FICTIONAL FOUNDATIONS AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Using insights from poststructuralism, this thesis examines some of the dilemmas of thinking beyond the borders of particular identities in two areas of contemporary political debate and analysis. Specifically, dilemmas identified in the texts of Edward Said and standpoint feminism are treated as particular expressions of the more general problem of the way universality and particularity have been related under modern conditions.

Said and the theorists of standpoint feminism analyze the politics of representation to find ways that identities can be represented that do no produce relations of domination. This thesis argues that a basic paradox emerges: on the one hand each denies that there is any *essential* identity to be represented; on the other hand, the logic of representation demands that foundational categories must exist, otherwise the notion of representation would collapse. To fulfill this demand both Said and standpoint feminism create *fictional* foundations. Yet these fictional foundations produce further problems that undermine attempts to represent an identity that does not produce relations of domination: the foundational categories they create inevitably betray their historical and cultural specificities. Consequently relations of domination are reintroduced. In part, this is because it is assumed, in some cases implicitly, and in other cases explicitly, that it is possible to resolve the conflict between 'knowledge' and 'power'. However, as Foucault argues, there are no privileged categories, methodologies, positions, or speakers that can act as guarantor for any resolution to conflicts between knowledge and power.

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INTRODUCTION

The category of representation contains within it the notion of 'picturing'; that is, describing or making identity visible.[1] This practice of making identity visible is widely regarded as problematic. On the one hand, some critics within contemporary feminism and post-colonial discourse claim that representation can either 'reveal' or 'distort' the identity of what, or whom, is represented, thereby implying the possibility of potentially undistorted identities. On the other hand, other critics deny the very possibility of essential or 'true' identities, thereby contesting any grounds for potentially undistorted identities. Unsurprisingly, representational practices have become a site for political struggles. This is especially evident in notions of collective identity that express a common identity such as 'women', the 'human', 'species being', or 'global community', yet rely paradoxically on essential identities in order to destablize these identities. Even understandings of commonality that deploy essentialisms "strategically" are unable to construct categories to assure their goal of including 'differences'.

In his highly influential examination of 'Western' representational practices, Edward Said adapts and simplifies Michel Foucault's notion of discourse in order to point out that Orientalism has been so authoritative and restrictive that no one can write, think, act, or otherwise attempt to 'understand' the 'Orient' except in

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[1] See Michael Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography and Policy Analysis*. (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

categories drawn from an "archive" of available 'knowledge'.[2] According to Said, the 'Orient' 'invented' by this discourse is used by the 'West' to extend control over the territorial, cultural and political entity that has become known as the 'Orient'.[3] The production of what Said calls 'Orientalist discourse' is crucial because the 'knowledge' generated by it provides the foundations for 'Western' relations of domination over the 'Orient'. Central to Said's argument is the claim that the 'Orient' bears no ressemblance to the object it defines. The very idea of the 'Orient' is an invention of the 'West'; consequently he refuses to provide a counter description to replace it. However, in spite of his initial argument contesting the category of 'Orient' as a foundation for knowledge, Said introduces an ambiguity into his own critique by insisting that "effective" critiques require the deployment of specific categories such as the 'human', the 'worldly' or 'Power'. The political effect of their deployment is to establish in advance the categories by which something will be known -- categories that because of their historical and cultural specificity are as problematic as those used by Orientalists.

Especially evident within parallel feminist debates about the category of 'women' are the difficulties of securing 'firm grounds' for the representation of 'women's' identity while simultaneously rejecting essentialist categories. Since the late 1970s, 'women of colour' have

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[2] Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage, 1979), 3.
[3] Robert Young argues that similar explorations of the ethnocentric nature of representations of the Other occurred in France prior to Said's publication of *Orientalism* in 1978. However until Said raised questions about the connection of power and knowledge in the representation of other cultures, few people in North America were aware of these philosophical and theoretical investigations. See Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. (London: Routledge, 1990), 119-126 passim.

continued to claim that 'white' 'Western' feminists have established their experiences, identities, cultural practices and politics as the categories by which *all* women will be known -- in effect a 'feminist Orientalism'. As a consequence of these challenges it is increasingly difficult to understand 'women', the 'subject' of feminism, in stable terms, or even what ought to constitute the category of 'women'.[4]

In spite of these difficulties, the category of 'women' is maintained while 'grounds' for it which prevent the occlusion of 'differences' are sought. The challenge is to find a means to express commonality "that surely exist among women and simultaneously refuse to privilege any particular connection as that which subsumes the rest."[5] Otherwise, it is argued, feminism will have no starting point.[6] Most attempts to locate the foundation of this category emphasize what women *do* or what women *are*.[7] However, 'poststructuralist' feminist critiques question whether any category can 'ground' a common identity, particularly if the category of 'women' is "produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought."[8] These questions become especially crucial for feminist theory because it is forced to come to terms with the political effects of foundational categories in a situation in which, as Diana Fuss argues, "[T]he radicality or conservativism of essentialism depends, to a significant

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[4] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1.
[5] Laura Donaldson, *Decolonizing Feminism: Race, Gender & Empire-Building*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 1992), 135.
[6] Rosi Braidotti, "Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject" Hypatia 8:1, 1993, 8.
[7] Kathy Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5.
[8] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2.

degree, on *who* is utilizing it, *how* it is deployed, and *where* its effects are concentrated."[9]

I will argue that questions raised about the politics of representation by some contemporary feminists and by some postcolonial critics like Edward Said, a highly influential post-colonial critic, are framed around foundational categories that are better treated as open questions: the categories of 'women' and 'sexual difference' for feminists, and the category of the 'human' for Edward Said. The logic of representation, as Cynthia Weber has recently emphasized, requires the existence of foundational categories, otherwise the notion of representation can not be maintained.[10] In order to satisfy this requirement fictional foundations are invented. These foundations serve dual representational purposes: first, by making something or someone visible; and secondly, by providing the foundational authority for political representation.[11]

Any questions about how these categories are constituted have to be continually deferred if they are to be deployed as the 'grounds' upon which a series of subsequent categories and projects are established. For example, for Edward Said, the category of the 'human' is pivotal, but for all its importance its exact character remains unarticulated. Weber's examination of the concept of state sovereignty and the 'writing' of the Mexican people underlines the significance of this problem of representation and its solution in another context. Speaking of the "embarrassments" international relations theorists face because

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[9] Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference.* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 20.
[10] Cynthia Weber, "Writing Sovereign Identities: Wilson Administration Intervention in the Mexican Revolution", *Alternatives* 17, 1992, 317.
[11] Weber, "Writing Sovereign Identities", 317.

of the ambiguity of the meaning of state sovereignty, she states that, "international relations theorists readily admit that the precise character and status of state sovereignty remains rather fuzzy ...".[12] This "embarrassment" is resolved through a type of type of 'strategic essentialism' in order to "defer questions of meaning (in effect, affirming a specific meaning, however temporarily) in favor of pressing on to investigate 'serious' questions of international relations, all the while referring back to the sovereign state as an already settled question."[13]

These fictional and continually deferred foundations provide the 'ground rules' and 'bottom lines' for discourses that establish in advance what will be legitimate discourse and who will be authorized to produce this discourse. Yet if these foundational categories inevitably betray their historical and cultural specificities, then the problems of Orientalism as identified by Said, and the occlusion of 'differences' as articulated by contemporary feminists cannot be easily resolved.

This underlines the importance of Judith Butler's recent critique of those foundational categories that many feminists claim feminist discourse can not do without. "The point" she says, "is not to do away with foundations ... [r]ather, the task is to interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations authorizes, and what precisely it excludes or forecloses."[14] Butler argues that to assume that foundational categories, such as the subject, are unproblematically necessary:

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[12] Weber, "Writing Sovereign Identities", 313.
[13] Weber, "Writing Sovereign Identities", 313.
[14] Butler, "Contingent Foundations", 7.

is to claim that there can be no *political* opposition to this claim. Indeed, that claim implies that a critique of the subject cannot be a politically informed critique but, rather, an act which puts into jeopardy politics as such. ... [It is an] act which unilaterally establishes the domain of the political functions, then, as an authoritarian ruse by which political contest over the status of the subject is summarily silenced.[15]

Butler underlines the dilemma of how it is possible to use any foundational categories without reintroducing similar exclusions and closures. Crucially, at issue in any discussion of the problems of representational practices is much more than adding excluded voices or ensuring more 'accurate' representations of identity; 'better' methodologies or theories; 'more commitment'; 'putting women at the centre'; 'carving out a space from which to speak', or positing a 'transcendental identity' in order to undo this modern 'Gordian knot'. An additional, and very important consideration, is that each of these attempts to resolve the problems of representation to be examined in this thesis use their foundational categories to act as guarantors for their solutions to the conflict between 'power' and 'knowledge'. Moreover, these produce equally troubling problems that require a series of solutions that undermine the 'liberatory' intention of their projects. Michel Foucault is particularly well known for his problematizations of the difficulties and dangers of insisting that there are privileged methodologies, categories and speakers, or locations outside politics and innocent of power. For Foucault, there are no guarantees available to any critique or strategies of resistance that attempts to resolve the conflict between power and knowledge.

A more detailed examination of these questions will be made in the following chapters. Chapter one examines Said's critique of Orientalist

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[15] Butler, "Contingent Foundations", 4.

representational practices and his attempts to determine how non-Orientalist knowledge of 'others' is possible. The foundational categories that Said deploys serves to delegitimate critiques of his basic assumptions and to establish in advance the criteria by which discursive categories should be authorized. Despite his critique of the "archive" that Orientalist discourse uses in order to construct its categories of knowledge, Said himself uses an equally 'Western' archive for his own categories. The particular assumptions informing these categories act as the foundation for his arguments. They enable him to use these categories in order to guarantee his strategy for resolving the conflict between 'knowledge' and 'power'. However, his attempts to resolve this conflict are not convincing. Consequently, Said himself produces a 'reverse' Orientalist discourse on Orientalism.

Chapter two examines contemporary standpoint feminism in order to analyse the political effects of the foundational categories they use. Particular attention is given to Sandra Harding's arguments to show that her categories, as well as those of other standpoint feminists, repeat many of the problems encountered in the texts of Edward Said. For example, Sandra Harding's use of the categories of "objectivity", "experience", and the "feminist", are equally problematic as guarantees for her resolutions to the conflict between power and knowledge.

The third and final chapter examines the dynamics of representational practice more generally in order to explore the tensions between claims to collective identities expressed as 'women' or the 'human', and the difficulties in reconciling these with claims to particular or local expressions of identity. It also focuses on many of the significant themes within this thesis by examining Lata Mani's texts

on *sati*. Mani draws upon the categories of standpoint feminism in her critique of the production of Orientalist knowledge of *sati*. However, by examining the "never saids" of her categories it is possible to see how her analysis fails to 'rescue' the *sati* from a narrative of 'rescue'. Her unstated and unexamined assumption that 'the fear of death' is not culturally or historically specific produces categories through which the 'subject' of *sati* will be known that reproduce a culturally and historically specific discourse.

My representation of the problems of the politics of representation is also a product of a culturally and historically specific discourse. Michel Foucault argues that "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except, through the production of truth."[16] In spite of the difficulties associated with making this claim, I do not profess to write outside of 'games of truth'. Foucault argues that resistance is always possible, but that "this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."[17] The character of power relationships is "strictly relational" [and] "[t]heir existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance."[18] What makes it possible for me to engage in an analysis of representational politics is the presence of discourses produced by the "multiplicity of points of resistance" that generate the categories I use to understand that a problem even exists. My critique of foundational categories is the foundation I use to argue that the

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[16] Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings: 1972-1977*. (ed.) Colin Gordon. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 93.
[17] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume One: An Introduction*. (New York: Vintage, 1990), 95.
[18] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95.

possibilities for alternative understandings of both identity and politics are limited because the categories we use to impose meaning are inevitably exclusionary. I hasten to add that my critique imposes exclusions and reinforces power, too.

Impasses in theorizing are unavoidable and must not be entirely a source of despair, but instead be considered as an effect of power that opens up potential opportunities to 'think again'. Such rethinking is fraught with risks and will always produce and reinforce power even as it undermines and exposes power. Nevertheless within the current 'games of truth' this is one strategy for problematizing and enabling potentially different configurations of power/knowledge.

APTER 1

EDWARD SAID AND ORIENTALISM

The fundamental problem of Orientalism, Edward Said argues, is that it eliminated "humanistic values".[1] Said's project is to develop both a 'humanist' critique of Orientalist discourse and to establish 'humanistic values' as the foundation upon which non-ethnocentric and non-coercive knowledge could be produced. However, humanist values have been criticized as being as ethnocentric as Orientalist discourse.[2] Consequently, and as this chapter will demonstrate, Said's uncritical reliance on humanist values, particularly, the notion of a transcendental 'human', is as ethnocentric and as coercive as the Orientalist discourse he vigorously attacks.

Said's insistance on using the category of the 'human' - the meaning of which is not defined by Said in any sustained way but is always deferred - is a deployment of essentialism despite his rejection of essentialist identities. His inability to avoid using essentialist categories as the foundations for his critique of Orientalism, and as the foundations for a possible non-ethnocentric knowledge, is instructive because it forces us to examine why the notion of 'we' is an unavoidable requirement for contemporary foundationalist reasonings of identity politics. As Judith Butler has emphasized in a related context, the 'we' that is so central to representational politics can

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[1] Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage, 1979), 110.
[2] See for example Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 119-126, 130 and James Clifford, "On Orientalism" in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, Art*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988), 263.

only be a "phantasmatic construction".[3] Moreover, Said's use of the category of 'we', expressed as the 'human', restricts political theorizing and solidifies configurations not only of identities, but also "of politics itself"[4]. An examination of Said's critique of 'Western' ethnocentric and coercive representations of the 'non-West' is important because it underlines the seductiveness of essentialisms, especially covert ones, because they appear to furnish solutions that can place 'limits' on 'power'.[5] I will also critically analyze Edward Said's texts to examine his adaptation of Foucault's notion of discourse and his rejection of Foucault's reconceptualization of power because the implications of his adaptations of Foucault's arguments reverberate through Said's texts and undermine the 'liberatory' goal of his work.

Specifically, I will examine Said's claim that as long as two conditions are met it will be possible to produce non-ethnocentric and non-coercive knowledge of 'others'. I will then examine his claim that knowledge is produced by interpretations by a "willed, intentional activity of the human mind"[6]; and his use of the category of the 'human'. The category of the 'human', is especially important to Said because he rejects the argument that "since all reading is misreading, no one reading is better than any other, and hence all readings, potentially infinite in number, are in the final analysis equally

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[3] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 142.
[4] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 142.
[5] Michel Foucault argues that a traditional question in political philosophy is how it is possible for a philosophy concerned with truth to fix limits to the rights of power. See Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings: 1972-1977*. (ed.) Colin Gordon. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 93.
[6] Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 155.

misinterpretations."[7] Said urges intellectuals "to hold to a universal and single standard"[8] for judgement: "What I was trying to suggest was that standards of truth about human misery and oppression were to be held to despite the individual intellectual's party affiliation, national background, and primeval loyalties."[9] For Said, the category of the 'human' provides the 'fictional' foundation for this non-Orientalist knowledge.

In addition, I will examine whether Said successfully avoids introducing his own Orientalist representations into his analysis of Orientalism. This question is especially necessary because of the wide-spread acceptance and influence his arguments have had about how non-ethnocentric knowledge of 'Others' is possible. If, as Cynthia Weber argues, the logic of representation requires the creation of fictional foundational categories for the notion of representation to be preserved[10]; and if as Said himself argues, objective knowledge is a myth, how can Said claim that his representation of Orientalism and the 'West', and his solutions to the problem of Orientalist knowledge will be any less ideological and immune from the terms of the critique he himself develops. I will argue that Said's own critique and attempt to resolve the problems he has identified are seriously, but interestingly, flawed. This is not to suggest that an unimpeachable standpoint is possible. Rather, Said's failures underscore the limits of what is known

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[7] Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), 39.
[8] Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*. (London: Vintage, 1994),
[9] Said, *Representation of the Intellectual*, xi.
7 Cynthia Weber, "Writing Sovereign Identities: Wilson Administration Intervention in the Mexican Revolution" *Alternatives* 17:3, 1993, 317.

as 'progressive politics' and the need to avoid the 'conceit' that less ideological, less partial and more "innocent" standpoints are even possible.

Orientalism: An Ambiguous Legacy

The publication in 1978 of Edward Said's highly influential book, *Orientalism*, immediately attracted both academic and popular attention. *Orientalism* initiated a broad and influential literature usually classified under the heading of 'postcoloniality'. "The construction of fictions like 'East' and 'West', to say nothing of racialist essences like subject races, Orientals, Aryans, Negroes and the like" are what Edward Said argues his "books attempted to combat."[11] In *Orientalism*, as well as in *Culture and Imperialism*, *The Question of Palestine*, and *Covering Islam*, for example, Said articulates and challenges the ethnocentrism of Orientalism that covertly or overtly underwrites how the 'Orient' is represented in literature, art, music, foreign policy, area studies, and scholarship in general. The question of representation is crucial because "the representation of other societies and peoples involved an act of power by which images of them were in a sense created by the Western observer who constructed them as peoples and societies to be ruled and dominated, not as objects to be understood passively, objectively or academically."[12]

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[11] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, xi.
[12] Nubar Hovsepian, "Connections with Palestine" in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*. (ed.) Michael Sprinker. (London: Blackwell, 1992), 9, quoting Edward Said, "Orientalism and Zionism" *al-Majalla* Dec. 2-8, 1987 [Arabic].

Said is a Palestinian-born American who received his education in elite Western educational institutes, including Harvard where he trained in comparative literature. Said is well known as a literary critic and humanist scholar. His intellectual work is integrated with his political commitments. He writes extensively on the need for intellectuals to reject disengaged and 'ivory tower' scholarship. An intellectual, he argues, is "someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers."[13] For Said, an intellectual is someone who can "speak the truth to power."[14] Accordingly, he has used his own expertise on the Middle East in his political interventions on behalf of Palestinians in their quest for self-determination. Said tries to articulate to 'Western' audiences how the distorted representations of the 'Orient' are repeatedly used to deny Palestinians the right to self-determination. The political consequences of the negative manner in which the 'Orient' is represented results in denying "the Arab ... the most basic human attributes"[15] and enables the 'West' to justify racist foreign policies, and even war, as in the case of the Gulf War against Iraq.

In order to contribute to a broader public understanding of the political and moral implications of Orientalism, the audience for his own scholarship is not limited to an audience of academic specialists or intellectual elites, but is consciously aimed at a broader and more general audience. He maintains a continuous presence on television

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[13] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 10.
[14] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 7; see also 63-76.
[15] Hovsepian, "Connections with Palestine", 8.

programmes such as the *Today* show or the *Macneil-Lehrer News Hour*, and writes frequently for mass circulation newspapers and magazines.[16]

Said's most influential book, *Orientalism*, addresses three critical problems of representation: the relationship between power and knowledge, the institutionalization of discourse, and whether it is possible to have non-ethnocentric and non-coercive knowledge of other cultures. Of particular importance are the questions Said raises which suggest that representation is not an objective interpretation but an assertion of power over a subject that is treated as static and inert. Orientalist representations define the identity of a particular subject and establish the categories by which it is known - in effect the discourse creates the object of study.[17] He argues in *Orientalism* that an unequal power relationship exists between the 'First World' scholar and the 'Orient'. This relationship enables the 'First World' scholar to define the identity of, and represent, the 'Orient' as an object of study. Orientalism, the study and discourse of the 'Orient', "[a]bove all ... had the epistemological and ontological power virtually of life and death, or presence and absence, over everything and everybody designated as 'Oriental'".[18]

The 'Orient' it produces is not a 'real' object but one constructed out of an "archive of knowledge". It effectively reduces representations of the 'Orient' to a series of simple tropes and categories. These representations do not "happen simply as a necessity of the imagination", but because of the relationship of power and of

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[16] Michael Sprinker, "Introduction" in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*. (ed.) Michael Sprinker. (London: Blackwell, 1992), 3.
[17] Said, *Orientalism*, 4-7 *passim*.
[18] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 223.

domination between the Occident and the Orient.[19] Orientalism, in effect, is an alliance between knowledge and power that produced the 'knowledge' and the 'expertise' required for colonial expansion of the territorial area that came to be known as the 'Orient'.[20]

Said argues that Orientalist discourse produced a number of powerful 'realities' that continue to inform contemporary scholarship and 'popular' understandings of the 'Orient', and he insists that we cannot get around them by pretending that they do not exist. Importantly, these representations work not to the benefit of the Orient but of the 'West'. They benefit the 'West' by providing the 'knowledge' for colonial expansion, administration, restructuring of the colonies, and even the justification for these activities. 'Knowledge' of the 'Orient' also enables the 'West' to positively define its own identity at the expense of the 'Orient'. "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate, and even underground, self."[21] The effect is to allow the 'West' to represent itself as more 'human' than the 'non-West' thereby justifying the 'West' to establish itself as "judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior."[22] Nevertheless, Orientalism "has less to do with the Orient than it does with" the 'West'.[23]

Orientalist knowledge became institutionalized, and continues to make it difficult to say anything about the 'Orient' that differs from the existing "archive of knowledge". "[R]epresentations [of the Orient]

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19 Said, *Orientalism*, 5.
20 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.
21 Said, *Orientalism*, 3.
22 Said, *Orientalism*, 109.
23 Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

rely upon institutions, traditions, convention, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects [and] not upon a distant and amorphous Orient."[24] The notion of discourse is important to Said's project of making visible and contesting these relations of domination of the 'Orient' by the 'West' in order to undo the discourse's sheer "knitted togetherness". "My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period."[25]

In Said's view, then, Orientalism, then, is not a politically innocent quest for knowledge or 'truth' about the Orient, but a means of authorizing certain discourses and certain speakers to articulate the 'truth' and conceal their own investment in the power/knowledge network. "In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand."[26]

Foucault's notion of discourse is important to Said because of the emphasis it places on power relations. In *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Said argues that discourse is more than just what is spoken and what is written.[27] Foucault contends, he says, "that the fact of writing itself is a systematic conversion of the power relationship

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[24] Said, *Orientalism*, 22.
[25] Said, *Orientalism*, 3.
[26] Said, *Orientalism*, 7.
[27] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 47.

between controller and controlled into 'mere' written words - but writing is a way of disguising the awesome materiality of so tightly controlled and managed a production."[28] Consequently, "we are able to understand culture as a body of disciplines having the effective force of knowledge linked systematically, but by no means immediately or even intentionally, to power."[29] Said uses his account of power relations within discourse to erode the idea that literature or other forms of knowledge exist separately and apart from the 'world'. Through making visible the inescapable relationship between literature and politics, and by arguing that any conception of knowledge as objective and apolitical is a fiction, Said underscores the unavoidable ethical considerations with which all scholars must come to terms.[30]

This is especially important to Said because he wants to break down the assumption that culture is less dangerous than military or economic forms of domination. "My idea is that European and then American interest in the Orient was political according to some of the obvious historical accounts of it that I have given here, but that it was the culture that created that interest, that acted dynamically along with brute political, economic, and military rationales to make the Orient the varied and complicated place that it obviously was in the field I call Orientalism."[31] Orientalism's "durability and strength" are "a result of cultural hegemony".[32]

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[28] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 47.
[29] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 220.
[30] Robert Young says that Said's injunction that criticism be connected to the 'larger' world has exercised a powerful moral pressure, especially in the United States. See Young, *White Mythologies*, 126.
[31] Said, *Orientalism*, 12; Said makes similar arguments in *Culture and Imperialism*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993), for an example see p. 200.
[32] Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

The political implications of Said's arguments further erode the beleaguered notion of the possibility of 'objective', value free, and apolitical scholarship. A persistent theme throughout Said's texts is the intricate relationship of knowledge and power.[33] Said suggests that cultural and literary criticism must take on a specifically political role. It must take an ethical stand by acknowledging the relations between literature and other cultural formations to systems of power and domination. Criticism, he argues, "must see itself, with other discourse, inhabiting a much contested cultural space."[34] To deny the role of power in creating knowledge perpetuates the myth of the objective scholar. This is dangerous because knowledge produced from a position of strength relative to its subject in effect has the ability to create the 'subject'. Therefore, it is imperative to examine whether non-ethnocentric and non-coercive knowledge of other cultures can be produced and how this can be assured.

The arguments Said elaborates in *Orientalism* continue to have a significant impact on a wide range of disciplines because of his focus on the political ramifications of ethnocentrisms. This influence is evident in many subsequent attempts to represent other peoples and cultures in less ethnocentric and less racist ways. *Orientalism's* arguments are received as a

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[33] The relationship between 'power' and 'knowledge' is never far from the surface in Said's work; for examples of his arguments see: Said, *Orientalism*, 2-28; *Culture and Imperialism*, 62-190; *Covering Islam*, 135-164; *The Question of Palestine*. (New York: Vintage, 1980), 56-114; "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community" *Critical Inquiry* 9:1, 1982, 1-26; "Orientalism Reconsidered" in *Europe and its Others: Vol. 1*. (eds.) Francis Barber *et. al.* (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985), 15-26; and *Representations of the Intellectual*. (London, Vintage, 1994), 63-76.

[34] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 225.

larger principle to be applied to very different topics, especially the arguably different issues of representation for women, people of colour, gays and lesbians, and so on. ... In its broadest extension, the logic of Orientalism is thus often held to illustrate the view that *all* professional scholarship, inherently elite and undemocratic, is similarly based on a denial of self-representation to oppressed groups, making possible a monopoly of uncontested and degrading representations of them by authoritative, self-accredited professionals, in the service of more conveniently ruling those groups.[35]

Nevertheless, Said is criticized by some critics for complicity with, and even extension of, the system which he opposes because he does not examine his own critique as a discursive practice. As critics like Robert Young point out, while Said eloquently and elaborately demonstrates the relations of power within Orientalism, he does not offer alternative methods to escape the terms of his own critique.[36] And as James Clifford notes,

The key theoretical issue raised by *Orientalism* concerns the status of *all* forms of thought and representation for dealing with the alien. Can one ultimately escape procedures of dichotomizing, restructuring, and textualizing in the making of interpretive statements about foreign cultures and traditions? If so, how?[37]

Said appears to be aware of the espistemological implications of the politics of representation that he presents in *Orientalism*. Throughout his text he raises a series of questions about the implications of his arguments: "How does one *represent* other cultures?"[38] "[T]he real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything ..."[39] "Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always

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[35] Bruce Robbins, "The East is a Career: Edward Said and the Logics of Professionalism" in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*. (ed.) Michael Sprinker. (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1992), 50.
[36] Young, *White Mythologies*, 127.
[37] Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 261.
[38] Said, *Orientalism*, 325.
[39] Said, *Orientalism*, 272.

get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the 'other')?"[40] "Perhaps the most important task of all would be to undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to Orientalism, to ask how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective. But then one would have to rethink the whole complex problem of knowledge and power."[41]

These questions are crucial for Said. Indeed, the emphasis he places on the ability of individuals to resist 'power' requires that he contest anything suggestive of determinism. But his unease with what he categorizes as 'determinism', and his insistence that 'knowledge' is a product of "willed intentional activity of the human mind"[42] makes him unable to solve the problem of Orientalism.

In spite of the importance Said places on a Foucauldian notion of discourse, he interprets it more narrowly than Foucault himself. He seems unaware of both the theoretical questions Foucault confronted and their broader philosophical context.[43] Said especially overlooks the ethical dimension of Foucault's project and his concern with the very possibility of critique. The implications of Said's simplification of Foucault's notion of discourse and his misunderstanding of Foucault's reconceptualization of power are of key importance because Said repeats what Foucault argues is a mistake of modern humanism: namely, that it

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[40] Said, *Orientalism*, 325.
[41] Said, *Orientalism*, 24.
[42] Said, *Covering Islam*, 155.
[43] Young, *White Mythologies*, 69-90.

"draw[s] this line between knowledge and power".[44] Thus, Said believes it is possible to fulfill a central promise of the Enlightenment, specifically that a reconciliation between knowledge and power can be achieved by grounding claims to and the exercise of authority in reason.[45]

Knowledge, Resistance, and Experience

In *Covering Islam* Said claims that knowledge of other cultures is possible if two conditions are met.[46] The first condition is that the researcher is not in a relation of domination with the culture studied and is answerable to this culture. The second condition is the recognition that all interpretation is a "form of making", in other words, it depends on the "willed intentional activity of the human mind". Consequently all interpretations of other cultures are tied to the situation out of which they arose in the first place. The individual researcher needs to be aware that both her/his "private ego" and societal "affiliations" act as barriers to the interpretive process that requires "reason" as a guide in order to recognize that the "distant and alien" is "human nonetheless".[47] Or as Said has put it:

It is precisely this conscious willed effort of overcoming distances and cultural barriers that makes knowledge of other societies and cultures possible - and at the same time limits that knowledge. At that moment,

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[44] Michel Foucault, "Prison Talk" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings.* (ed.) Colin Gordon. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 52.
[45] Jane Flax, "The End of Innocence" in *Feminists Theorize the Political.* (eds.) Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 447.
[46] Said, *Covering Islam*, 155-157.
[47] Said, *Covering Islam*, 156-157.

the interpreter understands himself or herself in his or her human situation and the text in relation to *its* situation, the human situation out of which it came.[48]

At the end of *Orientalism*, Said expresses optimism that knowledge produced by the disciplines of the human sciences will provide the factual ammunition to combat ethnocentrism.

> Positively, I do believe - and in my other work have tried to show - that enough is being done today in the human sciences to provide the contemporary scholar with insights, methods, and ideas that could dispense with racial, ideological, and imperialist stereotypes of the sort provided during its historical ascendancy by Orientalism. ... The worldwide hegemony of Orientalism and all it stands for can now be challenged, if we can benefit properly from the general twentieth-century rise to political and historical awareness of so many of the earth's peoples.[49]

However, the basis for this optimism appears strained fifteen years later in his 1993 publication, *Culture and Imperialism*. This text reads like a catalogue of the failure of 'Western' intellectuals to resist both imperialism or engage with "the deeper questions concerning the ontological status, as it were, of European domination of non-Europeans."[50] Criticism of colonialism, as opposed to imperialism, made during the nineteenth century "usually turned on their [the colonies] profitability, their management and mismanagement, and on theoretical questions such as whether and how colonialism might be squared with *laissez-faire* or tariff policies; an *imperialist* and Eurocentric framework is implicitly accepted."[51] The effect of this "imperial consensus" is that "there was no overall condemnation of imperialism until - and this is my point - *after* native uprisings were too far gone to be ignored or defeated."[52] And finally, "only after nationalists

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[48] Said, *Covering Islam*, 156-157.
[49] Said, *Orientalism*, 328.
[50] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 241.
[51] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 240.
[52] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 241.

first took the lead in the imperial territories, then expatriate intellectuals and activists, did there develop a significant anti-colonial movement in the metropolis."[53]

Oppositional and dissenting views and literature do exist in the United States, Said argues, but their "*deterrent* power has not been effective" against imperialism.[54] The 'West' outside the United States, he implies, has been similarily unsuccessful: "With the exception of the work of small groups (e.g., the World Order Models Project), global thinking tends to reproduce the superpower, Cold War, regional, ideological, or ethnic contests of old, even more dangerous in the nuclear and post-nuclear era, as the horrors in Yugoslavia attest."[55]

Said's survey of 'Western' literature examines "how the processes of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions, and - by predisposition, by the authority of recognizable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature, and the visual and musical arts - were manifested at another very significant level, that of national culture ..."[56] Said argues that "structure of attitude and reference"[57] exist that maintain the "fundamentally static notion of *identity* that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism."[58] Imperialism and colonialism were maintained over and above a concern for profit by this "structure of attitude and reference" that "allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples

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[53] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 242.
[54] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 287.
[55] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 283.
[56] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 12.
[57] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxiii.
[58] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxv.

should be subjugated, and, on the other hand, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the *imperium* as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples."[59] Said contends that even humanist intellectuals such as Albert Camus, E.M. Forster, or Andre Malraux failed to transcend this consensus. Said "attach[es] so much importance to [Malraux's] *La Voie royale* because, as the work of an extraordinary European talent, it testifies so conclusively to the inability of the Western humanistic conscience to confront the political challenge of the imperial domains. For both Forster in the 1920s and Malraux in 1930, men genuinely familiar with the non-European world, a grander destiny confronts the West than one of mere national self-determination - self-consciousness, will, or even the deep issues of taste and discrimination."[60] Thus it was not the Orientalists, who Said examines in *Orientalism*, that were wholly responsible for the production of ethnocentric Orientalist knowledge. Orientalists do not emerge out of a vacuum but emerge as a result of the "structure of attitudes and references" in 'Western' culture.

As will be argued below, Said rejects Foucault's reconceptualization of power because Said argues it is too deterministic. On the one hand, Said continues to argue that knowledge is the product of conscious, willed intentional acts of the human mind[61], and that resistance is possible because

no matter how apparently complete the dominance of an ideology or social system, there are always going to be parts of the social experience that

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[59] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 10.
[60] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 208.
[61] Said, *Covering Islam*, 155.

it does not cover and control. From these parts very frequently comes opposition, both self-conscious and dialectical.[62]

Yet on the other hand, Said continues to stress the sheer "imperial consensus" that exists in the 'West' that makes it almost impossible for anyone, including even humanist intellectuals, to escape from its effect. How can one be optimistic that any change, especially the ethical change that Said proposes, is even possible? Crucially, how can one recognize and verify which parts of the social experience are left uncovered and uncontrolled by the dominant ideology or social system?

Said argues that it is possible for individuals to 'transcend' a particular and powerful "communal core of interpretations".[63] He disagrees with Foucault's downgrading of the role of individual agency and claims that he "do[es] believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism."[64] The question that Said must then confront is, as he states it: "How ... to recognize individuality and to reconcile it with its intelligent, and by no means passive or merely dictatorial, general and hegemonic context?"[65]

Said's model of "critical consciousness" privileges the idea of the person who is 'marginal', 'in exile', or otherwise has "detached [her/himself] from the dominant culture ... [and] adopted a situation and responsible adversary position".[66] Eric Auerbach is a 'Western' writer Said praises and uses to illustrate the 'power' of culture to "authorize", "dominate" and to "validate", and to show why the

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[62] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 240.
[63] Said, *Covering Islam*, 43.
[64] Said, *Orientalism*, 23.
[65] Said, *Orientalism*, 9.
[66] Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, 224. Said repeats this theme in *Representation of the Intellectual*.

intellectual must step "outside" this culture.[67] Auerbach was able to write *Mimesis* "precisely" because he is outside "that grid of research techniques and ethics by which the prevailing culture imposed on the individual scholar its canons of how literary scholarship is to be conducted."[68] Said's argument assumes not only the need for the 'outsider' who has an 'objective' 'distance', but the very possibility of an 'outside'. Moreover, it assumes that 'objectivity' is even possible in spite of Said's own arguments that 'objective' knowledge and scholarship are myths. And as Robert Young argues:

> Said's account therefore assumes the very totalities which he opposes, as is suggested by the grandiose claim implied in his *The World, the Text, and the Critic.* This title, which posits a separation between 'the world', 'the text' and 'the critic', as if the last two could at any time elect to avoid being part of the first, suggest a basic conceptual problem in its assumption of the possibility of an 'outside'.[69]

Said assumes that individuals can work in a separate space which is somehow insulated from contemporary ideology.[70] By considering Orientalism as *"willed human work"*,[71] and, therefore, one on which individual writers can leave a "determining imprint", Said wants "to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work was a contribution."[72] However, as Robert Young argues, this claim produces a methodological problem for Said, namely, "the age-old philosophical conundrum of the relation of the particular to the universal, and thus of free will to necessity".[73]

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[67] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic,* 9.
[68] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic,* 9.
[69] Young, *White Mythologies,* 135.
[70] Young, *White Mythologies,* 135.
[71] Said, *Orientalism,* 15.
[72] Said, *Orientalism,* 24.
[73] Young, *White Mythologies,* 134.

It also suggests that there are 'non-ideological' criteria available that can be used to judge both the 'theory' and 'practice' of human behaviour towards 'others'. Otherwise, how can Said claim that any 'new' oppositional knowledge or critical standpoints would be any less ideological than the knowledge and standpoints that are the focus of his critique? The basis of such a criterion is the category of the 'human' and is examined further on in this chapter.

Despite his self-acknowledged debt to Foucault, Said rejects Foucault's reconceptualization of power and insists on deploying a theory of power that is, in Foucault's words, "obsessed with the person of the sovereign".[74] In other words, Said assumes that power is possessed like a "commodity"[75] by particular classes, rulers, or genders and enables these groups to intentionally exercise control for their own benefit, at the expense of other groups who do not possess power. In order for 'powerless' groups to exercise greater autonomy and 'increase' their own power they have to wrest away power-as-commodity from these 'powerful' groups. The view that power can be possessed and deployed intentionally for beneficial or detrimental purposes, depending on who uses it, and the purpose of its use, leads Said to dismiss Foucault's critique of power and agency as being too deterministic and passive. The implications of Said's emphasis on the sovereign model of power reverberates throughout his analysis of Orientalism and restricts what he considers to be legitimate solutions to these problems.

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[74] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings: 1972-1977*. (ed.) Colin Gordon. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 121.
[75] Foucault, "Two Lectures", 89.

Contrary to Foucault, Said retains the idea that a straightforward oppositional resistance is possible; that 'agents' can resist from a position 'outside' the operations of power, and therefore, that it is possible to remain 'detached', 'innocent', and noncompliance. As a result, he is highly critical of Foucault's attempt to retheorize power and strategies of resistance. Foucault challenged the 'outsider/insider' binary relationship by arguing that the 'other' as 'outside' should be replaced by the 'other' as always 'inside'.[76] Consequently, the forces of domination and resistance are caught up, sometimes indistinguishably, within each other. There might be acts of resistance by individual acts of will, but there can be no guarantee that they will produce the intended goals. In other words, there is no 'transcendental' Truth than enables us to fix limits to the rights of power and there is no standpoint that is free from ideology.

Said, however, disagrees with Foucault. He equates Foucault's notion of power with a type of unstoppable 'bureaucratic' power. For example, Foucault's account of the "drive towards coherent order which characterizes human discourse" is interpreted as an account of "disciplinary society" characterized by an "unremitting and unstoppable expansion of power favoring the administrators, managers, and technocrats". According to Said, when Foucault says that power is everywhere, Foucault is assumed to be referring to a bureaucratic power

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[76] Michel Foucault, "Power and Strategies" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings: 1972-1977*. (ed.) Colin Gordon. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 141-142.

that is "overcoming, co-opting, infinitely detailed, and ineluctable in the growth of its domination."[77]

Accordingly, Foucault's reconceptualization of power is rejected by Said because he claims it is too undifferentiated, and because it ignores the ways in which power can be contested or opposed. Said insists that power is not inescapable. To illustrate this claim he draws on Raymond Williams's argument that "however dominant a social system may be, the very meaning of its domination involves a limitation or selection of the activities it covers, so that by definition it cannot exhaust all social experience which therefore always potentially contains space for alternative acts and alternative intentions which are not yet articulated as a social institution or even project."[78]

Said's disagreement with Foucault is grounded on a conception of ethics, and specifically a claim that knowledge, and hence human society, is primarily an expression of willed, intentional acts of the human mind. He extends Giambattista Vico claim that if people make history they can know it, by arguing that if people make history they can also change it. If history can be made by people, then these changes can meet ethical standards. Hence he places great importance on agency, intentions, consequences, causations, and consciously making ethical decisions.[79] If human society is the sum of human activities, as Said contends, then humans can actively, consciously and ethically make changes in what is a human creation, albeit a creation of an

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[77] Edward Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power" in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*. (ed.) David Couzens Hoy. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 150.
[78] Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power", 154.
[79] Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power", 154.

exclusive dominant group. Power is not, therefore, irresistible and unopposable, a position Said ascribes to Foucault.[80] Instead, power can be imagined in terms of "insurgent and utopian" possibilities. This is one of the reasons why he likes Antonio Gramsci's notions of "hegemony, historical blocks, ensembles of relationship done from the perspective of an engaged political worker for whom the fascinated description of exercised power is never a substitute for trying to change power relationships within society."[81] Given its popular success, Said might consider *Orientalism* itself as empirical evidence that power is contestable and that counter-hegemonic discourse is possible.

Nationalist struggles provide an example of the type of resistance Said has in mind. In spite of the dangers they present, Said argues, they offer an alternative way of envisioning human history.[82] The recovery of geographical territory is preceded by the "charting of cultural territory". Early nationalists "respond to the humiliations of colonialism, and lead to 'the principal teaching of nationalism: the need to find the ideological basis for a wider unity than any known before'".[83] However, he is concerned that nationalism can produce "natives" knowledge that is as insular and self-absorbed as is characteristic of Orientalist discourse. In particular he is concerned that the danger of "remaining trapped in the emotional self-indulgence of celebrating one's own identity" will make knowledge of, and

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80 Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power", 151, 222.
81 Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 222.
82 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 216.
83 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 210, quoting Basil Davidson, *Africa in Modern History: The Search for a New Society*. (London: Allen Lane. 1978), 156.

relationships with, 'others' difficult, if not impossible.[84] In order to prevent this problem he stresses the need to transcend the local identity in order to achieve a 'worldly' appreciation of the 'human condition'. [M]oving beyond nativism does not mean abandoning national identity, but it does mean thinking of local identity as not exhaustive, and therefore not being anxious to confine oneself to one's own sphere, with its ceremonies of belonging, its built-in chauvinism, and its limiting sense of security."[85]

Said appeals to the category of the 'human' as the basis for "universalist principles". The 'human' and 'universalist principles' serve as the foundations for non-ethnocentric and non-coercive knowledge, and for peaceful co-existence between peoples, both major themes in Said's works. Upholding basic human justice as a universal principle is the basis upon which Said establishes a reconciliation between "one's identity and the actualities of one's own culture, society, and history to the reality of other identities, cultures, peoples."[86] As Said puts it:

> As I have tried to show here, the public realm in which intellectuals make their representations is extremely complex, and contains uncomfortable features, but the meaning of an effective intervention in that realm has to rest on the intellectual's unbudgeable conviction in a concept of justice and fairness that allows for differences between nations and individuals, without at the same time assigning them to hidden hierarchies, preferences, evaluations.[87]

Said relies heavily on a notion of 'human rights' to act as the standard intellectuals might use as the basis for them "to speak the

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[84] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 229.
[85] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 229.
[86] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 69.
[87] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 69.

truth to power".[88] However the notion of the 'human' is criticized for being both ethnocentric and gender specific: Robert Young points out that Said's idea of the 'human' which he opposes to 'Western' representations of the Orient is itself derived from the 'Western' humanist tradition.[89] James Clifford is equally critical of Said's use of the 'human'. He says it "is still an open question ... whether an African pastoralist shares the same existential 'bestial floor' with an Irish poet and his readers." Moreover, "it is a general feature of humanist common denominators that they are meaningless, since they bypass the local cultural codes that make personal experience articulate."[90] Clifford argues that "the privilege of standing above cultural particulars, of aspiring to the universalist power that speaks for humanity, for the universal experiences of love, work, death, and so on, is a privilege invented by a totalizing Western liberalism."[91]

Within contemporary feminism universalist notions of 'man', 'humanity' and 'woman' are the focus of sustained examinations and are criticized as expressions of particular genders and cultures masquerading as universals.[92] Spike Peterson's examination of the

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[88] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual,* 71. See also page 72 where Said argues that intellectuals do not need to look "inwards for a guiding light supplied to one by inspiration or prophetic intuition" when upholding standards of international behaviour. He points out that most countries have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as other conventions of rules of war, the treatment of prisoners, the rights of women, children, workers, and so on, which can be used to apply universal standards of behaviour.

[89] Young, *White Mythologies,* 131.

[90] Clifford, "On Orientalism", 263.

[91] Clifford, "On Orientalism", 263.

[92] There is an extensive feminist literature on this topic. See for example, Anne Phillips, *Democracy and Difference.* (University Park, Penn: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism.* (eds.) Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Anne Russo and Lourds Torres. (Bloomington:

'givens' of human rights discourse argues that particular models of human nature are implicitly established as the basis for what it means to be 'human'. What is presupposed is "a definition of 'humans as they *are* (a model of 'untutored' human nature); a description of 'humans as they *could* (presumably 'ought to') be'; and an operative world view - our understanding of reality such that the transition from what 'is' to what 'ought to be' is possible and desirable."[93] The 'human' in human rights discourse is based on a male norm; a norm, moreover, that is 'Western', 'liberal', and individualist'.[94]

Establishing a notion of 'justice' on the foundational category of the 'human' is an attempt to put 'limits' on 'power' which cannot be impeached as *particular* expressions of interest. After all, if you can claim that one's standpoint is universally applicable, indeed transcendent, then you can claim that your notion of justice is not masquerading as the interests of the 'strong'. Crucially, if Said's basic assumptions about the universally applicable notion of the 'human' or 'human experience' are found to be ethnocentric or gender specific, then Said has not escaped from the terms of the critique he himself developed.

Robert Young points out that the notion of 'experience' itself is culturally and historically specific because it is "always experienced, analyzed, and given meaning through forms of knowledge that will

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Indiana University Press, 1991); and Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking From Women's Lives.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). The ethnocentrism of notions of a 'universal woman' is examined in chapter two of this thesis.

[93] V. Spike Peterson, "Whose Rights? A Critique of the 'Givens' in Human Rights Discourse" *Alternatives* 15:3, 1990, 307.

[94] Peterson, "Whose Rights?", 307.

themselves be already ideological."[95] More importantly, Said's categories of analysis show that "his ethical and theoretical values are all so deeply involved in the history of the culture that he criticizes".[96] In other words, Said uses 'Western' humanist categories and values in order to criticize 'Western' Orientalism, as he simultaneously advocates 'Western' humanist categories and values as the means by which post-imperial intellectuals can produce non-Orientalist knowledge. In effect, Said's critique of Orientalism is an argument that Orientalism fails to fulfill the promise of 'Western' humanism namely, that limits can be placed on power. And it is this promise of 'Western' humanism that Said extols to critics both 'inside' and 'outside' the 'West' as the means to prevent Orientalism.

Said's critique of and solutions to Orientalism depend on foundational categories that are historically and culturally specific to the 'West'. Consequently, Said himself has established 'Western' categories as the ones by which our understandings of 'justice', 'international relations', the 'human, and so on, will be known. The category of the 'human' serves two closely related purposes: first, it becomes the 'bottom line' that Said uses to construct and legitimate his standpoint; and second, it is invoked as a strategy of 'escape' when the political implications of his arguments cause him unease.

The implications of some of his arguments appear to disturb him. For example, on the one hand, he stresses the importance, indeed necessity for nationalism; on the other hand, he is aware that

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[95] Young, *White Mythologies,* 132; The notion of experience will be analyzed in greater detail in chapter two.
[96] Young, *White Mythologies,* 132.

nationalism can become as oppressive and authoritarian as imperialism. His solution to this tension is to propose a transcendental notion of the 'human'. The basis of this is the recognition that

> No one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind.[97]

Said's arguments rely on an uncritical acceptance of other 'Western' concepts such as nationalism, or 'Culture', the intellectual, or the 'human'.[98] In particular, he assumes a 'Western' philosophical claim that there is a fundamental ontological dualism between ideas and matter. Critiques of this dualism are a frequent and major theme within 'Western' philosophy, not least by those, like Marx, who tried to develop a critique of the power relations that are expressed and legitimized by dualist foundations. The notions of discourse and hegemony are frequently used precisely because "they stress the way seemingly abstract ideas and seemingly concrete processes converge in texts and institutions, song lyrics, advertisements...,"[99] and thus challenge simple oppositions between idea and reality, consciousness and matter, superstructure and base. Again, although Said uses the notion of discourse, he still maintains a dualistic sense of the 'cultural' and the 'material'. He seems to think that a concept such as nationalism is like a container that can be adapted and refilled according to location. Yet if notions of discourse and hegemony are meant to convey "a more

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[97] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 336.
[98] Robert Young has pointed out that despite his criticism of 'Western' culture, Said's own notion of culture "always remains exclusively European high culture, to which is ascribed a special ability to effect resistance to the state." See *White Mythologies*, 133.
[99] R.B.J. Walker, "The Concept of Culture in the Theory of International Relations" in *Culture and International Relations*. (ed.) Jonsuk Chay. (New York: Praeger, 1990), 5.

complex and mutually constitutive interplay",[100] Said's relapse into 'Western' dualistic categories is problematic.

Spike Peterson argues that "becoming conscious of deep structure assumptions enables us to recognize and critically examine patterns at the surface level of concrete manifestations."[101] Acceptance of notions such as nationalism or the 'human' presupposes acceptance of other notions about 'community', 'politics', or 'human nature'. In other words, categories do not exist in 'isolation' but are part of a 'package', so to speak. Foucault addresses this problem in *The Order of Things* when he writes about reading Borges's Chinese encyclopedia in which animals are classified in a taxonomy that is incomprehensible to a 'Western' reader such as Foucault. "In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*."[102]

Said's notion of the intellectual who is 'outside' and, in his words, "can speak the truth to power"[103] takes for granted that the intellectual will be able to understand what he or she observes; in other words, that the intellectual is part of a hermeneutic circle. Said's intellectual would not be able to speak of, let alone understand, something as incomprehensible as the taxonomy of the Chinese dictionary. The danger for any critical or progressive politics in attempting to understand and to "speak the truth" about expressions of historical or

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100 Walker, "The Concept of Culture", 5.
101 Peterson, "Whose Rights?", 304.
102 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*. (New York: Vintage, 1973), xv.
103 Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 7.

cultural 'difference', such as *sati* or female circumcision, is that the categories of understanding used are part of an existing "archive" and network of power/knowledge. As Foucault argues:

> There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.[104]

Said's intellectual "speaks the truth to power" may indeed be speaking "truth"; however, this "truth" is not transcendental, essential, and innocent of power and ideology. Thus the "truth" of Said's intellectual may be a disciplinary practice that reinforces particular 'games of truth'.

Nationalism and Closure

Said is critical of 'Western' intellectuals who consider nationalism, especially in the 'Third World', to be negative and no longer a useful form of political behaviour or community. The stance Said takes is indicative of a network of taken-for-granted modernist assumptions about statehood, human nature, justice, danger, and the 'good life'. He assumes that a sovereign territorial state is required for a 'subject' people to have dignity, autonomy, freedom. "Without political independence", he states, "there is neither sovereignty nor real freedom, and certainly not equality ..."[105] Palestinians, especially, need territorial sovereignty because "more

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[104] Foucault, "Two Lectures", 93.
[105] Edward Said, "Declaration of Independence" *New Statesman & Society* Feb. 11, 1994, 20.

than most people, Palestinians have been the victims of abuses by every government - Arab and non-Arab - under whose jurisdiction they have lived."[106]

It is within the territorial sovereign state that the Palestinians will be able to work toward the "universalist principles" that Said establishes as the basis for justice and peaceful co-existence between peoples and nations. The sovereign state, for Said, becomes the vehicle for Said to propose limits to power. *Within* the territorial state oppressed peoples will find safety from *outside* sources of danger. *Within* the sovereignty of the nation state there will be access to and control over the administrative, judicial, cultural, educational, political and, if necessary, military means to achieve the 'good life'.

Dangers present within the territorial state can be met through the instruments of administration, namely, the establishment of laws, rights, and other codes of conduct that place limits on the exercise of 'power'. Foucault argues that this is a conception of power that "risks becoming oppression whenever it over-extends itself, whenever - that is - it goes beyond the terms of the contract."[107] Palestinians are continually victimized because without a sovereign territorial state they lack the means to protect themselves from the 'power' of other states. Lack of sovereign state means that Palestinians cannot limit the excesses of 'power' of any Palestinian leadership.

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[106] Said, "Declaration of Independence", 18. Said makes a similar claim in Edward Said. *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994.* (New York: Pantheon, 1994.), xvii.

[107] Foucault, "Two Lectures", 91.

Accordingly, Said faults any 'Western' criticism of nationalism. In *Culture and Imperialism*, for example, he argues that this criticism reflects 'Western' "discomfort with non-Western societies acquiring national independence, which is believed to be 'foreign' to their ethos. Hence the repeated insistence on the *Western* provenance of nationalist philosophies...".[108]

Said quotes a section from *A Passage to India* where E. M. Forster characterizes the membership of a multi-sect Indian nationalist committee as "'tr[ying] to like one another more than came natural to them. As long as someone abused the English, all went well, but nothing constructive had been achieved, and if the English were to leave India, the committee would vanish also.'"[109] To Said, this is evidence of Forster's presumption that as an Englishman, Forster could see that the Indians "were not yet ready for self-rule" because even their committee would have collapsed without the presence of the English.[110] But if nationalism was a form of resistance to British rule, it would be expected that the committee would disband if the British left. Or perhaps Said saw the rise of nationalism and the nation state as a necessary, even essential, stage in a specifically 'Western' notion of the History of human 'development'.

Said is aware of the dangers of essentialized identities. One of the recurrent themes of *Culture and Imperialism* is a rejection of the idea that there can be, for example, 'Germanness', Jewishness, or Africanness.[111] A reason for his rejection of essentialized identities

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[108] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 216.
[109] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 204.
[110] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 205.
[111] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 32.

is that they promote polarizations and exclusiveness. Essentialist stances promote the position that only Iranians, for example, can understand Iranians.[112] Knowing about other people, he argues, is more important than identity.[113] Accordingly, he rejects granting "an ideal and essentially separate status" to women, Blacks, Westerners, and so on, in the production of knowledge.[114]

Despite his emphasis on the "massively knotted", "hybrid", and "impure" character of cultures,[115] and the need to use racial, gender, and national identities as starting points to be quickly discarded,[116] he still relies on ontologies identities to 'ground' his critiques. His criticism of Forster, for example, presumes that 'Indian' is a primary identity and that other identities such as Hindu, Moslem or Parses are merely attributes of an 'Indian' identity. These assumptions essentialize identity and foreclose on any examination, let alone recognition of, the 'identities' which may have existed prior to the constitution of an 'Indian' identity. Furthermore, they disallow any consideration of the relational characteristics of identity, and the possibility that 'Indian' identities would not have existed without the British.

Yet despite Said's account of the constructed nature of the identities that "are quickly left behind",[117] he does not examine how these identities were constructed, except to mention that imperialist

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[112] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 31.
[113] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 299.
[114] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 32.
[115] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 14, 15, 32.
[116] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 336.
[117] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 336.

culture suppressed "authentic elements".[118] The "never said" of his arguments enables his categories to become more difficult to unchallenge. The 'experience' of colonial domination becomes an unproblematic source of knowledge with the proviso that local identity must be transcended.

Moreover, Said does not unambiguously explain how it is possible to represent anything without violence. Is 'Orientalism' an inevitable result of knowledge-power or does it result from particular types of power relationships? If it is inevitable, then what sorts of relations of domination exist within Said's own texts?

Throughout *Culture and Imperialism*, in particular, there appears to be a tension between the goal Said is working towards, and the way in which the implications of some of his arguments risk undermining these goals. He recognizes that certain of his arguments have implications which he finds problematic; but his refusal to examine his own discourse as a site for relations of power-knowledge, results in "his restless and sometimes contradictory shifting of ground [that] can be seen as an attempt to get out of his dilemma."[119] The number of categories and assumptions that Said "cannot do without"[120] in framing his analysis of Orientalism, imperialism, "nativism", or the "human" prefigures what he authorizes to be "effective" solutions to these problems. Consequently

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[118] Benita Parry, "Overlapping Territories and Intertwined Histories: Edward Said's Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism" in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*. (ed.) Michael Sprinker. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 33, quoting Edward Said.
[119] Young, *White Mythologies*, 130.
[120] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 29.

both his categories and solutions reinsert the problems he associates with the authoritarian, exclusive, and closed nature of Orientalism.

The manner in which his earlier examinations of Orientalism, and now of imperialism, are structured both forecloses and enables what are to be authorized as legitimate areas of examination. Foucault argues that discourse, like power, is not simply repressive or negative; it is also positive and productive of knowledge, and not simply for the 'dominant powers'. As a precaution against reinscribing disciplinary practices, Foucault warns in *The Archeology of Knowledge* that it is important to "disconnect the unquestioned continuities" by which discourse, including our own, is organized.[121] The "already-said" that serves as the antecedent "never-said" authorizes what become the "unquestioned continuities".[122] These pre-existing forms of continuity must not be accepted without question. It is necessary to "tear away from them their virtual self-evidence, and to free the problems that they pose; to recognize that they are not the tranquil locus on the basis of which other questions .... may be posed, but that they themselves pose a whole cluster of questions."[123]

Robert Young observes that the problem of closure is fundamental to *Orientalism*:

> Said's hope is to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination involved in the dualist of 'the Occident' and 'the Orient' and by doing so perhaps to eliminate it altogether. But if he shows how Orientalism works by this opposition he does not so much try to undo it as simply deny it, with the result that he repeats the inside/outside structures of dualistic thinking himself. His analysis of the Orientalists takes the form of a series of judgments, according to which

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[121] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (London: Routledge, 1989), 25.
[122] Foucault, *The Archaelogy of Knowledge*, 26.
[123] Foucault, *The Archaelogy of Knowledge*, 26.

each writer is identified in turn as complicit in the process of the intellectual subordination of the East by the West. Said's remorseless drive to judge the texts of Orientalism into a straightforward 'for' and 'against' division leads him to conclude that 'it is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.[124]

The problem of closure, Young emphasizes, is repeated in Said's other texts as has been argued throughout this chapter.

Said writes of his indebtedness to Michel Foucault's writings on issues such as disciplinary practices and power-knowledge. However, although Said makes use of a methodology he mistakenly associates with Foucault, he has not engaged with the larger philosophical enquiry that motivates Foucault to draw on such methods as genealogy as a means of confronting the Hegelian dialectic.[125] An important issue for Foucault is the question of the very possibility of critique, especially because of the interdependence of power and resistance, and the extent to which they are inseparable.[126] For Foucault, as for Nietzsche before him, genealogy is not the ability of producing history from outside power/knowledge but of revealing what is at stake in such an attempt - a revelation which indicates that knowledge is not a struggle for Truth but for power.[127] "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad."[128] Yet Said dismisses this caution as being politically paralyzing.

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[124] Young, *White Mythologies*, 137-38, quoting Said *Orientalism*, 204.
[125] Young, *White Mythologies*, 69-87.
[126] Young, *White Mythologies*, 72-73.
[127] Philip Barker, *Michel Foucault: Subversions of the Subject*. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 66.
[128] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" in *The Foucault Reader*. (ed.) Paul Rabinow. (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 343.

Although Said uses the concept of 'discourse' to analyze Orientalism and to make visible its relations of domination, he does not problematize his own critique in order to examine it for relations of power or the "will to power". "A critique," Foucault says, "is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest."[129] Foucault is aware how difficult it is to say something different and is careful not to claim that he is writing outside the "games of truth". There is no "outside" from which to analyze and critique, no innocent source of knowledge. Equally important for Foucault is the necessary revaluation of one's own theoretical practice as the basis of an intellectual ethics: an ethics that commits one to a continual re-evaluation of one's own work, and an ongoing engagement with 'games of truth'.

> Problematization does not mean the representation of a pre-existing object, nor the creation by discourse of an object which does not exist. It is the whole set of discursive and non-discursive practices which causes something to enter the game of truth and falsity, and constitutes it as an object of thought (whether this be in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc) ... In the first case it was on the whole a question of knowing how one 'governed' the mad; now it is how one 'governs' oneself.[130]

Foucault contends that what becomes categorized as knowledge is constructed according to "rules of formation" of a discursive field.

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[129] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 245, quoting Michel Foucault "Practicing Criticism" in Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings. 1977-1984* (ed.) Lawrence Krintzman. (New York, 1988), 154-155.

[130] Barker, *Michel Foucault: Subversions of the Subject*, 73, quoting Michel Foucault, "Interview, The Regard for Truth" in *Art and Text, Burnout*. (eds.) P. Foss and P. Taylor. 16, 25.

"Discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories."[131] Discursive practices are prescriptive because they designate that which can be legitimately included or excluded without becoming nonsensical. Any person has to conform to these requirements in order to communicate, to be understood, to be accepted and thus to be "in the true". An important political and philosophical implication of this notion of discourse is that "one cannot speak of anything at any time; it is not easy to say something new; it is not enough to open our eyes .... for the new object suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground."[132]

By ignoring both the theoretical questions, and their broader philosophical context, that motivate Foucault's series of experiments and tactical interventions, Said himself undermines the "liberatory" goal that he wants to achieve. Said's reformulation of Foucault's methodology becomes problematic because Said reinscribes the very power-knowledge he criticizes. Said's retention of the 'sovereign' model of power[133] allows him to assume that because the 'amount' of power he 'possesses' is less than the 'Orientalists' he criticizes, this makes it unnecessary for him to problematize his discourse. His insistence that the individual subject is potentially sovereign over

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131 Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews.* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 199.
132 Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth.* (London: Tavistock, 1980), 122, quoting Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du Discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
133 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction: Vol. 1.* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 121.

her/his thoughts enables him to argue that it is possible for 'oppositional' critics to be 'outside' discourse. Furthermore, deployment of the highly contested category of the 'human' provides the criterion he uses to determine which interpretations are non-ethnocentric or non-coercive. He appears to envision a future "human community" 'grounded' on a secure 'innocent knowledge', which will be immune from the contingencies of politics. The ramifications of this are important because of the implications for what is authorized as legitimate forms of non-Orientalist knowledge.

Said's argument that power is involved in knowledge is important. Yet his definition of power seems to blind him to the possibility that his own knowledge is equally implicated with power. He seems to think that a primary problem of Orientalist discourse is unequal power. What he does not consider is that the categories he uses foreclose on other alternatives and reintroduce specifically historical and cultural resolutions to questions about political identity.[134]

Said is inattentive to the issues of power-knowledge he raises because he does not examine what is foreclosed by his own foundational categories. These categories are also used to prop up the primary premises of a "specific version of politics that is shown in its contingency once these premises are problematically theorized".[135] There is a certain irony about Said's categories propping up a specific

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[134] This argument will be examined in greater detail in a discussion about state sovereignty in chapter three.

[135] Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'" in *Feminists Theorize the Political*. (eds.) Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4. This point about a specific version of politics will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

version of politics at the expense of other versions. Said continually stresses the need for critics to become engaged with politics and the 'world'. In fact, Said faults Foucault for his unwillingness to "imagine a future society that conforms to the exigencies of human nature as best we understand them."[136] Categories that Said insists on establishing as unimpeachable foundations are still open questions: What is human nature? And who is the "we" that will decide? Is a representation of "the human" possible that is innocent of the play of power? Or is it another source for relations of domination?

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[136] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 246, quoting Noam Chomsky, *Language and Responsibility*. (New York: Pantheon, 1979), 80.

CHAPTER 2

THE BOUNDARIES OF EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY

Foucault argues that discourse is a system of possibilities for knowledge made up of rules that provides the necessary preconditions for what can be identified as true or false, and as reasonable or unreasonable. Discursive formations enable certain activities while they simultaneously confine activities within marked out boundaries. Foucault underlines how difficult it is to produce a critique that says anything 'new' and does not merely repeat what is "never said". Many of the problems concerning foundational categories which depend on silent essentialist representations as examined in the texts of Edward Said are currently the focus of analysis by contemporary feminists relating to the category of 'women', and will be the focus of analysis in this chapter.

Since the 1980s questions concerning 'differences' among women have become frequent and serious challenges to feminism. The 'subject' of feminism is contested by women who claim that the category of 'women' is normative and exclusionary. These critiques were first articulated by women of colour to address issues of race and class, but were soon extended to questions of sexuality, ethnicity and other forms of diversity.[1] The claim that feminism does not deal adequately with 'difference' challenges the legitimacy of the women's movement to speak for all women. This challenge suggests that questions of "hierarchy and

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[1] Early examples of this critique can be found in Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider.* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984); and Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism" *Feminist Review,* 17:1, 1984, 3-19.

power -- in particular, the power to define -- had to be rethought. Such a challenge initiated a difficult and very often painful examination of the nature of feminism."[2]

A significant theme within feminist literature in the 1980s and 1990s is the attempt to deal with the question of difference while retaining a notion of commonality among women. The difficulty of achieving this paradoxical, even contradictory, goal is summed up by Laura Donaldson: "Feminist theory must accomplish an extremely difficult task, for it must discern the experiential connection that surely exist among women and simultaneously refuse to privilege any particular connection as that which subsumes the rest."[3]

A recent theme is the focus on the question of 'location' or 'positionality', and it is this thematic within feminist standpoint theory that I will explore in order to examine the reformulation of the principles of identity and experience in representational practices. I will argue that reformulating these principles is an indication of important changes within feminist discourse concerning the authorization and the institutionalization of discourse. Questions of 'differences' and inclusion are important; but questions addressing how feminist discourse is authorized, and how it is framed are vital. In order to make this argument I will first critically examine the controversy over the principles of 'identity' and 'experience'. Following this I will analyse how the resolution to this has been framed and what the

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[2] Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit. (eds.), *Knowing Women: Feminism & Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 287.
[3] Laura Donaldson. *Decolonizing Feminism: Race, Gender & Empire-Building*. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 1992), 134-135.

political implications of this resolution are. Finally, I will argue that this resolution suggests that much feminist discourse and practice is an expression of sovereignty, and thus, will remain 'trapped' or 'stalemated' within the problematic of sovereignty. Until this problematic is confronted, feminist discourse and practice risks being less a politics of emancipation and more a politics limited within a 'disciplined' bounded space. Sovereignty, I will argue, may be a move of 'difference', but it is also a move of authority.

While recognizing the problematic character of universalist categories, some feminists argue that it is both possible and important to retain categories of analysis which express a common female experience and that simultaneously recognizes specific 'differences' among 'women'. In place of a stable, coherent and unified identity, women's identities are reformulated as multiple, changing and even contradictory. In spite of the dangers associated with it, some feminists argue that "'the risk of essence may have to be taken'"[4] in order to create a space from which women could speak. Diana Fuss's book *Essentially Speaking* repudiates what she argues are the divisive and depoliticizing consequences of identity politics that conflate identity, experience, and authentic knowledge. Essentialism is not completely rejected by Fuss because it provides an 'essentialist space' from which to theorize. And without this 'space', feminism "will have nothing

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[4] Diana Fuss. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference*. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 18, quoting Stephen Heath. "Difference" *Screen* 19:3, 1978, 50-112. For similar arguments see Alice Jardine. "Men in Feminism: Odor di Uomo Or Compagnons de Route" in *Men in Feminism*. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 58-59; Gayatri Spivak, "In a Word" *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1(Summer), 1989, 124-156; and Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean. *Materialist Feminisms*. (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell 1993), 151.

(nothing, that is, which is stable and secure) upon which to base a politics."[5] Essentialist spaces make feminist theory and practice possible; however to prevent these spaces from 'solidifying' into rigid and self-defeating essences they must be continually assumed and called into question. This "double gesture" provides the 'space' for feminism and prevents it from undermining feminism. Essentialism will be either "conservative" or "radical" depending on "*who* is utilizing it, *how* it is deployed, and *where* its effects are concentrated".[6]

Identity

The thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's, *The Second Sex*, was marked by Audre Lorde's claim that 'white' feminism is 'racist' because it has not dealt with the 'fact' of differences between women. A "sharp and strenuous critique" largely developed by feminists of colour has become more frequent and urgent.[7] In Britain, an important article by Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism", argues that Eurocentric, Western feminism is racist because it assumes that 'white' concerns, theories and practices can be applied to all women.[8]

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[5] Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, 104. For similar arguments see Liz Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics" in *Place and the Politics of Identity*. (eds.) Michael Keith and Steve Pile. (London: Routledge, 1993), 94; and Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory" *Signs* 13:3, 1988, 421.
[6] Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, 20.
[7] Christina Crosby, "Dealing With Differences" in *Feminists Theorize The Political*. (eds.) Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 131.
[8] Amos and Parmar, "Challenging Feminist Imperialism".

Amos and Parmar claim that because of the "straightforward and non-contradictory" way that women's oppression is analyzed that 'white' feminists have an "implicit consensus" over which issues are important and which strategies should be used to deal with them. For instance, because the family is analysed as always oppressive black families are thought to be especially pathological. As a result 'white' feminist theories and practices regarding the family often replicate racist practices similar to those of the State.[9] Moreover, because 'white" women use their own experiences as a standard against which to measure oppression, the consequence of this is a 'white' feminist "hysteria" about arranged marriages, purdah, or female-headed families.[10] To counter this racism, Amos and Parmar argue that only black women can decide which cultural practices must be challenged, accepted, or reformed "depending on [black women's] various perspectives, on [their] on terms and in [their] own culturally specific ways."[11]

Yet this solution is criticized by Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in a general article critical of the basic assumptions of this argument: the notion that difference of race, ethnicity or sexuality are discrete, coherent and absolutely separate, and can be the basis for sovereignty over theory and practice. Instead Martin and Mohanty argue that identity is not stable or pre-given, but fundamentally relational and positional. Accordingly divisions of race, gender, class, ethnicity and sexualities through which identities are

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[9] Amos and Parmar, "Challenging Feminist Imperialism", 11.
[10] Amos and Parmar, "Challenging Feminist Imperialism", 11.
[11] Amos and Parmar, "Challenging Feminist Imperialism", 15.

constructed, and through which the identity of others are constructed, are relational and not essential determinants.[12]

Arguments such as the one made by Amos and Parmar which claim that different types of identity or experience need "independent homelands" within feminism are challenged by Martin and Mohanty because "absolutist" identities are "based on exclusion and secured by terror."[13] Absolutist definitions exercise violence by creating *insides* and *outsides* that authorize which identities are legitimate.[14] These claims are also ahistorical because this absolutist model of identity is inattentive to the context and destabilizing effects of history. The term 'woman', Mohanty argues, does not automatically provide the basis of unity. The experience of being a woman is less important than the meanings attached to being one at various historical moments. Once the unity of woman is shattered, so too is the notion of experience that attributes a direct and unmediated connection between experience and knowledge. However, experience and identity are not categories to be disgarded because of the "power and appeal of these connections".[15] Instead they must be situated in the "politics of location".[16] "[E]xperience must be historically interpreted and theorized if it is to become the basis of feminist solidarity and struggle ..."[17] Absolutist

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[12] Chandra Mohanty extends these arguments in subsequent articles she has written. For example, see "Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience" in *Destablilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates.* (eds.) Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips. (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).
[13] Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" in *Feminist Studies/ Critical Studies.* (ed.) Teresa de Laurentis. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 197.
[14] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters", 85.
[15] Martin and Mohanty, "Feminist Politics", 200.
[16] Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters", 89.
[17] Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters", 88.

notions of identity are depoliticizing because self-reflection and a consciousness of difference are sacrificed to the "ultimate critic or judge" established by the authenticity of personal experience. Unity among feminists is undermined because it is assumed to be a product of 'sameness' rather that struggle.[18]

While feminists are largely responsive to charges of implicit racism, however, the argument that only black women, for instance, are in a legitimate position to decide on what constitutes an adequate response to potentially oppressive conditions 'black' women experience lead to often passionate and bitter debates. The question of who can legitimately speak for whom is highly contested because of its immediate political implications.[19]

Liz Bondi argues that "identity politics" began, in part, as a solution to the exclusiveness of 'women' as an 'essential' or stable category.[20] Multiple feminist identities develops through a process of "hyphenation" as women identify themselves as black-feminists, working-class feminists, lesbian-feminists and so on.[21] But instead of greater unity and coalition building the results are often bitter and acrimonius divisions. The assumption that "experience has the quality of irreducible essence" leads to a position that "authenticates knowledge in terms of personal experience... Consequently, anyone who criticizes

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[18] Martin and Mohanty, "Feminist Politics", 210.
[19] For example, see Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, 117; Gayatri Spivak. *Post-Colonial Critic.* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 59-66 passim; Landry and MacLean, *Materialist Feminisms*, 54; as well the essays which focus on the role of men within feminist discourse. For example, see articles in *Men in Feminism. (eds.) Alice Jardine and Paul Smith.* (New York: Routledge, 1989), especially Alice Jardine, "Men in Feminism: Odor di Uomo or Compagnons de Route?"; Stephen Heath, "Male Feminism" and Paul Smith, "Men in Feminism: Men and Feminist Theory".
[20] Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", 93.
[21] Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", 93.

knowledge generated in this way is liable to be accused of attacking the person from whom it originated."[22]

Critics of "identity politics" argue that rather than acting as a solution to the problem of exclusion, these "hypenated" identities rely on pre-given categories of class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. Identity thus becomes something to be 'uncovered' or acknowledged instead of something constructed and unstable. Bondi argues that the chief difference between "identity politics" and "liberal humanism" is that "identity politics" posit many identities rather than just one universal (male, white, 'western') identity.[23] To reiterate Mohanty's argument: "Identity politics", moreover, depends on a "exercise of violence in creating a legitimate *inside* and illegitimate *outside* in the name of identity".[24]

Questions about identity politics have led to critical examinations of theories of the 'subject', and many feminists have moved away from notions of fixed and unified identities. Instead women's identities are theorized as fragmentary, contradictory, and unsettled, and which argue subjectivity and identity are always constituted relationally.

A major focus of Sandra Harding's *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* is the task of retheorizing and reformulating the issues of experience and identity in order to avoid universalist pretensions in the category of 'women'. Harding, too, rejects the notion that women's identities are essential, coherent or

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[22] Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", 95.
[23] Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", 93.
[24] Mohanty, "Feminist Encounters", 85.

stable, arguing instead that women's identities are multiple, contradictory and fractured. The *fact* of women's differences would become a major plank in her argument that to begin thinking or research with women's lives produces less partial and more objective knowledge. Women are part of every culture, race, class and sexuality and hence, differ not only from men, but also from other women. These differences will be a strength of standpoint feminism because it precludes basing knowledge claims on a small dominant group as has been the case until recently.[25]

Harding is insistent throughout her text that feminism's strength is grounded in the fact that women are found in every social strata, race, and culture thus, to start research from women's lives would necessarily be inclusive. Feminism must be at centre of the concerns of each movement that seek progressive change (peoples of colour, gays and lesbians, the Left, peace movements and so on), and each of them must move feminist concerns to its centre.[26]

Harding admits that there is a logic in standpoint theory that can lead to essentializing women because it "tends to center a difference between the genders at the ontological (and, consequently, scientific, epistemological, and political) expense of clearly focusing on difference between women or between men in different races, classes, and

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[25] Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking From Women's Lives*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 174; Central to Sandra Harding's argument is the claim that only members of the "ruling group", i.e. privileged white, Western men, "are permitted to elevate the perspectives from their lives to uniquely legitimate ones". Rather than being "the purportedly universal perspective" as has been claimed, it is "in fact local, historical, and subjective". Harding, *Whose Science?*, 273.

[26] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 156.

cultures."[27] But standpoint feminism does have the resources to combat any essentializing tendencies by recognizing, for instance, that knowledge is socially situated; by insisting on causal symmetry in explanations; and by placing the observer, the institutions of observation and the subject on the same critical plane.[28] Moreover, richer conceptualization and analyses of the "interlocking relationships" between sexism, heterosexism, racism, and class oppression will provide better knowledge and combat essentialism.[29] She also urges the development of a "single theory" to integrate race, class, and gender issues in order to transform the separate theories of the origins and natures of these problems.[30]

The one aspect of identity that does not get critically examined within Harding's texts or within standpoint feminism in general is the basic assumption of sexual difference. Despite extensive examination of the category 'women', a similar analysis of the category 'woman' is remarkably absent in recent literature. Yet if the category of 'women' is problematic, surely this would mean that 'woman' is equally problematic. If gender is examined as an effect of juridical and discursive power, then the notion of sexual difference would become problematic and the links that are assumed to exist, however precariously, between identity and experience, and between women as a group, would be difficult to sustain. Indeed, as Judith Butler argues, it may be the case that fixing on representation as the sole focus of feminist politics actually undermines feminism, and establishes sexual

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[27] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 178.
[28] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 178.
[29] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 178.
[30] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 214.

difference as a disciplinary power to reinforce the category of 'woman'.[31] These questions will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

Experience

Experience is reformulated by standpoint feminists so that the emphasis is placed on it being the grounds of *learned* rather than *spontaneous* knowledge. This change is crucial for Harding and other feminists because by reformulating experience in this manner it deals with the contentious and divisive issues about what some have called the "limits" of identity politics; in particular, the question of authenticity. Harding argue we must be able to decide the validity of a knowledge claim apart from who spoke it.[32]

Oppression, Harding emphasized, does not automatically provide the grounds for producing less distorted knowledge. A feminist standpoint is a socially produced position -- an achieved position -- and so is not necessarily immediately available to all women. Standpoint theory held that "actual experiences often lead to distorted perceptives and understandings because a male supremacist social order arranges our lives in ways that hide their real nature and causes. .... [F]eminist analysis is needed to provide the tools" in order to provide less distorted knowledge.[33] The logic of the position that insists that it is due to their uniquely female experiences that only women can become

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[31] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 6.
[32] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 269.
[33] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 282.

feminists and generate knowledge can lead equally to the position that only the 'Third World' can produce anti-imperialist knowledge.[34] The implications of this argument mean that Harding, for example, would not be able to legitimately address issues of imperialism or race. Feminists, she claims, are actually in the forefront of addressing issues of racism.[35]

Harding insists that for a position to count as a feminist standpoint it had to begin in the objective location of women's lives. Equally, she stressed that the authority for a standpoint lay not in women's authentic renditions of their lives but in the "subsequently articulated observations and theory about the rest of nature and social relations -- observations and theory that start out from, that look at the world from the perspective of, women's lives."[36]

Two issues make this reformulation of experience problematic. First, there is the question of the material link between feminist discourse and women's lives. Rosemary Hennessy argues that experience as a category of analysis is reformulated by standpoint feminists because of the recognition of the inadequacies of an empiricist notion of experience that relies on an unmediated understanding of experience. But the material connection between a feminist perspective and its starting point in women's lives is invariably not explained.[37] Sandra Harding claims that human knowledge is grounded in complex ways in human lives and experience and is the source of knowledge in modern western

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[34] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 278.
[35] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 176.
[36] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 124.
[37] Rosemary Hennessy, "Women's Lives/Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique" Hypatia 8:1, 1993, 15.

societies.[38] She claims that it is specifically *women's* lives and experiences that will produce knowledge that benefits everyone, and not just a minority. Harding's argument depends on the assumption that it is possible to discover "innocent knowledge [that is] some sort of truth which can tell us how to act in the world in ways that benefit or are for the (at least ultimate) good of all."[39] Moreover, her entire argument that "innocent knowledge" is possible depends on what is still an open question: the category of 'women'. Kathy Ferguson points out that arguments such as Harding's that want to put 'women at the centre' do not explain "why any group would seek to detroy the centre once they have occupied it ..."[40] Neither placing 'women' at the 'centre', nor her arguments about the need for 'objectivity' and "standards of competency" could resolve the conflict between knowledge and power.

Furthermore by emphasizing the *learned* aspect of experience, and arguing that experience can "lie", Harding establishes a difference between women and feminists. This points to another problem that emerges in her attempts to guarantee her proposed resolution to power-knowledge conflicts: If experience can "lie"[41] then feminists must become the adjudicators of truth by virtue of their ability to provide accurate, objective, and less partial interpretations of the meaning of women's experience. For Harding feminists fulfill the crucial role of producing knowledge and guaranteeing that it is free from conflicts

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[38] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 270.
[39] Jane Flax, "The End of Innocence" in *Feminists Theorize the Political*. (eds.) Judith Butler and Joan Scott. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 447.
[40] Kathy Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Feminist Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3.
[41] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 286.

between power and knowledge. Rosi Braidotti declares that "feminism requires both an epistemological and a political distinction between 'woman' and 'feminist'".[42] She elaborates this point by arguing that "the recognition of a bond of commonality among women is the starting point for feminist consciousness in that it seals a pact among women."[43] The distinction between 'women' and 'feminists' is not an articulation of an 'innocent' statement of the obvious because this distinction depends on what is still an open question: the category of 'women'.

Experience on its own, then, becomes inadequate but instead becomes the "material" of feminist thought.[44] This seems to indicate a shift away from experience itself to the interpretation of experience. Thus the role of the feminist as the interpreter of experience becomes crucial for the production of feminist knowledge. The 'feminist' becomes the 'expert' who 'learns' to give meaning to experience. But what or who authorizes this 'expert'? Harding's argument claims it is because their techniques for producing this knowledge meet certain standards of adequacy. But the effect of this is to establish in advance what is considered to be legitimate knowledge.

This distinction between the feminist and 'women' is also problematic because it is a move that disempowers women. It claims that only a feminist can adequately represent women because only feminists can guarantee that the knowledge they produce is free from being implicated with power, particularly patriarchial power. The

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[42] Rosi Braidotti, "Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject" *Hypatia* 8:1, 1993, 8.
[43] Braidotti, "Embodiment", 12.
[44] Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", 95. Harding, *Whose Science?*, 286; see also 270.

transference of authority from 'women' to feminists depend on taking that which does not exist except as a fiction -- the boundaries of the category of women -- and transforming it into the foundation of the sovereign authority of the feminist.

This privileging of the role of the feminist in the production of feminist discourse leads inevitably to controversy about what it means to *be* a feminist. This controversy has become especially contentious in the wake of Foucault's general critique of the "universal intellectual" and Judith Butler's specific critique of the "I" position both of which challenge the assumption that anybody can be a 'free subject' who has somehow escaped the rules of the dominant discursive formations. Foucault contests the notion of an intellectual who has access to some neutral 'location' that allows the intellectual to escape the rules of the dominant discursive formation. Claims that escape from the discursive formation is possible are self-serving illusions and leave unproblematized those categories that are argued to be absolutely necessary. The intellectual is thereby set up as a transcendental 'other' who has escaped the relations of power and can act as the vanguard for the less knowledgeable.

Yet this distinction between the more and the less knowledgeable is troubling when politics is defined as the management of problems, and knowledge as that which is used to solve them.[45] Furthermore it does not engage with the politics of how something becomes 'visible', in other words, an examination of the body of rules that enables something to become the object of a discourse, and thus constitutes the conditions

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[45] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 304.

of their historical appearance.[46] Experience defined as 'fact' or 'material' is often expressed as a means of making 'visible' the relations of domination that 'shapes' women's lives. But deciding on what constitutes the subject of experience and the interpretive significance of 'experience', has to engage with the critical function of what and how something is made 'visible'. Julie Stephens comments in her examination of feminist ethnography that the "never said" enables certain categories of experience to appear as self-evident and beyond question.[47] Consequently, ethnographical narratives of 'tribal women' make it possible for them to stand for anything: "utopian natural democracy, sexual freedom or devastating experience".[48] This raises the important question of how conflicting interpretations and theories about the lessons of experience are to be adjudicated.

My reading of Harding's arguments in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, suggests that Harding would defend a distinction between 'women' and feminists by arguing that she has merely set up "standards of adequacy" for feminist knowledge claims.[49] The question of how discourse is authorized takes on importance if "standards of adequacy" are not 'beyond politics'. This is especially the case if the source of human knowledge is, as Harding claims, "grounded in complex ways in human lives and experience". Indeed her reliance on 'objectivity' is an attempt to establish in advance a specific version of politics, a

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[46] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (London: Routledge, 1989), 48.
[47] Julie Stephens, "Feminist Fictions: A Critique of the Category 'Non-Western Woman' in Feminist Writings on India" *Subaltern Studies VI*. (ed.) Ranajit Guha. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 93.
[48] Stephens, "Feminist Fictions", 121.
[49] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 305.

version of politics that is identified with problem-solving activities which depend on 'concrete' or 'real' answers in order to diagnose and solve problems.[50] The effect of establishing this as the sole acceptable version of the political allows Harding to limit acceptance to only those theories, practices, or knowledge-claims that have paid the entry fee of internalizing a scienticized politics.[51]

Harding underlines the need to have "guiding principles" to assist feminists to make the 'correct' decisions when uncertain about which are the best solutions to a problem.[52] Harding insists that once the false, distorted, or partial understandings and practices are uncovered and resolved some basic 'core' will be found which will provide the 'core' for feminist knowledge.[53]

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[50] Kirstie McClure, "The Issue of Foundations: Scientized Politics, Politicized Science, and Feminist Critical Practice" in *Feminists Theorize the Political*. (eds.) Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 344.

[51] McClure, "The Issue of Foundations", 358.

[52] In order to illustrate the crucial need for "feminist justificatory strategies", Harding uses Jane Flax's experiences as a therapist, in which she discussed the problem of uncertainty in knowing which theories are best for her distressed patients. Sandra Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques" in *Feminism/Postmodernism*. (ed.) Linda Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 89. Harding wants to get rid of unhelpful uncertainties that hinder operating in the 'real' world. This is one of the reasons she is critical of poststructuralism. "The poststructualist stance raises important issues. Nevertheless, one must recognize that it is unlikely to satisfy policymakers, who need to know what the best assessments are today of 'how the world is' and 'what we should do about it' as they attempt to remedy and forestall the damage done to women's lives by sexual violence, the health-care system, the court system, dangerous technologies, and a profit-oriented economy." Harding, "*Whose Science?*", 304.

[53] For example, see Harding's claims that knowledge need not be based on "truth' but rather on "best claims", a formulation that draws on Thomas Kuhn's arguments in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) which suggests that it is "better to conceptualize the history of the growth of scientific knowledge as progress away from falsity rather than toward truth." Harding, *Whose Science?*, 185.

Harding rejects an essential identity for 'women', but her arguments depend on essentializing identity and experience. Moreover, the political effect of deploying foundational categories such as 'objectivity', 'standards of adequacy', and the 'less false' means that she establishes in advance what is to be legitimate and unchallengeable discourse. 'Objectivity' she claims is crucial if women are to achieve progress. Without objectivity any progress will be impossible. Indeed she insists that to be a feminist requires acceptance of the promise of the Enlightenment: "[H]ow could a feminist theory completely take leave of Enlightenment assumptions and still remain feminist?"[54] Without objectivity it would be impossible to distinquish between what ought and what ought not to happen. Moreover, it is needed to distinquish feminist from non-feminist knowledge, but also to judge between competing feminist knowledge claims.[55]

By establishing 'objectivity' as a foundational category, Harding entrenches rather than destablizes ethnocentrism. Like Said, she does not examine the exclusionary operations that constitute any category, or even a 'feminist standpoint'. Like Said, Harding takes her key categories for granted and does not acknowledge that these categories express specific cultural and historical resolutions rather than transcendental 'realities'. Another similarity that Harding shares with Edward Said is her unease about the tension between the 'universal' goal of 'emancipatory' knowledge and the specificity of local cultural customs and experiences.

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[54] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 186.
[55] Harding, *Whose Science?*, 160-161.

Authorizing Discourse

A major tension within standpoint feminism concerns the category of 'identity'. While the category of woman is defined as inclusive, the logic of identity also authorizes a multiplicity of identities. "Identity politics too often becomes mosaic politics; at its worst it devolves towards an unseemly nationalism of competings isms, - a geopolitics of identity which is still being fought out."[56] The problem seems to arise out of an unproblematized assumption that there is an identity "before the law" characterized as 'sexual difference', a 'core self', the 'embodied knower', 'woman', the 'body', or 'location'. These categories are the 'space' that has to exist so that one could "impose some order on the seemingly chaotic *melange* of social difference and relations."[57] These identities are claimed to exist prediscursively and are the 'spaces' on which 'culture', 'power', or 'politics' are inscribed. As such they are the 'grounds' on which feminist discourse needs be to established as the 'space from which to speak'. These spaces are theorized as multiple, unstable, and contradictory as a means to escape the dangers of essentialism. However, Smith and Katz argue that the use of spatial metaphors is problematic because it presumes that space is not problematic.[58]

What makes these metaphors attractive and contribute to their widespread use is the assumption that space is a *priori* and infinite, an

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[56] Neil Smith and Cindy Katz, "Grounding Metaphor: Towards a Spatialised Politics" in *Place and the Politics of Identity. (eds.)* Michael Keith and Steve Pile. (London: Routledge, 1993), 77.
[57] Smith and Katz, "Grounding Metaphor", 69.
[58] Smith and Katz, "Grounding Metaphor", 75.

'emptiness', or container to be filled, and hence something which has an 'inside' and an 'outside'.[59] The 'common sense' notion of space depends on a very specific representation of space: *absolute space*. "Absolute space refers to a conception of space as a field, container, a co-ordinate system of discrete and mutually exclusive locations."[60]

Space is a category that is not 'natural' but has a history. From the early modern period absolute space has been established as one of the grounds for hegemonic social, political, cultural and economic practices. The 'world' is conceived as a space that is divisible into sovereign states in which particular identities could develop, but are bound together within the framework of the 'human'. Within the particular space of the state, the basic social unit is the individual who can be 'free' provided the basic framework of the sovereign space of the state is unchallenged. This does not always happen as is shown by the development of nationalism and ethnic identities which demand their own sovereign space to express their own identity. The number of groups identities that demand sovereign spaces in which they too can be 'free' is an ongoing expression of the principle of sovereignty. However, what some critics consider to be a demand for fundamental 'human rights' is seen by other critics as a process leading to a 'balkanization'. In other words, this is another manifestation of the difficulty in resolving the relationship between who 'we' of a particular identity are and the relationship this 'we' will have with other 'we's'.

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[59] The following section on spatial metaphors draws from the article, "Grounding Spatial Metaphors" by Neil Smith and Cindi Katz.
[60] Smith and Katz, "Grounding Metaphor", 75.

Uncritical reliance on this 'space' of 'representation' leads to some of the tensions and impasses evident in questions about the politics of representation. So-called 'identity politics' is attacked because it is claimed that the establishment of separate and sovereign spaces is divisive because it undermines notions of 'commonality' among 'women'. The notion of 'difference' itself is considered to be benign and acceptable, but only as long as it is not articulated as the grounds for a *particular* sovereignty. If it does demand sovereignty it is argue to be divisive, exclusive, balkanizing and threatens to make feminism weak and susceptible to internal and external dangers. Identity itself is not the problem, but rather, identity 'grounded' in notions of sovereignty as an expression of absolute space. The shift to multiple, fractured, contradictory identities is seen as a 'solution' to the divisiveness of identity as claim to sovereignty politics. However, this solution is problematic once the unexamined metaphors are understood to reinscribe fixity. 'Women's' identities may be multiple, contradictory and so on, but *within* the boundaries of absolute space. The political effects of this is the reification of binary gender relations that depend on stabilising their binary appearance as the grounds of politics, rather than the effects of politics.[61] Furthermore the category of 'women' becomes the foundational authority for legitimating what counts as feminist discourse and who counts as a feminist.

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[61] Judith Butler "Gender Trouble, Feminists Theory and Psychoanalysis" in *Feminism/Postmodernism. (ed.) Linda Nicholson.* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 339.

Neil Smith and Cindi Katz provide a very useful analysis of the political implications of the spatial metaphors in social and cultural theory, and the way in which "cruder versions of standpoint theory" or "perspectival difference" never question the absoluteness of geographical space and therefore, "the political ramifications filter back to infect the map of the social: social location, inherently fluid, is inadvertently mapped as absolute."[62]

Adrienne Rich's notion of the "politics of location", which conceptualizes gendered social location starting from the "political geography of the female body", is cited by Smith and Katz as an "elegant accomplishment" because it provides an inclusive space for women while it simultaneously maintains "the relationality of social identity without slipping into formless relativism, and at the same time disarranges the received fixity of social *and* geographical locations."[63] What makes this "elegant accomplishment" possible is the "political geography of the female body". However, Smith's and Katz's argument that Adrienne Rich's formulation of the "politics of location" is problematic if this space of the female body is not a 'matter' to be taken for granted as a grounds 'beyond politics', then this "elegant accomplishment" becomes yet another insertion of absolute space. A conception of space, moreover, that is connected to power and on which "a wider web of social, economic, military and cultural relationships were modelled."[64] Moreover, it acts as an example of disciplinary powers used to patrol the boundaries of discourse.

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62 Smith and Katz, "Grounding Metaphor", 77.
63 Smith and Katz, "Grounding Metaphor", 77.
64 Smith and Katz, "Grounding Metaphor", 76.

The 'female body' can be problematized in at least two ways: first, as the seemingly neutral 'matter' of nature on which culture is inscribed; and secondly, by examining what exactly is meant by gender. This raises the unexamined assumption that there is a 'subject', 'core', or 'space' who stands 'before' the law, awaiting representation. Judith Butler says this "fictive foundation" .... "might be understood as a contemporary trace of the state of nature hypothesis ...".[65] I will extend this by arguing that what makes this "fictive foundation" possible, in part, is an unexamined use of spatial metaphors that rely on notions of absolute space - a space that is supposedly empty that can be filled with 'difference' thereby assuring that the category of 'women' is inclusive. The category of 'women' is supposed to be non-prescriptive, a "vacant lot where different women can play with their subjectivity."[66]

But what if this "fictive foundation", this "space from which to speak" is not an innocent "vacant lot" in which to play? What if "the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation?"[67] And what if the 'body' is not just a simple form of 'matter'? These are critical questions "because juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not 'show' once the juridical structure of politics has been established."[68] Thus by assuming that an "unwritten space" existed that is prior to politics that will be the 'material' of discourse disregards the exclusionary

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65 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 3.
66 Bradotti "Embodiment", 5, 9.
67 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2
68 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2.

practices that enable "juridical power inevitably 'produces' what it claims merely to represent."[69]

To problematize the 'body', to argue that it is constructed is not to say "that words alone ha[ve] the power to craft bodies from their own linquistic substance."[70] Moreover, the word 'construction' itself needs to be examined for the 'taken-for-grantedness' packaged into the way understanding of 'construction' are framed.[71] Construction usually implies that whatever has been made is artificial and dispensible; something that has been made according to a particular expression of 'interest', 'will', and thus subject to the vagaries of 'power' and 'history'. Those categories, practices, and objects that are 'fundamental' and without which we cannot do, think, or be free are treated as given or 'natural', not made, and thus are characterized as 'essential' or 'transcendental'. Such is the understanding of 'justice', 'emancipation', the 'body', and 'sexual difference' as the fundamental expressions of the 'inescapable' material differences between 'men' and 'women'.

Judith Butler argues that:

> what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect. And there will be no way to understand 'gender' as a cultural construct which is imposed upon the surface of matter, understood either as 'the body' or its given sex. Rather, once 'sex' itself is understood in its normativity, the materiality of the body will not be thinkable apart from the materialization of that regulatory norm. 'Sex' is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of

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[69] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2.
[70] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), x.
[71] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 7-10. See also David Rapport Lachterman. *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity*. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 1-24.

the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for the life within the domain of cultural intelligibility.[72]

The importance of Butler's rethinking the body as something that is not assumed by a subject, but instead that the subject is formed by the process of assuming a sex, and thus is linked to the question of identification, is that it makes it problematic to argue that the body provides an inclusive site for the category of 'women'. The materiality of the body and the coherence of gender operates not as the grounds of politics but as its effect.[73]

Moreover, what, she asks, is left of 'sex' once it assumes its social character as gender?

> If gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not *accrue* social meanings as additive properties but, rather, *is replaced by* the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces 'sex', the mark of its full substantiation into gender or what, from a materialist point of view, might constitute a full *de*substantiation.[74]

The Discourse of Danger

A significant theme within feminist discourse is the need for "investments", "commitments" and a "stake in the game" that will protect feminist discourse from both internal and external threats.[75] These

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[72] Butler, *Bodies that Matter,* 2.

[73] Judith Butler makes this argument with specific reference to gender; I extend it to include the materiality of the body. Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse" , 324.

[74] Butler, *Bodies that Matter,* 5.

[75] Susie Tharu "Response to Julie Stephens" in *Subaltern Studies VI,* (ed.) Ranajit Guha. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 130. See also Susan Bordo, "Feminism, Postmodernism and Gender-Scepticism" in *Feminism/ Postmodernism.* (ed.) Linda Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 151. She argues that it is no coincidence that just as feminists have a "foothold" within institutions of power that scepticism about the analytic category of 'gender' has developed. "Could gender scepticism

"investments" in feminism are also seen as enabling. Yet commitments to strategic essentialism as a means to maintain "a space from which to speak" are problematic because they deploy the 'effects' of power as the 'grounds' for politics. Strategic essentialism thus becomes a strategic move of sovereignty. By remaining within the bounds of absolute space the theorist of identity inadvertently creates herself as the sovereign of the limits of identity.[76] These investments 'police' feminist discourse by classifying certain questions, scripts, or possibilities as 'illegitimate', 'impractical', or even 'dangerous'.

A theory of identity that rejects the boundaries of absolute space is argued to be too flexible to have any meaning at all.[77] Consequently, it would lead to a form of "paralysis" and would undermine the effectiveness of emancipatory politics.[78] But what does not get asked is how an *a priori* and unexamined definition of politics forecloses on anything that seems at 'odds' with it. Thus only feminist

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..."", she warns, "now be operating in the service of the reproduction of white, male knowledge/power." Nancy Hartsock makes a similar argument about the importance of 'bottom lines', in this instance, the 'subject' and a specific notion of 'power' in "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?" in *Feminism/Postmodernism. (ed.) Linda Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990).* Sandra Harding stresses the importance of Enlightenment categories in reply to an article by Jane Flax critical of these categories in feminist analysis. See Sandra Harding, "Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critiques" in *Feminism/Postmodernism. (ed.) Linda Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990).* For examples of foundational categories that act as 'bottom lines' see also Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", 94; Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism", 421; Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), xii.

[76] I am extending an argument made by Judith Butler who says that if one frames in advance what will be the acceptable preconditions of coalition politics these preconditions will actually undermine this goal. Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 14.

[77] For examples of this argument see Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", 94; Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism", 421; Braidotti, "Embodiment", 6.

[78] Bondi, "Locating Identity Politics", 96.

discourse that has demonstrated adherence to a particular "will to truth" will be authorized. Consequently, "something without which we cannot do anything"[79] is turned into a 'bottom line' rather than as an opportunity to 'think again'.

The rejection of subjectivity or the category of 'woman' is also seen as a threat because it "colludes with the liberal generic human thesis."[80] The idea of androgeny that "underneath we are all the same" means that "there lies no natural core to build on or liberate or maximize."[81] Androgeny is also a threat because, without firm foundations on which to build feminist subjectivities, it leaves feminism defenseless against the threat of male domination.[82]

Thus the constitution of the category of 'women' depends on the corollary of lack or absence in order to define its boundaries. Judith Butler uses the notion of abjection to designate zones of "uninhabitability [which] will constitute the defining limit of the

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[79] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 27, quoting Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "In a Word", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1 (Summer), 1989.
[80] Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism", 421.
[81] Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism", 421.
[82] See David Campbell, "Global Inscriptions: How Foreign Policy Constitutes the United States." *Alternatives* 15:3, 1990, 263-286; in particular, 266, where he argues that "meaning and identity are, therefore, always the consequence of a relationship between the self and the other that emerges through the imposition of an interpretation rather than being the product of uncovering an exclusive domain with its own preestablished identity." And "While the precise form and content of the identities of these domains is dependent on specific historical contexts, we can say that identity in the realm of global politics can be understood as the outcome of exclusionary practices in which resistant elements to a secure identity on the inside are linked through a discourse of *danger* with threats identified and located on the outside. This demarcation is achieved through an inscription of danger on ambiguity in such a way that the differences within are transformed into differences between." (italics in original), 274, he argues: "Establishing and maintaining the dominance of a particular enframing of humanity required the transfer of the differences within to differences between."

subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which - and by virtue of which - the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life."[83] In this sense, androgeny and its ever present threat of male dominance serves as feminism's 'abject' Other. The domains of exclusion reveals the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when elaborated for emancipatory purposes. An ironic consequence of the insistence of the categories of women/woman is that it might reinforce disciplinary powers that constitute gender as the effects of power. Paradoxically, unless the risk of unbounded categories of identities is undertaken, feminist investments in the politics of identity might have unexpected returns.

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[83] Butler, Bodies that Matter, 3.

CHAPTER 3

ON THE NAKEDNESS OF EMPERORS AND EMPRESSES

The Ventriloquist's Dilemma

Knowledge is a consequence of the "imposition of an interpretation rather than being the product of uncovering an exclusive domain with its own preestablished identity."[1] The 'human' or 'women' are categories of knowledge that have no essential identity prior to the imposition of specific historical and cultural constructions of meaning and identity. Edward Said's and contemporary feminist critiques of representational politics challenge the specific identities imposed on 'Orientals' and 'women' because alternative - and it is argued less coercive - identities are marginalized. Said argues that the 'West' represented the 'Orient' in such a way that the 'West' could justify its coercive relationship with the 'Orient'. Similarly, constituting feminist theory and practice around the silent category of 'Universal (white) woman' serves to impose and reinforce a single and coercive identity on all women. "The idea that anyone could speak for one Woman and all women has become increasingly transparent, but how to speak without the comfort of a preliminary gesture toward the shared ground of women's common oppressions is, however, unresolved."[2]

The difficulty that contemporary feminism and Edward Said confront is challenging, but not re-establishing, particular hegemonic

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[1] David Campbell, "Global Inscription: How Foreign Policy Constitutes the United States", *Alternatives* 15:3, 1990, 266.
[2] Elspeth Probyn, "Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local" in *Feminism/Postmodernism*. (ed.) Linda Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 176.

representational practices. Meaning and identity are inevitably constituted through a series of exclusions. "The imposition of an interpretation on the ambiguity and contingency of social life always results in an other's being marginalized."[3] To understand something inevitably means a particular meaning has been imposed.[4] To argue that something has a particular meaning automatically excludes other meanings. The majority of debate within any 'society' consists of various degrees of disagreement about the meaning imposed on something.[5]

Moreover, the categories of analysis used to impose meaning are part of a complex network of categories and assumptions. The impossibility of an 'innocent' standpoint undermines the Enlightenment promise that a reconciliation between 'knowledge' and 'power' is possible. "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth."[6] The unavoidable danger of reimposing relations of domination confronts every challenge of the 'status quo' by 'progressive politics'.

The limitations of the "archive" we draw from to understand something restricts how we come to understand it. The significance for Foucault of J.L. Borges's Chinese encyclopedia is that it clearly underlines the limitations of our own "codes of knowledge". The classification scheme of the Chinese encyclopedia shatters "our" preconceived understandings of intelligibility. The 'unintelligibility'

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[3] Campbell, "Global Inscription", 265-266.
[4] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 145.
[5] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 145.
[6] Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures", in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings: 1972-1977*. (ed.) Colin Gordon. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 93.

of the classification of animals in the Chinese encyclopedia to a 'modern', 'Western' observer demonstrates "the limitation of our own [system of thought], the stark impossibility of thinking *that*. But what is it impossible to think, and what kind of impossibility are we faced with here?"[7]

Foucault has stressed the difficulty in saying anything 'new'. The unavailability of a standpoint outside the grid of power/knowledge means the production of 'truth' is always associated with the exercise of 'power'. Accordingly, a

> critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest.[8]

Lata Mani's analysis of *satin* (or widow burning) in India can be used as an example of the limitations of our own system of thought which make it difficult to think of *satin* except in terms of 'culture' or 'oppression'. Mani attempts to speak the 'truth' about *sati*; however, because the categories of knowledge she draws upon to "speak the truth" are part of an "archive" of power/knowledge, the 'truth' she speaks is as ideological and as potentially coercive as the male Indian national and Orientalist discourses she criticizes.

Several issues are explored in my examination of Lata Mani's arguments about *sati*. These include an implicitly stated essentialized

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[7] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), xv.
[8] David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 245, quoting Michel Foucault "Practicing Criticism" in Michel Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984 (ed.) Lawrence Krintzman. (New York, 1988), 154-5.

'fear of death' that she uses as the 'truth' upon which she grounds her analysis, and her attempt to reconcile the general theories of feminism with the particular concerns and strategies of Indian feminists. Mani's analysis of *sati* also underlines Rajeswari Rajan Sunder's point that feminists often take away women's subjectivity from them in order to give it back.[9] In Mani's case this takes the form of defining in advance which 'acts' will be classified as 'true' acts of subjectivity.

Mani's examination of *sati* draws on both the analytic strategies of Edward Said's arguments about Orientalist productions of knowledge and also the categories of standpoint feminism. 'Putting women at the centre' of her analysis is Mani's key strategic move for analyzing *sati*. Her work can be used as an example to determine whether the stance she takes enables her to produce more "objective" knowledge about *sati*. Knowledge about it produced by colonial administrators, missionaries, "indigenous elites", or male Indian nationalists is profoundly flawed, she argues, because the concerns of women are marginalized. Rather than being the 'subject' of the analysis, the *sati* becomes emblematic of other concerns. Mani wants to speak on behalf of the *sati* rather than using them solely as an excuse to advance other matters.

Rajaswari Rajan Sunder argues that Mani is "motivated by a concern to" 'know' the subject of *sati*" and is "frustrated by the unavailability of records of women's consciousness."[10] In her article, "Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception",

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[9] Rajaswari Rajan Sunder, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender Culture and Postcolonialism*. (London: Routledge, 1993), 4-5.
[10] Rajan Sunder, *Real and Imagined Women*, 54. She also argues that "there are suggestions that Mani's project would be the restoration of 'full' subjectivity to the woman through more assidious historical research." 55.

her specific focus is directed at two areas in need of further examination: a notion of 'subjectivity' as it relates to questions of agency; and 'positionality' as it relates to questions of strategy. A major concern is the need for better and more complex theories of women's agency in order to produce a counter-narrative to the scenario of rescue."[11] Central to Mani's work is the issue of subjectivity because questions about women's agency are "treacherous" to an analysis of *sati*. She points out that agency is usually "framed around the limited and analytically unhelpful binary terms, coercion and consent."[12]

> I have long felt anxious about how a broader consideration of women's agency is foreclosed by its reductive translation into an issue of whether or not the widow went willing. Limiting discussion of women's agency in this way makes it difficult to engage simultaneously women's systematic subordination *and* the ways in which they negotiate oppressive, even determining, social conditions.[13]

Another important concern for Mani is examining "questions of positionality and location and their relation to the production of knowledge as well as its reception."[14] She argues that it is politically significant that audiences in different countries seized on entirely different aspects of her work.[15]

The importance of exploring the issues raised by the different receptions audiences gave to her arguments is to emphasis that 'progressive' activists interpret the same event in crucially different

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[11] Rajan Sunder, *Real and Imagined Women*, 53; Lata Mani, "Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception" in Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit. (eds.) *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 321.
[12] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 319.
[13] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 320.
[14] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 307.
[15] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 309.

ways because of the different political contexts they are in. British audiences who hear her arguments on *sati* focus on current British government policies which manipulate women's oppression in India and Pakistan to control immigration to Britain. Indian audiences present a sharp contrast. Instead of an immediate concern with developing anti-imperialist critiques, her work is viewed as an "engagement with nationalism, the limited parameters within which nationalists posed the question of women's status, the marginality of women to nineteenth-century discussions supposedly about them, and the legacy of colonialism in contemporary discussion of women's issues."[16]

Mani uses these "multiple mediations" to support her argument that local feminist groups must exercise control over which theoretical positions and strategies are used to challenge local women's oppression. Without local feminist control over strategy theoretical positions and models valuable in "Anglo-American" feminism could have disastrous results in specific local contexts.[17] For example, a tactic of 'strategic victimization' by Indian feminists allows them to "counter right-wing discourse that falsely proposes women's total freedom."[18]

> [I]t seems safest to counter the notion of woman as free agent by emphasizing her victimization. However, unless we include in this a complex sense of agency, we run the risk of producing a discourse which sets women up to be saved. This would situate women within feminist analysis in ways that are similar to their positioning within colonialist or nationalist discourse.[19]

Her solution to the question of local control over strategy is similar in many respects to the argument made by Valerie Amos and

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[16] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 312.
[17] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 321.
[18] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 321.
[19] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 321.

Pratibha Parmar. Their tactic for ensuring feminism does not become ethnocentric is to propose that 'black' women have 'sovereignty' over how to deal with the political issues that affect them. "Our argument is that it is not up to them ['white' feminists] to accept or reject arranged marriages but up to us to challenge, accept, or reform, depending on our various perspectives, on our own terms and in our culturally specific way."[20]

Nevertheless, the solutions offered by Mani, Amos and Parmar to reconcile the 'universal' goals of feminism to the strategies used by particular groups of feminists assume that there is only one local 'we' that could decide what should be accepted, challenged or reformed. Who is the 'we' that Amos, Parmar and Mani rely upon to legitimate their claims to sovereignty? In the case of Mani it is Indian feminists and in the case of Amos and Parmar it is 'black' women'. But the categories of 'Indian' feminists or 'black women' are no more stable or essential than the category of 'women' Mani, Amos and Parmar perceive as a threat. This 'we' is established only by excluding questions which ask how the necessarily phantasmic 'we' is constituted. Moreover, if 'we' has no essential or stable identity then questions about who is included or excluded challenge the grounds for sovereignty Mani, for instance, assumes. Yet it is this highly problematic 'we' that Mani, Amos and Parmar use to ground their authority to speak on behalf of 'we'.

Representation can be defined as making something 'visible' but representation can also be defined as 'speaking on behalf of'.[21] In

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[20] Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism" *Feminist Review*, 17:1, 1984, 15.
[21] Weber, "Writing Sovereign Identities", 317.

other words, the fictional 'we' becomes the foundational authority that Mani, Amos and Parmar use to legitimate the arguments they make on behalf of particular groups of 'women'. Crucially it is also assumed that a consensus exists among these 'women' that Mani, Amos and Parmar can represent. They speak on behalf of these 'women'; they do not use these 'women' as ventriloquists dolls. Thus the solution to the tension between the universal and the particular needs of feminism is constituted by positing *a priori* the existence of certain norms.[22] These norms preauthorize the arguments made by Mani, Amos and Parmar and silence questions which could undermine their claims to speak on behalf of Indian or 'black' women. Once the legitimacy of these claims is challenged, Mani, Amos and Parmar can no longer argue that their representation of 'women' is any less potentially ideological than 'white' feminism.

Similar problems can be found in the argument Mani has repeatedly made[23] that claims only feminists and a few 'progressives' have "placed women at the centre of their analysis" in the debate over *sati*. Mani complains about interventions by male administrators, "indigenous elites" or nationalists because she says that *satis* were used as an

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[22] Weber, "Writing Sovereign Identities", 318. Foucault argues that discourse can be controlled in numerous means. One such mean is through 'ritual', or the qualification required of the speaking subject, the gestures, behaviour, circumstances, and the whole set of signs that must accompany the discourse. This framework operates to qualify some people as producers of discourse by limiting it to within a restricted group. See Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse." in (ed.) Michael Shapiro *Language and Politics* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 108-138.

[23] See Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India" in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.) *Recasting Women: Essays on Indian Colonial History*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990; "Multiple Mediations", and "The Production of an Official Discourse on *Sati* in Early Nineteenth-Century Bengal" in (eds.) Francis Barber *et.al. Europe and Its Others. Vol. 1.* Colchester: University of Essex, 1985.

excuse to "civilize" or "modernize" India, or to "expand" the powers of the Indian state.[24] In contrast, feminists are concerned only with the women involved. The implication is that feminist interventions are 'innocent' standpoints.

The foundational assumptions within Lata Mani's analysis of *sati* also operate to prevent her arguments from being criticized except on grounds she considers to be legitimate. Consequently these assumptions constrain what can qualify as legitimate solutions and areas of investigations. These assumptions also restrict which people can legitimately intervene in this debate. A tension that runs throughout Mani's analysis can be found in her inability to explain how her analysis of *sati* and solutions to it are substantially different from those of the 'Orientalist' administrators she criticized.

Mani, in effect, frames her analysis in ways that are remarkably similar to those of the colonial administrators. She and the administrators share a view that *sati* is repellent. What separates a feminist from a non-feminist analysis, according to Mani, is whether women are "marginalized." In other words, whether an analysis focuses on women as women or whether women are used as an excuse to focus on other issues. Accordingly, Mani places great importance on developing more complex theories of agency to ensure that feminists will not 'rescue' *satis*. However, despite her desire to avoid 'rescuing' the *satis* she fails to do so. Moreover, by assuming that *sati* is 'evil' and thus a form of 'oppression', she fails to use *sati* as an opportunity to 'think' again, for instance, to problematize notions of death.

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[24] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 318.

Instead, Mani takes for granted that a 'fear of death' is part of the 'human' condition that spans different histories and different cultures and uses it as the pivotal foundation for her analysis of *sati*. Possibly she might argue that some women may, by virtue of the systematic oppression experienced by Indian women, not have a 'fear of death' and thus 'willingly' become *sati*. However, implicit in this argument is the assumption that 'fear of death' is a 'natural' condition that would be present if systematic oppression of women did not exist. This type of argument is similar to what Judith Butler describes as contemporary traces of the state of nature hypothesis that invokes a nonhistorical 'before' that becomes the foundational premise upon which other assumptions follow.[25]

Moreover, by grounding women's 'fear of death' at the centre of her analysis she establishes the categories by which the 'subject' of *sati* is known. Consequently she disallows any critique that challenges her assumptions or arguments, and establishes in advance which arguments are legitimate. "Genuinely anti-imperialist" positions are made by feminists because "not surprisingly, concern for women's lives was very much at the centre of feminist discourse."[26]

Mani wants to 'rescue' the *sati* from an Orientalist produced narrative of 'rescue'. Accordingly, she argues it is important to understand how *satis* remain agents even during those moments when they are "viciously oppressed".[27] Yet in spite of this emphasis on agency a paradox is present in her argument. On the one hand, she argues that

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[25] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 3.
[26] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 317.
[27] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 320.

even when a women does become *sati* this is an exercise of agency;[28] on the other hand, she argues that *sati* is yet another way in which women are oppressed.[29]

Mani appears to be aware of this paradox and tries to resolve it by arguing for a "more complex theory of subjectivity." Yet in spite of this she still seems to privilege a particular type of 'act' to qualify as a sign of subjectivity - an act which conforms to her foundational 'fear of death'. The "never said" is the assumption that "left to herself, the widow would 'turn with natural instinct and horror from the thought of suttee'".[30] Yet this quote was written by a colonial administrator and is quoted by Mani as an example of colonial administrators denying subjectivity to the *sati*.

In effect, to 'rescue' the *sati* from an Orientalist produced discourse, Mani has to take away the *sati's* subjectivity in order to give it back; but, only if it means the *sati* flees from the "thought of *sati*". Mani is unequivocal that any reading that suggests her arguments can be "read reductively as support for *sati*" could happen only as a result of a "deliberate misreading".[31]

Yet if the pivotal category of Mani's analysis, the fear of death, is problematized to show its cultural and historical specificity, then 'putting women at the centre' of her analysis of *sati* does not produce knowledge that is free of problems or ideology. Mani says that

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[28] "Women also expressed their will when they resisted being prevented from jumping into the flames." Mani, "The Production of an Official Discourse", 117.
[29] Mani situates *sati* within the "context of the general subordination of women in Indian society." Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 317.
[30] Mani, "The Production of an Official Discourse", 114.
[31] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 318-319.

discussions are caught between judging *sati* as acts of coercion or consent and argues that more complex theories of agency will prevent feminists from representing the *sati* as women who need to be "saved".[32]

The notion of the subject as agent is also part of a particularly modern conception of what it means to be 'human'. David Lachterman argues that a characteristic that distinguishes the 'moderns' from the 'ancients' is

> the 'idea' of construction or, more broadly, the 'idea' of the *mind* as essentially the power of making, fashioning, crafting, producing. ... For the radical modern and their heirs, making - understood as (trans)formative or 'creative' technique - is neither an occasional nor an indispensable 'feat' performed by rational souls, the latter when it serves the indisputable needs of the body, the former when it puts artfully on display distinctively human activities; instead, making is *definitive* of the mind's 'nature'... [T]he modern invention of the 'mind' is tied to the primacy of human activity or, indeed making. Passivity, and with it any hint of the mind as *mirroring* the domain of external things, is the signature of precritical thinking.[33]

Mani too, along with the colonial administrators, establishes in advance the categories by which knowledge of *sati* can be legitimately produced. In Mani's case this involves notions of the subject and agency, notions, it might be added, that could be criticized for being expressions of a particularly 'modern' and 'Western' notion of identity.

This critique of Mani's work on *sati* is not to suggest that *sati* is legitimate. Instead, the purpose of my analysis of her work is to underline how difficult it is to produce any critique that says anything 'new' that is not caught up in "games of truth". By denaturalizing what purports to be natural it makes the exercise of power more difficult.[34]

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[32] Mani, "Multiple Mediations", 321.
[33] David Rapport Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity*. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 4,10.
[34] Bradley S. Klein, "After Strategy: The Search for a Post-Modern Politics of Peace" *Alternatives* 13:3, 1988, 311.

And to point out, as Foucault argues, that "for a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death."[35]

Edward Said makes a similar point about the power of the sovereign when he argues that Orientalist discourse creates its object of study by establishing in advance the categories by which the 'Orient' is known. "Above all [Orientalism] ... had the epistemological and ontological power virtually of life and death, or presence and absence, over everything and everybody designated as 'Oriental'."[36] Similarly the concept of 'women' is a problem within contemporary feminist discourse because of the dangers of presupposing who women truly are.[37] How then is it possible to represent political identity in ways that avoid exercising the "characteristic privilege of sovereign power" to decide, in these cases, ontological and epistemological life and death?

There is a fundamental difference between critiques by poststructuralists and those by Edward Said and standpoint feminists over strategies for resisting the operations of power in representational practices. At stake in this disagreement are questions about the 'subject' or a 'core self', and the exercise of 'agency' as the necessary prerequisite for the practice of politics. If a 'core gendered self' exists are there fundamental conditions that must be met so this 'core' is not oppressed, however defined?

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[35] Michel Foucault, "Right of Death and Power Over Life" in *The Foucault Reader* (ed.) Paul Rabinow. (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 258.
[36] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 223.
[37] Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structualism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13:3, 1988, 405.

Do politics require a basic 'truth' or 'ground' to challenge the operations of power and is 'agency' necessary to 'master' and 'limit' the effects of 'power'? Do basic Truths supply the 'grounds' for our understandings about the 'subject', 'agency', 'intellectuals', 'resistance' or 'power' and provide us with a safe set of directions away from 'power'? Or do these directions lead us blinkered straight to 'power'? Is it even possible to 'escape' the operations of power? Crucially, what strategies can be invoked to resist the operation if 'power' cannot be 'escaped'? The answers to these questions are important because what is at stake are crucial questions about 'power', 'knowledge', the role and definitions of 'intellectuals', how 'power' may be 'resisted', and 'visions of the future'.

A key disagreement is whether there are implicitly or explicitly claimed 'innocent' standpoints that disrupt or overturn power and create spaces or opportunities to create noncoercive knowledge and relationships. A central promise often attributed to the philosophers of the Enlightenment is the claim that conflicts between 'knowledge' and 'power' can be overcome provided claims to, and the exercise of, authority is grounded in Reason. Reason, it is claimed, both represents and embodies Truth.[38] However, critics of this claim point out that Reason and Truth are categories that are not applicable at any time or in any place, but rather are specifically Western and modern categories. The claims of Reason and Truth have been established historically,

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[38] Jane Flax, "The End of Innocence" in *Feminist Theorize the Political*, (eds.) Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 447.

despite all attempts to insist that they express the transcendental certainties of mathematics, science, or the Word of God.

Modern versions of Reason can be found in the claims that politics must 'ground' itself in some basic 'truth' - a basic 'truth' that serves as a 'map' to guide one's path through the uncertainties and ambiguities of politics. Orientalism's crucial failure, Edward Said claims, is that it fails to use an understanding of a fundamental human condition to provide the foundations for knowledge produced about 'others'. A notion of a universally applicable "human experience" should have acted as a 'map' to guide their attempts to make intelligible their encounter with 'Others'. Edward Said's attempt to limit the sovereign's power is grounded on the maintenance of fidelity to a universally applicable understanding of the 'human condition'. But by establishing these categories as the foundation of his own critique of Orientalism, Said established specifically modern or *Western* referents as the standards against which attempts to produce non-ethnocentric knowledge would be judged. Said's complaint about the Orientalists is that they did not strive to fulfill the promise of the Enlightenment. His proposal that non-ethnocentric and non-coercive knowledge can be produced provided certain conditions could be read as an exhortation to "oppositional critics" to remain faithful to and confident in this promise of reconciliation.

Sandra Harding claims that a more "just" world is possible if political analysis and action begin by "putting women at the centre". Continued deployment and faith in "objectivity" will guide the production of "less partial" knowledge and be the basis upon which the

competency of competing knowledge claims may be judged. The categories of 'woman' or 'women'' become a basic 'truth', 'ground', or 'touchstone' for political analysis and action for many feminists. Linda Alcoff, for instance, rejects poststructuralist critiques of the concept of 'women'. She argues:

> If the category of 'woman' is fundamentally undecidable, then we can offer no positive conception of it that is immune to deconstruction ... If gender is simply a social construct, the need and even the possibility of a feminist politics becomes immediately problematic. What can we demand in the name of women if 'women' do not exist and demands in their name simply reinforce the myth that they do?[39]

How identity is claimed to be constituted becomes important. Theories which suggest that identity is a stable essence are rejected by Said, Harding and significant numbers of contemporary feminists. Instead, especially within feminist theories, an emphasis is placed on 'positionality', 'location' or 'sitatutedness' as the subject is reconceptualized "as shifting and multiply organized across variable axes of difference."[40] Linda Alcoff argues that "the very subjectivity (or subjective experience of being a woman) and the very identity of women is constituted by women's positions."[41] Kathy Ferguson stresses "mobility" rather than "multiple" to avoid any suggestion of movement from one stable resting place to another.[42] This claim does not imply the 'subject' is a passive recipient. "Rather, she herself is part of

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[39] Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism", 420.
[40] Kathy Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*, 158, quoting Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects" *Feminist Studies* 16(Spring 1990), 116.
[41] Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism", 434.
[42] Ferguson, *The Man Question*, 158.

the historicized, fluid movement, and she therefore actively contributes to the context within which her position can be delineated."[43]

'Positionality' is linked to 'agency' in order to resist suggestions of determinism. "Identity is something one *does*, an active corralling of practices, events, desires, contingencies, a regulatory semiotic and material operations."[44] However the highly contentious question remains whether a 'core self', an 'I', exists that negotiates its way through 'culture' and 'history'. Is 'culture', 'history', or 'class' like race and gender, "*et cetera*"[45], something I move through, that moves through me?[46]

Judith Butler points out that

> The foundationalist reasoning of identity politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken. ... The question of locating 'agency' is usually associated with the viability of the 'subject', where the 'subject' is understood to have some stable existence prior to the cultural field that it negotiates. Or, if the subject is culturally constructed, it is nevertheless vested with an agency, usually figured as the capacity for reflexive mediation, that remains intact regardless of its 'cultural embeddedness'. On such a model, 'culture' and 'discourse' *mire* the subject, but do not constitute that subject. This move to qualify and enmire the preexisting subject has appeared necessary to establish a point of agency that is not fully *determined* by that culture and discourse.[47]

To be politically 'active' implies a rejection of determinism because to be 'determined' means that something has been 'fixed' beforehand. There can be no 'beginning', no 'change', because the 'end'

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[43] Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism", 434.
[44] Ferguson, *The Man Question*, 159.
[45] Judith Butler points out that the attempts to encompass a situtated subject inevitably fail to be complete. An exasperated "etc." usually concludes the catalogue of predicates. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 143.
[46] I adapt an argument by Kathy Ferguson to make this point. See Ferguson, *The Man Question*, 171.
[47] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 142-143.

has been 'predetermined'. Thus, to be determined means that it is not possible to 'fix' one's own alternative 'directions.' Ferguson claims that the problem with poststructuralism is "that its politics lack adequate direction."[48] However, this notion of an 'active agent' who can set directions is an expression of the traditional 'Western' problem of the 'sovereign's power'.[49]

The myth of interior origins or the 'core self' needs to be examined in this context. The "I" position, or 'core self' does not provide a "space of primal liberty".[50] The 'subject', or "I", who selects is constituted simultaneously in advance and during the selection. "Is it not always the case", Butler argues,

> that power operates in advance, in the very procedure that establish who speaks in the name of feminism? ... The "I" is the transfer point of that replay, but it is simply not a strong enough claim to say that the "I" is situated; the "I", this "I", is constituted by these positions, and these 'positions' are not merely theoretical products, but fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce me as a viable 'subject'. ... No subject is its own point of departure; and the fantasy that it is one can only disavow its constitutive relations by recasting them as the domain of a countervailing externality.[51]

If there are no 'spaces of primal liberty' that allows the 'subject' to exist prior to and exterior to the practices that produce it, then the 'subject' cannot be sovereign over her/his consciousness, thoughts, words, acts, or 'directions'. Without 'sovereignty' over her/his thoughts or actions, then the political "direction" the 'core

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[48] Ferguson, *The Man Question*, 133.
[49] Foucault, "Two Lectures", 94-95.
[50] Foucault, "Power and Strategies" in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writing, 1972-77*. (ed.) Colin Gordon. (New York, Pantheon, 1980), 142.
[51] Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'" in *Feminists Theorize the Political* (eds.) Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 8-9.

self' establishes is not 'outside' power. Rather, power is "always already there"[52] and the 'subject' is 'directed' to instead of away from 'power. 'Knowledge' produced by the 'subject', by the 'intellectual', or by the 'feminist' is constructed according to the "rules of formation" of a discursive field. To be 'intelligible' requires that any person must conform to the prescriptive rules of discourse formation in order to communicate, to be understood, to be accepted and thus "in the true". It is because of the difficulty in saying anything "new" that is not already caught up in "games of truth" that Foucault questions the very possibility of critique as an 'escape' and 'overthrow' of 'power'. "But this does not entail the necessity of accepting an inescapable form of domination or an absolute privilege on the side of the law. To say that one can never be 'outside power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what."[53]

The position that "discourse constructs the subject" is equally problematic because it retains "the grammatical and metaphysical place of the subject"[54] and encourages the assumption that some extra human force is in 'control'. Rather than a 'human' who 'constructs', impersonal forces such as 'Culture', 'Discourse' or 'Power' are substituted.[55] "As a result, construction is still understood as a unilateral process initiated by a prior subject, fortifying that presumption of the metaphysics of the subject that where there is activity, there lurks behind it an initiating and willful subject."[56]

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[52] Foucault, "Power and Strategies", 141.
[53] Foucault, "Power and Strategies", 141-142.
[54] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 9.
[55] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 9.
[56] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 9.

Moreover it is possible to think of a 'core self' because identity is constituted using notions of "absolute space" which makes it possible to think in terms of inside/ outside.[57] If the notion of a neutral 'empty' inside is not an 'innocent' category of knowledge, then the problem of essentialism returns. And essentialisms always serve as the basis for certain standpoints and operate to exclude whatever is judged to be 'threats', 'unintelligible', or 'useless'. The 'subject', the 'human', or 'women' become the inviolable spaces needed for security. However, security is premised on the existence of threats. Threats are responded to by trying to control or discipline them. One of the preferred mechanisms of control is the establishment of borders which can be patrolled to keep out competing 'knowledge'.

Categories of knowledge such as 'sexual difference', the 'body', the 'human', or 'women' are the consequence of the "imposition of an interpretation rather than being the product of uncovering an exclusive domain with its own preestablished identity".[58] Accordingly, theories of identity need to be examined not only for historical and cultural specificities, but also as a

> boundary producing practice central to the production of the identity in whose name it operates. The consequence of this argument is a fundamental orientation of foreign policy that shifts from a concern with relations between [identities] to a concern with the *establishment of the boundaries* ...[59]

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[57] Judith Butler makes a similar argument about the effect of a structuring inner space. See Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse" in *Feminism/Postmodernism* (ed.) Linda Nicholson. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 335.

[58] Campbell, "Global Inscription", 266.

[59] Campbell, "Global Inscriptions", 266. I have adapted his argument about how foreign policy as the creation of boundaries creates the very identities of 'inside/outside' that produces the practice of 'foreign relations' and fear of 'others'.

The category of 'wome/an' defined as the 'female body', 'sexual difference', or "a vacant lot where different women can play with their subjectivity"[60] become the metaphoric 'spaces' for feminism. These metaphoric spaces work in much the same way that Edward Said assumes a sovereign territorial nation state works, and suffers from many of the same problems. *Within* these spaces there is safety and the conditions for 'justice' and the 'good life'. But *outside* these spaces there are threats that must be continually guarded against. The problem then arises of how to establish relations with others. Debates over the category of 'women' are concerned with the difficulties of establishing 'relations' with 'other' women. In this respect it is possible to read these debates as concerns about 'foreign policy'.

'Foreign policy' is the "process of making foreign or exotic, and thus different from the self, someone or -thing."[61]

> The making of the Other as something foreign is thus not an innocent exercise in differentiation. It is closely linked to how the self is understood. A self constructed with a security-related identity leads to the construction of otherness on the axis or lack of threats to that security ...[62]

'Foreign policy' thus defined is an important part of a representational politics that depends on the production of otherness and is evident at very basic levels of social organization.[63] 'Otherness' is represented as 'race', 'ethnicity', 'class', 'sexuality', 'gender', "*etc.*,".

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[60] Rosi Braidotti, "Embodiment, Sexual Difference and the Nomadic Subject" *Hypatia* 8:1, 1993, 5,9.
[61] Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation,* 100.
[62] Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation,* 101-102.
[63] Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation,* 100.

Kathy Ferguson does not challenge gender as 'foreign policy'. 'Woman' or its aggregate, 'women', are not categories to be rejected.[64] Her concern is what takes place within the category of 'women'; in other words, how individual women theorize their identities that

> suggest that some secure residence in a stable subjectivity, a home, is the answer. But such homes always end up requiring much policing to monitor the fringes and basements, to stabilize the points of rupture and erosion. The border patrol is kept busy erasing and denying whatever does not or will not fit.[65]

The notion of "mobile subjectivities" is her solution for dismantling these barriers to 'relations'. "Resting places" are discouraged because they promote congealment and stasis and undermine "coalitions", "affinities", and other expressions of active political engagement.[66] Identities within the category of 'women' are to be kept in motion but the categories of identity known as 'women' or 'woman' are still taken for granted.

Judith Butler contests the assumption that feminism must be 'grounded' on the assumption of a binary sexual difference. Gender coherence, she argues, operates not as a ground of politics, but as its effects. Gender may 'appear' to be binary, but the proliferation of gender styles and identities implicitly contest the 'self-evidence of this reified 'appearance'. "The loss of that reification of gender relations ought not to be lamented as the failure of a feminist political theory, but rather, affirmed as the promise of the possibility of complex and generative subject-positions as well as coalition strategies that neither presuppose nor fix their constitutive subjects

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[64] Ferguson, *The Man Question*, 166.
[65] Ferguson, *The Man Question*, 165.
[66] Ferguson, *The Man Question*, 178-181.

in their place."[67] By refusing to consider that 'woman' is an effect of power, rather than a fixed albeit troublesome category, the possibility exists that 'woman' may be a coercive regulatory function rather than the 'grounds' of a liberatory politics.

Debates about the category of 'women' and how it is possible to produce non-ethnocentric and non-coercive knowledge about 'others' are evidence of the difficulties of thinking beyond the borders of particular identities. The dilemmas identified are specific expressions of a more general problem of the way universality and particularity are related under modern conditions. The attempts by standpoint feminism and Edward Said to resolve this problem draw attention to a profound dilemma: on the one hand, particular identities tend to aspire to universal standards of the 'good', the 'true', and the 'just' in order to facilitate, for instance, a 'global sisterhood', a 'human' or a 'worldly' community. Yet on the other hand, such aspirations for universality inevitably betray their historical and cultural specificity. As R.B.J.. Walker argues in the context of similar problems arising in contemporary international relations theory, "these claims to universal values and processes presumed, implicitly or explicitly, a boundary beyond which such universals could not be guaranteed."[68]

Despite aspirations to universal standards, it is usually assumed that 'justice', 'freedom', or other expressions of the 'good life' can

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[67] Butler, "Gender Trouble", 339.
[68] R.B.J. Walker, "Sovereignty, Identity, Community: Reflections on the Horizons of Contemporary Political Practice" in *Contending Sovereignties: Redefining Political Community*. (eds.) R.B.J. Walker and Saul H. Mendlovitz. (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1990), 165.

only be assured within the safety of a sovereign space, defined as 'nation', 'women', 'class', 'race', "*etc.*,". However, sovereignty also produces its own familiar problems: how to conceive of some 'global community', some 'common humanity', some 'species being' on the basis of particular cultures, societies, and histories.

The puzzles this solution produces are often framed in terms of questions about where to 'draw the line' between what can be considered conducive to promoting either particular communities or universal communities, and simultaneously protecting their separate and autonomous coexistence. Edward Said, for example, privileges the local identity as the primary identity, yet also warns that it can become self-absorbed and pre-occupied to such an extent that knowledge of 'others' will be jeopardized. Nevertheless, it is only by working through, and not rejecting, local attachments that the "worldly" identity necessary for knowledge and understanding of other cultures can be achieved.[69]

Feminists offer a variety of solutions designed to simultaneously protect aspirations to the universal and the particular. Sandra Harding, for example, argues that "less partial" knowledge for everyone will be produced if thinking and analysis begins with women's lives. However, she does express concern about the tension between emancipatory knowledge and local customs. Other feminists such as Biddy Martin, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Linda Alcoff, or Kathy Ferguson reject fixed "homes" that erect boundaries that make it difficult to build coalitions and other forms of community. Threats to community by 'differences'

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[69] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Knopf, 1993), 336.

such as 'ethnicity', 'class', 'sexuality', "*etc.*," are challenged; however, 'sexual difference' continues to be viewed as an essential category, and a zone of safety.

The categories of the 'human' or 'sexual difference', for example, are used as the stable and secure 'grounds' upon which to base 'progressive' politics. These categories are proposed as ways to embrace 'difference' and produce non-ethnocentric and non-coercive knowledge. However, the unproblematized assumptions embedded in these categories, and inevitably in every other part of analysis and 'knowledge', create the very impasses they were supposed to prevent.[70] Attempts to overcome these impasses involve much more than adding excluded voices, ensuring a more accurate representation of identity, resisting power or 'better' methodology.[71] Knowledge and identity are always the consequence of an imposition of an interpretation and not the uncovering of Truth.[72] The exclusionary effects of categories that foreclose as much as they enable discourse and politics is recognized by many critics. But despite this recognition many critics find certain categories too useful to abandon.

In my analysis of Edward Said and standpoint feminism, I argue that their own discursive practices depend on a play of prescriptions that designate their exclusions and choices.[73] In particular, their

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[70] Judith Butler makes a similar point about the subject/object dichotomy in Western traditions of epistemology, which she argues, "conditions the very problematic of identity that it seeks to solve." Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 144.

[71] This claim is made by Sarah Radcliffe in "(Representing) post-colonial women: authority, difference and feminisms" *Area* 26(1994), 25-32 *passim*.

[72] Campbell, "Global Inscription", 266.

[73] Michel Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*", (ed.) Donald Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 199.

foundational categories establish in advance the criteria used to determine which strategies for dealing with, and which critiques of, the politics of representation will be legitimate. A motivating influence in my analysis of the arguments of Edward Said and standpoint feminism has been Foucault's concern about the very possibility of critique because of the necessary convergence of power and knowledge. Foucault emphasizes the difficulty in saying something 'new' that is not already implicated in "games of truth". By continual reassessment of one's own work, of the assumptions built into the categories deployed, as well as an on-going engagement with "games of truth", he argues it might be possible to avoid reinscribing the "disciplinary powers" that maintain the status quo. Crucially, there are no guarantees to whatever strategy of resistance is undertaken.

Foucault's genealogical method enables him to point out the assumptions that are built into familiar categories, particularly the useful categories "we cannot do without".[74] Genealogy, or the search for descent, is not a search directed to "that which was already there, the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature".[75] The search for descent does not erect foundations but rather "disturbed what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself."[76] Foucault's examination of the possibilities for critique argues that knowledge is a struggle for 'power' and not for 'Truth'.

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[74] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 29.
[75] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, (ed.) Donald Bouchard (Ithaca,NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 142.
[76] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", 147.

In conclusion I will not offer my own prescriptions for how to resolve the politics of representation. I do not think it is possible to think in these terms if resolution means the act of 'fixing' something in need of repair. Suggestions I would offer for how frequent and recurring impasses might be avoided would point to the way the categories and 'solutions' we depend upon can actually create the very problems and impasses that cause us so much despair. 'Progressive' politics is actually much harder than its protagonists are often prepared to admit.

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