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History of the Development of Orientalism: Its Influence on the Modern Islamic World

Ahmad Mudzakkir^{1□}, Syamsudduha², Abu Half³, Suarni⁴
^{1,2,3}UIN Alauddin Makassar, ⁴Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari

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Abstract

Orientalism is basically a Western perspective on the East that is often colored by bias and stereotypes. This study aims to analyze the development of orientalism in three main phases: the early phase, the colonial phase, and the modern phase, and its impact on the Islamic world. The method used in this study is a literature review with a qualitative-descriptive approach to explore changes in the orientalism paradigm from time to time. The results of the study show that orientalism, since its inception until today, has played an important role in shaping the global narrative about Islam and the Eastern world. The colonial phase shows how orientalism was used to support the dominance of Western power, while in the modern phase, orientalism is present in the form of new discourses through the media and global politics. This study provides a critical understanding of how orientalism has transformed and remains relevant in the relationship between the West and Islam in the contemporary era.

✉Correspondent Email:

mudzakkirahmad51@gmail.com

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Introduction

Orientalism is basically the West's perspective on the East, which is often colored by bias and stereotypes. This term was popularized by Edward Said in his monumental book entitled *Orientalism*. (Said, 1995) Said argues that orientalism is not a neutral and objective study of the East, but rather a construct created by the West to define themselves as superior and civilized, while the East is depicted as exotic, mysterious, backward, and barbaric. (Sari et al., 2023)

This image of the "East" is constructed through various media, such as literary works, paintings, and academic writings, which often ignore the diversity and complexity of Eastern cultures. In the context of the Islamic world, orientalism has contributed to the formation of negative stereotypes about Islam as a religion that is rigid, fanatical, and opposed to progress. (Nurachman & Mujahid, 2023) Understanding orientalism is essential to studying the history of the modern Islamic world and how the Islamic world responds to various discourses and representations produced by the West.

The study of orientalism continues to develop and spark debate among academics. Recent studies show a shift from classical orientalism which tends to be essentialist and monolithic to a more critical and nuanced approach. Badarussyamsi reveals significant differences between classical and contemporary orientalism. (Badarussyamsi, 2016) Classical orientalism tends to view Islam negatively and homogeneously, while contemporary orientalism shows a tendency to be more objective and recognize internal diversity within Islam.

This development shows a growing awareness among Western scholars to understand Islam in a more just and balanced way. Some scholars argue that orientalism, despite its development, cannot be separated from its problematic historical roots. (Setiawan & Muhsinin, 2017) Therefore, critical vigilance is needed in analyzing orientalist works, both classical and contemporary, to avoid the trap of stereotypes and bias in understanding Islam.

Studying Orientalism is crucial because it plays a significant role in shaping the West's perspective on the East, including the Islamic world, for centuries. Orientalism is not just an academic study, but also has significant political, social, and cultural implications. By understanding Orientalism, we can study the history of the modern Islamic world more critically and deeply, including how the Islamic world responded to the various discourses and representations produced by the West.

Understanding orientalism allows us to identify the biases and stereotypes that are often attached to Western depictions of Islam. This is important to avoid misunderstandings and prejudices in viewing Islam and Muslims. In addition, studying orientalism also helps us understand how orientalist discourse has influenced various aspects of Muslim life, from politics and education to art and culture. Thus, understanding orientalism can provide valuable insights in efforts to build better intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature research method to analyze the development of orientalism and its impact on the modern Islamic world. The main data sources were obtained from primary literature in the form of orientalist works, such as *Orientalism* by Edward Said, as well as historical documents and other academic writings. Secondary data in the form of scientific journals, research articles, and academic reports relevant to the theme of orientalism are also used to enrich the analysis. Data collection techniques are carried out through literature and documentation studies, by tracing information from various credible sources related to the development of orientalism in three main phases: the early phase, the colonial phase, and the modern phase.

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis methods to identify main themes, classify the data according to the development phase of orientalism, and interpret its impact on the modern Islamic world. Data validity is maintained by using source triangulation, comparing information from multiple references to ensure accuracy and consistency. The results of the analysis are presented descriptively to provide a deep understanding of the relationship between orientalism and social, political, and intellectual dynamics in the modern Islamic world.

Results and Discussion

1. History of the Development of Orientalism

a. Early Phase (Middle Ages)

The early phase of Orientalism, which took place during the Middle Ages, was driven primarily by religious motivations. (Rahim, 2014) The Crusades, which involved a prolonged conflict between the Christian and Islamic worlds, sparked curiosity and anxiety among Westerners towards Islam. During this period, Orientalism focused on the study of Islamic religious texts, such as the Quran and Hadith, with the primary goal of understanding the “enemy” and finding a way to “defeat” Islam. The translation of the Quran into Latin was one of the important efforts in this phase, although it was often done with prejudice and distortion.

One of the important figures in the early phase of Orientalism was Peter the Venerable, a Christian monk who in the 12th century commissioned the translation of the Quran and other Islamic texts into Latin. (Kritzeck, 2015) The goal was to expose Islam and to prove its errors. Although dominated by religious motivations and full of prejudices, this early phase of Orientalism also produced some valuable scientific work. The study of Arabic and Islamic texts contributed to the development of science in Europe. However, the main legacy of this phase was the formation of a negative image of Islam that would continue to influence the West's view of the Islamic world in the centuries to come.

b. Colonialism Phase (18th - 19th Century)

In the colonial phase (18th - 19th centuries), orientalism experienced a shift in motivation. If previously dominated by religious motives, now orientalism began to be directed to serve the political and economic interests of Western colonial powers. Studies of the East, including the Islamic world, were

increasingly intensified with the aim of gaining knowledge that could be used to control and exploit resources in the colonies. Orientalism was used to build a narrative that legitimized colonization, by depicting Eastern societies as backward, uncivilized, and in need of Western guidance. (Teng, 2016)

In an effort to effectively control the colonies, colonial orientalists conducted in-depth studies of the languages, literatures, and cultures of Eastern societies. They studied the legal systems, social structures, and religious beliefs of local societies to find weak points that could be exploited for colonial purposes. However, these studies were still colored by the view of Western superiority that viewed Eastern cultures as inferior and in need of modernization according to Western standards.

One of the influential orientalist figures during the colonial era was Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje. (Sidik, 2020) He was a Dutch scholar who conducted in-depth research on Acehese society in Indonesia. Hurgronje studied Islam and Acehese culture intensively and provided advice to the Dutch colonial government on effective strategies to subdue the resistance of the Acehese people. His contributions to the study of Islam and colonial politics in Indonesia made Hurgronje one of the most controversial figures in the history of orientalism.

c. Modern Phase (Post Colonialism)

The modern phase of Orientalism, which emerged after colonialism, was marked by a significant shift in the West's view of the East. (Ramadani, 2023) Sharp criticism of classical Orientalism began to emerge, calling for self-reflection and a more balanced approach to the study of the East. Said revealed how classical Orientalism was laden with Western biases, stereotypes, and political interests that created an exotic, mysterious, and inferior image of the "East" to strengthen Western hegemony. Said's criticism sparked an intense debate among academics about objectivity in the study of the East. (Said, 1995) The crucial question that arose was whether it was possible for Western researchers to free themselves from historical biases and prejudices in understanding Eastern culture and society? This debate encouraged the emergence of various new perspectives in the study of the East, which tried to offer a more critical and reflective approach to the need to understand occidentalism as a reflection of Orientalism. (Metin, 2020)

One of the important developments in this modern phase is the emergence of postcolonial studies. These studies, as Tuhiwai Smith explains, try to understand the Orient from its own perspective, giving voice to Eastern peoples who have been marginalized in orientalist discourse. (Linda, 2012) Postcolonial scholars analyze the impact of colonialism on various aspects of Eastern people's lives, including identity, culture, and politics. They also seek to deconstruct the orientalist narratives that have long shaped the West's view of the Orient, as highlighted by Viswanathan on the power of postcolonial critique. (Viswanathan, 2022) Thus, postcolonial studies make an important contribution to the effort to build a more just and balanced understanding of the Orient.

2. The Impact of Orientalism on the Modern Islamic World

a. Negative impact

Orientalism has had a significant negative impact on the modern Islamic world. (Tsarwat & Arifullah, 2024) One of the most striking impacts is the strengthening of negative stereotypes about Islam. Through various written works, paintings, and other representations, orientalism often depicts Islam as a religion that is rigid, fanatical, closed, and tends towards violence. This stereotype not only influences Western society's perception of Islam, but also permeates various aspects of life, from the media and politics to the education system. As a result, Muslims are often faced with discrimination, prejudice, and marginalization in various fields.

Another negative impact is the formation of an inferior self-image among some Muslims. Continuous exposure to orientalist discourse that depicts Islam as backward and contrary to progress can lead to feelings of inferiority and doubts about one's own religious and cultural identity. (Amirudin & Maisarah, 2020) This can cause some Muslims to try to blindly imitate Western culture or even reject their own religious teachings because they are considered out of date. This phenomenon shows how orientalism can influence the process of internalization and identity construction among Muslims. (Rochmat et al., 2024)

In addition, orientalism also has an influence on Western political policies towards the Islamic world. (Sodikin & Lenggono, 2023) Negative stereotypes and prejudices about Islam built by orientalism can influence political decision-making and shape Western attitudes towards Muslim countries. This can be seen in various Western foreign policies which are often colored by suspicion, intervention, and attempts to control the Islamic world. Examples include Western support for authoritarian regimes in the Islamic world, military intervention in Muslim countries, and discriminatory policies against Muslim immigrants.

b. Positive impact

Although orientalism has negative impacts, it has also triggered a number of positive developments in the modern Islamic world. (Nugroho & Imam Syafi'i, 2022) One of them is the emergence of a modern Islamic thought movement as a response to orientalism. Various Muslim thinkers and intellectuals rose to answer the criticism and accusations made by orientalists. They tried to formulate Islamic thought that was relevant to the challenges of the modern era, and showed the compatibility between Islam and the progress of science and technology. This movement also tried to correct misunderstandings and stereotypes about Islam built by orientalism, and offered alternative interpretations of Islamic teachings that were more progressive and inclusive.

In addition, orientalism also indirectly contributed to the increase in more objective and balanced studies of Islam in the West. (Nimah, 2021) The criticisms leveled at classical orientalism prompted Western scholars to reflect on their methods and assumptions in studying Islam. This led to the emergence of a new generation of orientalists who sought to be more objective, critical, and respectful of the Islamic perspective. They recognized the diversity and complexity of the Islamic world, and avoided misleading generalizations and stereotypes. This increase in more objective studies paved the way for a better understanding of Islam in the West.

Another positive impact is the establishment of intercultural dialogue and cooperation. Although orientalism was initially colored by an unequal power relationship between the West and the East, in its development it also opened up space for meetings and exchanges of ideas between the two cultures. (Susmihara, 2017) This dialogue and cooperation are important to overcome misunderstandings, reduce prejudice, and build more harmonious relations between the West and the Islamic world. Through intensive interaction and mutual respect, both parties can learn from each other and work together to achieve common goals.

Conclusion

Orientalism, with all its developments and controversies, has played a significant role in shaping relations between the West and the modern Islamic world. The long history of Orientalism shows how the West's view of the East, including the Islamic world, has changed over time, from religious motivations in the beginning to political and economic interests during the colonial era. Although classical Orientalism was often colored by bias and stereotypes, the criticism that emerged in the modern era has encouraged the development of more objective and balanced studies of Islam.

A critical understanding of Orientalism is essential for both Muslims and Westerners to avoid the pitfalls of stereotypes and prejudices that can damage intercultural relations. By understanding the history and dynamics of Orientalism, we can identify the biases hidden in various discourses and representations of Islam. This will help us to build a more just and accurate understanding of Islam and the Eastern world.

Moving forward, joint efforts from all parties are needed to build a better understanding between the West and the East. Open dialogue, mutual respect, and based on the principle of equality are the keys to bridging the gap between cultures and realizing harmonious cooperation. Only in this way can we overcome the negative legacy of orientalism and build a better future for all.

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