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ABSTRACT

“Native Informants and Neo-Orientalism in the
‘War on Terror’ Discourse in Pakistan”

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This paper will reflect on the political culture in Pakistan, where the scene is grim and no one can predict with certainty the future of the country. This is especially so in light of the “war on terror,” in which the US is now heavily involved in *AfPak*. In this context, many Pakistani media specialists and educated elites have been engaged in Orientalism, denial, mythmaking, and complacency with US hegemony. This trend among the elites in Pakistan is partly a result of the impact of 9/11 on the Muslim world, which caused some to argue that violence in Pakistan and by Pakistanis in other places is largely due to the “Arab shift.” There is an attempt to recalibrate Pakistani identity away from its Islamic character that gets conflated with Arabness. This takes place as part of a wider liberal assault, wherein critiques of Islam and the Arab, sugarcoated under the critique of Wahhabi Islam, is in synergy with a post-9/11 global narrative of the *clash of civilizations* that puts Israel and the West on one side, and Arabs and Muslims on the other. Thus, many Pakistani liberal elites participate in anti-Arab racism and Orientalist narratives to avoid being associated with *bad Islam*. Issues of history, culture, and justice tend to be obscured in what is an overly simplified discourse about the “War on Terror” in Pakistan, one that is rigidly polarized. As Talal Asad argues, the concept of terror is an “epistemological object” defined by modernity and attributed to the *non-modern* and *non-liberal*. Hence, in the modern Western imagination, knowledge about what constitutes *terror* is deeply intertwined with ideas about what constitutes civilization and also liberalism. This is a concept that is cultural as well as political. This paper tries to problematize discourses with such heavy ideological baggage.