

Beyond the 'West' and the 'East':  
Towards Critical Occidentalism Studies

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In contrast to prevailing studies on Occidentalism in the last decades, this paper builds on the assumption that Occidentalism is not limited to generic representations of the 'West' or to simple reverse- or counter-Orientalism. Instead, it suggests that Occidentalism as a modern Euro-American hegemony (A. Gramsci 1929-35) must be considered more radically as the necessary condition for Orientalism's and self-Orientalism's very possibility (F. Coronil 1996). In spite of the pervasive and heterogeneous impact of modern Occidentalism on a global scale, there is still no unified field of systematic academic investigation on the 'West' as a concept, which has become a sort of *blind spot* in the Humanities and Social Sciences (K.M. Heller 2007).

This paper suggests that insufficient understanding about the complex processuality of Occidentalism is complicit to the present reproduction of global inequalities (M. Boatca 2015), even in the absence of direct coercion, as a widespread, self-evident and reifying hegemony. Occidentalism, Orientalism and self-Orientalism still continue to be examined as separated processes through a body of disconnected works on the one hand, or through methodological civilizationalism, nationalism and culturalism on the other, as evident in the widespread use of the terms the West or the East without quotation marks. This affects to a great extent especially the fields of comparative research and Area Studies, contributing to the reproduction of essentialising theories, methodologies and knowledge

Accordingly, the basic questions inspiring this paper are: 1) How and why have the signifying practices shaping modern ideas of the 'West' and the 'East' become globally hegemonic? 2) To what extent do the hierarchic and naturalized legacies of Occidentalism, Orientalism and self-Orientalism still have an impact in the present age of globalization, especially in relation to the representation of 'Asia' or 'Japan'? 3) How can critical investigation

contribute to the elaboration of more polyphonic, dialogical and inclusive methodologies in order to foster trans-national and trans-disciplinary knowledge?