

CLASSICISM AND ORIENTALISM IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW GLOBALIZATION THEORIES

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Abstract

The intense and dichotomous relationship between Orientalism and Classicism that has been created over the last decades of the XX century, reaches new dimensions through the rapid scientific growth, the discoveries of new historical sources and artefacts, and, most importantly, through the paradigms change in many scientific disciplines. This development is also influenced by the rapid and multifaceted societal transformations in the intensively globalizing world of the new millennium. In this context, the paper explores the new understandings of these two important conceptions in the research of the past, and their redefined scope and relation in the light of the globalisation theories and through the paradigm of the ancient globalisation.

Key words: Classicism, Orientalism, globalisation theories, globalization *avant la lettre*.

INTRODUCTION

The aspirations and different perspectives on self-awareness, as well as the process of self-discovering, have been related to significant aspects of religion and philosophy from antiquity to modernity, and have had great impact on the development of many historical and cultural processes during different periods and in diverse geographies.

In the domains of the intellectual and scientific, the objective analysis of oneself has been hailed for centuries as one of the most difficult, but also most virtuous task that one researcher can work on. In ancient times these kinds of analyses were connected with the great knowledge of the “wise”, whereas the interest and the analyses of the questions related to “knowing oneself” have been attributed to important thinkers, such as Socrates on the western or Sun Tzu on the eastern corner of the Old world, since the IV century BC (Seigel 2005, 45-48).

In modernity, on the other hand, the analysis of “oneself” and the related questions touching upon various areas of scientific exploration, additionally burdened with the ideas of the Enlightenment for “the objective science” and “the progress and prosperity” (Trigger 2006, 101), have proven to be one of “the most confusing” and “most slippery” areas in scientific research (James 1890, 330) (Seigel 2005, 3). According to the famous French sociologist and philosopher Baudrillard “the modern” European elites, “didn’t believe anymore in the world’s illusions, but in its reality” (Thomas 2004, 361).

Precisely this “objective science” of the last two centuries, which is referred today by many as “the last and the worst of the illusions” (Thomas 2004, 361), has recognized its own self and its professional traditions in the identity of the “West” and the particular values developed in this “theoretically designed” or “imagined” geographical space in both antiquity and modernity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the development and rethinking the paradigms of classical tradition and orientalism in scientific analyses, as well as their societal impacts, this paper opts for a more dynamic approach to the East-West dichotomies in both science and society. It suggests the models and theories of globalization as new tool of great importance for overcoming the academic misconceptions created by these artificial dichotomies and relates to an understanding of early development of the Old World through the lenses of the globalization *avant la lettre*.

Contemporary academic research has incrementally increased its attention over the need for transcending the new ideas and scientific paradigms related to culture, identities and globalization from modernity to antiquity. Thus, in the 2014 Cambridge University Press edition dedicated to the globalization in the Classical world, the editors Pitts and Versluys use the already prominent and rather prescriptive quote of Morris that “we should push the globalization analogy harder, applying to the ancient Mediterranean the same tough questions that scholars ask about connectedness in our own time.” (Morris 2005, 33; Pitts and Versluys 2015, 3)

A plethora of contemporary analyzes relate to this new scientific trend and provide new articulation of the relations of the classical culture and the cultures of the East (Rossi 2011; Strootman 2011; Mairs 2012; Versluys 2014). It adds to the contemporary authors that acknowledge the Eurocentric and ethnocentric bias of the old classicistic paradigms related to Western colonial and imperialistic worldviews (Dietler 1998, 296–98; Traina 2005; Hall 2011), and the enthusiastic post-colonial turn that has emphasized the new role of the East and the Eastern in the global antiquity and the hybridization of the ancient and “classical” culture (Deagan 1983, van der Spek 1987; Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1993; Young 1995; Stewart 1999; Ferguson 1992; White 2010). Finally, “the propositions of Morris” and common theoretical leanings are present and becoming increasingly dominant in many contemporary analyses of the classical epoch and the history of the Old World, as a whole.

(Harvey 1990; Giddens 1990; Appadurai 1990; Friedman 1997 and 1999; Tomlinson 1999; Nederveen Pieterse 2001; Whitmarsh 2010; Stockhammer 2013; Pitts and Versluys 2015).

In this context, the paper suggests that the new globalization theories articulating the relations in both modernity and antiquity through constant, or at least periodical, increase of connectivity of ideas, materials and communities, and deterritorialization and constant change of cultures, have sidelined the conceptions of classicism and orientalism, together with all other concepts of homogeneous blocks of “authentic” cultures, as well as the rigid understandings for their trans-historical frontal clashes or mixing and hybridizations.

METHODOLOGY

This paper utilized a *longue durée* approach that analyzes parallelly the development and transformations of the conceptions of orientalism and classicism, displacing them from their traditional dichotomous context. Instead, it is reanalyzing their relation in a complex matrix of their shared roots and structure, built upon the identity needs and societal transformations in both antiquity and modernity. It places the method of content analysis. The reason for adopting this method is mainly because the study is a

The dominantly qualitative approach of this paper relies heavily on documentary evidence and secondary data sources, analyzing them mainly through a comparative research design. It uses the method of content analysis, but also touches upon epistemology and the methodological approaches towards positivism and relativism. In addition, the paper utilizes elements of the discourse analysis method in relation to the ancient and modern identities of different “glocalized” cultural groups and entities, their mutual relationships and their relationships with identities and beliefs of the ancient and modern authors that illustrate or “reimagine” them.

CLASSICISM AND THE EUROCENTRIC WORLD

In the new ideologically framed, clearly defined and segmented concept for oneself and the world, of the XIX century, the science and scientific was “objectified”, clearly separated from the areas of “the artistic” and “the religious” and cleansed from their “vague” influences. At the same time, this new “rational” tendency in Europe, has found its symbols and narratives in the antiquity, identifying itself as bearer of the “unique” traditions of Athens and Rome. Thus, through these tendencies, and for the needs of the modern ideals, ideas and identities, the specific manifestations on European soil of the wider and complex ancient development of the Mediterranean and the Near East, were stripped of their context, and separated from global history, as idealized ancient Atlantis, that should be resurrected, or at least eternally commemorated by the modern West.

By the end of the XIX century, the new “scientific” findings have liberated the European elites of the “oriental illusion”, which claimed that the classical world originated from the “primitive cultures” of Babylon and Egypt (Athanasoglou-Kallmyer 2011).

The two social and cultural manifestations of the European coasts of the Mediterranean, have transformed for the needs of self-identification and legitimation of the western elites, into separate islands of the authentic European, western, rational, and “classical” heritage, whose value have exceeded to the point of incomparability with the one of the earlier or related cultures of the ancient world. In that sense, the “Classical epoch”, has transformed into archetype of “the western world”, and “a magical mirror” which speaks about its famous origin and past, as well as an ideal for the present and the future of the western man, society and world. The other “ancient” cultures, as well as the modern ethnological complexity of the world, considered as “inertial” and stagnant, “mystical” and irrational, have transformed into an object of “the healthy critical analysis” of the western man’s skeptical mind, both in antiquity and modernity.

Moreover, this strong conceptual establishment influenced the classical world in a form of obsessive addiction in the modern Western societies with the classical archetypes and benchmarks, creating a real mimesis in the architecture and art, music and literature, law and philosophy, education and sport. Therefore, “the imagined”, and often “fictional”, classical

culture has transformed into living heritage that has grown into the tying thread of “the western civilization” (Dyson 2006, 1-19), as well as an authentic signature of the “western administration” or domination over the rest of the world in the last few centuries (Grafton 2010, vii-ix).

ORIENTALISM - FROM REMNANT OF TRADITIONS TO CRITICAL REACTION

The “classicistic” view on the world that separated “the Western” and “the European” traditions, from the ones of the wider civilizational development of the ancient world, was challenged early by the orientalists. Their profound interest and learning of the Near East cultures, as well as the Middle and the Far East, was a continuity of the view on the history and the human civilization as unity, which was globally dominant before the French Revolution and the Spring of Nations in XIX century Europe. Nevertheless, the European domination in the world in the XIX century and the first half of the XX century, the colonial and imperial needs and views of the European elites, combined with the new national and racial theories, gave primacy to the divided world of different cultures and civilizations, in which the European one- “the classical civilisation”, was morally and physically dominant, and as such legitimately governed with the world (Tevdovski and Ilievski 2015; Tevdovski and Masalkovski 2020).

That is why the appearance of the Orientalism as scientific paradigm, firstly through the Edward Said’s with the same name (Said 1977), as well as through the wider corpus of new views on the world, related and encouraged by his work, is direct response of Eurocentric views on the world and global history, based on the central spot that the classical culture and its heritage supposedly held. Despite the fact that Said’s initial analyses, and of those inspired by him, were mainly focused on the relations in modernity and literature, the paradigm of Orientalism in the context of the wider global changes in the second half of the XX century, such as the anti-colonial movements and the decreased global influence on the European

powers and centres, grew into wider perspective, or at least a corrective of the views, on the human relations in the present, as well as through history.

In the scope of the several-decade lasting focus on the “discourse” and “hegemony” of the western imperialism and colonialism over the research of the past, by various analyses and authors, known under the general term “post-colonial studies” and “post-colonial critique”, one of the fundamental paradigms of the western perspective on world’s history, the domination of “Greek-Roman culture” and “the classical world” over the rest of the cultures and civilizations was seriously questioned. In this context, the cultural manifestations in the “Classical world” that were not part of the strict social and cultural standards, thoroughly filtrated during the XIX century by the western elites and called “Greco-Roman culture”, received new recognition as the culture of “the enslaved and oppressed” by the “post-colonial authors”. Thus, through this new scientific tendency, the idealistic classical world of the Greeks and the Romans have transformed into stable dichotomies of the Greek against the Near Eastern and of the Roman against the Oriental and Native (Reeves 2004, 15-26; Diaz-Andreu 2007; Golden and Toohey 1997).

However, the great contribution of the “post-colonial” critique with regards to the views on the classical world and the past in general had its own limitations, as well as side effects and lateral tendencies. Thus, the recognition and definition of the Orientalism as a phenomenon, since Said’s work, as a conscious or unconscious stigmatization of the great variety in cultures and cultural characteristics, first and foremost from the Near East, but also from cultures of the further east, by the traditional “Western” author, through their simplification and instrumentalization, needed for building the classical and broader western narrative and identity, has been more than useful for the scientific analyses, as well as for the modern social relations. Still, this significant development only partially led towards real pluralization, objectification, and profound views on the cultural and social development of different communities and regions in the past.

Many of the authors with post-colonial approach or perspective on the past and its research are basing their deconstructive analyses on Said’s principles illustrated in his famous and often quoted expression: “No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life... there is such a thing as knowledge that is less... partial than the

individual... who produces it. Yet, this knowledge is not therefore automatically nonpolitical.” (Diaz-Andreu 2007, 11). Still, some of these authors are themselves illustrative examples of the subjectivity in science,¹ whereas in the broader post-modern scientific context there are remarkable tendencies of using this kind of conclusions for promotion of subjectivism and vulgar scientific relativism (Pangle 2006, 7-42).

In this context, in significant number of the post-colonial analyses, one can clearly trace the tendency to recognize the newly “emancipated nations” of the disintegrated colonial system into the narratives of the classical past. Taking the example of their former rulers – the European elites, the “new nations” had to legitimize themselves through classical literature and artefacts, even if the only alternative is to be seen as descendants of the “the enslaved” and the marginalized cultures of the classical and ancient world. Thus, instead of moving towards deeper understanding of the past and deconstruction of the artificially composed strata needed for the modern identities, orientalism, at least through some of its side effects, has transformed into an alter-ego of the classicism. It has become a starting point and an excuse for all those eager to reach self-recognition on the other side, or the alternative identity of the known rigidly conceived “classicistic vision” of the past. Enriched with its “dark side”, the classicistic view of the past and its standard narrative produced in the XIX century, have included extensively the history of “the enslaved, ruled and oppressed”, and, thus, they were accepted and recognized as new, reformed image of human history by various new elites and groups (Thomas, Burstein 1997, 37–54).

This intense dichotomous relationship between the Orientalism and the Classicism that has been created over the last decades of the XX century, reaches new dimensions through the rapid scientific growth in many areas, as well as the multilayer social transformations in the intense and globalizing world of the new millennium. The modern trends, achievements and changing paradigms in various social and humanistic disciplines, combined with social, economic, cultural and demographic changes in societies caused by strong globalization waves that are intensified over the past two decades, have created new perspective for

¹ From today’s point of view, Versluys, as many other modern authors, clearly defines this manifestation since the end of the previous century, speaking precisely about some of the post-colonial analyses of the classical world, that he names “anti-colonial”, including them in the context of the social-political, or the emphasized social-political influence over the scientific (Versluys 2014, 2-14).

consistency and identity transformations, entities, communities and institutions as part of the broader historical development (Briant 1982).

As a result of these new tendencies, fewer researchers look at the categories and concepts created by the classicists, orientalist, and even the post-colonial authors, as compact, self-sustaining and static entities through history. Instead, these and the wider processes in the past, as well as in the present, are being increasingly looked upon as multifaceted and connected influences and transformations, whose appearance and development is directly related to the wider context and their mutual interrelations. In that sense, the scientific interest in globalization processes and their use as methodological approach in analysing societies, phenomena and processes of the present, slowly, yet steadily, are being introduced into the scientific research of the past (Versluys 2014, 2-14).

Nowadays, researchers of the “early”, “ancient”, “the classical”, “the oriental”, “the barbaric” or “the medieval” cultures, often avoid the rigid modern constructs and artificially closed systems of typification and periodization, that were created for the needs of epistemological validation in modern science. Instead, the modern researchers see these entities and processes as open mosaics of diversity, constantly reorganized by the diverse interactions among “people, ideas and materials, connected in constant and fast-paced globalization process” (Tevdovski 2020).

Due to the dynamics of these processes, we need to question again the relation between classicism and orientalism, first for their changing relations, and second because of the possibility for new perspectives and understandings of the building process of each of these concepts individually, in relation with one another, and as a reaction of the other.

Sociologists, political scientists, and researchers in the area of cultural studies, already produced extensive material that describes the variety of layers in modern identities and misunderstandings, subjectivities or related methodological irregularities that have integrated in the modern scientific and social views of the classical past and the past of “the oriental cultures”. Still, it is left to the classical scientists, historians, archeologists, and other researchers whose focus is this period and not modernity, to study the remains of the past that still exist under the layers of modern misunderstandings, delusions and implications.

CONCLUSION

During the seventies of the XX century when Said in his “Orientalism” describes the need for abandoning the Eurocentric discourse about the past and the identity of many regions and cultures, his thoughts equally and consciously reflect the global changes caused by the industrial revolution, as well as the development and transformations of the modern world related with it. The inconsistencies of values, the constant value competition, ideas, cultural and material additions from different origin, are the harbingers of the new world that will be subject to further recreation by the globalization process after the end of the Cold War.

Today, the scientific hypothesis and views of the XIX century timeless and conserved cultural cores or entities, such as nations, cultures, races or civilizations, that transform but persist next to each other, with their authentic values, symbols and ideals, are being analysed as an ideal of the European elites of the XIX century and recidivism of their new self-definition (Geary 2002, 157). At the same time, they are recognized as a need for scientific validation and tendency towards universalization of the new Westphalian model of global relations that was developed in that historical period (Diaz-Andreu 2007, 80; Tevdovski and Ilievski 2015, 7-22).

The renowned globally prominent American historian and president of the Medieval Academy of America, Patrick Geary, has concluded in this context that:

“Modern history was born in the XIX century, conceived and developed as an instrument of European nationalism. As a tool of the nationalist ideology, the history of Europe’s nations was a great success, but it has turned our understanding for the past into a toxic waste dump, filled with the poison of ethnic nationalism, and the poison has seeped deep into popular consciousness. Cleaning up this mess is the most daunting challenge for the historians today” (Geary 2002, 15).

The numerous scientific analyses based on or connected with the old scientific paradigms, that reflect the views and needs of the European elites in the XIX century and Westphalian multi-polar model of governing with the continent and the world, are today perceived as significant part of different scientific disciplines’ professional history.

Yet, at the same time, they represent huge subjectivity burden whose overcoming is crucial requirement for all studies related to the classical, or any other epoch of the human past.

Despite these strong scientific traditions, the global and local developments of many epochs including the XIX century, still influential with its ideological recidivisms in contemporary science, are seen today through new conceptual tendencies and principles. They are defined as models which are methodologically advanced and more applicable in diverse historical and geographical contexts. Hingley illustrates this significant paradigm change, analysing that today “people in the Western world draw upon these ideas just as directly as their ancestors drew upon colonial concepts. This is why we cannot ignore globalisation...” (Hingley, 2015, 32).

Today, there is no contemporary development, nor phenomenon, that can be imagined without the influence of the global context, where the ideas, materials, individuals and groups, are in constant competition, and constant self-examination and reimagination. Thus, the scientific views and ideas regarding various movements, processes and groups throughout history are often seen through the lenses of this contemporary perspective as well (Hopkins 2002; Pitts and Versluys 2015, 3-25). In that context, the central spot belongs to the cultural and social cores of the globalization process, which extends geographically by taking new cultural elements from the local and transforming some of them into significant globalization ideas and symbols (Reeves 2004, 71-72; Morris 2005, 30-55).

The increased number of artefacts and the variety of sources discovered with scientific projects and new technologies over the last decades, as well as the progress in human relation theories, institutions and identities by sociologists, political scientists, and researchers of cultural studies, create new complex images that show the modern scientific categories as “the oriental” and “the classical”, or the historical manifestations defined through them, lose their compact character and limits, and interact through continuous mutual impacts and diverse processes that run through history. The complex process that defines this global dynamic in the widest sense, and in the contemporary context, is called globalization, and more scientists each day relate it with the same processes and dynamics of earlier historical epochs. Hence, today we speak increasingly about the globalization process in early modernity, medieval period, classical epoch, and even in the prehistory (Pieterse 2015, 225-237).

In the analyses and theories of numerous contemporary researchers, such as Frank, Gills, or Morris, the Near East, defining the “Orient” for centuries, is again perceived as central locus where the core of the ancient globalization process has been created. Its key importance for global development is well captured in Wilkinson’s construct “central civilization”. Many contemporary researchers agree that the interactions of the cultures of the two significant and big regions, Mesopotamia and Egypt dated back to the Bronze Age, and facilitated through the millennial imperial traditions of the wider region, was crucial for the creation of a consistent and big enough civilisational core. This would become the founding element of the globalization process, that dates from antiquity, and has continued with different range dynamics until today.

In that sense, these theories of the ancient globalization, or globalization *avant la lettre*, create new perception about the classical period and classical civilization and their relation the Orient and the Oriental. Within this new scientific perspective, the beginnings of the “classical world” are result of the approach of the globalization culture of the Near East towards the Aegean and the European soil. Thus, the birth of the “Classical civilisation” cannot be perceived anymore, as opposing forces to the “Orient”. Just in contrary, in the period between neo-Assyrian and Persian imperialism, when the globalisation process resulted in the accumulation of ideas, knowledge and materials from India to Egypt, it also had a significant impact upon the intensive development of the communities in South Europe. This “classical Greeks” can no longer be treated as forefathers of the unique western values, and “less-classical Macedonians”, as forefathers of the Western imperialism and dominance over the world. The two nations, in the words of Strootman, can no longer be seen “as both Classicists and Orientalists have done... as proto-Europeans alien to the Near East”. Instead, “Greeks and Macedonians (should be seen) as peoples integrated into a wider Mediterranean and Near Eastern “world system”” (Strootman 2013, 34). Moreover, the world of the Macedonian imperialism, that created the classical world, its main cores and much of its outreach, represents a continuation and extension of the process of the ancient globalisation and the millennial imperial model, both developed in the “oriental context” of the Near East. Finally, the most western extension of the classical world and its cultural offerings, developed during the period of the Roman imperialism, is perceived, though these new understandings of the past, as just another phase of the globalisation *avant la lettre*. In this context, Rome

and its “classical culture” spread throughout the European continent is not just continuation of the Macedonian and Persian, and thus Near Eastern cultural traditions, but also a shared heritage with the new “oriental” empires, such as the Parthians (Strootman 2013).

This new methodological approach towards the past through the globalization theories, many of the entities and identities, more or less subjectively recognized and defined by the ancient, medieval, or modern authors, are objectified in relation with the general globalization principles or in reaction to them, as well as to communities and elites, their symbols, traditions, narratives and aspirations. It also provides an entirely new approach to the concepts of the “classical” and the “oriental”. It challenges and changes their traditional relation and dynamic, placing them into a fluid interrelation and further emphasising their outdated nature in the context of contemporary scientific inquiries of the past.

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