

# A Comparative Narratological Analysis of the Oriental Focalized in Christie's Appointment with Death and A Caribbean Mystery\*

Christie'nin Ölümlerle Randevu ve Ölüm Adası Eserlerinde Doğulu Odaklanılanın Karşılaştırmalı Anlatıbilimsel Analizi

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## Abstract

The implications of Agatha Christie's works are multifarious; however, her texts have been understudied when compared to those of her contemporaries. Much has been written about the generic qualities of her detective fiction, and the representation of women and class hierarchies in her works. However, her texts have rarely been subjected to narratological analysis. Her works of detective fiction *Appointment with Death* (1938) and *A Caribbean Mystery* (1964) are set in former colonies of Britain, and through Western narrators and focal characters, Christie presents an Orientalist perspective. While the onlookers and the tellers are Westerners in these novels, the objects of their narration are oriental landscapes and people. As the image of the objects of focalization presented to readers in a literary text is constructed by the focalizers, the narrative abounds with their subjective views. By closely reading a text, a reader can gain insight into the focalizer and its relationship to the focalized. In these novels, the hegemony of the West over the East, and the Westerners' biased perceptions are made apparent. Edward Said's theory of orientalism along with Shohat and Stam's four basic racial tropes form the theoretical framework for this study. Through a comparative narratological analysis of the focalized objects in these novels, this study aims to shed new light on how Christie's novels lay bare the biased attitudes of Westerners towards the Oriental focalized.

**Key Words:** Agatha Christie, Orientalism, Narratology, Oriental Focalized.

## Öz

Agatha Christie'nin eserlerinin etkileri çok yönlüdür; ancak çağdaşlarının eserleri ile kıyaslandığında Christie'nin metinleri yeterince incelenmemiştir. Onun eserlerinde polisiye türünün genel nitelikleri, kadınların betimlenmesi ve sınıf hiyerarşilerinin temsili hakkında çeşitli çalışmalar mevcuttur. Ancak, metinleri nadiren anlatıbilimsel analize tabi tutulmuştur. *Ölümlerle Randevu* (1938) ve *Ölüm Adası* (1964) adlı polisiye romanları Britanya'nın eski sömürgelerinde geçer ve Christie Batılı anlatıcılar ve odak karakterler aracılığıyla Oryantalist bir bakış açısı sunar. Bu romanlarda izleyiciler ve anlatıcılar Batılılar iken, anlatıların nesnelere ve kişileri Doğu manzaraları ve insanlarıdır. Edebi bir metinde okuyucuya sunulan odaklanma nesnelere ve kişilerin imgesi odaklayıcılar tarafından inşa edildiğinden, anlatı odaklayıcıların öznel görüşleriyle doludur. Okur, bir metni dikkatlice inceleyerek odaklayıcı ve odaklanılan ilişkisi hakkında içgörü kazanıp çeşitli görüşler elde edebilir. Bu romanlarda, Batı'nın Doğu üzerindeki hegemonyası ve Batılıların önyargılı algıları açıkça ortaya konmaktadır. Edward Said'in Oryantalizm kuramı ile Shohat and Stam'ın dörtlü taksonomisi bu çalışmanın teorik alt yapısını oluşturmaktadır. Bu romanlardaki odaklanılan nesnelere ve insanların karşılaştırmalı anlatıbilimsel analizi yoluyla, Christie'nin romanlarının Batılıların Doğulu odaklanılanlara yönelik önyargılı tutumlarını nasıl ortaya koyduğunun farklı bir açıdan ele alınması amaçlanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Agatha Christie, Orientalizm, Anlatıbilim, Doğulu odaklanılan.

## Extended Summary

Reading two novels of world-famous Agatha Christie, *Appointment with Death* (1938) and *A Caribbean Mystery* (1964), it could be argued that Christie forms a thorough opposite between her Western characters and the Eastern setting because they visit old colonies of Great Britain. While *Appointment with Death* is set in historical Middle Eastern cities like Jerusalem, Petra, and Amman, *A Caribbean Mystery* takes place in a fictional place, St. Honore in the West Indies in the 1960s. In addition to the depiction of the alleged contrasts between civilized and uncivilized, logical and illogical, or between the East and the West in these novels, the focalizer is either an Occidental detective or narrator. It is possible to detect a few differences in the portrayal of the Oriental focalized, which may be considered in line with British colonial rule and the process of decolonization.

In this study, these two novels of Christie are comparatively read through the lens of postcolonial narratology. Edward Said's theory of Orientalism and Shohat and Stam's racial tropes in colonialist discourse: animalization, naturalization, infantilization, and light/darkness form the theoretical framework of this analysis. Through a close study of the focalizers and the focalized in these novels, it is possible to observe power and ideology relationships between these groups. Within the framework of narratology, the representation of a certain object may be limited or biased depending on who sees and who narrates. Regarding the novels in this study, as the objects of focalization are oriental people their religion and customs together with oriental landscape and the subjects of focalization are the Westerners, the Eurocentric perspective can easily be detected.

While the narrator and focalizers assume the identity of "civilized" Westerners, Eastern people are represented as lesser beings that are uncivilized and barbaric. The representation of the Easterners can be categorized and analyzed in four tropes: animalization, naturalization, infantilization, and light/darkness. Stereotypical Eastern figures like the dragoman Mahmoud and servant Abdul feature in *Appointment with Death* as focalized others. They are depicted as ignorant, brutal, vigorous, barbarous, and unreliable figures in comparison to the "civilized", logical, and brilliant Western characters. In addition to eastern people, the landscape, their religion and customs are derided mainly because of their departure from the commonly accepted European ones. Thus, Christie's depiction of the East only serves to strengthen the superiority of the scientific Western ideology. She represents the East as the opposite of the West, as a setting having the potential for anything uncivilized and criminal. As a corollary of this, both narratives present the local officers as unable to solve the crime, and a westerner is there to bring the criminals to justice.

Western focalizers tend to offer a prejudiced and Eurocentric perspective of the Orient. When Westerners take on the role of focalizers, the portrayal of Orientals tends to be stereotypical, the view of the Oriental landscape and climate is unfavorable, and there are derogatory expressions about Oriental religions. While *A Caribbean Mystery* takes a somewhat more moderate stance toward the Orient in comparison to *Appointment with Death*, the Western narrators and focalizers in both novels still exhibit a Eurocentric outlook. The relatively subdued tone in *A Caribbean Mystery* may be influenced by the ongoing process of decolonization at the time of the novel's publication. Despite *Appointment with Death's* presenting a harsh depiction of othering and stereotyping of the Orient and Orientals, aligning with British colonization in Transjordan during the 1930s, the portrayal of the Orient is somewhat more positive in the latter novel. Overall, it could be argued that Christie, through her narratives, constructs an Orientalist discourse that reflects a

condescending Western dominance and perpetuates the Eurocentric belief that the supposedly “inferior” East requires civilization by the supposedly “superior” West.

## Introduction

The Queen of Crime, Agatha Christie composed a variety of texts, including detective novels, short stories, plays, and non-fictional works, thanks to which she still holds the title of the best-selling female writer of all times. Famous for her detective fiction, she is a mistress of suspense and surprise endings, and rational conclusions. Christie's works, in fact, have been read widely and accepted as representing English, and by extension, European positivistic reasoning with her famous European detectives: the Belgian Hercule Poirot and the English Miss Marple. Usually set in Western cities, houses, and surroundings, Christie's stories mostly praise the power of the scientific problem-solving approach of Western ideology. In *Appointment with Death* (1938) and *A Caribbean Mystery* (1964), Christie forms a thorough contrast between her Western characters and the Eastern setting: the characters visit old colonies of Great Britain. While the former novel is set in historical Middle Eastern cities like Jerusalem, Petra, and Amman, the latter takes place in a fictitious place called St. Honore in the West Indies in the 1960s. The contrast between civilized and uncivilized, logical and illogical, or between the East and the West is displayed in these novels, and the focalizer is either an Occidental detective or a narrator. There are a few notable differences in the portrayal of the Oriental focalized in these novels, which may be considered in parallel with British colonial rule and the process of decolonization. While both texts abound with stereotypical representations of the eastern landscape and its people, the racist attitude of some English characters are also disclosed. The fact that in both novels the murders are committed by the Westerners in an eastern setting also displays Agatha Christie's critical approach to orientalism and ironical treatment of colonialism.

## Detective Fiction as an Ideological Genre

Some scholars draw attention to the propaganda of imperial Englishness in the detective fiction and its utilization as a tool to support the interests of imperialism; that is to say, it is “an important player in the arena of imperial literature” (Reitz, 2004, p. xiii). From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, detective fiction “helped a national readership imagine the British Empire in a way that was at once destabilizing and reassuring” (Reitz, 2004, p. xiii). Beginning with Willkie Collins, detective fiction assisted in the construction of the idea of the superiority of the British Empire. In *The Moonstone* (1868) by Collins, binaries that cast Indians as the inferior “other” and the English as superior in comparison to them are offered to the reader, including domestic and imperial, safe and dangerous. Though there is a stereotypical representation of Indians and out of eleven narrators none is a native Indian (with the exception of two hybrids) and they are not given the authority to narrate the events from their own perspective, the crime's being committed by English people twice, and praising statements on the perseverance of the Indians in reclaiming the diamond prove that the novel has anti-imperialistic undertones. Similar to *The Moonstone*, Conan Doyle's depictions of India and Indians in works like “The Sign of Four” seek to justify British colonial rule there. The majority of locals are portrayed as horrifying savages with distorted features. Doyle's detective fiction is “distinctive in its valorization of empirical values and imperialism. He was one of the great Victorian apologists of empire. . . the greater part of his energy was devoted to defending the interests of the British Empire” (Thompson, 1993, p. 68). During a time of confusion and unease, and when people lacked certainty about what lies ahead because of the world wars,

Golden Age detective fiction consolidated the idea of a great and ideal England. In line with this tradition, Christie is known for invoking “a world of unnerving uncertainty, in which only the fiction of detection brought security” (Knight, 2003, p. 82). Christie's most common settings are distinguished country houses surrounded by exurbant and luxurious gardens or peaceful green English villages, which mostly evoke tranquil and undisturbed times in English society. Such countryside settings of Christie's fiction consolidate the “idealization of England, and [the image of] England that exists in the popular imagination as a conflict-free, rural Arcadia” (Thompson, 1993, p. 123). In her narratives set in the east, there is a certain contrast between the Orient and the Occident, which is in line with the tendencies of her contemporaries. As Rowland maintains, “a major characteristic of the golden age writers . . . is their self-conscious deployment of Orientalism in the construction of psychic Englishness” (2001, p. 67). Christie's works are no exception; Oriental people and places act as the opposite of those in the Occident.

Classified as genre fiction, Christie's works have not received much scholarly attention. Her works are primarily studied regarding the generic qualities and the stock characters of detective fiction, as well as from Marxist and feminist perspectives. To my knowledge, aforementioned novels of Christie have not yet been studied comparatively from postcolonial narrative perspective. A few articles deal with different aspects of the texts. Putting specific emphasis on the beginning and ending of *Appointment with Death*, Gulddal reads the novel consisting of two stories, namely “a narrative of retribution” and “narrative of sacrifice” (2020, p. 1817). Though Gulddal touches upon the orientalist setting and the distinction between the east and the west, he does not delve into a narrative analysis, rather he comments on the cultural and mythical meanings of the setting. Reading *A Caribbean Mystery* within the framework of Freudian uncanny, Övünç maintains that through “the feelings of fear, eeriness, doubt and disturbance” (2018, p.161), feelings of suspense are strengthened. Though both works provide insightful comments about the novels, the focus of this study markedly differs from the arguments of these critics. In what follows, I first clarify narrative terms such as focalizer and focalized, and explain my rationale for studying these texts from within a postcolonial narratological perspective. Next, I refer to Edward Said's ideas discussed in *Orientalism*, and I illustrate with Agatha Christie's two novels, how Western focalizers present biased versions of the Eastern characters and places. I read the novels comparatively with a specific emphasis on their focalized objects; mainly Oriental landscape and people as perceived by Occidental focalizers or narrators.

## Theoretical Framework: Narratology and Postcolonial Literary Theory

In each narrative, who tells the story (the narrator) and from whose perspective the story is told (focalization) play significant roles, for “whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain ‘vision.’ A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle” (Bal, 1999, p. 142). Mieke Bal defines focalization as “the relationship between the ‘vision,’ the agent that sees, and that which is seen. This relationship is a component of the story part, of the content of the narrative text: A says that B sees what C is doing” (1999, p. 146). She also emphasizes that each party involved in the relationship, namely the subject and the object of focalization should be examined separately. According to Bal, “The subject of focalization, the focalizer, is the point from which the elements are viewed. . . a character-bound focalizer (CF), brings about bias and limitation” (1999, p. 146). The partiality and restraint of the focalizer should be taken into consideration because “the image we receive of the object is determined by the fo-

calizer. Conversely, the image a focalizer presents of an object says something about the focalizer itself" (Bal, 1999, p. 150). In accordance with this, we can understand whether a certain focalizer has bias against his object of focalization (focalized), and if so the possible reasons of the biased representation of the focalized could be discussed.

Narratology has been studied in tandem with several literary theories, and postcolonial literary theory is among the possible theories that can be studied together with narratology. Monika Fludernik, in *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996), draws attention to the "field of ethnic and postcolonial studies" (p. 274) and their connection with narratological analysis under the subtitle "Power and ideology." She mentions that "the choice of language, dialect or idiom for the narrator's language and for the represented dialogue" are the most common areas of study (Fludernik, 1996, p. 274) in the field of postcolonial studies. Combining narratology and postcolonial studies can yield results that help us to read the texts with a fresh outlook. Stuart Hall also underlines "power in representation; power to mark, assign and classify; of symbolic power; of ritualized expulsion" (1997, p. 259). He states that "the exercise of symbolic power through representational practices" is possible and "Stereotyping is a key element in this exercise of symbolic violence" (Hall, 1997, p. 259). The representations of the East and Eastern characters are enmeshed with stereotypes and as Light notes about Christie's stories set abroad, her "characters take their domestic outlook with them" (1991, p. 91), and when the stories are focalized by the Westerners, there appear a certain Occidental viewpoint to the Orient and Oriental people.

In his groundbreaking study *Orientalism*, Edward Said (2003) asserts that "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (p. 1). Among other definitions of the term, Said focuses on "Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). During the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a "growing systematic knowledge about the Orient" (Said, 2003, p. 39). This knowledge was originated from a collection of a "sizeable body of literature, compiled by poets, novelists, translators and travelers" (Said, 2003, p. 40). Such biased writings about the Orient were the foundations of what created the Orient. Most people were informed about Oriental people, cultures, and societies from books. According to Said,

There are two situations that favor a textual attitude. Firstly, when a human being confronts something threatening, which was previously distant. The text that is written about this sometimes gets more authority than the thing that is being described. The second situation that favors a textual attitude is the appearance of success. When one has read a book about Orientalism and one likes it, this encourages to read more books about the same subject. (2003, p. 93)

In brief, texts may have more salience and authority than the real people and objects narrated on the audience. Since "texts can not only create knowledge, but also the reality they appear to describe" (Said, 2003, p. 94), Christie's novels as ideological texts construct a subjective reality which is then served to a great number of readers.

As a tool of domineering imperialist societies, the Orientalist body of literature produce an image of the East which is in constant need of civilization. Said states that

Orientalism exposed the strength of the [w]est and the weakness of the [e]ast. The Orient and the Islam were represented as outsiders, who had to play a special role inside Europe. The Orient was characterized as alien and incorporated schematically on a theatrical stage. (2003, p. 71).

Hence, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (2003, p. 1-2) The "Orientalization" of the Orient is where Said applies the notion of "imaginative geography" where "history help(s) the mind to intensify its own sense of self by dramatizing the distance between what is close to it and what is far away" (2003, p. 55). This, in turn, leads to othering and marginalization so that power could be better exerted to the other positioned in an inferior state, so that they would have a reference point to define themselves. Thus, the depiction of the Oriental people as inferior beings is necessary for the Westerners' self-actualizations as being more civilized, more rational, more reliable when compared to the Easterners. When above mentioned novels of Christie are read within the framework of Orientalism, the hegemonic relationship between the focalizers and the focalized subjects and objects can be observed.

### A Comparative Textual Analysis of the Novels

In *Appointment with Death*<sup>1</sup>, a group of Westerners, consisting of Europeans and Americans, are on a trip to the Holy City, and to the archaeological sites in the Dead Sea. Following the years after the World War I, Trans-Jordan and the newly-established Palestine were jointly controlled by Britain and France until 1946. In the novel, the British army is still positioned in the region, and deals with external affairs as well as administration. Because of this, the English Colonel Carbury is responsible for the local region around Amman and is to investigate the death of an American citizen. In Amman, the old and wealthy American Mrs Boynton is found dead with a needle puncture in her wrist, suggesting the bite of a deadly snake. Christie is well aware of the power of the signs like snake, poison, and the archaeological camp site near Petra, all of which may denote exoticism, backwardness, incivilization for the Western mind, and, once the *mise en scene* of mystery is prepared, now is the time for the antidote to solve the enigmatic murder. The rational, scientific detective, Hercule Poirot, would unveil the mystery regarding the death of Mrs Boynton. He is so self-confident that he claims to find a logical interpretation to the mystery in twenty-four hours while the local officials are unable to solve it, thereby underlining the belief in the superiority of the Western reasoning in the Eastern setting. Moreover, since the novel is set in the East, stereotypical Eastern figures like the dragoman Mahmoud and servant Abdul also feature in the story as focalized others. They are depicted as stupid, savage, lusty, barbarous, and unreliable figures in comparison to the civilized Western characters. The Eastern landscape, their religion and customs are ridiculed just because they deviate from the commonly accepted European ones. Hence, Christie's depiction of the East only serves to strengthen the superiority of the scientific Western ideology. She just uses the East as the opposite of the West, as a setting having the potential for anything uncivilized and criminal. Against the backdrop of a whodunnit story, Christie's novel *Appointment with Death* constructs the image of the Orient mostly as a negation of the Occident. Such an orientalist representation of the colonized landscape and the colonized people may consolidate the notion of West's superiority over the East.

Similar to *Appointment with Death*, in *A Caribbean Mystery*<sup>2</sup> (1964) a group of Westerners are on holiday on an island in the West Indies. This time, however, the representative of Western rationality is Miss Marple, an old curious lady, who inquires people about the things she wants to learn

1 Henceforth, parenthetically cited as *AD*.

2 Henceforth, parenthetically cited as *CM*.

by way of her friendly chats. The West Indies had been dominated by the European powers since the 16<sup>th</sup> century following Columbus's first setting feet on the land, till 1963 when the West Indies Federation was dissolved and provinces became independent foreign states. Especially the British, French and Spanish officials colonized the area and established sugar plantations, searched for gold throughout the Caribbean, and severely enslaved the natives. The story of *A Caribbean Mystery* is set in a fictitious town St. Honore of the West Indies in the 1960s. A third-person narrator opens the narrative from the focalization of Miss Marple; she is listening to old Major Palgrave's stories and when he is about to show her a picture of a murderer, he suddenly changes the subject to lions and elephants. The next day, Major Palgrave is found dead; the medical expert believes it is a natural death because of heart condition, and the local officers close the file. Miss Marple, however, has doubts that his death may have been caused by somebody and she wants to learn more about Major Palgrave, the stories he has told to people, the murderer he has mentioned and approaches to the other visitors of the Golden Palm Resort and talks to them subtly about him. She later appeals to Dr Graham and Mr Rafiel (a wealthy American guest in the resort) for assistance about the issue. In the meanwhile, two more murders are committed; thanks to Miss Marple's attempts, what the local authorities have overlooked is investigated and the criminal is caught.

In both novels, the Orient is the setting of the stories and the Western judgement of the Orient as an exotic and savage place strengthens the mystery surrounding the murders. Throughout *Appointment with Death*, the landscape is represented as wild, wretched and influencing the Westerners negatively:

Sarah's senses felt *dazed*. The ride was like a *dream*. It seemed afterwards that it was like the *pit of Hell* opening at one's feet. The way wound down – down into the *ground*. The shapes of rock rose up round them – down, down into the *bowels* of the earth, through a *labyrinth* of red cliffs. They were *towered* now on either side. Sarah felt *stifled -menaced* by the ever-narrowing gorge. She thought to herself: 'Down into the valley of *death* – down into the valley of death...' On and on. It grew *dark* – the vivid red of the walls faded – and sill on, winding in and out, imprisoned, lost in the bowels of the earth. She thought: 'It's fantastic and unbelievable... a *dead city*.' (AD, p. 55 emphasis added)

With the words having negative connotations, the narrator is able to bring together very intricately the idea of the east's being a threatening place. Through the choice of vocabulary, Christie's narrator exoticizes the Oriental lands and assigns negative meanings to it. In *A Caribbean Mystery*, Miss Marple the main focalizer and the spinster detective compares the West Indies with England, and she seems to be more moderate at the beginning, she contemplates "far from the rigours of the English climate, with a nice little bungalow of her own, with friendly smiling West Indian girls to wait on her" (CM, p. 9). Later, she starts to get bored with the tranquility of the island, her thoughts are given as

Perhaps a trifle monotonous? So many palm trees. Everything the same every day never anything happening. Not like St. Mary Mead where something was always happening. . . indeed, in St. Mary Mead, there was always something going on. Incident after incident flashed through Miss Marple's mind. (CM, p. 10)

She compares the holiday resort with her hometown, and naturally the new environment is unhabitual for her. Thus, she uses her village as a point of reference when he interprets her new

environment. As she is used to the Western cuisine and weather conditions, she cannot hide her bewilderment on the varieties presented her in the holiday resort:

The fruit on the island, thought Miss Marple, was rather disappointing. It seemed always to be paw-paw. If she could have a nice apple now but apples seemed to be unknown. Now that she had been here a week, Miss Marple had cured herself of the impulse to ask what the weather was like. The weather was always the same fine. No interesting variations. (CM, p. 22)

While having a conversation with another guest in the resort, Miss Marple's preconceptions about the East are made apparent: "'No dangerous encounters with snakes or with wild animals or with natives gone berserk?' ('What a fool I sound,') thought Miss Marple. 'Nothing worse than insect bites,' Evelyn assured her" (CM, p. 39). While uttering such type of prejudiced conceptions regarding the East, Miss Marple also realizes that those are foolish assumptions about the place, yet she cannot help expressing her biased ideas. As they are in an eastern setting, she seems to expect seeing dangerous animals or native people acting wildly, which can be interpreted as a Eurocentric view.

The ferocity associated with Oriental landscape and culture may provide an explanation for Western fascination, as it provides "the civilized" mind a safe environment to channel its unconscious desires. It could be argued that Christie is also critical of the prejudiced mindset of the Westerners. The idea that Westerners also have dark desires is implied in a dialogue between two European psychologists; Dr. Gerard and Sarah King, the former tells

There are such strange things buried down in the unconscious. A lust for power – a lust for cruelty – a savage desire to tear and rend – all the inheritance of our past racial memories... They are all there Miss King, all the cruelty and savagery and lust (AD, p. 18).

As an instance of Golden age writers' "self-conscious deployment of Orientalism in the construction of psychic Englishness" Rowland proposes "Sarah King's exploration of her own capacities for murderous sacrifice in an alien desert" (2001, p. 67) as an example. As *Appointment with Death* unfolds, it becomes apparent that the "savage desires" of the Westerners do not, in fact, remain suppressed in the unconscious; but exert themselves in the violent act of murder. In the novel, the murder under investigation is committed by an English woman, Lady Westholme. The criminal is not discovered instantly after the crime because she has dressed herself up as an Oriental servant, and therefore she is almost able to get away with the crime. She is well aware of the fact that the Western group present there will consider the possibility of an Eastern murderer because of their Eurocentric viewpoint. According to Light, such travel "settings produce a Chinese box effect" through which "readers are given back a mirror image of their own concerns and the peripatetic settings enhance, rather than diminish, the social and psychological inwardness of the plots" (1991, p. 91). Rather than presenting the alleged backwardness of the East, this story subtly represents the cruel psyches of the Westerners. It is apparent that the Eurocentric perspective and their biased approach to the East are subverted especially with the choice of an English murderer.

Besides the geography, the religions of the Orient are also belittled in *Appointment with Death*. References to Islam are laden with biased statements. When Dr Gerard asks Sarah, the English doctor, whether she enjoys Jerusalem which is one of the holiest sites for Muslims, she says 'It's rather terrible in some ways,' 'Religion is very odd!' . . . 'Every imaginable sect squabbling and fighting!' 'And the awful things they've built, too!' [...] 'They turned me out of one

place today because I had on a sleeveless dress,' (AD, p. 8-9). She acknowledges the difference of Islam from her own religion in a mocking tone. Her use of derogatory adjectives such as terrible and awful can be considered as proofs of her prejudiced attitude towards Oriental religions. Her judgmental approach to the holy buildings and practices of Islam stems from her Eurocentric perspective which leads her to have a biased perception of the East. Another implicit value judgement is made through the depictions of Mrs Boynton, who is repeatedly referred to as a Buddha by the narrator: "a distorted old Buddha" (AD, p. 9), a "grotesque Buddha-like figure" (AD, p. 7), and a "monstrous swollen Buddha" (AD, p. 37). The Buddha is cognate to the Eastern religion of Buddhism and by likening Mrs Boynton to Buddha and describing her with negative modifying adjectives, it could be argued that Buddhism is also devalued.

Along with a biased representation of the landscape and religion of the Eastern countries as focalized by the Westerners, Eastern people are also the focalized objects having negative stereotypical qualities; they are seen as lesser beings, and nearly equated to animals, while their culture is depicted as the dark counterpart of enlightened European countries, especially the British Empire on which the sun never sets. As stated by Stuart Hall, "stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power" (1997, p. 258) and as these narratives are focalized by Western characters and the Western authorities have been dominating the East for several decades, it is not surprising to see such stereotyped representation. Furthermore, "stereotyping deploys a strategy of 'splitting.' It divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then excludes or expels everything which does not fit, which is different" (Hall, 1997, p. 258). In the context of these novels, the normal and the acceptable is the Western people and their traditions while the expelled is everything related to the East. The following dialogue between two Europeans illustrates their viewpoint towards the Easterner,

"I have here a plan," said Poirot, "concocted with the help of the dragoman, Mahmoud."

Lady Westholme remarked that in that case it was probably wrong!

"That man is grossly inaccurate. I have checked his statements from my Baedeker. Several times his information was definitely misleading." (AD, p. 91)

The only native characters in the novel, namely the servants and the guide are attributed animal like qualities, and they are never trusted. Instead of counting on the native guide's knowledge and his first-hand experience about the cities they visit, Lady Westholme prefers reading a guidebook written by a European, which provides an evidence of her distrust to the Oriental people. Unfortunately, she is oblivious of the fact that the guidebook is just another Western construct.

Closely in line with Said's theory of Orientalism, Shohat and Stam identify four common racial tropes present in colonialist discourse: animalization, naturalization, infantilization, and light/darkness. The first trope is animalization: "Colonialist discourse renders the colonized as wild beasts in their unrestrained libidinousness, their lack of proper dress, their mud huts resembling nests and lairs" (1994, p. 137). Discourse of animalization can be explained as describing Others as savage animals. One of the ways of representing the natives in Appointment with Death is putting emphasis on their instinctive and intuitive behaviors. For instance, in the following scene a servant is behaved rudely and depicted as if he ran away like an animal:

'One of the Bedouin servants attached to the camp. He went up to her [Mrs Boynton]— I think she must have sent him to fetch something and I suppose he brought her the wrong thing — I don't

really know what it was — but she was very angry about it. The poor man slunk away as fast as he could, and she shook her stick at him and called out.' (AD, p. 92)

Such a portrayal of the communication between an Occidental and a native servant also provides clues about the racial hierarchy between the Occidental and the Oriental, which could be considered serving to justify the uncaring treatment of the Other within the narrative.

As well as depicting the Oriental people as inferior beings, the lack of clothing in the European style is emphasized as a demonstration of the native population's decadence. It is also implied that there is a constant need for Western dominion in the area. While describing a servant, Lady Westholme states:

'He was a man of more than average height,' 'and wore the usual native dress. He has a pair of very torn and patched breeches — really disgraceful they were — and his puttees were wound most untidily — all anyhow! These men need *discipline!*'

...

[Poirot says he takes his duster wherever he goes] "Because these Arabs they do not remove the dust from one's belongings" (AD, p. 93)

This value judgement is again impartial and informed by the idea that Western societies are superior, and more civilized than the rest of the world. Everything the native inhabitants of the Orient wear is characterized as being shabby and unconventional: one servant's clothing is described when the focal character is Sarah, as follows "He wore khaki breeches, much patched, and untidy puttees and a ragged coat very much the worse for wear" (AD, p. 57). This attitude of the "Orientals" of all putting on shabby and dirty clothes makes it more complicated for the Westerners to distinguish them, for Westerners have a penchant for homogenizing the people from the Orient. By considering them of the same type, they discard the multiplicities and unique beauties. For instance, one of the English ladies, Miss Pierce says about the native people: "All those Arabs look alike to me" (AD, p. 93). In a similar vein, the tourist parties represented in the do not restrict themselves to one country; their travel destinations include tours of the Middle East, where the traveler is expected to visit several tourist attractions in a row. A variety of Middle Eastern countries in this novel are depicted as a homogenous entity abounding in tourist destinations. Because a homogeneous group or landscape is easier to dominate and rule, the colonizing powers consider "the people there being anonymous masses rather than individuals, their actions determined by instinctive emotions (lust, terror, fury, etc.) rather than by conscious choices or decisions" (Barry, 2009, p. 186). In this way, they aim to ensure their political stability and superiority.

In *A Caribbean Mystery*, which was published right after the dissolving of the West Indies Federation, the attitude is more sympathetic towards the natives and the land of the Orient. The narrator tells about Miss Marple,

She began to feel slightly at home in her new environment . . . Up to now, she had missed what she usually found so easily, points of resemblance in the people she met, to various people known to her personally. She had, possibly, been dazzled by the gay clothes and the exotic colouring. (CM, p. 19)

The difference between the West and the East is underlined here; however, it is not directly despised as it was in *Appointment with Death*. Miss Marple and the narrator also have friendly attitude to the native servants as displayed in the following excerpts:

The black West Indian girl smiled and said Good-Morning as she placed the tray on Miss Marple's knees. Such lovely white teeth and so happy and smiling. Nice natures, all these girls, and a pity they were so averse to getting married. (CM, p. 22)

The girl Victoria Johnson rolled over and sat up in bed. The St. Honore girl was a magnificent creature with a torso of black marble such as a sculptor would have enjoyed. (CM, p. 36)

In the first excerpt, the focal character is Miss Marple and she exhibits a friendly and favorable attitude to a native servant while she is critical of the cultural tendency of reluctance to marry. In the second excerpt, the focalizer is the narrator, who recounts a scene with the native character Victoria and he uses positive adjectives as well as equating her physical beauty to a stone to be carved. In both quotations the focalizers express an amiable viewpoint, yet they cannot be fully objective: Miss Marple critiques a cultural tendency while the narrator objectifies the woman he narrates. Another biased outlook to the natives can be Greg and Evelyn's dialogue about Victoria; their prejudice towards the natives of the island can easily be detected:

Evelyn: "Who was that you were talking to?"

Greg: "The coloured girl who does our place. Victoria, her name is, isn't it?"

Evelyn: "What did she want? Making a pass at you?"

Greg: "Don't be stupid. Lucky. That girl's got some idiotic idea into her head."

...

Evelyn: "Had she pinched them?"

Greg: "No. She found them somewhere I think." (CM, p. 64)

Victoria told Greg about the Serenite tablets that may have been placed in the bathroom of Major Palgrave, but when this is conveyed to Evelyn she directly thinks either she tries to woo him or she stole the tablets. A common westerner considers a native servant either as immoral person or as a thief, and this is highlighted with the above scene in the novel.

In both novels, while the Western people are the representative of rationality and they are relied on as problem solvers, the Eastern people are yet again depicted as sentimental and spontaneous. This in parallel with the fourth racial trope present in colonialist discourse according to Shohat and Stam, "Light/darkness that envisions non-European worlds less luminous, whence the notion of Africa as the 'dark continent' and of Asians as 'twilight people'. . . Sight and vision are attributed to Europe, while the 'other' is seen as living in obscurity, blind to moral knowledge" (1994, p. 140). While "Americans are disposed to be a friendly race" (CM, p. 21), a colonial administrator and a friend of Dr. Graham, Mr. Daventry says "Well, the St. Honore people are very excitable, you know. Emotional. Work themselves up easily. Are you thinking that she knows a little more than she has said?" (CM, p. 60) when Dr. Graham tells him about his doubts about what Victoria told could be true and Major Palgrave could have been murdered. Another biased perspective about the East is voiced by Tim, the manager of the resort, when he mentions his wife Molly's parents' concerns about the West Indies with a specific emphasis on the darkness as opposed to the light of the Western world, "Coming out here to the West Indies. All the dark faces. You know, people are rather queer, sometimes, about the West Indies and coloured people" (CM, p. 73).

Both narratives present the local officers as unable to solve the crime, and a westerner is there to bring the criminals to justice. In A Caribbean Mystery, Major Palgrave's death is believed to occur because of natural causes and as told by Dr. Graham "the local authorities were quite satisfied. There had been that bottle of Serenite tablets, and the old boy had apparently talked to people about his blood pressure quite freely" (CM, p. 36). A colonial administrator Daventry also wants to learn the attitude of the West Indian police doctor named "Robertson, I suppose. He didn't have any doubts, did he?" (CM, p. 36). The curious old English lady Miss Marple continues her investigation discreetly until she unravels the mystery regarding the murders. Similarly, the complex murder investigated by Poirot in Appointment with Death is depicted as an impossible task to be committed by a simple Arab let alone being solved by one of them. This perspective is so prevalent in the novel that it is possible that it would be anticlimactic and upsetting if the murderer was discovered to be an Arab. Actually, this is made obvious with Colonel Carbury's attitude. The colonized others are reduced into animal-like beings so that Colonel does not consider them as capable of conducting a murder.

'And what about that servant motif that keeps cropping up – a servant being sent to tell her dinner was ready – and that story of her shaking her stick at a servant earlier in the afternoon? You're not going to tell me one of my poor desert mutts bumped her off after all? Because,' added Colonel Carbury sternly, 'if so, that would be cheating.' (AD, p. 117)

It is evident that the portrayal of Easterners is in a stark contrast with that of the British military forces. When it comes to the portrait of individual British officers, the common idea about armed forces is confirmed by portraying the soldiers as men of action, as seen for example in the traditional depiction of Colonel Carbury, who by working as the head of the local police force, utilises his military expertise in the service of people:

He did not look in the least like a soldier. He did not look even particularly alert. He was not in the least one's idea of a disciplinarian. Yet in Transjordan he was a power . . . 'Yes. I'm a tidy man,' said Carbury. He waved a vague hand. 'Don't like a mess. When I come across a mess I want to clear it up. See?' (AD, p. 45)

The noun used to describe the state of the East is "mess" which strengthens the idea that the East is in a state of chaos and needs British administration to achieve order. This type of a diverse approach to a focalized when he is a westerner and when he is an Easterner is in parallel with the third racial trope proposed by Shohat and Stam, infantilization and it "projects the colonized as embodying an earlier stage of individual human or broad cultural development" (1994, p. 139) it also posits "the political immaturity of colonized or formerly colonized peoples" (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p. 140). By representing the East in complete controversy to the West, this idea is strengthened and especially about the Eastern notion of sacrifice condescending discourse is used:

All round and below stretched the blood-red rocks – a strange and unbelievable country unparalleled anywhere. Here in the exquisite pure morning they stood like gods, surveying a baser world – a world of flaring violence. Here was, as the guide told them, the 'Place of Sacrifice' – the 'High Place'. (AD, p. 40)

A loose association between sacrifice for the religious beliefs and general tendency of the easterners for violence is suggested. The European visitors are likened to "gods" looking down on a lower world, which exemplifies the power hierarchy of the colonizers and the colonized. The

guide Mahmoud's words summarize the position of the colonized and how an Oriental person is considered by an Occidental one:

“Always, always, I am blamed. When anything happens, say always my fault. When Lady Ellen Hunt sprain her ankle coming down from Place of Sacrifice, it my fault, though she would go high-heeled shoes and she sixty at least-perhaps seventy. My life all one misery!” . . . “what a life! I do all I can- always I blamed” (AD, p. 114)

His statements are like a plea for discrimination and prejudice against the people of the Orient to stop, as well as laying bare the unjust treatment he and his fellows are subject to. Although he is just a guide trying to help, he was the scapegoat for almost everything. As pointed out by Lassner, “Having been relegated to their one dimensional stature, the Orientals turn out to be important only as decorative props that lend a mysterious air to an otherwise conventional tale of Occidental revenge.” (2009, p. 36). The Oriental people serve as both as components of exotic Orient and as decorative objects to color the story of Western revenger.

Christie has “Orientalized” the detective conventions, and the Oriental setting plays a significant ideological role in her novels. There is a certain discrepancy between the reality and the fantasy about the Orient, which is implied in the following scene:

‘What do you think of it?’ [Raymond] made a gesture indicating the fantastic red rocks that stretched in every direction. [Sarah says] ‘I think it’s rather wonderful and just a little horrible’, . . . ‘I always thought of it as romantic and dream-like – the ‘rose red city’. But it’s much more real than that – it’s as real as – as raw beef.’ (AD, p. 39)

With oxymoronic expressions such as wonderful and horrible, dream-like and real, the disparity between the constructed image of the Orient and the real Orient is revealed. The westerners in this scene are disappointed because their expectations about an exotic Orient are not realized. As Robert Young states,

The Orient, in other words, has now become an ideological representation with no corresponding reality. There can be no “real” Orient because “the Orient” is itself an Orientalist construction. Orientalism was a signifier whose signified corresponded only to a Western fantasy world, “the Orient”. It was a Western projection onto the Other producing only knowledge of “the Other.” (2001, p. 389)

Sarah's surprise about the place and her underlining the reality of the place by comparing it with a concrete thing like “raw beef” perfectly exemplifies the orientalist construction of the orient.

### Conclusion

As it has been argued throughout this article, Occidental focalizers present a biased and Eurocentric view of the Orient. What comes to the fore when the focalizers are Westerners are stereotypical characterization of the Orientals, unfavorable outlook on Oriental landscape and climate, derogatory expressions about Oriental religions. Although *A Caribbean Mystery* offers a more moderate attitude towards the Orient compared to *Appointment with Death*, the Occidental narrators and focalizers still demonstrate Eurocentric perception since “everyone—the powerful and the powerless—is caught up, though not on equal terms, in power's circulation. No one—neither its apparent victims nor its agents—can stand wholly outside its field of operation” (Hall, 1997, p.

261). The mild tone of *A Caribbean Mystery* could be attributed to the process of decolonization, that was underway just prior to the novel's publication. While *Appointment With Death* presents a severe portrayal of othering and stereotyping of the Orient and Orientals in parallel with British colonization and imperial presence in Transjordan during 1930s, the depiction of the Orient is relatively more positive in the latter novel. Ultimately, through her narratives, Christie creates an Orientalist discourse which depicts patronizing Western hegemony and reinforces the Eurocentric notion that the “inferior” East needs to be civilized by the “superior” Westerners.

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