


“The Scope of Orientalism” by Edward Said



Edward Said (1935 –2003)

- Foundational postcolonial theorist
 - Postcolonial Theory:
 - An analytical approach to examining the cultural, political, and social legacies of colonialism and imperialism.
 - It focuses on how the effects of colonization impact both the former European colonial powers and formerly colonized territories, even after political independence.
 - Postcolonial theory provides perspectives from which to analyze how colonization continues to shape culture, politics, and global relations well after independence.
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Postcolonial Themes

- Cultural colonization
- Representation and identity
- Cross-cultural exchanges
- Resistance and decolonization
- Ongoing impact of colonization



“The Scope of Orientalism”

- It is a chapter from *Orientalism* (1978)
 - Edward Said’s central argument in his book *Orientalism*:
 - “Orientalism” is a longstanding Western representation of its colonized others in academic, artistic, literary, and institutional terms that serve to to naturalise the subordination of the colonized to the colonizer.
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“The Scope of Orientalism”

- Orientalism
 - Prior to Said’s publication, “Orientalism” referred to a discipline or a field of study, flourishing in the 19th century, that focused on the languages and cultures of the the East in Western institutions of culture and education.
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“The Scope of Orientalism”

- Orientalism in 19th Century art
 - Orientalist art:
 - Popular paintings in the late 18th and the 19th century that purported to portray the the East for a Western audience.
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The Snake Charmer by Jean-Léon Gerôme (1889)



“The Scope of Orientalism”

- Orientalism
 - Edward Said’s book created a paradigm shift:
 - Orientalism in the work of Said is not a study of the “Orient” and its culture but rather an analytical lens to view how non-European others are viewed, represented, stereotyped, and consequently subordinated by the West.
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Discussion

- Orientalism as a “library or archive of information commonly and, in some aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behaviour of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere “ (p.42)
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Discussion

- The Orientalist “Library or Archive of Information”
- What is in the orientalist “library or archive of information” ?
 - Binary oppositions
 - Stereotypical differences

Can you add to this list from the reading?



Discussion

- The persistence of Orientalism
 - “ My argument takes it that the Orientalist reality is both antihuman and persistent. It’s scope, as much as its institutions and all-pervasive influence lasts up to the present” (p.44)
 - Think of the above statement. Is orientalism persistent? How is it reflected in contemporary media, political or social discourse, for example?
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Discussion

- “For that is the main intellectual issue raised by Orientalism. Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly? By surviving the consequences humanly, I mean to ask whether there is any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into “us” (Westerners) and “they” (Orientals). For such divisions are generalities whose use historically and actually has been to press the importance of the distinction between some men and some other men, usually towards not especially admirable ends.” p. 45
 - Comment on the above
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