CHAPTER TWO

Occident-Orient Dichotomy: Historical Background

and the Trouble of Definition

Any critical reflection on the concepts of East and West must begin with a purview to their imputed meta-historical meanings. When a vaguely defined geographical division is transfigured into an invariant contrast of socio-cultural identities, the underlying criteria must be derived from experiences and interpretations of a particularly formative nature. The visions (primarily Western ones) of East and West as enduring opposites, encompassing a variety of cultures and a series of epochs on each side, draw on successive patterns of polarization and on the accompanying self-images. The Greek encounter with the Near East -- a combination of borrowing and demarcation through distinctive inventions, followed by conflict and counter-offensive -- has been commonly figured as the inaugural episode of a much longer story and as the original source.

However, the concept of East-West divide was constructed over a passage of time and was a result of certain historical, socio-political and cultural as well as religious factors and forces. Each period tried to cast out certain definitional constructs by which each cultural force would create its instrumental tools of power over the “Other” by means of which it could ward off its opponent and win over the battle religiously, socially, and culturally. The recurrent and accumulative forces of “perception”, “(mis)representation” and “demonization” of the “Other” resulted in a false and “created” dichotomy that has later manifested in different sociopolitical and cultural forms.

It is from this perspective that Edward Said has become the most cited and referential icon due to his striking contribution to the study of the East-West relationship.
His denunciation of the construction of the dichotomy between the “Orient” and the “Occident”, his treatment of these two constructed identities as equal interlocutors, and his debunking of the binary demarcations between human race has injected new definition of the concept and destabilized the foundation of the long-believed process of “Othering” that was, and still remains, prevalent in the Western perception of the “Other”. He has brilliantly brought those notions into a critical scrutiny after it was outside the academic and critical circles.

By treating “Orientalism” as a discourse, he directs the attention to the systematic relation between knowledge and power and their relationship to the institutionalized discipline and beliefs. Consequently, the significance of Orientalism came not only from its dialectical methods and structure of questioning but also from the influential interdisciplinary effect it has on the other disciplines, inciting various comments and responses. Effectually, Said has brought the concept of Occident-Orient dichotomy from a given, unquestionable social cult and belief, into a critical concept viable to the scrutiny of analysis, evaluation, criticism and even rejection. His contention was mainly that since dichotomy is culturally and epistemologically constructed, it is to be dialectically questioned and contested.

But, what is meant by “Orient” and “Occident”? What are the perceptual theories behind the nourishment of the concept? What are other forms of polarization that were, and still are, dominating the concept under study? This chapter attempts to answer these questions in detail, providing a historical survey of the development of the concept of the Occident-Orient dichotomy and how it has been deployed in the Western premises and thought.
The “Orient” and the “Occident”: Definitions and Identifications

The classification of the world into oriental “East” and occidental “West” has pervasively its history of epistemological and ideological basis. This categorized divide has entailed an ontological and geographical formation of one’s location and essentialized his/her identity. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the term “Orient” is derived from the Latin word “*oriens*” meaning “east”. The use of the word for “rising” to refer to the east (where the sun rises) has analogs from many languages: compare the terms “Levant” (French levant “rising”), “sharq” Arabic: شرق “rise”, shurooq Arabic: شروق “rising”), and “The Land of the Rising Sun” to refer to Japan. The opposite term “Occident” is derived from the Latin word *occidens* meaning “west” (“occido” “fall/set”).

In its broad etymological terminology, the “Orient” is a term which means the East. It is a traditional designation for anything belonging to the Eastern world or the Far East, in relation to Europe. The term “Orient” particularly included regions that used to be known as Persia, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Egypt. The adjectival term “Oriental” has been used by the West as a term to describe cultures, peoples, countries, and goods from the Orient. “Oriental” generally means “eastern”.

Over time, the common understanding of the “Orient” has continually shifted eastwards, as Western explorers traveled farther into Asia. It finally reached the Pacific Ocean, in what Westerners came to call “the Far East”. These shifts in time and identification sometimes confuse the scope (historical and geographic) of Oriental Studies. Yet there remain contexts where the “Orient” and “Oriental” have kept their older meanings. “Oriental” typically forms the regions extending from the Middle East to sub-continental India to Indo-China.
In European historiography, the meaning of the “Orient” changed in scope several times. Originally, the term referred to Egypt, the Levant, and adjoining areas. Later, the term became synonymous with Islam and its scope expanded both eastward and westward to include all non-European areas of Eurasian civilization, including North Africa as far west as Morocco. During the 1800s India, and to a lesser extent China, began to displace the Levant as the primary subject of Orientalist research. By the mid-20th century Western scholars generally considered the “Orient” as just East Asia, Southeast Asia, and eastern Central Asia. As recently as the early 20th century, the term “Orient” continued to be often used in ways that included North Africa and even parts of southeastern Europe.

In contemporary English, Oriental usually refers to things from Asia and the parts of North Africa. This includes Indians, Arabs, and most other West Asian peoples. Because of historical discrimination against Chinese and Japanese, in some parts of the United States, the term is considered derogatory, preferring the word “Asian”, instead. It has been even legalized as in the US Engrossed Senate Bill, March 11, 2002. The American Heritage Book of English Usage shows that the Oriental “is most objectionable in contemporary contexts and when used as a noun, as in the appointment of an Oriental to head the commission. In these cases Asian . . . is the only acceptable term. But in certain historical contexts, or when its exotic connotations are integral to the topic, Oriental remains a useful term” (189, italics in origin).

However, it is to be noted that though the three words, “Orient,” “Oriental” and “Orientalism” might suggest a similar root, i.e. “Orient”, from which the other two emerge as derivatives, they are in fact different in concept and meaning. While the “Oriental” refers to someone/something belonging to a geographical designation -- what is from “out there” -- the Middle East and Asia, the term “Orient”, however, becomes a loaded construct that contains within itself ideological dimensions in political and cultural
discourses. Thus, the noun “Orientalism”, and the adjective form “Orientalist” (as opposed to Oriental), however, are more contentious and problematic. It is Edward Said who popularized the term “Orientalism” in his classic book which bears the same name, i.e. *Orientalism*, and polemicized it at the same time. The concept “Orientalism” refers not only to western scholarship on the East or simply dealing with what is “out there”, but involved a complex construction of a body of knowledge motivated and shaped by interests and power, covered with political overtones and implications. It is the nature of this construction that makes the very truth and representation contentiously questionable.

The “Occident” is the term which is associated with the “Orient” as its antithesis or contrastive “Other”. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* takes the “Occident” to refer to “Western lands or regions; the west; [t]he countries of Europe and the Western Hemisphere.” However, in its etymological genesis, the Western world, also known as the West and the “Occident” is a term referring to different nations depending on the context. Though the term originally had a literal geographic meaning and contrasted Europe with the cultures of the “Orient” or Asia, today the term West does not imply geographic location, as most of Europe and major components of the West, lie in the Eastern Hemisphere. From of the word “Occident,” we get “Occidental” and “Occidentalism”. Occidentalism is a quality, mannerism, or custom specific to or characteristic of the Occident; Scholarly knowledge of Occidental cultures, languages, and peoples. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines Occidentalism as “the characteristic traits or customs of the occidental peoples”.

In fact, the term Occidentalism refers to one of the two main senses: a) stereotyped and sometimes dehumanizing views on the Western world, including Europe and the English-speaking world; and b) ideologies or visions of the West developed in either the West or non-West. While the former definition stresses negative constructions
of the West, as an inverted label of “Orientalism”, the latter approach has a broader range and includes both positive and negative representations. The term was used in the latter sense by James G. Carrier in his book *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (1995), and subsequently by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit in their book *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (2004) and Couze Venn in *Occidentalism: Modernity and Subjectivity* (2000). Couze Venn associated Occidentalism with modernism. For him, Occidentalism is “the conceptual and historical space in which a particular narrative of the subject and a particular narrative of history have been constituted” which “have become hegemonic with modernization, having effects throughout the world because of the universal scope of the project of modernity and the global reach of European colonization” (2). Thus, Venn’s definition relates Occidentalism with the “logic of capitalist accumulation” and “the force of colonialism and imperialism” through “hegemonic discourse of modernity which has left behind both the ethical priority in the emancipator ideals of Enlightenment and the memory of the physical, psychological and ontological violences that have shadowed the making of the modern world” (8). He concludes that Occidentalism is “the space of the co-articulation of logocentric reason, technocratic rationality and imperialism by way of an egocentric ontology of being. It inscribes the privilege of the West as the superior locus of world-historical development, and the modern Western subject as the agent of that process” (83).

**Dichotomy: Types and Forms**

The lexical meaning of the term “dichotomy” refers to any splitting of a whole into exactly two non-overlapping parts. They are either complements (subdivision creating subsets) or opposites. A dichotomy may represent sequence, magnitudes or hierarchy. The first is oppositional and anti-symmetrical; the second is complementary or asymmetrical; the third refers to a mix of categorical and magnitudinal properties.
The *Macmillan Dictionary* defines dichotomy as “a difference between two opposite things or ideas.” In the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, dichotomy refers to “division into two usually contradictory parts or opinions”. In other words, it is a partition of a whole (or a set) into two parts (subsets) that are may be mutually exclusive, that is, nothing can belong simultaneously to both parts, and jointly exhaustive and that everything must belong to one part or the other. In its philosophical sense, “dichotomy” entails fundamental distinctions of objects (whole-parts) and relationships (static/dynamic) which are combined into text/context partnerships that go to manifesting a “whole” experience. This experience is encoded and symbolized, transferring meaning to a “carrier” of it, allowing for general and particular sharing of information where the metaphors/symbolisms elicit emotional resonance.

However, dichotomy is not always real or true. It poses a hermeneutic problematic and logical configuration. For example, the colors black and white represent a classic dichotomy: either something is black, or it is white, with no room for overlap or alternatives. Dichotomies are used in a number of ways and in an assortment of fields. This idea of a true dichotomy is different from that of a false dichotomy; a dichotomy which is not, in other words, a true dichotomy. A well known example of a false dichotomy is the saying “you are either with us or against us.” In this case, the dichotomy leaves out a third option, neutrality, setting up an “us vs. them” mentality which can be very dangerous. Such flaws in logic are often used in arguments, in the hopes of brow beating an opponent into conceding a point by setting up a false dichotomy and thereby forcing the issue. As a general rule, something is a false dichotomy when its elements are not mutually exclusive or contradictory, or when some other option or concept is left out. In short, false dichotomy is a logical fallacy.
Perceived dichotomies are common in Western thought. In *The Argument Culture* (1998), Deborah Tannen suggests that the dialogue of Western culture is characterized by a “warlike atmosphere” in which the winning side has truth (like a trophy). In such a dialogue, the middle alternatives are virtually ignored. Tannen argues that “the argument culture urges us to approach the world -- and the people in it -- in an adversarial frame of mind. It rests on the assumption that opposition is the best way to get anything done” (3).

Apart from the philosophically oriented classification, the Occident-Orient dichotomy is manifested in four main unqualified forms: epistemological, related to knowledge/power stratification or the system of creation and representation of the “Other”; hierarchical, related to racial supremacy and cultural superiority; ideological, related to antagonistic political and socio-economic disparity; traditional, related to religiously historical antagonism.

**East-West Dichotomy: Historical Purview**

East-West divide is a long-contested concept since the Greek time. It is said that the Greek historian, Herodotus, was possibly the first recorded historian who deliberately portrayed the “East” (Persians) and the “West” (Greeks) as mutual antagonists, thereby proposing the nucleus of all ancient history.

The East-West divide is prominently epistemological more than anything else. It is mostly the product of a long process of constructiveness. This can be found in the writings of both Eastern and Western scholars and writers. In this context, Dean Acheson horridly believes that “in the final analysis, the United States was the locomotive at the head of the human kind, and the rest of the world was the caboose” (qtd. in Beisner 388). Japanese sinologist Tachibana Shiraki in the 1920s wrote of the need to unify with China and some other Asian nations in forming a “New East to balance the West” (Li 104). In
China, Mao Zedong proclaimed, “This is a war between two worlds. The West Wind cannot prevail over the East Wind; the East Wind is bound to prevail over the West Wind” (qtd. in Kau, Mao and Leung 775).

To the 1940s Western writers, however, the concept was bound up with the idea of the Third World Nationalisms that was conceived as “intrinsically anti- or non-Western”. The sociologist Frank Furedi points out how the growth of the Third World was assessed in terms of “mature Western versus immature Eastern nationalism.” He asserts that “this East-West dichotomy became an accepted part of Western political theory” (115-16).

More recently, the East-West divide has been posited in terms of an Islamic “East” versus a Euro-American “West” (Mestrovic 63). Critics note that an Islamic/non-Islamic, East-West dichotomy is complicated by the global dissemination of Islamic fundamentalism and Western cultural hegemony, “the argument moves beyond that of an East/West dichotomy and into a tripartite situation where every side is attempting to have a claim over the Truth” (Khatib 173).

Besides the epistemologically constructed form of East-West dichotomy, a philosophical formulation was introduced into the construction of the concept. The renowned Chinese historian Ji Xianlin provocatively claims that while “the West is deductive, from the universal to the particular; the East is inductive, from the particular to the universal” (qtd. in Pattberg 7). In line with this, some scholars and philosophers theorize certain categorical classifications of the world into different spheres and cultures. Among these theorizations are Arnold J Toynbee, Samuel P Huntington and Ji Xianlin. Xianlin classifies the world’s spheres into “nine civilizations” and “four cultural systems: Arabic/Islam, Confucian, Hindi/Brahmin and Western/Christian, with the former three
forming the Oriental cultural system and the latter one the Occidental cultural system” (7).

Traditionally, the concept of religion constitutes a dividing doctrine at the heart of the East-West dichotomy. Disguised in the attire of politics, the religious dichotomy took place in the seventh-century Europe with the advance of Islam as a compelling rival force. Hence, the “Orient” came to specifically refer to the “Oriental Islamic” people and location. With the passage of time, it recently came to narrowly refer to the world of Arab and Middle East. It is no surprise then to find that the major subject of the Oriental studies and Orientalists’ scholarship is the Arab-Islamic people, culture and regions, with its misrepresentations and disfigurations.

The division was historically penetrated in the Western perception of its opponent “Other” since the emergence of Islam. As Zackary Lockman observes, “the initial western Christian perceptions of Islam and of its adherents did not come out of nowhere or develop in a vacuum. Seventh-century ‘Europeans’ . . . already possessed concepts and categories through which this new and frightening phenomenon could be made sense of” (8). According to Lockman, the Western Christian perception of Islam, goes even further back in time, to ancient Greece and Rome, along with the exploration of the origins and evolution of the idea of a “Europe” and a “West” that deemed to essentially be different from an “East.” Over the succeeding centuries these and other ideas and images have been drawn, in different ways and in changing contexts, to underpin certain ways of dividing the world and categorizing its parts. The Europeans came to identify ancient Greece, and particularly Athens in its “golden age” (about 500–400 BCE), as the source of core components of the thought and culture of what they had come to call the “cradle” of that “Western civilization”.

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Therefore, at various points over that very long span of time, some European scholars, writers and others appropriated certain images and notions about the East and Islam from what they had come to perceive as Europe’s distinctive past, refashioned them in keeping with their own contemporary concerns, and propagated them as relevant for their own time. It is this process of selective borrowing and creative recycling that makes delving into early images and attitudes useful for understanding how Islam and the Middle East would come to be understood and portrayed.

However, it is remarkably significant to note that the ancient Greeks did of course not see themselves as Europeans or Westerners. Rather, they regarded themselves as a distinctive and culturally superior people surrounded by less advanced “barbarians,” by which the Greeks meant all those who spoke not Greek but some other language. In fact, the European appropriation of the Greek culture failed to realize that as we all know that the Greeks were very much influenced by, and borrowed from, the cultures of their older, richer and more powerful neighbors to the South and East such as the mighty Egyptians, the people of the Fertile Land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers (Mesopotamia, from the Greek for “between the rivers”), and the Phoenicians, who ranged far and wide across the Mediterranean Sea as traders and settlers. In his controversial 1987 book *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Martin Bernal argued that the great debt which ancient Greek culture owed to neighboring Egypt had been ignored or concealed by nineteenth-century European scholars, who saw ancient Greece as “the cradle of the West” and could not tolerate the thought that the Greeks had borrowed heavily from the “Semitic” Egyptians. He remarks: “Greek culture had arisen as the result of colonization, around 1500 BC, by the Egyptians and Phoenicians who had civilized the native inhabitants . . . Greeks had continued to borrow heavily from Near Eastern cultures” (1). Interestingly, Bernal identifies two models of Greek history: the “Aryan”
history which views the Greece as essentially European or Aryan, and the “Ancient”
history which he views it as Levantine, pertaining to the periphery of the Egyptian and
Semitic cultural area. He discovers that “historiography were profoundly affected by anti-
Semitism”, and therefore it is easy “to make a connection between the dismissal of
Egyptians, and explosion of Northern European racism in the 19th century” (xv).

What the West actually inherited from the cultural and civilizational legacy of the
Greek is the insistence on their superiority over the “barbarians”, a term used to describe
those different from Greek with regard to language and culturality. This can be traced, for
instance, in Aristotle’s speculations on the superiority of the Greek as compared to the
inhabitants of the cold lands of Europe, “full of spirit but somewhat deficient in
intelligence and skill” and therefore free but politically disorganized and incapable of
ruling over others, with the natives of the warmer lands of Asia who were “intelligent and
skillful in temperament, but lack spirit, so they are in continuous subjugation and slavery”
(qtd. in Lewis and Wigen 214). However, Aristotle portrayed the Greeks as neither
European nor Asian but rather as a distinct people who by virtue of their intermediate
location between the two continents were endowed with the best qualities of both. The
Europeans, therefore, drew on the ancient Greeks’ image of the social and political
character of the peoples and states of Asia to underpin the sharp dichotomization of East
and West. In fact, this image seems to have been a legacy of the Greeks’ long conflict
with the Persians, who posed as a threat to the independence of the Greek city-states and
their own hopes for expansion. The struggle for domination between the Greeks and the
Persians as rivalries of power at that time created an ontological division. This struggle
was not only political, imperial in a modern sense of the word, but cultural as well.
According to Lockman, “The Greeks often contrasted themselves with Asians in rather
stark and essentialized terms”. They regarded Asians as “servile, virtually slaves . . .
almost socially immobile . . . vulgar, corrupt and immoral”. By contrast, “The Greeks tended to depict themselves as a virtuous, modest people who treasured their liberty above all else . . .” (13).

The East/West polarity was also adopted by the Romans along with the division of the world into three parts, just as they borrowed so much else from the Greeks. However, the Romans sometimes used the terms Europe and Asia to denote western and eastern parts of the empire. The Romans – unlike the Greeks – tended to use the term “ Asiatic” pejoratively (Hay 4). They also decried the morally corrupting influence of the East whose culture they saw as lacking in the manly and martial virtues which they believed had allowed the Romans to conquer and rule so vast an empire.

The early medieval European scholars largely adopted the ancient Greek geographers’ division of the world into three parts and the dichotomization of East and West, but they embedded this system of categorization into their conception of the world and its peoples as it was derived from their understanding of the Bible. The great theologian Augustine, identified each of the three continents and the peoples who settled in them after the great flood described in the biblical book of Genesis with one of Noah’s sons: Japheth and his progeny with Europe, Shem (from whom the term “ Semite” comes) with Asia, and Ham with Africa. But this conception also implied, for Christians, a conviction of European Christian superiority. As Denys Hay puts it,

Europe was the land of Japheth, of the Gentiles, the Greeks and the Christians; Asia was the land of Semitic peoples, glorious . . . but . . . condemned to an inferiority which was stated in the scriptures: “God shall enlarge Japheth and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem.” As for Africa, the lot of the unhappy
descendants of Ham, the Hamitic subjection was equally clearly laid down . . . “a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.” (14-5)

This hierarchical way of classifying the peoples and races of the world and fixing their place in the grand scheme of things, rooted in what Christians took to be the word of God, would much later be used to explain and justify the large-scale European enslavement, conquest and domination of non-European peoples. It is this appropriation and selectivity that characterizes the West’s perception of itself and the “Other”. By framing history in this manner, by very selectively choosing elements of Rome’s culture and history to include in the “heritage” it supposedly bequeathed to Western civilization, and by ignoring less pleasant aspects, the Europeans helped building on their thought and further buttressed the old and often highly charged dichotomy between East and West, between Europe and Asia.

However, bias and prejudice was not only in Western cultural discourse, but was also part of a larger religious, political, and cultural process that dismisses any different “Other” as useless, invalid and abnormal. This was the result of a conscious act that relied not on an accurate knowledge, but largely, often exclusively, on a perceptual account of what was happening in the East. The usual result was a distorted, misinformed image mixed with accurate crumbs. Within this strand of thought, the conceptual categories of knowledge had been filtered, buttressed and ingrained. The European image of Islam was the subject matter of two twentieth century Orientalists whose work was commissioned to promote British culture abroad: Norman Daniel’s Islam and the West: The Making of an Image (1960) and Richard W. Southern’s Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages (1962). As Daniel, Southern and other scholars pointed out, early medieval European writers tended to see the Muslims in ethnic rather than religious terms and usually called them “Saracens,” from the Greek and Latin term for Arabs, derived from a Greek word
for tent (i.e., the tent-dwellers). Late Roman and early medieval Christian observers had regarded the Saracens/Arabs as a particularly rapacious bunch of pagans even before the emergence of Islam. Lockman observes, “All sorts of bizarre and derogatory myths about the Saracens circulated in Europe, among the educated as well as the masses, reflecting the fear and hostility which Christians felt toward this threatening enemy about whom they knew so little” (26). These derogatory images and labels were epistemological warraantes that were crowned with the call of Pope Urban II in 1095 to Christians everywhere to unite, mobilize and attack the “enemies of God”:

You are a people sprung from the more temperate regions of the world, and you lack neither martial prowess nor discretion: you are a people both disciplined in camp and skilful in the field of battle . . . you are embarking on a memorable enterprise . . . you rescue your brothers from this danger . . . Rid the sanctuary of God of the unbelievers, expel the thieves and lead back the faithful. (qtd. in Hay 32–3)

The East-West discourse constitutes the basic premises in radical narrative doctrines of Western theorists and philosophers such as Herbert Spencer’s “Social Darwinism” in Process: It’s Law and Causes (1857), Friedrich Nietzsche’s “Will to Power” in Human, All too Human (1886), and Marx’s Communist Manifesto (1848) which all are rooted deep in the concept of dichotomy. Therefore, in the development of the history of ideas, particularsism breeds a form of a collective defense mechanism as in the neo-Darwinian terminology. Not surprisingly then that Europe-style nationalism and Europe-style concept of cultural superiority soon became very fashionable slot that determined the dichotomous trend in the modern and contemporary worlds. Consequently, along this process of antithesis, the East-West relationship was dominated
by power/knowledge constellation and principled on the notion of Western master and his Asian pupil.

The concept of the dichotomy has persisted as a key-word that assumed an influential analysis of the New World Order as worded by Samuel Huntington who predicted in his *The Clash of Civilizations* a world determined increasingly by the clash among the major civilizations. He pointed out that whereas the Cold War divided the world along geopolitical lines, into the First, Second and Third Worlds – that is, the West, the communist bloc, and everyone else, countries now are grouped “in terms of their culture and civilization” (“The Clash of Civilizations” 23). In Huntington’s analysis, “the West” functions as an unquestioned and foundational unity. He emphasized this dichotomous trend and argued that a “clash of civilizations” is inevitable and contended that “[T]he survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies” (*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* 20-1).

The concept of West was projected by Michael Hardt and Anthony Negri as the dynamic of power and knowledge that directed the pace of history from the Greek antiquity, to the Renaissance through Enlightenment and Modernism and postmodernism with its ideal and leadership. Hence, the New World Order as it was propagated is nothing but a line of continuity with the Old World Order with its dichotomous relationship as its core policy. In other words, if European modernity and imperialism was carried out under the slogan of “civilization mission” and the salvation of the “savage race”, the new imperialism and globalization continued the project with the same methodological fabrications under the slogans of “free market” “liberation and
democracy” that justify the colonization and the subjugation of the “Others” so as to “reorganize them and redirect them toward new ends” (xv).

From an Arab perspective, the East-West dichotomy was firstly conceived of in geographical terms. However, the Arabs were not a major force in the Occident-Orient dichotomy until the advent of Islam in the seventh century. The East-West divide was only attached to the then two competing powers of the Sasanians and the Byzantines that marked the East-West polarities. From the eighth century, the Arab-Islamic world posed a rival force to the Christian Europe, added to the religious dichotomy a sort of socio-political and cultural antagonism. The East, hence means the Arab-Islamic world, was seen as the threatening challenge and peer polar to the West. Within a century from the appearance of Islam, Muslim Arabs had created a vast new empire, defeating the Sasanian dynasty and conquering the empire it had ruled for centuries in Persia and adjacent lands while also conquering much of the territory which had long been part of the Roman and then Byzantine empires, including Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as the rest of the Arabian peninsula and North Africa, and in 711 Muslims landed in Spain. The East-West dichotomy has been enfolded then within a religious dimension: the “heretic” irreligious East was set in the face of the “divine” religious West. As described by John of Damascus, “it [Islam] was just one more heresy that had to be fought” (qtd. in Lockman 23).

In addition to difficulties in defining regions and overlooking hybridity, the East-West dichotomy, therefore, has been criticized for creating an artificial construct of regional unification that allows one voice to claim authority to speak for multitudes. In “The Triumph of the East?,” Mark Berger argues: “The historical power of the East-West dichotomy, and the fixed conceptions of culture/race to which it is linked, have
increasingly allowed the national elites of the region to speak not only for their ‘nations,’ but even for Asia and Asians” (276). Perceptually, the East-West dichotomy is a sociological concept used to describe perceived differences between Western cultures and the Eastern world.

Cultural rather than geographical in division, the boundaries of East and West are not fixed, but vary according to the criteria adopted by individuals using the term. As a result, Australia is typically grouped in the West, while Islamic nations are, regardless of location, grouped in the East. The culture line can be particularly difficult to place in regions of cultural diversity such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose citizens may themselves identify as East or West depending on ethnic or religious background. Further, residents of different parts of the world perceive the boundaries differently. For example, Western Europeans have traditionally defined Russia as East while Islamic nations regard it and other predominantly Christian nations as West (Mestrovic 61). Historically, Islamic and Asian nations have been regarded as East, while the United States and Western Europe are regarded as West. Used in discussing such studies as management, economics and linguistics, the concept is criticized for overlooking regional hybridity.

Conceptually, in the growing geo-cultural mapping of the world today, the East-West dichotomy becomes complicated and problematic, especially when the overlapping is there in areas such as race, ethnicity and national identity. The concept acquires a new meaning and requires new understanding. In his view of the concept, therefore, Edward Said has drawn attention to certain facts and problematics such as “overlapping territories,” “imagined geographies” and “intertwined histories”, as part of his strategic vision through which he attempts to cross the mental borders created by the Orientalist/colonialist and imperial powers, and as a strategic conceptual and cultural framework that would eliminate dichotomous thought and thinking.
Islam and the West

The recent appearance of the cartoon pictures of Prophet Mohammad in the Western media, as it was the case with the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, highlights the pervasive Western view of Islam, and shows a long process of antagonism, rivalry, and (mis)representation of/toward the Arab-Islamic culture, people, religion and territory. It is, in fact, a resurgence of an old Medieval disfigurement of Prophet Muhammad as a magician, a sorcerer who used his evil powers to produce fake miracles and thereby seduce men into embracing his false doctrines. These stories and many others, embellished with a wealth of utterly fantastic and lurid details, appeared in popular songs, poetry and folklore and the writings of scholars as well. Guibert of Nogent says: “it is safe to speak evil of one whose malignity exceeds whatever ill can be spoken” (qtd. in Southern 31). Islam, in short, was depicted as a religion of violence, bloody and cruel. In the words of Zachary Lockman, “medieval European Christian attitudes toward Islam were simply one more manifestation of the unfortunate human propensity not only to perceive people who are deemed to belong to another group . . . as essentially different from ‘us’ but also to believe that ‘we’ are superior to ‘them’” (36).

Based on such distorted images, Islam came to occupy a unique place in the imagination of Europeans from at least the eleventh or twelfth century onward as Europe’s most dangerous “Other”. Though the Jews were close at hand and were sometimes regarded as an ideological problem as a result of their steadfast refusal to accept that Jesus was the messiah and the son of God, they never constituted a political or military threat to the hegemony of Christianity in Europe. Similarly, though China and India and all those other “Oriental” peoples and places appeared for the Europeans simply as a sort of exotic objects of curiosity, wonderment and fantasizing, they constituted no
direct threat to them. Islam was generally perceived as more alien and certainly as more threatening, usually evoking revulsion, fear and hostility:

Europeans (and, much later, Americans) had and still have all sorts of images of other peoples, cultures and religions in their heads, not a few of them derogatory but it is only the image of Islam which has historically evoked both a profound sense of cultural difference and a deep sense of threat, today associated with the image of the fanatical Muslim terrorist mindlessly attacking Westerners. (Lockman 37)

As a result, Islam was a screen onto which Europeans could and did project their anxieties and conflicts about who and what they were or were not, a mirror in which Europeans could discern the traits that seemed to make them unique by highlighting how different, defective and inferior Islam was. It was in part by differentiating themselves from Islam that European Christians, and later their nominally secular descendants, defined their own identity. These representations persisted for centuries in popular and high culture and in scholarship, and some of them continue to circulate today, in movies, in television programs, in newspaper and magazine articles and in books, in children’s comic books, etc. Today’s resurgence of Islamophobia, therefore, is nothing but a repackaging of the old West’s depreciation of the “Orient”. According to Eugenio Chahuan, “the September 11 attacks set into motion a profound and sensitive debate” on the factor of religious dichotomy that was part and parcel of East-West divide. This religious resurgence “was coupled with an enormous capacity to mobilize and produce changes in various parts of the world”. What happened thereafter “is a process of self-legitimization of the West which predicated its own identity upon an antithesis -- Us/We as opposed to the Other/Them.” The Occident-Orient divide after September 11 would tell us that:
The psychological necessity of the “Us” to create its identity through the confrontation with and the discrimination against the “Other” serves, in this case, a dual purpose. On the one hand, it promotes the chauvinistic, xenophobic propaganda against the “Orient”, Islam, the Arabs, as well as many others; on the other hand, Islam is presented as a threat to the security of the West. (47-8)

“The danger of the present cultural discourse against Islam,” Chahuan continues, “is that it . . . engenders a re-identification on the other side” (48). This underscores the notable binary confluence of the Western intellectuality. “The lack of respect towards other cultures and the exaltation of the Western model,” he argues, “constitute a clear expression of intolerance and resistance to dialogue . . . the prejudices of today preserve and perpetuate the falsehoods of the past” (51).

With the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Western sense of superiority over and prejudices against Islamic culture, people and tradition gets coupled with technological progress which was seen as a reaffirmation of the intellectual supremacy of the West and its art of governance. To their perception, the vital and progressive Europe is opposed to the archaic and immobile East. The colonial act is thus seen as fully justified. In *Philosophy of History*, Hegel incorporates this modern-primitive dichotomy, associating Islam and the “Orient” with the primitive world. Perhaps the most representative synthesis of the modern view of the East and Islam can be found in one of the discourses the French philologist and Orientalist Ernest Renan made at the Sorbonne lecture in 1883, when he suggests that Islam and the Muslim are incompatible with rationality. This Orientalist position was thus based on a reality underpinned by the superiority of the Western “Us” over the Orient, “Them”. Its tenet is the binary opposition of two worlds, two styles, and two cultures.
Though, undeniably, Islamism is gaining ground today, this could be viewed as a result of decades of exploitation, political frustration and discrimination. Besides, if the West is as rational as it claims, it should address the problems rationally and not through fallacies, inadequate and inhumane means, and misinformed media. Juan Goytisolo, the contemporary Spanish writer, has this to say about the situation:

Those who systematically denigrate Islam should be reminded that in this context there have never been bloody inquisitions such as ours, nor genocides of entire peoples such as those of the Amerindians and the Aborigines, nor the collective extermination of an entire people of the magnitude of Hitler’s Holocaust, nor the use of lethal weapons as in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (qtd. in Chahuan 52)

The Western denigration, disfiguration and misconception of Islam and Muslims were countered by the rejection of modernity as a threat to Islam and Islamic tradition. It was seen by the Arab and Muslim masses as a Western product that devalued their traditional values and loyalties and, in the final analysis, robbed them of their beliefs, their aspirations, their dignity, and to an increasing extent even their livelihood.

**Dichotomy and the Concept of War**

The idea of war lurks deep in the concept of dichotomy in which there is no sense of equilibrium and balance. Hence, in the Darwinian struggle among nations for their survival, any inferior culture could be eliminated. It is also this dichotomous feeling and impetus of superiority of race, culture, and civilization that backed the Nazi-Germany, Fascist-Italy, Western imperialism, European colonialism, American cultural militarism, and Israeli-Palestinian antagonism, to name but a few. According to the intrinsic powers of Western analytical reasoning over history, this antagonistic world view is necessary because the East had to become westernized -- gradually -- by law of nature.
In effect, the concept of dichotomy entails the meaning of antagonism and war and indicates the struggle for encroachment and expansion over the “Other”. By simply tracing the history of man and nation, we could easily understand how several devastating wars were carried out, premised and fuelled by the concept of dichotomy. For example, the Greeks’ march into Persia; the conquest of Alexander the Great, the Romans and their emperors; the crusades (11th-5th centuries); the explorations and conquests by the Mediterranean world (15th-16th centuries); the missionaries (16th-17th centuries); the colonial powers (16th-19th centuries); the subjugation of the New World (15th-16th century); World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1935-1945); Cold War (1950-1989); Gulf War 1990s and the now Globalized War of cultural and economic hegemony -- are all products of constructed dichotomy. Significantly, the majority of these wars were nourished, launched and carried out by the West. The Europeans were “continuously re-inventing themselves either through struggle against Asiatic invasion . . . or through conquest and colonization, and consequently exercising their authority over all defining paradigms in any East-West dispute, be it on a philosophical, scientific, economic, or ideological level” (Pattberg 5).

Quite perceptibly, then, the Occident-Orient dichotomy has its root in the Western psychological perception which feels the “Other” inimically as a threat to its existence. Pattberg accordingly observes: “As a matter of perception, till today, the Western ways are universally associated with ‘war’, ‘aggression’, and ‘exclusiveness’” (49). Therefore, the act of the Crusades was a political, economic and cultural war as much as it was a religious war launched in the name of religious mission. It was no less an imperial act than a religiously divine task by the Christian Europe. Besides being “a way to enhance the political and spiritual power of the church,” Lockman remarks that “[T]he Crusades offered an outlet for knights who lacked land of their own and was backed by Italian
mercantile city-states like Venice and Genoa who hoped to win control of the lucrative trade with the East” (28). It is not surprising that the present “war on terror” and the crisis in the world politics are all some manifestations of dichotomy that has its root in epistemological and philosophical pretentions and contentions. In this regard, if the deep past escapes erasure, it is all too often collapsed into the present (Blanks 13). Therefore, the present-day attitudes toward Islam and Muslims are rooted in modern and premodern Western stereotypes culture.

However, within this constellated concepts of war, antagonism and dichotomy, several terms and tactics have been invested whose aftermaths are devastating to the mankind at large. Among these core terms and concepts is the term “terrorism”. Like its modern political sense, “terrorism” in its essentialized form goes back to the French Revolution, when it was used with reference to the campaign of the French revolutionary government to crush opposition by executing large numbers of those it deemed to be counterrevolutionaries. By extension, the term came to mean, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it, “a policy intended to strike with terror those against whom it is adopted; the employment of methods of intimidation.” In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the term was sometimes used to denote the strategy pursued by some European revolutionaries and nationalists to undermine regimes or exact revenge by assassinating royalty and government officials. Later, British officials came to use the term widely to describe anti-colonial violence, whether directed against military and civilian agents of colonial rule or against civilians. Similarly, the French depicted the anticolonial violence perpetrated during Algeria’s struggle for independence (1954–62) as “terrorism”. Along the same lines the Russian government, from the 1990s into the twenty-first century, insisted on portraying its effort to crush secessionist rebels in largely Muslim Chechnya as a struggle against terrorism.
Zachary Lockman’s statement on the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian in this respect is supportive: “The Zionist movement in Palestine, and later the State of Israel, adopted much the same discourse *vis-à-vis* Palestinian opposition to Zionism, [referring to them] as terrorists (*mehablim*)” (225). However, one cannot ignore the fact that some Islamist organizations did carry out terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians as well as others, including Jews in other countries. But “the official Israeli insistence on depicting the Palestinian nationalist movement it led as nothing but terrorism was a way of deflecting attention away from the deeply rooted grievances and aspirations that motivated the Palestinians . . . which had led them to adopt such a repugnant tactic” (Lockman 225, italics in origin). Down to the present day, Israeli officials have sought to reduce the entire Palestinian struggle to terrorism, depicting Israel as a peace-loving state compelled to use drastic means to deter or suppress hate-filled, bloodthirsty “Arab” terrorists mindlessly bent on its destruction.

As a result of the long and deep process of this dichotomizing spirit, successive wars have been carried out, several colonial projects were set in motion, and lots of conquests, occupations have been still in the process, and racial theories and cultural assumptions have gained central focus in human intellectuality, giving prominence to the discourse of warship to occupy a large space in human thinking and, therefore, blocking any way for dialogue and tolerance.

**East-West Dichotomy and the Western Sociology of Perception**

Our perception of the world around us undoubtedly determines the way we make our relation with and attitudes toward it. This sociological and perceptual view was a key-word element that directed the cultural dichotomy between the East and West. Based on this assumption, the Western sociological perception of “who we are” and “who we are
not” was rationalized and backed up by theoretical and philosophical proclamations. Most of the Western theories from philosophy, politics and evolutionary biology, social and linguistic anthropology seem to suggest that the history of civilization is built on and around the fundamental differences between the West and its “Other”.

Subsequently, treating cultures as living beings in the West has been the trend. Reading Western sociology today, we come across several interpretations of the cultural intake that characterizes the East-West divide. In one sense, it was viewed in the form of hierarchal relationship of “‘youth’, ‘growth’, ‘maturation’ and ‘decline’” and in another, it is conceived in “masculine and a feminine polarities” (Spengler 21, Garrison xvi). In the words of Oswald Spengler, “We men of the Western Culture are, with our historical sense, an exception and not a rule. World-history is our world picture and not all mankind’s . . . and perhaps when in due course the civilization of the West is extinguished, there will never again be a Culture and a human type in which ‘world-history’ is so potent a form of the waking consciousness” (12, italics in origin).

This discriminatory, classificatory and stratificational consciousness is reverberated in Max Weber’s “ideal types of cultures” that do facilitate progress and those that do not. In the light of this, opposing the Western progress, we have the “Axis’s of evil”, the “New Asian Hemisphere”, the “yellow peril”, and the primitive “Terror” (Mahbubani 224, 173, 304, 110). Weber claimed that Western standards, institutions of law, science, education and economics reflect Western analysis-based rationalism and this may explain why the West got rich and technologically advanced before the East did. This claim introduced the West as the only leading creative force of humankind. Accordingly, the only way for a person of Hindu, Arab or Chinese background to get some personal integrity in this world was to become westernized. He detailed on these ideas in his books The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1930), The Religion
Such “rationalist” view, theory or philosophy was devastating to human relations. In fact, Weber’s theory in sociology, like Freud’s in psychology or Marx’s in economics, has come out of favor. This is because his dialogue with other cultures is really self-serving. As Pattberg remarks, “He [Weber], like so many other Orientalists of his time, tells stories and plays with the imaginations of his European audiences, yet has never seen nor experienced anyone unlike them” (88-9).

Orientalism, therefore, was the result of European historicism that forged false terminologies and conceptions, claiming that the entire world history itself was a product of Western scholarship and no other. In his book, The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1970), Edmund Husserl discusses the struggle “for the meaning of a genuine humanity.” He claimed that Europe, by the fate of its essential history, stands at the center of this struggle: “The true struggles of our time, the only ones which are significant, are struggles between humanity which has already collapsed and humanity which still has roots but is struggling to keep them or find new ones. . .” (15).

Regrettably, it was persistently this philistine element of the Western thought that dominated, and is still dominating, Europe’s action and perception that view the “Other” at the receiving end of history. Accordingly, “Western nations act as if they ‘own’ the globe, history, and all material objects” (Pattberg 94). In this regard, the nineteenth century interpretations exemplified by Hegel’s philosophy of history pictured the West as a privileged domain of reason and freedom in progress towards universal rule. By contrast, permanent stagnation, failure to develop beyond early beginnings or at least a loss of civilizing capacity was the apparent hallmark of the East.
This uncompromisingly Eurocentric position was the underlying idea of Karl Marx’s well-known formulations of the *Communist Manifesto* that equated the triumph of the bourgeoisie over feudal adversaries with the victory of civilization over barbarism and the West over the East. Though he was well aware that colonial pillage, coercion and slavery in the Americas and elsewhere, he ascribed this to the stagnant nature of the Oriental mode or what he termed as “Asiatic Mode of Production”. As he saw it, colonialism was needed to build and maintain better systems and help raising the natives. He notoriously claimed that “Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society” (qtd. in Tucker 583). He reaffirmed this view in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: “the bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization” (qtd. in Tucker 339). In his reading of Marx’s underdeveloped theory of a “tributary mode of production”, the Egyptian Marxian thinker and economist, Samir Amin suggests that this theory is no more than a way of imposing certain economic system that is never free from its imperial cultural associations (7). Similarly, Engels put it in 1848 thus: “the [French] conquest of Algeria is an important and fortunate fact for the progress of civilization . . . All these nations of free barbarians . . . are ruled by the lust of gain, and only employ ruder and more cruel means” (qtd. in Feuer 451). Karl Wittfogel’s analysis of *Oriental Despotism* (1957) was an ambitious attempt to reaffirm and theorize a permanent contrast between East and West, stretching from classical antiquity to the Cold War. His aim was to say that the liberal West was heir to a tradition that began with the Greek rejection of Oriental despotism. Moreover, Marshall Hodgson’s *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (1974) and
Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History (1993) are perhaps the most ambitious one-man projects of that kind in twentieth-century Western scholarship. Hodgson replaced the dichotomy of East and West with a very different model of regional divisions that derived their outlying regions and respective identities from civilizational traditions. For Hodgson, literary traditions were most closely identified with civilizational cores, whereas religious, philosophical and scientific ones were -- in varying degrees -- more capable of cross-civilization.

The Western power of domination was attributed to its claim of rationality that they achieve useful knowledge so that they claim to be the masters and possessors of nature, with the perspective of active domination over other civilizations. Hence, Western societies attached to themselves the mantle of knowledge, and knowledge is linked to power, which has been the very source of European predominance: “We should admit that power produces knowledge . . . that power and knowledge directly imply one another that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge” (Foucault 27). As a result, the concept of culture was sociologically and paralinguistically endowed with the knowledge of power and politics rather with the integrity and ethics. In contrast, the concept of power in the perspective of the East is a “moral power” as reflected in the words of Mahatma Gandhi: “The truest test of civilization, culture and dignity is character, not clothing” (258).

The West has formulated its conception of Occident-Orient dichotomy and sets its theoretical assumptions on this basis. Western commentators on the East-West dichotomy from the political thinkers Montesquieu, and Jeremy Bentham; the great writers Denis Diderot and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; the economist and moral philosopher Adam Smith; the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss; the three great top thinkers in sociology and cultural studies Francis Bacon, Max Weber, and Karl Marx and in philosophy, the-
verifiably-highly gifted Gottfried Leibniz, Friedrich W. S. Schelling, Georg Wilhelm F. Hegel, Jacques Derrida, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Bertrand Russell -- all of them wrote about the East-West relationship, categorized the world’s people, and judged upon their cultural modes from a vantage point of the “Occident”. Ironically, none of the thinkers listed above ever mastered or learned any Asiatic language. If one might ask “why should they?”, one might also ask “why the standard of knowledge is Western civilization and culture against which all other cultures are measured and judged?” The West, not man, it seems, is the measure of all things, according to Husserl:

There is something unique here in Europe that is recognized in us by all other human groups, too, something that . . . becomes a motive for them to Europeanize themselves even in their unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation, whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, would never Indianize ourselves, for example. (275)

In the process of the Western hegemonization and homogenization, it is significant to note that in the Western world no man or woman is willing to read “Other’s” history unless it is incorporated into “Western history”, which is nothing less than “World History” itself. It is not because that a single non-Western society is unable to produce an alternative history to World History that the West would be able to read, but it could be tempting to announce all other histories “dead”. Fukuyama Francis has elaborately talked about this in his book, The End of History and the Last Man (1992). He suggests that the striving for different histories, or different versions of it, truly has come to an end, with evidently only one “World History” left, but from Western vantage viewpoint. With just one history left, the Western hemisphere is going to dictate how it is written.
In fact, the sociology of difference in Western thought is best expressed in the Nietzschean perception of the East-West dichotomy. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche distinguished between two modes of culture: the (Western) individual, rational, technical, cognitive, useful, and hierarchical *Apollonian*; and the (Eastern) collective, emotional, sexual, mystic, fertile, revolutionary *Dionysian*. Furthermore, the paradigm shift in the “Copernican revolution” from Galileo’s astronomy to Kant’s metaphysics assumed a scientific basis for the Western concept of the East-West dichotomy, with the belief that the human universe consists of the West at its core with all the other cultures revolving around this core. The Copernican revolution initiated by in the Kantian model had turned the focus conceptually to man and subject-object relationship. This intellectual trend had coincided with the emergence of Eurocentricism, Western thought of Renaissance Individualism, and Enlightenment Humanism. Therefore, it is assumed that the West is linear, sequential, concrete, logical, verbal, and reality-based while the East is holistic, random, symbolic, intuitive, nonverbal, and fantasy-oriented.

The separation of knowledge from ethics characterized the European concept of civilization. For the West, everything in the universe can be considered a potentially usable object that must be studied and manipulated so as to serve man and his cause. This “man and his cause” motto, had quickly turned during the European renaissance into “Western man and his Western cause” and during the colonial era into the “British Empire and her cause”. With this exclusionary and value-free knowledge, plenty of human souls and territories were quenched out to fulfill Western dichotomous will. Accordingly, this non-scientific other is positioned at the wrong side of the “man-conquers-nature” equation and consequentially must be totally subjugated, and manipulated to the will of its scientific conqueror. Therefore, the West along with its deeply intolerant “scientific way” appears to be “inherently violent” (Nandy 33, 63).
Furthermore, the West placed the Occident-Orient dichotomy within the scale of “masculinity/femininity, maturity/immaturity femininity or male activity and female passivity”, or simply about “race and manliness” by way of which after all, as Douglas McArthur claims, Western culture considered the Americans and the British, “a mature people” by all means (Shibusawa73, 55). The idea of a masculine West and a feminine East that has been elaborated in Jim Garrison’ *Civilization and the Transformation of Power* (2000) which takes this duality to the most profound level as he analyses today’s gender politics: *Here* -- the power of the masculine West; *There* -- the power of the feminine East.

In a rather subtle way, religion and nationalism are strongly intertwined in the false dichotomy constructed and sustained by the political discourses of the West. It is clear that during the Crusades, the theo-political authorities of Europe made religion a peculiarly relevant tool of nationalist mobilization, and provided the religious discourse as a toolbox for the symbolic policies used in sustaining the nationalist claims for the sovereignty over souls, bodies and territories. Hence, nationalism has been easily related to and transformed by other ideologies in sustaining a false dichotomy in order to further a hegemonic domination over souls and territories of the perceived “Other”.

Philosophizing of the concept of dichotomy between East and West, however, goes beyond scientific, anthropological and cultural lines into the cognitive and generic systems. Dualism, in its simplest notion, is related to binary thinking, that is, to systems of thought that are two-valued: valid/invalid, true/false, good/bad or right/wrong. The doctrine of two truths, however, is more concretely engaged in the dualistic response to the conflict between spiritualism and science, the spiritual and the secular, portrayed in the categorizations of things into matter and idea, or what is called in Western philosophy “Cartesian Dualism” (*Cambridge Dictionary* 1999). This duality was perceived and
concretized in the form of “an inductive East” and “an analytical West”. A detailed analysis of this categorization can be found in Edward Sapir’s *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture, and Personality* (1983).

Apart from the horizontal classification of cultures, there is the hierarchical classification of people as propagated by the theoretical assumptions of intellectuals such as Darwin, Spencer, Holldobler, Wilson, Weber, and Marion. In total, out of the cognitive, sociological, philosophical, psychological, ontological, anthropological presumptions of the Occident-Orient dichotomy, it has developed the theory of the “Other” as a predominantly politico-cultural terrain that recently governed and occupied the field of cultural studies. Therefore, the Occident-Orient divide in the Western thought was based on three main principles. The first is that of generalization, thus oversimplifying the current world-order and all other cultural, geographical, historical, political and social affairs and oversimplifications into two categories: East and West. The second is that of “stereotyping” or the production of false identities to help fashion the Western image of the “rest of the world”. Hence, stereotyping becomes the cult of fatalism, isolation, social discrimination, racism, prejudices, intolerance, and separation. This process of “Othering”, as Robert K. Merton argues, began with “a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the original false conception come ‘true’. This specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of terror” (477). The third deals with the concepts of unipolarity and bipolarity and multipolarity that are totally centric in thinking, aggressive in practice and exclusionary in philosophy. The present-day politics is nothing but a continuous process of the permanent East-West divide, though in different terms and classifications. Therefore, the classification of the globe into three Worlds: First, Second and Third, or at some other times into Eastern bloc
and Western bloc, provides a clear evidence of the imbalance and inequality in relationship that govern the world today.

Nonetheless, in its constructed theory of the “Other”, the Western power(s) introduces, in the place of overtly classical form of dichotomous rule, the tic of globalized culturalization, hegemonization and homogenization as a desperate form of political manipulation, new Western imperialism and wishful thinking that is “if you want trade with me, that means you have to be the same as me.” Westernization, modernization, and emancipation theories, therefore, were proposed as a main solution to the backwardness of the Third World nations, and at the same time reinforced the belief in the virtue and righteousness of the West and of its standard-bearer, the United States.

**Orientalism and the Emergence of Area Studies**

The emergence of Orientalism as a designed project was in the thirteenth century when some church scholars, Roger Bacon among them, argued that the church should pursue a patient, consistent and long-term effort to peacefully convert the Muslims and other unbelievers. To achieve this, they urged the church to foster the study of Islam and the Arabic language in order to arm Christians with the tools they would need to convince Muslims that their faith was false and Christianity true, and thus make effective missionary work possible. In 1312 a church council held at Vienne seemed to endorse this approach by calling for the establishment of chairs in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew and Syriac at the universities of Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon and Salamanca. Though this decision was not implemented, it reflected a significant turning point in the history of the Orientalist project.

In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the European Renaissance marked another twist in the Orientalist thought, especially with the European discoveries of what
was called “New World”. This gave Europe a sense of singularity and supremacy. The Orientalist invested this status of European achievements and utilized it to create their own self image and perception. However, this narcissist imagination was later replaced with a disciplined project to know, study, and dominate the exotic “Other”. Therefore, the traditional antagonism that dominated the Medieval period was recalled and established in a rather methodological and structural way. The distorted and pernicious depictions of the “Oriental” Muslims continued to be generated and spread. Most of the European travelers to those areas were more of a political agents rather than a truth seekers and knowledge finders. Norman Daniel accordingly remarks, “The themes of hostile mediaeval misinterpretation of Islam were constantly reiterated . . . Many who traveled in Islamic countries . . . preferred the ideas that they had brought with them to what they might observe” (307).

With the emergence of the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century, the crusading spirit of Europe was replaced by the power politics and the Ottomans were deeply perceived as culturally alien, and were often depicted in popular literature as cruel, violent and fanatical, in ways that drew on long-prevalent caricatures of Islam. The same period also witnessed the appearance of a distinct branch of humanities whose focus was the study of the “Orient”. Much later, in the nineteenth century, the specialized field of scholarly learning which studied the languages, religions, histories and cultures of that “Orient” would come to be called “Orientalism.” Islam was obviously central to this emerging new field of knowledge, since much of the region between Europe and China was predominantly Muslim, and Renaissance proto-Orientalists saw themselves as developing a fuller and more accurate understanding of that religion by studying a wide range of texts in the actual languages of the “Orient”.

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These perceptions had much to do with Europe’s evolving self-image which led the European thinkers to formulate new conceptions of political order and legitimacy that met the needs of the emerging system and its new kinds of politics. These theories flourished, in a variety of forms, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under the hands of European thinkers such as Karl Marx, Max Weber and many other who deployed the fundamental premises of the concept of Oriental despotism in order to help explain why a socially, economically and culturally dynamic “West” had come to dominate the world and why that domination was necessary and good.

Therefore, the Orientalism as designed project was overlapped with modernization theory. That is, both approaches can be seen as premised upon the drawing of sharp distinctions between “us” (Westerners living as modern people in modern societies) and “them” (non-Westerners, especially Muslims, traditional people living in tradition-bound societies). Both Orientalism and modernization theory shared a bipolar, dichotomizing vision of the world. While Orientalism tended to draw a sharp distinction between Islam and the West, as two essentially different civilizations, modernization theory tended to posit an equally sharp distinction between tradition and modernity, conceptualized as two completely different stages along the one and only path of human social evolution. Nadav Safran’s book, *Egypt in Search of Political Community* (1961), provides a good illustration of how modernization theory and Orientalism could overlap and reinforce one another. Safran’s analysis of modern Egypt’s “intellectual evolution” – more precisely, the ideas of a small number of elite Egyptian political and social thinkers – was shaped by the stark dichotomization of tradition and modernity which was central to modernization theory. He argued that by the 1930s liberal Egyptian intellectuals had failed in their attempt to “replace an obsolescent belief-system founded on a conception of truth as something that is objectively defined in revelation, with a world view, more applicable to
a new reality, that would be based on a conception of truth as something that is ascertained by the human faculties” (165). These intellectual paradigms obviously showed the extent of the complicity with Western power in the Middle East. The “strong links between the world of scholarship and the world of policy in Middle East studies” cannot be overlooked (Lockman145). Significantly, these ideas became the main debate among Arab intellectuals that challenged the Orientalist/colonialist discourse, of course, with different views and perspectives. Orientalism thus took shape within the context of Europe’s insistence on the differences among peoples and civilizations, with the modern West set at the pinnacle of a new hierarchy of human evolution. By the end of the nineteenth century this perspective was supplemented by a much more pernicious notion of how humanity was divided up.

Influenced by Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution as the product of natural selection and by the triumphal march of European imperialism, some European and American thinkers began to argue that the cultural and political superiority of the West was the result not simply of that civilization’s superior values and institutions, but rather of the superior innate biological characteristics of the “white” race. This system of classification made European colonial rule seem natural and inevitable. As the popular American journalist Lothrop Stoddard put it in his 1921 book *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, “the white races pressed to the front and proved in a myriad of ways their fitness for the hegemony of mankind. Gradually they forged a common civilization . . . they spread over the earth . . . assuring to themselves an unparalleled paramountcy of numbers and dominion. . .” (299–300).

Among the proponents of those assumptions which were central to nineteenth-century Orientalism, was Ernest Renan whose widely circulated 1883 Sorbonne lecture titled “Islam and Science” can give us some insight into how many Orientalists conceived
non-Europeans. Renan’s racist remark that “the actual inferiority of Mohammedan countries, the decadence of states governed by Islam, and the intellectual nullity of the races that hold, from that religion alone, their culture and their education” was clearly essentialist. He further claims that “from his religious initiation at the age of ten or twelve years, the Mohammedan child . . . at a blow becomes a fanatic, full of a stupid pride in the possession of what he believes to be the absolute truth, happy as with a privilege, with what makes his inferiority” (85).

Though they claimed to be simply and wholly devoted to the disinterested pursuit of objective knowledge and had no direct or indirect involvement in policymaking, most nineteenth-century Orientalist scholars could not deny the fact that Orientalism as an intellectual enterprise was in significant ways linked to contemporary European colonialism and that the kind of knowledge Orientalism as a discipline tended to produce was often used to justify and further the exertion of European power over the “Orient”. A substantial number of Orientalists and the institutions with which they were connected were ready and willing to put their expertise at the service of their countries’ colonial ambitions. For instance, Silvestre de Sacy’s advice to the French government on Islam and the “Orient” was acknowledged in the proclamation which that government issued when it invaded Algeria in 1830. Later in the century, the prominent Dutch Orientalist scholar Snouck Hurgronje helped the Dutch government formulate and implement policy toward the Muslim population of its colonies in Indonesia. Carl Becker in his address in the National Colonial Conference in Berlin 1910 urged that Muslims would be “as thoroughly capable of development in the direction of modern civilisation, if it be brought under the strong influence of European culture” (55).

In a much related events, it is to be recalled that during the First World War, many Orientalist scholars had naturally put their expertise at the service of the war effort. For
example, the noted Oxford Orientalist and archeologist D.G. Hogarth was stationed in British-ruled Egypt during the war, where he oversaw the effort to make contact with dissident Arabs within the Ottoman empire and induce them to revolt. His student Thomas Edward Lawrence was sent by British military intelligence to Arabia in 1916 to work with the Arab insurrectionary forces. After the war, Lawrence’s writings and his glorification by enterprising journalists made him a celebrity, hailed in Britain and the United States as “Lawrence of Arabia.” Other British operatives in the wartime and postwar Middle East, including St. John Philby and Gertrude Bell who helped engineer Britain’s creation of Iraq, picked up local languages as they went along and sometimes developed a romantic identification with the Arabs.

After First World War, therefore, the Middle-East gained prominence in the Orientalist discourse. However, until then the term “Orient” was used loosely and as too broad a category to refer to the East, which was lately classified into a “Near East” and a “Far East.” Hence, with a great focus on the Middle-East, the paradigm shift occurred in the Occident-Orient dichotomy as the identitarian classification posed a new polarity between the Judeo-Christian and modern “West” and Arabo-Islamic traditional “East”. During the Cold War, the Middle-East region became the battle field for the bipolar world system -- the Communist bloc headed by the Soviet, the Capitalist bloc led by America.

The term “Middle East” was coined in 1902 by the noted American military historian, Alfred Thayer Mahan. In his writings and lectures on global strategy Mahan demarcated a Middle East which he regarded as stretching from Arabia all the way across Persia and Afghanistan to the borders of today’s Pakistan. Valentine Chirol, then the Tehran correspondent of the Times of London, picked up Mahan’s new term and used it in his 1903 book The Middle Eastern Question; or, Some Political Problems of Indian Defence to denote “those regions of Asia which extend to the borders of India or
command the approaches to India” (5). Over time, Near East and Middle East came to be used more or less interchangeably to refer to the same geographical space, usually encompassing the present-day states of Turkey, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories it occupies, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the smaller Arab principalities along the Persian Gulf, and Egypt, though the vast majority of that country is actually located on the continent of Africa. Sometimes the predominantly Arab countries of North Africa such as Egypt and Sudan are loosely included in the Middle East. However, after the Second World War, the term “Middle East” came to predominate, especially in the United States while “Near East” has come to sound a bit old-fashioned.

In fact, the Orientalist scholarship on the Arab-Islamic Middle-East brought the Occident-Orient dichotomy to a narrower but more concentrated and patent structure. To Gibb, for instance, it had become necessary to have Orientalists and social scientists work together to produce knowledge about the Middle-East and Islam that was not only more comprehensive but also of more use to policymakers. He insisted that the Orientalists retained a unique and necessary role in Middle-East studies. It was the Orientalist’s function, he explained, “to bring together and correlate the findings of the separate social studies … to explain the why, rather than the what and the how . . . because he is or should be able to see the data not simply as isolated facts, explicable in and by themselves, but in the broad context and long perspective of cultural habit and tradition” (qtd. in Wallerstein, 216).

The development of Middle East studies as an academic field was closely connected with the emergence of the United States as a global superpower and its deepening involvement in the Middle East. Gibb’s successor in this field, Bernard Lewis, whose scholarly work focused mainly on Medieval Arab history, comes to declare that
“Islam and Communism are compatible” and deemed it possible to compare an allegedly monolithic communism to an equally monolithic Islam. He set himself the task of delineating “what qualities or tendencies exist in Islam, in Islamic civilization and society, which might either facilitate or impede the advance of Communism” (1).

The emergence of Middle East studies as a core genre was also significantly associated with anti-communist movement in America which looked at the Arab world as a main collaborator with the communist bloc. This conflict pitted the United States and its allies and clients often as the “West” or “the Free World,” against the Soviet Union and its allies and clients, “the Soviet bloc,” “the communist bloc,” or “the East”. The protracted struggle for global hegemony between these two blocs was central to international, regional and even national dominance. Though it did not witness an actual war, the Cold War did involve a sometimes tense military stand-off and also enabled regimes on both sides to justify repression and even violence on grounds of national security. In fact, it was not Europe but Asia, Africa and Latin America which became the main battlegrounds of the Cold War.

Therefore, yet in another epiphanic form, the period of decolonization and postcolonialism has witnessed a drastic social, cultural and economical change both in world politics, economy and culturalization as a natural outcome of the colonial legacy. We have come to the classification of the world into First, Second and Third worlds depending on the relative status of those countries to the dominant political and economic Western power. “First World” referred to the capitalist Western Europe and the United States, the communist “Second World,” and the weak and vulnerable new nation-states in Asia and Africa, and also Latin American states were termed as “Third World.” Therefore, we can understand the centrality of the Middle-East in the Western policy and
scholarship, and how it takes the priority of the Orientalist and neo-Orientalist/colonialist, both as an “enemy and threat” and as “a market and resource” of power.

What entails from this historical survey of the East-West relationship is the indeterminacy of historical truth and its entailments. This is basically the main concern of Said’s argument in his discussion of the Orientalist epistemological discourse. Therefore, re-thinking history and reconsidering the “given” historical truth is one of the major concerns of Said’s search for the liberation of human bias and antagonism. History for him is not a predetermined given facts disassociated from its contexts and reality. He conspicuously affirms: “We live in a secular historical world. History is the product of human labor, choice and will . . . There simply is no convincing way to assert special claims whose origin is the divine whether that is done by Israel or by the United States” (“Memory, Inequality, and Power” 17).

Therefore, it is no surprise to find that Said’s work on the history of relations between East and West, and his contribution to East-West understanding simplifies what has almost become a barrier to thinking. His contribution to understanding the West’s cultural, literary and popular discourse has emerged from his lived experience as a vibrant intellectual who lived in the midst of political disenfranchise and the social and cultural appropriations of the categories of “Self” and “Other”.

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Works Cited


