

## Occident and Orient Dichotomy in Saidian Orientalism

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### Abstract

The Occident (The West) is a term that is borrowed from Latin and translates as sunset. Etymologically point of view, it refers to features of a geographic nature. The orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. There are different types of culture, intertwined histories of human experience, and overlapping territories of human geographies, this article rests upon the recognition of equal interlocution that place the human above the political. In addition to that the further convey the message of Said and for the sake of a serious dialogue and to keep it worthwhile and mutually respectable, it is to be highlighted that ideas, positions, and values can be much more effectively communicated through a naturally pluralistic reality, primarily in the form of peer-to-peer, face-to-face discussions, on the basis that the “Occident” and the “Orient” are willing and equal interlocutors. This helps to build trust and to correct the widespread distorted images. It further entails that neither all of Arab and Muslims’ problems are due to the Western factor, action and intention. Likewise, it is unfair to assume the Western leaders always operate in bad faith as it is unrealistic to believe that they always operate in good faith either. Instead, trust, but verify.

**Key Words:** occident, orient, orientalism, dichotomy, Edward Said

Edward Said’s landmark publication, *Orientalism*, but the critical perspective he offered in the work continues to impact upon the world while it is at the same time refigured in current contemporary contexts. His conception of Occident-Orient dichotomy has been traced to three levels or parameters. Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority that puts the western perspectives in relationships with the orient without losing him the relevant upper land. The first level largely dealt with East-West dichotomy with the “Orient” as its broader parameter. The second layer of conception focused on “Arab-Islam” as its enclosed parameter. The last circle of focus was narrowed to the projection of “Palestine” as the zonal and

focal point of the total framework of the concept. As a result, it is safe to say that Said's view of the concept is reconciliatory and dialogic rather than binary and dichotomous.

However, if Said criticized Orientalism as a reflection of Western ethnocentrism, he castigated nativism as a reversed form of the same concept. It is a cultural and political fact that does not exist in some archival vacuum. It can be shown that what is thought or even done about the orient. Falsifying a dichotomy between "East" and "West" and essentializing the "character" and "psyche" of the "Others" constituted a "human failing" on the part of these two extremes of centricism. He reminded us that "any attempt to force cultures and peoples into separate and distinct breeds or essences exposes not only the misrepresentations and falsifications that ensue, but also the way in which understanding is complicit with the power to produce such things as the 'Orient' or the 'West'". (*Orientalism* 349)

Between the appearance of *Orientalism* in 1978 and *Culture and Imperialism* in the spring of 1993, there have been some interesting and paradoxical years. Edward Said has done a great deal of political writing about the Palestinians and American foreign policy, and he has become a public figure in a sense that would apply to very few literary critics, however respected. But he has not had the sort of public influence he desired. American policy toward the Middle East has remained grimly consistent, as has the quality of public discourse about the world of nations. The fifteen years that separate *Culture and Imperialism* from *Orientalism* have perhaps inevitably prompted an orgy of stocktaking about the direction of Said's career and about the direction of colonial and post-colonial studies, fields he did so much to get started and to shape. The contributions gathered here, which were originally presented at the convention of the Modern Language Association in Toronto in December 1993, were an effort to have a share of the fun. That is probably all the introduction they need.

*Orientalism* was written as an outcry and an assertion of his Palestinian nationalism would be anathema to his view of the "secular" role of the public intellectual which is to open spaces across borders. The shift from the nationalist attitude to humanist consciousness and sacrificing of the affiliation of one's persecution to that of others found their natural culmination in Said understands of the question of Palestine. Yet *Orientalism* is very much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history. I emphasize in it accordingly that neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the other. The greatest irony about Said's influence is the fact that the Palestinian experience of suffering, dispossession, denial, death, and elimination was the very experience which had shaped his Universalist consciousness, his intellectual generosity and ethical wakefulness. Said (2003) adds,

Modern man is progressing. Europe will be regenerated by Asia. The historical law that civilization moves from Orient to Occident.....the two forms of humanity will at last be soldered together. (*Orientalism* 113)

Orientalism is a perspective that sees the culturally, ethnically and historically different other through the eyes of the Western Self. In anthropological works, the perspective has been analyzed in the context of colonialism in which a clear dichotomy of West and non-West is highlighted. However, my research is not only to focus on this simple geo-political dichotomous West/non-West structure that has been a central issue ever since the publication of Said's influential work, but also to pay more attention to the mingling world in which it is hard to draw a clear distinction between West and non-West. In particular, I am interested in the idea of the interwoven positioning of a subject.

Orientalism describes a cross-cultural setting within a realm of exoticism; it is a perspective in which the culturally, historically and ethnically different other is seen through the eyes of the Western Self. It is the nature of this construction that is contentious, because of its political overtones and implications. Said has faulted the two modes of thinking, distinguishing between modernity as an extension of colonization and modernity as a form of cultural contact. Whereas he welcomes the latter as a healthy cultural exercise, he castigates the former as a means of hegemonic cultural force backed up by Orientalist discourse and got materialized in the imperial project. He argues that when culture is a check point at the door of identity, it becomes a gate to the exclusionist system. His critical approach has changed the way of studying the Arabs, and the Arabs' studying themselves.

It does not simply deal with what is 'out there', but involved a complex construction of a body of Knowledge motivated and shaped by interests and power, beside this, it is a desire to bring out an intellectual inquiry on its subject. It is the nature of this construction that is contentious, because of its political overtones and implications.

Western scholars carry with them their own epistemological, methodological and intellectual baggage in analyzing their view of the Orient, and these constructions have political implications, it is not surprising therefore to find Oriental scholars and their sympathizers resisting such discourse. Edward Said has persuasively argued for the ideological nature of such knowledge constructions, and its pernicious influence on Oriental societies and cultures. Therefore, Saidian Orientalism is largely a colonialist, imperialist project, sustained by a false image of scientific objectivity.

It does not simply deal with what is 'out there', but involved a complex construction of a body of knowledge motivated and shaped by interests and power, apart from a desire to carry out an intellectual inquiry on its subject. It is the nature of this construction that is contentious, because of its political overtones and implications. Nowadays, terms such as "Occident", "Occidentalism," "Western" is used to describe a different reality from the past, which necessarily implies a modern culture of consumption, based on economic development and wealth. Said is best known for his examination of representations of the "Orient" in the Western discourse representations that, he argues, legitimated colonial rule. While he takes a critical view of Orientalist representations, he identifies himself as a scholar in the tradition of humanism.

It shows that the Occident-Orient dichotomy is a result of falsified perceptions cherished by certain ideologies and political interests. The stereotypical perception of the Orient is the result of accumulative view based on a given Orientalist tradition and thought, not on actual presentation of facts on the ground. In his discussion of the concept, Said nullifies the invented narrative process that promotes the supposition of determinant factors as a major frame to justify the inclusions and the exclusions of societies, nations, or races at the level of the definition of identity and its cultural, religious, political, social and ethnic associations.

It is revealed that the concept of dichotomy between the Occident and the Orient is nothing but a created myth based on a Western view of the unity of world universal culture. World Culture is a myth created by the Culture of the Center to dominate the periphery in the name of acculturation. There is no One Culture with capital C. There are only multiple cultures, in small c's. Each culture has its own autonomous life, an expression of a people and its history. Cultural interaction throughout history does not mean acculturation, the absorption of small cultures in the periphery by the big Culture of the center, assimilation, imitation, or modeling. It means an equal exchange, a give and take, a two-way movement on the levels of language, concepts, horizons, methods, and values.

It can be concluded that Occident-Orient dichotomy has been constructed and perpetuated over time by ideologically oriented goals and supported by a plenty of theoretical perceptions and assumptions. "East" and "West," though began denoting geographical terms, they have come to assume extra-socio-political and cultural meanings. References to Edward Said's views on Orientalism will also be made. I argue that there is a relationship between Orientalism and politics, even in our contemporary world, not necessarily in the manner envisaged and presented by Edward Said. Though the relationship between the Orient and the Occident has sometimes been conflictual, there have nevertheless been fruitful and significant exchanges and encounters between them in literary world and history.

To sum up, a plea is made that though the scenario in East West relations might at present appear pessimistic, a normative element in favour of inter-cultural and inter-civilization dialogue should be introduced in both academia and politics; and to bring about change and hope for humanity. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and the Occident. Thus, a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, novels, epics, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, destiny, mind and so on.

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