

Research Article

Rereading the Construction of Cultural Identities During the Colonial Era in Edward Said's Thought

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Abstract

The 14th century marked the beginning of the organizational formation of Western countries on a new basis. Nations such as England, France, Spain, and Portugal brought the seas under their control and swiftly embarked on exploitation and the subjugation of other peoples. The term "colonialism" literally means "to make prosperous" or "to cultivate," but in its conceptual usage, it refers to a condition of subordination or servitude of a society, country, or nation that is politically, economically, or culturally dominated by a more advanced society or nation. This research aimed to explore Edward Said's theory of Orientalism and analyze the relationship between power, knowledge, and colonialism in his works. The present research was conducted using a qualitative method and content analysis. The unit of analysis for this research is Edward Said's main works, which include (Orientalism, the role of the intellectual, culture and imperialism, and the world, text, critic). The findings showed that Said believes that Orientalism, as a tool of intellectual and cultural power, has weakened indigenous identities and created inferior identities against Western identities. Orientalism has also played a fundamental role in strengthening colonial policies and creating ideological identities to justify Western hegemony, and has ultimately led to the institutionalization of cultural self-destruction in colonial countries. In addition, the relationship between power and knowledge, especially through Orientalism, has paved the way for the continuation of colonialism and the reconstruction of Western hegemonic identities.

Keywords

Edward Said, Orientalism, Colonialism, Power and Knowledge, Identity, Qualitative Content Analysis

1. Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The 14th century was the beginning of the organization of Western countries on a modern basis, and as soon as in the

15th century, countries with maritime power emerged in Europe and took control of the seas, intense colonial rivalries

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broke out between several new, strengthened European countries such as England, France, Spain, Portugal, and then the Netherlands, and they quickly began to seek profit and subjugate other nations [23]. What helped the European colonialists the most in this work was the expansion of shipping and military industries. However, economic trends were also not without influence. The realization of the European industrial revolution and the need for raw materials and an integral part of production, namely the market, forced the Europeans to colonize other regions of the world [8]. Western power allowed its metropolitan centers to subjugate other lands and peoples to the extent possible, which was truly astonishing in its scope. In 1800, the Western powers claimed 55 percent of the world's surface, but in reality they controlled 35 percent of it. By 1878, this had risen to 68 percent, an increase of 83,000 square miles (= 826,000 square kilometers) per year. By 1914, this annual increase had reached an astonishing 240,000 square miles (528,000 square kilometers), and Europe had 85 percent of the world's population under the titles of colonies, protectorates, trusteeships, and commonwealths [10]. Colonialism is neither Christianization nor a humanitarian act. Neither the will to push back the boundaries of ignorance and disease, nor tyranny; neither the expansion of God nor the expansion of truth. All these are the shadow of the misfortune of a civilization that, at a stage in its history, finds itself instinctively compelled to expand its contradictory economic rivalries on a global scale [11].

Colonialism literally means seeking to develop, to develop [15]. It is to force to develop [17]. And in the term, it refers to the state of subordination or servitude of a community, country, or nation that is politically, economically, or culturally under the domination of another more advanced community or nation [19]. It is a process that causes the cultural, political, economic, and social domination of a society by a foreign power [8]. Occupying a foreign land by resorting to military-political power [5]. It is the domination of a strong country over a weak country directly by taking possession of that country's political power and unfairly exploiting its economic resources [2]. Colonialism has various forms, including: a) Colonialism based on the occupation of new lands with the expulsion or extermination of the natives. b) Colonialism based on exploitation or colonization: a foreign group rules the natives and plunders their country's wealth. c) Mixed colonialism: foreign groups (Europeans) directly exploit the wealth; but some of them use the natives for this purpose [5]. Colonialism, which is always one of the results and consequences of imperialism, consists of arranging and preparing the settlement of a foreign people - immigrants - in a distant land. As Michael Doyle said, "Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one country controls the political sovereignty of another society. This may be done by force, or by political, economic, social cooperation, or by cultural dependence. In simple terms, imperialism is the policy process of creating or maintaining an empire [20].

Alongside the developments of the Industrial Revolution in

Europe, two rivalries emerged among Europeans. First, there was a rivalry within the European continent to industrialize as many countries as possible. Second, this rivalry was extended beyond Europe, leading to the emergence of a new type of conquest in the form of colonization, which was unprecedented in history. In the conquests of past civilizations, it is observed that these conquests were often formed on the borders adjacent to civilizations, but in the new type, the distance between the two lands is seen as hundreds of kilometers. As mentioned, the lexical difference between colonization and what was termed is at two ends of a continuum, from colonization and development to the other side of the spectrum, which is the subjugation of nations, some of which had a name and fame for themselves in the not-so-distant past. And they moved along with past civilizations.

Although the arrival of Europeans in various countries initially brought some prosperity, the continuation of this process left irreparable effects on those countries, as Braginsky states: No one can deny that the establishment of mining and manufacturing industries, the construction of railways and ports, the introduction of new grains and the development of commodity production are objectively considered positive developments. But all these developments were carried out to secure the interests of foreign monopolies, and Africa was a real gold mine for them. The economic development of African countries was ruthlessly disrupted, the growth of productive forces stopped, and only those branches of industry that were compatible with the interests of the monopolies developed. As a result, Africa became an appendage that provided raw materials and agricultural products for the imperialist powers [3]. Who but the rich world of white people can buy the raw materials and primary products of young African countries, which account for up to 90 percent of their exports? Even for the exploration, extraction and transportation of minerals, blacks need whites. And it is these whites who determine prices: they keep the prices of cocoa, coffee and fibres low and, in return, constantly increase the prices of vehicles, machinery and tools that Africa must buy from industrial countries [18].

Another consequence of colonialism for the colonized nations was the cultural effects that this colonial era left behind, which, like other economic effects, cannot be considered irreparable for them: as Franz Fanon says, the dehumanization of the natives constitutes the basis of imperialism and colonialism. There is an infinite distance from colonialism to civilization. Not a single human value can be extracted from the dispatch of all colonial missions, from all written colonial statutes, and from all ministerial departments sent to the colonies. Colonialism removes the colonizer himself from civilization and, in the strict sense of the word, turns him into an animal and drives him back. It awakens in him all the hidden instincts: greed, violence, and racial hatred, and a one-sided interpretation of moral principles. It must be shown that every time a head is cut off in Vietnam or an eye is gouged out and tolerated in France, every time a Malagasy is

tortured and passed under a mustache in France, a full-scale civilizational experiment is on display, a global regression is carried out. And in the end, all these broken treaties and all the lies told and all the campaigns endured and all the prisoners chained and interrogated, all the patriots tortured, at the end of this boiling racial pride and delicious self-aggrandizement, is poison that is poured into the veins of Europe and slowly but surely drives the European continent towards barbarism [11]. On the other hand, it belittles the value system of the colonized individual. The occupier, by portraying the Algerian as a prey over which Islam and France have fought with equal intensity and cruelty, reveals his behavior, philosophy, and politics. This means that the occupier, upset by his successive defeats, makes the value system by which the colonized individual resists his system of countless attacks simple and contemptible, and presents what is indicative of the colonized society's intention to preserve its distinctiveness and keep its national existence intact as behavior stemming from religious beliefs and superstitions based on prejudices [16]. The entire history of nineteenth-century European thought is full of discrimination. Between what is worthy of us and what is worthy of others, the former characterizes privacy, being in one's proper place, sharing, belonging, and in a word, being high, and the latter characterizes being alien, being left out, abnormal, inferior, and in a word, being low. The cultural-national identity of European culture as a privileged standard created a large group of other differences between our culture and others, between the worthy and the unworthy, European and non-European, higher and lower [10]. And in the same period of colonialism, we see that most of the national and local languages of African, Asian, and South American countries were destroyed and replaced by the languages of the colonial countries. In the meantime, the emergence of thinkers such as Edward Said creates a gap that itself has been the beginning of a wide range of post-colonial studies in order to reveal the consequences and scope of the effects of colonialism. Rather than focusing on the economic effects of colonialism, Said emphasizes the cultural effects of colonialism because he believes in the durability and penetration of the colonialist effects on the bodies of the colonized people and lands. He sheds new light on this topic and has written three books: *Orientalism*, *The World, The Text, The Critic*, and *Culture and Imperialism*. Therefore, in this article, we will examine colonialism, its formation process, and its effects.

2. Research Questions

- 1) How is the process of colonial formation in Edward Said's view?
- 2) What are the drivers of colonialism in Edward Said's view?
- 3) What were the consequences of colonialism for the colonialists?

3. Research Background

Postcolonial studies can be considered one of the areas of theorizing about the issues of developing countries, especially in the period after the end of mainly Western colonial rule. This theoretical approach analyzes colonial discourse with a critical perspective and with an emphasis on the consequences of colonialism and seeks to understand the current situation through rethinking and critical analysis of past history [13]. In the 1950s, Africa, Central and South America, and Asia witnessed decolonization movements. Colonized nations from Jamaica to Kenya, India, Vietnam, and Hungary demanded their independence. One of the effects of these global social changes was the emergence of thinkers whose social position had led their views to new theoretical perspectives. Thinkers such as Franz Fanon, Am  C  saire, and Albert Memme were colonized people who were also deeply influenced by the culture of the colonizing societies. They lived in two worlds – the colonial world and the imperial world. The experience of living in two worlds without fully belonging to either of them gave these thinkers a specific social perspective [12]. In Iran, many researchers have also critically examined colonialism in most of the fields of literature, sociology, etc., some of which are mentioned below.

In a study titled “A Critical Analysis of Gertrude Bell’s Travelogue of the Desert and the Farmland Based on Edward Said’s Orientalist Theory,” Muzahab (1400) showed that Gertrude Bell was not neutral in dealing with the culture and people of the East, especially the Middle East, and did not narrate the story honestly, indicating that she was more active as a political activist in the East and the Middle East to subjugate the countries of the East under Western domination.

Eissazadeh et al. (1397) showed in a study titled “Strategies for Understanding the Phenomenon of Islamophobia Based on Orientalism” that the Orientalist stereotypes that have been used in recent centuries about Islam and Muslims are: backward and underdeveloped, abnormal and deviant, inferior and lowly, fixed and uniform, petrified and fanatic, evil and war-like, extremist and terrorist, violent and misogynistic.

Ahmadi et al. (2015) in a study titled “Development as Domination: An Exploration of Edward Said’s Thoughts” found that in the works of Orientalists, development is a language and software that has made Western domination of the East possible and sustainable in economic, political, and cultural dimensions without violence.

Nasaj (2012) in a study titled “The Coherent Components of Orientalism in Edward Said’s Thought” showed that the common characteristics of Orientalism are the connection with power, the invention of the East, generality and integrity, the dualism of good and evil, the distinction between us and them, thinking elsewhere, self-centeredness, the centrality of Western needs, our superiority, and the contempt for the other.

Mousavinia (2011) in a study titled “Edward Said and the Colonial Narrative” showed that one of the cultural fields of

Orientalism is fiction, novels, or narratives. Narrative is a manifestation of the cultural machine that is used to erase memories of imperialist violence, to distort the minds of the natives, and to create ambiguity. As a result, the sense of pessimism towards imperial rule and its resulting hegemony is diminished or neutralized.

4. Research Method

This research was conducted using a qualitative method and content analysis method. Qualitative content analysis is a method that uses a qualitative approach and various techniques to systematically analyze texts obtained from interviews, diaries, observation notes, or documents [6]. The unit of analysis for this research was Edward Said's main works, which included (*Orientalism*, *The Role of the Intellectual*, *Culture and Imperialism*, and *World, Text, Critic*) and were analyzed after extracting the main elements from the text.

5. Discussion

Edward Wadi Said, a Palestinian-American thinker and theorist, was born in Jerusalem in 1935 and died in New York in 2003. Although he spent his childhood and elementary education in Cairo and, as he himself said, had lived in two colonies (Palestine and Egypt) as a child, he spent most of his life in America. He studied at Princeton and Harvard Universities, and after graduating, he was a professor of comparative literature at Columbia University from 1963 to 2003. In addition, he was a visiting professor and researcher at Harvard, Yale, Johns Hopkins, and the Center for Advanced Study of the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University [4].

In order to establish his theory, Said undertook a comprehensive and extensive study of the works of orientalists, intellectuals, and people who had traveled to colonial lands for the purpose of knowledge. In this regard, Said, in his book *Orientalism*, critically rereads the travelogues and historiographies that Western intellectuals and writers wrote in parallel with colonial movements from the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Said refers more than three hundred times to the works and writings of orientalists such as Schwab, Johann Foch, Schaefer, Balfour, Kramer, Quine, Glidden, Dugat, Daniel, Chiu, Aeschylus, Saturn, Barthold, Deherblot, Pirenne, Henri Bode, Arbery, Jean Thierry, Dulce, Beatty, Schlegel, Nerval, Scott, Chateaubriand, Hugo, Jules Mole, Kiernan, Gibb, Galland, Fourie, Marlowe, Flaubert, Massignon, Bernard Lewis, Abrams, Dussac, Ernest Renan and others in such a way that the reader can correctly understand Said's unique precision and subtlety in examining each of the works he studied [1]. In fact, the essence of Said's theory comes out when he analyzes and examines all of these works. Said believes that the West needed power and knowledge to conquer other lands. The power of the West, which was formed through scientific developments, military

inventions, and the expansion of navigation, therefore the grounds for colonialism in Said's works consist of knowledge and power. Therefore, the West had the foundations of colonialism, but in the meantime, just as it needed military force to start colonialism, it needed intellectual force to consolidate and continue colonial domination. The West had realized that scientists could provide the means for colonization more quietly and at a lower cost, and therefore a group representing Western countries went to other countries under the title of Orientalists to learn and study history, literature, and culture.

Scientists and so-called orientalists realized that in order to consolidate the West's dominance over colonial lands, they had to first create an identity separate from the Western identity, which had some characteristics and the only way other nations could reach the power of the West was to have the characteristics of Western people, and basically we see that throughout this discussion, a confrontation and identity war can be represented. Similar to the ideas of the Copenhagen School, which was founded by thinkers such as Barry Buzan, Weaver and Lemaitre. Members of this school believed that language, history, culture and even race and political borders are important in determining identity. The purpose of this phrase was to address threats that had put the identity of groups at risk and that social security would be considered when there was a potential or actual force as a threat to the identity of individuals in society. [22]. Weaver believes that social security is the ability of different professional, ethnic, national, sexual, etc. groups to maintain their traditional and eternal identity or values. In Western, and especially European, discourse, the most important issue of "social security" is the survival of group identity. In this discourse, groups do not tend to digest their identity or self in the identity or self of others [21]. Through literary and historical studies, Said reveals the fundamental antagonism between the West and the East and between the concept of Europe or the West itself and its constructed opposite point, which has permeated most of Western history and culture. This antagonism appears in the form of competition between active and passive forces, meaning that the West actively constructs its identity and the East is the mere recipient of a weak and inferior opposing identity. In this sense, Said's *Orientalism* is a type of identity politics. A Western style of domination, reconstruction, and having authority over the East. European or Western culture, through its visionary foundation, acquired its power and identity by positioning itself in front of the East as a kind of substitute and even self-conceited self. Orientalization, deeply imbued with traditional metaphysical distinctions, encodes in particular the dualities of inside and outside, as well as the familiar and unfamiliar, and the distinction between them (or in other words: Europe, the West, us) and the alien (the East, the Orient, them). In this dualistic structure, weights and priorities are distributed hierarchically: Europe, rational, mature and normal, and the East, irrational, childish and abnormal. Europe is essentially the knower, rational, the East is essentially the known or recipient of knowledge; po-

litically and intellectually, Europe is the master, and the East is the subordinate [7]. But colonial countries first targeted the identity and culture of the colonized countries, which is why Said, in *Orientalism*, aims to provide a cultural interpretation of colonialism.

Before there was a European colonial era, there had to be an idea of Europe, or the idea that there was a social and geographical space called the West, in contrast to the East. Furthermore, Europe and the West had to be seen as superior and as the path to social progress. The East, on the other hand, had to be seen as inferior, socially backward, and incapable of progress and advancement. The inferiority of the East was often understood in racial and gender terms. The Oriental was seen as a primitive race and associated with stereotypically feminine characteristics such as passivity, indecisiveness, childishness, and ornamentation. *Orientalism* played a fundamental role in imperialism. This system of knowledge allowed the West to subjugate the peoples of the East or Oriental. In fact, the ideology of *Orientalism* was the driving force behind colonialism: Western colonial powers saw these nations as mere examples of the East and therefore viewed them as children, women, despots, and immature beings—in short, as those who needed Western moral and intellectual guidance in order to become civilized [12].

Orientalism is a Western style of domination, restructuring, and authority over the East [8]. *Orientalism* is a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between the East and the West. Thus, a large group of writers, including poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and royal officials, accepted this fundamental difference between East and West and made it the starting point for theories about the East, its people, their customs, their minds, and their destinies [10]. *Orientalism* as a dynamic exchange between different authors and a vast set of political considerations shaped by the three great empires of England, France, and America, and within the intellectual and imaginative realm of those writings related to this field [10]. What German *Orientalism* has in common with English and French *Orientalism*, and later American *Orientalism*, is a kind of intellectual “authority” over the East in Western culture [10]. *Orientalism* is a collective notion and belief that gives us, “Europeans,” an identity in contrast to all “them,” non-Europeans, and in fact, it can be argued that one of the major elements in European culture is precisely what has made it dominant both within and outside Europe: the idea that the identity of the European human being is at a higher level than that of all non-European individuals and cultures. There is also a kind of dominance of European ideas about the East, which itself has been a repetition of the claim of European superiority over the backwardness of the East [10].

In his continuation of his discussions, Said addresses the role of orientalists, just as Dallmayer believes that Said powerfully exposes the collusion of Western scholars (called orientalists) in the expansion of European colonialism [7]. Defenders of colonialism knock on every door to prove that

this was a step forward in the history of backward African nations. For example, Professor Robert Emerson of Harvard University writes that colonialism was the conduit through which Western knowledge, ways, and theoretical traditions were made available to the people of Africa [3]. Jules Herman, a defender of French colonialism, said: It is necessary to accept this and accept it as a starting point that there is a hierarchy in races and civilizations and that we belong to a superior race and a higher civilization. By accepting this, in turn, gaining the right to superiority requires that permanent regulations be established. The essential legitimacy of the victorious over the native peoples comes from their submission and submission to our superiority, and not only submission to mechanical, economic and military superiority, but also submission to moral superiority. Our dignity is based on quality and this is the basis by which we have the right to govern all of humanity. Material power is nothing, but only a means to such an end [10]. With his writings, opinions and assessments on democracy in America and criticism of the mistreatment of Indians and black slaves in hand, Tocqueville later dealt with French colonial policies in Algeria between 1830 and 1840; there the occupying French army, under the command of Marshal Bogot, waged a brutal war of pacification against the Algerian Muslims. When we read Tocqueville’s writings on Algeria, we suddenly realize that the same norms that motivated Tocqueville’s humane protest against American mistreatment are ignored in the case of the French. It is not that he does not cite evidence: he does, but the evidence he cites is of little value and little value, the purpose of which is to grant a license to French colonization in the name of what Tocqueville calls national pride. The massacre of people does not affect him; he himself says: Muslims belong to a backward and inferior religion and must be brought under rule and discipline. In short, although his own country, France, has pursued the same inhumane policies, Tocqueville deliberately denies to his own country the apparently universal application of the language he used in the case of America [9].

The effects of colonialism are much deeper and more lasting than the last white policeman. Like Fanon, I believe that the real problems arise after the burden of oppression is lifted from the shoulders of the oppressed. For it is then that issues such as social transformation, nationalism and development become the responsibilities of the oppressed [14]. Said believes about the effects and consequences of colonialism: Such a struggle is complex and interesting because it does not only deal with soldiers and cannons, but is a struggle over ideas, forms, imaginations and perceptions. The vast majority of peoples in the so-called West, or what is called the metropolis, and their countries and counterparts in the Third World or former colonies share one thing in common: the classical era of the “powerful” empire, which Eric Hobsbawm so strikingly described in his analysis as the Century of Empire, came to an end more or less after the collapse of its structure after World War II, and yet, in one way or another, it has left its cultural effects on the present day [10]. Said con-

cludes that the continuation of the process of domination is due to one of the striking indications of how the intense tensions, inequalities and injustices that permeate and process colonial culture in the country of origin or the metropolis are expressed by the prominent conservative historian Field Hughes. He says that the basis of imperialist authority is “the mental and intellectual stance of colonialism. Acceptance of obedience and subordination either with a positive feeling of common interests with the dominating and custodian country, or due to the inability of the colonized country to have any alternative that would necessarily make the empire sustainable” [10].

Orientalism was considered by Western thinkers to have three interrelated functions: a) The first function of Orientalism is to facilitate the appropriation and plunder of the wealth of the East by the colonialists and Western states, which has been carried out in colonial movements with military force and political domination and unequal economic relations in

the Third World countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. b) The second function of Orientalism is the necessity of controlling and restraining the East and Eastern people, who have been defined and recreated in the works of Orientalists as violent, irrational, sensual, emotional and dangerous beings. In this function, the East and the East are created and recreated as subjects of Western power. c) The third function of the works of European and Western Orientalists is identification or identity-building. If we refer to Lacan's ideas about the construction of the "self", we can claim that there has never been a homogeneous and unified West and that many differences are hidden within what is known as the "West or European". The idea of a homogeneous West is constructed solely in opposition to an "other incorrectly assumed homogeneous" identity, namely the East. In this function, the East and the East are placed as objects of Western knowledge in order to establish the superior identity of the West, which has always required the humiliation of the identity of the East [1].

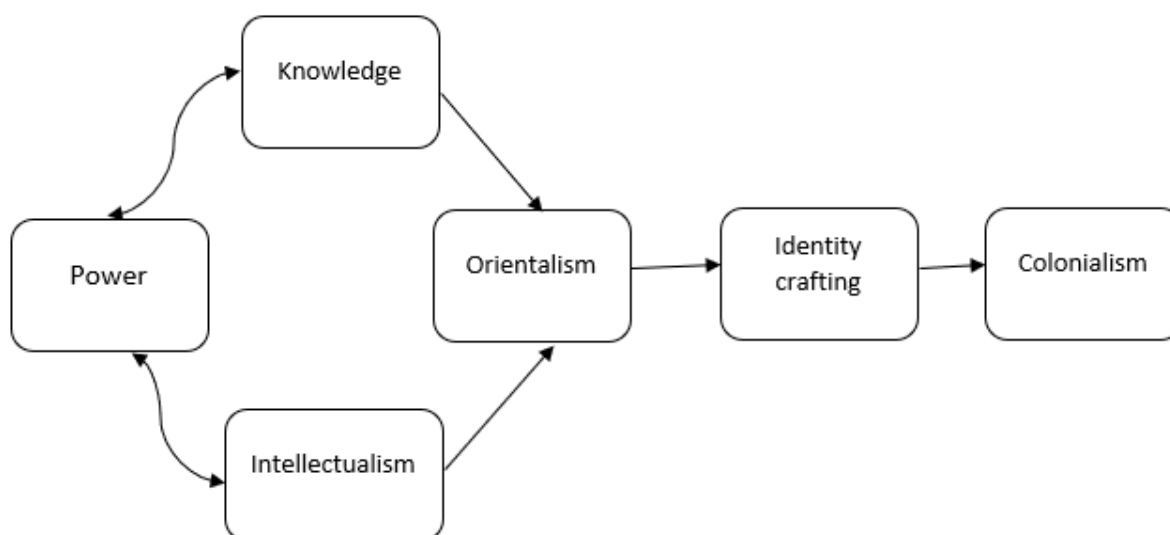


Figure 1. Theoretically extracted model of the research.

6. Conclusion

The connection and contact between different civilizations is valuable. No matter how mature, eloquent and ingenious any civilization or land may be, if it cuts off its connection with the outside world, it will undoubtedly not take long for it to fall into decline. Of course, the commitment and attachment between cultures, as well as the same degree of isolation, are dangerous. Said knows the value of culture, and believes that the sustainability of cultural dependence is greater than economic dependence, and it was on this basis that he pointed out that the continuation of colonialism by Western powers was culturally possible. Said fears the cultural self-destruction of the colonized countries. Said believes that the West was able to conquer the East with incredible speed because it had

combined its domination with knowledge. The first stage of colonization was related to the discussion of power. Military power, maritime power created the grounds for the colonization of different nations. Accompanying these developments, technical inventions come into play, combining and linking power and knowledge, becoming a strong impetus for colonization. In the meantime, a class of intellectuals emerges, who call themselves theorists and strategists of colonization, a group that associates their knowledge with power and tries to understand nations to the point where the power of arms and force is ineffective, and then uses other means to colonize. Western politicians were able to create a two-way connection between power and knowledge, power and intellectuals. From the fusion of knowledge and intellectuals with power, Orientalism was born. Orientalists created identities, Eastern identities, Western identities, one powerful, one weak; one supe-

rior, one inferior; one rational, one emotional; one bright, the other dark; all these identity creations led to the self-defeat of Eastern nations in the face of Western colonialists, and before the matter was taken to the battlefield, the Westerners won this confrontation. In general, the consequences of colonialism for Eastern countries can be divided into two categories: economic and cultural. On the one hand, the resources of Asian, African, and Central and South American countries were plundered and cheap raw materials were provided for factories in European countries. On the other hand, processed materials were sent to the markets of these countries. Since the domestic industries of the colonized countries were unable to compete with these countries, they became more dependent on Western countries. If there was even a small amount of development, it was not an endogenous development but rather a top-down one. However, in the cultural dimension, it can be seen that at this time many languages and cultures of the colonized countries were disappearing and the culture and language of Western countries were replacing these languages. But this is not all. Westerners tried to institutionalize two issues: first, that progress would only happen with their presence, and second, to instill and internalize this in the colonized countries, which were unable to govern their own lands. The least expensive way to maintain its colonialism was to make the helplessness of the Eastern nations a mental or habitual attitude for them and to consider accepting its domination as the only strategy that the people of the colonized countries could endorse.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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