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From Orientalism to Neo-Orientalism: A Study of the "Other"

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Abstract:

Edward Said's Orientalism revolutionized Western scholarship by exposing its deep-seated biases in studying non-Western societies, particularly the Arab-Islamic world. His critique revealed how Western narratives dehumanized the "Orient" through exaggerated differences, exoticization and imperialist assumptions. This intellectual framework, Said argued, distorted objective scholarship, allowing Western scholars to claim superior knowledge over the very societies they studied. This paper examines Said's arguments and their enduring impact on Political Science, Political Philosophy and International Relations. It explores how Orientalist discourse persists in shaping Western narratives, particularly in the post-Cold War era through scholars like Fukuyama and Huntington, as well as in studies on terrorism and democratization efforts in the Arab-Islamic world. Finally, it analyzes the evolution of Orientalism in its modern, neo-Orientalist configuration, which continues to influence global politics and academic discourse.

Keywords: *Imperialism; Neo-Orientalism; Orientalism; Post-Colonial Studies.*

Introduction:

In its essence, Edwards Said's "*Orientalism"* aims to provide an in-depth study of Western scholarship and its relationship to non-Western societies, especially in the academic field of Orientalism, laying the groundwork for a critical rethinking of previously accepted notions of "West" and "Orient", as well as the position (and representation) of the

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"Other[1]" in this dualism formed by a scholarship that was, allegedly, tainted by centuries of colonialist and imperialist discourse. As a discipline, Orientalism is defined, in Said's own words, *"as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: over the Orient."* (Said,1978, p.3). This quasi-ideological scholarship was no more than *"a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness"* (Said, 1978, p.204). It was, as such, a doctrine which had to be studied, scrutinized, criticized, and, above all, deconstructed as a discourse. The process of deconstruction of an almost canonical episteme seen in "*Orientalism*" was highly criticized and called out on its apparent political (instead of scholarly) orientation. Nonetheless, the path was laid open for drastic changes in post-colonial studies.

This polemical work redefined Orientalist studies and perceptions on non-western cultures, as drastic epistemological changes took place in the academic world, accompanied by qualitative changes in the agency of Western and non-Western actors, as well as changes in mutual perception, reviving an important debate that quickly shape-shifted in light of the globalizing phenomena of the twenty-first century. The very term *"*Orientalism" suffered semiotic changes. Bernard Lewis (1982, p.2), in the following years of debate over Said's work, argued that *"(Orientalism) has been emptied of its previous content and given an entirely new one – that of unsympathetic and hostile treatment of Oriental peoples.".* A successful resignification of the term meant that it quickly became pejorative and fell in disuse, being replaced by more personalized variants such as Middle Eastern studies, Arab studies and other regional fields of expertise. Academics and scholars worldwide started taking extra care to avoid being criticized based on a presumption of Eurocentric superiority or unscholarly biases, in an exercise of self-critique and empathy towards their "object" of study.

Said, however, was mainly interested in defining continuity, not change. His work intended to uncover a hidden ideology masking as a

[1] Here, the "Other" refers to an entity, individual, or group that is perceived as fundamentally different from the self or the dominant group. In Hegelian terms, the self-consciousness arises through recognition from the Other, creating a dynamic of dominance and dependence.

complex academic field. Orientalism was not just some sort of conspiracy that only served as a support for imperialist enterprises; the Orientalists themselves were often-times victims of the unawareness of their own prejudices that, consequently, formed distorted notions, representations and analyses of the "Other". It was precisely this masquerade of Orientalism as a pristine, fully neutral and objective academic field that Said set out to deconstruct. It is important to take note that Said was fully aware of the hetero generous nature of Orientalism, either in scope (philology, literature, arts...) or in schools (Anglo-Saxon, French, American…). After all, *"Orientalism was a dynamic and supple system of representations, that, as a style, had a wide array of expressions, and that it helps up a mirror to its time."*(Shatz, 2019) and Said set out to trace its genealogy. The fact that Orientalism was such a wide field of scholarship, with multi-disciplinary approaches to the "Other", is precisely what rendered the integrity and authority of Orientalism more secure and harder to deconstruct. However, this heterogeneity was only reserved to what Said called "manifest Orientalism". In its "latent" form, Orientalism was still based on the same age-old prejudices, constructions and representations that had hardly changed in centuries:

> The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity, which I shall call latent Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth, which I shall call manifest Orientalism. Whatever change occurs in knowledge of the Orient is found almost exclusively in manifest Orientalism; the unanimity, stability, and durability of latent Orientalism are more or less constant. (Said, 1978, p.206).

The "latent" format consolidated the quasi-ideological status of Orientalism, which permeated the field studies of non-Western societies. Although it was not empirically false, Orientalism created a discursive system of subtle discrimination and justifications for the oppression (or "civilizing") of non-Western societies. Said adopted a post-structuralist lens, tracing the genealogy of a "knowledge as power[1]" system (a type of analysis which he borrowed from Michel Foucault), in order to

[1] In Michel Foucault's works, power-knowledge (*pouvoir-savoir*) is defined as the inseparable relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault argues that knowledge is never neutral or purely objective; instead, it is shaped by power relations and, in turn, reinforces those structures of power.

understand how the current form of Orientalism came to be. The methodological premise of Said's work is, as Shatz (2019) argues, to treat Orientalism scholarship *"as a system of representations, sometimes explicit, more often implicit, to produce an Other, the better to secure the stability and supremacy of the Western self"*. The production of the "Other" is one of the major features of Orientalism, since it directly relates with the production of knowledge over the "Other", i.e., the non-Western, providing the scholar with an "object" of study.

The Other and its Representation

The relationship between Westerners and non-Westerners has always been tainted by dualist conceptualizations. The terms "West" and "Orient" are often used to divide the world using an arbitrary imaginary line to separate two undefined pseudo-geopolitical locations. This separation is more than a mere operational concept; it is, in fact, one of the tools used by Orientalists to create a notion of a "we" and a "them". The conceptualization of a "we" indicates an apparent homogenous, fixed and united group; it is this "we" that studies the "Other". This divide, even if not consciously used in scholarship, helped to justify and naturalize, at a more structural level, repeated patterns of exploitation, domination and "civilizing" missions: *"By portraying 'them' as lesser in humanity or lower in the great chain of being, dualism is employed to legitimize some implications of hierarchical power and to show who gets what, when and how."*(Samiei, 2014, p.1146). The dualism applied here has a performative function. It creates a distinct fictional representation of the "Other" that is detached from material experiences and reality. Small differences in culture (for e.g., clothes) are widely exaggerated, creating clichéd stereotypes that, in turn, create analytical foundations that repeat and are repeated by the same previous patterns, in an *ad aeternum* cycle of knowledge production. After all, most academic fields, including Orientalism, are composed by scholars that *"frequently refer to each other, (...) citing (their) works and authors."* (Said,1978, p.23). Inevitably, this means that any inaccurate representations of a culture or people will quickly be disseminated as "truthful" and "scientific" representations, readily accepted and confirmed by its peers as "objective

science".

Dualist scholarship's main goal is to demonstrate not only just superficial or cosmetic differences between Westerners and Orientals, but essential differences that place "Oriental" societies as "second-grade" human societies. The dehumanization of non-Western cultures was pivotal to the legitimation of colonialism and imperialism: throughout history, Western powers were not conquering equals; they were "civilizing" barbarians, who were seen as almost devoid of humanity. Kerboua (2016, p.11) argues that Western conceptions of the Orient, especially in the Middle East, are based on:

> (...) essentialist constructions and reconstructions of Islam, Muslim societies, and Muslim communities in Western societies. The fact that there exist various Islamic trends and traditions, different religious and secular views and movements, different social and cultural varieties of the Muslim world, means the diversity of political and social actors within Muslim countries are all put aside. They leave a vacuum which is filled with an essentialist and culturalist reading grid of a monolithic and unchanging Muslim world.

Orientalism, however, is more than a simple system of representations carried out by Western experts. It is a complex network of interrelated notions and prejudices about the "Orient". Essentialist lens of analysis are not necessarily false, but they necessarily lead to mental shortcuts and gaps of thought, which are promptly filled by the scholar's mental representation of its object of study. Essentialist conceptualizations are inevitably reductionist. They simplify and reduce complex phenomena and cultures to a few, often exaggerated, characteristics and traits. It was not uncommon for "experts" of the 19th and 20th century (and even today) to use the words "violent" or "fanatic" to describe - as if they were an homogenous group - the very different cultures, religions, practices and traditions of non-Western societies. While this gross simplification occurs, objective and rational scholarship is replaced by self-fulfilling prophecies and circular analyses. Unintentionally, the inherent flaws of a methodology based on these principles distorts the meaning of a study: *"Essentialist discourse*

reduces complex, abstract objects to concrete ones, while it also wrongly maintains the same attributes of those objects." (Kerboua, 2016, p.11).

Any representation needs an observer and an object to be observed. The fact that the relation of power in the last centuries between the West and the "Orientals" was widely in favor of European power meant that the European observer was incapable of fully detaching from its position of a "superior" foreigner:

> For if it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignoreor disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, thenit must also be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of his actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. And to be a European or an American in such a situation is by no means an inert fact. It meant and means being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient. (Said, 1978, p.11)

However, we should not mistake this for an inability of Western experts to study the "real" Orient or as a simple *ad hominem* attack on the privilege of the observer. Said's arguments throughout *Orientalism* indicate that, in his opinion, the "Orient" is, in itself, a constituted entity. What Said argues is that the cataloguing of radically "different" inhabitants (who apparently bear similar essential characteristics) of a certain undefined region known simply as the "Orient" does not permit an objective, serious and, above all, horizontal study of the "Other". The repetition of this pattern of scholarship leaves *"the Orient as something whose existence is not only displayed but has remained fixed in time and place"* (Samiei, 2014, p.1146). According to the Orientalist tradition, the "Oriental" does not progress; he is doomed to remain "primitive "and "barbaric". Like a biologist studies a species of an endangered animal (which is guided by its essentially primordial instincts), so does the Western scholar in his approach to the "Oriental". Aggregated to this prejudice comes the tacit assumption that the Orient cannot represent itself. The works of non-Westerners were (and, frequently, still are) ignored by Western academies or are seen as mere additions or secondary

sources to the established doctrine. In his study of the "Other", the Western scholar consults his Eurocentric-trained peers first and the local sources second (if at all). As Said conclusively argues in his 1995 revisiting of *Orientalism*, *"since the Orientals cannot represent themselves, they must therefore be represented by others who know more about Islam than Islam knows about itself." (p.7).* The lack of bilateralism in the production of knowledge transforms the apparent West-East dualism into a one-sided caricature of the "weaker" side and segregates the Oriental from his own history and culture.

Latent Orientalism

Latent Orientalism is an unconscious positivity based on constitutive myths about the "Other" that are so entrenched in our daily lives that they are deemed as undeniably true. It is characterized by very subtle (but no less damaging) representations of the benevolence of the West or of a handicap/lag (regarding their state of "civilization") of "Orientals" in comparison with their Western counterparts. Latent Orientalism is subtly ideological and political; it is a natural consequence of an epistemology that is flawed in its basis and lacks criticism in its methodology. The existence of an "object" of study, i.e., the "Oriental" - which is totally removed from any agency from non-Western societies in the production of knowledge about them - turns it into an only passive, inert and unchanging object. Western perceptions of the "Orient" did not change for centuries; the West progressed, the "Orient" did not. This led to the conclusion that latent Orientalism **"***was profoundly conservative - dedicated, that is, to its self- preservation. Transmitted from one generation to another, it was a part of the culture, as much a language about a part of reality as geometry or physics."*(Said, 1978 p. 222), as it was backed up by circular exchanges of knowledge about non-Western societies within Western scholarship.

Even though adjectives like "savage" or "primitive" might not be applied directly and no direct attacks to the "Other" were made in some areas of Western scholarship, scholars were nonetheless writing their works from a moral, political and economic pedestal. Francis

Fukuyama's "*The End of History and the Last Man"(1992)* is an example of Orientalism in its latent form. Fukuyama's work is based on two pillars: firstly, that history is a more or less linear evolutionary process; and, secondly, that Western liberal democracy should be the final form of government for all nations, thus reaching the "end" of history. The Hegelian notion of history as a linear progress, on which Fukuyama based his theory, implies that history has different stages and that we can qualify how advanced a society is by ascertaining on what stage that society is currently in. Inherently, this linearity forms a quantitative scale: the closer the society is to the "end of history", i.e., western liberal democracy, the more it has progressed. Subtle prejudices about the "Other" are best observed on how Fukuyama justifies the apparent superiority of Western liberal democracy on the basis of the moral freedom it provides, which, he argues, is a direct product of the predominant Christian religion of the West:

> The idea of freedom received its penultimate form in Christianity (…) because this religion was the first to establish the principle of the universal equality of all men in the sight of God, on the basis of their faculty of moral choice or belief. That is, Christianity maintained that man was free (…) to choose between right or wrong. (…) Christian equality, by contrast, is based on the fact that all men are equally endowed with one specific faculty, the faculty for moral choice. (…) Christianity's contribution, then, to the historical process was to make clear to the slave this vision of human freedom, and to define for him in what sense all men could be understood to have dignity. (Fukuyama, 1992, pp.196- 197)

The importance of this excerpt is not on what is written but in its omissions. What Fukuyama suggests here, in a blatant exercise of Western narcissism, is that one of the late stages of historical progress is the adoption of Christianity or, at least, the adoption of Christian morality, which is obviously prevalent in Europe and North America. Any society that failed to adopt Christian morality also failed to be a "free" society and was condemned to be dominated by "savages" who were unable to distinguish between "right or wrong". Absent from

Fukuyama's analysis is the fact that most religions, including Islam[1], also advocate for equality among men, at least formally. Inequalities, both in Christian and non-Christian countries are usually explained by political, economic and cultural decisions made by statesmen, not by the inalienable nature of a specific religion. For Fukuyama, liberal democracy was seen as the best form of government because it was able to transform "slaves" into their own "masters", as they were able to have full agency over their lives. Christianity is seen as a liberator religion and as a mechanism for an ascendency from "slave" to "master". What is implied here is that any non-Christian society is an uncivilized realm of oppression of the "masters" towards their "slaves". This characterization is subtly intertwined with the usual qualification of non-Western countries (usually Islamic ones) as "authoritarian", "despotic" or "repressing". In this line of argumentation, the Orient is deprived of its "dignity" because it was not able to grasp and assimilate the complex moral system that Christianity provided to the West. The "Other" is, therefore, an amoral being that is always one step behind. If the Orient wants to progress in history, it must behave like the West.

Not only did Fukuyama try to justify Western superiority in moral terms, he also tried to justify it in economic and political terms, this time by demonstrating a successful case of integration of Orientals in the Western dominated liberal institutionalism:

> What Asia's post-war economic miracle demonstrates is that capitalism is a path toward economic development that is potentially available to all countries. No underdeveloped country in the Third World is disadvantaged simply because it began the growth process later than Europe, nor are the established industrial powers capable of blocking the development of a latecomer, provided that country plays by the rules of economic liberalism. (Fukuyama, 1992, p.103)

The first thing to notice here is the assumption that capitalism, an

[1]"All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a White has no superiority over a Black nor a Black has any superiority over a White except by piety and good action" - *The Last Sermon Of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.).*

economic system created and exported from Europe, is a necessary stage of development for every single country in the world. This assumption is not exclusive to the neoconservative's circles from which Fukuyama hails from, as most Marxists (following the Hegelian tradition of linear history) admit the same premise of capitalism as an inherent necessity for human progression. This logic is mainly used to justify the international neo-liberal institutionalism maintained and constructed by Western powers, by creating a system of permanent structural oppression that requires every non-Western actor to adapt to it or perish in isolation. But the most curious remark here is how Fukuyama qualifies the economic development of(Eastern) Asia a "miracle". Even when non-Westerners are able to adapt, progress and even thrive under the "stages of development" set out by the West, they do it not on the basis of their hard work, organization or intelligence; they are only able to do it by a quasi-divine combination of circumstances. The implicit suggestion here it that Orientals are not able to naturally self-develop; they always need some sort of "help" to elevate them. Fukuyama is also able to provide several *a posteriori* justifications of Asia's success in its progress by giving a pat on the back to the countries which played by the rules of economic liberalism. Not only is the West able to provide an end-goal of development to Orientals, it is also able to dictate how this development should occur. Failure to play by these self-serving Western rules means that is highly implausible for a country to develop itself by alternative means, at leastnot without heavy backlashes and finger pointing by the West (as is the caseof China's recent successes).

Manifest Orientalism

Manifest Orientalism, contrary to its latent counterpart, is not formed out of ignorance, unconscious internalized biases or mutually confirmed inaccurate representations of the "Other". It has its own agenda and interests, a clear ideology and, at best, condescending remarks about non-Westerners; at worst, manifest Orientalism is aimed at directing attacks at the "primitives" on the other side of the West-East divide. This is a far-cry from the academic Orientalism championed by the likes of Bernard Lewis, who considered it *"(...)a branch of serious*

scholarship (…)dated from the great expansion of scholarship in Western Europe from the tome of the Renaissance onward."(Lewis, 1982, p.3). Manifest Orientalism is characterized by a conscious positivity that creates knowledge about the "Other" that is more than mere representation or myth; they are facts, studies and apparently scientific analyses, based on the latent Orientalist tradition. Latent and manifest Orientalism reinforce each other: the former creates favorable framing for the latter and the latter confirms that the characteristics that enabled the initial framing are correct. And that's precisely what made the Orientalist *praxis* so strong. According to Prakash (1995, p.206), *"This dual operation (…) permitted Orientalism to proliferate and change while maintaining its constancy and authority. Scholars could differ, challenge previous writings, revise their under-standing, and yet not disturb the Orient-Occident division."* In other words, Orientalism worked in a way that allowed Western scholars to drastically change the episteme, while the epistemology itself remained unchanged, uncriticized and unquestioned.

In the mid-nineties, political scientist Samuel P. Huntington published one of the most influential works of modern manifest Orientalism to date: *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). The main thesis of this work is that the primary axis of conflict in the post-ideological era would be along cultural-religious lines, which would then separate different parts of the world into rival "civilizations". Huntington approached the Oriental "Other" in quite a different way than Fukuyama. The assumption of Western moral, political and economic superiority is, of course, very present on Huntington's work: "*As the first civilization to modernize, the West leads in the acquisition of the culture of modernity."* (Huntington, 1996, p.68). However, indirect opposition to Fukuyama, *The Clash of Civilizations* portraits an "Other" which is essentially unable to adopt the western "culture of modernity":

> (…) the major differences in political and economic development among civilizations are clearly rooted in their different cultures. East Asian economic success has its source in East Asian culture, as do the difficulties East Asian societies have had in achieving stable democratic political

> systems. Islamic culture explains in large part the failure of democracy to emerge in much of the Muslim world. (Huntington, 1996, p.29)

The Orient was not just an entity that was lagging behind in development; it was, in fact, an entity so essentially different that it was simply incapable of maintaining benign and peaceful relations with the West:

> The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world. (Huntington, 1996, pp.217-218)

There is nothing subtle in Huntington's work. The "Oriental" is viewed as a hostile, aggressive and encroaching menace; in sum, a rival from which the West has to protect itself. The civilization clash theory had the very explicit aim of warning Western powers of the renewed "Oriental" threat, especially the Muslim one. Huntington, ever the polemicist, famously declared that *"Islam's borders are bloody and so are its innards."* (Huntington, 1996, pp.258). Throughout his book, Huntington cherry-picks whatever pieces of evidence he finds, while aiming to provide substantive proofs of his thesis, quoting unfounded testimonies to create an entirely fictional narrative:

> Arabs and other Muslims generally agreed that Saddam Hussein might be a bloody tyrant, but (...) "he is our bloody tyrant." In their view, the invasion (of Kuwait) was a family affair to be settled within the family and those who intervened in the name of some grand theory of international justice were doing so to protect their own selfish interests and to maintain Arab subordination to the west. (Huntington, 1996, p.248)

The most striking part of this excerpt is the total lack of references as to who are these "Arabs and Muslims" that think that blood feuds involving tyrants should be resolved like family disputes. This unilateral representation of, in this case, Muslims, reveals darker facet of

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Orientalism: everything can be said about the Oriental, since he does not have the power to prove otherwise. This type of unscholarly writing is constant in Orientalist works and serves the grand narrative of the power-knowledge oppression between the West and the "Other". The Orient cannot represent and exist by himself; it only exists because he is represented by the West.

Neo-Orientalism

Although Edward Said employed the term "neo-Orientalism" in the 2003 preface to Orientalism (1978), the concept acquired renewed analytical relevance in the academic literature of the post-9/11 period. Building upon Said's theoretical groundwork, Ali Behdad and Juliet Williams conceptualize neo-Orientalism as a *"mode of representation that, while indebted to classical Orientalism, engenders new tropes of othering"* (Behdad& Williams, p. 284). With the turn of the millennium, Orientalist representations of the Islamic world not only intensified but also gained an unprecedented reach, largely due to mass media and the expansion of Western cultural production (Wahid, 2025). Said himself identified these discursive continuities and mutations in the 2003 preface to *Orientalism*, observing that even a superficial glance at the early twenty-first century would suffice to reveal that:

> Today bookstores in the US are filled with shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, Islam exposed the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted to them and others by experts who have supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange oriental peoples. Accompanying such war-mongering expertise have been CNN and Fox, plus myriad evangelical and right-wing radio hosts, innumerable tabloids and even middle-brow journals, all of them recycling the same unverifiable fictions and vast generalizations so as to stir up America against the foreign devil. (Said, 2003, p.xx)

The end of the Cold War, the dwindling of predominantly internal and external ideological conflicts and the effect of globalization changed the paradigm of Orientalism. The world became increasingly more deterritorialised and interconnected, as distant events and policies no

longer have merely regional impacts and local issues quickly become global issues. The "Other" and what happens in distant places have, more than ever, direct and indirect impacts in communities all around the globe. This renewed proximity between the West, and the East should have eliminated at least some of the previous myths and representations of the "Other". However, scholars such as Samiei (2010, p.1148) consider that Orientalism did not disappear or fundamentally change: *"(...) they (the Orientals) have been reconstituted, redeployed, redistributed in a globalized framework and have shaped a new paradigm which can be called 'neo-Orientalism'"*. This new type of Orientalism operates within a "*Clash of Civilizations*" paradigm, which aims to explain political violence in non-western societies while omitting political and economic interests (either western or local). Instead, neo-Orientalism presents violence in the East as a direct result of inherent traits of local cultures. In an increasingly globalized world, the West became endangered by the aggressive, primitive and barbarian (Muslim) Oriental: "*The survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique, not universal, and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies."* (Huntington, 1996, pp.20-21)

For Samiei, the construction of enemy imaginaries serves the hegemonic interests of neo-colonial economic and political projects, particularly in the Middle East: *"the most important particularity of neo-Orientalism(is that it)neglects local and specific aspects of regional movements and instead attempts to portray a homogenous Islamist terrorist enemy (...) they are, first and foremost, enemies of the civilized world. "*Samiei (2010,p.1149). Orientalism in the post-Cold War era aimed to fulfill the Western threat vacuum that the collapse of the USSR left behind. The dualism "West-East" resurfaced, this time as a specific West-Islam dualism, with the 9/11 events as its greatest catalyzer, justifying military intervention in order to "pacify" the rebellious Oriental. As Shatz (2020) argues:

> The language of Orientalism during the Bush era was not always overtly racist, but it often reflected a racism based on putative differences in

> culture—differences that, some "experts" argued, justified a military response, as well as civilizational tutelage in the form of "democracy promotion".

To Said, this emergent form of what he termed *"belligerent neo-Orientalism"* (Said, 2003, p. xxviii) represented a significant paradigm shift, albeit one that remained firmly anchored in long-standing Orientalist stereotypes. Despite this, relatively few scholars have systematically attempted to delineate the specific features of this new paradigm, which transposes traditional patterns of Orientalist dualism onto an increasingly globalized epistemic framework (Samiei, 2010). Behdad and Williams (2010) argue that neo-Orientalism continues to operate through a logic of binarism that closely resembles its classical predecessor, while simultaneously diverging from it insofar as its production is no longer monopolized by Western scholars:

> Although predominantly a North American phenomenon, neo-Orientalism is not limited to the United States; nor is it merely produced by Western subjects. On the contrary, not only do Middle Eastern writers, scholars, and so-called experts participate in its production, but they play an active and significant role in propagating it. Second, unlike its classical counterpart, neo-Orientalism entails a popular mode of representing, a kind of *doxa* about the Middle East and Muslims that is disseminated, thanks to new technologies of communication, throughout the world. Finally, we designate this mode of representation as "neo" rather than "new "in order to signal the continuity between contemporary and traditional forms of Orientalism. (Behdad& Williams, p. 284)

Neo-Orientalism portrays the Western world as one that is "under siege" by the Muslim "Other", in a figurative "jihad[1]" that aims to overtake western culture and identity. Several examples, such as recent debates over the religion and origin of refugees and immigrants, heated disputes over the construction of mosques or the use of certain types of

[1] Jihad, at its core, is about striving for righteousness, whether through personal self-improvement, defending justice, or spreading knowledge and goodness. It is not synonymous with violence, but rather a broad concept that includes ethical and moral struggles in various aspects of life. The word has recently been misused as a synonym for "holy war" (the Arabic word for "war" is harb/qital);

clothes by citizens of different cultural backgrounds reached unparalleled heights. The creation of the Muslim "enemy" is intrinsically connected with the Western need of culturally reaffirming itself by creating a caricature of the "Other" in order to differentiate itself from other civilizations. The pinnacle of the "jihad" (the 9/11 events) was a scapegoat used to produce a new reality based on *"images of dominated people (...), generalizing the term 'terrorism'"* (Altwaiji, 2014, pp. 313-314). The Muslim "Other" became a victim of an uneven symbolic power relation between the West and, in this case, the Middle East. The "Muslim", independently of where he or she lived, became associated with violent acts of terrorism, a return to the earlier Oriental representation of the Oriental "Other" as a savage blindly fueled by its religion. Retaliation took place, in response to the 9/11 attacks, in the form of a "Global War On Terror[1]". "We" (the West) were being attacked by "them" (the terrorists) and "we" needed to defend ourselves.

The opinions and ideas of Western experts in Islam were widely transmitted throughout mass media, capitalizing on a hot-blooded "revenge" sentiment of the American people and Westerners overall. A new (manifest) Orientalist narrative came to life, with globalization, the media and the internet as key major instruments to legitimize it. Altwaiji (2014,p.315) suggests that "*the American media has accepted the side effects of a stigmatization of Islam, Islamic states, and the Muslims and paved the way for prejudices and offensive statements appearing regularly in televised interviews with leading politicians."*. Under this paradigm, the West was forced to react. President Bush was quick to declare, just four days after the 9/11 attacks, the Western response to the events: "*This is a new kind of - a new kind of evil. And we understand. And the American people are beginning to understand. This "crusade", this war on terrorism is going to take a while."* (Bush, 2001). The West represented the Oriental "Other" as the "Muslim terrorist". He or she had

[1] The Global War on Terror (GWOT) refers to a broad international military campaign launched by the United States and its allies after the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks, aimed at eliminating "terrorist groups". The term was first used by U.S. President George W. Bush to frame counterterrorism efforts as a global struggle against violent extremism.

no land, no nationality, no humanity, no agency; he or she was solely defined by a "hostile" religion. Bush's definition of USA's counter-terrorist measures as a "crusade" mirrors the narrative of current Neo-Orientalism discourse of essentializing and naturalizing opposing civilizations. Just like in the Medieval Ages, it is the West's duty to protect itself from invaders.

The western coalition invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was the first materialization of the "war on terrorism". Al-Qaeda, which claimed to be the author of the attacks, was a non-state, decentralized actor, with cells all over the world - and not just in Afghanistan. Invading a state, under the pretense that the government of that state was actively collaborating with terrorists, would do little to solve the problem, especially taking into consideration the large financial costs and inevitable loss of human lives. The Afghan people were deprived of their humanity. They were no longer like "us", not even an underdeveloped version of "us"; they were terrorists who had to pay for their crimes. According to Kerboua (2016, p. 25), *"the new structure of thought provided by Huntington presupposes that great irreducible cultural antagonisms underline modern societies, and that cultures and religions are doomed to collide. Moreover, it also stresses the essentialist belief that Islam is an awkward, degenerated, and threatening religion."*. Neo-Orientalism rejects the idea of cosmopolitanism in favor of a civilizational deadlock from which the West must come out on top. Its objective is not civilizing or educating "lesser" people; it is simply to survive the Oriental (Muslim) onslaught.

Complementing this line of analysis, other scholars, such as Tuastad (2003), examine Western media portrayals of Muslim violence and characterize this representational practice as a form of "new barbarism." The "new barbarism thesis" critiques accounts of *"political violence that omits political and economic interests and contexts when describing that violence, and presents the violence as resulting from traits embedded in local cultures"* (Tuastad, 2003, p. 592). Tuastad contends that the convergence of neo-Orientalist imaginaries and new barbarism narratives functions as a hegemonic strategy, particularly

insofar as the construction of enemy imaginaries serves to legitimize ongoing colonial economic and political projects, as exemplified by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He further argues that violence is rendered in an asymbolic and decontextualized manner, a strategy aimed at containing and fixing the "Other" within rigid representational boundaries. Through this mechanism, neo-Orientalist discourse not only normalizes but also legitimizes forms of violence directed at Arab cultures, thereby sustaining Western domination over the Middle East and parts of South Asia.

Conclusion :

Orientalism was subject to conceptual changes but retained its dualist approach to the "Other". Earlier versions of Orientalism utilized representations of the "Orient" as a docile and passive subject, that was somehow stuck in time and unable to progress beyond its essential, primitive traits. The "uplifting" of the "Orientals" was repeatedly used as a way to cloak the hegemonic colonial and imperial interests of the West. Earlier Orientalism was, however, mainly benign and focused on studying the "Oriental" as an object of "fascination", not of direct domination. Nonetheless, the exotic "Orient" was always constituted as an essentialized entity, with homogenous and caricatured traits. There were absolute differences between the rational and developed West and the aberrant and underdeveloped Orient. The West looked and treated the Orient the same way a parent patronizingly treats his child; something which had to be studied, understood and pacified. The Orientals were uniform in their habits and incapable of defining and representing themselves; they were no more than passive "objects" of fascination.

As Orientalism metamorphosed throughout the last decades, new constructions (distinct from orthodox Orientalist works) of the "Orient" and the "Oriental "took place, gradually shifting the *locus* of fascination to one of oppression, discrimination and xenophobia. In Samiei's (2014, p.1156) words, *"theories like Fukuyama's 'End of History', which posits Western liberal democracy as the ultimate solution for all, ignore its actual limits and do not appreciate plurality, diversity and dynamism."*.

Modern forms of Orientalism are riddled with conceptual imperialism that imply that modernization is a predominantly Western trait, which revives earlier imperialist slogans of "spreading civilization". This latent format of Orientalism, aimed at justifying the superiority of the West in moral, political and economic grounds, laid the groundwork for increasingly more oppressive manifestations of Orientalist scholarship. Late 20thcentury Orientalism generated an "us versus them" narrative, which resonates even on today's West-East relations. Neo-Orientalist discourse and knowledge production is aimed at aggravating this divide and to generate an often-times fictional threat in the Oriental "Other". It was not tendentious scholarship that created this fictional threat; it was the absence of serious and (at least formally) uninterested scholarship.

Said's heritage to post-colonial studies is an in-depth unmasking of the interests behind the study of the Oriental "Other", be it either intentional interests in the name of an ideological agenda or the unconscious bias and prejudice that scholars and academics often fail to recognize in their own works. Said considered Orientalism's failure *"a human as much as an intellectual one; for in having to take up a position of irreducible opposition to a region of the world it considered alien to its own, Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as human experience."* (Said, 1978, p.328). The deconstruction of Orientalism as a discipline and a discourse shed a new light on the "Other", an "Other" that was not an object, but a human being with his own language, culture and traditions; an "Other" that had its own independent history.

Every categorization of a people, especially at a social or cultural level, requires an extensive use of interpretations and judgements. The methodology used in this categorization is able to create different realities that portray a society in vastly different ways. The recent phenomenon of globalization brought an increasing human interdependence, which rendered the "West-East" dualism almost obsolete, as the "Other" is no longer a distant and imagined fantasy, but a close reality that is presented to us every day through means such as mass media, pop culture or social media. Previously "opposed" identities have

become, in fact, products of a complex and interrelated system of social relations. The relation between Westerners and Easterners is no longer a dualism; it became a complex network of mutual perceptions and representations of each other, especially in light of recent global issues such as transnational terrorism, environmental collapse and regional wars with global impacts.

As reductionist approaches become less used and, even if not at a brisk pace, give place to more horizontal interactions between different communities, it becomes ever more plausible to create a globally agreed body of universal principles that can guide and regulate not only our relations with others, but also how societies guide and regulate themselves. This is not to say that we should necessarily work towards a global ethical compass, since different societies and cultures will have different interpretations of the relationship of a human being with his community and the communities of others. Nonetheless, we must strive, through a serious inclusion of the "Other" in this debate (which implies the recognition that the "Other" can represent himself, meaning it will no longer be an "Other" but a fellow peer), to establish the fundamental principles in which every community should be founded, in order to achieve mutual respect and understanding, while maintaining the richness of the heterogeneity of cultures and traditions worldwide, as well as their positives impacts in the betterment of mankind.

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