

Orientalism



The Politics of Power and Knowledge

Literal Definition of Orientalism

“The study of the orient”

Definition of “Orientalism” as a system of thought, institutions & practice

Orientalism refers to a style of thought based on an epistemological distinction between “East and West,” with implications of western superiority.

“The image of the Oriental is materially expressed and represented by the Orientalist discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, and colonial bureaucracies and style.”

-Edward Said, Orientalism

Discourses are sustained by different dimensions of society:

- ▶ Academia
- ▶ Government/Polycymaking
- ▶ Media (old media, new media)
- ▶ Popular Culture
- ▶ Business/Commerce world

Walid Khalidi's 6 Factors

Dominant Assumptions in the Literature on the “Orient”

These assumptions are drawn directly from the most prominent European scholars (much less, American scholars) on the Middle East or Near East in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries.

[refer to Lockman’s *Contending Visions*, chapters 2 & 3, when he discusses Renan and Sacy, or the entirety of Said’s *Orientalism*.]

Dominant & Recurring Assumptions About the “Orient”

- Epistemological distinction between east and west (examples)
- Exoticizing the “orient”
- The existence of an *eternal* and *monolithic* essence that characterizes the “Orient” and “Orientals” (three implications)
- The “Orient” is either to be feared or controlled

Orientalist Methodologies

- Theologocentrism
- Philologism
- Middle East Exceptionalism (Neo-Orientalism)

Problematics of Orientalism

- The Relationship Between Power and Knowledge
- Construction of a monolithic “Oriental” identity
- Binary Oppositions
- When a Discourse Overrides Its Object of Study
- Self-Referential Authority
- “Objectivity” in Scholarship (the “Neutral” Author)