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# ORIENTALISM

Edward Said's publication of *Orientalism* made such an impact on thinking about colonial discourse that for two decades it has continued to be the site of controversy, adulation and criticism. Said's intervention is designed to illustrate the manner in which the representation of Europe's 'others' has been institutionalised since at least the eighteenth century as a feature of its cultural dominance. Orientalism describes the various disciplines, institutions, processes of investigation and styles of thought by which Europeans came to 'know' the 'Orient' over several centuries, and which reached their height during the rise and consolidation of nineteenth-century imperialism. The key to Said's interest in this way of knowing Europe's others is that it effectively demonstrates the link between knowledge and power, for it 'constructs' and dominates Orientals in the process of knowing them. The very term 'Oriental' shows how the process works, for the word identifies and homogenises at the same time, implying a range of knowledge and an intellectual mastery over that which is named. Since Said's analysis, Orientalism has revealed itself as a model for the many ways in which Europe's strategies for knowing the colonised world became, at the same time, strategies for dominating that world.

## THE ORIGINS OF ORIENTALISM

In 1786 William Jones, a Justice of the High Court of Bengal and student of Sanskrit, gave an address to the Bengal Asiatic Society in

which he made a statement that was to change the face of European intellectual life:

> The Sanskrit language, whatever its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure, more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs, and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.
>
> (*Asiatic Researches* 1788, cited in Poliakov 1974:190)

Jones's pronouncement initiated a kind of 'Indomania' throughout Europe as scholars looked to Sanskrit for an origin to European languages that went even deeper than Latin and Greek. What remained in the aftermath of Indomania was the entrenchment of Orientalism and the vast expansion of language study. For the next century European ethnologists, philologers and historians were to be obsessed with the Orient and the Indo-European group of languages because these seemed to offer an explanation of the roots of European civilisation itself.

Jones's statement was revolutionary because existing conceptions of linguistic history supposed that language development had taken place within 6,000 years since creation, with Hebrew as the source language and other languages emerging by a process of degeneration. Jones's declaration ushered in a new conception of linguistic history, but because language was so deeply implicated in concerns about national and cultural identity, 'the authentic and useful science of linguistics became absorbed in the crazy doctrine of "racial anthropology"' (Poliakov 1974:193). The link between language and identity, particularly the link between the diversity of languages and the diversity of racial identity, gave rise to the discipline of ethnology, the precursor of modern anthropology.

Orientalism, in Said's formulation, is principally a way of defining and 'locating' Europe's others. But as a group of related disciplines Orientalism was, in important ways, about Europe itself, and hinged on arguments that circulated around the issue of national distinctiveness, and racial and linguistic origins. Thus the elaborate and detailed examinations of Oriental languages, histories and cultures were carried out in a context in which the supremacy and importance of European

civilisation was unquestioned. Such was the vigour of the discourse that myth, opinion, hearsay and prejudice generated by influential scholars quickly assumed the status of received truth. For instance, the influential French philologist and historian Ernest Renan (1823–92) could declare confidently that 'Every person, however slightly he may be acquainted with the affairs of our time, sees clearly the actual inferiority of Mohammedan countries' (1896:85). We can be in no doubt about Renan's audience, nor the nature of the cultural assumptions they shared:

> All those who have been in the East, or in Africa are struck by the way in which the mind of the true believer is fatally limited, by the species of iron circle that surrounds his head, rendering it absolutely closed to knowledge. (1896:85)

The confidence of such assertions is partly an indication of the self-confidence engendered by the huge popularity of writers like Renan and philologer and race theorist Count Arthur Gobineau (1816–82). But they are, at a deeper level, the product of the unquestioned cultural dominance of Europe, maintained economically and militarily over most of the rest of the world. Through such statements as Renan's, the 'production' of Orientalist knowledge became a continual and uncritical 'reproduction' of various assumptions and beliefs. Thus Lord Cromer, who relied a great deal on writers like Renan, could write in 1908 that, while the European's 'trained intelligence works like a piece of mechanism', the mind of the Oriental, 'like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry' (Said 1978:38). The superior 'order', 'rationality' and 'symmetry' of Europe, and the inferior 'disorder', 'irrationality' and 'primitivism' of non-Europe were the self-confirming parameters in which the various Orientalist disciplines circulated. But what gave these disciplines their dynamism and urgency, at least in the beginning, was the need to explain the apparent historical connections between Europe and its Oriental forebears. The 'Orient' meant roughly what we now term the 'Middle East', including the 'Semitic' languages and societies, and those of South Asia, for these societies were most relevant to the development and spread of the Indo-European languages, although, as Said suggests, they tended to divide between a 'good' Orient in classical India, and a 'bad' Orient in present-day Asia and North Africa (1978:99).

The identification of the Indo-European group of languages was to have incalculable consequences in world history. Not only did it disrupt conventional notions of linguistic history, and give rise to a century of philological debate, but it quickly generated theories about racial origin and development, as language and race became conflated. The Indo-European group of languages, at different times called the 'Japhetic' languages (after Noah's son Japheth, distinguished from the 'Semitic' and 'Hamitic' languages that derived from his other sons Shem and Ham), or 'Indo-German', began to be called 'Arian' from their supposed origin round Lake Aries in Asia. The term 'Aryan' gained widespread authority in 1819 from the efforts of German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) (Poliakov 1974:193). This term came to symbolise an idea close to the hearts of European states—that a separate language indicated a separate racial/national origin. Schlegel's rhetoric in galvanising German youth with the myth of an Aryan race, early in the nineteenth century, began a process that led eventually to the Holocaust of the Second World War. Thus the concept that had the potential to unite peoples of wide cultural disparity—the Indo-European community of languages—peoples as diverse as Indians, Persians, Teutons and Anglo-Saxons, became the source of the most strident racial polarisation as it fed deeply ingrained European racial pretensions.

It is tempting to see Orientalism as simply a product of the growth of modern imperialism in the nineteenth century, as European control of the Orient required an intellectual rationale for its cultural and economic dominance. But the discourse was what we might call 'overdetermined': that is, many different factors all contributed to the development of this particular ideological construction at this time in history, of which the emerging imperialism of European states was but one (albeit a significant one). These tributaries of influence also varied from country to country: for example, the industrial dominance of Britain and the political economy of its colonial possessions; the post-revolutionary sense of national destiny in France; the centuries-old concern with the Teutonic community of blood in Germany. All these conspired to produce a passion for the study of Oriental cultures that saw the birth of entirely new disciplines of natural and human sciences, such as ethnology, anthropology, palaeontology and philology, and the transformation or formalisation of existing ones such as

history and geography. Far from being a monolith, the variety of intellectual disciplines Orientalism encompassed, its 'over-determination' from the different cultural histories of the major European states, meant that different intellectual styles of Orientalism were developed.

But despite the complexity and variety of Orientalist disciplines, the investigations of Orientalist scholars all operated within certain parameters, such as the assumption that Western civilisation was the pinnacle of historical development. Thus, Orientalist analysis almost universally proceeded to confirm the 'primitive', 'originary', 'exotic' and 'mysterious' nature of Oriental societies and, more often than not, the degeneration of the 'non-European' branches of the Indo-European family of languages. In this respect, Orientalism, despite the plethora of disciplines it fostered, could be seen to be what Michel Foucault calls a 'discourse': a coherent and strongly bounded area of social knowledge; a system of statements by which the world could be known (see box p. 14).

There are certain unwritten (and sometimes unconscious) rules that define what can and cannot be said within a discourse, and the discourse of Orientalism had many such rules that operated within the area of convention, habit, expectation and assumption. In any attempt to gain knowledge about the world, what is known is overwhelmingly determined by the way it is known; the rules of a discipline determine the kind of knowledge that can be gained from it, and the strength, and sometimes unspoken nature, of these rules show an academic discipline to be a prototypical form of discourse. But when these rules span a number of disciplines, providing boundaries within which such knowledge can be produced, that intellectual habit of speaking and thinking becomes a discourse such as Orientalism. This argument for the discursive coherence of Orientalism is the key to Said's analysis of the phenomenon and the source of the compelling power of his argument. European knowledge, by relentlessly constructing its subject within the discourse of Orientalism, was able to maintain hegemonic power over it. Focusing on this one aspect of the complex phenomenon of Orientalism has allowed Said to elaborate it as one of the most profound examples of the machinery of cultural domination, a metonymy of the process of imperial control and one that continues to have its repercussions in contemporary life. *Orientalism,* then,

pivots on a demonstration of the link between knowledge and power, for the discourse of Orientalism constructs and dominates Orientals in the process of 'knowing' them.

## A 'UNIQUELY PUNISHING DESTINY': THE WORLDLINESS OF *ORIENTALISM*

*Orientalism* is an openly political work. Its aim is not to investigate the array of disciplines or to elaborate exhaustively the historical or cultural provenance of Orientalism, but rather to reverse the 'gaze' of the discourse, to analyse it from the point of view of an 'Oriental' —to 'inventory the traces upon…the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a fact in the life of all Orientals' (Said 1978:25). How Said, the celebrated US academic, can claim to be an 'Oriental' rehearses the recurrent paradox running through his work. But his experience of living in the United States, where the 'East' signifies danger and threat, is the source of the worldliness of *Orientalism*. The provenance of the book demonstrates the deep repercussions of Orientalist discourse, for it emerges directly from the 'disheartening' life of an Arab Palestinian in the West.

> The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny...The nexus of knowledge and power creating 'the oriental' and in a sense obliterating him as a human being is therefore not for me an exclusively academic matter. Yet it is an *intellectual* matter of some very obvious importance.
>
> (1978:27)

*Orientalism,* as we can see, is the fruit of Said's own 'uniquely punishing destiny'. In this book, a Palestinian Arab living in America deploys the tools and techniques of his adopted professional location to discern the manner in which cultural hegemony (see p. 44) is maintained. His intention, he claims, was to provoke, and thus to stimulate 'a new kind of dealing with the Orient' (1978:28). Indeed, if this binary between 'Orient' and 'Occident' were to disappear altogether, 'we shall have advanced a little in the process

of what Welsh Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams has called the "unlearning" of "the inherent dominative mode"' (1978:28).

Said's own work of identity construction underlies the passion behind *Orientalism*. The intellectual power of the book comes from its inspired and relentlessly focused analysis of the way in which a variety of disciplines operated within certain coherent discursive limits, but the cultural, and perhaps even emotional, power of the book comes from its 'worldly' immediacy, its production by a writer whose identity has been constructed, in part, by this discourse, who still feels the effects of Orientalist 'knowledge'. Passion can be a confusing and unreflective element in intellectual debate, and while the passion no doubt explains a great deal about the popularity of *Orientalism,* the refusal by many critics to take the book's worldliness into account has tended to limit their perception of its significance. For instance, Basim Musallam, an Arab reviewer of the book, points out that one hostile critic, scholar Michael Rustum, 'writes as a freeman and a member of a free society; a Syrian, Arab by speech, citizen of a still independent Ottoman state' (Said 1995:337). Edward Said, however, 'has no generally accepted identity,' says Musallam, 'his very *people* are in dispute. It is possible that Edward Said and his generation stand on nothing more solid than the remnants of the destroyed society of Michael Rustum's Syria, and on memory.' Musallam makes the critical point that 'it is not just any "Arab" who wrote this book, but one with a particular background and experience' (Musallam as quoted in Said 1995:337–8).

But it would be too reductive to suggest that Said's intention was to merely vent his anger while asserting a (Palestinian) nationalism that would exorcise him and other colonised subjects from the experiences and legacies of colonisation. Such a position would be anathema to his view of the 'secular' role of the public intellectual, which is to open spaces and cross borders in an attempt to 'speak truth to power'. Taking up the unfinished project of Frantz Fanon, Said moves from a politics of blame to a politics of liberation. And yet, as he has noted, despite his protestations about what he sees his work setting out to do, to create a non-coercive, non-dominative and non-essentialist knowledge, *Orientalism* has 'more often been thought of as a kind of testimonial to subaltern status—the wretched of the earth talking back —than as a multicultural critique of power using knowledge to advance itself (1995:336).

Before the publication of *Orientalism,* the term 'Orientalism' itself had faded from popular usage, but in the late 1970s it took on

a renewed and vigorous life. The disciplines of modern Oriental studies, despite their sophistication, are inescapably imbued with the traditional representations of the nature of the Orient (especially the Middle East) and the assumptions that underlie the discourse of Orientalism. While Said laments the sometimes indiscriminate manner in which *Orientalism* has been appropriated, there is little doubt that it has had a huge impact on social theory in general. By 1995, *Orientalism* had become a 'collective book' that had 'superseded' its author more than could have been expected (1995:300). One might add that it is a continually growing book, in that the analysis of the strategies of Orientalism has been useful in detecting the specific discursive and cultural operations of imperial culture in various ways. For the analysis hinges on the ideological nature of representation and the ways in which powerful representations become the 'true' and accepted ones, despite their stereotypical and even caricatured nature.

## STRUCTURE

*Orientalism* is divided into three main parts. In the first part Said establishes the expansive and amorphous capacity of Orientalism. It is a discourse that has been in existence for over two centuries and one that continues into the present. The focus in this section is to look at the question of representation in order to illustrate the similarities in diverse ideas such as 'Oriental despotism, Oriental sensuality, Oriental modes of production, and Oriental splendour' (1976:47).

The second part of the book is an exposition of 'Orientalist structures and restructures'. Here, Said sets out to establish how the main philological, historical and creative writers in the nineteenth century drew upon a tradition of knowledge that allowed them textually to construct and control the Orient. This construction and rendering visible of the Orient served the colonial administration that subsequently utilised this knowledge to establish a system of rule.

The third part is an examination of 'Modern Orientalism'. This section shows how the established legacies of British and French Orientalism were adopted and adapted by the United States. For Said, nowhere is this better reflected than in the manner in which these legacies are manifested in American foreign policy. The book is a

complex articulation of how the absorptive capacity of Orientalism has been able to adopt influences such as positivism, Marxism and Darwinism without altering its central tenets.

The term 'Orientalism' is derived from 'Orientalist', which has been associated traditionally with those engaged in the study of the Orient. The very term 'the Orient' holds different meanings for different people. As Said points out, Americans associate it with the Far East, mainly Japan and China, while for Western Europeans, and in particular the British and the French, it conjures up different images. It is not only adjacent to Europe; 'it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other' (1978:1).

Part of the pervasive power of Orientalism is that it refers to at least three different pursuits, all of which are interdependent: an academic discipline, a style of thought and a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient. As an academic discipline, Orientalism emerged in the late eighteenth century and has since assembled an archive of knowledge that has served to perpetuate and reinforce Western representations of it. Orientalism is 'the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery and practice' (1978:73). As a style of thought it is 'based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction' (1978:2) between the Orient and the Occident.This definition is more expansive and can accommodate as diverse a group of writers as classical Greek playwright Aeschylus (524–455 BC), medieval Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1335), French novelist Victor Hugo (1802–85) and German social scientist and revolutionary Karl Marx (1818–83).The third definition of Orientalism as a corporate institution is demonstrative of its amorphous capacity as a structure used to dominate and authorise the Orient. Hence, Orientalism necessarily is viewed as being linked inextricably to colonialism.

The three definitions as expounded by Said illustrate how Orientalism is a complex web of representations about the Orient. The first two definitions embody the textual creation of the Orient while the latter definition illustrates how Orientalism has been deployed to execute authority and domination over the Orient. The three are interrelated, particularly since the domination entailed in the third definition is reliant upon and justified by the textual

establishment of the Orient that emerges out of the academic and imaginative definitions of Orientalism.

### EPISTEMOLOGY

The science or philosophy of knowledge, investigating the definition, varieties, sources and limits of knowledge, experience and belief. 'What can we know and how do we know it?' are questions central to epistemology. Thus it examines the relationship or distinction between knowledge and belief, and the relative function of reason and judgement. Abstract epistemological questions, however, miss the central idea Said adapts from Foucault, that 'knowing' and power go hand in hand. Knowledge, or truth, in whatever form, belongs to that group which has power to impress its version of knowledge on others.

### ONTOLOGY

The science or philosophy of being. Ontology is that branch of metaphysics which examines the existence or essence of things, producing a theory about what exists or a list of things that exist. Ontology raises certain kinds of question such as: Is being a property? Is it necessary that something should exist? What is the difference between Being in general and particular being? The character and variety of the questions asked says a lot about the culture in which the question of being is considered, and consequently, about the philosophical status of Being, and the place of the human in the world of that culture.

## THE SCOPE OF ORIENTALISM

The core of Said's argument resides in the link between knowledge and power, which is amply demonstrated by Prime Minister Arthur Balfour's defence of Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1910, when he declared that: 'We know the civilization of Egypt better than we know any other country' (1978:32). Knowledge for Balfour meant not only surveying a civilisation from its origins, but *being able to do that*. 'To have such knowledge of such a thing [as Egypt] is to dominate it, to have authority over it…since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it' (1978:32). The premises of Balfour's speech

demonstrate very clearly how knowledge and dominance go hand in hand:

> England knows Egypt; Egypt is what England knows; England knows that Egypt cannot have self-government; England confirms that by occupying Egypt; for the Egyptians, Egypt is what England has occupied and now governs; foreign occupation therefore becomes 'the very basis' of contemporary Egyptian civilization.
>
> (1978:34)

But to see Orientalism as simply a rationalisation of colonial rule is to ignore the fact that colonialism was justified in advance by Orientalism (1978:39). The division of the world into East and West had been centuries in the making and expressed the fundamental binary division on which all dealing with the Orient was based. But one side had the power to determine what the reality of both East and West might be. Knowledge of the Orient, because it was generated out of this cultural strength, 'in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental and his world' (1978:40). With this assertion we come right to the heart of *Orientalism,* and consequently to the source of much of the controversy it has provoked. To Said, the Orient and the Oriental are direct constructions of the various disciplines by which they are known by Europeans. This appears, on the one hand, to narrow down an extremely complex European phenomenon to a simple question of power and imperial relations, but, on the other, to provide no room for Oriental self-representations.

Said points out that the upsurge in Orientalist study coincided with the period of unparalleled European expansion: from 1815 to 1914. His emphasis on its political nature can be seen in his focus on the beginnings of modern Orientalism: not with William Jones's disruption of linguistic orthodoxy, but in the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, 'which was in many ways the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently stronger one' (1978:42). But the crucial fact was that Orientalism, in all its many tributaries, began to impose limits upon thought about the Orient. Even powerful imaginative writers such as Gustav Flaubert, Gerard de Nerval or Sir Walter Scott were constrained in what they could either experience or say about the Orient. For 'Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (Orient, the East, "them")' (1978:43). It

worked this way because the intellectual accomplishments of Orientalist discourse served the interests, and were managed by the vast hierarchical web, of imperial power.

Central to the emergence of the discourse is the imaginative existence of something called 'the Orient', which comes into being within what Said describes as an 'imaginative geography' because it is unlikely that we might develop a discipline called 'Occidental studies'. Quite simply, the idea of an Orient exists to define the European. '[O]ne big division, as between West and Orient, leads to other smaller ones' (1978:58) and the experiences of writers, travellers, soldiers, statesmen, from Herodotus and Alexander the Great on, become 'the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception and form of the encounter between East and West' (1978:58). What holds these experiences together is the shared sense of something 'other', which is named 'the Orient'. This analysis of the binary nature of Orientalism has been the source of a great deal of criticism of the book, because it appears to suggest that there is one Europe or one West (one 'us') that constructs the Orient. But if we see this homogenisation as the way in which the *discourse* of Orientalism simplifies the world, at least by implication, rather than the way the world *is;* the way a general attitude can link various disciplines and intellectual tributaries despite their different subject matter and modes of operation, we may begin to understand the discursive power of this pervasive habit of thinking and doing called Orientalism.

The way we come to understand that 'other' named 'the Orient' in this binary and stereotypical way can be elaborated in terms of the metaphor of theatre. Where the idea of Orientalism as a learned field suggests an enclosed space, the idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined.

> On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.
>
> (1978:63)

In this way certain images represent what is otherwise an impossibly diffuse entity (1978:68). They are also *characters* who conform to certain typical characteristics. Thus, Orientalism

> shares with magic and with mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are *because* they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter.
>
> (1978:70)

Imaginative geography legitimates a vocabulary, a representative discourse peculiar to the understanding of the Orient that becomes *the* way in which the Orient is known. Orientalism thus becomes a form of 'radical realism' by which an aspect of the Orient is fixed with a word or phrase 'which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply be, reality' (1978:72).

The focus of Said's analysis is provided by what he sees as the close link between the upsurge in Orientalism and the rise in European imperial dominance during the nineteenth century. The political orientation of his analysis can be seen by the importance he gives to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. Although not the beginning of the Orientalism that swept Europe early in the century, Napoleon's project demonstrated the most conscious marriage of academic knowledge and political ambition. Certainly the decision by Warren Hastings, Governor-General of India in the 1770s, to conduct the Indian court system on the basis of Sanskrit law paved the way for the discoveries of William Jones, who helped translate the Sanskrit. This demonstrated that knowledge of any kind is always *situated* and given force by political reality. But Napoleon's tactics—persuading the Egyptian population that he was fighting on behalf of Islam rather than against it —utilising as he did all the available knowledge of the Koran and Islamic society that could be mustered by French scholars, comprehensively demonstrated the strategic and tactical power of knowing.

Napoleon gave his deputy Kleber strict instructions after he left always to administer Egypt through the Orientalists and the religious Islamic leaders whom they could win over (1978:82). According to Said, the consequences of this expedition were profound. 'Quite literally, the occupation gave birth to the entire modern experience of the Orient as interpreted from within the universe of discourse founded by Napoleon in Egypt' (1978:87). After Napoleon, says Said, the very language of Orientalism changed radically. 'Its descriptive realism was upgraded and became not merely a style of representation but a language, indeed a means of *creation*' (1978:87), a symbol of

which was the immensely ambitious construction of the Suez Canal. Claims such as these show why Said's argument is so compelling, and why it caught the imagination of critics in the 1970s. Closer inspection would reveal that much of the most intensive Oriental scholarship was carried out in countries such as Germany, which had few colonial possessions. Wider analysis might also reveal that *various* styles of representation emerged within Orientalist fields. But Napoleon's expedition gave an unmistakable direction to the work of Orientalists that was to have a continuing legacy, not only in European and Middle Eastern history but in world history as well.

Ultimately, the power and unparalleled productive capacity of Orientalism came about because of an emphasis on textuality (see p. 19), a tendency to engage reality within the framework of knowledge gained from previously written texts. Orientalism was a dense palimpsest of writings which purported to engage directly with their subject but which were in fact responding to, and building upon, writings that had gone before. This textual attitude extends to the present day, so that

> if Arab Palestinians oppose Israeli settlement and occupation of their lands, then that is merely 'the return of Islam,' or, as a renowned contemporary Orientalist defines it, Islamic opposition to non-Islamic peoples, a principle of Islam enshrined in the seventh century.
>
> (1978:107)

## THE DISCOURSE OF ORIENTALISM

Orientalism is best viewed in Foucaultian terms as a discourse: a manifestation of power/knowledge. Without examining Orientalism as a discourse, says Said, it is not possible to 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' (1978:3).

Following on from the notion of discourse we saw earlier (p. 14), colonial discourse is a system of statements that can be made about colonies and colonial peoples, about colonising powers and about the relationship between these two. It is the system of knowledge and belief about the world within which acts of colonisation take place.

Although it is generated within the society and cultures of the colonisers, it becomes that discourse within which the colonised may also come to see themselves (as, for example, when Africans adopt the imperial view of themselves as 'intuitive' and 'emotional', asserting a distinctiveness from the 'rational' and 'unemotional' Europeans). At the very least it creates a deep conflict in the consciousness of the colonised because of its clash with other knowledges about the world.

As a discourse, Orientalism is ascribed the authority of academics, institutions and governments, and such authority raises the discourse to a level of importance and prestige that guarantees its identification with 'truth'. In time, the knowledge and reality created by the Orientalist discipline produces a discourse 'whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it' (1978:94). By means of this discourse, Said argues, Western cultural institutions are responsible for the creation of those 'others', the Orientals, whose very difference from the Occident helps establish that binary opposition by which Europe's own identity can be established. The underpinning of such a demarcation is a line between the Orient and the Occident that is 'less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production' (Said 1985:2). It is the geographical imagination that is central to the construction of entities such as the 'Orient'. It requires the maintenance of rigid boundaries in order to differentiate between the Occident and the Orient. Hence, through this process, they are able to 'Orientalise' the region.

An integral part of Orientalism, of course, is the relationship of power between the Occident and the Orient, in which the balance is weighted heavily in favour of the former. Such power is connected intimately with the construction of knowledge about the Orient. It occurs because the knowledge of 'subject races' or 'Orientals' makes their management easy and profitable; 'knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control' (1978:36).

The knowledge of the Orient created by and embodied within the discourse of Orientalism serves to construct an image of the Orient and the Orientals as subservient and subject to domination by the Occident. Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, says Said, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental and his world.

> In Cromer's and Balfour's language, the Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual). The point is that in each case the Oriental is *contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks.
>
> (1978:40)

The creation of the Orient as the 'other' is necessary so that the Occident can define itself and strengthen its own identity by invoking such a juxtaposition.

The Orientalist representation has been reinforced not only by academic disciplines such as anthropology, history and linguistics but also by the 'Darwinian theses on survival and natural selection' (1978: 227). Hence, from an Orientalist perspective, the study of the Orient has been always from an Occidental or Western point of view. To the Westerner, according to Said,

> the Oriental was always like some aspect of the West; to some German Romantics, for example, Indian religion was essentially an Oriental version of Germano-Christian pantheism. Yet the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture.
>
> (1978:67)

This encoding and comparison of the Orient with the West ultimately ensures that the Oriental culture and perspective is viewed as a deviation, a perversion, and thus is accorded an inferior status.

An essential feature of the discourse of Orientalism is the objectification of both the Orient and the Oriental. They are treated as objects that can be scrutinised and understood, and this objectification is confirmed in the very term 'Orient', which covers a geographical area and a range of populations many times larger and many times more diverse than Europe. Such objectification entails the assumption that the Orient is essentially monolithic, with an unchanging history, while the Occident is dynamic, with an active history. In addition, the Orient and the Orientals are seen to be passive, non-participatory subjects of study.

This construction, however, has a distinctly political dimension in that Western knowledge inevitably entails political significance. This was

nowhere better exemplified than in the rise of Oriental studies and the emergence of Western imperialism. The Englishman in India or Egypt in the latter nineteenth century took an interest in those countries that was founded on their status as British colonies. This may seem quite different, suggests Said, 'from saying that all academic knowledge about India and Egypt is somehow tinged and impressed with, violated by, the gross political fact—and yet *that is what I am saying* in this study of Orientalism' (1978:11). The reason Said can say this is because of his conviction of the worldliness of the discourse: 'no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances' (1978:11). The idea that academic knowledge is 'tinged', 'impressed with', or 'violated by' political and military force is not to suggest, as Dennis Porter supposes (1983), that the hegemonic effect of Orientalist discourse does not operate by 'consent'. Rather, it is to suggest that the apparently morally neutral pursuit of knowledge is, in the colonialist context, deeply inflected with the ideological assumptions of imperialism. 'Knowledge' is always a matter of representation, and representation a process of giving concrete form to ideological concepts, of making certain signifiers stand for signifieds. The power that underlies these representations cannot be divorced from the operations of political force, even though it is a different kind of power, more subtle, more penetrating and less visible.

A power imbalance exists, then, not only in the most obvious characteristics of imperialism, in its 'brute political, economic, and military rationales' (1978:12), but also, and most hegemonically, in cultural discourse. It is in the cultural sphere that the dominant hegemonic project of Orientalist studies, used to propagate the aims of imperialism, can be discerned. Said's methodology therefore is embedded in what he terms 'textualism', which allows him to envisage the Orient as a textual creation. In Orientalist discourse, the affiliations of the text compel it to produce the West as a site of power and a centre distinctly demarcated from the 'other' as the object of knowledge and, inevitably, subordination. This hidden political function of the Orientalist text is a feature of its worldliness and Said's project is to focus on the establishment of the Orient as a textual construct. He is not interested in analysing what lies hidden in the Orientalist text, but in showing how the Orientalist 'makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West' (1978:20–1).

The issue of representation is crucial to understanding discourses within which knowledge is constructed, because it is questionable, says Said, whether a true representation is ever possible (1978:272). If all representations are embedded in the language, culture and institutions of the representer, 'then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, inter-woven with a great many other things besides the 'truth' which is itself a representation' (1978:272). The belief that representations such as those we find in books correspond to the real world amounts to what Said calls a 'textual attitude'. He suggests that what French philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778) in *Candide* and Spanish novelist Cervantes (1547–1616) in *Don Quixote* satirised was the assumption that the 'swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books—texts—say' (1978:93). This is precisely what occurs when the Orientalist text is held to signify, to represent the truth: the Orient is rendered silent and its reality is revealed by the Orientalist. Since the Orientalist text offers a familiarity, even intimacy, with a distant and exotic reality, the texts themselves are accorded enormous status and accrue greater importance than the objects they seek to describe. Said argues that 'such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe' (1978:94). Consequently, it is the texts that create and describe the reality of the Orient, given that the Orientals themselves are prohibited from speaking.

The latest phase of Orientalism corresponds with the displacement of France and Britain on the world stage by the United States. Despite the shifting of the centre of power and the consequent change in Orientalising strategies, the *discourse* of Orientalism, in its three general modes, remains secure. In this phase, the Arab Muslim has come to occupy a central place within American popular images as well as in the social sciences. Said argues that this was to a large extent made possible by the 'transference of a popular anti-Semitic animus from a Jewish to an Arab target…since the figure was essentially the same' (1978:286). The dominance of the social sciences after the Second World War meant that the mantle of Orientalism was passed to the social sciences. These social scientists ensured that the region was 'conceptually emasculated, reduced to "attitudes", "trends", statistics: in short dehumanized' (1978:291). Orientalism, then, in its different phases, is a Eurocentric discourse that constructs the 'Orient' by the accumulated knowledge of

generations of scholars and writers who are secure in the power of their 'superior' wisdom.

It is not Said's intention merely to document the excesses of Orientalism (which he does very successfully) but to stress the need for an alternative, better form of scholarship. He recognises that there are a lot of individual scholars engaged in producing such knowledge. Yet he is concerned about the 'guild tradition' of Orientalism, which has the capacity to wear down most scholars. He urges continued vigilance in fighting the dominance of Orientalism. The answer for Said is to be 'sensitive to what is involved in representation, in studying the Other, in racial thinking, in unthinking and uncritical acceptance of authority and authoritative ideas, in the socio-political role of intellectuals, in the great value of skeptical critical consciousness' (1978:327). Here the paramount obligation of the intellectual is to resist the attractions of the 'theological' position of those implicated in the tradition of Orientalist discourse, and to emphasise a 'secular' desire to speak truth to power, to question and to oppose.

## SAID, FOUCAULT AND THE QUESTION OF RESISTANCE

The accusation that, for all his dissenting analysis of Western discourse, Said has no theory of resistance (Young 1990; Ahmad 1992) has most often emerged from the view that he misappropriates Foucault. Although Said has a clear debt to Foucault, there are important points of departure. Most importantly, Said became unhappy with Foucault for what he saw as a lack of political commitment within his work and within post-structuralist discourse in general. Foucault in particular, suggests Said, 'takes a curiously passive and sterile view not so much of the uses of power, but of how and why power is gained, used, and held onto' (1983:221). While trying to avoid the crude notion that power is 'unmediated domination', says Said, Foucault 'more or less eliminates the central dialectic of opposed forces that still underlies modern society'. The problem Said has with Foucault is a lingering sense that he is more fascinated with the way power operates than committed to trying to change power relations in society (1983:221). Foucault's conception of power, as something which operates at every level of society, leaves no room for resistance. Said characterises it as a 'conception [which] has drawn a circle around itself, constituting a

unique territory in which Foucault has imprisoned himself and others with him' (1983:245). Said's intention, on the contrary, is not to be trapped but to articulate the potential to resist and recreate. This is implicit in Orientalism, which stresses the relationship between power and knowledge.

### MICHEL FOUCAULT (1926–84)

Philosopher, born in Poitiers, France. Taught at several French universities, culminating in the prestigious position of Professor of the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France (1970). Foucault showed the ways in which basic ideas, normally taken to be permanent truths about human nature and society, change in the course of history. Referring to his practice as an 'archaeology', he showed how *épistemés* or discursive formations determine the manner in which the world is experienced in a given epoch. He explored the shifting patterns of power within society and the ways in which power relates to the self. Power, he says, is located in strategies which operate at every level: they cannot be reduced to the power of, for instance, the state or a ruling class. Rather than being simply coercive, he claimed, power is productive, and particularly productive of knowledge, being disseminated throughout the whole of society rather than simply exerted by dominant people and institutions.

For Said, the power of the Orientalists lay in their 'knowing' the Orient, which in itself constituted power and yet also was an exercise in power. Hence, for him, resistance is twofold: to know the Orient outside the discourse of Orientalism, and to represent and present this knowledge to the Orientalists—to write back to them. The reason for this is that none of the Orientalists he writes about appear to have intended an 'Oriental' as a reader. 'The discourse of Orientalism, its internal consistency and rigorous procedures, were all designed for readers and consumers in the metropolitan West' (1995:336). He therefore finds particular pleasure in listening into their pronouncements and making his uninvited interventions into their discussions (1995:336).

However, what Said is writing back is not an 'authentic' story of the Orient that only an Oriental has the capacity to tell, but rather a revelation of the fallacy of authenticity. For there is no 'real' Orient because

> 'the Orient' is itself a constituted entity, and the notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically 'different' inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture or racial essence proper to that geographical space is equally a highly debatable idea.
>
> (Said 1978:322)

Hence, it is important to note that Said's non-coercive knowledge is one that runs counter to the deployment of discourse analysis within *Orientalism*. Despite his obvious debt to Foucault methodologically, he maintains distance and allows for authorial creativity. Thus, despite accusations of his misappropriation of Foucault (Young 1990; Clifford 1988; Ahmad 1992), Said is adamant that the theoretical inconsistency of Orientalism is the way it was designed to be: 'I didn't want Foucault's method, or anybody's method to override what I was trying to put forward' (Salusinszky 1987:137). But even more explicit than this, he arrived at a notion of non-coercive knowledge at the end of the book 'which was deliberately anti-Foucault' (Salusinszky 1987:137).

This Saidian strategy of resistance is premised upon intellectuals who exercise their critical consciousness, not simply to reject imperial discourse but to intervene critically 'within the intrinsic conditions on which knowledge is made possible' (1983:182). For Said, the location of critical consciousness lies in challenging the hegemonic nature of dominant culture as well as 'the sovereignty of the systematic method' (1978a: 673). By adopting such a perspective, Said argues, it is possible for the critic to deal with a text in two ways—by describing not only what is in the text but also what is invisible. His idea of the contemporary critical consciousness is one that asserts the room for agency, for such a consciousness detaches itself from the dominant culture, adopts a responsible adversarial position and then begins to 'account for, and rationally to discover and know, the force of statements in texts' (1978a: 713). The development of this critical consciousness is central to Said's strategy of resistance.

## CRITIQUES OF *ORIENTALISM*

To maintain a view of Orientalism as a discourse is to give it a focus that opens up gaps in its coverage. Placing the beginnings of Orientalism as late as Napoleon's invasion of Egypt rather than in the eighteenth-century upsurge of interest in the Indo-European languages better suits Said's

demonstration of European power in the discourse. He largely omits the German school of Orientalists and their considerable impact on the field, since Germany was not a significant colonial power in the East; and he fails to mention the strong feeling among many Orientalist scholars that in some respects Eastern cultures were superior to the West, or the widespread feeling that Orientalist scholarship might actually break down the boundaries between East and West. Furthermore, Said's use of the concept of discourse, which he readily admits is partial, emphasises dominance and power over cultural interaction.

For these and many other reasons, *Orientalism* immediately stimulated and continues to generate responses from several quarters and with varying degrees of hostility. The vigour and range of these criticisms reveal how profound the influence of the book has been. But the nature of the criticisms has invariably tended to confirm Said's claim about the constricted nature of intellectual work in the academy: its 'theological' and exclusionary specialisation, its disciplinary confinement, its tendency towards caution and its retreat from the human realities of its subject matter. For, magisterial in scope though it is, *Orientalism* is an 'amateur' work, a demonstration of that approach to intellectual endeavour Said prizes so greatly. To call it an amateur work might appear contradictory and disparaging, but this effect of the term shows us how strong that constructed link between academic specialisation and 'truth' has become.

The book's urgent air of revealing injustice and its prodigal disregard for discipline boundaries have generated criticisms that tend to confirm the unacceptability and marginality of what Said would call a form of 'secularist analysis'. To historians he is unhistorical; to social scientists he conflates theories; to scholars he is unscholarly; to literary theorists he is unreflective and indiscriminate; to Foucaultians he misuses Foucault; to professional Marxists he is anti-revolutionary; to professional conservatives he is a terrorist. Twenty years of responses to Orientalism have tended to reveal what lies in wait for the 'amateur' public intellectual. However, as each disciplinary attack asserts the authority of its own epistemological base, it provides yet another example of the interpenetration of truth and power: 'truth' cannot be stated until the authority of its construction—the authority of its institutional base—has been proven.

The criticisms also hinge upon the paradoxical nature of Said's identity, and, indeed, upon the nature of representation itself. For many,

if not most, of the criticisms are astute and revealing, and almost all of them are valid in their own terms. But none can lay claim to an authority so absolute that it manages to undermine the work. Part of the reason for this is that the text is writing back to those very assumptions of disciplinary authority upon which many of these criticisms are based. The incontrovertible reality of the 'Oriental's' experience, and its very worldliness, is such that it continually eludes the disciplinary and epistemological assumptions of its critics. Ultimately, the worldliness of *Orientalism*—a text that expends a great deal of effort to expose the affiliations, the worldliness of Orientalist texts themselves— becomes the source of its intellectual and critical energy. The fact that the text addresses the reader not from an abstract theoretical position, but from the continuing reality of an 'orientalised' experience, explains its resilience against the persistent critical attacks it has received.

## THE 'PROFESSOR OF TERROR'

Edward Alexander, writing in the right-wing journal *Commentary,* produced an example of the most hostile responses to *Orientalism,* suggesting that Said, an expert on Joseph Conrad and one who has written extensively about the novelist, is someone 'whose great insight into modern political life, as it happens, has precisely to do with the special attraction of intellectuals to terror' (Alexander 1989:49). Alexander likens Said to a character in the Conrad novel *The Secret Agent* (1906), which describes the 'pedantic fanaticism' of a professor whose thoughts 'caressed the images of ruin and destruction'. He also analyses the longing of another (untenured) intellectual to create 'a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means', chief among them 'death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity' (1989:49–50). Alexander's argument relies largely on misrepresentation, and is more interesting for its revelation of the level of hostility possible in the exchanges between Said and his critics than for any incisive critique of Said's position.

This caricature of *Orientalism* also represents the hostility of some of the attacks upon Said himself in US society, and is interesting for the extremity and unguarded hysteria of its reaction. Such attacks demonstrate rather acutely the claim Said makes about contemporary

Orientalism: that the Arab has been invested with all the demonic terror of US racial and political xenophobia. What is interesting is how subtly such stereotypes enter into public debate in general and into academic discourse in particular. Although Alexander's attack does not represent a widespread attitude to the book itself, it provides an illuminating glimpse of the ways in which stereotypes of 'self' and 'other' tend to polarise in cultural discourse.

## AREA STUDIES

The critiques mounted from within the centre, mainly from the Orientalist as well as the Area Studies domain, elicited a great deal of comment, much of it positive and instructive, a fair amount hostile and in some cases abusive (Said 1985:1). The hostility that Said refers to was exemplified best in the works of Dennis Porter and Bernard Lewis. While Porter rejected Said's thesis on the grounds that it was both an ahistorical and an inconsistent narrative (1983), Lewis mounted one of the most vitriolic attacks on Said. This is not surprising perhaps, given Said's treatment of Lewis's work on Islam as an explicit example of contemporary Orientalism: aggressively ideological, despite his various attempts at subtlety and irony, and 'underwritten by a zealotry covered with a veneer of urbanity that has very little in common with the "science" and learning Lewis purports to be upholding' (1985:13). This should come as no surprise, says Said, to anyone familiar with the history of Orientalism: it is not surprising, he claims, that most of the criticism from specialist Orientalists 'turns out to be, like Lewis's, no more than banal description of a barony violated by a crude trespasser' (1995:346).

Lewis, in return, described *Orientalism* as a 'false' thesis that bordered on the 'absurd'. Further, he argued that it revealed 'a disquieting lack of knowledge of what scholars do and what scholarship is all about' (1982, 1982a). Lewis questioned Said's professional qualifications (in terms of what degrees he possessed) and his ability to speak of Islam, his knowledge of Arab history and of Orientalist disciplines. To Lewis, as a representative of 'specialist' academic scholarship, Said's 'amateurism' is an unforgivable failure rather than a liberating strength. Critically, Lewis substantially ignored the specific criticisms levelled by Said at Orientalist practices.

Orientalist scholars like Lewis and Daniel Pipes, according to Said, continue to reproduce such representations in their attacks on him, because they 'derive from what to the nineteenth-century mind is the preposterous situation of an Oriental responding to Orientalism's asseverations'. Said reserves his greatest scorn for contemporary Orientalists such as Lewis. 'For unrestrained anti-intellectuals, unencumbered by critical self-consciousness, no one has quite achieved the sublime confidence of Bernard Lewis' (1985:6). In short, Said once again seeks to illustrate the enduring legacy of Orientalism, its contemporary manifestation and its polemical and political commitments. It needs to be emphasised that academic Oriental studies are not the whole of Orientalism. The criticisms, coming mainly from the academy, and Said's responses to them have both tended to narrow down the field of contestation unnecessarily.

## THE FOUCAULT CONNECTION: METHODOLOGICAL CRITICISMS

The issue of Said's use of Foucault has been the focus of various, even very opposed, criticisms of Orientalism. Dennis Porter, for instance, argues that the employment of the notion of discourse raises overwhelming methodological problems, not the least of which is the manner in which Said deals with the questions of truth and ideology. On the one hand, says Porter, Said argues that all knowledge is tainted because the Orient, after all, is a construction. On the other, Said appears to be suggesting that there might well be a real Orient that is knowable and that there is a corresponding truth about it that can be achieved. For Porter, this ambivalence between knowledge and ideology is never resolved within Said's work. Indeed, this assumption of an implied 'real' Orient is one of the most frequent criticisms of the book despite Said's repeated disclaimers.

If Said is correct that there is no knowable Orient, Porter argues, then 'Orientalism in one form or another is not only what we have but all we can ever have' (1983:151). He traces the theoretical tension in *Orientalism* to the manner in which Said has attempted to bring together two differing theoretical positions in Gramsci and Foucault. Said's perceived misappropriation of Foucault can be traced to the manner in which he seeks to accommodate such diverse figures as Alexander the Great, Karl Marx and Jimmy Carter within a single discourse. Such a

claim, for Porter, 'seems to make nonsense of history at the same time as it invokes it with reference to imperial power/-knowledge' (1983:152). On the contrary, it is claimed that Foucault did not engage in such crudities. For him. discourse was grounded historically with epistemological breaks between different time periods.

The discourse of Orientalism in this Saidian sense is unable therefore to offer alternatives to Orientalism in the past. This, combined with the manner in which Gramsci's notion of hegemony (see p. 44) is deployed, renders the possibility of counter-hegemony impossible. It is the capacity to resist within the discourse of Orientalism itself that is nullified, and it is this that Porter finds unsatisfactory. He argues that even when Said praises individual scholars for not falling into Orientalist traps, 'he does not show how within the given dominant hegemonic formation such an alternative discourse was able to emerge' (1983:153).

This contradiction, and Said's failure to view hegemony as a process that emerges by consent rather than force, leads Porter to posit three alternatives to Orientalist discourse as constructed by Said. First, Orientalist texts are heterogeneous and not homogenous. Second, there may be alternative writings within the Western tradition. Third, it would be possible to consider a textual dialogue between the Occident and the Orient that would not codify knowledge and power relations. Porter uses examples within travel literature to demonstrate that within Orientalism there exist counter-hegemonic voices that express themselves in different ways at different historical junctures. The two works that he uses to prove his thesis are those that are referred to by Said: Marco Polo's *Travels* and T.E. (Lawrence of Arabia) Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Porter's main contention is that both of these writers problematise Said's claim of a united Western tradition in the discourse of Orientalism. He sums up his case against Said as follows:

> in the end to suggest alternatives to the discourse of Orientalism is not difficult to explain. First, because he overlooks the potential contradiction between discourse theory and Gramscian hegemony, he fails to historicize adequately the texts he cites and summarizes...Second, because he does not distinguish the literary instance from more transparently ideological textual forms he does not acknowledge the semi-autonomous and overdetermined character of aesthetic artefacts. Finally, he fails to show how literary texts may in their play establish distance from the ideologies they seem to be reproducing.
>
> (1983:160)

Porter's critique hinges on an apparent inability to accept the premise of Said's view of the intellectual's function: to oppose. The voice of dissent, the critique (of Orientalism or any other hegemonic discourse) does not need to propose an alternative for the critique to be effective and valid. The 'alternative' offered by Said is consistently implied in his concern with the role of the intellectual and his discussion of the strategies of intellectual dissent. Indeed, what make Said's criticism compelling are the repeated examples of the ways in which prejudice and stereotyping enter into Orientalist texts that purport to be scholarly, historical and empirical. All representations may be mediated, but the simple assertions of *Orientalism* remain: that power determines which representations may be accepted as 'true', that Orientalist texts owe their alleged 'truthfulness' to their location in the discourse, and that this situation is one that emerges out of, and confirms, a global structure of imperial domination. Hegemony does not need to be monolithic. Gauri Viswanathan's analysis of the use of the discipline of English literature in India as a discourse of socio-political control (1987) shows very clearly how a hegemonic discourse can operate and be effective in *the same arena* as acts and discourses of open social resistance.

One of the most vigorous attacks on Said's alleged Foucaultian position in recent times has been mounted by Aijaz Ahmad in his book *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992). Ahmad contextualises *Orientalism* with what he terms the general retreat of the Left in response to the global offensive of the Right. He is at pains to demonstrate that Said is inconsistent about whether Orientalism is a system of representations or *mis*representations. Further, Ahmad argues that Said's position is simply to suggest that 'the line between representation and misrepresentation is always very thin' (1992:164). The point is to suggest that Said has adopted, through Foucault, a Nietzschean stance whereby it is not possible to make true statements, in direct contrast to the Marxist position that allows for such a possibility. Said is accused of affiliating himself with a new kind of history writing that questions the 'very facticity of facts'.

Clearly, Ahmad's problem is with the notion of discourse itself. For where does the line between representation and misrepresentation lie? All representation is, in some sense, a misrepresentation. Any 'true' representation is one that has gained cultural and political authority. This holds for the 'facticity of facts' as well. Such facts are those

representations that count as facts within a particular discourse. But curiously, Ahmad is closer to Said than he realises. For Said's own problem with discourse lies in its retreat from politics. That is not to say there is a 'real' Orient somewhere outside of, or beyond, its representations, but that the material urgency of colonial experience—or to put it another way, the representations by the colonised of their own experience—must be taken into account. This tension between the materiality of experience and the constructedness of identity forms one of the most crucial issues in Said's work, as it does in political discourse of all kinds. Whereas he is criticised by Porter and others for implying a real Orient, he is criticised by Ahmad for not invoking an Orient that is real enough.

For Ahmad, this failure is untenable in a book that has been celebrated among Left cultural theorists. Yet what is particularly disturbing for him about *Orientalism* is that it appeals to extreme forms of Third Worldist nationalisms. This is a process of selective memory, where acts committed by Oriental subjects, such as the violence at the time of Partition, are overlooked in an attempt to establish the greater evil of the power of Orientalism that has made the Oriental inferior. That Said should be blamed for interpretations and uses of his book that have dismayed and irritated him seems a bit unfair. Third World nationalisms hardly need *Orientalism* to give them succour. But even more than this, what Ahmad finds ghastly as a Marxist is that Marxism itself can be reduced to being a product of Orientalism and a cohort of colonialism. This negates the role that Marxism has played as a site of resistance in the periphery.

## MARXISM

Marxism in its various forms is based on the belief that all political, cultural and ideological practices and values in a society are a consequence of the socio-economic conditions of life. The ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events lies in the economic development of society, the changes in the modes of production and exchange, the consequent division of society into distinct classes, and the struggles of these classes against one another. The dominant ideology of a society is perpetuated by the ruling class in its own interests, producing 'false consciousness' in the working class about the true state of economic oppres-

sion, and against which workers must struggle. Marx had little to say about societies outside Europe but Lenin argued that imperialism was a product of the economic stagnation of capitalist societies. Despite its reduction of racial, cultural and political questions to the economic, Marxism, particularly its notion of class struggle, has been a prominent feature of anti-colonial resistance throughout the world.

Ahmad sees the elevation of *Orientalism* to the status of a 'classic' as being linked inextricably to its rise to a position of prominence 'within those sectors of the university intelligentsia which either originate in the ethnic minorities or affiliate themselves ideologically with the academic sections of these minorities' (1992:166). In this way, he is able to dismiss not only colonial discourse analysis but also postcolonial theory (see p. 15), which he claims has been inaugurated by Third World migrants who came from privileged classes in their own countries. For these people, an alternative to Marxism was Orientalism, in which, above all, the question of race took precedence over gender and class. This allows Ahmad to assert that 'colonialism is now held responsible not only for its own cruelties but, conveniently enough, for ours too' (1992:167). In short, what Ahmad is disturbed about is the privileged locations within the West that figures such as Said, Spivak and Rushdie occupy, and the manner in which they use these locations to theorise their marginality.

Robert Young, in *White Mythologies* (1990), provides an account of the methodological problems within Said's work. He notes that a major objection to Orientalism has been that it offers no alternative to the phenomenon it sets out to critique. Young recognises that, because Said views the Orient as a construction, he sees no need to respond to such criticisms. However, this does not solve Said's problems of how he separates himself from the 'coercive structures of knowledge that he is describing' (1990:127). This is precisely the reason that Said, it is argued, falls into the very trap he seeks to expose. Hence, for Young, 'Said's account will be no truer to Orientalism than Orientalism is to the actual Orient, assuming that there could ever be such a thing' (1990:128).

To show Said's inconsistency, Young argues that the book is divided into two parts. The first part seeks to demonstrate the invention of the Orient as a construction of representation, and the

second strives to show how this knowledge system and forms of representation are brought into play for the colonial powers. He points to Said's attempts to reconcile these two positions by bringing together what he terms two forms of Orientalism. One form embodied classical scholarship which constructed the Orient, while the other was the Orient articulated by travellers, pilgrims and statesmen. Although these two existed in tension, they came together in a single form with colonisation. This leads Young to argue that 'while Said wants to argue that Orientalism has a hegemonic consistency, his own representation of it becomes increasingly conflictual' (1990:130).

Young argues that Said's fundamental thesis is to point out the anti-humanist nature of Orientalism. However, what is problematic for him is the manner in which Said appropriates the idea of human from within the Western humanist tradition in order to oppose the Occidental representation of the Orient. This allows Young to argue that Said's work comes perilously close to an Orientalist position, and he questions: 'How does any form of knowledge—including Orientalism—escape the terms of Orientalism's critique?'

James Clifford raises two sets of complementary questions about *Orientalism*. First, should criticism seek to provide a counter-narrative to culturally produced images such as the Orient? Second, how is the critique of Orientalism to avoid falling into the trap of 'Occidentalism'? Clifford points out the role all forms of knowledge and representation have in dealing with a group or society's others. Is it possible, he asks, to escape the manner in which Orientalism engages in the dehumanising, misrepresenting and inferiorising of other cultures? He argues that in Said's work there is no alternative to Orientalism, that his attack is firmly grounded within values derived from the 'Western anthropological human sciences' (Clifford 1988: 261). Such a stance, of humanism, of oppositional criticism, is a 'privilege invented by a totalising Western liberalism' (1988:263). Clifford here raises a perennial contradiction in Said's work, which is the employment of the tools of a Western theoretical tradition to critique that tradition. Yet it might be pointed out that this process of appropriation of dominant forms and cultural discourses is a common feature of post-colonial oppositionality. One might ask if this strategy contradicts what Said reveals about the processes of Orientalism in speaking for the Orient.

Clifford is disturbed by the absence of a fully developed theory of culture in *Orientalism*. He sees Said's work on culture as being hegemonic and disciplinary, forms of high European culture which are consequently 'meaningless, since they bypass the local cultural codes that make personal experience articulate' (1988:263). Clifford argues that Said misappropriates Foucault, especially through Said's humanism, which in turn means that there are major theoretical inconsistencies within Orientalism. Said's multiple identities, being a Palestinian who lives in the United States and one who operates as an oppositional critic deploying the very tools of the culture he seeks to rebuke, continue to raise problems for Clifford. 'From what discrete sets of cultural resources does any modern writer construct his or her discourse?' he asks (1988:276). 'To what world audience (and in what language) are these discourses most generally addressed? Must the intellectual at least, in a literate global situation, construct a native land by writing like Césaire the notebook of a return?' (1988:276). In one respect Clifford's questions go right to the heart of Said's work. How do any individuals construct themselves as cultural identities? How do they construct for themselves a homeland? This is precisely what makes Said so fascinating as a cultural critic. The ambivalence of his position, the many paradoxes he traverses and the tensions created in his own cultural identity reveal the very complexity of the process of constructing one's identity in the modern post-colonial world.

Michael Dutton and Peter Williams (1993) provide an extremely detailed account of the theoretical underpinnings of Said's work in *Orientalism*. Their major objection is with Said's theoretical inconsistencies. They make the oft-repeated criticism that Said makes ambivalent use of Foucault and that he fails to adhere to that methodology. They point out that Said's privileging of the author and his valorisation of literary writing and reading practices are incompatible with the way Foucault sees discourse operating. This has the effect of contracting 'both the range and scope of resistance to inequities of power and knowledge' (1993:325). In short, for them, had Said been truer to Foucault he would have been able to avoid the pitfalls that Porter, Ahmad, Young and Clifford have pointed out.

Mona Abaza and Georg Stauth (1990) have noted that, although critiques of classical Orientalism received considerable attention in the 1960s and 1970s, it was not until Said's *Orientalism* that Orientalism became a major area of inter-cultural research. They argue, however,

that Said's methodology is 'reductionist' (1990:210), assuming that discourse is a kind of one-way street from the powerful to the weak. This means that Said denies a 'long history of productive cultural exchange'. Furthermore, this framework is appropriated by sociologists, anthropologists and feminists to differentiate between the essence and reality of other cultures. This is a trend they term 'going native' and is similar to a type of Orientalism in reverse that has been articulated by al-Azm (1981).

Abaza and Stauth's own reductionism means that they unproblematically collapse such alternative research methodologies into a mere apology for Islamic fundamentalism (Abaza and Stauth 1990). In a similar vein Emmanuel Sivan argues that Said's defence of Islam is seen by liberal intellectuals in the Arab world as being complicit with conservative forces that are pushing a fundamentalist agenda. He argues that Arab reviewers of Orientalism challenge Said 'for the manner in which he sweeps uncomfortable facts under the rug', failing either to place the historical facts in perspective or to mention them altogether (Sivan 1985:137).

## THE GENDER CRITIQUE

Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg argue that Said's work needs to be more nuanced and that it needs to qualify and articulate differences within the Orient. Said's general theory, they claim, is based on West Asia. Hence, they object to Said's totalising and essentialising position (Mani and Frankenberg 1985:174–92). This represents the most frequent, and perhaps most damaging, criticism of *Orientalism* and is one to which Said has responded in the 1995 'Afterword'. The substantial point made by such criticisms is that the Occident and the Orient are constructed as monolithic entities. Said's description of power relations in such a formulation, it is suggested, fails to reflect the discursive nature of power as well as the differences, contradictions and counter-hegemonic positions evident within the discourse of Orientalism. Zakia Pathak, Saswati Sengupta and Sharmila Purkayastha point out problems with the manner in which Said deals with the question of gender in Orientalism. Their main concern, however, is to demonstrate that Said's work is directed primarily at a Western audience. His anger and fury is to be seen from the vantage point of an expatriate. They argue that 'it is doubtful if this obsession can ever be broken out from a place in the first world' (1991:216).

Reina Lewis, in her recent study called *Gendering Orientalism* (1995), seeks to destabilise the 'fiction' of a homogenous Occident. This is a position that is taken up also by Joan Miller, who points out that Said fails to view women as active participants within imperial power relations (Miller 1990). Lewis sets out to show the specificity of the female subject whose gaze 'has undercut the potentially unified, and paradigmatically male, colonial subject outlined in Said's *Orientalism*' (1995: 3). Lewis argues that women's differential gendered positions meant that this produced a gaze that was less absolute than Said's characterisation. She points out that Said only refers to a single woman writer, Gertrude Bell, and even then pays no attention to her gender position within her texts. Lewis asserts that Said 'never questions women's apparent absence as producers of Orientalist discourse or as agents within colonial power. This mirrors the traditional view that women were not involved in colonial expansion' (1995:18). By omitting women, they argue, Said falls into the very trap of stereotyping which he sees as the central problem of Orientalism.

## EXTENDING *ORIENTALISM*

A great number of responses to *Orientalism,* by Third World critics and like-minded theorists, have focused on the ways in which it might be extended into an understanding of the range and power of imperial representation. Homi Bhabha's discussion of how Said's pioneering work could be extended in colonial discourse analysis focuses also on the question of Foucault. Bhabha acknowledges Foucault's importance, but, like other critics, accuses Said of being too 'instrumentalist' in his use of Foucault's concept of discourse (1994:72). However, Bhabha's purpose is not to expose Said's theoretical problems but to suggest a way of extending Said's analysis, which he sees as central to colonial discourse analysis. He does this by interrogating Said's project with the theoretical tools of discourse analysis, focusing on the manner in which Orientalism becomes a tool of colonial power and administration. This introduces the notion of ambivalence within the very discourse of Orientalism. For Bhabha, Said is an important figure in colonial discourse analysis because his work 'focused the need to quicken the half-light of western history with the disturbing memory of its colonial texts that bear witness to the trauma that accompanies the triumphal art of Empire' (Bhabha 1986:149).

A special 1994 issue of *L'Esprit Créateur* devoted to 'Orientalism after *Orientalism*' seeks to go beyond what it sees as the theoretical limitations of Said's work, while recognising its formative position within colonial discourse analysis. Similar to Clifford, Ali Behdad argues that Said's attempt to characterise Orientalism as a coherent unitary system of knowledge locates his critique in the very epistemology it seeks to subvert. Said's portrayal of Orientalism leaves little opportunity for difference within the modes of representation that operate to create repressive relations between the Occident and the Orient. Behdad argues that Said construes power relations 'negatively in terms of a repressive hypothesis and constructs a totalizing interpretative framework to account for a phenomenon that in reality is discontinuous and plural in its formation' (Behdad 1994:3). In order both to counter Said's essentialisation and to recognise Orientalism's ambivalences, a system of local criticism as an elaboration of Said's work is offered.

Mahmut Mutman also seeks to extend Said's analysis, recognising that the very debate on Orientalism is one that has been made possible by Said's book. Mutman engages in a critical dialogue with Said. He does not see himself as posing a better alternative to Orientalism; rather, his project is to illustrate the Orientalist constructions of Islam and to contextualise them within a global perspective. For Mutman, it is the local context that is subsumed in Said's account that needs to be recovered in order to understand the complexities and the intricacies of Orientalism (Mutman 1993).

In an interesting review of *Orientalism,* Amal Rassam points out how Said's work could have been extended fruitfully by including an analysis of the Maghreb. Morocco, in particular, suffered at the hands of French Orientalism, which was deployed to 'study, interpret and control' the Moroccans (Rassam 1980:506). However, Rassam argues that Said does not deal with two important questions. These are: first, how does one really get to know another culture in its own terms? and, second, what are the alternatives to Orientalism? These concerns are echoed by Ross Chambers, who also wonders if it is possible to have a kind of humanistic knowledge that does not play a dominating role over the people it seeks to study. Is it possible that the silent can achieve a voice and represent themselves (Chambers 1980:512)?

## SUMMARY

The analysis of *Orientalism,* which Said published in 1978, has become a classic in the study of the West's relationship with its others. The depiction of Orientalism, in all its many manifestations, as a 'discourse' has raised a storm of theoretical and methodological argument, but it has given an unparalleled focus and political clarity to the complex range of activities by which Europe gained knowledge of its oriental other. *Orientalism* is a perfect demonstration of the power of 'amateurism' in intellectual work. For while it leaves itself open to various criticisms, its originality, its scope and its tenacious conviction have altered the way we think about global cultural relations. The essence of Said's argument is that to know something is to have power over it, and conversely, to have power is to be able to know the world in your own terms. When this 'something' is a whole region of the world, in which dozens of ethnicities, nationalities and languages are gathered under the spurious category 'the Orient', then the link between that knowledge and the power it confirms becomes profoundly important. The discourse of Orientalism becomes the frame within which the West knows the Orient, and this discourse determines both popular and academic representations of the Middle East even today.