

## Occidentalism Questioned

Jan Erik Lane

*Professor Emeritus*

*Geneva University, Geneva, Switzerland*

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**Abstract:** In the 21st century there is a new debate about so-called Western values. The beliefs of the occidental countries are attacked, as concealing contempt for other countries, spoken of as orientalist, Muslim or Buddhist. Yet, Western philosophy can only be equivalent to “OCCIDENTALISM” when focused upon truth, truth telling and freedom of choice.

**Keywords:** civilization, culture, beliefs and values, occidental-oriental, rule of law, dictatorship.

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### Introduction

The Western world is criticized for hypocrisy about climate change, capitalist exploitation and orientalist attitudes towards the other civilizations. I wish here to argue that only the first criticism is valid. Actually, all governments renege on environmental policy.

The global debate on science and technology, economics and development as well as global warming is dominated by the West: EU and USA, UK and Canada as well as Oceania and Japan. The BRIC is hardly a counterweight as it has too little coherence. The Russian attack on the Ukraine has pitted the West against the East. The following critiques are launched against the Western democracies.

### I. Orientalism

The theme of orientalism maintains that westerners look down upon other civilizations or cultures. This orientalist discourse was clearly formulated in literature by Said (1973), but it has a background in history and cultural studies with an implicit idea about Muslim beliefs and values. The orientalist themes resonate well with universities in Arab countries and India where Said often became honorary doctor. The themes of orientalism include: (i) Tradition, (ii) Gender inequality and (iii) Religious fervor.

Yet, in serious history enquiry into the three monotheistic religions, there is no room for bias. One has to employ the well-known methods of evidence also when taking on the big questions like:

(a) Were the alleged founder of regions beliefs historical persons: Moses, Jesus and Muhammed?

(b) When were the key religious texts composed and by whom?

(c) Are the proportions different between types of believers: fanatics or zealots, lukewarm, and hypocrites?

In orientalism, Islam is either accused of fundamentalism (jihad) or hypocrisy (just observing the tradition of FIVE DUTIES).

### Capitalist Exploitation

The West is much richer than the East, when it comes to GDP per capita. The total GDP of China (18 trillion USD 2022) and of India (4 trillion USD 2022) is not far from that of US (25 trillion USD 2022). The average living standard is however much higher in Western states with the exception of the Gulf monarchies and Singapore.

The economic advantages of the West are looked upon by the others mainly as the outcome of colonialism. The narrative is that the gap can be narrowed by states like China, India and the Gulf, if the rules of the global market game would be fair. The Asian and African countries complain with support often from Latin America that the global market institutions favor the West.

The response to Western economic dominance has been to either turn to another institution or mechanism than the Western market economic system, or to adopt it whole heartedly.

The planned economy was a major attempt to create an alternative to the capitalist economy. Tried in several countries, it failed in the 1980ies in Soviet Union and its satellites. Another development model was import substitution, employed in Asia and Latin America. It was abandoned in the 1990ies.

On the other hand, the economies like China and India that emulated decentralized capitalism performed much better.

Thus, we are now left with one global economy with a regime for creating a level playing field –the WTO institutions. Communism and socialism belong to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today the economy is either pure

capitalism or the welfare state. In the latter, citizens have access to free or subsidized public services. The oil monarchies also provide free public services.

### **Environmental Gap**

The suspicion of Occidentalism recurs in global environmental policy coordination. West is not only accused of having caused global warming through their oil thirst, but they are also told to take a much greater share of the necessary cuts in CO<sup>2</sup> emissions. It is true that western countries started industrial revolution much earlier including the CO<sup>2</sup> emissions. However, as Table 1 indicates, a few of the largest emitters are non-Western.

Table 1: Top seven emitters total CO<sup>2</sup> 2022

<b>Country</b>	<b>% of world emissions</b>
China	29
USA	11
India	7.3
Russia	4.8
Brazil	2.4
Indonesia	2.3
Japan	2.2

Yet, the non-western countries argue at the COP meetings that Table 2 is more relevant.

Table 2: CO<sup>2</sup> emissions per capita of the top emitters

<b>Country</b>	<b>GDP per capita (tonnes)</b>
China	11.0
USA	17.9
India	2.8
Russia	18.0
Brazil	6.0
Indonesia	4.5
Japan	9.4

The drive for cuts in emission of greenhouse gases should be based on Table 2 and not Table 1, according to the non-western countries.

### **Eastern Politics**

The ongoing wars in the world today have rejuvenated the theme of clash between civilisations, as suggested by Huntington (1996).

Orientalism used to be a big theme in the occidental view of Arabia, Islam and Turkey. A key person in the development of the Orientalist theme was Montesquieu. He characterized the Oriental society in Persian Letters (1730) as male chauvinist (harem) as well as fundamentally hierarchical. Moreover, he also coined the expression "Oriental Despotism" when analyzing the first typical polity. Thus, orientalism entailed gender inequality and personal and intellectual unfreedom. It was in his major work *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) that Montesquieu characterized Eastern civilisations as despotic.

However, Wittfogel offered an alternative perspective on despotism. Instead of viewing it as a flawed institution, he linked it up with social efficiency. Following Max Weber, Wittfogel (1957) focused the access to clean water in „hydraulic societies „, which required centralised government for drinking water and irrigation. A few majestic rivers or lakes called for large scale water management.

### **Herodotos**

The orientalist perspective may be traced to Greek historian Herodotus's story of the Persian wars, where the barbarians were defeated – a theme given philosophical connotations by Hegel. In his recent book Llewellyn-Jones (2022) argues that the regime of the Alchaemenids has been interpreted in this light, and unjustly so. I remain unconvinced though due to the presentation of ruling families in this book.

### **West and East**

There is no fixed demarcation line between Western and Eastern countries. Today we have the OECD versus Asia with a few exceptions like Japan and South Korea. More precisely, the US and the EU confronts

Russia, China and central Asia. With the invasion of the Ukraine, Russia appears no longer European. The so-called Shanghai Group of nations stands against the West in addition to the BRIC nations.

The separation between West and Shanghai + BRIC used to be affluence, but no longer so. The Mole world enters also the East with the 59 countries in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation OIC although Turkey is in the Nato.

Especially for the Arab league and Iran, the state of Israel is viewed as originating in orientalism. It is not only a matter of the territory of old Palestine but also the occidental meeting with Islam. There is no Eastern one religion like Christianity in the West.

Around 1900, the Koran was seen as a copy of the Bible. Weber devoted books to Calvinism and the various religions of India and China. He wrote a couple of pages on Islam, „a religion of warriors“ (Weber, 1978).

This is surprising, given his interest in religion and politics. Thus, Weber bypassed the idea of Islamic fundamentalism with ibn Taymiyya and the rise of Salafism. In the 20th century his ideas were reinvented in a violent rejection of occidental hegemony. As a matter of fact, Islam is rich on different interpretations of Islam of various groups with political consequences, in e.g. New York and Gaza.

### **Occidentalism Today**

Occidentalism used to entail capitalism and environmental exploitation. Yet, the Western countries have something inherently positive, namely the firm institutionalization of the search for truth and individual freedom. This should now be seen as the core of occidentalism.

The West may have acted wrongly in the Ukraine, as J. Sachs argues on YouTube. It may also have supported Israel naively and in a partial manner, as N. Chomsky has argued on YouTube. However, neither Chomsky nor Sachs would be allowed or tolerated in the East. People in Ukraine or in Israel cherish individual freedom and the pursuit of truth. A majority of people in the East would like to live under the institutions of property, life and liberty, as Locke expressed it.

### **Conclusion**

The West is no longer the land of the „white man“. Western nations comprise sizeable minorities from other civilizations. And the pressure on immigration is immense.

Why? Poverty – of course, but not only. Rule of law and liberty is valued also by immigrants from the East.

To claim that the Ukraine is basically Russian or that the Jews should live according to the One State Solution (said) is to miss the point.

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