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This is an electronic version of an article published in the ASCALF Bulletin, 25. pp. 14-37., 2002. Special issue, Remembering Empire. Presented at Remembering Empire, Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French Conference. University of Westminster, UK, 29 November 2001.

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French Orientalist Painting as a Trans-Cultural Exercise:
an Ambiguous Gaze

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French Orientalist Painting as a Trans-Cultural Exercise: an Ambiguous Gaze

Some twenty years ago, Edward Said's critique of Orientalism as a mindset devised a postcolonial grid which proposed to inform all subsequent readings of art, literature and writings in the humanities produced in the dominant West during the colonial era (1). This critique postulates, and sets about to illustrate that the majority if not all of Western cultural production during its period of colonial domination can be read as an expression of its will to power, either explicitly through blatant racism and propaganda, or more implicitly, by resorting to metaphor. In either case, it delivers, *in fine*, a cry of triumph, an assertion of its hegemony and a bid to justify its oppression.

Since then, the whole canon of Western art and literature has been revisited and reinterpreted in this light. Certain works by the cutting-edge avant-garde of French nineteenth-century painting, thus far consistently celebrated as progressive and emancipatory, have been reconsidered in terms of what they had to say about the ferocious conquest of empire. The Oriental production of Ingres (e.g. the *Bain Turc*, 1834) or Delacroix (e.g. *The Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827) was reappraised and reanalysed according to these new criteria, as was the vast academic or kitsch output by countless secondary artists of the time. The now familiar analysis which deconstructs along binary lines the discourse of the painter-coloniser on the oppressed and victimised territory and community (see p.6 below for a partial example) has uncovered a clear and fairly consistent pattern of opposites which contrast the civilised West with the barbarous East through the use of stereotypes. According to postcolonial criticism, such art and such literature, like the pseudo-scientific work of the anthropologists and the ethnographers who sometimes travelled with the painters - often in the footsteps of the occupying armies - are the vibrant illustration of the proposition that knowledge - or representation - is power. All Orientalist art therefore

transcribes an overwhelmingly unequal power relation where the painter's gaze belongs incontrovertibly to the dominant side. In contrast, the postcolonial outlook champions a reaffirmation of the Other's identity, of an authenticity unsullied by colonial intrusion with its attending westernisation and, in the French case in particular, attempts at assimilation. The postcolonial view aims to restore the Other's dignity away from the negative, undignified typology popularised by the coloniser's fictional and iconographic production.

All these notions are by now well rehearsed. There remains the fact, however, that the production of Orientalist images is by nature complex: it is a cross-cultural exercise, whose meanings are not always as straightforward as they appear in the light of a clear-cut binary study. There can be ambiguities in the message which they convey, and, as this paper will seek to demonstrate, in the uses to which they have been put, not just in the colonial past, but, perhaps even more strikingly, in the contemporary postcolonial era. Said himself wrote in *Culture and Imperialism*,

'as the twentieth century moves to a close, there has been a gathering awareness nearly everywhere of the lines between cultures... At the same time, we have never been as aware as we now are. < ;> f how oddly hybrid historical and cultural experiences are, of how they partake of many often contradictory experiences and domains, cross national boundaries, defy the police action of dogma and loud patriotism'. (2)

It is this hybrid nature of the transcultural exercise which is Orientalist painting that this paper will investigate, by highlighting the work of a late Orientalist born in France, Etienne Dinet.

A cursory look at this artist's cross-cultural record immediately indicates the reason for the choice of this little-known and nowadays little-appreciated painter. Dinet

travelled to Algeria for the first time in 1884, but he was so taken with the place, especially the South, that he settled in the Oasis of Bou-Saada in 1904, remaining a resident there until his death in 1929. Furthermore, he converted to Islam, did the Hadj pilgrimage to Mecca and, according to his last wishes, was buried in Bou-Saada in the mu slim ritual. At the same time, although sidelined and considered old fashioned by the contemporary French art scene, he sold well and was covered with honours by the art establishment of his time, both in Paris and in Algiers.

Posthumously he was re-discovered by the Algerian Ministry of Culture, and has been the subject of official publications and exhibitions in independent Algeria. A Dinet Museum opened in Bou-Saada in 1993, and the artist has been celebrated as a true Algerian master. He is, besides, genuinely popular among certain sections of the Algerian lower middle-class. Since the late 1970s, his artwork has appeared on Algerian postage stamps, calendars, greetings cards, *Air Algerie* advertising materials, as well as on Algerian television, where one of his paintings which hangs in the Presidential Palace is often used as a backdrop when the President entertains foreign dignitaries. Reproductions in all media of Dinet imagery, as well as the manufacture of fakes sometimes candidly signed by the perpetrator, have fuelled a veritable industry which supplemented art students' personal resources through the 1980s and 1990s (3). Finally, a Dinet Exhibition was held in Constantine in the winter of 2000 2001 and attracted many visitors (4).

The reasons behind this cascade of honours showered by post-independence Algeria on a little-known French painter are in some ways obvious: first of all, he was a convert to Islam and even sometimes signed his name Nasr ed Dine Dinet. His conversion reportedly upset the French colony at the time. Moreover, he chose to live in Southern Algeria where he became something of a champion for the rights and

aspirations of the local population against petty regulations enforced by the local French administration. He was especially active during the First World War, which erupted shortly after his conversion, in attempting to have the dignity of muslim conscripts, and later veterans, recognised. All these actions led to a claim that he was in some way opposed to the French colonisation of Algeria. His paintings, moreover, were appreciated by members of the Muslim reformist tendency, which later became part of the core nationalist movement. At the same time, however, these justifications are riddled with paradoxes and deserve investigation and questioning. Etienne Dinet was, after all, posthumously elevated to a status akin to that of official painter of the Algerian past in a country especially vocal in its denunciation of colonialism. It was, besides, a country whose artistic past had been especially alien to representation even by the standards of the Islamic world. Dinet was, furthermore, chosen in preference to other French painters, such as Delacroix or Fromentin, who were not only held in far higher esteem in the aesthetic judgement of the day, but could be felt, at least for sections of their work, to be commendably tactful towards certain aspects of mu slim life. Delacroix painted two interior scenes representing Algerian women which have been praised by the contemporary Alg~rian novelist Assia Djebar as delicate and perceptive (5). Fromentin approached this subject with reticence and sensitivity, believing that 'to intrude further than is permitted into Arab life seems like an unseemly curiosity. One must gaze at these people from the distance at which they choose to show themselves: men from close up; women from afar' (6). By contrast, Dinet, a recognised master of Algerian painting, produced a vast output of nudes which were very daring in any cultural outlook, let alone in Islam, even after his conversion (7). Clearly this output tends to have been played down by the Algerian officials who presided over the rehabilitation of Dinet. They have preferred to put

forward his numerous compositions which celebrate the harsh but wholesome way of life of the muslim community, made up of the Saharan peasantry and nomadic populations. They include many canvases and illustrations featuring scenes of Islamic worship: Arab men in prayer, processions and pilgrimages, visits to mosques or to cemeteries. The nudes, nevertheless, amount to a large proportion of Dinet's production.

There was of course no consensus on the pertinence of the choice of Dinet' s work as suitable imagery to represent the Algerian colonial and pre-colonial past. The Algerian art world, bursting with - mostly abstract - creativity in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies was understandably horrified. Jean Senac derided its chocolate-box quality. The main claim for its post-independence interest was that unlike the bulk of Western Orientalist painting, which has been reviled as 'a visual document of nineteenth-century colonialist ideology' (8), Dinet's work features *real* Algerian people engaged in their daily activities, instead of the usual negative or patronising stereotypes. Denise Brahimi, in her monograph on Dinet, argues that his vibrant photographic realism, so out of step with the formal innovations pioneered by other artists of his generation, achieves a vision which, uniquely, is neither 'Orientalised', exoticist nor exploitative (9). She finds it full of dignity, understanding and respect. If one agrees with her judgement, such a rendition of the lives of the Saharan people would then be far removed from the gaze - arrogant,' prurient and patronising - of an establishment Academician such as Gerome whose lifespan and painting career partly overlap with Dinet's (10). All specialists, unfortunately, do not agree with this view. Dinet has to date had three biographers. Aside from his sister, who is informative but in the main predictably hagiographic (11), Brahimi's monograph stresses, as we have seen, Dinet's originality and his well-intentioned

attempt to empathise with the people of Bou-Saada. He considered himself one of them, and his friend and mentor Leonce Benedite once remarked that 'he became an Arab' (12). Brahimi agrees with this view, suggesting that the artist, in this case, became his own model. His third biographer Franyois Pouillon, on the other hand, takes a dimmer view of his work and of its posthumous uses in contemporary Algeria (13). He questions, furthermore, the significance of Dinet's conversion to Islam as the root cause of his alleged alienation ITom the French colony, and instead puts it down to his mediocre status as a painter (see p. 10 below).

Dinet and the Representation of Islam

According to Rana Kabbani, 'the study of the Muslim world by the West has never been a neutral, scholarly exercise' (14). There are plenty of examples, in painting, of representations of alleged Islamic fanaticism (e.g. Delacroix' *Fanatics of Tangier*, 1838), as well as massacres and bizarre practices (such as pictures of whirling dervishes). Post-colonial criticism states that the representation of Islam by European painters has reflected the arrogance of the coloniser who, coming ITom the Christian West, repeats in his renditions of the East the binary oppositions prompted to him by a resurgent crusader spirit. By opposition to the Christian West, Islam is thus portrayed as:

- fanatical as opposed to level-headed
- cruel as opposed to benevolent
- implacable as opposed to understanding
- destructive as opposed to benign

Therefore, the misrepresentation of Islam, including in painting, served the Western domination of the Other's territory, in effect conniving with the work of the Christian

missionary institutions, which served as spiritual fuel for the conquest. For Linda Nochlin, Islam was portrayed as either dangerous and irrational, or as picturesque and unthreatening, at the same time as 'violence was visited against native religious practices by the French Societies of Missionaries in Algeria' (15). Dinet's representations of Islam appear, in the light of that judgement, to be both more knowledgeable and far more respectful.

Dinet was initiated into Islam by a lifelong friend, Slimane Ben Ibrahim. Slimane taught him Arabic and co-authored all of his books, which Dinet then illustrated. The latter thus became something of a scholar in the mu slim dogma and wrote a life of the Prophet Mohamed which he also illustrated (16). He made his conversion to Islam public in 1913, though it is thought that he had moved spiritually closer to that faith as a gradual process since about 1905. Until then, he had been a lukewarm Christian, but, unlike his father, was never anticlerical. Once a muslim, he showed a new convert's typical enthusiasm for orthodoxy and authenticity and went in for a scriptural, rather austere form of Islam. This sensibility was close to that professed by the religious branch of Algerian nationalism which was beginning to emerge at the time (17).

This being said, Dinet's Islam was at the same time selective and idiosyncratic since, as we have mentioned, he continued to paint nude scenes. He held the view that images were never forbidden by the Koran, and only retained the taboo against idolatry and the representation of the face of the Prophet. His version of Islam was thus compatible with a number of practices in which other muslim scholars tended not to indulge publicly. He kept a drinks cabinet, held mixed parties on the roof of his house in the Arab quarter of Bou-Saada, and designed advertisements for wines and spirits. One such advertisement, a poster for *Vins Mariani*, features a smiling Algerian

girl with a half-full glass of aperitif in her hand (18). It has to be noted that none of this seems to point to a complete denial of his former identity. Yet his fascination for Islam, for the landscapes of Bou-Saada and for the Arab population was real. According to Franyois Pouillon he was mainly drawn in by the sense of community *la communaut fusionnelle* - which permeates Islamic life (19). What Dinet sought to represent, and, since his conversion, wanted to emulate, was in fact the authentic Arab character, that of the Algerians of Bou-Saada. He believed them to resemble the first muslims, those of the time of the Prophet: a people fashioned by the desert landscapes of Southern Algeria which he cherished as a painter. This olwservation brings us into familiar Orientalist territory, where the 'native' acquires by osmosis the characteristics of the topography in which he lives. Thus Dinet probably did, in some sense, 'become an Arab', but on his own aesthetic terms, and according to a notion of the authentic Arab character which was probably more of an ideal than of a sociological reality. Consequently, whilst Denise Brahimi admires the *real* individual expressions on the faces of Dinet's Algerian figures, which he often achieved with the help of photography, these individuals somehow contrive to come over as *types* and remain interchangeable. As a 'people', they form a hapnonious, serene community brought together by faith and communalit. As a series of representations, Dinet's pictures of Arab men in prayer undoubtedly convey dignified, positive messages on *arabicite*. Arguably, however, all these positive types continue to conform to essential features of Orientalist imagery. As in most Orientalist representation this *arabicite* is offered to the viewer after the removal of all signs of French presence in the region. There are no settlers, soldiers or administrators in sight, but also no indication of the ethnic diversity of the native population: only a united, idyllic, quintessentially' Arab' community. This absence is deliberate and Dinet never had any intention of showing

the reality of the place in its full colonial historicity. Instead, he felt entrusted with the mission to defend and preserve this unspoilt paradise against the encroachment of western influence. Denise Brahimi recognises this trait. She attributes it to Dinet's undeniable love of the place, and is clearly moved by his efforts to empathise with the 'real' Algerian people. This practice is again, nevertheless, far from peculiar to Dinet and is commonly found in Orientalist painting, where it has been denounced as a ploy to alleviate colonial guilt. One could argue, however, that the focus on the 'real' and traditional, and the concomitant absence of colonial references stems less from the need to disguise the immorality of Western encroachment, as is often claimed, than from a deeply felt-revulsion in the painter himself against the damaging pollution such influence would represent for the local community.

From apostasy to anti-colonial credibility?

In his correspondence, Dinet had harsh words for the colonial set-up in Algeria. In 1917, he wrote 'I have often been at daggers drawn with colonial ignominy', and he sometimes referred to the settlers as 'vile colonial scum' (20). During the First World War, he negotiated with the French military authorities to avoid the use of crosses to mark muslim war graves, and he designed a monument for muslim war casualties. At every stage of his negotiations, he came across the petty obstruction of lower and middle-ranking colonial officials, and his disputes with them seem, in the longer term, to have earned him some anti-colonial credentials. On the other hand, he always got on far better with the higher echelons of French officialdom and received plenty of honours. He was a respected member of the Society of French Orientalist painters, along with Chasseriau and Leon Belly, and of the Villa Abd-el-Tif in Algiers. He took part in the colonial exhibitions of 1906 and 1922 in Marseilles, for which he designed

posters. Nowadays, furthermore, according to the 1997 issue of the review *Etat D'Art*, 'he is the favourite of the former Pieds-Noirs' - whose forebears he reviled as 'colonial scum' in his lifetime. Finally, Dinet's muslim funeral in Bou-Saada was a most ambivalent affair. It was attended by a truly cross-cultural crowd, including Muslim reformists close to the nationalist leader Abdelharnid Ben Badis, and by local caids, but also some Spahis in uniform and the governor of Algeria, General Bordes, who read the Eulogy. In it, he asserted that Dinet's conversion to Islam in no way affected his patriotic faith. Dinet himself had, after all, declared in 1908 that his dearest wish had been, before dying 'to see a complete union of hearts between the mother-country and Algeria' (21). From this profile, Etienne Nasr ed Dine Dinet thus emerges, indeed, as a highly ambiguous transcultural figure whose death was in a way 'timely': the artist was never faced with Camus' dilemma, and remained in a position which allowed for contradictory claims to be made on his work and on his actions after his death. One such claim, essential for his posthumous - and postcolonial status as a major Algerian master, had of course been his rejection by France following his conversion to Islam, as mentioned on p.3 above. Koudir Bentchikou claims that he was ostracised by the French community in general, and in particular by French artists who broke up with him on this occasion. Most painful for Dinet was the estrangement of his close friend Paul Leroy who had settled in Biskra. Franvois Pouillon, on the other hand, persuasively argues that Dinet was gradually shunned by the art world because his painting was perceived as increasingly old-fashioned and decried on aesthetic grounds - an angle which would have been dismissed as counterproductive when the time came to 're-launch' Dinet's work and personal image during the post-independence era (22). According to Pouillon, most of Dinet's friends and acquaintances within the colony had nothing but respect for his religious

convictions, a counterclaim which raises the question of the relationship between French colonialism and Islam at that particular time.

Islam and the Republic

As a Western colonial power, France held a peculiar position towards Islam. At the turn of the twentieth century, the French Third Republic did not, in the way of British imperialism of the same period, seek legitimisation in Western Christian values. This does not mean that it turned down any territorial advances facilitated by missionary expeditions as the case arose, in Sub-Saharan Africa or the Far East, for example.

Nevertheless, the French attitude presents, in this domain, the added complication of anticlericalism, as the heyday of French imperialism coincides with the row over Church and state which culminated in the law of Separation of 1905. This long running dispute had included the institution of 'godless' - i.e. secular - state schools in the 1880s and the Dreyfus affair, and had a far-reaching effect on the generations who lived or grew up during those years. In this context, the moral justification of expansionism could not be found in the propagation of the Christian message, but merely in a secular *mission civilisatrice* championing reason, science and progress. In fact, any discourse or representation implying the superiority of the Christian worldview over anything else would have constituted an oppositional discourse, running against the mainstream ideology of the most expansionist government of French colonial history. Accordingly, the question of whether Dinet's 'defection' to Islam was a grave offence to the colony is problematical, and needs to be seen in this context.

There was, of course, an obvious resentment on the part of the *Republique laique* towards Islam. This resentment itself, however, deserves, in turn, to be contextualised.

To a secular, positivist mentality, hostility towards Islam was primarily an aversion to a traditionalist worldview, not unlike the Christian worldview represented by the Catholic Church in France. Islam was resented for the same reasons: it was seen as standing in the way of reason and progress. It is important to note at this juncture that the anticlerical mentality tends to focus on what it considers as the major clerical threat in a given community. Without contest, in metropolitan France, the Catholic Church was the main, indeed the only real threat, and during its struggle against it, the Republic was apt to make allies of members of the less representative persuasions, such as the Jews (during the Dreyfus Case) and members of the Protestant Churches.

In Algeria, however, things were necessarily different. According to the logic described above, it was Islam that was perceived as the major threat in the majority native community. Interestingly, the official propaganda often attributed to it the same negative traits associated with the Church of Rome in mainland France. The Muslim Brotherhoods were thus often harassed, and likened to the hated *congregations*. By contrast, the Catholic Church in Algeria continued to enjoy subsidised status after 1905, since it seemed a lesser threat there than it did in mainland France. Conversely, however, and according to the same reasoning, in a communally divided society like colonial Algeria, the conversion to Islam of a few eccentrics from the minority European community was not a real threat to anyone either, since they were unlikely to take many settlers with them. Dinet's apostasy is most likely therefore to have prompted, as Pouillon suggested, a reaction which could range from benevolent indifference to mild irritation. It could even be deemed useful by some, in order to promote harmony between the two communities.

This is not to say, however, that Dinet's representations of Islam do not clash with the mainstream ideology of the French *Republique laïque*. They still belong to an

oppositional discourse since they promote Islam, a religion especially earmarked as 'backward' and 'obscurantist' in the radical secular views of the time. More fundamentally, moreover, they jar with the post-revolutionary republican mentality by their serenely respectful rendition of a traditional lifestyle which could not contrast more with the turmoil generated by the political and religious struggles back home. To this climate of contention and spiritual angst they implicitly seem to offer a traditionalist, not to say a counter-revolutionary solution. They present an alternative sensibility which could appeal to conservative minds, ill at ease with Western modernity, whilst appearing more dignified and less sentimental than current trends in popular Roman Catholicism.

Dinet was not alone in portraying Islam with respect. Gerome painted scenes of prayer in Middle-Eastern mosques which exude calm and dignity. The nature of Gerome's admiration and respect for Islam is, in this context, even more intriguing than Dinet's, who was, after all, a Muslim believer and a scholar. Gerome, for his part, knew little about Islamic teachings and dogma and seemed to have no interest in learning about them. This is testified in the many errors and incongruities displayed in some of his most famous representations of Islamic worship, such as *Prayer in Cairo* (1865). For Gerome, however, as for many painters of a nostalgic, socially conservative disposition, their own depictions of this world of which they knew little show a yearning for a moral and a social order which imposes itself effortlessly from above and guides every activity of daily life. These artists, therefore, speak neither for the Christian West nor for the positivist, progress-oriented views of their own imperialist governments. It does not necessarily follow, of course, that they have anti-colonialist - or postcolonial - credibility. What they appear to do, rather, is long for some transcultural essence of tradition, away from the relentlessly forward-looking

bent of their own culture.

Hybridity of Cultures in Postcolonial Times

Whatever its attempts to decipher or emulate indigenous cultures, Orientalist iconography of the muslim world is at odds with local custom because it is representational, often even figurative. In principle, painting human figures in Islamic regions which had no representational tradition flew in the face of native practices. This statement needs, however, to be qualified. In actual fact, some visual representations have long been judged less offensive than others by muslims. For example, portraits of dignitaries are usually clearly posed with the consent of their sitter. They tend to be composed in order to convey an air of prestige and respectability, and prefigure photographs of monarchs and national figures which are now commonplace everywhere in the Arab world. Thus, over the years, such representations have grown acceptable to the Other's culture as perceptions on the ground have changed, and as Western influences have altered responses to images and to image-making. The proliferation of images in the twentieth century has triggered a global visual revolution which could not stop at the motts of the Arab-muslim cultural area. Rather than try to stem the flow, most administrations have moreover tried to enlist the phenomenal potential of mass images for their own ends: to promote government programmes, to disseminate large portraits of leaders, etc. New institutions have sprung up, such as subsidised national film industries, state-owned TV channels, and even museums devoted to the plastic arts, as new nations strive to assert their own identities after independence through visual expressions of their cultural heritage. In a country like Algeria, with no indigenous representational record of colonial and pre-colonial times, this raised the difficult question of how best to

convey the founding values of the State in visual symbols. In turn, this raised the even thornier issue of what place, if any, to assign to colonial art and visual culture. For post-independence Algeria, the founding values of the state rested on its people's Arab-muslim identity and authenticity, and its founding moment was the war of liberation against the French. Imprinting these notions on the imaginations of the entire population was not, however, a foregone conclusion: the celebrated unity of the people masked deep ethnic, linguistic and social differences which had fomented dissent within the national movement during the struggle for independence and have continued to exist ever since.

As we have seen, on the other hand, a consensus came to be formed at the level of government to consider Etienne Dinet's pictures (excluding the female nudes) as suitable for integration into the Algerian national heritage. This was clearly a compromise, and was due to the dearth of visual materials to choose from. The artist's dual identity was, besides, an asset, and his minor status made the choice less embarrassing and more affordable than would have been the case with works by Delacroix, Fromentin or Matisse. The choice of this material is especially interesting, however, from the ideological point of view. As we have seen, and despite claims to the contrary, Dinet's work displays to a high degree the classic signs of the Orientalist trend in the visual arts. It is most intriguing, therefore, that his portrayal of scenes from the Algerian South was found by the post-independence administration itself to match the official definition of Algerian identity with such uncanny precision. Dinet's Saharan types are, as we have seen, all Algerian' Arabs' without further specifications. They include no Westerners and no Jews, and no references to a distinct Berber culture. As it happens, this fitted the vision the post-independence governments were trying to project: that of a consensual traditional community united

by Islam and custom. A late Orientalist, Dinet had never known the pre-colonial past. But he had attempted to restore it, by stripping away the signs of acculturation which, already, were everywhere around him. He had created an Algeria thorough Wy decontaminated ITom French presence, and this was exactly what the nationalist anti-colonialist discourse of the regime stated that it wanted to do. Dinet's Orientalist dream posits an 'authenticity' ultimately made up of the same ancestral qualities as the *discours identitaire* tended to celebrate, with the heterogeneous aspects - urban life, ethnic diversity, the influence of foreign invaders - brushed away. The new discourse claimed to combat Western influences, even as, paradoxically, these progressed as never before in the society at large in the second half of the twentieth century, due, to a large extent, to government policy.

As a result, far ITom being defiantly returned, the Other's gaze seems, perversely, to have been appropriated - at least in the discourse of officials at bay, faced by the even harder identity-centred claims of the Islamist movement. In the end, therefore, it is less true to state, as Brahimi does in her monograph on Dinet, that the artist had become his own model - an 'Arab' - than that the government-approved Algerian 'Arab' had become a Dinet. In any case, the posthumous career of Etienne Nasr ed Dine Dinet remains a revealing, if intriguing, transcultural episode which seems in addition, with surprising candour, to acknowledge the right to represent the Other, even in an unequal transaction during a colonial era. In a sense, it repeats another, earlier episode in which Dinet acted as adviser on mu slim Maghrebian lifestyles on the set of Re x Ingram's 1927 feature film *The Garden of Allah*. Half a century later, however, it was no longer Hollywood but independent anti-colonial Algeria which resorted to Dinet's work in order to characterise its essential identity and *arabicite*. More generally, these developments tend to blur the boundaries between European

and non-European perceptions, and to disrupt the binary oppositions which are meant to run between them. They illustrate some of the new uses to which this type of visual production is being put as a response to objective situations: in this case, the propaganda needs of the Algerian government in the absence of pictures ITom the past. This is not, moreover, an isolated occurrence, but forms part of the gradual globalisation of visual culture. In the last thirty years, the art market has registered a strong upsurge in the prices of Orientalist works of all kinds, a movement which is not unconnected with the re-discovery of and renewed scholarly interest in this section of nineteenth-century art during the same period. This is not hard to explain: a major cause is undoubtedly the increase in oil revenues in Arab countries combined with the generalisation across cultures of the desire to own idealised pictures of one's past. Neither is this broad trend a minority phenomenon, since consumers range across geographical areas and social strata: ITom the oil sheiks of the Persian Gulf, the Algerian presidency and the Royal House of Morocco to lower middle-class Maghrebians and to French former Pieds-Noirs. These considerations bring the reflections contained in this paper back to the Said quotation of its opening lines, and to the need to take on board – or at least not to ignore - .the multiple contradictions and odd hybridities inherent in historical and cultural development.

Notes:

- (I) Edward Said, *Orientalism, Western conceptions of the Orient*, Routledge & Kegan

Paul, 1978.

(2)) E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto & Windus, 1993, p.15.

(3) Source: interview with Dinet biographer Fran~ois Pouillon, March 2001.

(4)) Source: Interview with Koudir Bentchikou, cataloguer of the work of Etienne Dinet, March 2001; according to this source, the duration of the exhibition had to be extended due to public demand.

(5) *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, 1834, Louvre, Paris, and 1849, Musee Fabre, Montpellier; discussed in Assia Djebbar, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, Des Femmes - Antoinette Fouque Editions, 1980 and 1983.

(6) In E. Fromentin, *Un Ete dans le Sahara*, (1857) Gallimard, 1984, p.176.

(7) His last nude, painted during the last year of his life, was entitled *La Source* (1929).

(8) Linda Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient' *Art in America*, vol. 71, p.122 quoted in James Thompson, *The East Imagined, Experienced, Remembered, Orientalist Nineteenth Century Painting*, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 1988 p.89.

(9) Denise Brahimi, Koudir Bentchikou, *La Vie et l'oeuvre d'Etienne Dinet*, Paris, ACR Editions, 1984.

(10) The personal link goes further; Dinet was briefly intended to be married to J-L Gerome's daughter.

(11) Dinet-Rollince, Jeanne, *La vie de E. Dinet*, Paris, Maisonneuve, 1938.

(12) L. Benedite, in *L 'Art et les artistes*, No.58, Jan. 1910, p. 168.

(13) F. Pouillon, *Les Deux Vies d'Etienne Dinet*, Balland, 'Le Nadir', Paris, 1997.

(14) R. Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions, European Myths of the Orient*, 1986, second revised edition, Pandora, 1994.

(15) L. Nochlin 'The Imaginary Orient' in *The Politics of Vision, Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*, Thames & Hudson, 1991, p.50 - with special reference to the paintings of Gerome.

(16) E. Dinet, S. Ben Ibrahim, *Vie de Mohammed, prophete d'Allah*, Paris, 1918.

(17) Unlike his direct contemporary Isabelle Eberhardt, Dinet showed no mystical or aesthetic interest in the more charismatic forms of ritual carried out in the muslim brotherhoods (*zawyias*) which were very present in Southern Algeria.

(18) Source: Archives, Musee d'Orsay.

(19) F. Pouillon, op. cit. p. 115.

(20) F. Pouillon, ibid p.135, quoting Jeanne Dinet-Rollince, op. cit.

(21) See F. Pouillon, ibid, p.203-6.

(22) Interviews with K. Bentchikou and F. Pouillon respectively, March 2001.