
Almost the Same but Incomplete: Orientalism and Eastern Resistance in Ben Okri's "Belonging"

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ABSTRACT

The prevailing sentiment is that colonialism is a thing of the past. However, the Western portrayal of the East is one of the shackles that still holds postcolonial societies. A diverse number of Orientalist writings and language perpetuate a rigid image of the people of the East as primitive, prone to tradition, and uncivilized. Such a representation tends to be perceived as true if it is told repeatedly, consistently, and continuously. This research attempted to provide insight into how imperialism operates in current discourses, how colonial power structures persist, and how these structures can be deconstructed, by presenting a re-examination of the presence of Orientalism in Ben Okri's short story, "Belonging" (2009), not as a careless reiteration of Western dominance, but as a type of Eastern resistance. This critical exploration was based on Edward Said's *Orientalism* theory and Homi Bhabha's *Stereotype* and *Mimicry* theory, and employed descriptive qualitative and deconstructive reading methods to re-evaluate the use of Orientalist stereotypes in the short story. The findings showed that the Orientalist view and stereotypes are unstable, creating a space for Eastern resistance against Western colonial discourse. This article thus sheds light on how Western perspectives on Eastern societies are embedded in literary works and at the same time discloses a possibility of resistance against Western stereotypes.

Keywords: *colonial discourse; eastern resistance; orientalism; postcolonialism; stereotypes*

INTRODUCTION

"Belonging" narrates the story of a man who enters the wrong house. He initially intended to visit Margaret House, which is described as a "mansion block" symbolizing a luxurious residence. Instead, he finds himself in a flat where he sees an Arabic man who is busy preparing a big meal for his family. The protagonist describes a rich Arab family life, filled with enticing aromas of the dishes that are being prepared. Immersed in the atmosphere of the household, the protagonist imagines the large extended family that

would later be enjoying the food.

The man of the house welcomes and mistakenly takes the protagonist as his in-law, and thus as part of the Arab family. The protagonist enjoys being seen as belonging there. However, when the real in-law arrives, his perspective changes and he views the situation through stereotypical depictions of Arabic family culture. The real in-law is portrayed as an "Arab man", black, lacking the spirit of freedom, to the extent of not being able to think independently, constrained by

tradition, rigid, oppressed, and with a predetermined future. The stereotypical depictions of Arabs in the short story are used by Ben Okri as a type of mimicry that challenges Orientalist writings, revealing the discourse of postcolonialism in “Belonging”.

The prevailing sentiment is that colonialism is a thing of the past. Hegemonic influences are often still embedded in the practices and identities of individuals and groups in former colonies, creating invisible shackles that still constitute the bedrock for deep-rooted inequalities (Smallwood, Woods, Power, & Usher, 2021). The intellectual movement, known as postcolonialism, aims to study and critique the implicit presence of colonial discourse in Western literature. In addition, postcolonialism offers a response to colonial literature, by using various styles and techniques to convey a different message (Bartiza and Zrizi, 2022). In the case of Ben Okri, his writing encapsulates the “political and spiritual realities” of Nigerian society after colonialism, as an alternative to the “Western reality” that is so often present in Orientalist writings (Sharma, 2023). In this research, our purpose is to explore how Ben Okri deals with colonial discourse and simultaneously challenges it in his short story “Belonging”, clarifying his position as part of the postcolonial movement.

Orientalist perspectives are read and absorbed by the public and have been the subject of ample research and constant debate. One example stems from children’s literature. Shafie & Aljohani (2019) analyzed how Arabic people are represented in the writings of American author Elsa Marston. Their analysis points to a dichotomous classification of Arab families. A binary opposition is made between: “the rich civilized urban family” and “the poor and uncivilized rural family”.

Stereotypical depictions can be countered by what Bhabha calls mimicry. According to Bhabha (1984), “mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” Mimicry serves as a means for colonized people to ridicule colonialism by imperfectly imitating their oppressors. This form of resistance is depicted in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* (Astutik & Ayu, 2019). Within the novel, Indian characters imitate Western customs. Through their mimicry, the characters create chaos, which symbolizes a form of mockery (Munandar, Ayuningtyas, & Ihsanullah, 2022).

The presence of literary characters with ambiguous stances serves as a means to challenge Eastern stereotypes (Neisya, Aprilia, & Lestari, 2022). The ambivalence of stereotypes is also a space for counter-knowledge, strategies of resistance, and contestation (Huddart, 2006: 37). In line with the colonial discourse and mimicry, postcolonial issues are also reflected in Ben Okri’s novels, *The Famished Road* (1991) and *Songs of Enchantment* (1993). According to Aljasim & Rashid (2024), Okri uses fiction to explain conditions in Nigeria after the colonial period.

The novelty presented in this article lies in the exploration of how Ben Okri’s short story “Belonging” disrupts colonial discourses through deconstruction. Unlike his other works that portray the Nigerian society after the colonial era, “Belonging” no longer merely describes, but counteracts the repressive impact of colonialism, through the use of mimicry. By employing postcolonial theories, this study re-evaluated colonial discourse and uncovered new ways through which colonized people resist and counteract the consequences of colonialism.

Concentrating on postcolonial theory, this research drew from Said’s *Orientalism* and Bhabha’s theories on *Stereotype* and *Mimicry* to provide insights into how Western perspectives are used to exert dominance over the East, how Easterners see themselves through Western stereotypes in Ben Okri’s “Belonging”, and how stereotypes and mimicry are used as forms of resistance against colonial hegemony in Ben Okri’s “Belonging”.

Postcolonial theory fundamentally questions styles, genres, epistemologies, value systems, and assumptions about the universal features of language. The theory calls attention to certain cultural traditions that have been obscured by misconceptions about “the universal” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002: 11). According to Faruk (2007: 16), postcolonial theory is directed towards the (ex-)colonized societies, offering insights into their conditions and tendencies. Within this framework, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak are often referred to as “The Holy Trinity” in postcolonial theory (Arab, 2023). Nevertheless, this study focused specifically on the concepts put forth by Said and Bhabha.

Edward Said integrated aspects of Michel Foucault’s *discourse theory*, Antonio Gramsci’s concept of *hegemony* (Vandeviver, 2017), and Jacques Derrida’s *deconstruction theory* to examine colonial discourses

in Orientalist literature and academic works. In contrast, Bhabha uses structuralist repertoires like those of Foucault, Derrida, and Melanie Klein's psychoanalysis to analyze colonial discourse. Here, the concepts of *discourse* and *hegemony* are used to understand social conflicts, and forms of coercion or negotiation in cultural interactions (Pala, 2015).

According to Said (1979: 3) "Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient", became an essential agent of colonialism. The image of the Orient is one of the "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said, 1979: 1). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, literary texts helped strengthen the insular colonial world and sustain the colonial vision (Shabanirad & Marandi, 2015). An illustration, based on the personal experience of one of the authors (Könning) demonstrates how these mechanisms work. The subtle influence of colonial mechanisms on the minds of generations of Dutch high school students can be found in the hierarchy of place in history and geography textbooks. When studying a certain topic such as world wars or natural disasters, the focus is on the Western countries, followed by other areas, and the final chapter deals with "the situation in former colonial areas". Discussing (ex-) colonial geographies habitually as the "last bit", contributes to the discourse of looking at the West first, securing a hegemonic position. In this case, the historical development of social policy is influenced by the ways in which colonialism and imperialism were taught and practiced (Plange & Alam, 2023).

Research has shown that if people are repeatedly exposed to false information, they tend to accept this information as true, even when they have prior knowledge that contradicts the repeated false—but now familiar—information (Bromberg, 2023). Orientalist writings perpetuated a rigid image of the East, highlighting attributes such as primitivity, adherence to tradition, and perceived lack of civilization. Said (1979: 5) stated that Western discourse has consistently constructed its understanding of the East over a prolonged period. In Orientalist writings, this staged image was repeatedly reinforced, in what he calls a *Mise en Scene* (Said, 1979: 197), a habitual way of reflecting the East. This raises a question; how do we see possibilities for forms of resistance against these colonial structures? To answer this, let us examine Bhabha's theory of

stereotype and *mimicry* as proposed in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994).

Stereotypes are essentially complex and ambivalent modes of representation (Bhabha, 1994: 94–100). He conceives stereotyping as a form of knowledge and identification that oscillates between what is familiar and what is repeated. Hence, stereotypes serve as a practical means of control; they do not reflect a social reality and therefore cannot be used as a philosophical justification for the colonial mission. In addition, stereotypes refer to the colonizer's dominant perceptions of the colonized. They act as the foundation of the colonial discourse, both for the colonizer and the colonized (Bhabha, 1994: 107). This reinforces the notion that people from colonies are an inferior race and by doing so, it justifies the colonial mission. It should be emphasized that stereotypes should not be viewed as simplifications of the people from former colonies, since they point to false representations.

The resistance from "the natives" taps into the fear of colonial agents (Domingos, Jerónimo, & Roque, 2019: 1). Bhabha shows how resistance from the East can occur through the concept of *mimicry*. In reference to colonization, it is understood as a "difference that is almost the same, but not quite." Mimicry can expose an ambivalence and marks a process of disavowal (Bhabha, 1994: 122). In this process, imitation becomes a mockery because the imitated subject (the copy) or the Other is incomplete or artificial. However, mimicry must continually produce moments of slippage, excess, and difference, in order to be effective (Bhabha, 1984).

This research used the deconstruction method to dismantle colonial discourse by analyzing stereotypes and examining the potential for resistance against it. The fundamental assumption of the deconstruction method rejects logocentrism, which is a belief in logos, transcendental truth, reason, and others (Derrida, 2001: 246). It is a form of literary analysis that considers writing as a free play and focuses on the element of decidability in every communication system (Norris, 2020: 42). There are three stages of the deconstruction method in practice: identifying binary opposition, examining a hierarchy between the binary oppositions, and hierarchy reversal and destruction. The final stage is the elimination of ways of thinking framed by binary opposition (Faruk, 2012: 221-230).

According to Butt & Ghauri (2022), Derrida questioned and deconstructed the established intellectual, religious, and metaphysical frameworks of the past. Thus, this research entailed an analysis of colonial discourse, drawing on multiple texts and uncovering overlapping elements (intertextuality) that reveal the underlying discourse previously outlined. Data consisted of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs taken from Ben Okri's "Belonging". Through close reading, these data were collected and classified based on research variables, and the analysis was carried out by comparing the categorized data to identify patterns and draw conclusions based on the results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This discussion on Ben Okri's short story, "Belonging", taken from the book, *Tales of Freedom* (2009), is divided into three main parts. The first provides an overview of the short story and the Western views of the Eastern perspectives, the second discusses the findings on how Easterners see themselves based on Western stereotypes which also includes physical features and shackled Arabs, and the last part reveals how stereotypes and mimicry are used as forms of resistance against colonial hegemony.

Ben Okri's "Belonging" is written from the first-person point of view, offering a unique perspective on the story through the eyes of the narrator, who is also the central character. The anonymity of the protagonist is maintained with neither his name nor his backstory revealed, leaving readers to focus on his thoughts and experiences. As he relates his own position to what happens around him, the narrator's subjectivity becomes clear through his stream of consciousness.

The journey of the "I" starts ambiguously, with him entering a house "by accident or maybe not". Being mistaken by the host as being part of the family gave the protagonist a wonderful sense of belonging. He started to really enjoy himself being someone else, being an Arab. He even played with the idea that his old identity was just a dream and that this was him waking up and becoming his true self.

Based on this initial encounter, we can detect several emotions experienced by the "I" character. Initially, he wanted to correct the mistake made by the homeowner, but then he enjoyed being mistaken

for an in-law because in playing this role, he felt a sense of belonging. However, he knew that as soon as the person the host was waiting for appeared, his identity would be revealed and this was a frightening prospect for him. The confrontation with the real in-law, whose role he had so willingly incorporated, changed his point of view completely. He saw the in-law as very different from himself, as other, and more than that: the "I" character felt superior to the real in-law. However, when his cover was blown, he became the target of hostility. He was confronted with a display of harsh disapproval, curses, and scornful looks from the people around him.

Disrupting Western Views

At the beginning of the story, when the "I" character was misidentified as an in-law, the host spontaneously disclosed intimate details about the family.

"He began saying things to me confidentially, telling me how he disapproved of some acquaintance, and how we should do this that or other, and how my wife did or didn't do what she was supposed to do, and he bared his heart and said many intimate things."

(Okri, 2009: 111)

Eastern socio-cultural practices are often portrayed as repressive by Western views. In line with the colonial modes of constructing the colonized as inferiors, such stereotypes depict the family culture as loaded with rules and restrictions, such as emphasizing on what should and should not be done. Furthermore, patriarchal structures are shown by how the host describes the role of a wife in the family, a role that oscillates the Western view of the patriarchal East: a wife in the East is obliged to obey the men in her family. The host in the story represents an agent who perpetuates the colonial discourse influenced by Western views of Arabic culture, which is viewed as limited, restricted, oppressive, and patriarchal. However, whereas in patriarchal societies men are typically considered to have more freedom, the position of man and wife in the story is ambiguous, because the real in-law is constrained as well: "*He was, in the worst sense of the word, middle-aged; with no freedom, even to think independent thoughts* (Okri, 2009: 113–114). This ambiguity shows the rupture of colonial discourse and decentralizes the patriarchal system.

Eastern Encounters

The effects of such powerful representations and perceptions of the East can be found in the literary works created, not only by Westerners but also by Easterners themselves. In other words, Orientalism shapes how people from the East perceive themselves, influenced by Western and “othering” views that are often repressive and manipulative. As authors of this article, we share Said’s concern about “distortion and inaccuracy” (Said, 1979: 8), when using the terms “East” and “Easterners” and “West” and “Westerners”. Although these terms are unnuanced, “falsely unifying rubrics” (Said, 1979: xxviii) and represent “the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (Said, 1979: 7), we use these terms to discuss the application of Western stereotypes and mimicry as a form of Eastern resistance.

As previously discussed, postcolonial hegemony does not only affect how Westerners view the East, but also influences people from the East to see themselves, based on Western perspectives. In the story, however, the protagonist enjoys being part of the Arab family.

“Besides, I found I rather began to enjoy it. I enjoyed being someone else. It was fascinating. It was quite a delight suddenly finding myself part of a ready-made family, finding myself belonging. The thrill of belonging was wonderful.”

(Okri, 2009: 111-112)

Here, the narrator finds pleasure in imitating an Eastern subject that he sees as “other”. The narrator’s encounter with the household implies that he is an Eastern subject interacting with Eastern people and culture. His appearance can be inferred by that he was mistaken as the in-law. The narrator described the in-law as being black, indicating indirectly that he is also black, positioning him as an Eastern subject observing the East. Even though the narrator likes belonging in the household, it is clear that he does not see himself as part of the same community as the family, as he “enjoyed being someone else”. This shows that practices of othering do not only occur between people from the East and West, but occur between Easterners as well, again showing a nuance to the East / West binary.

Physical Features of “the Arab”

In the story, the person for whom the protagonist is mistaken, is described as black, trapped in tradition, and “with no freedom, even to think independent thoughts”. This description resonates with the colonial dichotomous portrayal of the East as synonymous with black and the West with white. This portrayal comes with an implication of hierarchy: White is perceived as superior to black. Identifications of people as black and Arabic embodied by the in-law are associated with negative connotations, such as oppression and a lack of freedom. This is illustrated in the following:

“A black, Arabic, pockmarked, elderly gentleman came into the room, and I knew instantly that this was the man I had been mistaken for. He had the quiet and unmistakable authority of being who he was, the real in-law. And my first shock was that I looked nothing like him at all. I was younger, fresher, better-looking. I had vigour and freedom. I wasn’t trapped by tradition. I was lithe. I could go any which way. I had many futures open to me.”

(Okri, 2009: 113)

The portrayal of the Arab man is conveyed to the readers through the protagonist’s thoughts. In the story, it is not explicitly stated whether the protagonist is black or white, but it is clear that he believes himself to be superior to the real in-law. His views are imbued with stereotypical perceptions of Arabs. This is evident in his perception of the in-law as rigid, traditional, and particularly in the way he emphasized the fact that they did not look alike asserting that he is much better looking. The protagonist was taken aback when he was mistaken as the in-law. His sentiment arose when he saw the in-law, an appearance that he did not want to be associated with. The “I”, influenced by the colonial discursive perception of Arabs, is unwilling to see himself as part of this community.

The story places the main character in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, when he is still perceived as the in-law, he feels comfortable being an Arab. On the other hand, when he is discovered as a false in-law, he distances himself from the family. He sees himself as free, as someone with a bright future, and thus as not to be associated with the ‘shackled Arabs’.

Shackled Arabs

In line with the physical description of the Arab man, the protagonist continues his stream of consciousness as follows:

“This man seemed weighed down. There was an air about him of one whose roads were closed, whose future was determined, whose roles were fixed. He was, in the worst sense of the word, middle-aged; with no freedom, even to think independent thoughts. All this I sensed in a flash, but realized fully only afterwards. But I was profoundly shocked to have been mistaken for this man.”

(Okri, 2009: 113–114)

The characteristics of the in-law that stood out in the eye of the protagonist disclose how he perceived the Arab man as shackled; a man who was not able to determine his own future, as it had been predetermined by his family. The protagonist went as far as to deny the Arab man the possibility of freedom of thought. In this portrayal, the Arab appeared as being restricted by his social surroundings, and particularly by his family structure. This perspective perpetuates the colonial discourse with the assumption that the life of an Arab is predetermined, leaving no room for autonomy.

The protagonist in Ben Okri's short story “Belonging” views Arab life from a Subaltern perspective that is influenced by Western views. Based on his experiences, the protagonist's depiction of the Arab man is marked by contradictions. He sees them as both sophisticated and traditional, refined and primitive. His high view of the Arab people is defined through their social behavior, such as hosting family gatherings and dinner parties. On the other hand, Arab people are depicted as primitive, holding on to ancient traditions, limiting their freedom and agency.

How did this perception become embedded in Eastern societies? The answer lies in both non-discursive forces such as colonial military actions and discursive forces such as literary works. The Western practice of shaping these representations of the East has, to this day, a deep-rooted effect.

The paradoxical elements of the short story are not limited to the Arab world, but also to the West. At the beginning, the protagonist mentioned that he was looking for a mansion block called Margaret

House or Margaret Court, represented as a place where Westerners live and where the protagonist ultimately needs to go. At this stage, the way the Subaltern protagonist views Margaret House becomes problematic. As the chaos unfolds following his “unmasking” the “I” discovers that Margaret House does not conform to his expectations.

“Then I looked towards Margaret House. I looked at the grounds. I saw people milling about, in aimless circles. They twitched, moved listlessly, or erratically. They were dark forms, in dark overcoats, and their bodies were all shadows, as if they were in Hades. They moved as if they had invisible lead weights on their feet. They seemed to have no sense of anything. The courtyard was of concrete, but their collective presence made it look dark and sinister and touched with unpredictable danger. There was the merest hint that they were mad...”

(Okri, 2009: 115)

Margaret House is home to people who are shackled and appear to have no future. If the protagonist had previously believed that the Arab in-law's future was predetermined, then this situation mirrors that belief. Thus, the perception of the Western household is now reversed and it is ironically portrayed as even worse than the Arab household.

According to Edward Said's concept of *Mise en Scene* (Said, 1979: 197), there is a predictable way of reflecting on the East. Upon a closer examination, we can identify an overall formula in writing about the East, comprising seemingly smaller elements, concealing a dominant framework. In this case, the protagonist was looking for the luxurious “Margaret House” or “Margaret Court”, while the Arab house is described with the more modest word ‘flat’. However as the stereotypes are unstable in “Belonging”, they create space for resistance against the Orientalist framework.

Eastern Resistance and Mimicry

Stereotypes are used by the West in an attempt to perpetuate power that has helped shape the colonial discourse. This discourse is evident in the interactions found in “Belonging” and in the way the characters are depicted. The protagonist serves as an agent for Western perspectives, or more broadly as a representation of an Eastern individual influenced

by Western views of the East. While implicitly defined as an insider, he adopts a stereotypical narrative of the Arab people in the story, as if he is looking from an external perspective.

The stereotypes used by the protagonist reinforce the colonizer's view of the colonized. The narrator, the main character with an Eastern identity in the story, is the subject, while other characters such as the host, the in-law, and others are interpreted as Eastern objects. An interesting contradiction exists in his position as both the recipient and conductor of stereotypes. Stereotypes are predominantly harmful to people with lower social status becoming targets of those in power. In this case, however, the stereotyping is done by someone from the East, showing the ambivalence in positions and the lack of merit in reducing individuals or cultures to fitting the label of one of two binaries. Through the eyes of the protagonist, the binaries materialize in the expectation or impression versus the reality he encounters upon arrival. These binary oppositions are found, for example, in the following data:

Margaret House

"Originally I was searching for Margaret House, a mansion block."

(Okri, 2009: 111)

"Then I looked towards Margaret House. I looked at the grounds. I saw people milling about, in aimless circles. They twitched, moved listlessly, or erratically. They were dark forms, in dark overcoats, and their bodies were all shadows, as if they were in Hades."

(Okri, 2009: 115)

Arab Flat

"The flat was cluttered with items of a rich family life."

(Okri, 2009: 111)

"This man seemed weighed down. There was an air about him of one whose roads were closed, whose future was determined, whose roles were fixed. He was, in the worst sense of the word, middle-aged; with no freedom, even to think independent thoughts."

(Okri, 2009: 113-114)

The discourse above reveals that the positions of Margaret House and Arab House are ambiguous in two aspects. Firstly, Margaret House, symbolizing the Western world, is for the protagonist the last stop in the world, because he "had nowhere else to go". This can be read as a foreboding to what is revealed at the end of the story, where Margaret House turns out to be reminiscent of the underworld of Hades. Secondly, the Arab house, described as a "flat", is considered more appealing than Margaret House. This ambiguity undermines the hegemony of colonial thought as the "*Mise en Scene*" is not monolithic and becomes fragmented.

Stereotypes are employed to put people in an inferior position. Racist notions go hand in hand with stereotypical constructions that are negative and demeaning. These notions and constructions can then be used to justify the hegemonic relations between the East and the West. The colonial discourse is thus not a simplification of the identity of the formerly colonized, but a very deliberate and self-serving misrepresentation of a social reality. Stereotyping, according to Bhabha (1994: 107) is the starting point of the formation of the colonial discourse, both for the colonizer and the colonized. In "Belonging" we can detect how the gap in the rhetoric can be used to counter the colonial discourse.

Stereotyping is indeed a Western attempt to perpetuate its power. Through colonial discourses, the colonizers maintain a strategic position by confining the formerly colonized within predetermined boundaries. However, these stereotypes are unstable and lack a valid foundation, which can be used by those who are stereotyped. This instability is illustrated in the short story "Belonging" as well as in the broader context of colonialism. Both language and its use in this context are inconsistent and fluid, making the relationship between signifier and signified arbitrary. These views cannot be dictated by one party alone but must be shared by both. The instability in the short story "Belonging" allows the Western stereotype to deconstruct itself.

Eastern resistance can fill the gap that is left by this instability. Stereotypes can be undermined, not by relying on other stereotypes, but by themselves. The Western discourse in this story, embodied by the postcolonial character "I", cannot be seen as fully Western by Western standards. This is illustrated when he is mistaken as an in-law of an Arab family,

which indicates that he has similar features as those of the family. However, the protagonist disentangles himself from the stereotypes. At the end of the story, the protagonist chooses his own path deviating from his earlier track to Margaret House and before moving 'on', once again returning to the Arab family. In the end the "I" declares: "*Then I changed direction, and went back towards the crowd, then out to the street, towards a life of my own*" (Okri, 2009: 115–116). With this statement, the protagonist rejects being an Easterner who sees the East through Western eyes. He did not correspond, nor did he agree, with the stereotype. He headed toward the path of freedom, his own path that is free from Western stereotypes. At the end of the story, the character disappears, allowing us to focus on the author's message.

Resistance by the Author

Resistance is not only evident in the story but also resides within the author himself. Ben Okri, born in Nigeria and educated in England, learned to write in a style that was influenced by Western literary conventions. How he wrote about an Arab in "Belonging" reflects a Western perspective. In *Tales of Freedom*, Okri's writing also demonstrates resistance and defiance. In stories such as "Music for a Ruined City", "The Racial Colourist", and others, the author positions himself as a black writer, challenging the dominant narratives and stereotypes that have been perpetuated by Western literature. Notably, in "Belonging". Okri shows resistance through mimicry, which becomes a mockery, imitating the Orientalist writers' style. In doing so, he reveals himself as "almost the same but not white" (Bhabha, 1994: 128).

Ben Okri rejected, resisted, and mocked colonial discourse through his writing. In "Belonging," he displays the binary opposition between Arab-Western, Arab-Arab, and Western-Western. These oppositions are not fixed and stable, and Okri used them repeatedly (*Mise en Scene*). In this case, he is not trying to marginalize one perspective over another but to destabilize them. One example of this is his exploration of the Orientalist narrative, as he attempts to mimic the Orientalist style in his writing. However, his imitation is not perfect, as seen in the story where the protagonist's guise as a fake in-law is revealed by the Arabs. More than that, the protagonist sees the vast difference between himself and the Arab in-law. Okri's way of removing his character from the Eastern

and Western contexts at the end of the story serves as an effective mockery of the fallacies, excesses, and differences of his mimicry.

CONCLUSION

Orientalism (the Western view of the East) in Ben Okri's short story "Belonging" portrays the Arab family as patriarchal, rigid, and shackled. This image is represented through the experience of the "I" with the Arab family, represented by the Arab host and in-law. His views are based on the stereotypes of Western colonial discourse. In this story, it is demonstrated that Orientalism also influences how Easterners perceive themselves and their social networks. However, this stereotyping is self-destructive. It creates instability, leaving gaps for Eastern resistance against Western colonial discourse. The story ends with the liberation of the "I" character, who chose to be free from the views that are constructed about the East. The writer Ben Okri also showed resistance when he employed a form of mimicry and mocked Orientalist writers by writing almost the same. Okri uses *Mise en Scene* in writing about the East and West, comprising seemingly smaller elements and concealing a dominant framework.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

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