

The association between hegemonic influence and discourse within the framework of...

[Art & Culture](#)



Theories of hegemony and discourse attempt to explain social privilege and injustice by looking at the relationship between authority and the production as well as dissemination of information and knowledge. During the Western imperialist era, the West used hegemony as a representational scheme to maintain accord to their exploitative system. It is essential to look at Orientalism as a discourse in order to fully understand the effect and influence of the Westerners' hegemonic representations. This essay will debate the association between hegemonic influence and discourse within the framework of Western Orientalism. This essay will discuss the way in which hegemonic influence manifests through visual representations, specifically paintings. Furthermore this essay will critically analyze a detailed orientalist painting.

Hegemonic power is used to convince groups of people to adhere to the norms and values of an exploitative and dominant system. It is a form of domination and social power depends on voluntary involvement, rather than the risk of being penalized. Humor may also be seen as being powerfully undermined by hegemony. Hegemony is often tacit and lies beneath the surface as it appears to be "common sense" that directs the conventional understanding of the people. It is a view of the realm that is inherited from the historical times and uncritically engrossed. By looking at different theories of hegemony it can be understood how Europe was able to produce and mainstream consent to their exploitative system. However it is important to firstly understand the connection between power and knowledge in order to fully understand how they came to use such power.

It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge apparatus, and knowledge apparatus on the other hand will always engender power. Michel Foucault argues that knowledge and power are internal parts, thus for the West to gain dominance over the East, they had to form, organize, and disseminate knowledge apparatus. Knowledge is developed through the exercise of power and power is exercised in the functioning of knowledge apparatus such as discourse. Discourses are frameworks of knowledge claims or systems of thought. It is argued that the production and dissemination of discourses are concurrently mechanisms of social power. Therefore in order to exercise social power, discourses must be used. The regulation of discourses gives the control to determine who is allowed to speak on any given topic, as well as which forms of knowledge is opposed in the production of truth. Foucault's insights support Said's definition of Orientalism, which highlights to extend to which knowledge about that was produced and circulated.

Westerners established Orientalist discourse to observe and study the East, which was referred to as the Orient, since their knowledge gave the power to rule as the dominant party. According to Stoddart, Orientalism is a system in which knowledge about the Orient is constructed and which simultaneously produced a fictional Orient as a discursive object of governance and colonialism. Orientalism is linked to artifacts, style of traits and characters of the African cultures and its people. The Westerners studies the Orient since it was new and strange to them. In an attempt to understand the motivation behind these studies, Westerners argued that the Orient is in need of being represented by Westerners since the Orientals are unqualified to represent

themselves. It was the Westerners who established Orientalism, as a so called academic discipline, which gave them a thorough understanding of the Orient. There was a significant contrast between the East and the West, based on this knowledge that they gained. However, genuine knowledge of the Orient was not their goal. They were invested in producing a representation that will enable the West to fabricate an orientation towards the Orient that best serves the interest of the West.

Orientalism is more a symbol of Western control than that being a discourse about the Orient. Through hegemonic representation strategies the West was able to construct an imaginary Orient as the West's other, whereby the other is degraded and the self is enabled with all the power. Orientalist discourses are entirely constructed by and for the West to rule and dominate the Orient. Orientalists had the false impression that their Oriental studies mirrored the true Orient; in fact, the very being of Oriental studies is an approach to dominate and change the world's viewpoint of the Orient in such a way from which they can benefit. Westerners drew on the dichotomy of the other and the self in order to uncivilized, barbaric, lazy and irrational. In defining the Orient, they defined themselves as well, as being the opposite of that. Westerners are deemed superior since they are civilized, virtuous and rational beings. It seems like the knowledge which they gained through studying the Orient, was proof that Oriental ideologies and social is inferior to that of the West. Hence this, they viewed the Orient as uncivilized and brutal beings and accorded them an inferior social position.

The Orient is represented through objects, jewelry, materials or tapestry etc. For example the silky cloths/draped in between the women in Ingres' Turkish Bath, 1859-63. The Turkish Bath by Ingres, is based upon stories written about Lady Wortly Montague visiting the women's baths as Adrianople. The painting involves women in uncomfortable and awkward poses in which the viewer takes pleasure in. All the women in Ingres' painting are white, which have a kind of hierarchy in place of race which may be emphasized of having a fattish to the white race. On the other hand, the dark skinned women does not seem or look real, they are gazing back at the viewer while all the white women are looking away from the viewer. The painting is framed in the shape of a circle, which appears as if we are looking through the lens of a camera or binoculars. A strange observation in the painting is that none of the women have pubic hair, which seems to be focused towards an ideal, clean, baby like skinned female goddess. Another observation is that the women are bathing, but not washing themselves, as opposed to Toril Kiyotsune's , Bathhouse of Women, where the women are bathing and washing themselves making it seem like a domestic scene. Although washing can be a sexual and beautiful scene, Ingres' painting the women are beautiful and sexual without washing themselves. All the women have elongated backs and bodies.