

*Understanding Orientalism With Edward Said's Vision From a Global Academic
Perspective: English Literature of HED Studies Questions
Orientalism and Globalization*

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The Paris Conference on Education 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The representation of the non-west in English literature of Higher Education has the potential to facilitate more spaces to question the ideas of orientalism, racism, and globalization. Non-western scholars of colors constantly question the validities and definitions made by the western white community of scholars. The number of analyses dealing with orientalist representations in the United States and around the globe is on the rise. Western authors and their viewpoints have historically dominated English literature. But there has been a growing movement to include more diverse voices and perspectives in the canon. This movement has the potential to challenge and disrupt the dominant narratives of Western cultural superiority and to create more opportunities for critical engagement with issues of race, culture, and power in the domain of Higher Education Studies. By implementing a few academic and critical measures, it is possible to achieve a curriculum in HED that better reflect the diverse realities of the world we live in, delighting in its rich heterogeneity while challenging harmful stereotypes and prejudices.

Keywords: Orientalism, Racism, Globalization, Representation, Cultural Competency, Power Asymmetry, Stereotypes, Prejudices, Eurocentrism, Transnationalism, Social Justice, Cultural Hegemony, Xenophobia, Funds of Knowledge, English Literature, Psychoanalysis, Social-Cultural Reproduction, White Supremacy, Race, Apartheidism

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Introduction

The representation of the non-west in English literature of Higher Education has the potential to facilitate more spaces to question the ideas of orientalism, racism, and globalization. Non-western scholars of colors constantly question the validities and definitions made by the western white community of scholars. The number of analyses dealing with orientalist representations in the United States and around the globe is on the rise. Western authors and their viewpoints have historically dominated English literature. But there has been a growing movement to include more diverse voices and perspectives in the canon. This movement has the potential to challenge and disrupt the dominant narratives of Western cultural superiority and to create more opportunities for critical engagement with issues of race, culture, and power.

Literature Review

One of the keyways in which the representation of the non-west in English literature can facilitate more spaces for critical engagement is by challenging the idea of orientalism. Orientalism is a term coined by Edward Said to describe the way in which the West has historically viewed and represented the East. Said argued that the West's representation of the East was not based on objective reality, but rather on a set of preconceived notions and stereotypes. By including more non-western voices and perspectives in English literature, we can challenge these stereotypes and create a more nuanced understanding of non-western cultures and societies.

In order to illustrate the theory of globalization, Leon Tikly highlights three major elements: economic, political and cultural. Emphasizing his abhorrence toward "Eurocentrism", he advocates for cultural element of globalization saying it is "the emergence of the borderless world where national cultures are transformed by global communications and cultural hybridization" (1999, p. 616). By including more non-Western voices and perspectives in English literature, we can create more opportunities for critical engagement with the complexities of race, racism, globalization and its impact on different cultures and societies. From under graduation to tertiary education of English literature, the representation of the East by the West scholars is questionable and debatable. Such a critical perspective affects the general ideas of globalization and migration. This eventually produces many different notions of nationalism. One of them is transnationalism.

According to Croucher (2008, p. 8), transnationalism is a social phenomenon that describes the ways in which people, cultures, and ideas move across borders and blur boundaries between nations. Croucher sees transnationalism as a multidimensional concept that encompasses a range of economic, political, and cultural practices that challenge the traditional notion of the nation as a fixed and bounded unit. He argues that transnationalism can be driven by a variety of factors, such as globalization, immigration, and advances in communication technology, and that it has profound implications for social relations, identities, and power structures in the contemporary world. It can also confront the colonial legacy of English literature and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive curriculum.

In 2014-2017, UNESCO offered global citizenship education as a strategy work under United Education Program and introduces the rationale for the implementation of global citizenship education across different countries solidifying social justice, solidarity, diversity and communitarianism. Since then, a good number of attentions are being dedicated to this new

subject of thought. Moreover, this gave birth to the term “critical democracy” which “is based upon a deep commitment to multiculturalism, critical awareness of global power asymmetries, emancipation and social justice” (Pais & Costa, 2020, p. 5).

Jill Koyama (1026, p. 15) has creatively defined a global citizen as someone who is universally self-aware, able to mobilize their energies at multiple levels and possesses individual autonomy, free choice and agency. This definition highlights the importance of possessing a ‘thick’ self-knowledge that is inextricable from social practices and service, while also serving local, national and global communities. For international students coming to the U.S. for tertiary education, this definition challenges the established and prejudiced version of their eastern representations in literature. When a student from Africa reads a syllabus that contains a maverick definition of Africa as a piece of study, they critically evaluate the representation and question their own identity as a global citizen. As an international student myself, I have gone through this process many times, where reading a prestigious literary piece on racism has put me in a dilemma where I had to answer questions about my identity as an Asian/person of color today, and as an Asian/person of color represented in the piece I am reading.

Theoretical Framework

There are a lot of theories that align with Edward Said’s concept of orientalism and racism in this paper, and a few has been taken into consideration at the analysis section to make more meaning and sense to the arguments. In this paper, there is an implied reflection of critical race theory, cultural capital theory, world literature theory, post-colonial theory, cultural imperialism theory and funds of knowledge frameworks.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework that examines society and culture through the lens of race and power dynamics. It challenges the idea that racism is only individual prejudice, instead highlighting how systemic racism is embedded in institutions and structures. CRT emphasizes the importance of understanding how historical context and social systems contribute to racial inequality. By analyzing how race intersects with other social identities like gender, class, and sexuality, CRT seeks to uncover and dismantle the ways in which racism operates in society.

Cultural Capital Theory

Cultural capital theory, introduced by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, posits that individuals possess cultural knowledge, skills, and experiences that can influence their social status and success. Bourdieu identified three forms of cultural capital: embodied (internalized cultural knowledge), objectified (material cultural goods), and institutionalized (recognized credentials). Those with greater cultural capital often have advantages in education, employment, and social interactions. This theory emphasizes how cultural resources can shape social inequalities and opportunities for advancement.

World Literature Theory

World literature theory explores the interconnectedness of literary works across cultures and languages, emphasizing the global circulation and reception of texts. It challenges traditional

notions of national canons and highlights the importance of translation and cross-cultural dialogue in shaping literary discourse. By examining how literature transcends borders and engages with diverse perspectives and experiences, world literature theory seeks to foster a deeper understanding of global literary traditions and their impact on shaping cultural identities. This theory encourages readers to engage with a wide range of texts from different regions and languages, promoting intercultural exchange and dialogue.

Post-colonial Theory

Post-colonial theory examines the legacies of colonialism and imperialism on societies, cultures, and individuals, emphasizing power dynamics, resistance, and decolonization efforts. It challenges Eurocentric perspectives and highlights the voices and experiences of marginalized populations in formerly colonized regions. By analyzing the intersections of race, power, and identity, postcolonial theory seeks to deconstruct colonial narratives and address ongoing forms of oppression and inequality. This theory explores how colonial histories continue to shape contemporary social, political, and cultural landscapes, shedding light on the complexities of postcolonial societies.

Cultural Imperialism Theory

Cultural imperialism theory examines how dominant cultures exert influence and control over less powerful cultures through cultural products, media, and practices. It highlights how powerful nations or groups can impose their values, beliefs, and norms on others, leading to cultural homogenization and loss of local traditions. This theory raises concerns about the unequal distribution of cultural power and the potential erasure of diverse cultural identities. Critics argue that cultural imperialism theory may oversimplify complex cultural interactions and overlook instances of cultural exchange and hybridity.

Funds of Knowledge

The concept of funds of knowledge intersects with English literature and orientalism in complex ways. Funds of knowledge refer to the diverse skills and knowledge that individuals and communities possess due to their cultural backgrounds. In the context of English literature, the representation and validation of different forms of knowledge can either empower or marginalize certain groups. Literature has the power to either celebrate the richness of diverse funds of knowledge or perpetuate stereotypes and hierarchies. Orientalism, as a Western construct that exoticizes and misrepresents non-Western cultures, can impact how funds of knowledge are perceived and valued. The orientalist lens often devalues the knowledge systems of marginalized communities, hindering their recognition and contribution to broader society.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative methodology to examine the influence of English Literature's selection of texts and the implication on how they are defined and described to the broaden global student community.

Design and Sample

Qualitative interviews from focus groups and document analysis guides this study. In total, 100 international students from the University of Arizona have participated. For the purposes of this paper, I have drawn upon the individual interviews and pre/post research articles course syllabuses and UofA library across a variety of disciplinary backgrounds.

Data Collection

Four distinct points of data were collected for this study: (1) interviews with international student participants, (2) pre and post reading materials for international education courses; (3) participant observations; and (4) pre and post published articles collected from UofA library. Individual interviews were completed with international graduate student of English Literature participants and lasted approximately 30-35 minutes. Interviews focused on the key words of this proposal.

Data Analysis

For document analysis, I have sorted the most reviewed research articles and literary texts along with the latest publications related to the topic. Analytic memos and categorical lists were created to summarize the findings. For the interview data, the analysis process followed two rounds of coding. Initially, I have utilized InVivo coding (Saldana, 2009) to extract words and phrases from the participants' language, gaining insight into their experiences. These codes were then organized into categories and themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of their views. The second round of coding involved interpretative analysis (Jones et al., 2014), I have discussed the preliminary findings from the interview data in the next section.

Descriptive/Narrative Analysis

Orientalism refers to the way in which the West has historically perceived, misrepresented, and constructed the "Orient" (i.e., the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa) as a strange, backward, and uniform cultural entity. English Literature, as a discipline, has long been associated with the production and dissemination of Orientalism in Higher Education, with many literary works portraying the East in stereotypical, caricatured, and dehumanizing ways.

As a result, the study of Orientalism in English Literature has become an important area of inquiry in Higher Education, especially in the context of decolonizing the curriculum. For instance, Higher Education institutions have started to critically examine the ways in which Orientalism pervades the texts, curricula, and teaching practices of English Literature, and to challenge the power relations that it perpetuates. Moreover, Higher Education institutions have begun to diversify the canon of English Literature, incorporating works by non-Western authors, as well as critical approaches that center non-Western perspectives. This approach allows for a more nuanced and complex understanding of the multiple, heterogeneous cultures that constitute the "Orient," and for a more equitable representation of the East in English Literature.

Moreover, "Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a verdict discourse about the Orient." (Said, 1978, p. 6). This is

true because of the effect of the World Wars that easily generated between the ruled and the ruler countries. Under the shades of Orientalism, the European scholars defined Africa and the Arabia as such continents that fail to act and react according to the rules of Occidental sophistry and soberness. This sort of biased views are not directly presented but indirectly injected with scholarly presentations in literature. For example, in Albert Camus's *The Outsider* (1942), it is shown that the xenophobic European protagonist kills an Arab anticipating him threatening and insulting. Shakespeare's *Othello* (1603) highlights black man's sexual desire and unbound jealousy as an inevitable common trait toward the white society. The representation of Caliban in *The Tempest* (1611) also defines the non-European as a deformed creature full of revenge and aversion. Therefore, the representations pointed out the concepts of orientalism in the name of literary artistry. Any one can question that if these works are so problematic, why do we study them? It highlights the differences between the East and the West, based on factors such as cultural diversity, architecture, and literature.

In his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1995, p. 204-332), Said explores the concept of Orientalism and its impact on Western perceptions of the East. He examines how the West created cultural and intellectual superiority over the East, placing Eastern individuals in the category of "Others" (ibid, p. 332). Orientalism, according to Said, is more than just a scholarly discourse; it is "a political doctrine", which has been used to reinforce Western notions of cultural hegemony. Said argues that the East has always been viewed through a Western lens, with even some of the most widely-read writers in the West depicting Oriental history and characters with very little scrutiny from readers. He asserts that the Orient is not a natural entity, but rather a construction of Western thought, which has given it a sense of reality and presence that persists even today.

In his book, Said argues that many Western writers have a preconceived notion of the Orient, which is often unchecked and unchallenged. Orientalism is viewed as a discourse that signifies European-Atlantic power over the Orient rather than an authentic portrayal of the Orient. He suggests that while Orientalism is still studied academically, it is primarily an institution that deals with the Orient by making statements about it and settling it. Orientalism is not just a historical phenomenon, but also a political actuality and a contentious issue. Eastern writers have challenged Orientalism in Higher Education and literature, as it constitutes a challenge to the West's knowledge, imperium, and spirit.

Chinua Achebe's "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" (1902) also critiques the racial bias and imperialistic imagery in literature that can be linked to Said's ideas. However, it remains debatable whether these protests can surmount the powerful litany of Orientalist prejudices. Some authors believe that their duty is to understand Oriental civilization, but Said argues that such a belief suggests that Eastern intellectuals are incapable of representing themselves. Said states that all cultures are complete and exclusive in their own way, and portraying a different culture can be admiring, but it should not be done with biases and prejudices that alter its true nature (1995, p. 248).

In an interview, Spivak (1990, p. 53) points out that representing a culture through aesthetics is a tool to understand its socio-economic dynamics. However, the West often uses hyperboles to depict the Orient as an unusual and mysterious entity, fueling their own fascination and portraying Orientals as subjugated individuals. This is enabled through linguistic hegemony (Mackenzie, 1995, p. 43), where the West exercises control over the language used to represent the Orient. Literature, on the other hand, is a world of imagination, where authors can blend reality and fiction to create a lasting impact (Nietzsche,

2000, p. 234). However, Said warns against the combination of real and unreal elements, which can be used to reinforce existing power structures. Said employs Foucault's idea of discourse and Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony to theorize the control of representations of the Orient by the West, perpetuating imperialist and racist ideologies (Mackenzie, 1995, p. 3-4).

To illustrate more, Orientalism is a concept that refers to the Western domination and control over the Orient (Said, 1995, p. 3), which is achieved through the application of Western ideological lenses. This concept has been prevalent throughout history, and it is a powerful tool used to assert Western authority over the Orient. Orientalism is “a master narrative” (Mackenzie, 1995, p. 6) of Western power and imperialism, which has continued to play a role in the world today. Even after the end of formal imperialism, Orientalism has survived as “the cultural and ideological superstructure of neo-colonialism” (ibid).

The idea of Orientalism was further extended by Gramsci's critical works, which focused on the issues of class disintegration derived from capitalist theories of imperialism. A range of institutions, scholarship, imagery, vocabulary, doctrines, and even colonial bureaucracies and styles supports this concept (Said, 1995, p. 1991). It has also been strengthened by industrialization and class distinctions, such as the inferiority of working class and superiority of ruling class, which has led to the introduction of further terms like supremacy, sexism, Occidentalism, racism, apartheid, xenophobia, and transnationalism.

The concept of cultural hegemony advanced by Gramsci has implications for English literature in higher education. Gramsci argues that the ruling class exercises cultural control through the creation of cultural norms and values, which are internalized by subordinate groups. In the context of English literature, this means that dominant cultural institutions and beliefs, which are often white, Western, and Eurocentric, have shaped literary traditions and canon, thereby privileging certain voices and perspectives over others. The study of English literature in higher education thus becomes a battleground of cultural negotiations, where questions of representation, power, and identity are at stake. By recognizing the impact of cultural hegemony in shaping literary traditions, English literature curricula can engage students in critical discussions about how texts and cultural norms are created, transmitted and maintained.

The concept of funds of knowledge intersects with English literature and orientalism in complex ways. Funds of knowledge refer to the diverse skills and knowledge that individuals and communities possess due to their cultural backgrounds. In the context of English literature, the representation and validation of different forms of knowledge can either empower or marginalize certain groups. The intersection of funds of knowledge, English literature, and orientalism underscores the importance of critically examining power dynamics and representation in knowledge production. By acknowledging and amplifying the diverse funds of knowledge present in different cultural contexts, literature can serve as a platform for empowerment and cultural exchange. It is essential to deconstruct stereotypes and biases embedded in literary portrayals to create a more inclusive and respectful dialogue that honors the richness of all forms of knowledge.

Moreover, Orientalist writers tend to rely on preconceptions, myths, and stereotypes to explain the East in their literature. This approach creates a sense of authority that allows them to fabricate the “Other” through their works (Said, 1995, p. 353). One example of this is seen in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where Caliban, a black deformed creature, represents the East

while the other characters, white-skinned and educated, represent the West. Through Caliban's reflections, one can observe how the representation of the East as savage or inferior is a form of subjugation (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1998, p. 168). Such an inclusion reinforces Said's claim that the East is habitually represented with orthodoxies.

When an avant-garde writer like Shakespeare represents an Eastern individual like this, it forms an association between being black, brown or of color to being irrational, depraved, childlike, or different. In contrast, the European identity is associated with being rational, virtuous, mature, and normal. These representations imply that the "Orientals" lived in a different, organized world of their own, with their own national, cultural and epistemological boundaries, but this identity was not derived from their own efforts but rather from the manipulations of the West.

If we compare with Albert Camus, we find that Orientalism refers to the depiction of the East by Western intellectuals and artists in a way that reinforces classicism and power hierarchies. This is achieved through the use of language and literary techniques that emphasize belongingness and otherness. The author argues that in Camus' novel, *The Outsider*, the portrayal of Arabs as aggressive and uncivilized exemplifies this form of Orientalism. Camus's portrayal of Western disdain towards the East is seen as a reflection of the intellectual hegemony that British intellectuals exercised over other races. It also emphasizes the idea of hegemony as a means of incorporating subjugated individuals through resistance and collaboration, further reinforcing power hierarchies based on race and social class.

To add more into the discussion, we can again point out Chinua Achebe, a scholar of critical race theory and founder of a Nigerian literary movement, who was deeply troubled by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. He sees Conrad's piece as an insult to African culture and a clear example of racism. As an African, Achebe finds Conrad's depiction of Africa as uncivilized and primitive as well as deeply problematic since it seems to perpetuate negative stereotypes while failing to recognize the humanity of African people. He sees *Heart of Darkness* as an example of how Europeans treat Africans as a mere subject of research. Although some critics may view the novella as a powerful critique of European imperialism, Achebe maintains that the work fails to capture the complexity of African humanity and cannot be considered a great piece of literature.

Similarly, E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) vividly portrays the complexity of ethnic relations in India during British colonial rule. Forster's novel highlights the destruction of a friendship between a Muslim doctor, Dr. Aziz, and a British woman, Adela Quested, due to the xenophobic and racial attitudes of the white community. Forster portrays xenophobia as a social disease that dominates social bonds and creates an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion among different ethnic communities. The novel emphasizes that people tend to fear each other due to differences in language, culture, and skin color. The protagonist, Dr. Aziz, represents the Indian mature generation that seeks to build fraternity and unity. However, the novel depicts how orientalist views, racism, and xenophobia dominate the hearts and minds of many white characters, making any kind of negotiation impossible, and resulting in a sense of regret and misunderstanding.

Future Implications

In terms of future implications, this literature review highlights the significant role that literature and education can play in promoting diversity, disarmament of stereotypes, and

tackling issues of racism and global binaries. Going forward, it is essential to continue to expand and critique the representation of non-Western cultures in English Literature courses, ensuring that more students are exposed to diverse expressions of human experiences scrutinizing the terms associated with it. Additionally, educators should seek to develop inclusive curricula that better reflect the diversity of their student populations, incorporating non-European and non-white voices where relevant. This approach can help to not just promote multiplicity in the traditional sense but also help students develop critical thinking skills and the ability to navigate complex cultural differences, creating more thoughtful and empathetic leaders and global citizens in the future. A possible future research direction regarding these themes could be to explore the intersections between Said's vision and other contemporary discourses such as critical race theory, post-colonialism and migration, and globalization studies.

Limitation of This Study

While the research on the representation of non-Western cultures in English Literature courses provides valuable insights into the importance of diversity, challenging stereotypes, and promoting cross-cultural understanding, it is not without limitations. One possible limitation of such research is that it focuses primarily on a Western educational context, without taking into account the different approaches or practices in non-Western educational systems. Moreover, there may be some limitations in terms of generalizability, as the experiences of students and educators in different cultural and social contexts may vary significantly. Finally, such research may not fully capture the experiences of other marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples or immigrant communities, whose voices may also be excluded from literary canons or under-represented in English Literature curricula. Further research should consider these limitations to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the role of literature and education in promoting diversity and dismantling stereotypes.

Probable Solutions

To address the limitations of such research, there are several probable solutions that can be considered. Firstly, researchers should strive to produce studies that explore the experiences of students and educators in different cultural and social contexts to determine how curriculum adaptations can promote diversity in various educational environments. Secondly, to address the possibility of limited generalizability, researchers should employ qualitative research methods that can gather in-depth insights from a more diverse group of participants. Thirdly, to expand the scope of representations, educators should incorporate literature by authors from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including those of Indigenous and immigrant groups. Additionally, there should be a concerted effort to promote the publication and recognition of English literature that represents non-Western cultures in academic and literary circles. By implementing these measures, it is possible to achieve curricula that better reflect the diverse realities of the world we live in, delighting in its rich heterogeneity while challenging harmful stereotypes and prejudices.

Conclusion

It can be estimated that the representations of non-Western cultures in English Literature courses provide an opportunity for Higher Education students to challenge long-standing stereotypes and biases concerning orientalism, racism, and globalization. By exposing

students to literature from diverse cultural backgrounds, such representations facilitate deeper cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, both in and out of the classrooms. By studying authors and works from non-Western cultures, students can gain a greater appreciation for the richness and diversity of human experience, helping to dismantle harmful stereotypes and prejudices. Ultimately, providing space for these representations can help produce more compassionate, informed, and global-minded citizens who are better equipped to navigate an increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to my mentor and supervisor Al-Haj Asma Jabin for all the guidelines and advisory efforts.

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