Analyzing Representations of Iran in Selected Works of the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies: A Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

Iranian studies, a facet of Orientalism, have long intrigued Western academia. This research explores the alignment of the Institute of Iranian Studies (IFI) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) with Edward Said's Postcolonial Theory, questioning if IFI's work mirrors Said's views on the colonial roots of Orientalism. The research posits that the IFI's undertakings neither manifest a colonial inclination nor align seamlessly with Said's theoretical framework. To substantiate this claim, four seminal publications from the IFI were subjected to a directed content analysis based on constructing a research category matrix, influenced by Said's postcolonial paradigm (Orientalism). In this framework, there are four main areas: politics, society, culture, and religion. Within each area, there are six opposing concepts: similarity-difference, equality-inferiority, internal convergence-divergence, external convergence-divergence, progress-backwardness, and freedom-despotism. The findings suggest that the IFI's selected works portray Iran in a predominantly positive light across all domains. Thus, it appears that the IFI's 21st-century scholarly contributions diverge from Edward Said's postcolonial critique of Orientalism, with distinct differences in approach and perspective. However, considering Said's critique primarily targets the works of English-speaking Orientalists from colonial powers, the conclusions of this research don't necessarily counter his theory. It suggests caution in generalizing Said's framework to German-speaking Orientalists, or more specifically, to the outputs of the IFI.

Introduction

In recent decades, the humanities have witnessed transformative shifts in the portrayal and understanding of various civilizations and cultures. Edward Said's seminal postcolonial theory, which critically delves into the essence of Orientalism and its representations of Eastern cultures, has been central to this evolution. Through his analytical lens, Said unveiled consistent Western narratives and imagery that painted the East, offering a counter-narrative to traditional Orientalist interpretations.

Within this vast landscape, Iranian studies, sometimes termed Iranology, stand out as a crucial subset of Orientalism. This research probes into the academic endeavors of the Institute of Iranian Studies (IFI) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), scrutinizing them from Said's postcolonial perspective. The pivotal question guiding this investigation is: How do the 21st-century publications of the IFI resonate with, or depart from, the postcolonial narratives, particularly as delineated in Said's critique of Orientalism?

Our hypothesis posits that the works emerging from the IFI might not consistently align with Said's postcolonial framework. Such a possibility challenges Said's assertion that Orientalism predominantly serves the colonial ambitions of Western powers. This introduces a nuanced take, prompting a reevaluation specifically in light of the IFI's scholarly contributions.

To validate this hypothesis, we employed a directed content analysis of four key IFI publications. This approach is anchored by a research matrix, inspired by Said's postcolonial constructs, that categorizes representation into specific domains and dichotomies. The ensuing sections explore these representations in depth, providing a thorough analysis and interpretation of our discoveries.

1. Literature Review

The field of Iranian studies has a complex history intertwined with Orientalism and intercultural dynamics between Iran and the West. This review examines existing literature related to evaluating Iranian studies in Austria through a postcolonial theoretical lens. It first provides background on Orientalism and its implications based on Edward Said's influential work. Next, it surveys the current literature landscape, identifying notable contributions and gaps related to the topic. Situating the work of the Institute for Iranian Studies (IFI) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the review then summarizes relevant academic and anecdotal sources. Finally, it

discusses the German context and additional references to situate the analysis within broader critiques of Orientalism before recapping the goals of this study.

1-1. Orientalism and Its Implications

The concept of Orientalism has been pivotal in framing Eastern versus Western worldviews. Edward Said's seminal 1978 work Orientalism critically analyzed this phenomenon, arguing that it often serves as an instrument of Western colonialism and power over the 'Orient.' Within this context, the development of Iranian studies in the West carries particular significance. Evaluating the field through a postcolonial lens provides an opportunity to assess potentials for perpetuating or challenging Orientalist biases.

1-2. Literature Panorama and Research Gaps

Investigations into evaluating Iranian studies in Austria via postcolonial theory reveal a significant research void. In Persian literature, Ghasemi (2015) offers a basic descriptive overview of Iranian studies in Austria without in-depth critical analysis. In English, Fragner (1987) provides a solitary review of Iranian studies in German-speaking areas from the perspective of a former institute head. Schmitt's (2013) German paper is the sole academic contribution discussing Iranian studies in Germany and Austria. However, its analytical depth is limited.

Additionally, Ghaderi (2018) offers a postcolonial analysis of English-language textbooks in Iran, arguing they reflect anti-imperialist discourses that challenge Orientalist representations. He examines the role of postcolonialism in Iranian studies, suggesting it has empowered Iran's multicultural society. This underscores the theory's relevance and applicability to the Iranian context.

Furthermore, Lewis & Churchill's (2009) memoir provides an insider's perspective on the evolution of Western Middle East scholarship. The reflections contrast with and supplement Said's theoretical framework.

This study aims to help fill the gaps in evaluating the IFI through a focused postcolonial examination. The additional sources stress the importance of considering historical and social contexts that shape representations over time.

1-3. Institute for Iranian Studies: An Overview

Established in 2002, the IFI serves as Austria's exclusive center for Iranian studies. As the only institute in Austria dedicated to the

interdisciplinary study of Iran, spanning linguistic, historical, and cultural perspectives, the IFI was selected due to its central and specialized role in advancing Iranian studies within the country.

The IFI promotes diverse academic, educational, and cultural initiatives related to Iran. Key figures include Florian Schwarz, renowned for publications on Iranian linguistics and historical periods like the Mongol era. Major projects include "Wine Culture in Iran and Beyond" (2014), exploring Iran's wine history over three millennia.

Despite the IFI's pivotal contributions, few studies have critically analyzed its work through a postcolonial lens. This significant gap underscores the importance of the present analysis, as findings can elucidate implications for perpetuating or challenging Orientalist paradigms within the institute's scholarly outputs.

1-4. Core Academic Sources

Schwarz's "Political Crisis and Cultural Transformation in Mongolian Iran" (2012) provides an important historical analysis of 13th–14th century Iran. It exemplifies substantive scholarly contributions by IFI researchers. Limited direct study of the institute's output underscores the need for deeper investigation through a postcolonial lens.

1-5. Anecdotal Sources and Insights

The media features extensive interviews and commentaries by figures like Rastegar (2006, 2014), a former IFI scholar and a University of Vienna faculty member. His writings deliver insights into the institute's growth and Iran-Austria cultural relations. While not academic, these offer useful perspectives to complement scholarly analysis.

1-6. Situating in German Context

Schnepel et al.'s (2011) anthology with essays by Orientalists merits attention. Notably, Klemm (2011) links Shiite and Iranian studies, while Escher (2011) reinterprets 'East' geographically, providing valuable context. Wiedemann's (2012) critiques also add nuance.

1-7. Concluding Remarks

In closing, this review synthesizes existing literature while revealing gaps that help motivate the present study. Moving forward, analysis will concentrate on applying postcolonial theory to better

understand the modes of Iranian studies practiced at the IFI since its 2002 founding. Findings can elucidate implications for perpetuating or challenging Orientalist paradigms.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a modified version of the deductive category application method, as proposed by Philipp Mayring (2000). This approach falls under the umbrella of directed content analysis. Here, the researcher sets specific concepts ahead of time and then analyzes predetermined texts and documents based on these pre-defined concepts. The comparison between the set concepts and the texts under analysis allows the researcher to determine whether those concepts are present or absent within the texts (Catanzaro, 1988: 440).

Central to this study is Edward Said's Postcolonial Theory of Orientalism, which critically examines the portrayal of the East in Orientalist literature. Drawing upon this theory, we developed a research category matrix, outlined in the theoretical framework section. This matrix encompasses four representational domains: politics, society, culture, and religion. Within each domain, we employ six dichotomous concepts for differentiation: Similarity-Difference, Equality-Inferiority, Internal Convergence-Divergence, External Convergence-Divergence, Progress-Backwardness, and Freedom-Despotism.

Our primary data sources are four seminal works from the Institute of Iranian Studies (IFI) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW), spanning publications from 2002 to 2022. We subjected these works to a directed content analysis based on the research category matrix. Each representation within these works received coding according to the dichotomous concepts. This coding facilitates a methodical evaluation of Iran's portrayal across the domains of politics, society, culture, and religion.

Once all the data underwent coding, we organized and interpreted them to discern an alignment pattern. This pattern reveals the degree of compatibility between the IFI's academic contributions and Said's postcolonial discourse. Using this pattern, we tested our research hypothesis concerning the IFI's scholarly endeavors' alignment with Said's postcolonial theory.

Finally, our research culminates by assessing the alignment pattern and extracting insights about the resonance between the IFI's academic pursuits and Said's postcolonial critique of Orientalism. We discuss the implications of our findings, situating them within

the broader postcolonial dialogue and emphasizing the unique perspectives of German-speaking Orientalists and the IFI's outputs. Overall, this study enriches the understanding of Iran's representation within postcolonial contexts and delineates the IFI's role in this discourse.

3. Theoretical Framework

Central to this study is Edward Said's Postcolonial Theory, which serves as the foundation for the research category matrix employed to systematically dissect the representations of Iran in selected publications of the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies (IFI).

Said's pivotal work, "Orientalism," underscored the West's skewed representation of the East, often perpetuating the narrative of Western superiority and Eastern inferiority (Bullock et al., 1999: 617). He emphasized that these images weren't mere mirrors of Eastern realities but were constructed within the confines of Western perspectives (Hall, 1997: 24). As Said states, "it is perfectly possible to argue that some distinctive objects are made by the mind and that these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality" (Said, 1978: 55). He contended that these portrayals, particularly by Western orientalists, were far from neutral; they were imbued with bias, often furthering colonial ambitions. As Said argues, "if such truth reserved for itself the right to judge the Orient as immutably Oriental in the ways I have indicated, then liberality was no more than a form of oppression and mentalistic prejudice" (Said, 1978: 107). He emphasized that these images weren't mere mirrors of Eastern realities but were constructed within the confines of Western perspectives. As Said states, the Orient was not "simply there only as a fact of nature" but rather "a system for citing works and authors" constructed by the West (Said, 1978: 23).

3-1. Matrix of Research Categories

Drawing inspiration from Said's postcolonial insights, we devised a research category matrix to enable a structured analysis of Iran's portrayal in the chosen works.

The matrix is organized with four representational domains along the rows and six dichotomous concepts spanning the columns: Domains:
- Politics addresses governance structures, legislation, leadership, and their overarching influence.
- Society captures demographics, living standards, societal

relationships, economic scenarios, and class hierarchies.
- Culture highlights ethos, values, norms, artistic endeavors, and other intangible societal attributes.
- Religion centers on the religious and spiritual facets, with an emphasis on Islam, Shiism, and Zoroastrianism.

Concepts:
- Similarity vs. Difference: Explores portrayals of Iran in terms of its resemblance to or divergence from the West.
- Equality vs. Inferiority: Evaluates whether Iran is depicted on par with or inferior to Western nations.
- Internal Convergence vs. Divergence: Probes the unity or divisions within Iran across various dimensions.
- External Convergence vs. Divergence: Examines Iran's external interactions and alliances.
- Progress vs. Backwardness: Assesses depictions related to Iran's progression or perceived regression.
- Freedom vs. Despotism: Investigates portrayals of Iran in terms of liberty or autocratic rule.

The matrix's detailed structure can be found in Table 1.

This matrix forms the analytical backbone for the directed content analysis of the chosen texts. By coding the textual data based on this matrix, we can systematically analyze and compare Iran's representations across domains and concepts. Recognizing patterns within this coding allows us to discern how closely IFI's academic works align with or stray from Said's postcolonial critique of Orientalism.

4. Data Analysis

4-1. Open Coding

Using directed content analysis and the research category matrix, this study codes and analyzes four works by the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies (IFI). The goal is to examine how Iran is represented in these works and compare it with Said's postcolonial theory. As Said argues in his seminal text, Western representations of the Orient have historically been dominated by narratives of Western superiority that place the East in a subordinate position. He notes that "Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West" (Said, 1978: 204). The analysis covers four thematic domains: politics, society, culture, and religion.

4-1-1. Analysis of the book "The 'River of Fire' and the 'River of Molten Metal'"

This book by Antonio Panaino (2021) delves into eschatological concepts in Christianity and Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Iran, and compares them with Islam. The author underscores the Zoroastrian belief in Ahura Mazda's universal mercy as a doctrinal novelty in ancient Iranian culture. He compares it with Christian and Islamic perspectives, highlighting shared religious motifs. For example, religious scriptures in all three faiths refer to rivers of fire or molten metal that may serve to purify or punish souls.

The author adopts historical and theological approaches to juxtapose Christian and Zoroastrian ideologies and explain the cultural and religious influences on their similarities and differences. The book aims to provide a detailed analysis of apocalyptic concepts and imagery in the two religions, with a sporadic focus on Islam as well, facilitating a richer comprehension of these intricate notions.

To decipher the representation of Iran and its associated images in this book, 61 initial codes that had the most relevance to the components of the research category matrix were analyzed. The results are summarized below:

• Political Representation Domain: Panaino portrays Iran as somewhat backward (-) and despotic (-), but does not comment on its equality/inferiority to the West or political similarities/differences. He believes Iran's political cohesion declined post-Islam, leaning towards divergence (-). He also depicts pre-Islamic Iran as aligning (+) with external political influences but diverging (-) from Western and global perspectives in modern times.

• Social Representation Domain: Panaino commends ancient Iran for its advancements (+) in the scientific, philosophical, and artistic realms. He emphasizes its elite society's contributions across various sectors and underscores Iran's congruence (+) with neighboring societies, like the Greeks and Christians, reflecting intellectual and cultural exchanges.

• Cultural Representation Domain: The book paints Iran as a culturally progressive nation (+), having imbibed multiple foreign cultural elements over its history. It underscores Iran's profound convergence (+) with other cultures, including Christian, Greek, Syriac, and Egyptian, while occasionally hinting at its perceived inferiority (-) to Western culture.

• Religious Representation Domain: Pre-Islamic Iran is depicted as

embracing a free (+) and advanced (+) religious milieu rich in historical and theological discourses. Panaino elaborates on Iran's religious convergence (+) with faiths like Christianity and Hellenism and its divergence (-) across various religious phases.

4-1-2. Analysis of the book "Prices, Wages, and Standards of Living in Safavid Iran"

The book "Prices, wages, and living standards in Safavid Iran: An Investigation into the Accounting Books of Wollebrand Geleynssen de Jongh (1641–1643)[1]" was written by Roman Siebertz (2013) and published by the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies. It is a research study that analyzes the economic and social achievements of the Safavid era, focusing on prices, wages, and living standards during this period.

The author uses the detailed and reliable ledgers of Wollebrand Geleynssen de Jonghs, a Dutchman who headed a factory in India, as the main sources to investigate various numerical data, prices, and wages in Safavid Iran. These ledgers were recorded between 1641 and 1643 and provide an in-depth insight into the economic and social conditions at that time.

The research aims to help better understand the economy and lifestyle in the Safavid era. The author examines the economic impacts on people's lives and the fluctuations and changes in prices and wages over time in the Safavid period.

The book also explores the representation of Iran and the mental images associated with it in four thematic domains: political, social, cultural, and religious. The author analyzes 67 primary codes that had the most connection with the components of "the matrix of research topics" and summarizes them as follows:

• Political domain: The author portrays Iran as a free (+) and advanced (+) country in political and economic fields. He shows how Iran improved its welfare and wealth levels, used its natural resources and geopolitical advantage to regulate its trade and financial exchanges, and responded to political and economic issues according to time and place conditions. He does not discuss Iran's convergence-divergence with neighboring countries and Europe in political dimensions.

• Social domain: The author depicts Iran as a highly advanced (+) society in geographical, historical, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic

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1. Preise, Löhne und Lebensstandard im safavidischen Iran; Eine Untersuchung zu den Rechnungsbüchern Wollebrand Geleynssen de Jonghs (1641–1643)

fields. He shows how Iranians fluctuated between divergence (-) and convergence (+) with their neighboring societies, such as Ottoman, India, China, and European states, according to social conditions. He also portrays Iran as socially divergent (-), mainly due to class differences.

- Cultural domain: The author considers Iran as a very advanced (+) cultural unit that preserved many of its cultural elements throughout its history. He also examines how Iran experienced some degree of divergence (-) with the West in some cultural issues.
- Religious domain: The author only refers to one case of divergence (-) between Islam and Christianity in this domain.

4-1-3. Analysis of the book "Under Two Lions: On the Knowledge of Iran in the Republic of Venice (1450 - 1797)"

The book "Under Two Lions: On the Knowledge of Iran in the Republic of Venice (1450–1797)," written by Giorgio Rota (2009), analyzes the knowledge and awareness of Iran in the Venetian Republic during a period of years between 1450 and 1797 and how the Venetian Republic understood and perceived Iran and its culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The author examines the sources available in Venice related to Iran, including the reports of travelers, merchants, and ambassadors who traveled to Iran. These sources shed light on the image that the Venetians had of Iran and its people, including culture, politics, economy, and diplomacy. The author also studies the history and cultural, social, and economic relations between Iran and the Republic of Venice. He explores the ways of knowledge transfer in this period of history between these two regions and the important role of trade, diplomacy, and culture in interactions between Iran and Venice.

The book highlights the importance of knowledge and information exchange for developing culture and trade between Iranians and Venetians and emphasizes the role of these exchanges in shaping an image of Iran in Venetian eyes.

The book also explores the representation of Iran and the mental images attributed to it in four thematic domains: political, social, cultural, and religious. The author analyzes 63 primary codes that have more connections with components of "the matrix of research topics" and summarizes them as follows:

Political domain: The author portrays Iran as an advanced (+) and convergent (+) country with the West in political and

diplomatic fields. He shows how Iran maintained its level of sovereignty and power during the Safavid era and was convergent (+) with neighboring countries and European ones. He also shows how Iran responded appropriately to political and diplomatic issues according to time and place conditions. He shows how Iran was similar (+) to the West and takes it as a model. He also depicts Iran as politically inferior (-) to the West in some cases, although he also emphasizes their equality as much.

Social domain: The author identifies Iran as an advanced (+) society. He shows how Iran was convergent (+) with its neighboring societies and beyond them and had social exchanges with them. Although he has mentioned similarity (+) between Iran and the West in one case, he believes in social dissimilarity (-) between Iran and the West more than their equality.

- Cultural domain: The author portrays Iran as having an advanced (+), convergent (+) culture with neighbors and other societies, similar (+) to them, as well as similar (+) to Western culture.

Religious domain: The author introduces Iran as religiously convergent (+) with others and similar (+) to Western religion, although he has paid less attention to religion in Iran.

4-1-4. Analysis of the book "Ottoman-Safavid Relations 1545–1550: The Fall of Abbas Mirza"

The book "Ottoman-Safavid Relations 1545–1550: The Fall of Abbas Mirza[1]" written by Walter Posch (2013), is a historical study of the rivalry between two regional powers in the sixteenth century. The author examines the cultural and political relations between Iran and the Ottoman Empire in a critical period of the history of both countries, using various sources.

The author shows how relations between the Ottoman and Safavid empires in the sixteenth century were fraught with tensions and conflicts for reasons such as border issues, religious differences (Sunni and Shia), and power struggles. He also explores the role of third parties such as Uzbeks, Circassians, Tatars, Georgians, and Europeans in Ottoman-Safavid affairs. He pays attention to the influential role of Abbas Mirza in shaping the events of that period.

The author tries to examine the roots, causes, and consequences of Abbas Mirza's downfall by studying credible historical sources and documents. He also considers the impact of this event on relations between the two empires and the subsequent changes.

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1. Osmanisch-safavidische Beziehungen 1545–1550: Der Fall Alḳâs Mîrzâ

The book also explores the representation of Iran and the mental images attributed to it in four thematic domains: political, social, cultural, and religious. The author analyzes 62 primary codes that have more connections with components of "the matrix of research topics" and summarizes them as follows:

Political domain: The author portrays Iran as a free (+) and relatively advanced (+) country in terms of politics. He shows how Iran maintained its independence and power during the Safavid era and was both convergent (+) and divergent (-) with neighboring and European countries. He shows how Iran competed with the Ottomans, fought prolonged wars with them, and occasionally cooperated, making peace with them.

Social domain: The author depicts Iran as a backward (-) society. He also considers Iranian society more divergent (-) than cohesive in terms of social convergence-divergence.

Cultural domain: The author pays minimal attention to cultural Iran. Of the two codes related to this domain, he refers to Iran's advanced (+) culture in one case and to cultural divergence (-) within Iran in another case.

- Religious domain: The author introduces Iran as religiously free (+) and externally convergent (+), but he believes more in religious differences and divisions denoting internal divergence (-) than in religious cohesion. He equally refers to religious similarity (+) and dissimilarity (-) between Iran and other countries.

4-2. Axial Coding

In total, 253 codes pertaining to the 48 cells of the research category matrix were extracted from the four selected scholarly works of the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies, whose details are provided in Table 1.

Table (1): Themes of Iranian Representation in Selected Institute Works According to Research Category Matrix

Theme & Representation Direction		Representation Domain				Total	
		Politics	Society	Culture	Religion	+/-	The sum
Bipolar Concept	Aspect/Code						
Similarity-Difference (with the West)	Similar (+)	2	1	2	1	6	7
	Different (-)	1	0	0	0	1	
Equality-Inferiority (with/from the West)	Equal (+)	3	2	1	0	6	16
	Inferior (-)	3	5	1	1	10	

Theme & Representation Direction		Representation Domain					
		Politics	Society	Culture	Religion	Total	
						+/-	The sum
Bipolar Concept	Aspect/Code						
Internal Convergence-Divergence	Convergent (+)	9	6	1	5	21	47
	Divergent (-)	12	5	2	7	26	
External Convergence-Divergence	Convergent (+)	9	11	13	18	51	68
	Divergent (-)	5	5	2	5	17	
Progress-Backwardness	Progressive (+)	32	30	14	10	86	100
	Backward (-)	6	6	0	2	14	
Freedom-Despotism	Free (+)	9	2	0	2	13	15
	Despotic (-)	1	1	0	0	2	
Total	Positive	64	52	31	35	183	
	Negative	28	22	5	15	70	
	The sum	92	74	36	50	253	

The top three findings from the above table, including the state of Iran's representation in the institute's four thematic domains, its approach in portraying Iran within the six dichotomous categories, and Iran's overall depiction in the selected scholarly works of the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies, are demonstrated in Figures 1 to 3, respectively.
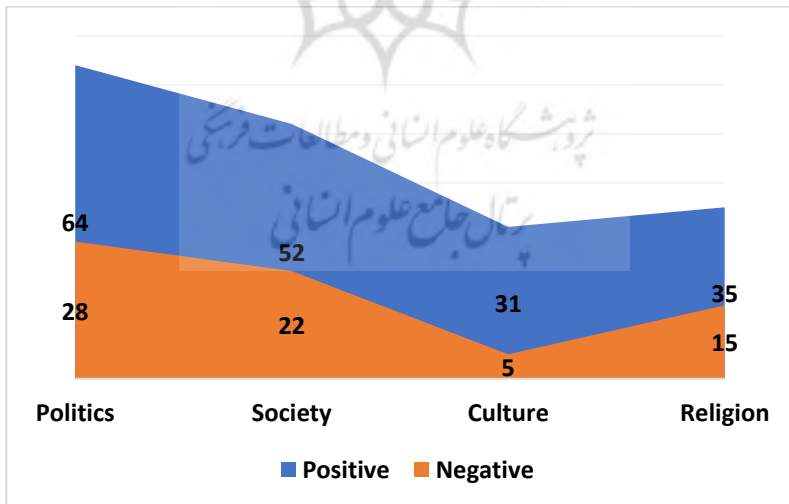

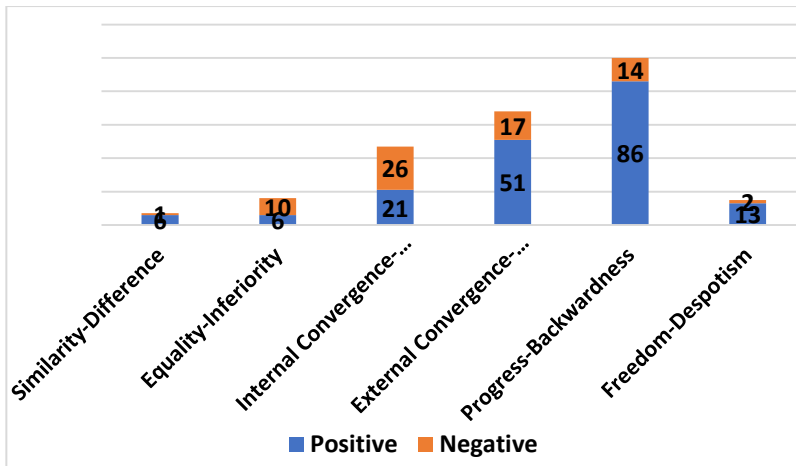**Figure (1): Status of Iranian Portrayal Across Four Thematic Domains**

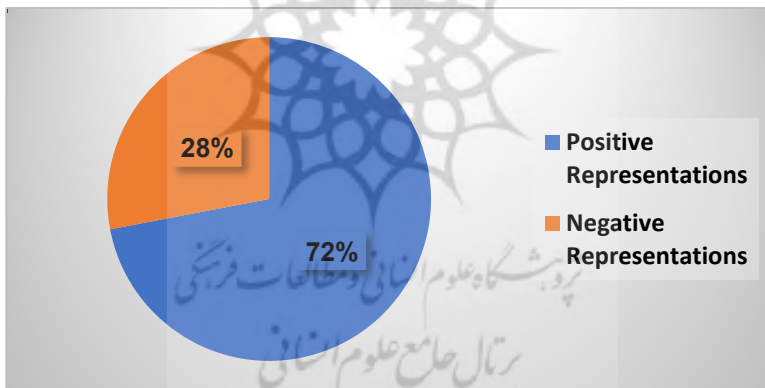**Figure (2): Status of Iranian Representation in the Six Bipolar Concepts**

Figure (3): General Representation of Iran in Selected Research Works from the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies

5. Research Validation

This article has utilized the following three strategies to increase the validity of the research:

   a. Member checking: The researcher presented his opinion on the process of data analysis and research reporting to several professors and experts with knowledge and experience in

conducting thematic analysis research and refined the results according to their feedback. These modifications were mainly in the selection and alteration of the titles of some categories and their subordinate concepts.

b. Peer review: The open coding process was shared with two professors, and students and their perspectives were used to refine the coding process. Also, the text of some interviews was coded in parallel by them as evaluators, and due to the 67% average match between the codes extracted by the evaluators and those extracted by the researcher, the research results can be considered valid. The alignment of the direction (positive or negative) of the codes extracted by the researcher with the evaluators' average was 96%.

c. Triangulation: The researcher tried to provide reliable generalizability of the findings by selecting all authored books of the institute that were accessible.

6. Research Findings and Analysis

The representations of Iran in the works of the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies provide a complex set of perspectives across four thematic domains and 12 value categories and their corresponding relationships. Among the four thematic domains, the political domain contained the highest number of codes. This indicates that the authors of these works were more interested in the political and historical aspects of relations between Iran and the West. In any case, the number of codes related to the political domain is not more than three times the number of codes in the cultural domain, which received the least attention.

The focus on political representation compared to social, cultural, and religious representation occurred in both positive and negative dimensions. This means that Iran's political dimensions, regardless of whether they portray (similar to the West, equal to the West, convergent with the West, internally convergent, progressive, or free) or a negative image (different from the West, inferior to the West, divergent from the West, internally divergent, backward, or despotic), were more prevalent in the Institute's selected works. However, the weight of positive images in portraying politics and government in Iran is markedly more prominent than the negative aspects.

In the three domains of social, cultural, and religious representation, although the number of explicit or implicit

references is less than in the political domain, the weight of positive images is heavier. So much so that more than three-quarters of Iran's cultural image in the Institute's research works is portrayed impartially or favorably. At the same time, the fewest codes among the four thematic domains were recorded for the cultural domain.

Overall, as shown in Figure 4, none of the political, social, cultural, and religious images of Iran in the Institute's research works were depicted undesirably.
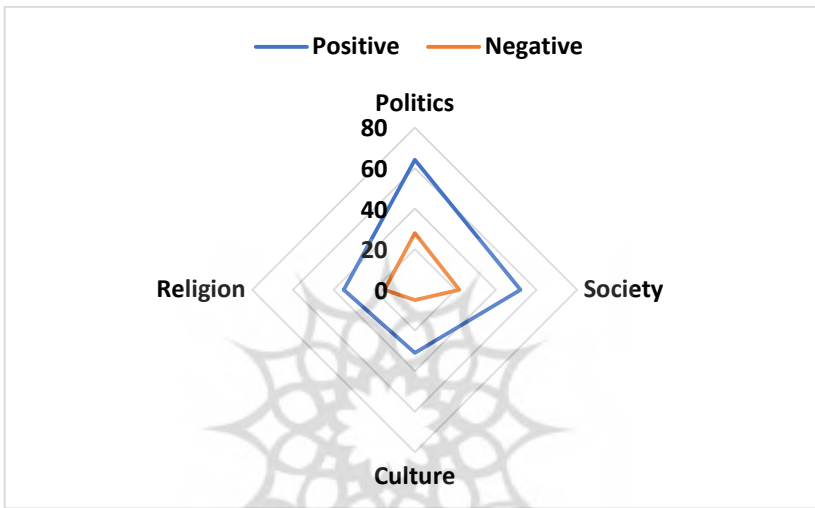

Figure (4): Assessment of Iran's Political, Social, Cultural, and Religious Image: Exploring Positive and Negative Aspects in Selected Institute Works

Logically, the 72% share of favorable or impartial depictions of political, social, cultural, and religious Iran in the Institute's research works is also reflected in the six dichotomous categories. However, some significant differences are noticeable. First, the weight of negative expressions in the two categories of "Similarity-Inferiority (with/from the West)" and "Internal Convergence-Divergence" outweighs the positive images. Second, there is a great imbalance in addressing the categories, so that the ratio of codes related to the dichotomous category of Progress-Backwardness is more than 14 times the codes of the dichotomous category of Similarity-Difference (with the West).

The share of attention given to the six dichotomous categories in the research works of the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies and the ratio between their positive and negative representations are shown in Figure 5.
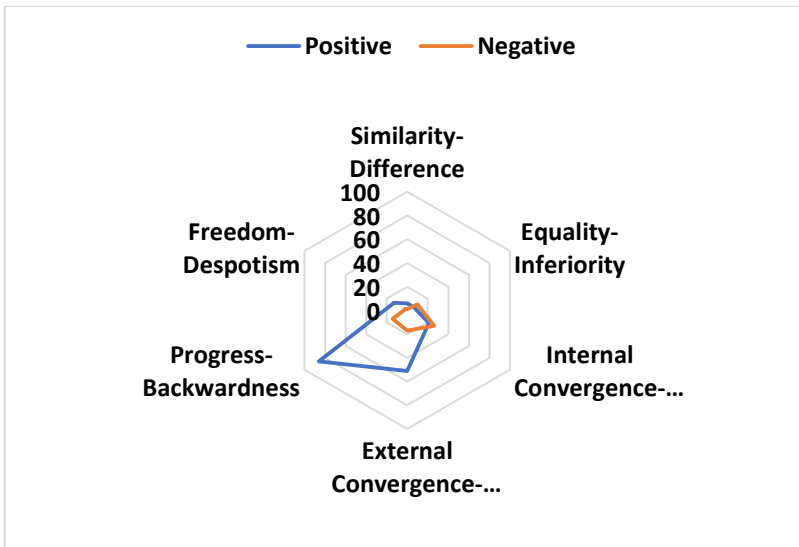
Figure (5): Weight and Direction of the Six Dichotomous Categories in Selected Institute Works

The category "Progress-Backwardness" has the highest number of codes among the six dichotomous categories, and its positive aspect (i.e., progressive) is heavier than all other positive dimensions of these six categories. The dichotomous category of "External Convergence-Divergence" also ranks second in both criteria. In contrast, although the dichotomous category of "internal convergence-divergence" ranks third in terms of total codes, the weight of its negative images outweighs the positive ones. So much so that it accounts for more than one third of all negatively marked phrases in the research works of the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies.

With this description, despite convergence with the outside world, including neighbors and the West, in all four religious, cultural, social, and political domains (which have respectively produced the most positive images), Iran's image in terms of political and religious tolerance domestically has not been desirable. Although, when it comes to religion, religious conflicts (and not political ones) in the realm of Islam have been considered an internal rather than external issue.

The weight of positive images in the dichotomous category of "Similarity-Inferiority (with/from the West)" is also relatively less than negative ones. This means that some of the phrases and images used in the Institute's research can be interpreted as indicating the

superiority of the West over Iran. This situation can only be inferred from 10 codes, which are mainly related to social, political, and governance dimensions, with only two codes pertaining to culture and religion together.

By differentiating the aspects of the dichotomous categories, progress ranks first with 32 codes, and internal divergence (12), external convergence (9), external divergence (9), and freedom (9) rank second to fifth. This situation is illustrated in two different ways in Figures 6 and 7.
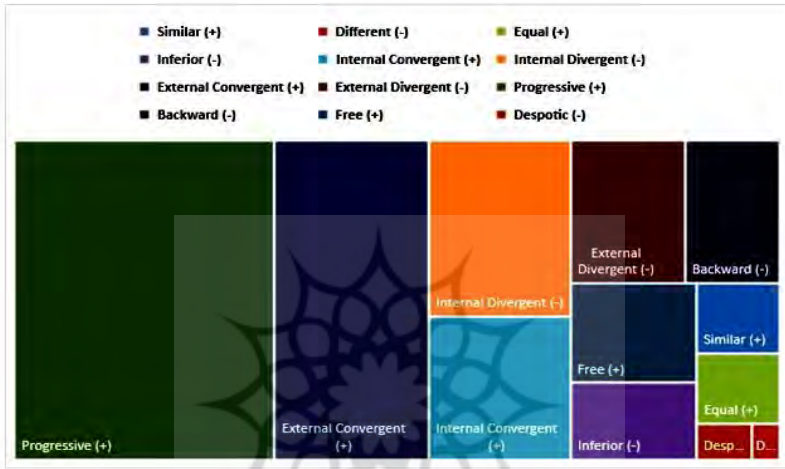

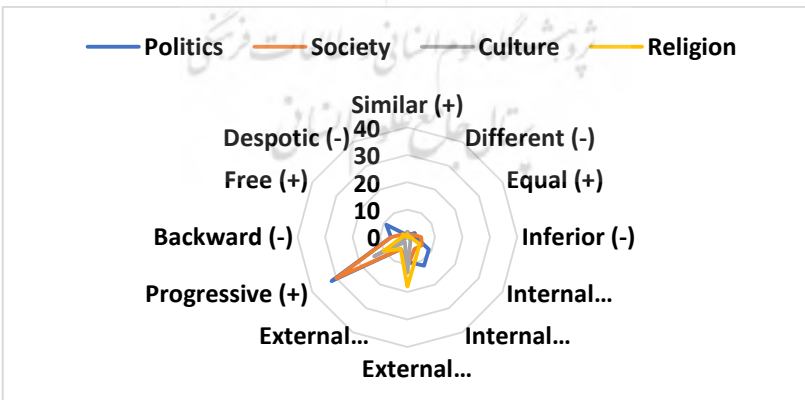**Figure (6): The Weight of Each of the 12 Categories in the Total Selected Institute Works**

Figure (7): The Institute's Research Works: Tendencies in Portraying the 12 Categories

In summary, the representations of Iran in the selected scholarly works of the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies provide a nuanced and predominantly positive perspective, with some hints of negative portrayals mostly related to internal political and religious divergence. The findings suggest a measured divergence from Edward Said's postcolonial critique of Orientalism, attributable to differences in historical context and geographical scope. While not directly countering Said's theory, this analysis calls for nuance in applying his framework to German-speaking Orientalists and the specific outputs of the IFI. Further research across a wider range of sources can elucidate these relationships from multiple vantage points.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate a substantive divergence between the 21st century academic contributions of the Austrian Institute of Iranian Studies (IFI) and the postcolonial critique articulated by Edward Said in his seminal work "Orientalism." Thus, the initial hypothesis proposing a lack of alignment is affirmed.

In recent years, the IFI has embraced multifaceted research orientations, with the majority not resonating with Said's theoretical perspectives. This highlights that Orientalism encompasses diverse influences, with noticeable variances between the IFI scholars' viewpoints and Said's discourse. However, given Said's focus on colonial-era English Orientalists, these contradictions do not necessarily negate his broader framework. Caution must be exercised in universally applying Said's critiques to German-speaking or Austrian Orientalists.

The results underscore the vital role of imagery and representation in dissecting cultural, political, and social dynamics. Additional research could elucidate how constructed portrayals of Iran shape its relations, especially with German-speaking nations. Analyzing other Iranian Studies institutes is also recommended to comprehensively grasp how academic contexts influence these representations.

While not directly challenging Said's theories, this study advocates nuance in applying his Orientalism critique to the IFI and German-speaking scholars. The findings reveal multifaceted representations of Iran that only partially align with postcolonial narratives. This stresses the enduring diversity of perspectives fostered through ongoing East-West academic engagement.

In summary, the research affirms the initial hypothesis of

divergence between the IFI's 21st-century scholarship and Said's discourse. The results further our understanding of how historical and geographical contexts shape Orientalism's manifestations. This contribution can inform future debates regarding Iranian studies through a postcolonial lens.

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