

## Occidentalism Revisited: A Dual Perspective on the Image of the Other (Western)

"إعادة النظر في الاستغراب: منظور مزدوج حول صورة الآخر (الغرب)"

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### Abstract:

This article reexamines the Western perception of non-Western cultures, shedding light on the dual perspectives that influence this depiction. The text delves into the construction of the Western image of the Other, emphasizing the complexities inherent in this portrayal. It highlights the historical and cultural factors that have shaped the Occidental viewpoint, inviting readers to reconsider their preconceived notions. It explores the power dynamics at play in the representation of the Other, emphasizing the impact of colonialism and cultural hegemony. The aim of this study is to critically assess how the West has historically positioned itself in relation to non-Western societies, offering insights into the intricacies of this dynamic.

**Keywords:** Occidentalism, Image of the Other, Western Perspective, Identity Construction, Cultural Appropriation

### ملخص:

تعيد هذه المقالة النظر في الإدراك الغربي للثقافات غير الغربية، مسلطة الضوء على المنظورين المزدوجين اللذين يؤثران في هذا الوصف. يتناول النص بناء صورة الغرب للآخر، مشددًا على التعقيدات الجوهرية في هذا التصوير. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على العوامل التاريخية والثقافية التي شكلت النظرة الغربية، داعيًا القراء إلى إعادة النظر في مفاهيمهم المسبقة. كما يستكشف المفاهيم القوية المتداولة في تمثيل الآخر، مشددًا على أثر الاستعمار والهيمنة الثقافية. هدف هذه الدراسة هو التقييم النقدي لكيفية تموضع الغرب تاريخيًا فيما يتعلق بالمجتمعات غير الغربية، مقدمًا رؤى حول تعقيدات هذه الديناميات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الاستغراب، صورة الآخر، المنظور الغربي، بناء الهوية، الاستيلاء الثقافي.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Occidentalism is a term that emerged as a response to the concept of Orientalism, popularized by Edward Said in his seminal work. Orientalism focused on Western representations of the East, primarily the Middle East and Asia. Occidentalism, on the other hand, focuses on non-Western representations and perceptions of the West. Occidentalism arises from a desire to understand how non-Western cultures perceive and respond to the West, particularly in the context of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization. It seeks to analyze how these perceptions are influenced by historical interactions and power dynamics (Said, 2000, p. 59).

Occidentalism serves as a counterbalance to Orientalism, offering a more complete picture of the global discourse on cultural representations. It highlights that the West is not the sole creator of stereotypes and images; non-Western cultures also construct narratives about the West. In an increasingly interconnected world, Occidentalism plays a crucial role in understanding how cultural exchange and globalization impact perceptions of the West. It helps us comprehend how media, technology, and information flows shape these perceptions (Az̄m Šādiq Ğālāl, 2019, p. 77).

"Occidentalism Revisited" is a concept that explores the representations and perceptions of the Western world from a non-Western perspective. The term "Occidentalism" is often used as a counterpart to "Orientalism," a concept popularized by Edward Said in his influential work of the same name (. In the context of Occidentalism Revisited, scholars and thinkers seek to analyze how non-Western societies, cultures, and intellectuals construct their own images of the Western world. It is a dual perspective that involves examining both how the West perceives the East (Orientalism) and how the East perceives the West (Occidentalism) (Buruma & Margalit, 2004, p. 121).

The study of Occidentalism can contribute to improved cross-cultural understanding. By examining how non-Western cultures view the West, it encourages empathy and dialogue between different cultural perspectives, potentially reducing misunderstandings and conflicts. Similarly, Occidentalism invites Western societies to reevaluate their own self-perceptions. It challenges the notion of Western exceptionalism and encourages critical self-reflection on how the West is seen by others, thereby fostering a more nuanced understanding of Western identity.

Moreover, in the modern era, with issues such as immigration, global politics, and cultural exchange at the forefront, Occidentalism remains highly relevant. It helps us make sense of contemporary debates and tensions surrounding the West and its role in the world. Interestingly, Occidentalism has become a prominent topic in academic discourse across various fields, including cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and international relations. Scholars use it as a framework to analyze and dissect cultural representations and perceptions.

This article examines the complex concept of Occidentalism in contemporary society. The article aims to offer a comprehensive exploration of Occidentalism by examining its historical and cultural roots, alongside its contemporary implications in the globalized world. The key objectives include defining Occidentalism in relation to Orientalism, elucidating their distinctions; tracing the emergence and evolution of Occidentalism from the rise of Europe to its appropriation by ideologies like Maoism and political Islamism; scrutinizing the construction of the Western image in non-Western contexts through the lens of intellectuals, artists, and the public; analyzing the impact of

Occidentalism on cultural and political identities, as well as its role in shaping international relations; and exploring avenues to challenge and transform Occidentalist narratives, underscoring the significance of critical thinking and cultural exchange in dismantling stereotypes and fostering a nuanced understanding of Western culture. By achieving these objectives, the article aspires to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the representation of Western culture in non-Western settings, thereby enhancing our broader comprehension of cultural differences and the intricacies of globalization..

## 2. Literature Review:

Occidentalism is a concept that refers to the stereotyping of Western culture by non-Westerners. The term emerged as the reciprocal of the notion of Orientalism, which refers to Western stereotypes of the Eastern world. Occidentalism can be seen in various ways, such as the construction of the image of the West by non-Western intellectuals, artists, and the general public, the appropriation of elements from Christianity and Western culture in general, and the rise of Europe in modern times. Interesting works on Occidentalism include *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (1995) by James G. Carrier, which serves as an early exploration of Occidentalism, flipping the Orientalist perspective onto the West. The book examines how non-Western cultures construct their own images of the West. Carrier argues that these representations are often shaped by historical encounters with Western imperialism and are used as a means of resistance or cultural preservation. In addition, *The West in the Eyes of Its Others* (1999) edited by Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, is an anthology that brings together diverse voices to examine how non-Western societies perceive and represent the West. The contributors analyze cultural and political factors that shape these perceptions, emphasizing the impact of colonial histories, globalization, and media representations. The book challenges monolithic depictions of the West and highlights the complexity of Occidentalism. *Occidentalism: Modernity and Subjectivity* (2001) by Harry Harootunian, as well focuses on the Japanese experience of Occidentalism, tracing its origins to the Meiji era and the subsequent rapid modernization of Japan. He argues that Occidentalism in Japan was not merely a response to Western influence but also a process through which the Japanese constructed their own modern identity. Harootunian's work sheds light on the internal dynamics of Occidentalism within non-Western societies.

Recent Perspectives include *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (2005) by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit. This book examines the rise of anti-Western sentiment in various non-Western societies. Buruma and Margalit argue that Occidentalism has taken on a more hostile form in recent times, fueled by geopolitical conflicts, religious fundamentalism, and the perception of Western cultural imperialism. The authors explore the consequences of Occidentalism on global politics and intercultural understanding. Also, *Reverse Orientalism: Western Anti-Islamism and the Problem of Islamophobia* (2018) by Tarek Fatah, digs into the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the West, highlighting the negative representations of Islam and Muslims. While primarily focusing on anti-Islamic sentiment, the book explores how Occidentalism intersects with contemporary socio-political discourses, particularly in the context of terrorism and immigration.

## 3. Defining Occidentalism

Occidentalism is a concept that helps us explore how people from non-Western backgrounds, including intellectuals, artists, and the general public, perceive and depict the Western world. It's essentially a way of looking at the West, but often through a distorted and stereotypical lens. This view can be held by both people within and outside the Western world, and it can be expressed explicitly or hidden beneath the surface (Machart et al. 2016, p. 90). The term "Occidentalism" emerged as a counterpart to the concept of "Orientalism," which refers to how Western societies have historically stereotyped and portrayed the Eastern world. But Occidentalism isn't just about how non-Western cultures see the West. It also extends to the idea of how Europe and the West have risen in modern times. This includes how Europeans have attempted to turn their own historical experiences into a universal and dominant model for the world.

In more recent times, Occidentalism is not solely about how non-Western cultures perceive the West. It also encompasses the idea of Western modernity becoming a privileged and even dominant form of social organization, tied to a desire for universal influence. Interestingly, while early encounters between different cultures and the West were often genuine and diverse, later manifestations of Occidentalism have been influenced by Western ideas. This includes things like the importance of the nation-state, the rejection of rationality in favor of Romantic ideals, and concerns about the spiritual well-being of citizens in liberal democracies. In academic circles, Occidentalism is a term used to describe the various academic activities related to the study of Western societies (Fazlhashemi, 2013, p. 85).

Moreover, Occidentalism has also become a discourse about the perceived challenges facing Western civilization in our increasingly globalized world. It has evolved alongside the changing landscape of global development. To truly understand Occidentalism, we explore historical pathways of transformation and cultural change. This helps us see how Occidentalism fits into the broader context of uneven and combined development throughout history. In essence, Occidentalism is a multifaceted concept that involves looking at how the West is perceived, how it perceives itself, and how these perceptions have evolved over time in various academic disciplines and global contexts (Buruma & Margalit, 2004, p. 89).

Occidentalism is a fascinating concept that offers a misleading yet revealing reflection of Western society. Unlike Orientalism, which represents the historical depiction and stereotyping of Eastern cultures by the West, Occidentalism is the lens through which people from non-Western cultures perceive the Western world. It's not a simple reversal of roles, though. Occidentalism is a complex phenomenon that adapts to various contexts and perspectives. It encompasses a broad range of manifestations, both external and internal, and influences diverse ideologies, from Maoism to political Islamism (Quinn 2017, p.72). In certain revolutionary contexts, Occidentalism becomes a significant political force. Academically, Occidentalism is not just a concept; it is a field of study that enables scholars to dissect and understand Western societies, particularly in relation to Europe's historical dominance and its desire to establish a global model. In summary, Occidentalism is a multifaceted and shape-shifting concept that provides insights into Western society, observed by both insiders and outsiders, with potential political implications, and is an area of academic exploration (Said, 2000, p.104).

The relationship between Occidentalism and Orientalism, as well as other related concepts, is

complex and interconnected. Orientalism, coined by Edward Said, refers to the way Western societies historically depicted and stereotyped Eastern cultures, creating an "us vs. them" binary (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001, p.67). Occidentalism, on the other hand, emerged as a response to Orientalism, representing the perceptions of the Western world by non-Western cultures. While Orientalism focuses on the East-West dynamic, Occidentalism expands the discourse to include the West's own self-perception. These concepts are intertwined and inform each other, shedding light on power dynamics, cultural representations, and the construction of identity in a global context. Additionally, related concepts such as postcolonialism, cultural imperialism, and hybridity further contribute to the nuanced understanding of how cultures influence and shape one another, both historically and in the present day.

#### 4. Occidentalism as "The Other"

Occidentalism represents a distorted and often simplistic image of the Western world, held by people both within and outside the Western societies, whether explicitly expressed or subtly implied. Occidentalism acts as a counterpart to Orientalism, which focuses on Western stereotypes of the Eastern world. While Orientalism has been extensively studied and analyzed, Occidentalism lacks a definitive body of work that represents the West for non-Western audiences in the same way Orientalism does for the East (Salhi, 2019, p. 57). Nevertheless, Occidentalism is a significant force in its own right, and it sometimes refers to the process of Westernization, where non-Western societies adopt or aspire to adopt Western cultural elements.

The concept of "Representation of the other- Occidentalism representing a distorting Western world" is supported by sustainable evidence from various sources. Occidentalism is defined as a distorted and stereotyped image of Western society, which can be held by people inside and outside the Western world and which can be articulated. Occidentalism is seen as a style of representation that produces polarized and hierarchical conceptions of the West and its Others. The practices and discourses of Occidentalism vary a great deal from time to time and region to region. Occidentalism is not limited to a specific cultural or political ideology; it can be found in various forms, such as Maoism, political Islamism, and other ideologies. The concept of Occidentalism is often discussed in juxtaposition with Orientalism, and the practices and discourses of Occidentalism vary a great deal from time to time and region to region. The evidence from the sources supports the idea that Occidentalism represents a distorted image of the Western world (Al-Sharoufi, 2011, p. 109).

Substantial evidence supporting this fundamental idea emerges from various sources, including cultural expressions, academic analyses, and literary works. In terms of literary evidence, Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel "Persepolis" stands out as a significant example. The novel challenges conventional postcolonial perspectives on Western influences in Iran, offering literary evidence that illustrates how Occidentalism is manifested in storytelling, highlighting the distortion of the Western world (Leservot, 2011, p. 125). Furthermore, an academic study examining Taiwanese undergraduate students' responses to a fictional text, utilizing Occidentalism as a theoretical framework, showcases how stereotypes linked to the Western world are deconstructed. The study reveals explicit and implicit assumptions and ideologies present in the text, providing insight into how Occidentalism influences perceptions (Huang et al., 2022, p. 47).



In the realm of cultural expressions, Western art portraying "Otherness" is discussed as evidence on platforms like thecollector.com. This artistic representation reflects a menacing and destructive portrayal aligning with the concept of Occidentalism, thereby emphasizing how stereotypes are visually conveyed in artistic expressions (Salhi, 2019, 23-4). Academic analyses and definitions also contribute sustainable evidence to the core concept. Scholarly work on Occidentalism emphasizes its evolving nature and its role as a reaction against Orientalism and Western civilization. This academic effort aims to construct a non-biased definition of Occidentalism, underlining its involvement in distorting representations of the Western world. Moreover, within a historical context, the legacy of Orientalist stereotypes provides additional evidence (Ewing, et al., 2015, p. 210). Occidentalism can be viewed as a reaction to and distortion of these stereotypes, further supporting the core concept by showcasing the historical perpetuation of distorted representations of the Western world.

For instance, one evidence of orientalism is the Media representations of the "East" in Western media are often fraught with persistent stereotypes and biases, such as depicting Middle Easterners as terrorists and exoticizing Asian cultures. These portrayals simplify and misrepresent the complexity and diversity of Eastern societies, reinforcing prejudices and shaping public perceptions. To address these issues, it is crucial to increase diverse voices in media production, engage in responsible storytelling, critically analyze media content, and advocate for greater diversity and inclusion in the media industry. This approach aims to create a more nuanced, empathetic, and accurate media landscape.

Moreover, the concept of "Imperial Orientalism" explores how the expansion of Western colonial empires was often accompanied by a justificatory ideology that portrayed the colonized peoples as backward, uncivilized, and in need of Western "enlightenment." This Orientalist mindset, as described by scholars like Edward Said, served to underpin and rationalize the colonial occupation and subjugation of non-Western societies ( Said, 1979, p.89) , The construction of the "Orient" as an inferior, exotic "other" allowed Western powers to assert their cultural and political dominance, while presenting colonial rule as a civilizing mission to bring progress and modernity to these supposedly primitive lands and peoples. This Orientalist worldview was reflected in a wide range of cultural, academic, and political discourses that ultimately served to legitimize and perpetuate the unequal power dynamics of the colonial era.

In non-Western contexts, the way the West is represented and stereotyped is influenced by a variety of factors, including Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the role of institutions in upholding Western-centric knowledge hierarchies (Harrison, 2000, p.58). These representations often present a distorted and oversimplified image of Western culture, highlighting perceived strengths and weaknesses. For instance, in art, literature, and cultural studies, there is a tendency to imitate or depict aspects of the Western world in a simplified and stereotypical manner. Certain regions and religions are portrayed through a Western lens, fitting them into preconceived notions and ideas (p. 62).

Moreover, Occidentalism can also manifest in the adoption of Western cultural elements by non-Western societies, often driven by a desire for progress and modernity. This can result in the portrayal of the West as a symbol of advancement, while non-Western societies are seen as

traditional or backward. In fashion and popular media, there are instances of imitation, inaccurate depictions, and caricaturizations of the Western world by non-Western artists, creatives, writers, and designers (Ahmad, 1992, p.93-4) . Such representations can reinforce Western stereotypes and caricatures, as non-Western cultures are sometimes interpreted out of context to fit preconceived notions.

These representations and stereotypes of the West in non-Western contexts have significant implications. They shape the way non-Western societies perceive and engage with Western culture, contributing to cultural misunderstandings and reinforcing existing power dynamics between the West and the non-Western world. It is essential to critically examine and challenge these representations in order to foster a more nuanced and inclusive understanding across cultures. Initially, power dynamics are crucial in shaping identity, especially in the realm of Occidentalism. Occidentalism can be viewed as a form of resistance against Western cultural dominance, as non-Western societies strive to assert their own cultural identity and challenge prevailing Western narratives (Buruma & Margalit ,2004, p 104). However, this resistance is often influenced by power dynamics, with non-Western societies defining themselves in opposition to the West rather than on their own terms. This can result in the continuation of stereotypes and caricatures of the West as non-Western cultures endeavor to establish their unique identity in contrast to Western influences.

Simultaneously, power dynamics also play a role in how individuals and groups within non-Western societies perceive and construct their own identity. For instance, in tribal societies, the dominance of tribal affiliations can shape individuals' behavior and ultimately their sense of self. Additionally, in the field of organizational ethnography, power dynamics influence the researcher-researched relationships, where factors such as ethnicity can impact the construction and understanding of identity. In short, power dynamics have a complex and multifaceted impact on identity, particularly in the context of Occidentalism. While Occidentalism represents resistance to Western cultural hegemony, it is intricately intertwined with power dynamics and can reinforce stereotypes and caricatures of the West. Furthermore, power dynamics also shape how individuals and groups within non-Western societies interpret and shape their own identities (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 122).

## 5. Implications and Challenges

Overcoming essentialism and stereotypes associated with Occidentalism presents significant challenges to intercultural understanding and communication. These challenges arise due to deeply ingrained cultural biases, historical legacies, and power imbalances. One of key challenges in Occidentalism is preconceived notions, which perpetuate stereotypes and hinder understanding between the Western world and non-Western societies. Occidentalism idealizes or demonizes Western culture while oversimplifying non-Western societies. This inaccurate understanding leads to misunderstandings and a lack of empathy (Machart et al. 2016, p. 101). By challenging existing beliefs, engaging in dialogue, and seeking diverse perspectives, individuals can overcome preconceived notions, foster genuine understanding, and promote tolerance and appreciation for different cultures.

Another key challenges in Occidentalism is cultural biases, which reinforces judgments and assumptions about superiority or inferiority between cultures. These biases act as barriers to

effective communication, hindering open-mindedness and respectful dialogue. When individuals hold onto these biases, they are less willing to genuinely listen and understand diverse perspectives, further deepening the divide between cultures. Overcoming these cultural biases is crucial for fostering meaningful connections and promoting a more inclusive and harmonious global society (p.102).

Finally, Occidentalism is complexly linked to power imbalances and the lingering effects of historical colonialism. These power dynamics significantly impact the ways in which individuals from diverse cultures perceive and engage with one another, making it difficult to establish a sense of equality and mutual understanding. The historical legacy of colonialism has created a framework where Western cultures are often seen as dominant or superior, while non-Western societies are positioned as subordinate or inferior. These power imbalances can perpetuate unequal power dynamics in contemporary interactions, hindering genuine understanding and inhibiting meaningful dialogue (p.102-3).

While overcoming essentialism and stereotypes associated with Occidentalism is challenging, there are potential ways to bridge the gaps and foster mutual understanding. Promoting education and raising awareness about Occidentalism and its complexities can help individuals develop a critical understanding of cultural biases and stereotypes. Education can empower individuals to challenge essentialist narratives and engage in more nuanced and empathetic intercultural communication. Moreover, facilitating opportunities for cultural exchange and immersion can break down stereotypes and foster meaningful connections. Encouraging individuals to engage with different cultures firsthand can challenge misconceptions and promote a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives (Harrison, 2000, p.81).

Besides, creating spaces for dialogue and active listening is crucial for intercultural understanding. Encouraging individuals to engage in open and respectful conversations, where they actively listen to each other's experiences and perspectives, can help break down barriers and bridge cultural gaps. Adding to that, promoting diverse and accurate media representations can challenge Occidentalism and its associated stereotypes. Encouraging media outlets to provide a platform for diverse voices and narratives can contribute to a more balanced and nuanced understanding of different cultures (p.85).

Emphasizing shared humanity and common values: Highlighting shared humanity and common values across cultures can foster a sense of connection and understanding. Emphasizing the universality of human experiences can help individuals move beyond essentialist perspectives and build bridges of empathy and compassion (p.86). Overall, overcoming essentialism and stereotypes associated with Occidentalism requires a commitment to critical self-reflection, open-mindedness, and active engagement. By challenging biases, promoting education, and fostering dialogue, it is possible to bridge cultural gaps and foster meaningful intercultural understanding and communication.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the examination of Occidentalism as the image of the Other reveals the intricate and multifaceted nature of global cultural interconnectedness. This research has delved into the



complexities surrounding the perceptions and representations of the Western world by non-Western societies, as well as the reciprocal views of non-Western cultures by the West. By analyzing the historical, cultural, and power dynamics that shape these perceptions, this paper has shed light on the formation of stereotypes, biases, and cultural appropriations.

A key aspect of this exploration has been the recognition of the need for shared understanding and empathy. The paper underscores the importance of confronting stereotypes and biases, both within academic and public discourses, to foster meaningful intercultural dialogue and cooperation. By acknowledging the fluidity and complexity of these perceptions, this research calls for a reevaluation of existing frameworks and narratives, to promote inclusivity and equity within the global community.

Ultimately, this comprehensive analysis of Occidentalism and the image of the Other emphasizes the significance of critical self-reflection, education, cultural exchange, and open dialogue. By actively engaging with these complexities, individuals and societies can work towards dismantling stereotypes, bridging cultural gaps, and cultivating a more interconnected and harmonious world.

In conclusion, this article has provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Occidentalism and its implications for intercultural understanding and communication. By confronting stereotypes, fostering empathy, and promoting critical engagement, we can strive toward a more inclusive and equitable global community. Future research in this field will undoubtedly contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of Occidentalism and its impact on our interconnected world.

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