INTRODUCTION

Edward W. Said is one the leading expatriate intellectuals, a prominent cultural and literary critic, one of the chief exponents of colonial discourse analysis, and a revisionist ideologue of postcolonialism. Orientalism is a 1978 book by Edward W. Said, in which the author developed the idea of ‘Orientalism’ to define the West’s historically patronizing representations of "The East"—the societies and peoples who inhabit the places of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East.

The issue of representation has been one of the most dominant themes of Said’s works. In his trilogy, i.e., Orientalism, Covering Islam, and The Question of Palestine, and to a considerable extent in Culture and Imperialism, he has tried to examine the manifold aspects of the Western representation of the non-Western world. According to this, his concern has been to study how and why language, people, culture, religion, history, and race, have been studied and represented by the West and in the in a specific manner. He has looked into the ontological, epistemological, philological, discursive, ethnographical, and colonial dimensions of representation, and has projected that mainly as a problem. In that connection, his political reading of history and historiography has contributed substantially to his basic theses on representation.

Apart from that, Said has occupied a distinct intellectual space from the late eighties onwards as a staunch critic of imperialism. He has been a rare force in championing the cause of the Third World’s politico-cultural positions, and has redefined the frameworks of postcolonial decolonization. Edward Said’s groundbreaking text, Orientalism is a contrapuntal reading of imperial discourse about the non-Western Other. It indicates that the Western intellectual is in the service of the hegemonic culture. The term Orientalism was popularized by Edward Said’s groundbreaking text, Orientalism, in which he examines the process by which the West has ‘Orientalized’ the Orient. By Orientalism Said means the collection of stereotypes, distortions, myths, and fantasies which the Occident (the West) has imposed in order to dominate it. Orientalism, as an academic discipline, was also a Western style of thought, “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (Said, 1978: 1). According to Said, the orientalist ‘creates’ the Orient through his writing. In the process, he helps in the creation of a series of stereotypical images, according to which Europe (the West, the ‘self’) is
seen as being essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, virtuous, normal and masculine, while the Orient (the East, the 'other') (a sort of surrogate version of the West or the 'self') is seen as being irrational, backward, despotic, inferior, depraved, aberrant and feminine sexually. Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying “us” Europeans as against all “those” non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter.

**Said and Marxism**

Marx’s most scathing comment on what he calls ‘the profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeoisie civilization’, is directed towards the duplicity of the colonial enterprise in which political alliance between forces of reaction can also erase the boundaries between orient and occident. Karl Marx is mentioned several times in Orientalism, although Said excluded German Orientalists from his analysis because he wanted to show French and British authors' complicity with imperialism. Said did not explain why he nonetheless included Marx, obviously he did not perceive Marx primarily as a German, but as authoritative or 'representative' for Marxism or Soviet policy; this is at least how Said’s readers understood his criticism.

The critique of cultural imperialism emerged in the 1970s as a completion to the analysis of economic dependency and mainly applied to imbalances in global mass media communication and to the spreading of consumer culture to the global periphery. Although Said dedicated himself to media asymmetries in Covering Islam (1981), his main target was neither media nor commodification but something more fundamental: the complicity between culture (Orientalism) and power (imperialism). Western culture itself had an imperialist imprint, through its capacity to threaten and annihilate other cultures. Accordingly, the world system is based on Orientalism, which Said understood as being an overwhelmingly powerful discourse, misguided knowledge, and even "a form of paranoia".

Said’s enterprise was interwoven with anti-Marxist sentiments from the very beginning. In the introduction to Orientalism, he contended that he had to say something new on cultural imperialism that had not yet been said by Marxists:

 [...] there is no getting away from the fact that literary studies in general, and American Marxist theorists in particular, have avoided the effort of seriously bridging the gap between the super structural and the base levels in textual, historical scholarship; on another occasion I have gone so far as to say that the literary-cultural establishment as a whole has declared the serious study of imperialism and culture off limits. ( qtd in Said’s Orientalism,13)

In Culture and Imperialism (1994), Said repeated that "Marxists are blinded to the matter of imperialism". And in the "Afterword" (1995) to the 5th edition of Orientalism he called Marxism "a coherent total system" and "orthodoxy to shoot down another". In interviews, he admitted that he found it very difficult "to identify with Marxism" and spoke of Marxism as "extraordinarily insufficient" and "more limiting than enabling in the current intellectual, cultural, political conjuncture". Although some non-Marxist critics called Said "a Marxist-oriented writer", Said mocked such attempts to turn him into an "undeclared Marxist". Although not an anti-Marxist either, he was aware of "this strange gap" since he was on good terms with representative figures of the New Left, like Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, Tariq Ali and Noam Chomsky.

In general, Said's ambiguity towards Marxism was mirrored by the Marxists' ambiguity towards Said. Most Marxists stood somewhere in the middle of the road, siding with neither Said's admirers nor his de tractors. They lauded his anti-imperialist stance and his contribution to the de-colonization of knowledge, but common critical points were Said’s omission of resistance to imperialism in the East and West, his seeming disinterest in replacing Orientalism with a better or alternative narrative,58 and his neglect of class differences.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

As Edward Said's Orientalism is mainly seen as a result of the 'cultural turn' that has been taking place in Western academia since the 1960s, we start our discussion with Said's cultural explanation for imperialism, followed by his criticism of how Karl Marx subscribed to classical Orientalism. In both cases, we highlight Said's ambivalent relations to Marxism as well as the reaction of his Marxist critics. We argue that Orientalism must be seen as an immediate expression for both the political and theoretical challenges after 1967. Thus, the debate became the crystallization point for two opposing leftist camps: For Marxists, the naksa was the result of a century of social stagnation, cultural backwardness, and the pre-dominance of religious worldviews. They focused on "the upper structures of thought, values, and culture" to explain the Arab setback as a phenomenon that was part of the difficult social transition to modernity. Said's argumentation in Orientalism was at odds with this critique, since he was opposed to binary concepts such as progress and backwardness which he saw as serving Self-Orientalization and imperialism.

Thus, a cultural explanation for the deeper reason of the defeat gained the upper hand inside the left, but it ranged from Arab mentality over Arab society to Western hegemony. Although this difference was, to our knowledge, not clearly expressed in the debate, Said’s attacks on Marx ism can best be understood in this context. Our thesis is that, for political reasons, the cultural turn created a cultural left that mirrors the concerns of right-wing culturalism, as Aziz al-Azmeh has argued. Although the leftist respect for the 'cultural other' and the rightist defense of the 'cultural Self' are opposed to each other, they share ideas relating to the importance and inevitability of culture. In the Arab context, the difference between left and right, between respect for the other and defense of the self, was blurred, because the Arab Self came to see itself as the other of the West. Especially in the wake of the Iranian revolution, the cultural left and Islamism moved closer to each other and shared anti-Marxist sentiments. Marx certainly did not suffer from Hindu philosophy. He began his first article on India with that harsh indictment of Hindu religion which, to Said, would
smack of Orientalist racism unmitigated by and trace of sympathy. Comparing Hindustan with Italy and Ireland, Marx seems to pass his ultimate sentence upon Hinduism and its ancient traditions in the first dispatch of India. But it would also be based on an ethical negation of the necessity of sacrificial violence that Marx sees as an aspect of human progress, even after the Enlightenment.

CONCLUSION

As a result, Orientalism has engendered feminist scholarship and debate in Middle East studies. For Said, many Western scholars, orientalists, colonial authorities and writers systematically created the orientalist discourse and the misrepresentation of the Orient. George Orwell as a Western writer experienced imperialism at first hand while serving as an Assistant Superintendent of Imperial Police in Burma from 1922 to 1927. In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand. Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West.

Thus the history of Orientalism has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it. Therefore, Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious Western imperialist plot to hold down the Oriental world. It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction but also of a whole series of interests which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only

References


