



THE WORLDLINESS OF THE ARAB WORLD



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ABSTRACT

Edward Said was one of the foremost intellectuals who supported the Palestinian cause precisely because of the 'Othering' of Arab world by the West. By using his concept of worldliness, this paper tries to explicate how Said represents the Arab world in his oeuvre. The inherent tensions and tribulations of the Arab world have also shaped him as a liminal and exilic intellectual. It is interesting to trace certain

'affiliation'[s] in Saidian works with the Arab world. Said's critique of the misrepresentation of Arab world in his critique of Orientalism, Zionism, and his reflexive criticism of Palestine struggle gives us various insights into the worldliness of these discourses.

KEYWORDS

Worldliness, Othering, Orientalism, Zionism, Arab World

RESEARCH PAPER

Edward Said attempts to show the causes and effects of the ‘Othering’ of the Arab World in his oeuvre. The Western representation of the Arab World is critiqued by Said in most of his books. It is interesting to trace certain ‘affiliation’[s] with the Arab world in his works. This forms the exilic consciousness of Said and allows him to represent the worldliness of the Arab world. Said’s critique of the misrepresentation of Arab world in his critique of Orientalism, Zionism, and his reflexive criticism of Palestine struggle gives us various insights into the worldliness of these discourses. The concept of worldliness becomes the key point in his assertions and criticism. My paper wants to probe into this issue and explicate the Saidian critical method of representing the Arab world.

As Edward Said has postulated in his work, the Arab world is othered at various levels. Starting from religion, culture and politics it has always been negated, vilified, and represented in bad faith. His books try to critique the inherent discursive thrust of certain ideologies that thwart the true representation of the Arab world and relegate it to the position of an abject *tabula rasa*. It is in this context that he tells Arab literature is “embargoed”:

Of all the major world literatures, Arabic remains relatively unknown and unread in the west for reasons that are unique, I think remarkable at a time when tastes here (in US) for the non-western are more developed than before and even more compellingly, contemporary Arabic literature is at a particularly interesting juncture. (“Embargoed Literature” *The Nation*, 1990, p372)

The particular sense of closure or prohibition of the Arab world views in the western discourses is what prompted Said to take up a lifelong project of speaking for the Arab world. This is evident in most of his books and actions. Now, we should clarify what he means by worldliness. According to him, “Worldliness was meant to be rather crude and bludgeon-like term to enforce the location of cultural practices back in the mundane, the quotidian, and the secular” (Power politics culture -335-36). What Said draws our attention to is the everyday lived experiences and cultural practices constitute the worldliness. Further, he clarifies thus, “My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted” (*The World* 4). In this observation he makes it very clear and evident that texts are basically the products of human labor and will- which are in turn related to the various factors that govern the space that both the text and the author inhabit. A careful observation of this proposition makes us realize how his hermeneutics of suspicion facilitates him to locate the position of texts in the social, historical, and quotidian human world. This book further clarifies his stand on the textuality and the materiality of discourses that are generated in our world. He does not want to allow immunity or the hermetic closure to texts as many of his contemporaries did. But he wants to open up the original trajectories of texts to critique their inherent intentions, and power relations.

His focus on the materiality of a text refers to its historical contingency, its affiliations to various factors that facilitate and govern it, and to its socio-cultural and political dimensions. It also refers to the roots or origins of a text which inevitably point towards its worldliness. When

he locates the act of writing in the world which it is a part of and contains the same world, he goes beyond the scriptive presence of the text. This allows him to dig up the missing material conditions of a text. According to him, both the text and the critic originate and share the same discursive world. As Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia point out, this idea shows that the text has a "material presence, a cultural and social history, a political and even an economic being as well as a range of implicit connection to other texts" (*Edward Said* 21). Doubting the Derridean position of texts as the ensembles of endless deferral of significations, Said feels that texts invariably point out towards understanding the various discursive and quotidian realities of the world. So the text is our rite of passage into a world whose worldliness is contained within it. The text according to him is not excluded from the actual world but is an integral part of the world that is portrayed.

He engages in a debate about criticism here to show how valuable it is to question and oppose hegemonic discourses. A critic, who lives in the same world that a text inhabits, ought to develop an "awareness- a worldly self-situating" so as to oppose certain positions. For him, this "critical consciousness" stems from the textual and actual worlds (15). By constantly observing the two impulses of 'filiation' and affiliation', the critic must forward a secular criticism that deals with the worldliness of the text, and which is "constitutively opposed to the production of massive, hermetic systems" (26). Filiation connotes the traditional, hereditary descent of a text whereas affiliation refers to the authentication of a text through culture. He stresses on the affiliative factor of a text because it allows a secular, critical space for the critic to overcome the debilitating filiative associations of the text. Affiliation shows the text's worldliness and allows the critic to reveal the various other socio-political and cultural forces that shape a text. This enables the critic to examine and explicate the exact worldly elements that are "entailed in the reading, production, and transmission of every text (26).

In a profound and a liberating manner, Said tells about the basic prerequisites of criticism. He says that it should be "*oppositional*", and should be discontent with totalizing, codified and hereditary habits of thinking. It "must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, abuse; its social goals are noncoercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom" (29). By recognizing the primary role of criticism as "oppositional", he clearly posits how it is a part of the hermeneutics of suspicion – criticism which has a critical consciousness of various "totalizing concepts" and discourses that can challenge such hegemonic thrusts (29). Conor McCarthy makes a pertinent point that Said:

advocates a criticism that is alive to the subsistence of literature amidst the dynamic field of forces. We should note Said's suggestion that the text is a kind of *event*, and also his sense that texts are part of the moments in which they are *interpreted*. Said is suggesting that texts are historical both at the moment of their production and at that of their reception. (98)

This makes us think that the Saidian project is not just about questioning various discourses but also a mature and liberating critique which strives for the secular, democratic humanitarian world for future generations to come.

Another major task of the critic is to locate or to exemplify the worldliness of a text. For him, a text "is a network of often colliding forces. . . a text in its actual *being* a text is a being in

the world” (*The World* 33). So the critic’s primary task is to recognize and decode this particular aspect of a text. This worldliness is “made whole and actual by the critic’s reading” (34). He tells us further, “The point here is that texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society- in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly” (35). But the important fact here is that Said’s postulation implies the worldliness of both the text and the critic. The various ramifications of this constellation are what he tries to explicate in the book.

These ramifications put several constraints upon the critic. To explain this, he cites the works of Hopkins, Conrad, and Oscar Wilde- which capture the tensions of textuality and worldliness. A text in addressing a reader plays out a dynamic relation between “speech and reception, between verbality and textuality” which “*is* the text’s situation, its placing of itself in the world” (40). To him, Hopkins’s work enacts this “dialectic of production” (41). Similarly, Oscar Wilde’s work acknowledges the “circumstantial reality” of a text (43). Lastly, Conrad’s work encapsulates “the encounter between speaker and hearer” (44). The reason for citing these writers as examples is to show how texts are aware of their “circumstantial reality”, and their “status as already fulfilling a function, a reference, or a meaning in the world” (44). The thrust here is to show how Western novelistic tradition has relied heavily on the above condition for its efficacy. What these three writers and many others have done is “valorized speech” and thus helping the false claim “for a democratic equality and copresence in actuality between speaker and hearer” (45). For Said, this is far from equality in real world, because he firmly believes that:

Moreover, all texts essentially dislodge other texts or, more frequently, take the place of something else. As Nietzsche had the perspicacity to see, texts are fundamentally facts of power, not of democratic exchange. They compel attention away from the world even as their beginning intention as texts, coupled with the inherent authoritarianism of the authorial authority (. . .) makes for sustained power. (45-46)

This is the main problem that a critic has to face in his critique of such configurations of a text. By rightly positing that texts are cultural ensembles of power relations, along with the stress on author’s authority, he tries to make a major critical act of locating the text’s inherent aspirations to power and hegemony in certain circumstances. This insight allows him to question Orientalism, imperialism, and the authorial intention in his books. Texts are dislodged out of their venerated position as works of pure art and entertainment, and shown as carrying the imprints of various socio-cultural, political, economic, and historical conjectures – which he calls as worldliness. By elaborating the material conditions that govern the text and its world, he successfully deconstructs various discourses. Saidian critique of the text and its worldliness is to show how it is an integral part of discourses. He further uses the ideas of Foucault and adds that both the text and its worldliness are inextricably in collusion with “ownership, authority, power, and the imposition of force” (48). We can briefly recall here the way in which he uses this observation to critique Orientalism and imperialism- by exposing the power-knowledge nexus inherent in these discourses. To him, “the self-confirming will to power” inherent in many texts help such discourses (50). This also is one of his major contributions to the postcolonial criticism.

So it is pertinent for us to look at how he lays bare the ‘Othering’ of the Arab world in his *Orientalism* (1978). The author denounces all forms of cultural oppression by

analyzing how Orientalism subjugated Middle East and succeeded in demonizing Islam or East as the West's 'other'. The question of representation, the institutionalization of Orientalism as discourse, the interrelation of various institutions, scholars and texts operating within the discourse, and finally the complicity of this discourse in cementing the Western hegemony over the East are discussed elaborately in the book. Edward Said wants to show how such discursive formulations worked in the colonial context. He makes evident all the ideological tools which were complicit in helping the West to consolidate its hold over the Oriental discourse. He also shows how despite of the ideological and geographical acquisition, Europe constantly defined the Orient as its 'other'. Orientalism "is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles". In one sweep, he lays bare all the ramifications of the Oriental discourse. The use of the Orient as the abject *tabula rasa* for the process of defining it as Europe's 'Other' is pointed out here. Said enjoins such an othering process to Europe's "*material* civilization and culture" (*Orientalism* 1-2). This shows how all discourses are 'worldly' in their proliferation.

He feels that there is a sort of coherence and consistency in Oriental studies. Text after text adds to the enormous corpus of Orientalism - facts, figures, notions, ideas, and (mis)representations about the 'Orient'. But in all this the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized remains "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (5). The subject of Orientalism, the Orient here becomes a "surrogate", inferior or "underground self" of the Occident (3). This is exactly how the Eurocentric discourses have been able to hold the reins of power for centuries. The continuity of this discourse is what enchants Said and he wants to analyze it. As a discourse, Orientalism imbues "geopolitical awareness" into texts (12). It not only creates but also "maintains" the analyses, descriptions, discoveries, reconstructions etcetera and demarcates the 'Orient' by specific geographical distinction (12).

He substantiates his writing of the book because his experience as a Palestinian in America is a "uniquely punishing destiny" which is caused by the increasing racism, stereotyping, and dehumanizing ideologies (27). By his own placement as a Palestinian in America, Said becomes the spokesperson of several people who bear the brunt of such animosity. Said's identity has been "constructed" by Orientalism and he avoids blaming it and chooses to dissect it instead of proposing violence. He tries to make evident the cultural hegemony of West over the rest of the world. As I pointed out earlier, Said strives to criticize Orientalism from a humanitarian view point and aims towards a non-coercive challenging of any suppressing discourse or cultural practice.

Said begins decoding the 'text' of Empire by analyzing the Middle-East crisis. The first chapter of the book explicates how Oriental discourse is amorphous in its nature- suiting to the specific needs of particular contexts. Said examines the British occupation of Egypt and scrutinizes how officers like Arthur Balfour, Lord Cromer and their ilk make confident but unreal statements about the Orient. The audacity with which they pronounce judgments about the East are tinged with racial prejudice and Said feels that their choice was supported by canonical formulations of their predecessors. Look at this typical statement from Lord Cromer- "I content myself noting the fact that somehow or the other the Oriental generally acts, speaks, and thinks in a manner exactly opposite to the European" (39). To take another example, we can hear what

Arthur James Balfour says, “We *know* the civilization of Egypt better than we *know* the civilization of any other country. We *know* it further back; we *know* it more intimately; we *know* more about it” (32) [My emphasis]. This statement shows the confident yet haughty attitude of colonialists [whether be it a historian, philologist, politician, anthropologist or anybody who deals with the Orient] by assigning it a relatively unchanging or passive role. Leela Gandhi makes a pertinent point when she quips that:

Discourses are . . . heavily policed systems which control and delimit both the mode and the means of *representation* in a given society. Accordingly, colonial/Orientalist discourses are typical of discursive activity whenever they claim the right to *speak* for the mute and uncomprehending Orient and , in so doing, relentlessly represent it as the negative, underground image or impoverished ‘Other’ of Western rationality. In other words, Orientalism becomes a discourse at the point at which it starts systematically to produce stereotypes about Orientals and the Orient, such as the heat and dust, the teeming marketplace, the terrorist, the courtesan, the Asian despot, the child-like native, the mystical East. (177)

This knowledge about the Orient was one of the several rites of passage for the Europeans. The Orient was a “Platonic essence” for the Europeans as Said feels (*Orientalism* 38).

Edward Said further tells that Orientalists view humanity in “collective terms” and “abstract generalities” and are not capable of looking at the specific individual traits of the Orient (154). This facilitates the scholars to use the Orient for illustration of a philological or racial theory than “existential human identities” (155). They never used actual examples from the Orient to describe what they wanted to and instead chose an example which supported their assumptions. This was the root cause for the absence of any real communication or exchange between the Occident and the Orient. So: “In short, as a form of growing knowledge Orientalism resorted mainly to citation of predecessor scholars in the field for its nutriment” (176-77).

Critics particularly point out to this position by Said about the absence of communication between these two parties and opine that it is improper. They use Homi Bhabha’s concept of ‘hybridity’ to criticize him. But if we think of Orientalism as a gigantic culture machine that dominated the Orient, we may accept Saidian viewpoint. Given the exclusionary nature of Orientalism, its entire project seems to be the grafting of the dominant European ‘self’ over the Oriental ‘other’. How can the excluded Orient speak to the Occident in Orientalism? How could have the Occident allowed the Orient to speak? These and many other questions may arise to a discerning reader of this book. And as answers to these questions, the author has painstakingly elucidated the over-arching, dominant structure of Orientalism, which is like one way traffic.

The author further strives to show how there was a gradual transformation in Orientalism. The author shows how textual representations, ideologies, stereotypes etcetera [Latent Orientalism] gave way to the actual geographical domination through military or political interventions [Manifest Orientalism]. All these changes occurred due to the shift in global power equations during and after the two world wars. He also considers the rise of the United States as the new colonizing force. He mainly strives to show how the legacy of the British and French Orientalism has been incorporated by America now. This, Said feels, is evident in the foreign policies of America.

The present day American hegemony was made possible by four phases in Orientalism which Said lists. The first phase saw the indoctrination of the discourse in western thought with a considerable academic impact- thus allowing ethnocentric perspectives to flourish. Almost sixty thousand books were published between 1800 and 1950 on the Near Orient (204). This institutionalization also kept Islam under constant focus and retained the earlier animosity about Islam and its followers as threat or menace. Biological determinism and the binary of “advanced and backward (or subject) races, cultures, and societies” defined this phase [nineteenth century] (204). It was also characterized by patriarchal notions about women as exemplified in travelogues and novels. Both the French and the British saw the Orient in “sexist blinders” (207) and their thrust were to penetrate it by the means of their “disseminative capacities” gained by modern learning (221). The major shift in this phase was the transformation of Orientalism from being a textual attitude to a more radical “administrative, economic, and even military” attitude (210). There was a qualitative change in the spatial and geographical apprehension of the Orient. The conquest of many new territories and lands turned the mute Orient into “an actual administrative obligation” to be dealt with (223).

The second phase saw the reformulation of the myth of the White Man and his ‘burden’ as famously put by Rudyard Kipling in British Orientalism. Linguistics, anthropology, race theory, Darwinism- all were amalgamated in their science, religion and culture to retain their superiority in the Orient. This dehumanizing tendency was due to the demarcation of various languages, races, civilizations and cultures as inferior. This truth was “radical and ineradicable” which discarded the quotidian realities of the Orient and “set” boundaries between people based on which nations, civilizations and races were “constructed”. This definitely promoted a regressive idea of “immutable origins” (233). Thus manifest Orientalism gained ascendancy due to the German, French and the British fight to gain control over the region.

The next phase marks the Anglo-French supremacy over the Orient during the inter war period. They both created and recreated false stereotypes about Muslims and the Arab world because of the Arab Revolt and other small freedom movements in the region. Islam, which was earlier seen as threat now came to be regarded as containing the seeds of ‘Jihad’- the war against Christianity and Judaism. The earlier scholastic activity turned into the political activity of policy making towards the Eastern regions. The fourth and the last phase that Said notes contains the transformation of the earlier scholar into the new ‘area specialist’. There is the circulation of new stereotypes and “hybrid representations” of the Orient in the West culled out from Indochina, Japan, Pakistan, India and China (285). One important feature of Orientalism in all its forms is the retaining of Islam and Arabs as constant referring points. After the 1973 war, Arabs are seen as a “menace” and the disruptors of Israel’s and West’s existence in the Middle-East. They are termed as anti-Zionists, degenerate, camel drivers who can disturb their peace by their ‘Jihad’. Palestinians are seen as nomads with no cultural or national identity or reality of their own.

The American hatred towards Muslims and the Arab world becomes acute due to the 1967 Morroe Berger’s report on the Middle- East. America eschews philology and looks at the Orient as a “social science specialty”, deriving its vocabulary by military expeditions not texts because after the World War II, the Orient became an administrative matter for “policy” formulations (290). It also studies the languages of the region for propaganda and not for sympathetic understanding. The establishment in 1946 of the American Oriental Society and its

consequent interest in the oil resources of the region made it a leading Orientalist nation as Said feels. The changes in the political equations of the world surely make America a super power which, through its control over world economy, military prowess and capitalist ideologies dictates the terms to the entire world and thus occupies the place of the new imperialist nation. It also is concerned with the modernization of Arabs.

Edward Said's politics of liberation in the book is best enumerated in his afterword to the 1995 edition of the book. As he tells us that the answer to Orientalism is definitely not a counter Occidentalism at the end of third chapter, here too his thrust is to show the various possibilities to tackle Orientalism without taking recourse to reductionism, essentialism and coercion. He clearly states that he is never putting forward the idea of a pure Orient because it cannot be found anywhere. All cultures engage in transactions which make them hybrid and interrelated. Reiterating Vico's idea that human history is created by men and is made up of human beings, he tells that he cannot separate colonialism and anticolonialism but sees them as interconnected. He wants to show how identity formations are based on various factors and how all cultures and nations are involved in the process of constant othering which is eternal:

Each age and society re-creates its "Others". Far from being a static thing then, identity of self or of "other" is a much worked- over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies. In short, the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society (332).

This makes Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia to say that "Taking up the unfinished project of Frantz Fanon, Said moves from a politics of blame to a politics of liberation" (*Edward Said* 55).

His *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* makes evident the discursive factors that demonize Islam and its followers. The author's focus shifts to the discourses propagated by the Western media- especially America in this book. As the last part of the trilogy consisting of *Orientalism* and *Question of Palestine*, this particular book attempts to critique the covert and overt othering processes about Islam. We can recall Said's critique of the misrepresentation and stereotypical rendering of Arabs in his *Orientalism*, and the victimization of Palestinians by the Zionist discourse in his *Question of Palestine*. Islam as a constant threat to Christianity is a disturbing idea that the West has always been preoccupied with. So in this book, Said takes up the task of enumerating the reasons for this hatred and animosity in the Western psyche and cultural discourses towards Islam. One basic fact for him is the continuation of the same orientalist notions, fears and teleological furtherance of hegemonic discourses in the West with America taking the centre stage of such dominating positions after World War II.

The title of the book employs a pun on the word 'covering'. This means that the western media tries to 'cover' Islam through its media broadcasts and 'cover up' the true meaning and world view of Islam due to its own vested interests. All of this attenuates the reality of the issue at stake. The ascription of such notions to a supposedly diverse and varied religion and people seems to be a deliberate act which has been employed by the West to denote, characterize, portray and to analyze it. This as he feels is the "revival of canonical. . . Orientalist ideas about muslim[s]" (*Covering Islam* xi). The media attention to this has also facilitated the false representation of Muslims as terrorists- which to him is entirely "factitious" (xiv). Many

incidents and uprisings in the countries like Iran, Sudan, Iraq, and Afghanistan; the Muslim attacks on the American embassies – are some of the reasons for the new found hatred and rancor about Islam in the Western world. The covering of these incidents has further led to the mobilization of people in the West to wage a “continuing war against Islam” (xv).

For Edward Said, the umbrella term ‘Islam’ [as used by the West] does not really portray the quotidian realities of the Islamic countries. It allows both the Muslims and the western people to react and counter-react whenever the term is generally used in a loose sense. This referential term “defines a relatively small proportion of what actually takes place in the Islamic world”- which consists of disparate people, languages, experiences and geographical locations (xvi). This sweeping generalization bothers the author and he wants to discard such usage and tells that such general and loose formulations about Islam are forwarded in the western media by a handful of journalists, academicians or area experts who try to designate Islam as fundamentalism. What follows is the reduction of,

Islam to a handful of rules, stereotypes, and generalizations about the faith, its founder, and all of its people, then the reinforcement of every negative fact associated with Islam – its violence, primitiveness, atavism, threatening qualities- is perpetuated. (xvi)

The main argument of the book is that the Western representations of Islamic world are far from reality and are predicated upon the power relations and geopolitical conditions that affect such portrayal in the media and other disciplines. Such renderings of Islam fail to allow any “genuine desire” to comprehend the Islamic worldview (xlvi). The reasons for such absence of dialogue is- the crisis in oil supply in the Arab world; the Iranian revolution and its effects; and the “resurgence” of Islamic nationalism in the various parts of the muslim world. These reasons are the main driving factors for the renewed Western interests about Islam (1). Evident in all such interests and concerns is the old Orientalist habit of dealing with the Islamic ‘Other’. This has obviously facilitated the “covering up” of Islamic world and the proliferation of various untrue adages and ideas about it. Said tells us that, “For the right, Islam represents barbarism; for the left, medieval theocracy; for the center, a kind of distasteful exoticism” (lv). So, he wants to analyze the specific dialectics between the West and the Muslim world. This dialectics stems from the premises of corporations, government and media in the Western world, and inherently has power dynamics involved - which is why, Said feels that the production of knowledge about Islam is “relative to who produces it” (lvii).

Accruing various tropes and stereotypes from the Oriental discourse, the modern preoccupation with Islam seems nothing but a continuation of such unhealthy interests. This is because Islam for the West is always a part of the Orient. Stereotypes like Islam as a blasphemous religion, and Prophet Mohammad as an impostor etcetera are used by the modern American area experts. Similarly, the emergence of Iran as a formidable power in 1978 and Ayatollah Khomeini “embodied all that was objectionable about Islam” to the West (7). Such ideas are furthered by other people who are inscribed into the discourse and they too never acknowledge the realities of the people inhabiting the Muslim world. Another reason for such attitudinal apathy is the binary of West as superior, and Islam as inferior or primitive - which pits “Islam versus the West” (12).

The emergence of America after the World War II has facilitated such preoccupation and through the project of area studies, it is trying to analyze the Islamic world for its own policy

matters and benefits. Said observes pertinently, “I have not been able to discover any period in European or American history since the Middle Ages in which Islam was generally discussed or thought about *outside* a framework created by passion, prejudice, and political interests” (24). This is the reason for the absence of any empathetic understanding of Islam in America. The geographical location of “Islamic Orient” is another reason for the obsession in America which has led to many incursions and invasions (27). The modernization discourse is also one of the reasons for such obsession which “dovetail[s]” with “Orientalism” and made roads for the political, military, and economic invasion and imperial ventures in the Islamic world (30). This is the precise moment when Islam came to be associated with terrorism. America uses the example of Israel for the benefits of modernization theory and the efficacy of western life style.

To elaborate such attitudes and thrusts by the Americans, the author gives instances from various journalists and writers whose pronouncements on Islam precede the actual domination of the Islamic Orient. He cites Robert W. Tucker, Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s articles which actually “gave shape, rhetoric, and dramatic structure” to the discourse about Islam in America (37). This leads to the objectification and ahistorical treatment of Islam devoid of any attention to the spatio-temporal or political realities – only helping in the hegemonic thrusts. Another example is given from Samuel P. Huntington’s article, “The Clash of Civilizations?” which posits the impossibility of any reconciliation and co-operation between Western civilization and the Islamic world (42). That is why, “the media’s Islam, the Western scholar’s Islam, the Western reporter’s Islam, and the Muslim’s Islam are all acts of will and interpretation that take place in history, and can only be dealt with in history as acts of will and interpretation” (45). This stand point tries to clarify that the efforts of Western media and experts from various fields are not just natural outcomes but deliberate acts of volition to contain the Islamic world. Said’s contention in his project of hermeneutics of suspicion is to show how statements, texts, discourses, policies, and opinions actually originate from a specific contextual and discursive frameworks that make such pronouncements possible. We can see the detailed exposition of these ideas in the fourth chapter of the thesis wherein Saidian ideas about the inevitable worldliness of the text and the critic; the preliminary conditional factors affecting the text’s inception; and the affiliative process that is involved in such conditions etcetera are described and discussed.

The American media consisting of news papers, radio, television and films all try to feed the stereotypes and fear about Islam in the psyche of the audience through their own rhetoric of hatred. This collusion of media form the “communities of interpretation”(36) which shade the opinions to be “communal”- which in turn serve vested interests of the national policy towards Islamic countries (47). Other genres and forms that constitute these communities are the books, journals, and lectures that are propagated widely across the country’s public sphere. To Said this is a very deliberate and calculated act of selection and omission of news, facts and ideas to cover or cover up Islam. These various representations and coverage of Islam set the binary of self/other, thus affecting the thinking of people who subscribe to such tailored responses towards Islam. Such national rhetoric of Islamophobia gets consensus through very few corporations and media like the “CBS, *Time*, the *New York Times*, AP” (54). The concentration of representational rhetoric and power in such a handful of corporations makes the proliferation of fear, hatred and rage towards Islam more acute and controlled. Another ironical situation that the author mentions here is the percolation of Western especially American media in the Islamic world in the present context. The Muslim world “learns *about itself*” through the Western media’s promulgation of ideas and representations (56). This fact also shows the inherent political and economic concerns

of the American media about Islam. In an interview with David Barsamian, Edward Said notes the antipathy towards the American representation and occupation of the Islamic world, and says thus:

I think that most Arabs and Muslims feel that the United States hasn't really been paying much attention to their desires, but has been pursuing its policies for its own sake, without much in the way of explanation or attempts to somehow justify them. And above all, pursuing these policies not according to many of the principles that the United States proclaims are its own: democracy, self-determination, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and its commitment to international law. (105)

In the name of representation and delivering justice to the Islamic world, America seems to continue its Oriental preoccupations with the land and people. This position by Said shows how the Western domination is actually seen and realized in the Muslim world.

In his critique of the Western representations of Islam, Said does not rush to say that the West is the sole reason for all the problems and tribulations of the Muslim world. Rather, he tries to look at the various meanings, interpretations, experiences, possibilities, and connotations of Islam. His main postulation is that Islam and its meanings are contextual and specific; the multiplicities of the meanings of Islam do not fit into the monolithic, compartmentalized generalizations made by the West. He also takes note of how power is concentrated in the Muslim world and has its own complex effects. But this alone does not attest to the Western misrepresentations about Islam. That is why, "So much of Islamic life is neither bound by texts nor confined to personalities or neat structures as to make the overused word "Islam" an unreliable index of what we try to apprehend" (65). Both the West and the Islamic worlds have their own comprehension of Islam and there are many contestations because of this very fact. But what affects the author is the fact that the West has produced enormous amounts of literature and media opinions about Islam and has finally succeeded in turning the Muslim world to a consumer market of goods and stereotypes (67).

The most interesting argument comes when Said tries to decode the collusion of power and knowledge in the Western discourse about Islam. In order to explain this, he takes note of both the orthodox and oppositional knowledge about Islam. The former discourse includes the continuation and furtheration of the age old Oriental stereotypes that are guised in the name of expertise which emanates from the nexus of "the old-boy corporation- government- university network" (152). For him, this is the continuity of the "guild tradition" of Islamic studies in the West which gives impetus for the misrepresentations of Islam (137). He cites Bernard Lewis again to show how his one-sided, uninformed and false views about Muslims are revered and put to use by other scholars and journalist alike. He then ponders that, "for when was a Western scholar ever in a non-Western country except by dint, however symbolic and indirect, of Western power over that country?" (140).

The origin of such authority to judge Islamic world according to the author resides within the Western culture itself which provides a space for area experts and Orientalists to produce knowledge, to disseminate and to represent Islam. This fact clearly denies "the connections between scholarship [. . .] and worldliness" which is very vital in deconstructing the hegemonic thrusts of discourses (140). We can see in the last chapter of the thesis about how Said develops this idea in his book *The World, the Text, and the Critic* and tells about the connection between

scholarship, power and contextual frameworks. The basic idea that runs through the Saidian critique is the questioning and elucidation of such connections that are very important in assessing discourses and representations of various kinds.

For him, the contemporary Western assertions about Islam come from the pressures operating in the present context. The continuation of Orientalist tradition in America reduces Islam to a news item and as a “threat to Western civilization” (144). He gives the example of the seminars held at the Princeton University funded by the Ford Foundation during 1971 and 1978 which tried to pronounce the same indictments on the Islamic world which suited the “national interest” (145). What resulted from these particular seminars was the commodification of Islam, and the “market for expertise” was thrown open to the next generation of area experts (149). He says emphatically:

Knowledge and coverage of the Islamic world, therefore, are defined in the United States by geopolitics and economic interests on . . . an impossibly massive scale, aided and abetted by a structure of knowledge production that is almost as vast and unmanageable. (153-54)

This structure allows for the normalization of the discourse on Islam and also lets the stereotypes about the Muslim world to gain a space in the culture and polity of America.

Andre Sursock in his review of the book, feels that it successfully carries forward the analytical framework of *Orientalism* in its questioning of the Western representations of Islam, and avers that - “*Covering Islam* is a stimulating book—insightful on many levels—for those who are interested in the Iranian revolution, Islam, the Middle East, the media, or the issue of objective knowledge” (268). Thus, we can see how Said has provided an oppositional critique to the Western Islamic discourse and has tried to contrapuntally put forward his ideas and positions in a mature and secular form. Interestingly, his position as the foremost secular and humane critic of our times falls under the third category of critics that he notes in this book. His insistence on dialogue, oppositional critique, secular interpretation and his humanistic thrust make his project more valid and noteworthy.

As we have seen in the critique of various discourses like Orientalism, imperialism, and the Western discourse about Islam- Saidian project tries to locate and analyze the inherent collusion of power and knowledge that facilitates the textual representation of the ‘Other’. His hermeneutics of suspicion works through the inherent gaps and aporias of the discourses to point out their hegemonic and oppressive nature and tries to forward a secular, humane, oppositional and contrapuntal critique that allows for mutual understanding, co-operation and respect. He is not nihilistic in his approach but is a genuine and humane critic who recognizes the worldliness of discourses and paves a way for a critical ‘voyage in’. This gives an opportunity to the occluded to speak and represent them and lead for a process of fruitful discussion and co-existence.

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