

# THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

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This distillation ***The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power*** by **Stuart Hall** aims to inspire readers to think critically about knowledges taken for granted. Hall problematizes language used to discuss global affairs, recognizing roots of Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and colonialism prevalent in contemporary discourse.

## THE WEST

The West is a grouping of countries primarily located in Western Europe. It also includes many countries previously colonized or currently colonized by these European countries on Turtle Island (North America) and Abya Yala (South America). The differentiation of East and West is arbitrary and not geographical as the Earth is a globe with no objective scientific Eastern and Western halves; so what is the West?

*“‘The West’ is a historical, not a geographical, construct. By ‘Western’ we mean the type of society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern”. (Hall, 2018)*

Hall elaborates that the West is a concept based on how Western societies shortly after the Middle Ages interpreted other societies and classified them as either similar to themselves or different. To be Western is to embrace and benefit from global capitalism.

## & THE REST

As Enlightenment thinkers attempted to understand their own identities and those of their societies, they carved out what they considered valuable traits and classified what was left as different. Much like with the geographic language, there are no objective criteria to rank one society above another, so Western Europeans formulated criteria favouring Western European societies. This process of differentiation creates a divide between cultures and establishes a hierarchy.

The West and the Rest were constructed through the same process. Instead of recognizing the immeasurable differences between global societies, Western Europe decided what they were doing was normal, and that whatever anyone else was doing was different. In other words, the rest of the world was not invited to the discussion of how to treat the rest of the world and was therefore dubbed ‘the rest of the world’.

## DISCOURSE

***“A coherent or rational body of speech or writing” (Hall, 2018)***

Discourse relates to the construction of the West. Language often gives meanings to ideas and crystallizes a biased narrative as ‘truth.’ It combines many statements to create a collaborative social understanding of concepts. Western institutions shape the discourse around the West and the Rest. Discourse is liquid and shifts through time but for global discussions remain centralized to Western knowledge, language, and power.

# REGIME OF TRUTH

How does the West use power to shape knowledge?

Discourses are always related to power structures. The language used to describe and categorize groups and issues holds an often subtle but critical subtext of dominant ideologies. The West have historically anointed themselves as global leaders in science, exploration, and human advancement while also holding the power to proclaim these pursuits are important. By basing the discourse of knowledge and truth in Western understandings of the world, the global narratives of power are controlled by the West.

## HOW DID THE WEST ESTABLISH GLOBAL POWER?

Hall cites five historical phases of the industrialization and colonialism that set up Western Europe to seize global power over other societies which they used to classify and exploit 'the Rest'

**1. Exploration:** The Enlightenment inspired Europe to 'discover' more land to expand their empires.

**2. Early contact:** Indigenous civilizations and their resources in these 'new worlds' were annexed as European territories.

**3. Exploitation:** Europe established structured settlements to expedite the extraction of the natural resources in the rest of the world. Through Transatlantic Slave Trade and colonization, capitalism overtook trade as the global market system.

**4. High noon of Imperialism:** European greed reach a tipping point where countries had stolen so much from Indigenous Peoples around the world that they began fighting amongst themselves for capital, escalating to World War One.

**5. Globalization:** most of the world is economically dependent on the exploitation of the West and the West is entirely dependent on the labour and resources they continue to extract from the Rest, even those who have regained independence.

## ORIENTALISM

Orientalism is the process formulated by Western Europeans to distinguish themselves and their society from those in Asia and the Middle East. By classifying the parts of Asian and Islamic cultures that contrast with Western European cultures, they used discourse to create a regime of truth that set a basis for what was considered 'normal' (Occident) and 'different' (Orient). By basing global discourse in a Western-centered language, they hold an advantage.

## STEREOTYPES

'Stereotypes' are one-sided descriptions of complex cultural identities into shallow simplified homogenous representations of the dominant discourse

## DUALISM

Stereotyping and Orientalism work together to dichotomize all groups as either 'known or unknown'. Western discourse reshapes this dualism as 'right and wrong' or even 'good and bad'.

# OTHERING AND REFLECTING

Enlightenment thinkers in Western Europe studied 'others' and quantified their knowledge wherever it contrasted with European knowledge and through discourse, the West were able to talk about the Rest and collaboratively invent ideas about 'them'. By sharing understanding of what make others 'different', they could choose what made themselves 'normal'.

# GLOBAL NORTH GLOBAL SOUTH

Contemporary discourse of global issues maintains the separation of the West and the Rest with the terms Global North and Global South. The Global North (except Australia) exist in the Northern hemisphere of Earth but by continuing to use empirically based geography to legitimize groupings of power, the regime of truth reinforces the oppression of the Global South. Africa, South America and Southeast Asia are not able to change geographical location and by institutionalized language the same is true of status.

# SUMMARY

The West and the Rest are social constructs created by Western Europeans to simplify complex societal differences. The colonial aspirations of the West's identity required justification for their exploitation of external civilizations.

They created Orientalism to 'prove' there was a difference between European societies and non-European societies. This constructed stereotypical dualism which homogenized the 'other' and reinforce their own cultural identities as 'more developed'.

The West 'othered' the Rest through exclusionary language, stereotyping, and belittlement of their achievements for falling outside of the Western ideal of an 'developed society'.

# REFERENCES

Hall, S. (2018). The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power. In *Essential Essays* (Vol. 2). Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002710>

# THE MYTH OF DEVELOPMENT

The outdated term 'Developing Country' was used to refer to countries experiencing the theft or deprivation of resources by colonization and imperialism. It also served to infantilize non-Western countries as 'less developed' while uplifting Western countries as 'more advanced', a hierarchy which continues to maintain unfair power imbalances between countries. The regime of truth enforces a Eurocentric model for what society should be, impling all civilizations must be assimilated into Western societal framework.

# KEY TERMS

## Discourse

The power to create knowledge through language and rhetoric

## Orientalism

The distinction of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures as different

## Dualism

Dichotomous thinking black-and-white thinking

## Regime of Truth

Institutionalized discourse as fact

## Stereotype

Homogeneous representation of a group by external discourse

## The West

Historical grouping of some of Europe

## The Rest

Generalized group of all countries different to Western Europe