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The Chauvinistic Nature of Virtual Platforms: A Digitalized Clash Between the Self and the Other

Abstract

In the bygone time, the ecology of learning had been parsimoniously affiliated with language classrooms, in most cases the teacher-students' scenarios. Later in time, howbeit, the industrious interest in pedagogy had discredited teachers' centred learning in favour of learners' sovereignty. Notwithstanding, the advent of technology had been the most quintessential aspect of modern societies, as it metamorphosed all scopes of life, including the realm of education. The pedagogical sequels of such a phenomenon had been typified in the set of useful materials that had been invested in the process of teaching. More importantly, technology has redefined the process of learning as it stretched its areas. Now, learners can effortlessly retrieve information via Internet and other online sources. Nonetheless, Learners' language learning and their learning about other cultures, especially in online platforms have never befallen in neutral ecologies, including the classrooms and online platforms. One of the prima omnipresent aspects of technology is displayed in its deterministic nature, the way that technology affects learners' learning process, notably learners' perceptions of the world. Beyond shadow of a doubt, technology has never been a sui generis process, able to develop itself without the intervention of human beings. Ergo, online settings are considered as a futile area that can propagate a given group's representations and stereotypes. Under this spirit, learners of English are exposed to myriad kinds of reality distortion, namely those affiliated with their identity pillar, religion. Consequently, any stricture about it is construed as a disavowal for their cultural identities. On the other hand, Western cultures are represented as ideal and overbearing cultures. Positively, these representations' hotbeds are one of the major reasons that lead learners of English to develop negative attitudes towards the Other.

Key words: Self- Other- Culture- - representations - Stereotypes- Prejudices- Attitudes.

1. Introduction :

The relationship between the Self and the Other has never been an intact process that directly relates the two constructs. Per contra, these two pillar agents in communications within cultures are mediated by various percolators. These mediators include the teachers' beliefs, learners' upbringings, and the materials that carry the target culture to the learners. The interplay of both the Self and the Other is attired technological dimensions as technology became among the most important means of teaching, learning and manipulation of views. These robotic tools had been invested to spread ideological dimensions that metamorphosed how the learners perceive the Self and the Other. The relationship between these two constructs is nurtured by means of constant tension that, one the one had paved the way for stereotypical ideas to be propagated via divergent online links, and instigated learners' negative attitudes towards the Other, on the other hand. Claiming the significance of the elements that intervene in the reciprocity that jumbles both constructs, one may suggest that the success of the mediation bottoms on the development of an intercultural competence, a competence that does not differentiate between the Self and the Other on grounds of ethnicity and sexism, but on platforms of tolerance and understanding.

2. The Self and the Other

The concept of the Other has become one of the labyrinthine concepts that permeate current intellectual landscapes, and therefore tackled within heterogeneous cultures and within different communities. Likewise, in politics, one is likely to come across the '*the political Other*'. The same thing is applicable to the other fields such as religion and culture, where "*the religious Other*" and "*the cultural Other*" have become conventional words employed in all forms of speeches and writings (Almilad, Z :2013). Withal, the issue that obligates emphasis does not relate to the forms of the other, but how conglomeratic cultures chauvinistically approach it.

Positively, the concept of the other has never been confined to a particular field of study. Per contra, it appealed to sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, and philosophers, in particular. As to Lacan, J., the discrimination between "the other and Other"¹ is paramount in diving deep in the true meaning of the concept (cited in Homer: 2005). The other (with small o) can be effortlessly identified in infants' behaviour. Infants are predisposed to face the other as they look at the mirror, and hence forming their construal of the other in a form of an ego that meets their desires. The sequel of that process manufactures a cognitive imaginary of the other that is preconceived as unified and coherent self-depiction. Most importantly, this egocentric representation of the other is likely to bring about in us a sense of complete human beings. As to the Other (with capitalised O), Lacan, J., postulates, it excels one's utter subjective ego. The Other, he argues, epitomises the linguistic ecology that beleaguers us. In other words, this understanding of otherness limns individuals' using their language to express their desires. In the same way, it delineates how people's discourse is internalized within one's desires (cited in *ibid.*).

¹ In this paper, the Other with capital "O" is employed, since it embraces perceiving individuals from heterogeneous cultures and from particular linguistic and cultural lens.

Sartre, J.P. was amid the philosophers whose ideas had been cardinal in relation to the understanding of human existence. The existentialist view of the Other is reflected in persons' daily life. Likewise, to probe into the understanding of the Other, Sartre, J.P., recounts the imaginative story of a person who, while listening through the doors' key hole, got caught by someone else, who kept gazing at them strangely (cited in Priest, 2001). Under this spirit, the feeling of shame is contextualized within the presence of the Other. Unquestionably, the other, here, has negative connotations, mainly typified in forming preconceptions and judgments about the self. The negative aspects of the concept of the Other, expressed in most of contemporary European scholars' writings, Almilad, Z. (2013) speculates, are lucidly pictured in Sartre famous mantra "*hell is the others*". Be that as it may, the mammoth duties that the Other occupies, though they circumvent one's freedom, are a quintessential part of who that individual is. To cut it short, the self is part of the Other.

Admittedly, in seeking an understanding of the features of both the self and the Other, the quintessence of each one should be conspicuously identified. In a way, the self can be recognised as such, given the fact that it displays some traits that make it peculiar and distinguishable. The two terms used by Edward Said (1977): Orientalism² and Occidentalism³ serve to illuminate this idea best. The Orient is identified as such, as it typifies certain elements that are absent in the Occident, and in this way the former considers the latter as the Other, as the first preconceives the second as the Other. Howbeit, the reciprocity between these two cultural constructs has never been established on grounds of similarities and divergences that can be reconciled; per contra, most of their contacts are ideologically loaded (cited in Ruwaili, M. and Bazighi, S.: 2002).

A successful communication between the self and the Other bottoms, to a great extent, on the ability to put oneself in the position of another. Empathy, under this spirit, is the skill that teachers should be au courant of so as to be charted within their course objectives. In the same way, learners need to develop it to become intercultural mediators. Howbeit, the obstruction, here, resides in the fact that in looking at others, one is predisposed to use their own cultural lens, which prioritise the self and underestimate the Other. Paul Ricoeur in his analysis of the nature of the self, identified two cardinal relational features that lead to a better understanding of both the self and the Other. His hermeneutic⁴ principles mainly embody: primacy of reflection before positioning any construct, opposing the selfhood to sameness, and finally drawing the dialectic ties between the self and the Other. Ergo, any study that calls upon the intervention of the three elements, Paul Ricoeur calls, '*the hermeneutics of the self through a triple mediation*' (cited in *ibid.*). Likewise, the dialectic relationship between the self and the Other is more momentous than the antecedent two features, since it elucidates how the self relates to the Other in social settings. He claims that Otherness has never been autonomous in relation to the self; on the contrary, '*it is part of the meaning and the ontological constitution of the selfhood*'. He further expounds that this relationship is mediated by

² **Orientalism** is a concept employed by historians and literary and cultural studies scholars, including writers, designers and artists from the West to limn particular aspects of Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures (Wikipedia).

³ **Occidentalism** is used to describe the image of 'The West' in two elemental ways "*stereotyped and sometimes dehumanizing views on the Western world, including Europe and the English-speaking world; and ideologies or visions of the West developed in either the West or non-West.*" (Wikipedia).

⁴ **Hermeneutics** refers to: "*the science of interpretation, especially of the Scriptures; the branch of theology (the study of religions) that deals with the principles of Biblical exegesis*". (Dictionary.com).

the feature of 'passivity'⁵ that is shared by both the self and the Other. In other words, the self by means of passivity, in some actions, is the Other. Thus, the Other turns to be '*the variety of experiences of passivity intertwined in multiple ways in human actions*' (cited in *ibid.*). This feature also subsidizes the connection between both elements and obstructs them from founding autonomous juxtaposing grounds.

3. Online Representations

Baker (2007) highlights some cardinal aspects of media representations as he underscores the fact that online images, texts and information, though forsaken as being crystalline representations of reality, are "*someone's vision of it*". This claim accompanies the fact that those representations are subjected to many human variables such as thoughts and ideologies. Interestingly, media representation, unlike other types of it, is seductive and tempting. In this way, in media, as it percolates two divergent sides, "*place us at a remove from reality*". Baker (*ibid.*) maintains that:

Every time we encounter a media text, we are not seeing reality, but someone's version of it. This may seem like an obvious point, but it is something that is easily forgotten when we get caught up in enjoying a text.... The media place us at one remove from reality: they take something that is real, a person or an event and they change its form to produce whatever text we end up with. This is called mediation. You should be looking for this with any media text.

Positively, there are multifarious forms of mediations and representations. Be that as it may, people are likely to be more cognizant of TV products' representations such as Films than others. As to the first category, people have ambient knowledge as to the divergent phases of film production, including acting, rehearsal, alternation, and all human agents who contribute to the film production. In connection with this, representation is operated by means of the knowledge persons develop or come up with as they watch the film. By contrast, news, that is hotbeds for representations and mediations, is profoundly persuasive since it penetrates persons' credibility. News is a spokesman of truth, one may argue; but in reality, it comes to be a mere form of mediation since, as clarified by Baker (*ibid.*) "*...someone has decided that these are the few news items that are the most "newsworthy" and has chosen the shots that are used to tell the stories...*".

Hall (1997:121) maintains that representation is an ambivalent concept that triggers off two main distinguished meanings. The first meaning is "*to present*", "*to image*", "*to depict*" something. The second meaning triggers off the idea of something that is "*already there, and through the media, has been represented*". Representations, though, in most cases do not picture reality truly, represent us. Hall (*ibid.*122) comments:

⁵ **The passivity** can be understood in three main forms: the experience of one's body and its relation to the world, the experience of the self and the foreign, and the experience of the link between the self and the self, what Ricoeur calls '*consciousness*'. (cited in Reagan, C. 1996).

We probably don't say that very often these days; you may not think they represent us very well, but they're sort of *supposed* to represent us, and in that sense, they *stand in* for us. They are our representatives, and where we can't be, they can be. So the notion of something which images and depicts, and that which *stands in for* something else, both of those ideas are kind of brought together in the notion of representation.

Representations as a process operate at multifarious levels such as appearance, behaviour and prototypes. More important than this, these forms of manipulation influence the very nature of meaning itself before it reaches the audience. Cultural studies are noticeably involved in analyzing the differences between the meaning in reality and its distorted version delivered via media. However, the question of meaning is the source of the problem within representation, since meaning is bound to promiscuous variables, including the setting, the means available, and most importantly the agents who, by bringing divergent ideologies and conceptualization of the world, interpret the events differently, if not oppositely (ibid.). Under this spirit, representations should be understood as an mammoth process that vividly shapes events. In this sense, these forms of reality depiction are "*not an after-the event-activity*"; on the contrary, events stem their existential aspects from representation, and therefore an event "*has no fixed meaning, no real meaning in the obvious sense, until it has been represented*" (ibid.). Representations are a quintessential part of the events we are likely to encounter in our daily life, and hence, to use Hall's words, are constitutive elements of a distorted reality.

Likewise, the context that shapes representations needs to be emphasized, including cultural, social, and historical backgrounds. Under this spirit, an understanding of representations would positively call upon the culture where they emerge and progress. Culture turns to be a primary element since "*Culture is a way in which we make sense of or give meaning to things of one sort or another*" (ibid.). In this sense, culture turns to be a uniting agent that, by means nurturing common understandings and interpretations of things, develops shared meanings and therefore makes sense of the whole world. Differently put, culture, as it brings about "*maps of meaning*", yokes people's visions of the world. Undoubtedly, culture "*is not just sort of the values and things which we happen to have been born into. It literally is the way without which we would find the world unintelligible*" (ibid.).

The hegemonic view of media representation stresses the bias of the process in question. Incontestably, there are other perspectives to media that prioritize their boons. Pluralistic approaches to media representation emphasize the fact that media are so advantageous to human existence inasmuch as they are "*diverse, with a wide range of available choices for consumers*". Advocates of such a view postulate that people's consensus is the one that affects media representations. Thus, "*If particular representations are dominant, pluralists argue, it is because they are popular among the audience, not because powerful media institutions are 'pushing' a particular ideology*" (Baker, ibid.).

3.1. Methodology

Dealing with cultural issues has always created problems for researchers, given the complexity of the concept studied. The advent of the Internet, though it abetted a lot in reducing distances among researchers and research participants, it made the study of culture more arduous as, in technological terms, one is likely to come across digital cultures⁶ and online cultural identities. For this reason, this part of the study diversified its methodological tools so as when completed, it will hopefully pour in the stream of valid researches and studies that can enlighten some minds and initiate other future studies.

In this paper, the most useful website used by learners of English will be analyzed from the vista of computer-mediated discourse analysis⁷, with the emphasis on Western and European representations of different cultures. This section posits that these online platforms purposefully do not portray divergent cultures in the same way, mainly through the distortion of some susceptible parts of known cultures, and systematically the embellishment of their cultures and their allies'.

Beyond shadow of a doubt, the concept culture is rather an inclusive concept that depicts multifarious elements and behaviours, including technological boom, to boot. For such a reason, and since culture as a process cannot be encapsulated in this work, some aspects of cultures are going to be contrasted within online platforms, depicting ideological perspectives. These aspects are purposefully chosen since they are believed to be the pillars of any culture, and on which lot of controversies emanate, let alone their decisive roles in developing learners' negatives attitudes and stereotypes, that unquestionably obstruct the learning process. The following cultural aspects are going to be analyzed cross-culturally via Internet representations within the software Google⁸:

- ✓ Behaviours .

- ✓ National identities, namely Arabs, European and Americans, Africans.

- ✓ Customs and traditions

⁶ **Digital cultures** are the cultures that emanate from the use of the Internet.

⁷ **Computer-mediated discourse analysis** is the application of the rules of discourse analysis to the study of computer mediated communication

⁸ **Google** is “an American multinational corporation specializing in Internet-related services and products. These include online advertising technologies, search, cloud computing, and software” Wikipedia.

3.1.2. Online Representations of the Arabs, the Africans and the Westerners

3.1.2.1. Arabs' Online Representations

100 pictures which represent the Arabs online had been retrieved from the Internet (via Google image). They have been classified in the categories mentioned below⁹. The analysis conducted had focused on the topics and the themes these pictures share in common, in addition to the negative as well as the positive connotations they trigger off. The graph below elucidates the common stereotypes of the Arabs identified in the love of music, dance and fan. Under this spirit, the pictures depict different music TV shows and miscellaneous parties organized within the Arab world. The other negative stereotype that is gelled to the Arabs relates to the daily conflicts and the demonstrations that are accompanied by clashes in the Arab world. The stereotype, within this vista, stands for the Arabs as aggressive and uncivilized people. Last but not least, some pictures represent the Arabs as organizers of useless summits. The graph below clarifies the point:

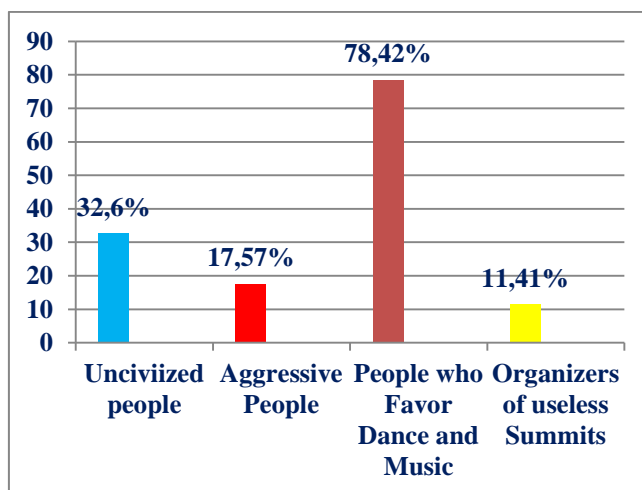


Figure 1: Arabs' Online Representations

Media, in the light of the arguments provided above, have never been a neutral source of information. Unquestionably, these means are useful tools for research developments and studies to be carried out. But, the other seamy side reveals a dark perspective that cannot be denied. Among the quintessential aspects of media is that they influence morals, values, if not an utter view about the whole world. They "*direct and orient one's feelings and thoughts and dictate to one who one "may abhor", who "may sympathize" with, who "may trust", and who "may have misgivings about"*" (Ridouani: 2011). Media representations are distinguished from the other types of forms of thoughts in their recurrence of images, ideas, news, etc. In such a way, their thoughts *will be «mythologized"*. Thus, when one seeks truth, they are not that afraid of the set of the lies they come across, but they are more frightened to deal with myths. Shaheen, J. (1990:12) uses the following quotation by President John

⁹ Here too, we typed the word "Arabs" with no specification as to orienting the research towards implicit aims. Neutrality had been an ethical issue on which this research bottoms on.

Fitzgerald Kennedy¹⁰ to explain the point: "*The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive and realistic.*" The myth that media propagate describes the Arabs as people who "live in mythical kingdoms of endless desert dotted with oil wells, tents, run-down mosques, palaces, goats, and camels" (Ridouani, *ibid*).

Truly, the Arabs' representations by the West are not a novel issue to be addressed in media studies. On the contrary, the stereotypical relationships among the two cultures had accompanied the very contact between the Arabs and the Westerners over the bygone times. Now, with the advent of miscellaneous types of media, these distortions of reality are even ubiquitous as far as divergent locations are concerned, in most cases with West representing the Arabs as «*Other*" or "*Enemy*". Here, a Western representation of Islam limpidly explains the idea:

The term Islam as it is used today seems to mean one simple thing, but in fact is part fiction, part ideological label, part minimal designation of a religion called Islam. Today Islam is peculiarly traumatic news in the West. During the past few years, especially since events in Iran caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it known. But this coverage is misleadingly full, and a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances Islam has licensed not only patent inaccuracy, but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility (Edward Said, 2003).

The Western descriptions of the Arabs via a set of stereotypes have gone through distinguished processes due to a set of events that charted the streams of representations. Ridouani (2011) observes that the "*stereotypical images of Arabs and Muslims are intact; the sole difference between the past and the present lies chiefly in the means and not in the content*". Interestingly, the Arabs in the bygone centuries, had been described in literary works as "*erotic, primitive, ignorant, and slave trader*"; however, with the advent of technology and the emergence of media of all kinds, new labels had been well designed. Today, we are more likely to come across names such as "*terrorist*", "*fundamentalist*" and "*blood-thirsty*". Shaheen, J. (1990:12) observes that:

Research verifies that lurid and insidious depictions of Arabs are staple fare. The Arab Muslim continues to surface as the threatening cultural "Other." As John Esposito says, "Fear of the Green Menace [green being the colour of Islam] may well replace that of the Red Menace of world communism. . . . Islam is often equated with holy war and hatred, fanaticism and violence, intolerance and the oppression of women.

¹⁰ **John Fitzgerald "Jack" Kennedy** , "commonly known by his initials **JFK**, was an American politician who served as the 35th President of the United States from January 1961 until he was assassinated in November 1963".(Wikipedia)

The Westerners are not the only ones who represent the Arabs and Islam, in particular as a threat; the Europeans too, have such a representation of the Arab world, a world that is a hotbed for menace and instability. And, to operate against such a danger, Westerners and Europeans instrumentalise all the tools at hand, including media, to do what they call " *defending themselves*" (Ridouani,2011). Additionally, in media most importantly, the image of all that is Arab is related to bad values and atrocious behaviours grouped in one category described as «barbaric, *uncivilized, and anti-democratic*". Moreover, the Arabs are categorized in one static frame of representations. Thus, Arabs' representations in media do not take the diversities within the Arab world, a diversity that permeates cultures, religions, traditions and ways of thinking and acting. Arabs are scapegoated for things that they are accused of, and hence they are victimized within a complex world veiled by media manipulators. The Western process of generalization is clarified by Shaheen's J. (1990: 12) comment:

Muslims are lumped together and our expectations are based more on stereotyping than on empirical research, according to Esposito. All too often the "coverage of Islam and the Muslim world concludes there is a monolithic Islam out there somewhere, believing, feeling, thinking and acting as one." The stereotypical Muslim presented to Americans resembles Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, or Iraq's Saddam Hussein; the imagery "has profoundly affected American perceptions of Islam and the Middle East.

3.1.2.2. Africans' Online Representations

The stereotypical images in relation to the Othered cultures¹¹ are intensified as it comes to the African cultures. Positively, typing of the word "*African*" online reveals the biased nature of the online platforms. 100 pictures had been used to explore the discussed representations. To begin with, most of the pictures retrieved from the Internet provide the stereotype of the Africans as crowded and hungry people who need help and all kinds of aids. The Arabs and the Africans, undoubtedly, share the same negative representation that stands for the aggressive nature of these people. Other chauvinistic pictures stress the primitive nature of the African cultures, served to the Internet users. The lack of education, too, gets its share as far as the African countries are concerned. All these stereotypes pour in the stream of one ironclad representation that depicts the Africans as uncivilised people. The graph below elucidates the data discussed:

¹¹ The Othered cultures denote the Arabs and the Africans.

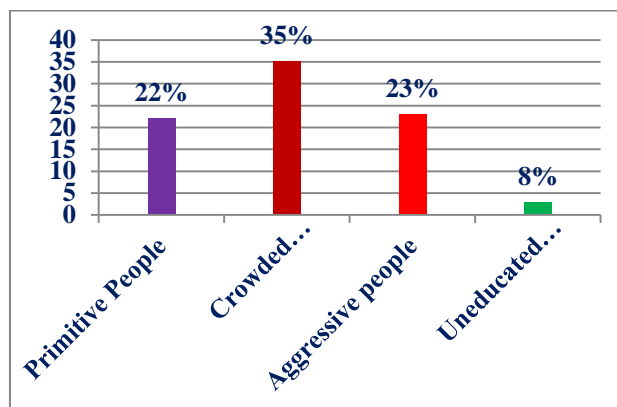


Figure 2: Africans' online Representations

The link that affiliated between Western countries and African's had been mediated by the stereotype of slavery. The stereotype had been tailored religious connotations when the Africans had been forced to adopt Christianity so as to become kind and obedient slaves, and thus creating the stereotype of the Christian black peaceful slaves. (Suleiman, S., 2003: 375). The stereotype had become the culture that the Westerns tried hard to preserve. Right from the first contact with the Africans, the Europeans considered them as beasts that were not able to think properly, if not mindless beings. This stereotype had been functional even when America was declared a new state. The Africans had been stereotyped as beings closer to animals than to human beings, and are superior to the gorillas and the monkeys and inferior as to the Europeans. This stereotype had been a kind of excuse so as to legitimise their trade to the New World. The sequel of these chauvinistic forms of preconceptions had affected the black community to greater extents. In all fields of life, this race had been obstructed from realising their basic dreams, to live a dignified life based on equality and justice. The blacks' abilities had been limited to the activities that require physical efforts such as hard works and sports (ibid. 378).

Suleiman, S. (ibid.) argues that the whites took advantage of everything that could be invested economically. While the blacks had been used so as to construct America, the post period had seen another version to the exploitation of this race. In nowadays' time, the black people are employed in the production of leisure, including songs, dance, etc. The black women are stereotyped as brilliant dancers who perform half-naked performances that reflect their unlimited sexual desires (ibid. 380). As to the black men, they are used to perform some secondary acts in white-men dominated films, highlighting the superiority of the Americans.

The stereotype that depicts the blacks as criminals had been instrumentalised so as to justify the racist attitudes the Americans and the Europeans exercised when dealing with the black community. These black people would look like criminals who are a threat for the whole society, and therefore it is the duty of the white race to take them away from those places to civilize and educate them to become good citizens. (ibid. :382). However, according to some statistics, it is claimed that 80 percent of the persons who consume drugs such as cocaine and commit crimes in America are white Americans (ibid: 383). The Western media have instrumentalised an ideological analogy that

hinges on racist and biased parameters. The analogy that places the white at the top of humanity, the one who is so humane and able to abolish slave trade. Those features that depict this race as powerful, intelligent, able to solve all kinds of problems and to manage all sorts of leadership and administrative occupations, created the desired image of the whites. The blacks, on the other hand, are described as ugly and stupid. These stereotypes have influenced the way people judge the behaviour of both the whites and the blacks. Suleiman, S. (ibid.) argues:

When a white person commits a crime, he is believed to have some circumstances that obliged him to do so. The aim, at the end, is to have him gain affectionate support. In some other cases, the crime is described as being an exceptional individual case that goes against the norms. Consequently, the person is punished as the one who broke the society's laws.

The abolishment of slavery had been a turning point as to the relationship between the blacks and the whites. At least the stereotype that embodies this race only in the frame of submissions and servitude was somehow over. However, the colonial activity had come to create other stereotypes that can justify the process in question. These ideological plans had been motivated by the mantra “*civilizing the black savages*”. And since civilization springs from Europe and America, they were the only ones who had the right to handle the situation. This stereotype had been backed up by means of another one that took the title of “white men’s burden”, a burden of leading the blacks from ignorance to knowledge. Under this motto, the African countries had been exploited and instrumentalised to achieve an economic prosperity in Western societies. The image is even more efficient for those who have not been to the continent. Suleiman, S. (ibid.) comments: “*Most of the Westerns have not visited Africa, though there is a specific image to Africa settled down in Western people’s minds that hinges on primitivism, tribes, hanger, civil war, political instability, corruption, and abuse.* (394).”

3.1.2.3. Westerners¹², Online Representations

Unlike the online representations of the Arabs and the Africans that in most cases depict aggression, violence, and terrorism, those of the Americans denote positive traits. Most of the retrieved images described the Americans as people who are more concerned with human issues, including healthcare, education, and aids of different kinds to the poor people around the globe. The other positive image given to this race emphasizes the organized and the democratic nature of its culture, including the organized ceremonies, unions and peaceful demonstrations. The only negative picture attached to the Americans relates to the issue of obesity that would not harm the American nation as the Arabs and the Africans’ representations would do. The figure below explicates the data discussed:

¹² The West includes many countries, but since America represents it we took it as a sample.

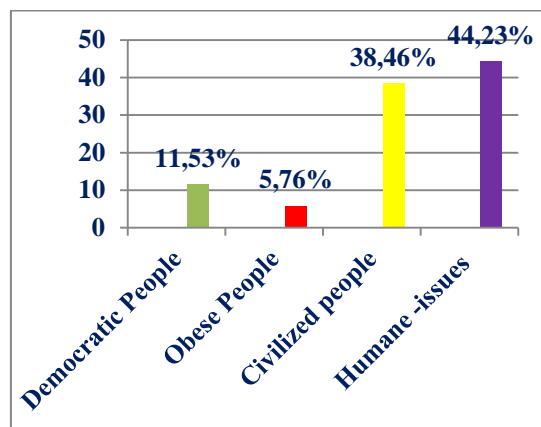


Figure 3: Americans' Online Representations

4. Learners' Stereotypes about the Self and the Other

The previous section elucidated the chauvinistic position online platforms display in relation to the Other, particularly towards the Muslim, the Arabs and the Africans. However, this part, by contrast to the one that proceeds, targets learners' stereotypes about the West and their attitudes in relation to online representations. A questionnaire¹³ had been given to the **75** students of English who are members of the online community studied. It included a set of quantitative questions as well as qualitative ones purposefully, for the sake of cross-checking the findings.

All the learners who have been interviewed via the questionnaire admitted that they access images and videos via Google. In addition to this the majority of them claimed they search for videos and images in relation to their own culture and the target one as well. The role of media and Internet in particular in shaping learners' stereotypes and representations about the other cannot be eschewed. The Americans¹⁴ are among the people who receive a great deal of representations and stereotypes in such online platforms. Learners too, are more likely to link the West to America, and consequently produce miscellaneous kinds of reality distortion towards it. In the graph below, most of the learners believe the Americans to be intellectual people (**27, 77%**). Howbeit, this positive image is contrasted by means of two negative images, including Americans as colonizers (**19, 44%**) and as allies of Israel (**19, 44%**). It is worthwhile noting that these two negative images are developed due to historical backgrounds, ethnic conflicts within the cultures involved, and the political discourse within learners' community¹⁵. Other stereotypes picture the Americans as *“most hated societies in the world, criminals, powerful, mind-users, creative*. The Figure below elucidates the data discussed.

¹³ The questionnaire is displayed in the appendix

¹⁴ The question of the questionnaire goes this way “how can you describe the Americans?”

¹⁵ Political discourse is believed to be effective in the process of stereotyping and representing culture due to the employment of religious texts in such kinds of speeches.

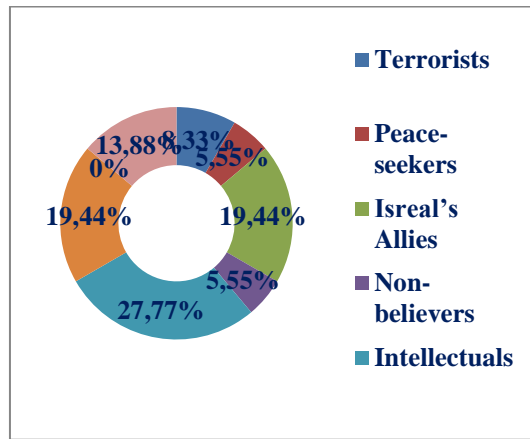


Figure 4: Learners' Online Representations and Stereotypes about the Americans

Most of the learners who have been asked the question in relation to the way they stereotype the Europeans¹⁶, have pictured this race as intellectual (26, 47%). They also maintain that the Europeans are colonizers due to the historical heritage they call upon in the process of stereotyping and representing the Other. What can be noticed here, is that both the Americans and the Europeans are pictured almost in the same way, despite the fact that each one epitomises divergent histories and cultures. The body of knowledge in relation to the nature of stereotypes and representations serves as a lighthouse in relation to this, since these kinds of reality distortion group people of different cultures in certain unitary categories. The same thing is applicable to the Muslims who, to some extent, are positioned within the locus of terrorism. In addition to this, some learners think that the Europeans are racists (17, 64%), while others describe them as “non-believers (12, 5%). Other stereotypes centre on the following ideas: “civilized, unified, developers, friends, and “they hate Muslims”. The graph below details the findings.

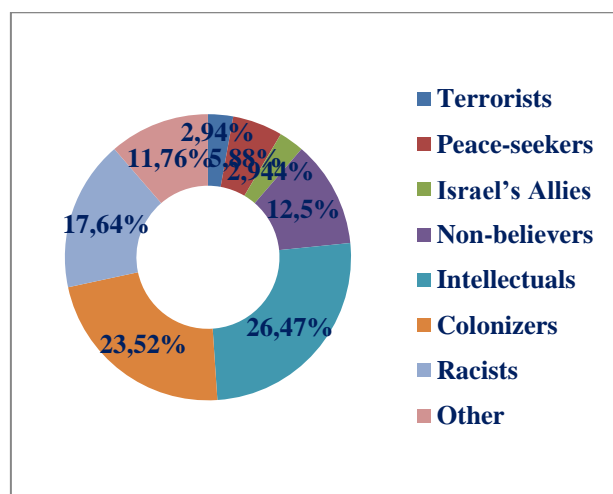


Figure 5: Learners' Online Representations and Stereotypes about the Europeans

¹⁶ The second question of the questionnaire goes this way “ how can you describe the Europeans?”

The effects of representations on learners' development of certain stereotypes are lucid in the graph below. These forms of reality distortion and simplification serve as hotbeds for learners to develop ethnocentric attitudes in relation to the Other. Learners, as it is shown below, fall in the trap of generalization, the natural process of stereotyping others. More precisely, the learners interviewed conjecture that all the Arabs are believers (27, 58%). They seem to overlook the fact that in some Arab countries, numerous non-believers co-exist with believers.¹⁷. Interestingly, as opposed to the belief that Westerners are the enemies of Palestinians, the image of the Arabs as allies of Palestinians is among the ironclad representations that the learners hold in their minds (20, 68%). Beyond shadow of a doubt, this issue is debatable, and therefore requires other studies that cavilingly permeate politicized and religious discourses. Other representations and stereotypes about the Arabs include the following descriptions “They treat all men as their brothers”, “weak”, “empty-minded”, “narrow-minded”, “separated”, “peaceful”, “non understood people by other communities”, and “brave”. The graph below explicates the findings:

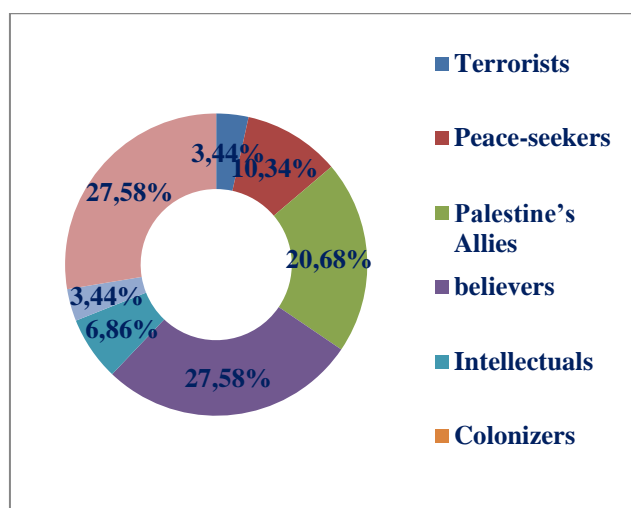


Figure 6: Learners' Online Representations and Stereotypes about the Arabs

5. Discussion :

Positively, our learners are exposed to myriad kinds of reality distortion that is enhanced by means of online platforms. The Internet, despite its utility in the field of studies and conducting research works, propagates divergent kinds of stereotypes and representations. These kinds of manipulations are even accentuated as learners lack intercultural skills that allow them think critically as they come across those forms of reality distortion. In addition to this, the absence of teachers as intercultural mediators intensifies the heat that brings the Self and the Other into contact. Consequently, our learners are prone to respond to the stereotypes they come across online in a negative way, and hence in turn launch a vicious circle of reality distortion. In connection with this, the role of

¹⁷ Believers, according to the interviewed learners are limited to Muslims only.

education is momentous, as to developing learners' awareness in relation to the use of technology. The aim of teaching languages and about other cultures should be enhancing learners' critical thinking. To put in a nutshell, education to prepare the learners to become intercultural citizens.

6. Conclusion :

Beyond shadow of a doubt, the online platforms that have become another venue for learners to develop their cultural knowledge are instrumenstalisied chauvinistically to scatter some negative representations and stereotypes about the Other. The biased nature of these online ecologies inspects the very nature of technology that, according to the prospect that this study adopts, is humanised and deprived of its robotic and mechanistic qualities. The neutrality of such online spaces is substituted for implicit intentions loaded by discriminatory, racist attitudes and evil wills. Learners, though it is undeniable to eschew the amount of knowledge they develop in relation to online spaces, are exposed to a flow of information along stereotypical ideas and depictions, including their own culture. Undeniably, this paper divulged the seamy side of the Internet, and revealed that representations of cultures are but an activity of power and superiority. On the one hand, the West is represented as the cascade of good values, social democratic issues, civilization and modernity. The Orient, per contra, is the epitome of moral decay, dehumanization, and terroristic behaviours. In the same stream, pour the online representations of the Africans who are described as the source of famine, poverty, and aggression.

In such unbridled online ecologies where the human percolators, namely the teachers are substituted for manifold links of distractions, the chary infiltration of the knowledge that the learners come across is too low. Unquestionably, this environment instigates the spread of stereotypical and prejudicial affiliations between the self and the Other. Likewise, the lack of learners' intercultural awareness and their self-centredness along the chauvinistic representations of learners' culture, undeniably foment a kind reciprocity between the two sides, nurtured and loaded by mistrust, if not hatred. Lucidly, the learners respond, in most case negatively to the online representations they have been introduced to. Furthermore, these learners are not aucourant of the clear-cut distinction between the religions and religious beings, and religious interpretations. Consequently, they label all that is the Other in the frame of "unbelievers". In the light of the discussions in relation to online representations and learners' attitudes about online distortion of their culture, the background knowledge that learners bring to the EFL classrooms obligates chary exploration and rigorous analysis.

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Appendix 1

Learners' Questionnaire

This questionnaire explores learners' representations and stereotypes about the self (their own culture) and the Other (Western cultures). Parallel to this, it delves into learners' attitudes about this online reality distortion of both the self and the Other.

1- Do you use social media?

Yes

No

2- Do you access images and videos via Google

Yes

No

3- Have you ever tried to look for some images and videos about your own culture using Google?

Yes

No

4- Have you ever tried to look for some images and videos about Western cultures using Google?

Yes

No

5- How can you describe the Americans?

- Terrorists
- Peace-seekers
- Israel's Allies
- Non-believers? (كفار)
- Intellectuals (متقفين)
- Colonizers?
- Racists
- Other descriptions

6- How do you describe the Europeans?

- Terrorists
- Peace-seekers
- Israel's Allies
- Non-believers? (كفار)
- Intellectuals (متقفين)
- Colonizers
- Racists
- Other descriptions

7- How do you describe the Arabs?

- Terrorists
 - Peace-seekers
 - Palestine's Allies
 - believers? (مؤمنون)
 - Intellectuals (مثقفين)
 - Colonizers?
 - Racists?
- Other descriptions