Edward Said, Orientalism, and the Problem of the Other

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ABSTRACT

Edward W. Said offers an important critique of Western thinking. The critique of the discourse of Orientalism articulates the evasions, misrepresentations, and implicit violence of Western accounts of Palestinians in particular and Arabs in general. However, in so far as he sets himself within the Western humanist tradition, Said himself ends up appealing to the same tradition that he seeks to criticise. By positing a claim to universal truth, Said does not move beyond the point that Montesquieu reached in the 18th century. The thesis argues that relentless contemporary post-structuralist critiques deployed in concert with the analysis that Said has offered is needed to develop new avenues of resistance, research, and politics.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Edward Said and the Problem of Otherness

On May 15, 1948, the agony and mourning of a dispossessed people began amidst the ecstasy and celebrations of proclaimed statehood of their kindred. With the tacit support of the major powers of the day, and with the legitimacy provided by the myth of a land without a people awaiting the return of a people without a land, the Zionist demands for a Jewish national home in Palestine--promised by the Lord Balfour Declaration of 1917 and despite vehement objections of the local inhabitants--were granted provided that the civil and religious rights of the other inhabitants of the country were not prejudiced.[1] But prejudice abounds.

As Edward Said, and many others, have pointed out the divisionary and exclusionary policies only intensified with time. The plight of dispossessed Palestinians did little to stir mass Western support against Israel's behaviour. Until very recently, calls on behalf of the Palestinian cause, have had little echo from, or impact on, Western consciousness. In 'the West' and especially in the United States of America, the Palestinian cause wallowed in obscurity. The obscurity intensified when Yassir Arafat, the once evil-incarnate, was abruptly rehabilitated after he had acceded to US and Israeli terms[2] by affirming the intellectual order that is at the root of the Palestinian plight. As a Palestinian, for example, Said (and millions like him), whose ancestors had lived there for centuries until Israel's creation, is categorically denied the automatic right granted by

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[1] Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 318.

2 Edward W. Said, *The Pen and the Sword: Conversations with David Barsamian* (Toronto, Between the Lines, 1994), 138.

the Israeli Law of Return to any person of the Jewish faith, and regardless of nationality, color, ideology to settle in Palestine. Rather, Palestinians were cast as inheritors of the Hitlerian legacy bent on the elimination of the state harbouring the survivors of the Holocaust. It was (and still is) difficult for the Palestinian experience to be articulated in 'the West.'

The situation was made worse by Arab states' bungling of the Palestinian cause, the treatment and use of refugees as a tool for national interests, as well as outright persecution of progressive and independent views. The tragedy of the Palestinian people, Edward Said writes, is that they have "been under such comprehensive assault -- not only by Israel (with its patron and collaborator the United States) but also by the Arab governments and, since Oslo, by the PLO under Arafat."[3] The Palestinian cause, the plight of the refugee, the question of Palestine, writes Fawaz Turki, a scarred Palestinian refugee in Lebanon, "was ignored by some, rejected by others, and derided by the rest."[4]

For two decades after the 1948 catastrophe (*Na'ba* in Arabic[5]) and in an era of world-wide decolonization, the Palestinians were adrift in utter hopelessness while witnessing euphoric anti-colonial guerrilla victories on adjacent and distant world stages. The hunger for dignity through self-determination had been fed by a sense of intense frustration with a festering wound. The defeat of the promise of Arab nationalism was a wake-up call for all Palestinians that they were, in the words of Fawaz Turki, "at the end of history, like a petrified long-forgotten species about to emboss its distorted image on a

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3 Edward. W. Said, "The Mirage of Peace," *The Nation*, October 16, 1995

4 Fawaz Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 77.

5 The word na'ba or nakba was first coined by Aref al-Aref, one of the prominent Palestinians during the British mandate, after the 1948 catastrophe.

stone, arrested for all time."[6] As Albert Hourani suggests: "Defeat goes deeper into the human soul than victory."[7] Their salvation lay in their own capacity for sacrifice, resilience, and resistance. They too, like Franz Fanon, could not "ever again doubt the possibility of a Dien Bien Phu."[8] But.if the possibility of Dien Bien Phu proved painfully ineffective, it wasn't because Palestinians did not try. Since then their exploits testify to the dynamics of a Palestinian life that has been neither passive nor innocent. Many, with Edward Said, admit of a "considerable independent power of our own, which it would be bad faith to deny."[9]

Disturbed by the smouldering shards of Arab nationalism strewn about the battle field, with the consequent political, cultural, and geopolitical devastation the war engendered in the Middle East--all the while wincing at phrases like "the Arab thinks ..." and accounts of "the Arab Mind"--Edward Said embarked upon a difficult road to express the inexpressible. He has endeavoured to establish permission to narrate, in 'the West,' the existence of a 'Palestinian' people that, like all others, had a history, a society, and the right to self-determination.

The subject of the thesis is Edward W. Said. My purpose is to focus on his work, and especially the influential theory of Orientalism, because he offers an important critique of Western thought. Published in 1978, *Orientalism* was written in the shadow of the 1967 war, the emergence of the Palestinian resistance in the late 1960s, and the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. In the wake of the defeat of Arab nationalism in the fateful six day long war

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6 *The Disinherited* 98

7 *A History of the Arab Peoples,* 301.

8 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 70.

9 Edward W. Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, with photographs by Jean Mohr (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 5.

of June 1967, Edward W. Said was "emotionally reclaimed"[10] by Palestine, and was vaulted into political activism. For Said it ceased to be an acceptable excuse to bewail the hostility of 'the West' towards the Arabs and Islam only to sit back in outraged righteousness sustained by the sense that the Palestinians were the aggrieved party, trodden upon savagely, and that the rightness of their case require no further action because it would eventually be discovered, *Allah Kareem.*[11]

The combination of these events, and the spate of academic writings about and media coverage of the Middle East compelled Said to respond to representations of the region and its peoples: "My own sense of my history as an Arab and as a Palestinian," Said once commented, "didn't seem to bear any relationship to what I was reading. I felt that my own history, which had been enmeshed with the West in various ways, had never really responded to the challenge of the West."[12]

A Christian Palestinian, born in Jerusalem, raised, after his family's dispossession, in Cairo and Beirut who pursued higher education in the United States of America where he became a professor of comparative literature, Edward W. Said was deeply perturbed by the Palestinian plight and the way it was (and still is) being manipulated. Strengthened in his sense of the Palestinian's just cause, he set out to place the Palestinian experience of loss in the Western public consciousness, and to enable some understanding of a people whose mere existence was denied.[13] This project has thrust upon Said the responsibility to represent the people and cause with which he organically identifies.

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10 Edward W. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969-1994* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), xiii.

11 *The Pen and the Sword*, 93.

12 Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Revisited: An Interview with Edward W. Said," *MERIP* (January-February 1988): 32

13 See "Orientalism Revisited," in *The Pen and the sword* 46. See also "Permission to Narrate," in *The Politics of Dispossession*, 247-268.

Said was a prominent member of the Palestinian parliament-in-exile for 14 years until he quietly stepped down in 1991. He had broken with Yasir Arafat after decades of support, arguing that the PLO lacked credibility and moral authority. He has called the peace agreement between Israel and the PLO "an instrument of Palestinian surrender" and an extension of Israel's long-standing policy to dominate the Arabs militarily and economically. Since the Oslo accords, Said has been a critic not only of the pact that effectively dismisses Palestinian rights and institutionalizes their dispossession, but also of the Palestinian leadership that lacks insight into US politics and seems intent on cultivating the cult of the leader. Said points out that the 'peace process' gave "official Palestinian consent to continued occupation".[14] His criticism extends to the United States, which he calls a "dishonest broker" in the peace process due to its long-standing support for Israel. He eschews the "sound bite" mentality of the American television networks and views major U.S. publications as "ideologically hostile" to his viewpoint. Said points to the "role played in all this by liberal Americans, Jewish and non-Jewish alike."[15] Because the struggle happens to be between Jews and Arabs, it has been easier to veil Israeli oppression behind the dominant perception in 'the West' of Arab countries as undemocratic, paternalistic, violent, backward, anti-feminist and so on.

Said's public lectures on the Palestinian problem always begin with a narration of the historic realities of the occupation of Palestine and the dispossession of the Palestinian people. His task is daunting. In the general "political economy of memory and recollection" pervading Western popular culture, there is hardly any space "for the

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[14] Edward W. Said, "The Mirage of Peace," *The Nation,* October 16, 1995.
[15] Edward W. Said, "The Mirage of Peace," *The Nation,* October 16, 1995.

Palestinian experience of loss,"[16] especially in the United States of America where "Palestinians are not so much a people as a pretext for a call to arms."[17] He speaks from experience of being an Arab living in the United States.

> There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental. The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding the Arab or the Muslim back is very strong indeed.[18]

Living in the shadow of the West's power is for Said a conscious experience which induces doubts about the ordering of things. Said was of the generation who were trying to make sense of what one refugee perceives as a "paradox of unfathomable dimensions,"[19] of 'the West' preaching liberalism, engaging in humanitarian projects, and championing the cause of persecuted minorities, but remaining indifferent to its ideals in the Palestinian/Israeli context and elsewhere. The bruised colonized native, Fanon's wretched, began to gaze upon, and write back to the West, uncomfortably aware of the erosion of its once self-evident centrality. Following Gramsci's footsteps, Said inventories the traces upon himself, "the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals."[20] The result of this inventory culminated

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16 *The Pen and the Sword*, 95.
17 *After the Last Sky*, 4.
18 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 27.
19 *The Disinherited*, 13.
20 Orientalism 25.

in the publication of *Orientalism*, the book that introduced Said to a world-wide audience.

In *Orientalism* Said homed in on the cultural and ideological dimension of 'the West's' imperialist thrust. He undertakes a rereading of travelogues on, scholarly investigations of, and diplomatic accounts about the Orient, to shed a new light on a comfortably received ideas and traditions whose hypnotic praise of Western competence and superiority drowned the effects of invasion and general mayhem. He suggests that Orientalism is not merely an idea but more significantly a scholarship that has been used to wield power and perpetuate domination.

Said points out that the injustice inflicted upon the Palestinians became unavailable to public discourse not merely through crude censorship. He ties the injustice to the structuring of 'otherness.' Though at times his analysis is mordant, sarcastic, and falls short of the aphoristic *bon mot,* it, nevertheless, struck a chord with many readers. A field of study came to be understood as a literary means through which 'the Orient,' a subject matter otherwise presumed to be politically and culturally neutral, was systematically appropriated and prefabricated through texts linked by a network of interwoven traditions, as irreducibly different and inferior to 'the West.'

Eventually, this account of 'the Orient' was transformed into institutions and practices of Western power and domination. Orientalist scholarship, Said argues, transformed the distant and exotic Orient into a "known" object that can be spoken for and subsequently ruled, thus sustaining the longevity of the disparity in power between colonizer and colonized. The effect of having the history of Palestinians, and other colonized people, buried by the hegemonic power was exemplified at peace talks where

the Palestinains could not even chose their own representatives. They could only represent themselves through the filter of Israeli denial and American complicity.

Said's critique has broad implications. Said is not trying to show that Orientalism is a lie that can be contradicted. Rather he moves toward an understanding of the ways in which the Orientalist representations actively replace the Orient in the imagination of the 'the West.' He demonstrates how the Orientalist sets "up both the material and the processes of knowledge."[21] The Orientalism critique brings to the forefront the politics of distinction between truth and falsehood.

His approach has been appropriated so as to challenge the accepted binary oppositions between 'masculine' and 'feminine,' 'black' and 'white,' and so on. Indeed, the *Orientalism* sent shock waves across numerous fields of study for it is, as one author commented, "an immensely seductive theory about seduction."[22] The response has ranged from the advocates who may share Partha Chatterjee's view that *Orientalism* "talked of things I felt I had known all along but had never found the language to formulate with clarity. Like many great books, it seemed to say for the first time what one had always wanted to say,"[23] to the detractors foremost among whom is Bernard Lewis who denounces *Orientalism* by arguing that Said's "limitations of time, space, and content" unfairly isolate Arab studies "from both their historical and philological contexts."[24] There are also those who would like to go beyond the either/or battle between the advocates and detractors.

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[21] Ibid 300.

22 Jane Miller, *Seductions* (London: Virago Press, 1990) 114.

23 "An Essay for Edward Said" in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, edited by Michael Sprinker (Cambridge. MA: Balkwell, 1992), 194.

24 Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 111.

Said's critique of Orientalism has particular meaning for me personally since it articulates some of my own feelings about the evasions, misrepresentations, and implicit violences of Western accounts of Palestinians in particular and Arabs in general. The Arab endures, especially with the onslaught of the electronic world, an intensification of stereotypes, ossifying, in Said's phrase, the "nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology"[25] of the Arab world and the religion of Islam. The Western media's superficial coverage[26] concentrates on reinforcing prejudices and perceived stereotypes of Palestinians, and Arabs in general, as prone to violence--a reputation so ingrained that it is difficult to contemplate its end. The anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian racist depictions as, at best, incompetent rich "oil-sheikhs" or, at worst, murderous "terrorists" fuels to this day a burgeoning entertainment industry. Presently this insidious representation is tied and compounded by posing and defining the problems in the Middle East in terms of those who are for 'peace' and those who are the 'enemies of peace.'

Apart from being an untiring spokesperson on behalf of the Palestinian plight and self-determination, Said's project goes further. He attempts to solve the problem of "otherness" by placing too much emphasis on the intellectual with a "vocation for the art of representation," while remaining loyal to humanism. However, Said's attempt first to expose the foundations sustaining the "the paradox of unfathomable dimensions," and to elaborate a solution, leads him to affirm capitalist individual values and mires him in another liberal paradox rooted in the same tradition. If Said's inventory was also an attempt to answer Fanon's call of learning from the bad habits drawn from the colonial

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25 *Orientalism* 26.

26. It is worth noting, for example, that the word Intifadah whose English translation encompass uprising, revolt and insurrection is one of the rare Arabic words to be incorporated into the media lexicon.

world,[27] then it is fair to question Said's attachment to an intellectual hegemonic system that forecloses on the needs, aspiration, and beliefs of others. The thesis will argue for the need to critique Said's jump from one paradox to another.

I will begin with the criticisms levelled by historians and area studies scholars, on the one hand, who argue that Said has misconstrued Western literature about Arab world, and by academics in various fields, on the other, who argue that he set up an "other" that helps Said rationalize his own political stance. These critiques, I will suggest, point to the significance of Said's argument in contemporary politics rather than undermine it. However, in my view the more pressing problem with Said's analysis is neither that Said neglected certain aspects of this scholarship nor that Said Orientalizes the West. Rather, it is that Said is too committed to, and constantly appeals to, the same tradition that enables the Orientalism he has exposed in the first instance.

My argument will rely on Montesquieu's work, which points to the futility of producing a universal law applied to all peoples in all circumstances to correct all wrongs, to make it clear that political order varies from region to region, as a function of cultural and natural conditions, and that it is reasonable to require that laws conform to local mores. Morality and political judgement should be seen as a function relative to different communities. Said's work, I will suggest, has not moved beyond the point that Montesquieu reached much earlier. Said's response to the practices of Orientalism is to push for democracy and rights of an already identifiable nation. Despite his rejection of essentialist identities, Said nevertheless employs essentialist categories at the forefront of his emancipatory project. He takes the position adopted by Tzvetan Todorov, who

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27 *The Wretched of the Earth*, 221.

adheres to an absolutist account of good and evil. This stance is a regression from Montequieu's more open position on universal reason and cultural specificity.

A more appropriate development of Montesquieu is the approach taken by Zygmunt Bauman in *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Bauman's position can be read in relation to themes developed by Robert Young in *White Mythologies*, James Clifford in *The Predicament of Culture*, and Michel Foucault. Said diverges significantly from the work of Michel Foucault, whose work was an important influence on *Orientalism*. Said does not make full use of Foucault's conception of discourse and knowledge/power nexus. Unlike Foucault, Said regards power as enhancing the capacities of those who possess it. He does not consider it "as a productive network which runs through the whole social body."[28] As such, Said grounds his emancipatory project in foundations that are under dispute. By attempting to articulate a way for representations to be free of domination, he succumbs to the appeal of universal humanism. He believes that the humanist ideals can be employed to produce non-ethnocentric knowledge. In the end, however, his work remains exposed to the charge of repeating what he seeks to criticize.

Hence, I find myself sympathetic to contemporary post-structuralist critiques, in so far as they can be applied to humanist thinking. This approach stresses a relentless critique of Western foundationalism, and in the process opens a wide range of possible understandings of political space. I think we must approach politics from the point of view of an uncertain and decentered universe in order to attempt to rethink the ways in which it is possible for people to live together, and give a better chance for the different histories and experiences to manifest themselves. It gives people in opposition and on the

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28 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 119.

margins the possibility of expression. The emphasis is to go beyond, on the one hand, the restricted Newtonian order in which space is understood as absolute and immovable, and on the other, Cartesian instrumental rationality, which is seen as a panacea. Rather than essentializing, we must begin by repudiating the intellectual hegemony of the Western sovereign "self" against which all Others are measured.

The futility of the defense of the fundamental idea of the current intellectual hegemony--sovereign space--is presently pronounced by the current and enduring crises world wide. Given that Said offers a crucial but flawed analysis of Orientalism, and given the ways in which various critiques have tried to respond to the kinds of difficulties that have been identified in Said's analysis, it is urgent that we reconsider the foundations upon which we elaborate theories which in turn have a direct impact on world-wide conflicts. The actions of all parties in the Middle East peace process, much like all parties to the crisis in Kosovo, are based in the same ontology. By stressing a 'Palestinian' or 'Israeli' identity, 'Kosovar' or 'Serbian', 'Quebecois' or 'Canadian', we affirm the complete hegemony of the international intellectual political system that creates more problems than it solves.

Culture or identity gives us our world, but it also traps us in that world. Our ways of seeing become the ways of not seeing. I think it is was Marshall McLuhan who first noted that the last thing a fish is likely to discover is the water it is swimming in. The water is so fundamental to the fish's way of life that it is not seen or questioned. It is from this premise that I think it is important to question what we know and never let it harden, in Said's phrase, into an institution. We have to free our selves from our favoured ways of thinking which lead us to become trapped by constructions of reality that, at best, give an

imperfect grasp on the world. The critique of Orientalism alerts us to the pitfalls that may accompany our ways of thinking and encourages us, despite Said's reservations, to question the fundamental premise of our thought.

As dissidents rejecting and undermining the idea of a singular, sovereign identity, we should shed our rigid faith in fundamentalism and infuse our approach to politics with ambiguity and doubt. We must be skeptical concerning the existence of the 'truth' or reliable knowledge, due to the absence of fixed standards against which to measure anything. By no means does this free us from recognizing that an effort is needed to address a problem. Rather we need to be wary of repeating what we criticise. In his attempt to find 'fairness and justice,' Said falls into reifying this same system. Unlike Said, I think that these critiques have to be deployed in concert with the analysis that he has offered.

CHAPTER TWO

The Theory of Orientalism

Having been evicted along with Edward Said from his birthplace, and unlike Said, raised in a refugee camp on the outskirts of Beirut, Fawaz Turki was a witness to, and a victim of, a grave injustice. In 1972 he published *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile*, which was in his words "a sincere narration of a phase in the history of the Palestinian people and their response to the challenge of adversity that has confronted them."[29] He, like many, suffered the indignity that accompanies statelessness. But what was on his mind was more than a travel document or a flag or borders. After one too many Israeli attacks on refugee camps, he asks how is it that it came to be expected, to be naturally understood, "that those who colonize and occupy and napalm somehow acquire a higher moral authority to inflict violence on [others] because it is institutional and is accompanied by pious claims?"[30] It is this institutionality that Edward Said endeavours to expose. *Orientalism* (1978), *The Question of Palestine* (1979), and *Covering Islam* (1981) were written by Said as a series in an attempt to deal with the "modern relationship between the world of Islam, the Arabs, and the Orient on the one hand, and on the other 'the West,' France, Britain, and in particular the United States."[31] As an exiled Palestinian, Said set out to expose Orientalism as a formidable part of the culture of imperialism.

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29 *The Disinherited* 7.

30 *The Disinherited* 160.

31 Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How we see the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), ix.

In this chapter, I will examine Said's theory of Orientalism. Then, I will proceed to argue that Said's concept of Orientalism helps us to understand not only the particularities of Anglo-French scholarship about the Arab world, but also the pattern of current commentary about Arab peoples and Arab countries. I will begin with references to the more overt and ubiquitous forms of Orientalism found in the mainstream media dealing with the Middle East. Then, I will introduce a travelogue by David Grossman, an acclaimed Israeli author, who claims to be sensitive to Palestinians but remains spellbound by the traditional Western approach to the Arab world. I will argue that Grossman is not a literary aberration; rather he and others, like the example of William Golding will show, writes from within a site that is demarcated by an area studies scholarship that provides the imagery and vocabulary. I will conclude that Western thought about the Arab world remains deeply rooted in Orientalism, which structures commentary even by people who appear, or even claim, to be sympathetic to their subject.

Said focuses on a variety of English and French textual forms in order to grasp, in his words, "a better understanding of the way cultural domination has operated."[32] His analysis concentrates on a scholarship that developed under the impact of trade and travel as well as military campaigns that protected existing, and created new trade concerns, and originally indicated the study of the languages, literature, religions, thought, arts, and social life of the East in order to make them available to the West. His study of Orientalism "deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient and its ideas about the Orient (the East as career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or

lack thereof, with a "real" Orient."[33] While limiting his sources to the Middle East, the Arabs and Islam, he, nevertheless, studies the ways in which power, scholarship, and imagination of a two-hundred-year-old tradition in Europe, and later America, viewed or came to terms with 'the Orient.'

This tradition viewed the Orient as Europe's "cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other,"[34] and produced an image of it, "mysterious, enticing and threatening, cradle of wonders and fairy tales."[35] A stereotype, framed in opposition to the West--as irrational, depraved, feminine, and degenerate Orient as opposed to masculinity, rational, resourceful, and ordered West[36]--was projected upon the Orient and rendered it a place of sensuous and inferior people, ripe for domination by the 'civilized' powers. The cultural identity of these powers attained superiority "by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate, and even underground self."[37] Even though the net effect of these Orientalist stereotypes misrepresent the Orient as they do equally the Occident, Said suggests that these views became a convention with little significant divergence from the Renaissance onwards.

The word Orientalism is used by Said as a generic term for three interdependent meanings to describe a Western scholarly approach to, or "style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over,"[38] the Orient. It encompasses an academic field that "teaches, writes about, or researches"[39] the Orient specifically and generally. This field serves as "a *distribution* of geographical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly,

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32 *Orientalism* 28.
33 Ibid 5.
34 Ibid 1.
35 *A History of Arab Peoples* 300.
36 *Orientalism* 40 & 137.
37 Ibid 3.
38 Ibid 3.

economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts,"[40] and is equipped with its own ideas, scientific terminology, and tradition. Above all, it secures the supremacy of the Orientalist on Oriental matters. Secondly, it is a mode of thought premised on an ontological and epistemological division between "the Orient and (most of the time) the Occident." It is an "*elaboration*" of interests from which "poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators" both create and maintain their "theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts" in reference to a geographical designation.

For Said the knowledge and power nexus created 'the Oriental' and it is more than an exclusively academic matter; it also encompasses a political practice. With the advent of direct European expansion and colonization in the late eighteenth century, Orientalism metamorphosed, through the congruence of the aforementioned aspects, into a "corporate institution" that deals with the Orient, securely and unmetaphorically, "by making statements about it, settling it, ruling over it."[41] The "relatively common denominator between these three aspects of Orientalism is the line separating Occident from Orient and this," he argues, "is less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production, which I have called imaginative geography."[42] Students of the scholarship have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, "its people, customs, 'mind', destiny."[43]

Weaving the three interdependent meanings of Orientalism together as a discourse, Said presents Orientalism as a formidable Western style of authority and

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39 Ibid 2.
40 Ibid 12.
41 Ibid 2-3.
42 "Orientalism Reconsidered" 211.

ultimately domination. Drawing from the work of Michel Foucault, he demonstrates how texts can create and codify not only knowledge that produces authoritative and essentialist Truths but also the reality of that knowledge, a process that culminates in a sprawling discourse that in turn becomes the ground-work for further literary renderings. Orientalism's "complex dialectic of reinforcement"[44] is very much in tune with what, in a different context, Foucault has defined as "regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse."[45] Far more sophisticated than crude censorship, it fosters and promotes more of itself. Rather then being unilaterally inhibiting, the *modus operandi* of "power exercised" is one of "dissemination and implantation."[46] Out of the various Orientalist texts emerged self-containing and self-reinforcing codes of discipline that authorized continuity. What is already written on a subject became the factor determining the reader's experiences of it, in turn influencing further writings on the subject.[47] Hence the "swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess"[48] that characterizes human experience is assumed in the discourse of Orientalism to be understood and tamed in texts and on the basis of what texts say. The process enabled the discourse about the Orient to highlight the ways in which the identity of the Orient is "typically Oriental." The Orient, Said explains, was Orientalized "because it *could be*- that is, submitted to *being* - made Oriental."[49] As a discourse, Orientalism could be "willed over the Orient because the

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43 *Orientalism* 3.
44 Ibid 94.
45 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 34.
46 Ibid 12.
47 *Orientalism* 94.
48 Ibid 93.
49 Ibid 6.

Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness"[50] In effect the Orientalist presence came to denote the Orient's absence.

Through this systematic accumulation, Orientalism acquired a "cumulative and corporate identity," a uniform "writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases." [51] Relying on these texts, European culture was able to take charge, "manage--and even produce--the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively"[52] and systematically excluded the actualities of the Orient.[53] The Orientalists' structure for Oriental - Middle Eastern, Arab and/or Islamic - "history, character and destiny"[54] is sustained by a scaffolding fastened together through "a dynamic exchange between individual authors and large political concerns" which makes it difficult to be easily dismissed, and culminating in the establishment of the essential "interconnectedness of texts," through which authors frequently quote each other.[55] Orientalism enveloped the Orient by a "discourse that aimed to allow it no obscurity, no respite."[56] Knowledge about the Orient came to conform to the Orientalist vision of the Orient, and Orientalism came to denote and discuss whatever lies East of the dividing line.

What is written on the Orient depends less for its efficacy on the Orient than on various Western techniques of representation. The representations of the Orient produced by Orientalism, Said argues, are never simple reflections of a true anterior reality, but composite images which came to articulate a mute subject embodying eternally fixed and

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50 Ibid 204.
51 Ibid 202.
52 Ibid 9.
53 Ibid 177.
54 Ibid 95.
55 Ibid 15-23.
56 *The History of Sexuality* 20.

irredeemably inferior identities that are in dire need of illumination for 'the West' and 'the Orient' equally. The representations that make the Orient visible and clear rely more upon Western institutions and codes of understanding than on the Orient itself, and therefore are far from natural or true depictions. Far from being objective, these representations were the prerogatives of power and continued control over subjugated populations. Orientalism embodies the Orient as "a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later Western empire."[57] Orientalism, Said argues, responds to the West, the dominant culture that produced and encompassed it, and slights its inferred subject.[58]

Therefore the discourse produced is more than a mere way of communicating. In *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Said relies on Foucault to point out that "the fact of writing itself is a systematic conversion of the power relationship 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."[59] As such, Said argues, the Orient became a restricted subject of thought or action and consequently appeared "as a category denoting the Orientalists' power" and had little to do with the "Orientals as human beings" or with "their history as history."[60] What Said is getting at is the need 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."[61] Said's

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57 *Orientalism* 203.

58 Ibid 22.

59 Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 47.

60 *Orientalism* 87.

61 *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 220.

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."[62]

Said's study of Orientalism is an exposition of the dynamic exchange between the detail-conscious scholar on the one hand and the brute British, French and American political agendas on the other. Within the East/West power relationships where the West enjoys an advantage, Said argues Orientalism plays a major exploitative role. It created the whole concept of Orient and Oriental. Said posits at one and the same time that Orientalism invented and overrode the Orient - negated it "as it is"[63] (more on this later) and that neither the Orient nor the Occident is an "inert fact of nature" because he believes

> men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities - to say nothing of historical entities - such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made.[64]

Since territorial struggles are part of human history, so too is the struggle over historical and social meaning. Moreover, all geographical designations are an odd combination of the empirical and the imaginative. A line was drawn to separate Occident

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62 *Orientalism* 25.
63 Ibid 104.
64 Ibid 5.

from Orient that is less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production. This imaginative geography, Said argues, must be studied as a component of the social world.

Said seeks to analyze culture as an effective form of domination, along with the traditional military and economic forms. He attempts, he writes, "to rub culture's nose in the mud of politics."[65] As such Said argues that culture has to be dealt with "as the rival, informing and invigorating counterpoint to the economic and political machinery" normally associated with imperialism.[66] Along with the European and presently American "brute political, economic, and military rationales"[67] in pursuing their interest in 'the orient,' Orientalism, Said argues, plays a dynamic role. The post-Enlightenment empires, in Said's view, did not instantaneously become empires, nor did they rely for their success upon sheer luck and improvisation (although that may have at times been a factor as well). These empires were constitutively different in scope and scale from previous ones insofar as their organized rule relied heavily on a "sheer knitted-together strength" of a field of study intricately tied to "the enabling socio-economic and political institutions."[68] The interrelated web of literary, travel and scholarly texts that served as a distribution of geopolitical awareness, Said explains, were later appropriated by the imperial institutions as conceptual framework and justification of imperial domination. Orientalism's "durability and strength" are "a result of cultural hegemony."[69] The invasion of Egypt by Napoleon at the end of the 18th century, Said explains, relied less on military dominance than on classical texts and Orientalist knowledge.[70] India, encompassing over three

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65 Ibid 13.
66 Edward W. Said, *Literature and Society* (Baltimore: John Hopkins university Press, 1980), 7.
67 *Orientalism* 200.
68 Ibid 6.
69 Ibid 7.
70 Ibid 80.

hundred million inhabitants, was controlled by one hundred thousand British administrators. Orientalism's effectiveness, usefulness, and authority[71]--the toils of "study, understanding, knowledge, evaluation," while "masked as blandishments to 'harmony'"[72]--brought the Orient into the realm of representation, familiarity, accessibility, and manageability. Orientalism emerged into the service of the imperial institution by establishing political, military, and economic supremacy over the Orient. Orientalism aided in broaching the way for Western power and sustained its continuation against looming challenges in the neo-colonial context especially with regards to the current self-serving American imperial role.[73] Said argues that it is a conscious choice to ignore Orientalism's political facet, for it underwrote the Western political, economic, and cultural interests of colonialism.

At the core of Orientalism is the politics of identity that relies on the assumption of the "ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority."[74] Orientalism is premised on contrasting the superior 'we' to the inferior 'they', which reaffirms essential identities. In encountering the Other, Said explains, Orientalists concentrated in themselves a Western essence from which they drew a defensive perimeter around their work called 'the West.' This perimeter served not only as protection for, and retreat to an unchanged, superior Self against a supposed contamination by the inferior Other, but also froze the Other in a kind of basic objecthood. The Orientalist vision halts and fastens the Orient in an immobile and uniform ontological status premised on "an already pronounced evaluative judgement"

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71 Ibid 123.
72 Ibid 308-309.
73 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 341-408.
74 *Orientalism* 42.

linked to "lamentably alien" and inferior identities in Western society[75] that became the common denominator in knowing the Orient. Said refers to this phase as latent Orientalism.

Latent Orientalism was only one constant feature of Orientalism's dual constitution. Said goes on further to explain that whereas latent Orientalism anchored the Oriental designation in a stationary ontology, seen as a problem "to be solved or confined or - as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory - taken over,"[76] the second phase, manifest Orientalism, provided whomever researched the Orient with room for heterogeneity. It is through the manifest phase that travellers, scholars, diplomats can change, revise, and add to previous work while remaining loyal to and operating within the latent phase's grip on "the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability." It is taken for granted that the Orient is in dire need of Western adjustment and the differences and changes in knowledge of the Orient are "exclusively manifest differences" exhibited through "differences in form and personal style" of the engaged writers.[77] Throughout all this, however, the Orient does not speak.

The Orientalist assumption that the Orient is ontologically stable for all time, "it exists, in a sense, as we know it,"[78] provides the grounds to endlessly assert authority and superiority--power--of the West to know, speak for, and regulate the Orient. For Said, Orientalism is a Western "*will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control,

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75 Ibid 207.
76 Ibid 207.
77 Ibid 206.
78 Ibid 32.

manipulate, even to incorporate," the Other.[79] His thrust is to point to the link between all forms of knowledge and power, especially, since it is his specialty, the link between literature and politics. As Robert Young points out, Said's contention has exerted a moral pressure on all scholars in various fields to come to terms with the ethical consideration of the so called 'value free' scholarship. For Said, the question is whether it is possible to produce non-ethnocentric and non-coercive knowledge of other cultures?[80]

The relationship between the East and the West is a relationship of power and domination. In fact, an underlying theme in *Orientalism* is the affiliation of knowledge with power. As Said puts it: "knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control."[81] Knowledge about the Orient had to conform to the Orientalist vision of the Orient. Through this systematic accumulation Orientalism acquired a "cumulative and corporate identity," a uniform "writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases"[82] that took charge of the Orient. Relying on these texts, "European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively"[83] and systematically excluded the actualities of the Orient.[84]

Orientalism, Said argues, is far from being objective and apolitical.[85] The unequal power relationship between the Orientalist and the Orient empowers the former to possess, define and represent or speak for the latter, all the while impeding, even

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79 Ibid 12.
80 Ibid 325.
81 Ibid 36.
82 Ibid 202.
83 Ibid 9.
84 Ibid 177.
85 Ibid 202.

disqualifying, any independent approach to or views on the subject under study. Said points out an "implicit and powerful difference" between the assumed observant, studious Orientalist, the person who *writes* about, and the presumed passive Oriental, the one who is *written* about.[86] The learned Orientalists benefited from historical facts of domination (wealthy, foreign, male[87]) in order to excavate and accumulate experiences, territories, peoples and histories, and to study, mould, verify, and classify them over time into an accepted "system of knowledge," thereby filtering and constituting the Orient into Western consciousness. The Orientalist knowledge of the Orient becomes the Orient, an object that can then be controlled and managed.

With this extensive Eurocentric codification of the non-European world no room is left for the subjugated peoples but to feel "subservient to a superior, advanced, developed and morally mature Europe," engaged in the benevolent enterprise "to rule, instruct, legislate, develop"[88] and even discipline and punish non-Europeans benevolently for their own good. Orientalism, Said elaborates in *The World the Text and the Critic*, "had the epistemological and ontological power virtually of life and death, or presence and absence, over everything and everybody designated as 'Oriental'."[89].With the Western imperial expansion, the politics of identity was accentuated by the subordination, through what Said refers to as "undeterred, and unrelenting Eurocentrism"[90] of the inferior, colonized native peoples to the identity of the superior Imperial power.

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86 Ibid 308-309.

87 On this issue there is a large body of literature that deals with gendering Orientalism. For a discussion on the role and contribution of European women to the Orientalist knowledge see among many others; Jane Miller, *Seductions*; Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*; Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*.

88 Literature and Society 7.

89 *The World, ten Text, and the Critic* 223.

90 Ibid 7.

Said relies on Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony through which elite sway is sustained over the masses and thus frames Orientalism as a field that although operating autonomously of its subject's tangible lives, feeds off precisely those lives, analogously, as a parasite. In an imperial frame, hegemony encourages the oppressed to become party to their own oppression. Orientalism's "flexible *positional* superiority" in response to resistance depends on the willingness of the governed to be governed, which puts the Orientalist "in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand."[91] The extensive cultural domination has been sustained by the seductive spell of the rightness of the West's version of reality.[92] Orientalism's intellectual authorial grip over the Orient has so swept the field, Said argues, that Arabs repeat the myths of Orientalism,[93] ape Western culture, and have engrossed themselves in Western consumerism while the negative attitudes toward Arabs in general encapsulated in Orientalism, and plaguing the Palestinian/Israeli conflict to this day, continue unabated. In short, "the modern Orient," Said writes, "participates in its own Orientalizing."[94] Seen from the *Orientalism* lens, Said posits, the Palestinian became a nonentity in Palestine not merely because the Zionist filled that role physically but also because the Palestinian's or Arab's "negative personality (Oriental, decadent, inferior)" became more pronounced.[95]

The dispossession of Palestinians and Arabs can be seen in films, read in newspapers and magazines, and watched on television. It is also present in the works of

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91 *Orientalism* 7.

92 Salman Rushdie satirizes this seductive spell in *The Satanic Verses*: "They describe us..." the male model from Bombay now in a London sanatorium as a manticore explained to Chamcha. "They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct." Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Knopf, 19), 167.

93 *Orientalism* 322-325.

94 Ibid 325.

authors who claim, and we have no reason to doubt, their sympathy to Palestinians and Arabs. At a time when "peace" in the Middle East is championed by the US and Canadian mass media, it is disconcerting to witness the same media perpetuate the long trajectory of tactless misrepresentations of Arabs and Islam. A distorted image of Islam and Arabs has unfortunately been a feature of the American mass media for over a century. Throughout the years, Hollywood and the TV industry have provided audiences with instant bad guys, terrorists, prodigals and uncouth characters. The 1990s are unfortunately no exception. According to Jack Shaheen in *The TV Arab*, in the past 100 years Hollywood has produced more than 700 films whose contents vilify the religion Islam and the Arab world. Extending his study beyond Hollywood films, Shaheen also examined more than 250 comic books published during the past 50 years. He also looked at hundreds of children's cartoons and more than 450 children's films, from an early one in 1893 to Walt Disney's *Aladdin* in 1993. His conclusions were that Arab portrayal in US mass media "tends to perpetuate four basic myths about Arabs: They are all fabulously wealthy; they are barbaric and uncultured; they are sex maniacs with a penchant for white slavery; and they revel in acts of terrorism."[96]

The Arab as terrorist stereotype is no stranger to Hollywood. This image has been a constant in many Hollywood movies and TV shows. There are obvious historical precedents for this, going back to events like the Munich Olympics massacre. However, the complex and multifaceted Arab culture with its many religions and tongues is usually reduced to deplorable simplistic notions. Arabs—always in the plural—are always portrayed in large numbers. Individual personalities are never represented, unless the plot

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95 Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 37-38.

narrows to dealing with the proverbial vicious terrorist who is in any case rabid and incoherent and soon, deservedly so, to be blown to bits.

There is a historical pattern of portraying Arabs as barbarians and having no conscience in the film industry, including Walt Disney animations. One of the earliest was silent screen star Rudolph Valentino's 1921 portrayal as Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan in *The Sheik* and his 1926 reprise in *The Son of the Sheik*. These movies typically portrayed Arabs as sinister. This continued into the 1990s with plots of horrendous fantasy, offering up such memorable movies as: the *Iron Eagle* series (an 18 year old defeats the combined armies of ruthless Middle East tyrants), the *Delta Force* series (rescuing American hostages from the clutches of Arab kidnappers), *Navy Seals* (1990), *GI Jane* (1997), and The Siege (1998) among others.

It remains difficult to escape the insidious representations. The history of Arab roles in film is littered with at best trivialization, and at worst, negative, demeaning and racist portrayal. From magazine and newspaper articles to television broadcasts to motion pictures, and presently to cyberspace, the image of Islam and Arabs presented relies on, what Edward Said argues is "a repertoire of often racist cliches, all of them bearing the marks of colonial knowledge now allied with Naipaulesque disenchantment."[97] These representations require little introduction and play off current events to perpetuate the negative image. The plot of the movie *The Siege*, which focuses on a fictional campaign of terrorism in New York City, manipulates the public's memory of the Oklahoma bombing, but in the process implicates an entire culture, religion and people. Once word of the Oklahoma City bombing came in, journalists were quick to point the finger of guilt

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96 Jack G. Shaheen, *The TV Arab* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984), 37.

at Muslim fundamentalism. Steven Emerson, an expert featured on CBS Evening News, "suggested that there [must] be some inherent cultural trait behind the [Oklahoma City] Bombing" and that "the intent to inflict as many casualties as possible...[was] a Middle Eastern trait."[98] The newspaper reports following the bombing shaped "a social climate in which Arabs and Muslims [were] treated as potential terrorists"[99] Even the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was quick to point to Middle Eastern fundamentalists "similar to those who were convicted of staging the World Trade Center bombing in New York" in 1993.[100] The story in *The Siege* does not go into much detail about the leader of the campaign, but just pins him up in the first scenes as "the bad guy." And it works: people flock to the cinemas, cheer and talk about the movie until the next flick is released.

In an industry where the minutiae of European Renaissance cultures are accurately and painstakingly depicted, that of the Arabs is merely caricatured. There is a scene in *The Siege* where a large demonstrating Arab crowd is holding aloft scribbled placards. In another film, *Kazaam*, the genie played by the National Basketball Association's African-American superstar Shaquile O'Neal and commanded by a white American boy thrash swarms of hook-nosed, evil Arabs. The thrashing genie gives way to Navy Seal Demi Moore in *G I Jane,* killing faceless Arabs by the score in a gratuitous end sequence that has little to do with the plot.[101] In *Father of the Bride, II*, Actor Eugene

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97 The Politics of Dispossession 362.

98 Bazzi, Mohamad, "The Arab Menace", *The Progressive* 59, no. 8. (1995), 40.

99 Ibid 40.

100 Thomas, Pierre and Ann Devroy, "Clinton Condemns 'Evil Cowards' for Blast" *The Washington Post* (20 April 1995), A1, A24.

101 Said points out that: "Most of the terrorists, the Muslims and the Arabs are played by Israelis. There's a small but thriving industry in Israel of producing extras and stand-ins for these roles who play the Arabs who are being shot and killed. Two or three Americans or Israelis versus hundreds, maybe thousands of Arabs who can't do anything right." The Pen and the Sword 88.

Levy plays the role of Mr. Habibi - an obnoxious, greedy character, disrespectful of his wife, barking at her in an unintelligible and unattractive language, supposedly Arabic. In *Operation Condor* staring Jackie Chan, two Arabs characters make several fumbling appearances throughout the movie, regularly invoking the name "Allah". One scene shows Arab Muslims praying and then shows a slave auction where Chan's women friends are getting bids from dirty Bedouins. The price? One hundred and fifty camels, no less!

The list is long, and not limited to action-packed films. The insidious representations find venue in all entertainment genre. The popular TV animation, *South Park* gets on the act as well. In one episode, Cartman's teacher, Mr. Garrison, is away, so he gets a substitute teacher, who turns out to be a terrorist from Iraq and this is supposed to be funny. The Walt Disney animated feature film *Aladdin* included derogatory lyrics, that were later changed after protests from the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), when the film was released on video.

> *Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place;*
> *Where the caravan camels roam.*
> *Where they cut off your ear, if they don't like your face;*
> It's barbaric, but hey, it's home

In the movie *Titanic*, there is a scene that depicts Arabs as asinine. The ship is sinking and passengers are panicking. In the midst of the frenzy, an Arab family stands outside their sleeping quarters, appearing to have difficulties discerning the "EXIT" sign. The

casualness of this cameo of an Arab is symptomatic of the anti-Arab mantra that is perpetuated in print, pixel and digital. The scribble on placards in *The Siege* and Mr. Habibi's gibberish in *The Father of the Bride, II* are a telling pointer of the mass media utter disregard for anything Arab. Arab writing is no more than a mess of incomprehensible curly lines. The word "Allah" is interpreted as a "different" God than the God of the other monotheistic religions, when in fact it is just another word for the same God, such as "Yahweh" and "Jehovah." In fact, all Arabs, be they Christian or Muslim, use the term Allah to refer to God. But the issue here is that the religion of Islam is associated with violence. The representations in these films are conflated to visually create what has already been articulated by scholars, such as Samuel Huntington's fear of Islam as the new anti-American threat.

The term "Islam" has given license to expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism through the mass media. In *Covering Islam*, Said plays with the pun "covering Islam" to show how the news media relies on trivial cliches such as "Shi'a penchant for martyrdom," "betrayal is the mother's milk of statesmen," "the Islamic threat," "Muslims are enraged at modernity," "Islam never made the separation between church and state" and the like to cover or elide much of the world of Islam of which, he adds, most journalists are ignorant. These cliches are pronounced as general statements with scarcely a mention of the differences between individual Muslims, between Muslim societies, between Muslim traditions and eras. In the end, the use of the term "Islam," Said argues, amounts to hiding, distorting, deflecting, and ideologizing more than anything it purports to meaningfully explain.[102]

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102 *Covering Islam* x.

One has to search deeply for a positive aspect about Arab culture or Islam in the mass media. It is even more difficult to identify a positive role model. *The Siege* includes one Arab based character playing an FBI agent who protests the harsh policies. But the character's horrible mannerisms overshadow any other aspect of the character. The hero in *Aladdin* is a small-nosed Arab – stereotypically he looks more European than Arab. TV offers even less, perhaps for the better. Jamie Farr's Maxwell Q. Klinger originally appeared on M.A.S.H 1047 might be the exception that confirms the rule. The character was that of a cowardly transvestite psycho bucking for a Section 8 discharge. The character evolved into something more 'normal' as the seasons progressed. Still fondly remembered, Klinger was a rare positive Arab stereotype - even during his Section 8 days!

At a time when "peace" in the Middle East is the buzz refrain, Arab culture or the religion of Islam remains in all films merely a basis for suspicion by those who value "the American way." Every act of terrorism is tied into religious practice; Islam is equated with acts of violence. The sole purpose Arabs are good for is being killed, and the world is that much better off with their extermination. This lack of attention to detail is not merely an oversight on the part of filmmakers who do not seem to ever be interested in providing a balanced view of hypothetical events. Worse, it perpetuates a skewed version of Islam and whatever qualifies as a visual representation of "Arabness." Wounds will never heal when this kind of otherness is perpetuated.

Yet, this approach is inflected beyond the mass media. It is by no means a problem of movie production following the tired and tiring Hollywood script on how to portray Arabs in movies. Hala Maksoud, the president of ADC, is partly correct in

pointing out that: "It's particularly painful that a company which got its start humanizing animals: Mickey and Donald, has now taken to dehumanizing people as a major endeavor."[103] But the bigoted representations in the mass media are not necessarily intentional nor are they based in sheer ignorance. The distortion of the Arab image in the West reflects a specific pattern of understanding. The same representations surface in novels, travelogues and scholarly work. They surface even in the works of authors who view sensitivity as an important ingredient in approaching others especially those who have been misrepresented before.

Ahdaf Soueif, an Egyptian born author, recounts how she helped organize a trip to Egypt contemplated by the Nobel laureate William Golding. In an attempt to facilitate his visit, she enlisted the help of her brother, whom she describes as a disgruntled electrical engineer toiling to set up an alternative publishing house. He accepted to take time off work to "open doors and smooth paths" in order for Golding to fulfill his aim of "mingling lightheartedly with live Egyptians instead of dead ones." The result is published as a travelogue, *An Egyptian Journal*, in which Soueif found herself hard pressed to recognise her own brother. For all of Golding's eagerness to meet the Egyptians, he could not shed his mental image of a stereotypical Egyptian: distance from rather than closeness to "what is right there before his eyes," writes Souief, guided his encounters. Her brother's effort, especially in arranging meetings with the local inhabitants, amounted to no more than being "the subject of yet another wrong-headed and patronizing account by a Western passer-through."[104] What Souief sees as a

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103 Press Release, Hala Maksoud, American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (August 18, 1997).

104 Ahdaf Soueif, "Passing Through" *London Review of Books* 3 (1985), 9

patronizing account is not a personal characteristic of Golding's character. It is a result, rather, of a way of thought.

Commissioned, in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip, *The Yellow Wind*[105] is a collage of the account of David Grossman's observations of the misery of the Palestinian refugees. To be fair, he embarks on this journey claiming full awareness of the effort needed on his part to untrain himself not to "look at Arabs with that same blurred vision" and learn to practice "exactly the opposite, enter the vortex of my greatest fear and repulsion, direct my gaze at the invisible Arabs, face this forgotten reality."[106] He is not oblivious to the malevolence of the occupation. Rather he aspires to use its effects to inspire "the real forge of a moral and human code of behaviour" for "to become human" is to pass "from speech to moral action."[107]

Yet, his journey among the Palestinians is an attempt, he reveals in the end, to deal with a lingering personal doubt over how

> an entire nation like mine, an enlightened nation by all accounts, is able to train itself to live as a conqueror without making its own life wretched. What happened to us? How were they able to pass their values on to me during these years?"[108]

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105 David Grossman, *The Yellow Wind* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988).
106 Ibid 20.
107 Ibid 216.
108 Ibid 212.

"They" of course are the Palestinians in particular and Arabs in general. For all his good intentions, Grossman, almost predictably, paints the Palestinians in either of two preconceived portraits, pitifully passive or intensely violent. For example, the theme of paternalism is taken later on with Raja Shehadeh, a West Bank lawyer and founder of a human rights group, who was rhetorically asked by Grossman; "How can you explain the fact that we rule more than a million and a half Arabs, almost without feeling it? After all, were the situation reversed, wouldn't we make your lives miserable?" One may wonder whether or not making each others' lives miserable is the ultimate of human tests; or one may be even horrified to hear the terrifying echo of Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, demanding to know "Why did members of the Jewish race go to their deaths so easily?"[109] But what is of great poignancy here is that Grossman does not insist on an answer. Rather he is satisfied with finding the "Arabushim" whom he was told about "who wear a mask of ignorance and apathy, to the point that the mask has seeped into their skins."[110] He feels satisfied to quote one short paragraph from Shehadeh's *Journal of a West Bank Palestinian*, out of context and mocks the painfully evident testimony throughout the journal of hopeless limitations of Palestinian life under Israeli military rule, in order to prove that Arab paternalism is the source of the Arab predicament which the Israelis need to be aware of or, Grossman warns, risk contamination.

What Shehadeh's journal makes painfully clear is the hopeless limitations of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation. Palestinians try to make best within the waiting slots prefabricated by the knowledge of the Arab specialist and the power of the military

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109 Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), 170.

authority. What other option is left than "lying, wheedling and currying favour" with authority for people that "looked undernourished and miserable, completely absorbed in the fight for survival?"[111]

This survival is referred to by David Grossman with the derisive air of certainty of a writer who knows Arabs, as "practically turning their expert passivity into an art."[112] From passivity, abject servility to authority and constraining paternalism, the image of Palestinians oscillates to hate, violence, and mindless revenge. Together they constitute the mainstays[113] holding up Grossman's travel account.

Grossman's portrayal of the refugees as deprived of human agency, and their actions devoid of reason, context and direction, at best mired in blind violence, are conspicuous instances, reflected in the scholarly work of Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami and others, of the depoliticization of the Palestinian cause and plight. The assumption that the Palestinians are passively accepting a subordinate status without resistance is itself blinded by the arrogance of rejecting the Other as inferior in all possible aspects. This mode of thought about the Arab world is structured by Orientalism.

Moreover, *The Yellow Wind* carries with it the weight of respectability. Grossman is praised as one of Israel's best novelists by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's literary commentator Eleanor Wachtel. The blurb on the front cover of *The Yellow Wind,* praising Grossman for a beautifully written work "of passionate self-honesty, unafraid to

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110 *The Yellow Wind* 19.

111 Raja Shehadeh, *Samed: Journal of a West Bank Palestinian* (New York: Adama Books, 1984), 27.

112 *The Yellow Wind* 147.

113 Arab passivity is Grossman's first theme introduced early in the book as passed on from father to son. The Yellow Wind 21. The second theme is approached through a quote of a teacher's response to a political settlement - "what was taken by force will be returned by force. Only thus" - as a prelude to condemn all the refugees and their children for their "education in blind hatred," and the "tremendous

ask terrible questions," is by the 1991 Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer. The assumptions Grossman makes are taken for truths and perpetuated officially by respected and honoured public figures, locally by Wachtel and internationally by Gordimer.

On the Canadian scene, Wachtel carries much import within the literary community. She has her own show that commands a wide audience (by CBC standards). Likewise, Gordimer's work itself is praised world wide. A long-time foe of apartheid in South Africa, she received numerous international prizes, including, in the United States, the Modern Literature Association Award, and, in 1987, the Bennett Award. Her fiction has appeared in many magazines worldwide. She has been given honorary degrees by Yale, Harvard, and other universities and has been honoured by the French government with the decoration Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. She is vice president of PEN International and an executive member of the Congress of South African writers.

Gordimer, Wachtel and others represent the reinforcement of the hegemonic culture. As Said put it in *The World, the Text and the Critic:*

> [I]n the transmission and persistence of a culture there is a continual process of reinforcement, by which the hegemonic culture will add to itself the prerogatives given it by its sense of national identity, its power as an implement, ally, or branch of the state, its rightness, its exterior forms and assertions of itself: and, most important, by its vindicated power as a victor over everything not itself.[114]

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energy being expended for the preservation of malice," and their fault for making no "effort to get out of this barrenness, this ugliness in which this kindergarten lies. *The Yellow Wind* 23-25.

114 *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 14.

If there is no critical scrutiny of the terrible questions Grossman asks, which amount in the end to selected questions that serve to support his already preconceived ideas on Palestinians whose presence, he claims, have fouled Israel's sublime values; if the questions are short in coming, then we cannot blame it on the overt hostility on the part of Grossman, Wachtel or Gordimer. If not even a long-time foe of apartheid in South Africa is able to see the shortcomings of Grossman's narrative, then the problem goes beyond personal perception. The problem must be with the character of the discourse itself.

Ahdaf Soueif remarks in criticism of William Golding's distortions and omissions in his writings on Egypt, that "The trouble with travel books is that their subject/victims don't normally get to read them, much less to give their version of what things were like."[115] And if they did, one might add, the version of what things were like may be skewed by the pervasiveness of the deeply embedded discourse, and mirrors the distortions and omissions. The discourse of Western superiority as opposed to Oriental inferiority, manifests itself in Shehadeh's later warning to Grossman that "Arabs are developing. Part of that is to your credit, of course. We are now more exposed to the world. There are many foreign visitors. We are not standing still."[116] What Shehadeh's conclusion, and Grossman's and Golding's knowledge share in common is a discourse through which another culture was appropriated.

The discourse of Orientalism unifies the diversity, and the weight of the variety of factors influencing responses, within Islam, Arab and Palestinian society under the banner of fanaticism. When attempting to come to terms with the crises in the Middle

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115 "Passing Through" 9.
116 *The Yellow Wind* 156.

East, this is the image, Edward Said argues, held up for reprobation by 'the West' that is trained to readily accept old negative clichés about the eternal enemy. This portrayal not only serves to depoliticize the Palestinian cause and plight but is rooted in Western perception of the Arab world. These maligned representations serve as the starting point for a wide array of events that include incidents of racism and bigotry, hate crimes, discrimination, the denial of basic rights to avenues of free speech, and the exclusion from participation in government and private area activities.

There are those who argue that Hollywood's portrayal of Arabs is part of its history of dealing with ethnic groups. They invoke the image of the Native American and Italian examples to point out that this is merely a phase that eventually will give way to some other group. Sadly, this argument itself is part and parcel of the Orientalism discourse. It reifies this approach as normal. What is assumed and, indeed, seen as truth by some, and as a wrong-headed and "patronizing account of a passer-through" by others, is based on and derived from what, Said explains, a deeply rooted scholarship that feeds off itself and positions authors and readers to think of the subject in certain ways.

The negative perceptions can lend license to violence as Turki experienced growing up in a refugee camp and as many other Palestinians experienced in Jordan, Syria, and continue to experience in Lebanon and the occupied territories to this day. But violence is reciprocated. People who are abused, abandoned, and ridiculed constantly will rise up and turn to the only alternative allowed to them. Violence is oftentimes the result of frustration that stem from inherent policies of exclusion, intimidation, incitement and discrimination. These "activities of covering and covering up" as Said explains, eliminate "consideration of the predicament of which they are symptom: the general problem of

knowing and living" in a complex world.[117] The easy and instant generalisations can only aggravate and further alienate already maligned cultures and peoples.

117 *Covering Islam* xii.

CHAPTER THREE

Critiques of the Orientalist Thesis

The term "Islam," Said maintains, suffers from rigid representations. Over the last two centuries, historians have published an extensive learned literature on the subject. Nevertheless, however worthy their studies may have been, they have contributed little to a better understanding of the world of Islam. The historians are entrapped in a "cognitive mastery" that although it allows them to excel within the field, nevertheless restricts their work to the parameters defined by the same field. The body of literature they have accumulated has not always been inspired by the purest spirit of scholarly impartiality towards the religion of Islam and its adherents, a tendency particularly marked in the heyday of the colonial empires. In order to open up interpretation, however, Said argues that Orientalism must be addressed as a discourse.

In this chapter I will present two forms of critique of Said's Orientalism theory. These two diverge when political conclusions are drawn. One of the forms of critique suggests in effect that Said does not fully study, and offers a tendentious interpretations of, a diverse body of area studies literature. He has been accused, for example, of presenting the wrong factual details on certain events and of dividing the Middle East field of studies in two opposing groups. I will argue that these criticisms tend to focus on minor issues, and to miss the main point of Said's argument. In fact, the criticisms come from commentators who tend to practice the very thing that Said complains of when they themselves write about the religion of Islam and Arab world. The second form of critique takes Said's argument at its value and employs it to turn the table on him, accusing him of

Orientalizing 'the West.' These commentators point to contradictions within Said's argument. With respect to this argument, I will rely on Said's post *Orientalism* work—*Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994)—to show that Said idealizes the Western tradition, rather than set it up as an 'other' that he deplores. I will outline some of the ways in which Said, employing this very tradition, tries to imagine solutions in order to overcome some of the lingering issues that he raises in *Orientalism*.

Being the doyen of the scholarly discipline on which Said points the spotlight, Bernard Lewis is in a good position to question *Orientalism's* selective and parsimonious "limitations of time, space, and content."[118] In *Islam and the West*, Lewis provides a bleak view of *Orientalism*. He condemns it for "its science fiction history and its Humpty-Dumptyism"[119] and denounces it as "intellectual pollution."[120] He is livid about *Orientalism's* introducing ideology and politics into the domain of scholarship.[121] For a real scholar, and the purity and neutrality of his or her scholarship, Lewis maintains, are not tinged and impressed upon, even violated, by petty squabbles--"the gross political fact"[122]--derived from "fashionable creeds or causes" that seem to be espoused by "brainwashed university students."[123]

This tone of criticism comes from a highly respected and regarded historian. He was trained at the London School of Oriental and African Studies where he later taught. Today he is a Near Eastern Studies Emeritus at Princeton University. Ever since the

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118 *Islam and the West* 111.
119 Ibid 114.
120 Ibid 49.
121 Ibid 50.
122 *Orientalism* 10.
123 *Islam and the West* 100.

publication of *Orientalism*, Lewis, the pro-Israeli professor, and Said, the once member of the Palestine National Council, have engaged in a simmering debate fueled by genuine dislike of each other's political stance.

Lewis frames *Orientalism* in terms of beneficial services rendered to ungrateful recipients. *Orientalism's* success, Lewis protests, is merely product of foolish anti-Westernism; ungrateful recipients who seem to have found allies in the West, misguided by the "growing need for simplification."[124] He wonders how to combat the evils of sexism, racism, imperialism etc., if Western culture is to be dismissed, as he claims (unidentified) others insist it should? Lewis believes that the freedom to name and denounce the aforementioned evils will be dismissed with this assault on modernity.[125]

His concern is even reflected in his unfortunate choice of a title for his book, *Islam and the West*. "Islam" doesn't pair logically with "the West", but rather with "Christendom"-a medieval concept. Lewis remains preoccupied in his opposition of "Islam" to "the West." This dichotomy compels him to attribute the perceived "pernicious" assault on Oriental scholarship to be the work of "[c]ommitted Muslim critics" who have their own "intelligible rationale," unlike the Christian Arab minority, "curiously" resident in the West who also write with "obvious emotion" and express "passionately held convictions" yet at least they work "within the limits" of the approved scholarship.[126] Lewis fears the grave assault on the West, grave in its falsification of the past, (read, the Orientalist's version), which has threatened "our common humanity,"[127]

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124 Ibid 114.

125 Bernard Lewis, *Cultures in Conflict: Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 79.

126 *Islam and the West* 50.

127 *Cultures in Conflict* 73.

by which he means the West with "Europe at its source and America the leader."[128] Said stands accused of audaciously attempting not only "to implicate the literature of sensibility, the Leavisite great tradition, in the squalor and brutality of imperialism," but also to condemn Western liberal humanists as "accomplices of colonialism."[129]

Lewis reasons that the "historians in free countries" have a "moral obligation to use that freedom for those who do not possess it."[130] And "use that freedom," for example, is what Fouad Ajami does. Ajami, a scholar in Middle Eastern studies, can be located within Lewis's network of "fellow scholars." As a non-Western intellectual who came to the United States of America for "liberty and work" Ajami finds himself far too grateful to "rail against the sins of the West,"[131] as others do. He sees himself in the role of the scholar defined by Lewis as possessing

> a moral and professional obligation not to shirk the difficult issues and subjects that some people would place under a sort of taboo; not to submit to voluntary censorship, but to deal with these matters fairly, honestly, without apologetics, without polemic, and, of course, competently. [132]

He writes from an intellectual location, stimulated by a genuine sense of being an auxiliary to what he believes to be the ultimate course of human action ingrained in the West--the site of maturity and freedom. Lewis's fear of the assault on the 'West' is echoed

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128 Ibid 74.

129 John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 6.

130 *Islam and the West* 130.

131 Fouad Ajami, "The Summoning," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 1993), 4.

132 *Islam and the West* 130.

by Ajami. in *The Arab Predicament.*[133] He quotes Lewis to show that Arabs are unable to handle modernity and change in order to explain the rage against the "Western standard-bearers of civilization."[134] For a culture that conforms to a "cyclical vision of history"[135] where Islam is the "pillar of political authority," explains Ajami, the historic desire for revenge against the West is not far from the surface.[136]

Ajami's condemnation Arab society as a mere "intermediate crossroads civilization," its ideas inauthentic, "like the borrowed machines that litter their landscape,"[137] perpetuates the dichotomy of Oriental despotism to Western freedom, European superiority to Arab complacency, apathy, paternalism. Ajami dismisses the diversity of the Arab world through subtle appeals to the backwardness of its attitudes, lack of desire to effect any change, and its violent nature by mere association with the violent behaviour of certain groups.

In the 1992 edition Ajami adds concluding thoughts in which he explains that the only route for change and surmounting backwardness, is to "hear and honor" the West--the source, the reference point. He implies that the dragging "into a world inhabited by others" and the coming "up against those others"[138] is a one way street leading from Arab nativism to Western modernity. Being an Arab and a Shi'te Muslim to boot,[139] carries with it the weight of the insider, and draws the praise of the historian.[140] Ajami

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133 Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).
134 Ibid 6.
135 Ibid 185.
136 Ibid 177.
137 Ibid 18.
138 Ibid 252.
139 His work is not that of a "stranger" he recounts, thus the "political tradition I hack away at here was, in the most intimate way, my own and my generation's." *The Arab Predicament* ix . The fact that within "my own and my generation's" political tradition there are dissenting views is of no concern to Ajami, for he represents the 'real' issues.
140 *Islam and the West* 114.

acquiesces to legitimize the authority of the West's preconceived view of modernization, development, 'civilization' etc., and unfortunately espouses in the process the images, doctrines, and reticence embedded in the discourse of Orientalism.

For the most part Lewis interprets *Orientalism* as a rigid and an unequivocal battle between "us" and "them." This distortion is premised on the reading of *Orientalism* as an anti-Western tract. Seen as such, Said's argument is distilled further to produce a view of the West as an enemy of the Arab world and the religion of Islam. It is an interpretation that mirrors the distortions made by Muslim fundamentalists who read *Orientalism* as a systematic defense of the victims of Western colonialism and prejudice--Arabs and Muslims.[141]

However, rather than setting it up as an "other" that he deplores, Edward Said idealizes the Western tradition. Said is steeped in the Western philological tradition and formed by the West's betrayal of the *Nahda*, renaissance of Arab nationalism - itself imbued and inculcated by Western thought. His intellectual aim as a professor of English and comparative literature is to augment the same project commenced by the European Philologen, which he regards with high esteem, by ridding it of the ethnocentrism that underwrote the work of his predecessors.[142] As Clifford points out, Said turns to European authors "for his expression of essential values" and "for his analytical tool."[143] Said is in pursuit of reintegration of people and cultures, once confined and reduced to peripheral status, into the fold of "humanity." This is made clear in the work Said published after *Orientalism*.

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141 Edward W. Said, "Orientalism, an Afterword," *Raritan* 14 (Winter 1995), 34.

142 *A Critical Reader* 3.

143 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Universty Press, 1988), 275.

Said argues that literary culture cannot be understood without at the same time studying the society from which it flourishes.[144] Imperialism, for Said, is a major determining political horizon in the study of cultures. The "epistemology of imperialism"[145] brought about the division and separation of people along homogenous national and racial lines, and espoused ubiquitously today with quasi-fanatical vigor. Imperialism could not but influence culture, and not so much that "imperial culture" was developed to promote imperialism. In the age of imperialism, as in this age of postcolonialism, culture generally serves to normalize imperial power relations in habitual activity, intellectual debates, artistic creations as well as the blunt imperialist exploits. This is akin to Benedict Anderson's argument in *Imagined Communities*,[146] that the development of vernacular print culture played a major role in the construction of the imagined national communities that underpinned the imperial ideologies and administrations, so long, however Said cautions, as the linear periodizations of the imagined national community is not taken for granted.

Far from condemning authors, or enumerating a list of shame-on-you imperial texts, Said rather locates their work within the imperialist values that structure the articulation of texts including those expressing opposition (feminist, labour ... movement) because, Said explains, subject peoples were rarely regarded as equal human beings and thus not deserving of self-determination.[147] With the sprawl of the British empire, for example, the historical experience of possession became part of the intellectual, imaginative, and emotional English experience inflected differently in texts. Said

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144 *Orientalism* 27.
145 Edward W. Said, "The Politics of Knowledge," *Raritan* 11 (Summer 1991), 21.
146 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).
147 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), xi-xxvii.

associates imperialism with creativity in the same sense as Robinson Crusoe, after surviving the shipwreck, launched into claiming and creating his world on the Island. In this regard, Said places Zionism within the same framework of Western imperial acquisition and occupation. Zionism, Said writes, "never spoke of itself unambiguously as a Jewish liberation movement, but rather as a Jewish movement for colonial settlement in the Orient."[148] As such a parallel may be discerned between the experiences of Arab Palestinians and other subjugated peoples portrayed as subhuman by Zionism and nineteenth century imperialists respectively.

Therefore, Said points to the need to open up interpretation.[149] He sees culture and literature as neither politically nor historically innocent, but rather intertwined with power. Since texts are part of the imperial culture, they are part of a process which involved not only the most sordid practices but also some of the best aspects of that society. For Said, texts are part of the world and solicit the world's attention. As such criticism

> must see itself, with other discourse, inhabiting a much contested cultural space, in which what has counted in the continuity and transmission of knowledge has been the signifier, as an event that has left lasting traces upon the human subject.[150]

The imaginative projection of novels, for example, which Said sees as accommodating Self to society, suggests the interconnectedness or interdependencies of the imperial

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148 Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 69.
149 *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 40.

power with the colonies,[151] and thus, the history of the colonized people beyond what is enacted in the novel, and texts, may be discerned.

At the end of *Orientalism*, Said calls for a "libertarian or nonrepressive and nonmanipulative perspective" to be brought to bear on the study of other cultures. He asks how and whether it is possible to understand another culture without misrepresentation and distortion, and wonders whether the notion of a distinct culture, race, civilization, religion[152] is a useful one when what is involved is either self-congratulation of Self or demeaning of 'the Other.'

He takes it upon himself to solve this conundrum. Said believes that it is not only possible but also necessary for individuals to transcend a particular and powerful "communal core of interpretations."[153] Unlike Michel Foucault whose work he relies on in Orientalism, Said still believes in individual agency. He believes in the "determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism."[154] Therefore Said tries to imagine a solution to the question of how "to recognize individuality and to reconcile it with its intelligent, and by no means passive or merely dictatorial, general and hegemonic context."[155]

He aspires to dispose of the East-West dichotomy and nurture the concept of intertwined histories and human experience. What he advocates is the acknowledgment of other's histories and traditions. He advocates an alternative or a counterpoint to the

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150 Ibid 225.

151 As in the case of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park the slave plantation that Sir Thomas Bertram owns in Antigua is used to finance the estate in England

152 *Orientalism* 325.

153 *Covering Islam* 43.

154 *Orientalism* 23.

155 Ibid 9.

hegemonic dominant myth, viewpoint, ideology. Employing a musical metaphor, he calls for a contrapuntal reading or probing of texts to flush out the negative against which the Self is defined. He describes contrapuntalism as a connection or mutual consideration of otherwise disparate social practices, of culture and empire, of history and the present:

> we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others.[156]

Ultimately, he is after historical contextualization through which many voices are heard producing a history. Nowhere is this more urgent, Said feels, than in the recognition of the Israeli-Palestinian context of shared suffering and history. Since the history of Jewish suffering did little to deter Zionism from inflicting the cycle of suffering systematically on the Palestinian people, and faced with the massive Western discursive power of interpreting the Palestinian people into the cobwebbed recesses of oblivion in order to elevate the Israeli Jew to polished eminence, Said puts the emphasis on interpreting not how spheres are separated, but rather "how they are connected, mixed, involved, embroiled, linked."[157] Interpretations must be ventured equally "here" and "there," he argues, in "the same language employed by the dominant power, to dispute its

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156 Culture and Imperialism 36.

157 *Freedom and Interpretation: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1992*, edited by Barbara Johnson (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 198.

hierarchy and methods, to elucidate what it has hidden, to pronounce what it has silenced or rendered unpronounceable."[158]

Lewis sees the assault on the West through Said's choice of works. He dismisses *Orientalism* for its failure to account for the equally important German, Russian, Austrian, and Hungarian Orientalisms, as a narrow polemic mired in the current Middle East ideological struggle. Lewis argues that Said isolates Arab studies "from both their historical and philological contexts."[159] He wonders why Said ignores some of the major centers of oriental scholarship? Said himself states that these countries had nothing

> to correspond to the Anglo-French presence in India, the Levant, North Africa. [T]he German Orient ... was never actual, the way Egypt and Syria were actual for Chateaubriand, Lane, Lamartine, Burton, Disraeli, or Nerval.[160]

Lewis is aiming at the heart of Said's thesis—the connection between imperial power and Orientalist knowledge. What he misses, however, is that German, Hungarian, Russian, and Austrian Orientalism shared with British, French and American (and other) Orientalism a common authorial grip over the Orient. Since Said was not engaged in writing, as he puts it, "an encyclopaedic narrative history of Orientalism,"[161] Lewis's complaint of German Orientalism--even when backed up by analysis of Edward Gibbon's attempt at being objective--emerges as an attempt to elide Said's concern with the

158 Ibid 198.
159 *Islam and the West* 108.
160 *The Question of Palestine* 19.
161 *Orientalism* 16.

hegemony of the modern American Orientalist discourse framed by 'the West's' idea of the Middle East.

Orientalism, Said argues, is analogous to an archive in which relations of power are produced and reproduced by scholars, which is interpreted by Bernard Lewis as reducing the scholar to an "agent and instrument of the imperialist."[162] It is a critique that is not limited to Lewis's reductions but is an ongoing debate that is far from showing signs of ebbing let alone from being resolved. Albert Hourani points out that Said's manner of casting the type of the Orientalist, mirrors his criticisms of their work on the Orient and may be legitimately accused of repeating what he criticizes the Orientalists of in casting the type of 'the Oriental.'[163] In singling out the Orientalists's exaggerations, racism, and hostility Said may have neglected to stress the Orientalists's positive contribution to human knowledge, especially the critical intellectual work by scholars that Said himself commends (Clifford Geertz, Jacques Berque, Maxime Rodin) and may have salvaged the term Orientalism from the abyss of ridicule and retained it to describe in Hourani's words "a limited rather dull but valid discipline of scholarship."[164]

In an even more insightful critique, James Clifford remarks that Said at times tends to repeat the essentializing discourse that he set out to expose in *Orientalism.*[165] Clifford points out that Said himself is caught up in the same Orientalist processes of "construction of simplifying essences and distancing dichotomies."[166] This criticism also surfaces in another sympathetic review by Sadik Jalal al'Azm. In it, he argues that Said's attempt to trace the origin and development of Orientalism "back to Homer, Aeschylus,

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162 *Islam and the West* 109.
163 Albert Hourani, "The Road to Morocco," *The New York Review of Books* (March 8, 1979), 29.
164 Quoted in *Orientalism, an Afterword* 46.
165 *The Predicament of Culture* 262.

Euripides and Dante" makes it more than "a modern phenomenon," and therefore Said's approach "lends strength to essentialist categories."[167] These are critiques that employ Said's arguments to point out the reverse. Said stands accused of Orientalizing "the West." Said "contributes to this saturation by occidentalising the West, by 'essentialising' the characteristics of European powers no less than they 'essentialised' the East."[168] But unlike Lewis and many historians, Clifford and al'Azm realize that the problem Said has presented is deeper than setting a high standard of objectivity. The problem is in how do "we" get to know and deal with 'the Other.'

Clifford's critique shows that Said fails to establish a foundation or site outside 'the West' from which to launch his attack. Said's criticisms, Clifford argues, remain "locally based and politically engaged" yet presented from the point of view that they "must resonate globally."[169] Clifford's aim is to displace the idea of authenticity of "self". Yet unable to do without culture he argues that identity is hybrid, "contingent and subject to local reappropriation."[170] This is a view that becomes very much a norm in Said's post-*Orientalism* work.

One of the recurrent themes throughout his work is a rejection of the idea of essentialized identities. As a victim of insidious representations Said, to his credit, rejects essentialized identities for they promote polarization and exclusivness, the very thing Said is trying to combat. He would like to steer away from the essentialist stances which promote the position that only Jews can understand Jews or only Muslims can represent Islam. Rather he refuses to grant "an ideal and essential separate status" to national states

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166 Ibid 11.
167 Said Jalal al-'Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," *Khamsin* 8 (1981), 6.
168 *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* 5.
169 *The Predicament of Culture* 11.

or cultures, and sees them as "massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences."[171]

In *Orientalism,* Said's analyses steer away from showing discrepancies between 'reality' and the Orientalists' view of it. By avoiding positing, or arguing for, an essential Orient, Said attacks the hierarchical human division within Orientalism. He is not as much concerned to defend Arabs and Islam as much as to show that these terms exist as "communities of interpretation."

> So saturated with meanings, so over-determined by history, religion and politics are labels like 'Arab' or 'Muslim' as subdivisions of 'the Orient' that no one today can use them without some attention to the formidable polemical mediations that screen the objects, if they exist at all, that the labels designate.[172]

He does not engage in articulating a voice[173] for those who are silenced by Orientalism, but rather, tries to hack away at many distorted yet tenaciously held Western beliefs embedded in the discourse of Orientalism. It is a discourse, he explains, that came to bypass Oriental sources altogether in a self-referential process of legitimation.

The difficulty historians have with *Orientalism* is the concept of discourse, which is seen "to circle around an intellectual superstructure wrenched from its empirical base."[174] They argue that for historians it is the norm to rub, as Said is recommending,

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170 Ibid 10.

171 *Culture and Imperialism* 32.

172 "Orientalism Reconsidered" 214.

173.His political engagement and his writings on the Palestinian question do, and eloquently. *See The Politics of Dispossession, After the Last Sky; Palestinian Lives, The Question of Palestine, Peace and its Discontent,* and *Covering Islam.*

174 *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* 37.

"culture's nose in the mud of politics,"[175] and approach texts as "a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted."[176] *Orientalism* continues to be a thorn in the Orientalist side - an anathema - for the fundamental tenets of historical procedures are violated. No longer is the historian able to explain change over time with reference to actual events. Said's work offers no "narrative thread which the historian can follow."[177] However, as I will show later, Said himself would not pursue his own work as far as the historians fear.

Nevertheless, if the scholarship is truly in need of improvement, Lewis argues, the solution should be through the "rigorous and penetrating critique" by "fellow scholars, especially, though not exclusively, those working in the same field."[178] In order to accentuate the point, Lewis provides the example of Edward Gibbon. In a chapter, first presented at a conference in 1976, he tries to give credence to his argument by showing how the work of Edward Gibbon, though citing former authors who in turn relied on each other as "sources of information" remains nonetheless nonpolemical and a great source of influence on Western perception of Islam and the prophet Muhammad.[179]

What is left unsaid or untouched by Lewis is the "already pronounced evaluative judgment"[180] on Islam and the Orient. So Gibbon produced a work on Islam "that was clear, elegant, and above all convincing," and presented the rise of Islam as a "part of human history,"[181] but he remained spell-bound by the common evaluation of Islam, Arabs, and 'the Orient' already embedded in the discourse. Gibbon's critical judgment,

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175 *Orientalism* 13.
176 *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 4.
177 *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* 38.
178 *Islam and the West* 118
179 *Islam and the West* 87-88-89-90.
180 *Orientalism* 207.
181 *Islam and the West* 98.

Lewis admits, was impeded by his "own imperfect knowledge," partly by his lack of fluency in Arabic,[182] and mired in "the defective state of European scholarship" in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.[183] Lewis points out that Gibbon had to contend with "lack of adequate access to major Arabic sources and the lack of tools facilitating access to the Arabic language itself." Lewis recounts that there were further hindrances:

> the remnants of theological prejudice, which still coloured the views even of those who personally were free from them and which sometimes made the expression of a more objective opinion physically hazardous; the fables and absurdities inherited from the ignorant past; and - a new feature of the period - the various attempts to present Muhammad and Islam in terms of current controversies in Christendom.[184]

Gibbon may be a good example of Orientalism's manifest phase in which Orientalists thrive in adjusting previous knowledge on Islam. For although he recognized "the polemic character and purpose" of previous authors, he nonetheless remained "deeply influenced by it."[185] Gibbon's work, in the end, never diverged from what previous texts had to say on the subject.

It is from this perspective that Said points to the important connection between the political circumstances enveloping the scholar and the assumption that the 'true' knowledge eventually produced is primarily nonpolitical. The Orientalist pretension of

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182 "Gibbon never learned Arabic." Islam and the West 85.
183 *Islam and the West* 95.
184 Ibid 94.
185 Ibid 90.

being preoccupied only with eternal values, high principles, freedom, and objectivity, Said points out, is belied by the adherence to an absolute certainty that recognizes only disciples or enemies. Movements in the Middle East that question the role of imperialism, or complaints directed at Israel, are automatically labelled anti-Western. For Lewis the Return of Islam is everywhere on the ascendant including the Palestinian resistance which reeks of "Islam." Muslim and Arab political, social, and cultural activity is wrung to its last drop of Islamic essence.[186] When there are calls for change such as the assault on tradition, bourgeois regimes, Zionism, imperialism, and the US support for unpopular client regimes they are ignored by Lewis and belittled by Ajami as mere illusion. This type of work tend to de-politicize and irrationalize the Palestinian cause. I think books like Ajami's are symptomatic; they become weapons in subordinating, and defeating any Arab or Muslim resistance to U.S.-Israeli dominance in the Middle East. Far from being an interlocutor, the Middle East was, and continues to be, reduced by Lewis and Ajami to a mere object.

Orientalism's provocative transgression of the boundary demarcating the opposition of the Orient to the Occident, that limits the benefits derived from the "encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies,"[187] is lost on Lewis. He is compelled, rather, to scoff at *Orientalism's* thesis through an analogy of "radical" Greeks mounting a hypothetical assault on "the profession of classical studies" and "the classicists" for "insulting the great heritage of Hellas," (Lewis p. 49) thus dubiously equating the Hellenic tradition, the fountain spring of Western culture, with Otherness.

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186 He singles out the most obvious aspects of Muslim or Arab fervour denuded of context as, for example, the PLO's "srikingly Islamic" nature that "has been overtaken" - simply - by more Islamic movements that, Lewis reminds us, "has become customary to call 'fundamentalist'" (p. 141) without any explanation as to how and why that has transpired, if it is true.

Unfortunately, Lewis skirts around Said's concern about "the Orient" being reduced to the archetypal symbol of the Other that influenced Western scholarly texts (at least the ones Said analyzed) dealing with the region. What Lewis sees as an exercise of 'freedom,' Said understands as a discourse that paints the Other in inferior colours. This view, this fear of everything not "us," Said argues, is indicative of cultural exclusivism. It assumes that no hope of overcoming barbarism is possible without Western values.

What the historians are concerned about is the threat *Orientalism* poses to the Western quest for knowledge about the Other, which Lewis claims others shirk as a taboo subject. Lewis explains that it is a uniquely European phenomenon, "perhaps one of the West's most creative innovations," and motivated by "pure curiosity."[188] This is a sentiment echoed by many others including Tzvetan Todorov in *The Conquest of America* and *On Human Diversity*: "Acculturation," Todorov writes of the Enlightenment, "is possible and often beneficial: deculturation is a threat."[189] Part of Western knowledge has developed into a science called Orientalism. Like all Western science, Orientalism allows for self-correction and improvement. Said, after all, is himself immersed in the Western analytical method, and *Orientalism* is a celebrated example of how Western knowledge is self-critical. As an ideal the West has not only benefited from it but also imparted it to others, yet is "regarded with bafflement and anger" Lewis complains, "by those who neither share nor understand it."[190] *Orientalism* is seen by Lewis as an attempt by Said and "committed Muslim critics" to malign an excellent and unexcelled scholarly tradition

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187 *Orientalism* 46.

188 *Culutres in Conflict* 78.

189 Tzvetan Todorv, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 387.

190 *Culutres in Conflict* 78.

(for where and what is the alternative) to understand the Arab world and the religion of Islam.

Said believes in the scholarship whose intellectual's allegiance is not confined to a canon, a geographic or an imperial guild. He is very amenable to the idea of benefits and enrichment derived from the knowledge of other cultures' achievements, but questions the notions of cultural distinctness and superiority with respect to those who differ from "us." He is not, as a former "Oriental," in pursuit of studying new "Orientals;" in short, Occidentalism for Said is not a viable option. Said is attacking the inauthenticity of Orientalism without recourse to an authentic counter field of study which creates problems for him to be discussed in the next chapters.

For now, however, Said's critique of Orientalism as a European scholarly discipline exposes the "fallacy of imagining the life of texts as being pleasantly ideal and without force or conflict and, conversely, the fallacy of imagining the discursive relations in actual speech [assumed to be] a relation on equality between hearer and speaker."[191] Even though Said maintains that all representation is misrepresentation, he argues that with certain care representation is possible. He believes that texts are in the world and "place themselves--one of their functions as texts is to place themselves--and indeed are themselves, by soliciting the world's attention."[192] He wants to be free to deal with texts interpretively.

Knowledge of other cultures, Said holds out hope, needs neither depend on the observer's familiarity nor foreignness or, as Tzvetan Todorov explains, the foreigner's

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191 *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 47.
192 Ibid 39-40.

"epistemological privilege."[193] What is of optimum importance for Said is a detachment from oneself.

> The more one is able to leave one's cultural home the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment *and* generosity necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance.[194]

The observer, the scholar, the intellectual, Said argues, must proceed from a position of cultural empathy not antipathy; to engage in uncoercive contact rather than in confrontation and dominance; to answer to the culture and the people being studied not to a guild, an ideology or patron; and to recognize that all representation is produced and dependent on the "willed intentional activity of the human mind."[195]

Although the taking for granted of the education, religion, nationality of one's society, influences one's perception and analysis of other cultures, and it is just as common to internalize the values and habits of one's society as it is to not question and test them, Said maintains that knowledge of other cultures is not only possible, but desirable as well. He sees it as historical knowledge, subject to unscientific imprecision, never absolute, and therefore resting upon situational and relative judgement and interpretation of facts. For Said knowledge of other cultures should be understood in human and political terms and employed not in the limited service of particular races, nations, classes, or religions but in the unrestrained deference to coexistence and

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193 *On Human Diversity* 354.
194 *Orientalism* 259.

communal interest.[196] For Said this deference lacks when it comes to the approach, and definition of, the Palestinian/Israeli coexistance.

In this endeavour, Said champions the intellectual who is committed to retrieve the forgotten, connecting previously detached issues, envisioning alternative courses of action, and constantly disputing the official narratives and justifications. A constant in his work is a suspicion of a version of the intellectual duplicity attacked in Julien Benda's The *Treason of the Intellectual*; Benda accussed academics and other intellectuals of placing personal gain above principle. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said presents his version of the intellectuals, their duties, opportunities, betrayals, audiences, and choices as well as the role of the intellectual as an outsider and amateur. The intellectual, he argues, is one who does not fear risk or exposure and is committed to an engagement with ideas and values in the public sphere. He or she should be free of links to the circles of power, to specialist guilds,[197] and to so called, neutral methodologies that identify proper professional behaviour--"not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and 'objective'."[198] Said distrusts the cult of the specialist that condemns the intellectual to operate from within a field of study that divides the benevolent "us" from the evil "them," which informs and sustains rigid and destructive representations.

According to Said, the responsibility of the intellectual is not merely to unearth a buried history of a repressed people, "but to represent it, to speak it, to let it be without

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195 *Covering Islam* 152-160.
196 *Coverign Islam* 153.
197 Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 113.

constant assaults on the speaker of that history, on the integrity of the messenger."[199] Hence, "it is the intellectual as a representative figure that matters—someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers." This means, he insists, "that intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representation, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing on television. And that is important to the extent that it is publicly recognizable and involves both commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability..."[200]

For Said the search for the truth begins with secularism. In *Representations of the Intellectual* Said argues:

> However much intellectuals pretend that their representations are of higher things or ultimate values, morality begins with their activity in this secular world of ours -- where it takes place, whose interests it serves, how it jibes with a consistent and universalist ethic, how it discriminates between power and justice, what it reveals of one's choices and priorities.[201]

This secular criticism is anchored in Said's "unbudgeable conviction in a concept of justice and fairness."[202] Only through justice and fairness can one reconcile "one's identity and the actualities of one's own culture, society, and history to the reality of other identities, cultures, peoples" without "assigning them to hidden hierarchies, preferences,

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198 *Representations of the Intellectual* 74.
199 Said, "Orientalism Revisited," in *Said, The Pen and the Sword* 46.
200 *Representations of the Intellectual* 12-13.
201 Ibid 120.

evaluations."[203] Said claims that the scholars most likely to escape the dangerous seduction of Orientalism are those who define their discipline intellectually rather than those who operate in a field defined canonically, imperially, or geographically.[204] According to Said there is a great value in "skeptical critical consciousness," for it is guided by constant scrutiny rather than by "doctrinal preconception."[205] He believes that the standards of truth must be adhered to despite "the individual intellectual's party affiliation, national background, and primeval loyalties."[206] Said continually stresses the need for intellectuals to become engaged with politics and the 'worldly' causes. The intellectual effort is coloured by an optimism to imagine the alternative by pressing the frontiers and going beyond what is "lived through in reality."[207] Secular humanism nourishes and cautions Said's intellectual

> from transforming the complexities of a many-stranded history into one large figure, or of elevating particular moments or monuments into universals. No social system, no historical vision, no theoretical totalization, no matter how powerful, can exhaust all the alternatives or practices that exist within its domain. There is always the possibility to transgress.[208]

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202 Ibid 69.
203 Ibid 69
204 *Orientalism* 326.
205 Ibid 327.
206 *Representations of the Intellectual* xii
207 Edward W. Said, "On Mahmoud Darwish," *Grand Street* 12 (Winter 1994), 115.
208 Edward W. Said, *Musical Elaborations: The Wellek Library Lectures* (New York: Columbia Press, 1991), 55.

Thus in Said's view, by "asking the right questions and expecting pertinent answers,"[209] knowledge of the Other - cultures, traditions that bare directly on human beings - may be approached with sensitivity and critical self-scrutiny. Said's right questions and pertinent answers, the discernment of sense from nonsense with regards to social as well as foreign policy are grounded in universal moral obligation for judgment premised on human rights as the foundation or site within the complex public sphere from which intellectuals can "speak the truth to power."[210] Here Said's standards of truth concerning human misery and oppression come into relief. While Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami revel in Western "freedom" and values, they both apparently remain unconcerned for the mutilation of freedom, for example, in the suppression of the Intifada or the so called liberation of Kuwait.

It is imperative for intellectuals, Said argues, to challenge the status quo especially when the voice of the underrepresented, the downtrodden seems least heard. It is the spirit of opposition that should guide the intellectual's consciousness, nourished by the commitment to the "virtues of outsiderhood."[211] This is a site, Said sees as beyond the "mainstream, unaccommodated, unco-opted, resistant,"[212] that engenders and maintains a critical sense, an oppositional stance, that transcends the dominant culture and the catalogue of *idées reçues* in the possession of specialists. It is through the employment of this critical sense that sense may be disentangled from the nonsense of "patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking," and "class, racial or gender privilege."[213] He argues that that stance provides even the scholars trained in traditional disciplines, such as

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209 *Covering Islam* 46.
210 *Representations of the Intellectual* 71.
211 Ibid 107.
212 Ibid 52.

Orientalism, the tool to free themselves from the "old ideological straitjacket."[214] But this 'oppositional' knowledge takes for granted that there are non-ideological criteria available that can be used to judge both the 'theory' and 'practice' of human behaviour towards 'others.' As Robert Young point out, Said assumes that intellectuals can work in a separate space which is somehow insulated from contemporary ideology.[215]

This critical consciousness model that Said propounds privileges the idea of the person who is marginal. In the introduction to *The Politics of Dispossession* (1994), an anthology containing over two decades' worth of essays on the struggle for Palestinian self-determination, Said describes his simultaneous support and skepticism of the "tangled history of the Palestinian national movement":

> my relationship to the Palestinian struggle and to Arafat developed but never my party affiliation. I refused all inducements to join one of the groups or to work in the PLO, largely because I felt it was important to preserve my distance. I was a partisan, yes, but a joiner and member, no.[216]

Despite his "partisan" awareness of the Palestinian predicament of exile and dispossession, Said's "distance" from the PLO foregrounds his unwillingness to align himself with national movements. More broadly this "distance" foregrounds his wariness of constituencies predicated upon national, religious, racial, academic, or institutional guilds. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said portrays the secular critic's exilic space

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213 Ibid xiii.

214 *Orientalism* 326.

215 Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 135.

as, for the most part, historically unsituated. He suggests that "exile" extends beyond the level of material, historical specificity:

> While it is an actual condition, exile is also for my purposes a metaphorical condition. By that I mean that my diagnosis of the intellectual in exile derives from the social and political history of dislocation and migration ... but is not limited to it.[217]

The exilic condition involves more than geographic displacement. It should also be understood as "internal exile"[218] In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said argues that one of the conditions of exile is the "voyage in." It entails the movement and integration of 'Third World' thinkers into the metropolitan 'First World'. An inversion of narratives such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that emphasize a "voyage in" to the 'Third-World's' interior in name of colonization, Said's re-appropriation of the journey motif and his reversal of its direction suggest the ways in which exiled intellectuals "write back to the centre," in Salman Rushdie's phrase by migrating across a liminal space separating the 'First' and 'Third Worlds':

> The voyage in, then, constitutes an especially interesting variety of hybrid cultural work. And that it exists at all is a sign of adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial structures. No longer does the logos dwell exclusively, as it were, in London and Paris. No longer does history run unilaterally, as Hegel

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216 *The Politics of Dispossession* xxiv.
217 *Representations of the Intellectual* 52.

> believed, from east to west, or from south to north, becoming more sophisticated and developed, less primitive and backward as it goes. Instead, the weapons of criticism have become part of the historical legacy of empire, in which the separations and exclusions of 'divide and rule' are erased and surprising new configurations spring up.[219]

Said suggests that "the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now." This "double perspective…never sees things in isolation"[220] In *After the Last Sky*, Said describes how he and the photographer Jean Mohr both experienced a "double perspective" that illustrates perhaps the fragmented Palestinian diaspora and exilic condition:

> Our intention was to show Palestinians through Palestinian eyes without minimizing the extent to which even to themselves they feel different, or 'other.' Many Palestinian friends who saw Jean Mohr's pictures thought that he saw us as no one else has. But we also felt that he saw us as we would have seen ourselves -- at once inside and outside our world. The same double vision informs my text. As I wrote, I found myself switching pronouns, from 'we' to 'you' to 'they,' to designate Palestinians.[221]

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218 *After the Last Sky* 80
219 *Culture and Imperialism* 295.
220 *Representations of the Intellectual* 60.
221 *After the Last Sky* 6.

Said's critical position exterior to the PLO demonstrates his commitment to the "secular" responsibilities of the intellectual and critic. From *The World the Text and the Critic* (1983), in which Said portrays criticism as "skeptical, secular, reflectively open to its own failings,"[222] to his suggestion in *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994) that the "true intellectual is a secular being,"[223] Said has consistently encouraged and defended what he has termed the "politics of secular interpretation."[224]

In *Culture & Imperialism*, Said faults nationalist models as constraining to a population's multiple, plural interests. "Nationality, nationalism, nativism: the progression is, I believe, more and more constraining."[225] Said is wary of nationalism. He is aware of the dangers of "remaining trapped in the emotional self-indulgence of celebrating one's own identity."[226] He argues that local knowledge can be as ethnocentric as is characteristic of Orientalism, and hence make the pursuit of knowledge of other cultures problematic. He stresses the need to go beyond nativism. Yet, for Said this does "does not mean abandoning national identity," rather, he explains, it "means 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."[227]

The solution in his view is to transcend local identity and aspire to achieve a 'worldly' appreciation of the 'human condition.' Said's detachment from the PLO, coupled simultaneously with his ongoing censure of U.S. foreign policy, suggests that his

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222 *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 26.
223 *Representations of the Intellectual* 120.
224 *A Critical Reader* 231.
225 *Culture and Imperialism* 277.
226 Ibid 229.
227 Ibid 229.

"politics of secular interpretation" is also anti-nationalist politics of non-affiliation, irony, detachment, exteriority, amateurism, skepticism, and anti-authoritarian defiance--even of movements the intellectual ostensibly supports.

By way of conclusion, Lewis's criticisms of *Orientalism*, in my view, amount to mundane issues, that lend credence, for example, to articles in *Commentary*, a neo-conservative magazine for which Lewis is a contributor, accusing Said of being a professor of terror (August 1989, v 88) and of falsifying his early life in order to give poignancy to the Palestinian cause (September 1999). The articles in *Commentary* tend to make blanket condemnations of the Arab culture and the religion of Islam. While it is legitimate to emphasize Said's factual limitations in *Orientalism* and elsewhere it is equally, if not more, important to stress that Said is addressing the problems of representation and the concept of discourse that takes for granted that the Orient is in dire need of Western adjustment. This view predicated on the separation of cultures, Said argues, denies the interdependence of different histories by apolitical and pure scholarship that aided imperialism and colonialism.

Said questions the obdurate supremacy of the specialist who refuses to acknowledge anything beyond the self-imposed limits of his scholarship. It is not the attempt to study seen as an intrusion by the Other that Said questions but the closed circular knowledge derived from that study and considered off limits to all but the ones versed in that scholarship. The problem that cannot be easily discounted in Said's work lies in the closed, self-evident, and self-confirming character of the trite structure of ideas and attitudes that sustains the guild of Orientalists, complicit with imperial power. His basic thrust is that the authority of the Orientalist discourse that produce and reproduce

the discourse essentially unchanged must be challenged along with the institutional, political, and socio-economic conditions by which Orientalism has flourished.

Although Said's work should be located within the experience of personal and national history of loss, dismemberment, dispossession, it would be a gross distortion to interpret it as a mere misguided product of an anti-Western, anti-Zionist ideological rage. This interpretation diminishes the important insight on how claims to universality are grounded in power, on how "we" come to know the "other," and on how discourses are perpetuated. Despite professions of sympathy and understanding, Lewis, Ajami, Gordimer and others are working within an intellectual framework that casts Arabs and Muslims as frightening and threatening to others. While Clifford's criticism of Said is conducive to debate and dialogue, Lewis's and Said's points of view miss each other like passing ships on a moonless night.

CHAPTER FOUR

Alternatives to Orientalism

Edward Said once claimed profound distrust of all "metanarratives" as interpretative tools. He continues to see less need for "a master discourse or a theorization of the whole," and prefers instead a "more unbuttoned, unfixed, and mobile mode of proceeding" which he feels to be more "useful and liberating."[228] He adheres, rather, to pluralism in politics, culture, and aesthetics which ferments both his opposition to, and all out abhorrence of, sectarian ideologies and racialist, exclusionary, and separatist values.[229] Throughout his work he remains critical of assertive discourse and dogmatic orthodoxies. He argues ceaselessly that rigidity of homogeneity should be replaced by malleable heterogeneity, that all identities are communities of interpretation and should be able to communicate together "in a dialogue of equals."[230] He understands his approach as reflecting his background as "a series of displacements and expatriation which cannot ever be recuperated," he once commented, he is "always in and out of things, and never really *of* anything for very long."[231] However, this is so only in so far as not considering western modern thought as culturally specific.

If Said once declared that the word "humanist" invokes within him "contradictory feelings of affection and revulsion," [232] the affection has long since overcome revulsion. This affection is anchored in the promise of emancipation through the Enlightenment

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228 *A Critical Reader* 241.
229 *The Pen and the Sword* 18.
230 Edward W. Said, "Orientalism, An Afterword" *Raritan* 14 (Winter 1995), 42.
231 Imre Salusinsky, *Criticism in Society* (New York: Metheon Pres, 1987), 128
232 See "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Postmodern Culture*, Hal Foster ed, (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1985), 135-159.

ideals. In this regard Said reintegrates himself into the same fold which he criticizes. He has come to share with Tzvetan Todorov, and Bernard Lewis in an awkward, paradoxical way, the ideal of humanism as not necessarily ethnocentric and does provide the grounds to defend democracy and human rights.

Said's response to the practices of Orientalism is to push for democracy and human rights. This response rests in turn on a commitment to "universality" both in truth claims and moral claims. He espouses this response despite his distrust of all metanarratives. In this chapter I will argue that Said reflects a continued tendency within Western thought to respond to the problem of otherness with a claim to universal truth. Said's work, including *Orientalism*, falls back rigidly on the idea of universal reason—an idea which Montesquieu approached with more scepticism. Said's response to solving the problem of 'otherness' falls comfortably within Tzvetan Todorov's morality on good and evil. I will introduce two works by Tzvetan Todorov—*On Human Diversity* and *Facing the Extreme*—in order to show how the tendency to give in to the appeal of universal humanism neglects to consider other traditions. I will also show that Montesquieu posed the problem of 'otherness' in a more open-ended way than Todorov. I will show how this open-ended approach is used by others such as Zygmunt Bauman to elaborate ways out of the dilemma of universalising, which loops back to the "orientalism" trap. Therefore, I will conclude that relentless criticism of Western foundationalism is required.

Ultimately for Said, the humanist ideal remains the fountain spring of emancipation. This Universal requirement is interpreted by Said to mean "taking a risk in order to go beyond the easy certainties provided us by our background, language, nationality, which so often shield us from the reality of others. It also means looking for

and trying to uphold a single standard for human behaviour when it comes to such matters as foreign and social policy."[233]

Said's loyalty to humanism is not unique. This loyalty rather is a symptom of a tendency to revert to universal truths in order to deal with "the other." Tzvetan Todorov, for example, tries to imagine a better way to deal with the problem of "self" and "other." He presents a solution to the problem through a morality on good and evil. He argues that the distinction between good and evil is arrived at through political and moral thought that combines philosophical abstractions with everyday activity. "Philosophical doctrines," Todorov writes," have practical consequences."[234] He sees the interlocutors in the debate as sharing in common the identification as human beings, and more importantly possessing the universal aptitude to learn, and the capacity to change, as one particular cultural feature or another does not constitute a human being. He argues that the facile distinction of Self/Other must be put aside in favour of judgments of good and evil qualities in human beings, based on "ethical principles."[235] These principles are derived from the product of the eighteenth century marriage of rationalism with the secularization of Christian values or ethics--humanism.

Through an inventory of nationalism, racism, and exoticism in French thought from the 18th century to the present, Todorov undertakes in *On Human Diversity* to debate the relation between human diversity and the unity of the human race. The study presents his understanding and reflections on a representative portrait of French thought on the questions of the opposition between the universal and the relative; races; the nation-state; exoticism; how "we" behave with regards to "them." He presents an

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233 *Covering Islam* 46.
234 *On Human Diversity* xi.

argument against the universalising tendency inherent in the blind love of the Self and, its opposite, the blind love of the Other. He examines the pitfalls of employing the theory of human nature as the measure of universal norms as well as, to him, the "logically contradictory and morally hindering" calls of relativism.

Although scientism with its goal of one universal applicable law that suits the human species; nationalism with its exclusionary membership in a cultural group; racialism with its system of human hierarchy; and exoticism with its emphasis on the community over the individual emerged from within the Enlightenment tradition, Todorov argues that they represent deflections rather than humanism's logical consequences. Therefore, Todorov argues humanism does not necessarily lead to its own perversion and need not be condemned for the evils committed by its perversion. However, the humanist tradition, Todorov concludes, recognizes the importance of universalism, nationalism, and egocentrism as equally necessary aspects of human life. Through the humanist ideal, especially as embodied and fostered in the work of Montesquieu[236] that recognizes equally the importance of the unity of the human race, and the diversity of the social body, critical humanism, he hopes, may be nurtured now and in the future, and offers "a new meaning to the universalist requirement"[237] Todorov profits greatly from Montesquieu's accomplishments in recognizing the heterogeneity of culture requiring a universal framework - rooted in humanism - of mixed and moderate responses to deal with a complex and diverse world that eludes a panacea, that refuses to succumb to a final solution.

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235 Ibid 384

236 Todorov credits Montesquieu and Rousseau, as well as Kant if, as he put it, his "inquiry had been international," with embodying, "at their best, the humanist philosophy" which he employed "to observe the distortion of its project during the nineteenth century." *On Human Diversity* 394.

Montesquieu is significant in this context because he recognized that political order varies from region to region, as a function of cultural and natural conditions, and posed the question of whether it is reasonable to require that laws conform to local mores. In the 18th century Montesquieu posed the problem of "the other." Montesquieu elaborates upon the combination of relative values derived from the nature of government, and local physical and moral conditions in order to deal with the diversity of cultures in their proper context. One of his Persian travelers is characterized as thinking: "I have often tried to decide which government was most in conformity with reason. I have come to think that the most perfect is one which attains its purpose with the least trouble, so that the one which controls men in the manner best adapted to their inclinations and desires is the most perfect."[238] *The Spirit of Laws* is ripe with examples of positive as well as negative human behaviour in all regions; nations are formed of a mixture of virtue and vice.[239] Montesquieu's work points to the futility of producing a universal law applied to all peoples in all circumstances to correct all wrongs.[240]

This may be gleaned from his work where he ponders why, in spite of the natural existence of justice, human beings still act immorally. He posits that this due self-interest taking precedence,[241] or that rationality is insufficiently developed or clouded by passion. This is reflected in the parable of the Troglodytes. With the second generation's increase in numbers, and burdened with being virtuous despite themselves, they decided on a venerable man to become the king whose rule would be less rigid than their costume of virtue in order to satisfy their weakness and self interest. Virtue, justice is burdensome,

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237 On Human Diversity 390
238 *Persian Letters* letter 80.
239 *The Spirit of Laws* (XIX, 10), 136.
240 *The Spirit of Laws* (XIX, 2) & (XIX, 19), 135.

yet this is as far as Montesquieu goes. The parable ends with a cliffhanger, so to speak. The reader is led to surmise that the change in the Troglodytes life will be negative if only because Montesquieu argues that laws imposed from the outside cannot create viable political entity. Virtue is a product not of rules and regulations, but of personal habits, customs, and a way of living - "customs and mores always produce better citizens than laws do."[242] Moral and political responsibility should be approached and understood within the context of particular people with aspirations and values. Decrying relativism while accentuating the need of universal absolutes is, in the words of Warren Magnusson, "an evasion of our moral and political responsibility."[243]

Montesquieu poses the question of 'self' and 'other' in a more open-ended way than Todorov's strict formula of grounding the definition of good and evil in humanism. The factors that produce cultures are not constant in all ages nor in themselves immutable; Montesquieu sees human behaviour as liable to change. Being of a finite nature and liable to error on the one hand, and, on the other, free agents by nature, people habitually infringe both laws of their own instituting as well as natural laws.[244] The change is possible when there are virtuous legislators as in the case of China where despite the climatic conditions that produced "servile obedience; in spite of the apprehensions which follow too great an extent of empire," the first legislators passed "excellent laws."[245] Change is also possible when communication is present: "The more communicative a people are, the more easily they change their habits."[246] Through the

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241 *Persian Letters* letter 162.

242 *Persian Letters* letter 129.

243 Warren Magnusson, *The Search for Political Space: Globalization, Social Movements, and the Urban Political Experience* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 7.

244 *The Spirit of Laws* (I, 1). p. 1

245 *The Spirit of Laws* (XVIII, 6). p. 126.

246 *The Spirit of Laws* (XIX, 8). p. 136.

mode of communication people then are able to engage others in the process of changing themselves.[247]

However, in the work of Montesquieu morality remains a function of rationality. Rationality is a distinct human faculty, according to Montesquieu, and potentially capable of explaining all natural as well as human phenomena. As such it should be capable of transcending ethnocentric judgment. It is the employment of this rational tool of scientific investigation that Montesquieu undertakes--and Todorov accentuates while Said takes for granted--to study human laws "which are as changeable as the minds of the men who invent them or the nations which obey them."[248] Since human beings are endowed with human reason they should not only be able to find the best laws that suit their cultural context, but also to distinguish between moral virtue and vice.[249] Hence virtue and vice in all cultures, it is believed, can be differentiated through value judgments by human beings qua rational human beings. It is from this perspective that Said, Todorov, and others argue value judgments can be made that transcend artificial frontiers and claims of cultural superiority, the "us" verses "them" distinction. For this view to succeed all people engaged in dialogue must eventually come to the same conclusion, mainly based in Western thought.

If the only possible approach to politics is more rationality, then it is legitimate to ask: reason based on what or on whose background? Whose rationality is being propagated? And how are we to know? The counsel that seems wise in one group of people may seem utterly ridiculous to another group that adheres to a different paradigm, and different still to others that may not wish to be bound by a paradigm. To those who

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247 *The Spirit of Laws* (XIX, 14). p. 138.
248 *Persian Letters* letter 97

held to an earth-centered view of the universe, Galileo and Copernicus were raving lunatics. Yet today their views are very much accepted as part of the evolution of science. Similarly, images are interpreted by different people to stand for different concepts. The meaning is not inherent in the image; rather it is a social construct. In *Persian Letters* Montesquieu argues against the belief, common in various religions, in the inherent purity or impurity of certain objects, arguing that these are not qualities in objects, but merely judgments made by the senses of human beings.[250] Or in Foucault's formulation: "we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power."[251]

Individuals produce social truths and identities historically and discursively. For many, the image of a stone throwing Palestinian has come to symbolize resistance to tyranny. For others, it is regarded as revolting commentary on blind violence. For others still, it is meaningless. A cross has greater meaning than just two lines for millions of people. An instrument of execution became emblematic of a set of theological constructs that stand for Christianity. More recently, national flags are mere pieces of cloth, colourful rags for a few, yet many will give up their lives for them. Palestinians protesting the actions of Israel often burn its flag. Until recently both Palestinian flag and its colours—white, green and red--were outlawed by Israel. Burning a piece of cloth or restricting the use of certain colours, in and of itself, is meaningless; burning or outlawing a national flag is taken as a strong political statement.

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249 *The Spirit of Laws* (XIX, 11), 137.
250 *Persian Letters* letter 17
251 *Power/Knowledge* 93-94.

On an individual level, rationality is no less problematic. A rock seen by anybody else would merely be a rock with all its general possibilities for meaning—symbol of resistance by a Palestinian, evidence of lack of Palestinian blue print by an Israeli, a construction material by an engineer, an *objet d'art* by a sculptor, and so on. Yet, for the individual who picked up the rock during a hike in the mountains with a loved one, the rock may stand for an entire delightful experience. An insignificant part of the hike can bring back the sights, sounds, smells, physical sensations, and emotions of the experience. The meaning of the same image or data can be different for different groups and at different times. In the end, what we see depends on what we are trained to see.

It is important to note that rationality need not be seen as universal. The need for more rational development as Montesquieu advocates is effective only when what constitutes a desired value is agreed upon. To argue rationally with Montesquieu as Todorov does that a desire is legitimate if it can become the desire of all,[252] takes for granted that the operation is performed on a level field or in the same time and space. Or, furthermore, that through the mode of communication people are able to engage others in the process of changing themselves[253]--"The more communicative a people are," Montesquieu writes "the more easily they change their habits"[254]--remains an open question as to how is it that "we" come to assume that others need changing? Who is changing whom and why? For example are the calls for population control in the 'Third World' motivated by genuine concern for over-population or something else such as an excuse not to remedy the inequality in the distribution of resources? Is David Grossman's

252 *On Human Diversity* 391.
253 *The Spirit of Laws* (XIX, 14), 138.
254 *The Spirit of Laws* (XIX, 8), 136.

fury against Palestinian's lack of a blueprint for "a homeland,"[255] an indication of Palestinian ineptitude or Israeli political intransigence? etc. These may be simple questions but they reflect the broader issues of how claims to 'truth' are established.

The ethnocentric problem that besets a morality of good and evil can be gleaned from the way Todorov employs his experience in order to combat evil. Todorov is motivated by his personal experience and subjectivity, molded while growing up under a Stalinist regime. Over time, he claims, his experience has widened through the level of reflection and analysis. He profited from the insight on the subject of former authors who, he declares with a touch of self-promoting modesty, are "surely more intelligent than I,"[256] to include the perpetration of genocide, the horrors of wars, and colonialism.[257] He has come to recognize "evil as evil" because he has discovered "a sort of absolute that will never loosen its hold."[258] Evil manifests itself in the depreciation of liberty, equality, and justice into mere tools for repression by the power of the authority wielding the truth. Nevertheless, evil remains in Todorov's work a function of, and subordinate to, the totalitarian experience, for him, the epitome of evil.

In *Facing the Extreme*, a case in point, Todorov's commendable argument against Nazi Germany's and Stalinist Russia's totalitarian systems leaves a disquieting feeling that evil is not only limited to and a product of those regimes, but worse yet, that it is their only possible common denominator. Todorov mirrors Zygmunt Bauman's argument in *Modernity and the Holocaust* in relation to depersonalization of evil and power free of constraint wherein evil need not be committed by evil human beings, and social

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255 *The Yellow Wind* 14.
256 *On Human Diversity* xi.
257 Ibid vii.
258 Ibid viii.

separation through the achievements of modern rational society where duty and discipline reign supreme. He diverges, however, from Bauman in that his condemnation of totalitarianism absolves by proxy all non-totalitarian regimes. The seeds of evil, Todorov seems to be saying, are sown in distant and rejected soil, but he neglects to test the soil nourishing his argument.

Unlike Todorov, Bauman sees a danger in advancing instrumental rationality as panacea. He argues that instrumental rationality does not disqualify social designs and engineering as irrational. After having processed the unsatisfactory "findings of the specialists" through the "methodological mill of orthodox sociology,"[259] Bauman explores the experiences of the Holocaust for information about the modern society. Much as Todorov, Bauman contravenes the view that the Holocaust was solely a unique event in Jewish history, or as an exceptional episode that represented a historical regression to barbarism. He also challenges the view that the Holocaust was a result of a perpetual history of European anti-Semitism where the German branch, as it were, was the most vicious. Focusing on the *Germanness* of the crime, he argues, is a mere process of "self-exculpation."[260] He warns that the self-exculpation has dire consequences in terms of moral and political disarmament. As a tool directed against the Other considered anomalous to the Self, anti-Semitism alone is insufficient to explain the Holocaust.

Rather, he argues, the components of the Holocaust are the flip side of the guiding spirit, the priorities, and norms of the modern civilization which in no way ameliorated or dealt with European anti-Semitism. Driven by the etiological myth, ossified in the self-

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259 Bauman claims that sociology has not adequately confronted the chalenges raised by the Holocaust, in part because sociology participates in the same scientific culture of modernity, shares its emphasis on technique, its propensity for social engineering, and its understanding of rational action. *Modernity and the Holocaust* 4-29.

consciousness of the Westernized society, of the morally elevating story of humanity emerging from pre-social barbarity in quest of 'civilization' to eliminate all of nature in human beings, modern society provided the powerful instruments of rational and effective action, which created the violent encounter. That in turn fuels the vicious cycle by rationally assuming that more civilization is needed. Rooted in the rational management that substituted organizational discipline for moral responsibility, the Holocaust is an example of the triumph of the power of specialization over moral drives.[261]. It was born and executed in the modern rational production of an industrial bureaucratic society[262] "at the high stage of our civilization and at the peak of human cultural achievement."[263] Much as the Nazi architecture and engineering employed modernist techniques for ruthless nationalist ends,[264] Bauman posits that modernist values were also used to plan and execute the Holocaust. That long and tortuous execution was a product of the rational pursuit of efficient, optimal goal-implementation, and sprouted out of the principles of rationality, where even the rationality of the victims was cultivated.[265]

In the advanced state of modernity, anti-Semitism became racist and deadly. Racism became a self-rationalizing practice, combining strategies of architecture and gardening with that of medicine to envisage a pure and perfect social order--a modern

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260 Ibid xii.

261 The hideous murder of Jews was an exercise in the rational management of society requiring the neutralization of the impact of primeval moral drives, and their isolation from the machinery of murder. These drives may lead to pogroms but could not be systematically sustained. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 13-26 & 198.

262 This does not imply that the end result of modern bureaucracy is a Holocaust. The kin bureaucracy of the one set in motion to execute the Holocaust, was set in motion through the same efficiency maximizing procedures to stop the former.

263 Ibid., x.

264 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 33.

265 *Modernity and the Holocaust* 117 & 129.

weapon employed in the service of pre-modern and modern struggles, alike.[266] "Modern culture is a garden culture"[267] where the territorially dispersed Jews became the enemy inside, the unwelcome weed, that represented the essence of differences: "the difference between 'us' and 'them'."[268] Bauman elaborates, "[t]hey were the opacity of the *world* fighting for clarity, the ambiguity of the *world* lusting for certainty."[269] The modern world's obsession with self-control and self-administration, united by the principle of state sovereignty--supplemented by Bauman with the analogy of Milgram's experiments where he points out that morality is "inextricably tied to human proximity"[270]--fuels racism's singling out a certain category of people as beyond hope of amelioration, and the transformation of the once human fellow into the resented Other. The stereotyping of the nation, class, or cultural enemy is a recurrent theme within nation-states built on the foundation of sovereignty where the out of sight human being becomes the out of mind victim. With distance, the responsibility for the other shrivels, and the moral accountability to the object is befogged.[271] Segregation and separation breeds indifferent social and moral identification with the Other. Pour social and economic pressures into the mix and the unthinkable becomes acceptable.

However, none of this, Bauman points out, is unique to or invented by totalitarianism. Rather, totalitarian regimes purposely propel to an extreme a rational world availing itself of modern technology, and rational scientific management. The combination of rational social design, the concentration of power and resources, and

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266 Ibid 46-66
267 Ibid 92.
268 Ibid., 52.
269 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 56
270 Ibid 192.
271 Ibid. 184.

managerial skills are products of modernity that can be murderous. Even though Nazi hatred for Jews and the concentration of power did not have to meet, nor is anti-Semitism necessary for exclusionary and exclusivist regimes, Bauman warns that they did coincide then, and there are no guarantees that they may not meet again.

Todorov's neglect to test the soil nourishing his argument is also evident in *On Human Diversity*. Perhaps the nineteenth century twisted the Enlightenment to bad ends, but Todorov's study is limited to French thought and to the period from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth.[272] Combined with his arguments against imperialism within French thought, his study ordains the impression that there is nothing else to discuss about colonialism and imperialism other than what is present in French thought. Other traditions need not be elaborated upon, and, by extension, the Enlightenment is a self-sufficient, essential Western tradition that can be projected universally.[273]

The process of 'Othering', is very much the standard mainstream behaviour and action, and the probability of another Holocaust is "fortuitously related to the ability of modern bureaucracy to co-ordinate the action of great number of moral individuals in the pursuit of any, also immoral, ends."[274] As such, bringing back Todorov's totalizing view of evil it becomes apparent that it is fraught with danger especially with rampant heterophobia gripping not only Europe again but Europe's creations as well. Witness the violent dismembering of Yugoslavia, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, oppression in East Timor, and elsewhere.

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272 With one before and one after exception of the work of Michel de Montaigne and Claude Lévi Strauss.

273 *Musical Elaboration* 55

274 *Modernity and the Holocaust* 18.

The inconsistencies of Montesquieu's ideal at times not measuring up to his practice, Todorov argues, need not impair modern Western thought. Thus Todorov downplays Montesquieu's reservations. Despite Montesquieu's praise for the rational tool of scientific investigation, he does also allude to the negative effects of science if misused. Concomitant with the advances in scientific technology is the increase in the devastation and horrors of war. The invention of gunpowder, Montesquieu reflects, not only deprived "every nation in Europe of its freedom," but also meant that "there is no asylum on earth against injustice and violence." And in a prophetic meditation, that has become sadly a mere fact-of-life today, Montesquieu feared that science "will eventually succeed in discovering some secret which will provide a quicker way of making men die, and exterminate whole countries and nations."[275] The corrective is moderation. Montesquieu[276] champions moderation and tolerance as corrective universal ideals available to human beings regardless of time and space. But when moderation is called for, it is explicit that the extremes exist.

Secular humanism remains the foundation from which Said's intellectual aspire, against all hardship, to think the alternative by constantly choosing to represent the truth rather than placating an authority.

> That this involves a steady realism, an almost athletic rational energy, and a complicated struggle to balance the problems of one's own selfhood against the

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275 *Persian Letters* 105

276 Montesquieu advocates moderation in the exercise in commercial affairs (XX, 4), in limiting of political liberty (XI, 4), in laws enacted by the legislators (XXIX, 1), and in the division and balance of power in government (V, 14). It is no less the case with tolerance where there are abundant and consistent references to the ill treatment of the Jews in Europe (ex. XII, 5), and acknowledgement of the need for coexistence of religious diversity within a nation based on mutual tolerance. (XXV, 9)

demands of publishing and speaking out in the public sphere is what makes it an everlasting effort, constitutively unfinished and necessarily imperfect.[277]

Said's life exudes a strange prismatic sense of cultural dislocation and skepticism about identity and settled existence which informs his sense of the intellectual. Perhaps the above quotation best exemplifies Said's intellectual life. His everlasting athletic rational effort is beyond reproach; being constitutively unfinished is understandable and even expected; but necessarily imperfect is open to debate for if it is perfect than it is implicit that it also constitutively finished. Said's imperfection revolves around his attempt to solve the procedures exposed in *Orientalism* of "dichotomozing, restructuring, and texualizing in making of interpretative statements" about the Other.[278] What is necessarily imperfect for Said is a gaping theoretical hole for others.

Said is comfortable with the view that different societies produce different standards of judgement and behaviour; the problem for him is that they tend to elevate them through self-complacency to the realm of the absolute. He feels the need to frame emancipation within a universal strategy. Said has experienced in Todorov's phrase the "fear of being afraid." (On Human diversity p. viii) He writes as a dispossessed and displaced Palestinian, and against Western embedded myths and tropes.[279] Therefore he feels an urgency to stress justice and fairness which can only come to fruition by defending democracy and human rights. In order to defend democracy and human rights, Said, much like Todorov, sees the need to make a distinction between good and evil. Said, Todorov, and others view humanism as a regulatory instrument of analysis that is

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277 *Representations of the Intellectual* 23.
278 *The Predicament of Culture* 261.

not ruled by empiricism, nor its content fixed. Rather they believe it to provide a "common ground for fruitful confrontation of differences." As such, subject to revision developed in the course of dialogue through the toils of the "human mind:" through dialogue that appeals to the human being's "rational faculties." In this manner the arguments remain "down to earth," and the connection between "life activities and speech is sustained."[280] Their efforts are driven by the hope that humanism will limit and restrain the political principles that drive *les raisons d'etat*. It is precisely at the political level that they stress that humanism is imperative and should take precedence over nationalism or any other particularism.

Familiarity often provides a source of false security. Said, Todorov and others take for granted, and do not deal with the fact, that humanism is itself a particularism. Said thus finds himself contradicting his call for intellectuals to be free of the neutral methodologies that identify proper professional behaviour. Inherent to claims to universal truths is a dogmatic quality. Positing claims to universal truths requires the vilification of both those with their own universal truths and those who do not see the need for any. This is evident if one asks on whose terms is the "common ground" established? Could the "fruitful confrontation of differences" be exacerbated by elevating rationality to the forefront of debate? What are the consequences of essentializing the category of the human being? How, and by whom, are "life activities" and "speech" defined? The comfort derived from our cherished beliefs may equal the lemmings' security in group conduct, but will the result, at a cycle's end, differ?

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279 *The Politics of Dispossession* xiii.

280 This is evident in his example that it is far more comprehensible to pose a question in terms of for or against democracy rather than for or against rationality. *On Human Diversity* xv.

Humanism has already been shown to be ethnocentric. Robert Young argues that humanism served as an "explanatory category" that gave meaning in a rational way to the understanding of 'man', usually white bourgeois male, and ended up affirming the superiority of 'man' at the exclusion of the Other, whether categorized as sexual, social, racial, economic, etc. In *On Human Diversity* Todorov points out that in eighteenth century, "our" values became the universal values which fueled and inflated the sense of historic mission to "civilize" the globe. Universalism, Todorov argues, was surreptitiously connected to ethnocentrism. For it to excel humanism requires the negation of the same ethics outside, which are supposed to be taken for granted inside. It creates the 'non-human' outside to solidify the 'human' inside.

The humanist tradition remains a tradition which bypasses "the local codes that make personal experience articulate."[281] By remaining loyal to humanism Said repeats the very same privilege "of standing above cultural particulars, [and] of the universal experiences of power that speaks for humanity" that the "totalizing Western liberalism"[282] espouses presently as much as formerly. Thus Said's appeal to the discourse of humanism that formed a European identity by setting it apart from the Rest is to perpetuate a totalizing discourse that "was deeply complicit with the violent negativity of colonialism, and played a crucial part in its ideology."[283] Said finds himself not only complicit but also extending the epistemological implications of the politics of representation under dispute.Worse yet, it is a stance that contradicts his own claim that objective knowledge does not exist. By having his ethical and theoretical values deeply intertwined "in the

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281 *The Predicament of Culture* 263.
282 Ibid 263.
283 *White Mythologies* 121.

history of the culture that he criticizes"[284] and repeating "the very totalities which he opposes,"[285] Said finds himself repeating in *Orientalism* what he criticizes.[286]

Therefore, *Orientalism* is viewed as an attempt to expose the dark side of the humanistic tradition by transgressing or overstepping boundaries and bursting confining restraints, while writing within, and remaining loyal to, and in the process, confirming the humanist tradition itself. In fact this process also gives credence to Lewis' argument. This loyalty opens an irreconcilable problem for Said, arguing in *Orientalism* that humanism is ethnocentric then relying on it in his later work for salvation. His lack of examination of his own critique as a discursive practice, exposes Said to criticism of complicity and extension of the very same process he exposes as malicious. As critics like Robert Young point out, while Said exposes the relations of power within Orientalism, he does not offer alternative methods to escape the terms of his own critique.[287] As for his works proceeding from *Orientalism,* Said ends up repeating what he criticises. Accordingly, Said's stance makes the need for a rigorous critique of Western foundationalism all the more urgent.

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284 *White Mythologies* 132.

285 *White Mythologies* 135.

286. Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, Inc. 1990), 119-126 & 130-131. And *The Predicament of Culture* 263.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion: Politics without Otherness

The focus on the political ramifications of ethnocentrism in *Orientalism* continue to have an impact on a wide range of scholarly disciplines. The process Said describes has since been appropriated by many theorists. It is analogous to the study of nuclear strategic analysis by Carol Cohn.[288] She points out the disturbing sexual, patriarchal, domestic imagery, and sanitized abstractions employed by defense intellectuals in distancing the horrid reality of nuclear weapons from words and language, to establish a chasm between image and result. In fact, a whole new language--she calls it technostrategic[289] --is introduced from a new perspective, the end result of which has no link with the language of suffering. This exclusive language offers its manipulators "cognitive mastery," and more importantly escape. The linguistic stance offers escape from the debilitating weight of oppression, isolation, and the fear of becoming a victim by transforming - by entering a new mode of thinking - the user into the active role of planner. And the more deeply engaged one becomes with the exclusive language or paradigm the more eroded are one's morals and values.

This is akin to what Thomas Khun elaborates upon in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*[290] where he states that a paradigm is a theory which has managed to gain acceptance within a scholarly community, and tends to constitute the focus around which

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287 *White Mythologies* 127.

288 Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no.4 (1987).

289 Ibid 690.

290 Thomas Khun, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2 ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

scholarly debate takes place. Said remains attached to ethics or moral obligation in politics, which produces a certain urge to act immediately to prescient problems. Scarred by the bitterness of the stunted Arab independence and Palestinian catastrophe, Said's attachment to ethics or moral obligation in politics may perhaps be understood. The problem with this approach stems from the fact that this urge takes for granted that we "know" what the solution is. As this chapter will show Said is inattentive to the power/knowledge relationship within his work. I will argue that Said's project is limited to a rigid paradigm that excludes other forms of identity from emerging.

In spite of *Orientalism's* demystifying nature, the question of how to approach another culture without distortion remains unanswered.[291] Said's analysis is useful in deciphering the dangers in making any simple ontological distinction between the essential character of the Orient or Occident or any cultural group. But if approaching another culture is made easier when certain features are recognized as similar to one's own then is oversimplification the only viable route? It is difficult, if not all together impossible, to avert Orientalism.[292] The domestication of the exotic which takes place between all cultures is common enough. The Westerner's privilege to 'penetrate', observe, and give meaning to the unknown 'Orient' was afforded by the lopsided strength 'the West' enjoyed over the rest. But respect for difference should begin with the recognition that Otherness is not a negative image of Selfhood. Recognizing that there is no opposite or ideal Other but only difference that has to be understood and judged in its context is the first step away from the systematic objectification of the Other that condemns people to perpetual confrontation.

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291 *Culture, Ideology, and World Order*, edited by R. B. J. Walker (Boulder, Co: Westview Pres, 1984), 17.

Said's attempt to find a way to represent other peoples and cultures in less ethnocentric and less racist ways, ends up relying on the same method that he exposes as mendacious. The combination of grappling with the production of non-ethnocentric knowledge by appeals to the values of humanism that are no less ethnocentric than Orientalism, and trying to put a limit on nationalism, on identity, beyond which the cause of liberation goes astray, Said (much like Todorov) may be accused of being caught up in what Partha Chattarjee calls the "liberal paradox."[293]

If historians have difficulty with the concept of discourse, Said himself stands accused of faring no better. Although Said imbibes greatly from the work of Michel Foucault, he remains skeptical and does not adhere to it wholeheartedly.[294] Said's use of the concept of discourse to expose the relations of domination within Orientalism, is not extended beyond the initial success in *Orientalism*. While Foucault sees the intellectual as a function of discourse, Said diverges and reserves a belief in "the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts that constitutes a discursive formation like Orientalism."[295] Said suggests that inherent to the intellectual vocation is the 'art of representing,' where the intellectual is affiliated with a political movement, social cause, or people. This stance is in contradistinction to Foucault's who warns against intellectuals wielding 'the truth' and advancing prescriptions. Both Young and Clifford quote the same sentence from *Orientalism* to point out Said's break from Foucault. Although Said is mindful of the epistemological implications of the politics of representation, he nonetheless reserves the possibility to

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292 Ibid 16-17.

293 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 155

294 *White Mythologies* 69-70.

transcend the sustained "communal core of interpretation."[296] He is trying to imagine a possible way to posit a representation without at the same time exercising domination.

Diverging from Foucault, Said believes in an oppositional stance. Intellectuals can resist from a position 'outside' the operations of power, and therefore, it is possible to remain 'detached', and perhaps even 'innocent.' Said is uncomfortable with Foucault's concern with the possibility of critique. In essence Said puts the emphasis on individual agency which is contrary to the Foucauldian discoursive formation that is not reliant for its production on "authorial subjects" or "a group of authors arranged as a 'tradition.'"[297] As such, Said contradicts himself by assuming that the intellectual can "operate in a separate space independent from contemporary ideology,"[298] while showing that the Orientalists could not at one and the same time posit a personal statement detached from the discursive statement.

Said's method in addressing this problem by placing the emphasis on the ability of the intellectual to resist power is no less contradictory. It is not clear how an exile and an amateur intellectual would secure a public position to speak on behalf of the "poor, the disadvantaged, the voiceless, the unrepresented"[299] without professional accreditation and "independent of contemporary ideology."[300] Said's recourse to the integrity of the intellectual adhering to "the great value of a skeptical critical consciousness"[301] based on experience, is to forget that experience is itself experienced, derived, and given meaning

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295 *Orientalism* 23.
296 *Covering Islam* 43.
297 *The Predicamernt of Culture* 269.
298 *White Mythologies* 132.
299 *Representations of the Intellectual* 113
300 *White Mythologies* 132.
301 *Orientalism* 327.

through the existing forms of knowledge,[302] and hence is culturally specific. Experience and critical consciousness "cannot be posited as prior to knowledge."[303] As such, the very possibility of an 'outside' available to the intellectual becomes problematic. Said undermines his emancipatory project by re-inscribing the very power/knowledge relationship he criticises. By trying to transgress the boundaries of existing structures he extends them further. In the process he finds himself repudiating his own sense of dissidence. It is easy to sympathize, at least in my view, with Said's need to popularize a cause, to narrate a repressed history, to win an audience. The end effect, however, brings us back to Said's concerns with representation raised in *Orientalism*.

The world can be simultaneously different things to different people. Individuals deal with the world on a daily basis, and throughout their lives, operate within many localities and many roles. People grow up within a web of beliefs, customs, language structure, political and philosophical paradigms, and circumstances requiring action. The education system, to single out one among others, shapes people's way of viewing the world, yet, nevertheless, individual circumstances may lead to individual variations. People experience school in different ways. The experience itself is inflected by variations in people's abilities and background that may yield significant differences. These differences affect the way people perceive, compare, judge, and contemplate alternatives to pressing situations.

Authors and readers each possess a set of conventions. Only if the author of a work and readers share backgrounds are their conventions likely to have significant overlap. If I read the works of Rob Walker with the aid of a dictionary, then the insight

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302 *White Mythologies* 130-131.
303 Ibid 132.

gained from and familiarity with a certain theoretical point of view are messaged and inflected by my own experiences. To a degree, I may be able to situate his work within current political and social environment. On the other hand, if I read Homer, even with an aid of a dictionary, I may gain insight from a time long since past. However, I gain a halting understanding of what it would have been like to be a part of Attic Greek culture, to feel the necessity of oral poetry, to appreciate the belief system, or to fully understand the political environment.

Representation is the set of means by which one thing stands for another. The Oxford English Dictionary speaks of "the fact of expressing or denoting by means of a figure or symbol," as well as "to bring clearly and distinctly before the mind …by description." Much like Said the dictionary speaks of the expression of a symbol describing clearly and distinctly a fact before the human mind. However, representation is a complex web of attributes of disparate concepts, socially constructed codes and agreements. Representation is a system for highlighting some characteristics of concepts, along with an explanation of the rules and reasons for that extraction. A representation is not just another instance of the original. It presents only some characteristics of the original. The purpose of representation strongly influences which attributes are highlighted or selected as representative. We can always scale down attributes to a manageable size and produce an essence of a group of people or of a thing. However the achieved essence may differ for different people with different background. The people's purpose, the codes with which people are familiar, and the situation in which people find themselves all work together to determine how we come to find and understand signs and by extension the essence of identity. The representation highlights those characteristics

suited to 'our' needs and values. If someone does not know the rules and procedures for the representation, it may be of little use.

Therefore, the intellectual commitment to 'outsiderhood' takes for granted that the intellectual will be able to understand what he or she observes. As John Tomlinson points out in a discussion about Cultural Imperialism; "How does the European sociologist [watching Charley Chaplin on TV], with her stock of cultural referents…know that she laughs 'about the same things' as the tall peasant from the tropical swampland? Isn't all she can confidently say that they both see the image and laugh?"[304] It is still an open question as to the grounds upon which we acquire the capacity to know how alien texts are read. How do we filter the cultural effects they may have? Said's attempt to understand expressions of historical or cultural differences, and "to speak the truth to power," relies on categories of understanding that are part of an existing 'archive' and network of power/knowledge of which Said spoke so forcefully in *Orientalism*. 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.[305]

Power is exercised through the appropriation and distribution of knowledge. The 'truth' Said's intellectual speaks may be no more than a tool in reifying certain

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304 John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 52.

intellectual systems. Said does not examine his own knowledge as equally implicated with power. Rather he repeats what Foucault argues is a humanist tendency of drawing "this line between knowledge and power." Foucault argues that the "exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power."[306] Unlike Foucault Said does see knowledge and power as integrated with one another. When Foucault argues that the'outside/inside' binary relationship should be set aside in favour of 'other' as always 'inside,'[307] he is pointing out that the 'truth' that enables the intellectual to fix limits to the rights of power is not free from ideology and therefore the intellectual has no solid ground upon which to stand. But Said understands this reconceptualization of power as politically feeble. He is satisfied that the relationship between power and knowledge can be reconciled if grounded in rationality. He feels more comfortable with the standard political theory's conceptualization of power, which is, to employ Foucault's terminology, "obssessed with the person of the sovereign."[308] We should heed Foucault's call to start considering power as a "productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression."[309]

If Said finds common ground with post-structuralist thought on the pitfall of projecting 'our' values onto others, he diverges with regards to intertwined histories and grounding claims to 'truth' in rational thought. Rather than essentializing, poststructuralism repudiates the intellectual hegemony of the Western sovereign "self" from which all Others are measured against. This approach reflects the dissident

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305 *Power/Knowledge* 93.
306 Ibid 52.
307 Ibid 141-142.
308 Ibid 121.

rejection and undermining of a singular, sovereign identity by stressing ambiguity and doubt. "[G]enres blur, narratives of knowing and doing intersect ...contingency threatens to displace necessity, the very identity of the subject is put in doubt, and human beings live and toil as exiles, deprived of any absolute territory of being able to call home." (Ashley and Walker, 1990: 260). It is the rejection of chauvinism grounded in the negation of "the other." What this accentuates is the arbitrariness of order:

> every historical figuration of sovereign presence - be it God, nature, dynasty, citizen, nation, history, modernity, the West, the market's impartial spectator, reason, science, paradigm, tradition, man of faith in the possibility of universal human community, common sense, or any other--as precisely a question, a problem, a contingent political effect whose production, variations , and possible undoing merit the most rigorous analysis. (Ashley and Walker 1990: 368)

Absolute space, sovereign center is a fiction--an illusion that Said embraces in his pursuit for 'the truth'. It is an illusion that hinders the attempt at understanding the "multiplicity of incommensurable realities"[310] that constitute the world people live in. Post-structuralism does not posit a fixed center; rather it allows for multiculturalism to flourish and new identities to emerge. Hence if the production of knowledge is relative to the local circumstances, then the need for the "absolute standpoint" in order to "judge the truth" is eliminated.[311] It is imperative that we refuse to establish an alternative paradigm or research program. This refusal eliminates "paradigmatic conceit" which imposes

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309 Ibid 119.
310 *The Search for Political Space* 7.

"limitations even--and perhaps especially--in those shrinking circles where it is possible to get away with the attempt." (Ashley and Walker, 398)

Nevertheless, Said sees this approach as "oppositional debate without real opposition."[312] Philosophical abstractions, Todorov argues in opposition to postmodern thinking, are neither sufficient in dealing with what is human nor do they pinpoint good and evil, thus hinting that philosophical abstractions may contribute to evil. Much like Todorov, Said regards poststructuralism as offensive posturing removed from the most pressing current problems. Said faults Foucault and by extension the post-structuralists for lack of interest in the relationship between their work and "postcolonial writers facing problems of exclusion, confinement, and domination."[313] Said understands the post-structuralist critique as theoretically poignant, but at present politically feeble. The concern, shared by many, is that post-structuralism marginalizes, silences, and exiles precisely those whom it seeks to embrace.

Upon closer scrutiny, however, Said's work may itself be open to a similar charge. Said argues that the secular intellectual's effort is productive as long as he or she fulfil three conditions: encouraging worldliness over what Said has termed the "pitfalls of nationalism,"[314] conceptualizing a "contrapuntal" mediation of disparate social practices, and ultimately demonstrating the "hybrid cultural work" of anti-imperialist struggle. But when Said refers to the "real" world he is merely referring to sovereign presumptions of a reality that can be applied here, there and everywhere. The structure of Said's argument

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311 Ibid 6.

312 *The World, the Text, and the Critic* 160. This stance is shared by others such as bell hooks who is suspicious of "postmodern critiques of the subject" because they "surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time." bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 28.

313 *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, Jonathan Arac, ed. (London: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 9.

enables, perhaps, the "voyage in" of 'Third World' intellectuals, but it also forecloses on all but the authorized and legitimate areas of examination.

To be fair, Said's critique of Orientalism as discourse stands apart from the nativists, nationalists, and fundamentalists. All three are in their own way preoccupied in countering Western domination, but through division and separation whether be it cultural, national, or religious, and find themselves trapped not only in the stereotype of the West's constructed Orient but, worse, repeating what they loathe.[315] The limitations of nationalism's self-centered vision are not lost on Said. For Said, as with Todorov, the existence of cultural diversity within humanity is an ever present aspect in the lives of human beings. It is taken for granted that people are embedded in a culture, which affords a sense of belonging and pride, and provides the needed resources to live. The freedom to associate with a language, a landscape, a custom much as to love our family, without thereby inflicting injustice on others is, safe to say, a human characteristic.[316] Said believes in nationalism as politically constructed. With Benedict Anderson, Said sees the nation as an "imagined political community," which is "imagined as both limited and sovereign"[317] and which essentially constitutes a shared consciousness of a certain set of elements of identity made possible by a conjunction of factors, including what he describes as "print capitalism."[318] Different societies produce different standards of judgement and behaviour; the problem is that they tend to elevate them to the realm of the absolute.

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314 *A Critical Reader* 233.

315 Eward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered" *in Literature, Politics and Theory*, edited by Francis Baker et al (New York: Metheun, 1986), 216.

316 *The Search for Political Space* 6.

317 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (New York: Verso, 1991), 9.

318 Ibid 37.

What is problematic for Said and Todorov is how to prevent culture from degenerating into xenophobia. Imbibing from Frantz Fanon, Said is scathing on the post-independence nationalism that failed to make the transition to liberation, and remained politically, economically and philosophically dependent on the old hierarchies that extend oppression under new guise.[319] Nationalism can quite easily degenerate into chauvinism especially when under threat, often imagined, where the tendency is to fall back into the fold and demonize the enemy. When national consciousness becomes not only an end in itself, an ethnic or racial particularity, or any invented national essence, but the program of higher aim of that civilization or that culture then the consequences are more ethnocentrism, more divisiveness, and more haemorrhaging of human wealth. It flies contrary to Said's ideals of, and reasons to struggle for, liberation which, for example, encompass more than the simplistic, juvenile, and chauvinistic calls to liberate all of Palestine, from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean Sea.

I think Said's argument is problematic because he, much like Todorov, grounds his arguments in sovereign space and the nation-state, which pave the way to essentialist identity even when he is arguing otherwise. Said stands at a point in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict that is equidistant from both Arafat's Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Palestinian opposition groups, and that is even farther away from Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. He refuses to be drawn into an active role of building a Palestinian state. He is among the most strident critics of the Palestine National Authority, the Oslo Accords and one of its chief architect, Yassir Arafat. So much so that Islamicists who also oppose the peace process regularly quote him. The irony is that Said stands for the very things that Hamas and the Islamicist political movement oppose, the

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319 Edward W. Said, "The Politics of Knowledge," *Raritan* 11, (Summer 1991), 24.

creation of a democratic, secular State. Said vehemently rejects the use of violence as a means of liberating Palestine. He goes further and denounces those who have turned to violence as a means of opposing Arafat's regime. Ultimately, he argues, Israelis and Palestinians are contending for the same land. Said concludes that the "two communities must be seen as equal to each other in rights and expectations" and that the Palestinians must find a way to rethink the Oslo process and put it on a fair and just course. He thinks that a sovereign state is required for self-determination.

Even though Said argues that cultures or identities are never "purely one thing,"[320] he still relies on essential identities to ground his critique. His advocacy of Palestinian rights, for example, takes for granted that 'Palestinian' is a primary and uncontested identity. This stance forecloses on the need to examine or provide room for expression of other 'identities' beyond the 'Palestinian' rubric. He links the possibility of expression to state sovereignty. This is indicative in his attacks on the "peace process" whose effects, he argues, are measured by Palestinians losing "more land (and sovereignty) everyday."[321] Only the territorial state can provide the means to fulfil Said's aspiration for justice and peaceful co-existence between peoples and nations. Said believes in a bi-national state as an embodiment of Palestinian rights. This idea is currently being promoted by "Israeli" Knesset member Azmi Bshara and others, as a just resolution to the Arab-Zionist conflict. In *Le Monde Diplomatique* (August/September 1998) Said argues that the solution for the Palestinian/Israeli conflict must begin in terms of the idea of citizenship, not nationalism. Therefore, a concept of citizenship whereby every individual has the same citizen's rights, based not on race or religion, but on equal justice for each person guaranteed by a

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320 *Culture and Imperialism* 336.

constitution, must replace all the outmoded notions of how Palestine will be cleansed of the enemy 'other.'

There is a sad and perhaps even disquieting irony about Said, the champion of "justice and fairness" foreclosing on other alternatives by his insistence on universal principles. The categories Said relies upon are derived and sustain a specific intellectual system. The futility of the defense of sovereign space is presently pronounced by the endouring Israeli/Palestinian conflict, as well as in the present Kosovo and East Timorese crises. What bothers Said is where post-structuralism is taking us in time and space for its fruition is deferred to the future and the Palestinian as well as other prescient problem need to be addressed now.

The privileged focus on the former Yugoslavia in 'the West', the demonization of this nation or that culture, all depend on discursive acts of othering—whether one means the image of the brutal Serb, the terrorist Palestinian, or the way Israeli or Jew is written as 'the other' in the Arab world. This othering replenishes the need to construct and destroy a lesser enemy to restore and revive 'our' identity. For the Gulf War, as for the Kosovo war, Iraq much like Serbia, served its purpose well as the enemy 'other' which redefined 'our' own liberal-informed Western essential identities, and restored the US hegemony in the New World Order.

It is high time this dichotomy is put aside in favour of more malleable approaches to politics. Rather than finding ourselves once again with an impossibly painful situation wondering "what is to be done?," it is far more productive, in lessening the same pain and avoiding the same useless question, to wonder how we ended up here in the first place.

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321 Edward W. Said, "The problem is Arab Powerlessness," *Guardian London* (April 24, 1996), 15.

However, the need to solve prescient problems now is driven by arrogance that is blind to existing problems and uncertainties.[322] Said criticises Foucault for the lack of political commitment. "It was noticeable," Said is certain, "that he was more committed to exploring, if not indulging, his appetite for travel, for different kinds of pleasure (symbolic by his frequent sojourns in California), for less and less frequent political positions."[323] How does Said know what Foucault did in California? According to one account the political significance of the visits, given the nature of the subject, passed unnoticed. In the 1970s Foucault used to give talks in San Francisco gay bathhouses. The "trips to California were, for many gay European men, as politically important as visits to Israel were for European and American Jews."[324] To argue that these talks are less political or less politically significant than any international event requires a hefty dose of conceit. The act of deciding or authoring what is political is grounded in sovereignty.

Writing in the aftermath of yet another Palestinian uprooting, displacement, and bewilderment of the Palestinian future the poet Mahmoud Darwish's verse is, understandably, infused with the sense of catastrophe.

> The earth is closing on us, pushing us through the last passage.
> We saw the faces of these who'll throw our children
> Out of the windows of this last space: Our star will hang up mirrors.
> Where should we go after the last frontiers? Where should the birds fly
> after the last sky?

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322 *Culture, Ideology, and World Order* 7.
323 Edward W Said, "Michel Foucault" *Raritan* 4, no 2 (1984), 9.
324 David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books,1993), 475.

Edward Said has special affinity with this poem[325] because it speaks of defeat and doom - the Na'ba of 1948, the 1967 debacle, the 1970 Black September, and the 1982 disaster in Beirut - yet concurrently of optimism and rebirth, an indication of another frontier, another sky, of hope beyond the current place and time of ending. This poem fits comfortably with his belief that resistance to the dominant ideology or cultural hegemony is always possible, since "there are always going to be parts of the social experience that it does not cover and control. From these parts very frequently comes opposition, both self-conscious and dialectical."[326] Said's interpretation of the poem, however, is more restrictive than the poem allows.

It is from the perspective of this same poem that I think post-structuralism offers hope. We are constantly changing. In the words of Naguib Mahfouz, "If permanence were possible, why would the seasons change?"[327] We are always pushing through the "last passage." The hope post-structuralism presents is in the emphasis placed on going beyond the twin pillars of modern thought—"the last sky" of Newtonian assumptions and Cartesian rationality--that hinder an effective response to contemporary political and social problems. By attempting to go beyond, on the one hand, the Newtonian restricted "synthesis of cosmic order"[328] where space is understood as "absolute, 'always similar and immovable,'"[329] and instrumental rationalism, on the other, we provide a better chance for the different histories and experiences to manifest themselves. "We need,"

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325 So much so that he titled one of his books which was a reflection on the Palestinian people *After the Last Sky*

326 *Culture and Imperialism* 240.

327 Naguib Mahfouz, *The Harafish*, translated by Catherine Cobham (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 137

328 R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5.

Foucault argues in relation to political theory's tendency obsessed with sovereignty, "to cut off the King's head."[330] It is a serious attempt at rethinking the ways in which it is possible for people to live together.

Post-structuralist thought offers new strategies. Far from being offensively restrictive, as Said claims, post-structuralism does not free people from recognizing that an effort is needed to address a problem. This attempt at approaching politics without universalizing need not be, nor should be, understood as paralysis. Nor does this approach undermine the enabling politics of those whom it seeks to emancipate. It gives rather those very people in opposition, on the margins, and the voiceless the possibility of expression. But first, I think we urgently need to resist Fanon's native envy of the dominant system. It is a mistake to dream of setting ourselves up in the settler's place.[331] It is imperative that we resist being envious of the dominant intellectual system, for the dream has invariably turned out to be a nightmare. We should espouse the stance of approaching morality and political judgment as a function relative to different communities. As a mode of thought that questions the stable and secure foundations for human thought based on the premise that there are different conceptions of time and space, this approach to politics reduces the need to impose our values on others or adhere to rigid paradigms. Rather it extends the desirability of traditional struggle for a more meaningful politics. The desire is such that we must resist and refuse to endanger the struggles for democracy and self-determination by abrogating responsibility for them again to another paradigm. It is urgent that we start seriously focusing on exploring the post-structural approach to politics in order to counter the capitalist New World Order. I

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329 Ibid 129.
330 *Power/Knowledge* 121.

think there is little gained in overthrowing the shackles of sovereignty only to have it applied on others.

331 Ibid 39.

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