor points to the value of the comparative mode in resolving the normative tension between *Self* and *Other*. He derives that "other-understanding is always in a sense comparative. That is because we make the other intelligible through our own understanding" (*Philosophical Arguments* 150). He then links this value of comparison to the concept of ethnocentrism by arguing that "the great leaps in other-understanding take place through (perhaps implicit) comparisons or contrasts. The hope that we can escape ethnocentrism reposes on the fact that these contrasts transcend and often incommode the previous home understanding" (*Philosophical Arguments* 150).

Taylor with his thoughts on the importance and inevitableness of comparativism in cultural learning provides the philosophical and scientific skeletal structure to assemble the core results of the present framing study. The mode in which the chosen authors pursue their autobiographical endeavor meets the very challenge of comparativism in a pragmatic and effective way. They demonstrate that essentialism and cultural other-thinking serve a cognitive purpose that does not "lock us into ethnocentric prisons" (C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* 148-49). Taylor again refers to Gadamer in emphasizing this positive learning effect when stating that "the fortunate thing about human beings is that understanding can change. And one of the important sources of this learning can be meeting foreign cultures" (C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* 148-49). In allowing the reader to meet the Other in a form not experienced through mainstream media consumption, contemporary Arab American and Muslim life writers open up the possibility of comprehensive comparison and contrasting between different issues separating the self from the cultural and ethnic Other. Only in provoking this constant cognitive contrasting does the formerly internalized half-knowledge derived from mainstream media sources become apparent. The temptation of taking the position of the colonial superior still remains as the attitude displayed by the life writers also suggests. Yet, information gain provides the key to preventing this scenario. Taylor sums up the trajectory of this mechanism in powerful words: "I meet this challenge [of ruling another culture] by altering and enlarging my understanding, remaking its forms and limits. This means that I articulate things that were purely implicit before, in order to put them into question" (*Philosophical Arguments* 149).

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8   Gadamer was an influential proponent of critical hermeneutics in the 20th century. He was especially concerned about questions of truth and matter which also play a key role in Taylor's work and ultimately in the present analysis of the role of life writing in contemporary discourse.

These lines also demonstrate that the initial realization of cultural difference is the essential starting point for questioning truths about one's own culture. In other words, cultural commonalities between individuals and people cannot be encountered if difference is not acknowledged in the first place. The numerous accounts of the general and of the journalistic readership in reaction to the life narratives bear testimony to this finding. The respective identity change of the authors serves as a model for a cultural opening that emerges in the act of articulating difference and finally carries over to the reader. This again points to the strong impact of mediated discourse on human thinking and feeling. Instead of simply presupposing this influence, the empirical method of framing in conjunction with the philosophical insights provided by Taylor explains this link on an empirical basis. Mediated schemata thus frame the world and only the reframing of this worldview can lead to different thoughts, evaluations, and actions of the cultural Other.

This is why other-understanding changes self-understanding, and in particular prizes us loose from some of the most fixed contours of our former culture. The very questioning we are engaged in here is an instance of this. The sober and rational discourse which tries to understand other cultures has to become aware of itself as one among many possibilities in order properly to understand the others. (C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* 149)

The life narratives analyzed in this study provide striking evidence for this effect. With their focus on "rational discourse" and knowledge transmission rather than on mere personal storytelling and ethnic identity negotiation, the authors trigger this process of self-understanding in unique and formerly unexplained ways. The constitution of alternative frames of interpretation fosters this process by not only offering the audience snapshots of details on various topics but by essentializing Orientalist difference to the effect that more complex thought patterns can be derived. This complexity within simplification and these details conveyed by essentialized contrasting provide the methodological power for reframing the Arab/Muslim.

Mediated Orientalism

The relationship between the media and Orientalism has always been interpreted along the same normative lines as Orientalism itself. Mediation has become a synonym for distortion, stereotyping, and essentialism (Shohat and Stam 59). Postcolonial media scholars like Ella Shohat and Robert Stam count as the strongest advocates to counter this shortcoming. In their work *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (2007), they approach the deconstruction of binary oppositions from an interdisciplinary

angle to unveil the "universalization of Eurocentric[9] norms" conducted by the media (3). Obviously, contemporary Arab American life narratives share the view that the media are crucial actors in manifesting stereotypes about Arabs. Their own use of Orientalist binaries, however, also underlines the function of mediation as act of communication which reconciles conflictual notions, reframes stereotypes, and ultimately contributes to the conveying of alternative Orientalisms that are not defined by the *West*.

The origin for the mediation of binaries between different cultures is rooted in the existential importance of binaries for self-creation. The different cultures emerging from this are surrounded by frames connected to a particular cognitive structure. Pamela Morgan establishes this link between binary discourse, self-creation, and framing in the following passage by drawing on the works of Goffman and Lakoff:

[E]ach of these "frames" of self-presentation is a multi-element cognitive model with rich traditional linguistic and cultural components and associations, including presuppositions and entailments or inferences, through which a society views, understands, structures, and conducts itself and its activities. Because of this complexity, these cultural frames are often cognitively linked to each other by the intersection or overlap of some of the elements of their idealized cognitive models. (qtd. in Sandikcioglu)

The key terms mentioned in this paragraph provide the basic elements of a reformed notion of Orientalism. As the analysis has illustrated, Orientalist binaries build up a conceptual framework around different cultures. In order to communicate knowledge of the Orient beyond the notion of borders as conflict lines,[10] mediation is required. Binary thinking and its respective vocabulary fosters this process: it does not hinder it, as postcolonial ideology has always claimed. It is precisely the dualism of *East* and *West* that allows for the "us and them" to find a proper voice. The authors of autobiographies do not engage in sophisticated scientific metadiscourses on the state of Orientalism today. When formulated in more unconventional terms, one can infer that these life writers put into practice a call by Spivak

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9   Eurocentrism is commonly defined as the viewing of the *West* as the center of historical development (Childs and Fowler 75). Shohat and Stam more specifically see Eurocentrism as "an ideological substratum common to colonialist, imperialist, and racist discourse" that is not only buried in the past but "a form of vestigial thinking which permeates and structures contemporary practices and representations even after the formal end of colonialism" (2). In short, they view Orientalism as a present, not a historical concept.

10   Mignolo, who locates the "exercise of border thinking" inherently in "Western epistemology," suggests the use of the concept "gnosis" to avoid the negative and confrontative connotation of the term (9).

who states that "one must learn to speak in such a way that the masses will not regard it as bullshit" ("Interview" 24). It is this language that the audience in its reading experience can share and that leads to "unlearning one's learning" (Spivak, "Interview" 24). The result is a reframed and more complex image of the Arab/Muslim that is mediated through Orientalism as "cognitive model" (Morillas qtd. in Sandikcioglu).

Graph 8: Model of (Re-)Framed Arab/Muslim American Identity in Mediated Orientalism
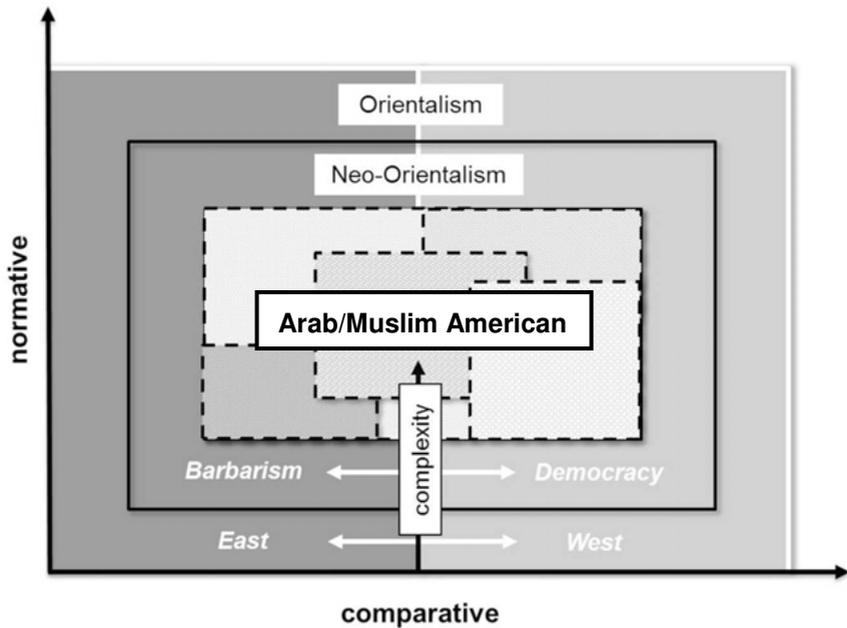
This (re-)mediated model of Orientalism demonstrates that Orientalism does not only take place along the vertical axis of normative judgement but also on the horizontal line of contrastation in which *East* and *West* build "contrasting pairs" that are necessary for learning about other cultures and ultimately for surmounting normative ethnocentric biases. As Hinz puts it in her study of the conditions for multiculturalism,[11] "binaries without hierarchies are possible" and horizontal thinking pro-

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11 Hinz discusses the positive and even constitutive impact of binary thinking in the practical political context of multiculturalism. Similar to the notion of horizontal Orientalism, multiculturalism claims as its main feature a focus on pluralism of thought rather than hierarchical thinking. Hinz also makes a strong claim that this 'equality' of multicultural-

vides the necessary condition for this. Consequently, single terms such as barbarism and democracy that constitute the neo-Orientalist frame, do not lose their affective connotation as either positive or negative. Their opposition, however, is necessary to charge them with new meaning.

Orientalism as a cognitive concept represents a step toward a reformulation of Orientalism from the other side. The act of mediation makes cognitive difference visible. This conceptual opening also results in the reversal of stereotypes concerning the epistemologies of *East* and *West*. Such an approach requires the examination of a "variant of Orientalist dualistic thinking [...] that sees the West as conceptually rigid and Eastern thought as open-ended and flexible" (Sandikcioglu). Only such a theoretical opening allows for a rethinking that Orientalism itself is not the reason for colonial practice. As Sandikcioglu as one of the few contemporary scholars who account for the existence of alternative Orientalisms suggests, such a rethinking "would have to start with a discussion of the culturally and geographically different notions of Orientalism held by the West resulting in a differentiation between what can tentatively be referred to as an Asian Orient with a background of Buddhism and Hinduism and an Islamic Orient."

The function of mediating Orientalism found in this study therefore has a dual meaning. The authors of the memoirs analyzed in this study obviously act within the larger ideological framework of Orientalism. Partly, they reflect the Orientalist ideology by taking a morally superior stance based on their American background. This notion of Orientalism as instrument of suppression corresponds to the normative condemnation of binary thinking in Postcolonial Studies (Merskin 158). By employing Orientalist binaries as tools of communication, however, they also mediate an alternative concept of Orientalism to the general and scientific public. This notion is cognitive in nature and differs from the *Western* view of Orientalism as normative power constellation. Taylor summarizes this constructive effect of mediation by means of a binary "language or mode of human understanding" which allows both sides, the "us and them," to be undistortedly described (*Philosophical Arguments* 155).

In sum, an "East-West synthesis"[12] (Braginsky 515) is only possible through the evocation of the East/West dialectic. This mode of comparativism builds the basis for a reformulated model of Orientalism. This model is detached from the historical determinism suggested by Hegel. As Taylor points out, the focus on comparison is

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ism cannot emerge without "dualistic" thinking since the thinking of the other always requires the thinking in opposites.

12 Ning in her work on Orientalism in Asian American literature uses the term dialogue with respect to the finding that Asian American studies are moving away from the binary opposition between Orient and Occident. This corresponds to the logic of a synthesis following the antithesis to both concepts (57).

not necessarily linked to a unidirectional course of history but allows for the notion of "potentiality" (*Philosophical Arguments* 164). Ultimately, this potentiality derives from the fact that "the comparativist enterprise," as Taylor coins it, includes various actors from all sides of the lines dividing contemporary discourse (*Philosophical Arguments* 164). The hope thus rests on a "community of comparativists" who come from different cultural backgrounds to contribute their insights in different languages (C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* 164). It is up to writers and scholars alike to form this collective and put the act of mediation into practice.

Mediating Orientalism: Framing as Narrative Method

When Said published his major work *Orientalism* and his progressive notions of the way in which the media influence the spread of Orientalist thought on a global level, he did not do so with a limited view only on the academic world. As a public intellectual and political activist for the Palestinian cause, scholarship to him always needed to fulfill the criterion of "wordliness" to meet the demands of political and social life ("Interview with Salusinszky" 76). The practical relevance of Said's work relied on its quality to help Arab Americans as part of a larger postcolonial collective to reflect and understand their own position (Shakir, *Bint Arab* 17). With respect to the practical impact of actually changing Orientalist power structures, his outlook was rather bleak. Said's pessimism was mostly caused by his awareness of the rising dominance of the media in comparison to literary and political activism. As he states in an interview: "We have not yet devised the means to deal with a television or film or even a script image, and to criticize the framework in which that image is represented, because it is *given* as reality, mediated so powerfully, and accepted almost subliminally," he laments ("Interview with Crary and Mariani" 43).[13] The present study provides a more positive outlook to change the media reality through framing.

When read from the renewed perspective of comparativist Orientalism, new possibilities for the self-definition of Arab/Muslim Americans and other so-called minority groups emerge. Since it is not Orientalism itself which triggers possible negative evaluations of Arabs and Muslims but the lack of information within this cognitive binary, the struggle between two identities and between two cultures becomes a valuable source of agency (compare Leonard 83). Contrary to the previous practice of countering Orientalism, the latter can thus be strategically em-

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13 Especially contemporary readings of Said approach the founder of Postcolonial Studies very critically with respect to the lack of trust he had in the potential to implement effective counter-narratives. This critical stance from within the postcolonial theory camp appears quite noteworthy given the almost unchallenged praise of his work in former periods (Aboul-Ela, "Is there an Arab" 730).

ployed and mediated in life writing to make a positive impact on public discourse. The result is a renewed sense of literary activism based on the use of framing as literary instrument.

Framing in the political realm has long been accepted not only as a constraint but as an instrument of political and social activism. Framing as activist tool counters the popular critique spread by media critics who claim that framing cannot serve the "public good" if political decisions depend on it (Kern 298). If those who are affected by these political decisions, however, employ the same means of public opinion management, framing can indeed serve the public good by means of supporting collectives. This particularly holds true for Arab and Muslim American political activists in the period post 9/11 who have come to realize the potential of media framing as an effective force to counter media images through mobilization. They increasingly started to regard framing as "political and educational tool" to reclaim their agency (Buck). Mostly due to the separation of the disciplines and the limited view of life narratives as counter-stories, this practical relevance of framing has not been transferred to the literary arena. The present analysis, however, reveals that framing can be just as powerful to influence public discourse as other media formats. The first step to achieving this aim is not the avoidance or deconstruction of Orientalism but its instrumental and strategic use in order to systematically explore contrasts between *East* and *West* (compare Norris 203-04).

It needs to be reiterated that this concept of strategic Orientalism does not correspond to any of the given ideas on re-Orientalism, counter-Orientalism, or post-Orientalism. Rather, the source of this Orientalist mode can be traced to the traditional opposition between *East* and *West*, as it was first formulated by Said. What differentiates the strategic use of this comparativist trope of Orientalism on the basis of framing from other uses of the term today is its focus on the cognitive and structural function of opposition. This logic does not negate the factor of normative judgement since comparativism will never be value-neutral (C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* 163). It thus sees judgement and evaluation as the conclusion emerging from binary comparison. This opposes the constant accusation by (Re-)Orientalist critics who state that Orientalism has come to serve as "discursive strategy that is directly absorbed and re-cycled by the diaspora in a way that it attests to the separation of cultures" (Salgado 211, 204). Furthermore, this practice stands in contrast to the constant debates on Spivak's "strategic essentialism" as tool to political agency (Salgado 204). If essentialism is defined in cognitive and not normative terms of identity politics, it does serve a strategic function in the creation of a collective identity which is more complex than essentialist.

How these more complex frameworks of identity definition can be installed has also been demonstrated by the given authors. By mediating issues which do not count among the standard issues found in the dominant media discourse on Arabs and Muslims, they offer the very complexity necessary to alter public images. De-

spite the issue frame of the media itself, one of the most outstanding examples is the economic issue frame established by Kaldas and Hamoudi. The strong impact of this frame on the audience relies on the fact that class counts as one of the most neglected issues in the literature on Arab Americans.[14] The strategic employment of an economic frame fills this information gap. Another noteworthy example of an alternative frame with a high potential to change the public definition of Arabs and Muslims is the one of law, as established by Hamoudi. This frame facilitates the intervention of Arab American authors in the expanding discourse on civil and human rights. Without the strategic targeting of this frame "it will always be the West that holds the key to the truth about law," as Ruskola reminds his readers (234). By actively bringing attention to legal topics, the writer as an "unacknow-ledged legislator" fully uses his/her professional and multi-ethnic agency to inter-fere in this discourse (Shelley qtd. in Orfalea 191).

These are just two outstanding examples that illuminate how framing based on the strategic use of Orientalist comparativism can fully take advantage of its poten-tial to interfere in mediated discourse. The examples provide evidence that the stage at which the main purpose of Arab American literature was mostly seen in a collec-tive "defining discourse" has been overcome (Jarmakani qtd. in Cainkar 164). By now, a more sophisticated approach to identity definition in life writing should be taken. The achievement of agency does not lose its significance within this ap-proach but should be seen as an effect of more complex literary instruments. Not the reiteration of existing frameworks of interpretation and their countering allow for this potential, but the embracing of alternative frames sheds light on facets of Arab/American/Muslim identity previously unacknowledged. Orfalea in his obser-vation of the current status of Arab American writing notices this necessity of the-matic shifting when urging Arab American authors to write on things which are "not strictly Arab American," as he puts it (224).

This expansion of the thematic scope presently limiting the production of Arab American writing and ultimately its reception in the public not only refers to Arab American authors themselves. Writers in the literary and media sphere can also adopt the method of reframing presented in this study instead of being lost in coun-ter-discourse. "The avoidance of stereotyping is not just a matter of grinding a single scene to imaginative powder," Orfalea poetically phrases it (170). The most essential prerequisite to actively engage with stereotypes and not their avoidance is

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14 This neglect of class issues is symptomatic of a large body of Cultural Studies literature. Class here played a major role during the Thatcherism of the 1980s in British Cultural Studies and later quickly ceased (Padley 15). In American Cultural Studies, class as a so-ciological concept has never been a considerable object of investigation except for the muckraking period. It remains to be seen whether the lasting economic difficulties faced by the United States at the beginning of the 21st century change this trend.

cultural and issue-related expertise to produce the authentic accounts the audience obviously demands. As suggested by the authors of the present Arab American life narratives, this also calls for immediate cultural experiences in the Middle East. Orfalea in this context again points to the close entanglement between literary and journalistic production when urging American authors to become familiar with the Arab world. "We need authors with the lust for experience and hunger for humanity [...]. We need authors to live in Cairo, Nablus, and Damascus," Orfalea tries to awaken the lust for immediate cultural encounter (185-86).[15]

These elaborations on the strategic use of Orientalist comparativism turn the world of postcolonial scholarship upside down. Orientalism thus loses its status as a merely "intellectual enterprise" and takes the shape of "*practical orientalism*"[16] (Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen 173). As such, it meets the reality of contemporary globalized discourse on Arab Americans and other ethnic minorities on much more empirical grounds than the secluded intellectual theorizing of supposedly deconstructable binaries. Framing as narrative strategy does not provide a tool to write *about* Orientalism, Arab Americans and Muslims. Instead it offers a tool for Arab/Muslim Americans authors to negotiate and mediate the Orientalist reality of their lives. It is now up to Orientalist scholars to also take a closer look at this Orientalist reality without deconstructing it. Framing as an analytical instrument therefore also gains practical value for the scholarly audience.

Mediating Orientalism: Framing as Analytical Method

Obviously, the redefinition of a long-standing concept such as Orientalism poses a challenge to all those who derive their right of academic existence from the very assumption that Orientalism fosters the notion that the *West* is still "civilizing the world" (Khair 156). Even critics in postcolonism have meanwhile come to the conclusion that *Western* scholars are still the ones defining major scientific concepts and thus play a "constructive" role (Khair 156). The immediate postcolonial impulse to this critical finding is to work against it by insisting even more vividly on the essentialist tendency of *Western* scholarship. Again, this approach seeks to

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15 Orfalea generally has a high acclaim of literature and values it even more than journalism. In the case of immediate cultural experience, he nevertheless sees the mobility of journalism triumphing over literary production. "On this account," Orfalea states, "our journalists may have a better start than our so-called serious novelists [...]" (185-6).

16 Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen introduce the term "practical orientalism" to describe the function of Orientalism in Denmark. The interview-based analysis reveals that the borders between East and West are blurred in the everyday encounter of members from different cultural backgrounds who display practical Orientalism as a means to engage with each other (173).

change the conditions of empirical reality before actually interfering in it. If taking the empirical reality as a given, one can see the lasting *Western* dominance in scientific discourse as a chance to arrive at new theoretical concepts and redefinitions of former *Western* biases. Framing provides a means to this.

According to the harsh critique of Hilfer, the lasting essentialist impulse of scholars is one of the greatest obstacles to path-breaking new theories in Postcolonial Studies:

Theory is most self-contradictory in its overt negations and covert resurrections of value. Theory thrills by its ruthless negations, using the methodological shortcuts examined in previous chapters. Other discourses are discredited for violating essential rules of thought by being essentialist – that is, centered, universalist, transcendent. These bad discourses are also ascriptively discredited by illegitimate origins: "white, bourgeois, androcentric Westerners" […]. (Hilfer 69)

The interdisciplinary analysis of the workings of Orientalism in present-day culture and literature points to the fact that such an opening toward "other discourses" is not only necessary but possible in order to grasp the reality of Orientalist tropes working through discourse. Pragmatic essentialism must first and foremost embrace the positive potential of binary thinking as not only constitutive of power structures but of cultural knowledge. As Ashcroft and his colleagues state: "Just as the two geographical entities, the Occident and the Orient, in Said's terms, 'support and to an extent reflect each other', so all postcolonial societies realize their identity in difference rather than in essence" (165). Elizabeth Eide in her study on strategic essentialism hints at a similar trajectory when calling for a move away from "ethnification" to "culturalization" to leave behind the heavy thematic focus on ethnic identity in scientific discourse (69). The most radical shift of thinking on the basis of the comparative mode is suggested by Ruskola. From the philosophical insights of Taylor, he derives the need for "an ethics of comparison" (230). This ultimately provides the chance for scholarship to arrive at a new understanding of Orientalism which turns into "an ethics of Orientalism, rather an impossible morality of anti-Orientalism" (Ruskola 225).[17]

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17 Ruskola develops his argument for an ethics of Orientalism in the context of his discussion of legal Orientalism in which the rule of law is constantly defined by *Western* standards. He defends a very specific definition of ethics as "normative systems that are concerned, not with what a pre-given subject may or may not do, but rather with the construction of that subject. Instead of assuming an ethical subject and then regulating it, ethics regulates the conditions under which subjects emerge" (225). Although developed in a field outside Literary and Cultural Studies, this understanding underlines the interdisci-

Such a reformed understanding of Orientalism as the consequence of autobiographical mediation marks a move from a focus on normativity to cognitivism, from essentialism to comparativism. Above all, knowledge relies on cognitive schemata produced and reproduced in everyday discourse. Framing as a theory of reading life narratives and ethnic literature provides a novel instrument for scholars to grasp the mechanisms underlying mediated discourse. The necessary condition for this is the acquisition of empirical as opposed to hermeneutical knowledge on the part of cultural and literary scholars. The opening toward cognitive science and social psychology is a promising starting point for such an interdisciplinary engagement. In addition, the overcoming of the constructionist bias to either ignore or deconstruct empirical reality in favor of purely abstract models is another fruitful path. Both of these theoretical advancements ultimately also constitute a strategy for scholars to reframe present-day postcolonial discourse and look at fictional and non-fictional writing as active participants in contemporary media discourse.

The evidence presented in this analysis strongly underlines that Orientalism continues to be one of the most encompassing ideologies in mediated discourse. It is a global cognitive mindmap allowing people to order and evaluate cultural knowledge. Alternative Orientalisms, such as the comparativist Orientalism modeled in this study on the basis of framing, allow those who mediate cultural knowledge and who analyze it in the academy to probe new strategies of communication without neglecting the respective other. Taylor thus suggests that "comparative understanding lets our own faith be too. It liberates our selves along with the other" (*Philosophical Arguments* 164). In a similar vein, Orientalism as cognitive concept opens up new forms of analytical engagement with multi-ethnic life narrative inside and outside the academy.

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plinary importance of comparison as preceeding normative judgement, which in turn is a consequence of individual agency.