Said's Interpretation Of Orientalism And Its Consequences

Forty-two years after its first publication, the groundbreaking text by Said (1978), Orientalism provides a counterpoint for the imperial discourse about the non-Western Other, the Orient against the Occident. It is a rounded critique of the West's representation of the East as an inferior, exotic, uncivilized, and a primitive "Other" which was illustrated both theoretically and literally, to be a mysterious place consisting of deserts, belly dancers and harems in a very racialized and sexualized culture from a "distant land". In the book Orientalism, Said (1978) analyses the discourse of orientalism and institutions used by the West to construct the entity of the "Orient" by a set of stereotypical images and texts, he shows how Western imperialism and colonialism is implicated in oriental texts, (Hall, 1992). This essay seeks to elaborate and discuss the definition of orientalism provided by Edward Said (1978) and examine its effects and consequences through the examples of Terrorism in today's age and Flaubert's account on an Egyptian courtesan.

In his book, Said (1978) by orientalism means the stereotypes, and fantasies which were created and imposed by "the Occident" in order to have authority over "the Orient". He first defines the "Orient" as Europe's oldest colonies and the source of its culture, tradition, language and most importantly as a contrasting image that helped define Europe by playing the role of the "Other", he says "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident"", (Said, 1978, p.1). He mentions how geographically, "the Orient" for Europeans meant mainly the Middle East whereas, for Americans it was Japan, Korea and other Indochinese regions, (Said, 1978). He then proceeds to discuss his three different approaches to orientalism and elaborates on how all three are interconnected, the approaches are: academic study or institutions, general meaning and, historical meaning. According to his first classification, orientalism, as an academic discipline, was also a Western construct and was, "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience", (Said, 1978, p.1). He says, "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient- and this applies to whether the person is an anthropologist, historian or philologist-either in its specific or its general aspects, is an orientalist and what he or she does is orientalism", (Said,1978, p.2) and argues that this acceptance of the Orient and the Occident is problematic and makes for a bias narrative as this distinction is the starting point of most elaborate theories, epics, novels and political accounts about the people of the East, their customs, their ideologies, and "mind", (Said, 1978).

To expand on his second classification he employs Foucault's understanding of discourse and argues that orientalism through the tools of description, authorizing views, teaching and ruling can be discussed as the West's style of restructuring and dominating the East or the Other by placing it in contrast with the West. He claims that "the West" as a regime of knowledge relies heavily upon folklore, myth, traveler tales, and religious sources to create an understanding of the "Orient" and with time these ways on understanding the world have become so natural that they are taken to be as true making it difficult to have a mainstream alternative understanding of reality. In addition to this, he claims that without understanding Foucault's notion of discourse one cannot understand the systematic discipline through which the European culture constructed the Orient politically, ideologically, scientifically, militarily and logically during the

post-enlightenment period, (Said, 1978). He connects both the first and second classification by elaborating on how these discourses and understanding are created through written texts where the orientalists writes and creates a discourse of how the West is civilized, developed, rational and superior whereas, the East is the opposite. Arguing that this understanding legitimizes the Western interest of imperialism by building or adding to the narrative of how the East needs to be saved by the West because the West is superior and rational while the East is not, serving the West's hegemonic purposes. He establishes his third classification of orientalism in relation to the first and second by using Marxist philosophy of cultural hegemony he explains hegemonic relations of the West and the East and how the West using the discourse of the Orient against the Occident was able to gain strength, stability and an identity by manipulating cultural institutions and maintaining political power through it. According to Bertens (2001), "For Said, Western representations of the Orient, no matter how well intentioned, have always been part of this damaging discourse." (Bertens, 2001, p. 204).

Using these classifications, Said (1978), detailed onto the consequences and effects of orientalism. One of which is the stereotypical generalization of terrorist being anti-American, anti-democratic and in most cases Muslim, an example of this is the orientalism of today, that news channels like Fox News propagate the narrative of the "West" being under-threat from the "East" or Muslim or Arab majority countries, from the refugees, etc., (Shatz, 2019). Another is of the representation of Oriental women in European literature and art that has added to a widely-accepted narrative even today which presents these women as always being scantily clad, sexually promiscuous, exotic and doubly-inferior to men for being both, female and oriental. One prime example of such a stereotypical representation of Oriental women is Flaubert's narrative of a sexual experience with an Egyptian courtesan after which he stereotyped all eastern women as "the oriental woman is no more than a machine; she makes no distinction between one man and another man". (Said, 1978, p. 187). This experience speaks of the Victorian prejudice against women, it also speaks of the power dynamics between a Western man and an Eastern women and how the man represented the woman and spoke for her and not only did he possess her physically but also created a narrative of her in which she had no say. This illustrates the power dynamics of the East and the West, how false narratives were created, used, manipulated, widely accepted to assert dominance of one over the other. Besides this, it also lead to the double colonization of women in the East as under colonialism it exposed women to both oppression by patriarchy and colonial manipulation (McLeod, 2000). Furthermore, the women were also a subject of objectification at the hands of Western man who objectified them as exotic creatures.

To conclude, orientalism as said by Edward Said failed to identify with human experience and discriminated against a region of the World by considering it and its residents alien to its own. It not only dehumanized a large chunk of human population by stereotyping, sexualizing and by having prejudiced opinions about the other but it also served as the road to barbarism and stays relevant to this day being prevalent in other forms such as social media, television, the web, etc.

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