

Viewpoints

Orientalism's Wake: The Ongoing Politics of a Polemic

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Edward W. Said, who passed away at the age of 67 on September 25, 2003, was a towering “public intellectual” — a man of extraordinary erudition, a path-breaking scholar, and a passionate activist.

Said was a man of many interests, talents, and accomplishments — pianist, opera critic, newspaper columnist, popular essayist, television celebrity, and public lecturer. From 1963 until his death, he was Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University.

Said, the distinguished man of letters, also was deeply immersed in the politics of Palestine. Born in Jerusalem in 1935, he moved with his family to Cairo following the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli War, and later to the United States. He subsequently emerged as one of the best known advocates of the Palestinian cause in the United States. From 1977 until 1991, he served as an independent member of the Palestinian National Council. He later became one of the most trenchant critics of the Oslo peace process and of US policy in the Middle East.

This special edition of MEI *Viewpoints* recalls and reconsiders Edward Said’s seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978) — the critique it proffered, the controversy it aroused, and the influence it has had.

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Orientalism's Wake: The Ongoing Politics of a Polemic

Daniel Martin Varisco

More than any other individual scholar in recent history, Edward Said laid bare the discursive ideological undertones that have infested the public and academic representation of an idealized Orient. No one reading his *Orientalism* can fail to appreciate that much of the previous writing and lecturing about Muslims, Arabs, and stylized 'Orientals' reveals more about those doing the writing than about real people inhabiting a geographical space east of Europe. Appearing on the eve of the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but after the 1973 Ramadan War and Arab oil embargo, Said's thesis resonated across disciplines and in public culture. His seminal polemic brought a new awareness of the political agenda pursued, consciously or not, by contemporary social scientists coming to terms with an explosive part of the world.



Daniel Martin Varisco

Orientalism is still widely read after three decades, as befits a book now available in three dozen languages. Thirty years in print connotes a lifetime for any modern academic text. Consider the measure of three decades; the irony may be quotidian, but Said's text is separated from us today by the same length of time between the formation of Israel and its publication. Although *Orientalism* is not directly about Palestine, it is the opening sally in Said's successive critical engagements with *Covering Islam, Culture, and Imperialism* and *The Question of Palestine*. Although Said's pen was silenced on September 25, 2003, when he succumbed to leukemia, the debate over Said's *Orientalism* thesis is far from over. In part this is due to the ethnocentric prejudice and political bias that continue to fuel depictions of the real Orient in the media and popular culture, especially after the 9/11 tragedy and subsequent global War on Terror. But, as three decades of criticism shows, the historical errors, methodological flaws and palpable polemical rhetoric in the text burden its thesis for current and future readers.

In the past three years, three major critiques of Said's *Orientalism* have appeared, each attempting in a different way to put the polemic in its proper place. In *For Lust for Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (2006) Robert Irwin provides a swashbuckling account of clerics, scoundrels, and scholars as passionate curiosity seekers rather than unwitting dupes of a coercive Aeschylus-to-Lewis discourse or indiscreet French and British colonial policy. The pseudonymic Ibn Warraq launched an *ad hominem* attack on Said and liberals in general in his aptly titled but badly edited *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (2007). What need be said of an incautious critic who unilaterally resurrects the Greek Herodotus as a historian "totally devoid of racial prejudice" (p. 33) and then stamps Said's book as merely a "trawl through Western literature for filth to besmirch Western civilization" (p. 27). This modern son of a bookseller imprints a polemical farce not worth the 500-plus pages of paper it wastes.

I argue in my *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (2007) that the literarily induced blame game binary introduced by Said is as problematic for ongoing scholarship as the East/West dichotomy that Said so rightly attacked. Unlike Ibn Warraq and more than Robert Irwin, I do not doubt Said's sincerity or his intellectual acumen. Pointing out the flaws in *Orientalism*, and there are many specific ones, should neither be a defense of the way the West bested the East nor a referendum on Said's passionate advocacy for Palestinian rights. My concern is not simply what Said said but what is to be done with a polemical text that has served its purpose and is now superseded in most scholarly assessments of Islam and cultures of the Middle East.

In hindsight Said's contribution was not unique. Establishment thinking had already become the target of critics within several disciplines. Examples include historians Hayden White's flirtation with the ideas of Giambattista Vico and Michel Foucault in *Tropics of Discourse* (1978) and Lawrence Stone's call for a new kind of narrative history in *Past and Present* (1979). Sociologists Bryan Turner's *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (1978) and Syed Hussein Alatas's *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (1977) laid out similar claims about the colonial residue in ongoing academic study. Yet it was Said's text, by far the most widely distributed and read, that fostered the emergence of what came to be called the post-colonial critique. By the mid-1980s the formerly colonized subaltern could indeed speak in academic halls, even if such major fetishized icons as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak seemed to have little interest in writing readable prose.

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Unfortunately, the debate over *Orientalism* has centered largely on the persona of Said himself, usually in opposition to Princeton's Bernard Lewis, the media *doyen* of establishment academia. The acrimony between these two men came to a head at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) in 1986, when some 3,000 conference participants witnessed what some unknown wit labeled the "shoot-out at the MESA corral." Armed with file cards of quotes from Lewis' extensive writings, Said dismissed everything Lewis had to say about Arabs and Muslims as utterly worthless and Zionist. The pedantic pugilism of Said vs. Lewis readily became a comic and at times tragic sideshow to the issues underlying the polemic. The problem of an essentialized East/West binary was reduced to whether one sides with the brash literary critic or the learned don. If this was the intent of the broader "culture wars" scenario, there has yet to be a clear winner, nor a resulting peace dividend.

Orientalism, like most polemics, is rife with faults. Critics from many fields have accused Said of redefining the term "Orientalism" to include virtually anyone who wrote about the "Orient," thus reducing the sympathetic historian Louis Massignon to the same discursively driven level as the libertine novelist Gustave Flaubert. While scholars have never been immune to ethnocentric and racial bias, it is counterproductive to blur genres and assume that trained historians and social scientists, even those who write for the seminal *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ultimately must share the same latent agenda. Polemical fervor resulted in an almost total lack of nuance, a most un-Foucauldian faux-pas. Besides the indiscriminate mixing of textual genres, Said only presented examples that illustrate his argument, ignoring the many Western scholars who critiqued the biases of fellow Orientalists. As noted by many of his ardent supporters, Said also failed to examine or give credence to the subaltern voices that resisted the alleged hegemony of Orientalist discourse.

Misquotes, dropped ellipses in quotations, and historical errors plague the unrevised text of *Orientalism*. One of the most egregious examples of Said's polemical blindness to the sources he read is his mistranslation of a verse from the German poet Goethe, who is denigrated as a meddling fabricator of Orientalist bias. The line is taken from Goethe's *Westöstlicher Diwan*, where the possessive "*Gottes ist der Orient*" is garbled by Said as "God is the Orient." Had he consulted the well-known translation by Robert Browning, that "God is of the east possess'd," Said would have recognized that the poet was not turning Islam into a romanticized pantheism. Ironically, Goethe here is quoting verbatim from the Orientalist von Hammer-Purgstall's German translation of the *Qur'an* (The Cow, 2:142). While several translations of *Orientalism*, such as the Italian and French, correct this error with existing translations of Goethe, most do not.

Even Gustav Flaubert, the *bête noir* of the sensual Orientalist gaze, is misrepresented. While it is questionable why a voyeuristic traveler who disdained academic study should be placed in the same literary bed with a trained historian or linguist, Said misquotes a passage from one of Flaubert's private letters. If Flaubert had really said that "Inscriptions and bird droppings are the only two things in Egypt that give any indication of life," as Said writes, he would deserve to be castigated. The quote refers to musings by Flaubert at the imposing Colossi of Memnon. As the original French reveals, Flaubert was lamenting that the only things alive "*sur les ruines*" of Egypt were graffiti and bird dung; contrapuntally, this seems more like disdain for the desecration of monuments by his fellow tourists than a repudiation of real Egyptians.

In addition to misreading, several seminal texts in the Western imagination of the Orient are left unread. Said totally ignores the genre of Oriental tales most celebrated in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), a *dilletante*[alizing] dialogue of two Persian travelers to Paris. The target of Montesquieu's sharp wit is not an Oriental other, but the political and religious foibles of his own society. In one of the letters the soft-spoken Rica mentions a French *decisionnaire* who thinks himself an expert on everything. "I spoke to him of Persia," noted Rica, "but hardly had I opened my mouth, when he contradicted me twice, basing his observations upon the authority of [the French travelers] Taverner and Chardin. 'Ah! good heavens!' said I to myself, 'what kind of man is this? He will know next all the streets in Ispahan better than I do!'" Montesquieu's satirical swipe at the budding Orientalists of his day would make a perfect epigraph for Said's text.

Ironically, Said's stated hope that his text would lead to a new way of moving beyond the discourse of power as knowledge has come true in most current scholarship. This is not due to his methodological contribution, especially given the

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extensive criticism over his adaptation of Michel Foucault's 'discourse' and Antonio Gramsci's "egemonia," but a result of the wider interdisciplinary assault on positivist hubris and scientism. Uncritical reading of Said's text obscures the positive results in contemporary academic study of an area too easily imaginable as an "Orient." After three decades, it is time to move beyond PhD thesis cataloguing of what the West did to the East and self-unfulfilling political punditry about what real individuals in the East say they want to do to the West. Edward Said brought us a long way in this process, but the politics of polemics can only go so far, as he himself acknowledged in his later years.

The term "Orientalism" as the label for a distinct field of study was abandoned 36 years ago on the 100th anniversary of the First International Congress of Orientalists, as a majority of scholars in what had been called "Oriental Studies" began to apply theoretical and methodological insights from their evolving disciplines. Said's *Orientalism* helped emerging scholars come to terms with the baggage of past Orientalism, but as a polemic his text needs to be re-read in the context of the profound changes it helped foster. Serious academic study will always be subject to the limitations and inevitable prejudices of individual scholars. But the contributions of scholars should no longer be summarily dismissed as hostage to a latent hegemonic discourse that Said mislabeled "Orientalism." The choice need not be reduced to an orthodox academic *nihil obstat* vs. an amateurish Nietzschean ortho-toxy.

Truth will continue to be essentialized, especially in the media and popular culture, but speaking truths (always in the plural, I should hope) to power is best served by a critical focus on the fit of observations with an assumed and irreducible reality worth studying. I am not so naïve as to assume that the damage of an opportunistic East/West clash can simply be wished away through careful research, but neither do I doubt the ability of trained scholars to whittle away at bias and misinformation through critical reasoning and refined methodologies. If we cannot completely lay to rest the ghosts of Orientalism past, at least we can stop being frightened by such a troublesome specter. The legacy of Edward Said's significant intellectual corpus deserves no less.

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Symmetrism

Gil Anidjar

"I think one can say this almost without qualification," writes Edward Said in *Orientalism*, as he reiterates some basic facts and moves toward a provisional conclusion (p. 204). Said had just explained that Orientalism is "a positive doctrine." It is "an influential academic tradition," as well as "an area of concern" (p. 203). As he implies here, and shows throughout his work, Orientalism is a great number of other things, too. It is the deployment of concepts regarded as always already universal such as race, religion, and fanaticism. It involves travelers and "commercial enterprises," governments, popular literature, and more. Orientalism is also the media outlets that disseminate its doctrine and commonplaces, the walls of the institutions that house and support the academic tradition, as well as the bureaucratic practices that regulate the movements of different passport holders by way of travel warnings and security advisories or by means of checkpoints and security fences. Note that, always stylistically acute, Said writes in the present tense.



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So what is it about all this that can be said "almost without qualification"? It is first of all the unequivocal fact that "for any European during the nineteenth century," Orientalism was "a system of truths, truths in Nietzsche's sense of the word" (p. 204; Said just quoted Nietzsche's famous description of truth as "an army of metaphors"). So far, so good. Indeed, it is hard to see how there could be any qualification to such a statement. It is therefore, and more likely, with regards to

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what he will go on to say next that Said nonetheless introduces the very idea of qualification, announcing it with due preciseness by way of the word “almost” (“almost without qualification”), and this in order to soften the accompanying “sting,” as he will call it. And so, without any qualification (for now), Said delivers the provisional, and robustly pointed, punch line: “It is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.”

This is certainly unpleasant enough. It may sting — or even stink — to acknowledge such racism, imperialism, and ethnocentrism; perhaps particularly so if one feels interpellated as a 19th century European or an inheritor thereof (and there may be more of these around than one might suspect). But seriously, who would wish, still, to qualify this particular, historically inflected statement? Who would want to say that the regimes of truth and power constituting and enabling, in the 19th century, the final stages in the conquest of the Eastern hemisphere and the “scramble for Africa” were not supported by the capillary spread of racism, imperialism, and ethnocentrism? Who could fail, finally, to understand that, far from an individual, personalized indictment, Said is here delivering a rigorous, and rigorously Foucauldian, diagnostic, accounting for the massive force of Orientalism across vast discursive and institutional fields? Statements, or what Michel Foucault referred to as *énoncés*, relate to each other by way of repetition, transformation, and reactivation. They are soldiers or, if you will, squads in a Nietzschean army of metaphors. They are dependent on the logistics of rear maneuvers, on what used to be called “the home front,” as they advance on the field of operations. Statements — what any European could say about the Orient — are contingent on an unequal *distribution* of knowledge or quasi-knowledge (“distribution” being one of Said’s powerful but rather neglected concepts). They find the source of their authority — the ground of their possibility — in positive doctrines, influential academic traditions, and accepted areas of concern. One speaks about the Orient, in other words, in a manner and tone rarely assumed when speaking about, say, Australia, the role of federal legislation in the exponential growth of “financial products,” or the function of the arms trade in the global pursuit of peace and happiness. One pronounces with confidence on the Orient (on Islam, on Pakistanis). One does so with an ease and an assurance otherwise rarely shown, that is, without having watched at least a few *National Geographic* specials, or having spent a couple of weeks in your average, touristy “green zone” abroad.

What possible qualification, then, could Said have alluded to? And offered by whom? Europe in the 19th century was racist, imperialist, and ethnocentric. So be it. At that time, the critique of Orientalism (one might think of Abraham Geiger; Franz Fanon was still far on the horizon) was not about to undo the tide of its conquests, epistemological and otherwise. And the critique of race science (such as Ernest Renan himself was offering) was meant to foster more and better science, not quite the emancipation of the darker races. So far, so good, right? But true to his word, Said nevertheless goes on to deliver the qualification he had announced. Said acknowledges the sting I have alluded to and immediately takes it — *almost* takes it — all back. He *qualifies* it. “Some of the immediate sting will be taken out of these labels if we recall additionally that human societies, at least the more advanced cultures, have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with ‘other’ cultures” (p. 204). Welcome to the other side. No need for a place to hide.

What concerns me here, what I am trying to do, is to read Said; to do no more than continue and take him at his word, strictly at his word. That is how I find myself provoked to ask — this, for example: Is it really the case that one could find, *elsewhere than in Euro-America*, another positive doctrine, another influential academic tradition, and another area of concern, supported and shadowed by a massive institutional, political and economic, legal and technological set of apparatuses, such that one could assert about each individual member of that society — again, *elsewhere than in Euro-America* — that whatever they say about the object of that doctrine, would be racist, imperialist, and ethnocentric? Is it really the case that “human societies, at least the most advanced cultures,” have offered their individual members the full institutional range and depth of scientific achievements from race doctrine to eugenics, from the industrial revolution to the liberal policies of the World Bank, from chemical to nuclear warfare, to the reshaping of sexual and other habits, all of which providing the ground upon which one could then adjudicate on the lifestyle — or death style — of these *other savages and fanatics* the world over? The combined structure of power and knowledge, of law and literature, of

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philology, industry and technology, of advanced capitalism and global imperialism that Said calls “Orientalism” would have been a *restricted* instance of a *universal* phenomenon. It would have had not *one* twin brother (say, “Occidentalism,” as some like to call it), but *many* such twins. There would have been a vast number of human societies that provided individuals with armies of metaphors as well as with the weapons of mass construction responsible for carrying and transforming them and others, for moving them onward, toward the civilizing of others. There would be, finally, a universal brotherhood of imperialist, racist, and ethnocentric man.

Now, if only there was a book, where I could read about this equal opportunity devastation; where I could read about the “metaphysics of white-hating” that Native Americans were inventing; about the way *they* were planning to put white people in reservations (I don’t know, in the South of France, for example) after having carefully determined their natural right to swift extermination. I imagine this book as engaging with *Ecclesia Africana Militans* as it programmed and justified the deportation and enslavement of the Portuguese nation; as being about the massive propaganda machinery activated by the Chinese against the “white peril” and the ensuing development of ever more destructive gunpowder machines toward the enslavement of pale people in the extraction of natural fertilizers in the Chinese colonies. If only I could read, in that very same book, the details of the Persian experiments in cranial measurement and selective breeding as a preview to taking over the non-Aryan globe in the name of *espace vital* (or, to be scrupulously philological, *Lebensraum*), toward the domination of world economy and the *Société des nations*. If only there was such a book, a book about reverse racism, reverse colonialism, and reverse imperialism! Still, with moderate exertion, and a massive amount of good will — call it my *humanitarianism* — I can imagine that book. I can see its title. Yes, I can see it now. Just one word: *Symmetrism*.

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Popular Culture, Orientalism, and Edward Said

Robert Irwin

There are at least two unexamined axioms in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*: first, the primacy of the political in Orientalist discourse, and secondly the importance in that discourse of the intellectual and the literary (using “literary” in a high cultural sense). The first will not be discussed here, though it seems doubtful. The second deserves thinking about, and it is that which is discussed here.

Said worked confidently with the conventional canon of great literary works, as they featured on the reading lists of literature departments of American universities. In 1978 Harold Bloom had yet to publish on the subject, yet of course the canon already existed. Said’s predilection for the classics of Western literature was paralleled by his enthusiasm for Bach, Mozart and other great composers of western classical music. Apart from hostile essays on the singer Umm Kulthum and the belly dancer Tahia Carioca (both Egyptians), his neglect of popular culture was fairly comprehensive.

His reading of Eric Auerbach and Antonio Gramsci fostered an elitist approach to cultural issues. Auerbach’s *Mimesis* (1946) had studied the way reality was represented in the great classics of Western literature. Gramsci had posited the dominance of elite culture. His concept of cultural hegemony meant that an elite could dominate the masses through “common sense” and everyday rituals and practices. He had stressed the role of intellectuals in shaping the consensus



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through education, the media, and the arts. Intellectuals were “experts in legitimation.” In *Orientalism*, Said presented the intellectuals and artists of the West as possessing a cultural hegemony which determined what could and could not be said about the Orient.

Said suffered from a *déformation professionnelle* — from an academic’s tendency to overestimate the importance of universities and elite literary coteries. Similarly, he overvalued difficulty, ambiguity, and subtexts. Things were not always and necessarily so ambiguous. “Whatever happens we have got/The Maxim gun and they have not,” as Hilaire Belloc put it. Or, to take a blunt American appraisal of lesser breeds:

I come from a land, from a faraway land 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. (Disney, *Aladdin*)

The book *Orientalism* took no account of pulp fiction, doggerel, cinema, theater, music hall, popular sing-songs, pantomime, postcards, science fiction, and cartoons. Said has been followed in his focus on the elite and high culture by his followers and allies, who write about Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Delacroix, E.M Forster and so on. But it is unsafe to assume that wider attitudes to the Orient were shaped by the intellectual elite in some kind of trickle-down effect.

Popular culture is a tricky thing to define and discuss. Popular culture is not merely an assemblage of plebeian pleasures, such as whippet breeding, line dancing, bingo, bodice rippers, and *Carry On* films. If one considers the reading of those who built and governed the British Empire, it is clear that a reading of Homer, Thucydides, Caesar, Cicero, and Gibbon had a leading role in shaping the minds and taste of some of the public-school educated, patrician elite. Men such as Curzon, Cromer and T.E. Lawrence knew their classics, but, on the whole, they did not read Silvestre de Sacy, Goldziher or Gibb. And neither did the lesser ranks — the rubber plantation managers, railway engineers, arms merchants, and Indian district officers. Not all that many of the latter read Homer, Cicero, Flaubert, or George Eliot either. So what did the majority of the empire builders read? Plausibly, Jim Corbett’s *Bring Em Back Alive*, John Buchan’s *Greenmantle*, Somerset Maugham’s short stories, Rider Haggard’s *She*, P.C. Wren’s *Beau Geste*, Jack London’s *White Fang*, Henty’s juvenilia and, of course, non-fiction about hunting, pig-sticking, and card playing. It was boring out in the desert and the tropics, and much of what the colonialists read was designed for entertainment, rather than education or aesthetic improvement. Martin Green has characterized adventure tales as the energising myths of European capitalism: “They were, collectively, the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night; and, in the form of its dreams, they charged England’s will with the energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer, and rule.”¹

Empire was indeed part of the background to popular fiction. G.M. Young has written of

the ever-growing literature of travel and adventure, always pushing further into the unknown and always leaving something for the next pioneer. Still armies might march into the mountains and be lost for weeks, as Roberts marched on Kandahar: into the desert and be lost forever, as Hicks was lost at El Obeid. Still false prophets might arise in the wastes beyond Wady Halfa, still Lhasa was unvisited, and a man might make himself as famous by riding to Khiva in fact, as by discovering King Solomon’s Mines in fiction. The ways of adventure stood wide open . . .²

Only two aspects of the Middle East as it features in popular culture will be touched on here. The first of these is the fiction of a pan-Islamic conspiracy. While the fantasy of the Jewish conspiracy in Western Europe can be traced back to at least the 13th century, the fantasy of the pan-Islamic conspiracy goes back perhaps no further than the First World War.

1. Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London, 1976), p.3.

2. G.M Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* (Oxford, 1936), p.179.

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Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916) was set in and around Erzerum in Turkey, and based on the actual Russian capture of that city from the Turks in that year. There was a very small kernel of truth in Buchan's account of a Pan-Islamic conspiracy, as the Germans and Turks did indeed seek to instigate a pan-Islamic uprising against the British in India and Egypt, though with strikingly little success. In this good bad book, rumours of the organization of a jihad against the Allies, sends Richard Hannay, Blenkinsop and Sandy Arbuthnot out to adventures in Constantinople and Erzerum. Sandy, old Etonian, aristocrat and clubman, is quite a character. A master of disguise and a fabulous linguist, "crazed by the spell of Arabia," Sandy is obviously better at being an oriental than the orientals are themselves. Which is just as well, since he and his chums are up against something formidable:

Islam is a fighting creed, and the mullah still stands in the pulpit with the Koran in one hand and drawn sword in the other. Supposing there is some Ark of the Covenant which will madden the remotest Moslem peasant with dreams of Paradise? What then my friend?

That same year, another novel was published which made use of the jihad theme. This was *King of the Khyber Rifles* by Talbot Mundy. This, his best-known novel, was set in 1857, the year of Indian Mutiny. Captain Athelstan King's life is in peril in the Muslim tribal area of northern India where, with the help of the oriental adventuress Yasmini, he succeeds in thwarting the jihadist plotting of the mad Turkish mullah Muhammad Amin and so saves British India. Mundy returned to the theme of the great Oriental conspiracy in *Jimgrim* (1930-1). As the eponymous Jimgrim, a US secret agent, observes,

There isn't a major government that hasn't files and files about the Oriental rumour of a King of the World who is likely to come at any minute. It's a cult. It embraces all religions. We have all of us known for years that even the Mahomedans were listening to it. And we have all known there was something more than communism at the bottom of the unrest that has run like a rot through Asia.

The Mahdist theme resurfaced in Sax Rohmer's *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932). In *The Eunuch of Stamboul* (1935), Denis Wheatley (1897-1977) presented a slightly less ambitious conspiracy in which a pro-Islamic organisation, KAKA, planned a coup against the Turkish Republic. The pan-Islamic conspiracy fantasy is still with us today and it has been part of the background to former President George W. Bush's speeches on "the war against terror." According to the blurb of the paperback of Daniel Easterman's novel, *The Sword*, (2007):

A dangerous new movement within the ranks of fundamentalist Islam wish [sic] to put a new caliph on the throne to rule the Muslim world. To do this they require the sword, and they will stop at nothing to get it. With the deadliest of weapons in his hands, if the new Caliph were to declare *jihad*, the consequences would be catastrophic.

Again, according to blurb: "A tense and gripping thriller on a truly international scale that poses a chilling question: how can you stop a holy war before it starts." Easterman's *The Sword* poses as something more than a novel; it pretends to be a dreadful warning and its insiderish background detail and knowing bits of research appear to back up that warning.

Turning now to something completely different, the Middle East as the butt of comedy deserves serious attention. Said was completely incapable of engaging with comedy. One would never guess from his accounts of Kinglake, Morier, and Twain that there is wit and irony, as well as jokes in their books. "Funny" did not feature in the Saidian vocabulary. He negligently described James Morier's *Orientalism* as "merely ornamental." This has to be nonsense, as Morier's picaresque novel *Hajji Baba of Isfahan* presented a sustainedly racist, hostile, and patronizing portrait of both the Persians and Islam, albeit a funny one. And there must be something wrong in an account of Kinglake's *Eothen* that fails to note its moments of stylish comedy. The relentlessly tragic tone in which Said pitched his *Orientalism* prevented him from

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noticing the degree to which Arabs and Muslims are belittled, travestied and patronized in the West by jokes — jokes about burkas, haggling, harems, Arab-style flowery rhetoric, the Muslim afterlife, oil-rich vulgarity, and camels.

It is likely that songs such as “The Old Bazaar in Cairo,” as belted out by Charley Chester, and films such as *The Road to Morocco*, *Carry On*, *Follow That Camel*, and Disney’s *Aladdin* have played a larger part in shaping a disparaging view of the Middle East than the writings of Silvestre de Sacy and Flaubert. So why look for implausible sexual subtexts in the essays of Vatikiotis and Bernard Lewis, when such material is readily at hand? And why did Said waste his time trying (and failing) to present Kuchuk Hanem as the prototype of Flaubert’s Salammbô and then going on to argue that this said something significant about imperialism?

Said’s over-interpretation of selected works from the canon of high literature has gone nowhere in particular. *Orientalism* has misdirected our attention. Who doubts that there is such a thing as Orientalism in the pejorative sense — a presentation of the Orient, or more specifically Arab Muslims, as corrupt, lazy, decadent, and so forth? One would have to be insane to deny such thing. There was and is plenty of racism with respect to Arabs and Muslims in Western culture, but the best places to go looking for it are in government departments, army barracks, police stations, Hollywood film studios, and the editorial rooms of trash newspapers. Orientalism in a pejorative sense comes bubbling up from below — pulp novels, musical hall songs, cartoons, the violent rhetoric of street gangs, fights on the football pitch, and films about fanatical yet corrupt terrorists. It is a very foolish piece of academic snobbery to go hunting for faint hints of Orientalism in the pages of George Eliot or Joseph Conrad, while neglecting the novels of Sax Rohmer and Dennis Wheatley. By misdirecting hostile attention to intellectuals, artists and, above all, academics, Said was indicting those who were mostly the good guys, and he turned what should be a serious socio-cultural issue into a campus dog fight.

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The Ways of the Nassara Anouar Majid

I had heard of Edward Said long before I discovered the world of theory and read *Orientalism* in the early 1990s, more than a decade after the book was published to great acclaim. I remember being vaguely intrigued by the public presence of a man with an English-Arab name. In a sort of fateful irony, Said’s parents seemed to have baptized their son to live across cultures, to be out of place, as Said wrote toward the end of his life. But it was the name’s hint of Arabness that first caught my attention. It allowed me, somehow, to count him as one of our own, to be proud of his accomplishments among the *nassara*, as generations of people in my native Morocco referred to Europeans and Westerners in general. When I did read the book, penning miniature notes on index cards, I was elated by the argument and Said’s voluminous knowledge of Western culture that supported it. The experience of reading the book was quite enthralling.



Anouar Majid

Yet when I sat down to write my first academic article titled “Can the Postcolonial Critic Speak?” I found myself a bit uneasy with Said’s excessive knowledge of the West. If the Orient was silent in the pages of Westerners, Islam seemed to have been so condemned in Said’s magisterial work. Few Muslims were allowed to speak for them-

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selves. It almost seemed that the debate was not about extending equal time for Orientals and Muslims, but about how best to talk about or represent Muslims. The whole controversy sounded more like a domestic disagreement among Western intellectuals (among whom I include postcolonial critics like myself, those trained or constituted by Western education systems) than about the quest for practical solutions to the perennial clash of civilizations. Orientalism, and debating it, as we do here, was, and still is, a Western enterprise, a preoccupation of Western or Western-trained *bon pensants*. I doubt whether our concerns register, at least not with the same intensity, in Muslim lands.

Thinking about the book almost two decades after I read it, I can't help wondering about my initial reaction. Most people who share my worldview have taken Said's thesis to the four corners of the globe, holding fiercely to its empowering message, driven by the hope of tempering the West's cultural arrogance and perhaps leading Westerners to reconsider their biases. It is, understandably, a worthwhile mission, one fought on behalf of the wretched of the earth — the billions of people in the world whose lives are reduced to expendable labor for the lifestyle of the prosperous, collateral damage in the age of imperialism, the subalterns of marginal lands.

But Said's paradigm was primarily cultural; it skirted cavalierly over the role of economics in shaping the prejudices Said dutifully condemned. Culture matters, of course, but economic behavior is culture in the first degree. Imperial nations such as Britain needed economic expansion to become the powers they aspired to be; self-sufficiency and fair trade alone could never have produced a Pax Britannica. France and, later, the United States had more resources and could take care of their needs; however, they, too, needed to be ruthlessly acquisitive in their rise to power and dominance. In the process of doing so, they blended the language of religious purity, cultural superiority, and the might of gunpowder to achieve their aims. Had Westerners not harmed Oriental lands, their prejudices would have amounted to mere fantasies; but the West denied itself the right to indulge in such fables by forcing itself on Orientals and treating them badly, even savagely at times. This is what gave Said's argument its timeless power and has frustrated people who think that he read too much into innocent texts.

At first, then, I thought that Said had failed to pay enough attention to the economic forces that structure cultural encounters, and did not allow Muslims to speak for themselves. This is not to say, however, that he should have been expected to do culture and the economy at once, take us on a whirlwind tour of modern European literary traditions, and somehow give equal time to Muslim jurists and imams. A work, however groundbreaking, can only cover so much. But as great as it may be, the work also invites additions, modifications, and amendments, if not by the author himself, then by others. Said only could do so much. What gave him strength was also limiting.

For one thing, he was the very embodiment of the global capitalist structure that worked against Arabs, Muslims, and other Orientals. Like most postcolonial critics, he railed against a system that made him, and reminded us of the extent to which we are all trapped in our monologues. He was, of course, not a total Westerner, since there were enough reminders in his life of what had been taken away from him, or what he had lost along the way. This much we could share, but we saw the world through different prisms. Just like his memory of loss and privilege made him, mine was fashioned in a city where Europeans were mere *nassara*, unclean pork eaters, their uncircumcised men effeminate, their sexy women inconstant worshippers of Arab men's sexual prowess. I am not exaggerating — this is really what I believed growing up only nine miles or so from Spain. Except for their well-endowed educational institutions, industry, and money, there was little to desire in the West. We genuinely believed that Moroccans had better religion and were certainly far more cultured than the robotic barbarians to the north. We were comfortable in our bodies, able to extract the most exquisite of pleasures from a casual encounter in a café, a handshake, or our endlessly surprising cuisine. Americans were, to the mother of one of my best friends, a lady from Tetouan, the city that embodies old Andalusian traditions, *h'jij*, basically, a collection of hoodlums without roots.

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This explains why I found Said's characterizations of the West as masculine and of Arabs as effeminate bewildering. He cared too much about what Westerners said, or didn't say. In Tangier, though, this was not a concern at all. We liked ourselves the way we were and only coveted European wages and what they allowed. Otherwise, we cared less about what others thought of us and actually pitied the Western expatriates who lived among us without having a sense of what really moved us. The protestations of postcolonial critics in the West struck me, therefore, as desperate pleas for recognition, but I didn't identify with the emotion, much as I recognized the intellectual argument. When people ask me whether we ride camels in Morocco, I simply answer "yes." I actually enjoy certain Orientalist accounts of Morocco when I read them; they confirm to me the fabulousness of the country and lifestyle I have known. Some came in handy when I led travel groups around the country. Who wouldn't want to be entertained by tales of sultans, viziers, and all manner of palace intrigues? Modern architecture and the machinery of the modern electoral process simply don't have the same effect. They may satisfy the obsession with order and symmetry, or the strong penchant for legalistic correctness, but they are too arid and colorless to inspire fables.

My early response to *Orientalism* was probably the expression of a Tanjawi, a Tangier native who grew up perfectly comfortable in his average social life. Years, if not decades, later, I realized that my privileged upbringing in the Moroccan social milieu was a form of luxury compared to what Arab or Muslim minorities living in the West are forced to endure. We were secure in our limited material means; but to be Arab or Muslim in the West, however prosperous, is to be sharply aware of one's less-than-equal social standing. It is, if my impression is correct, to be confronted with daily reminders of one's undesirability or bad cultural origins. Western Muslims seem to experience their Islamic identity more intensely because of their status. *Orientalism* only could have been written by an Arab or Muslim in the West; it is the work of a minority, an Arab out of place, a Palestinian yearning for a homeland.

I would like to think that my Tangerian background has shielded me from Islamic extremism and the uncritical adoration of the West. In fact, in an ironic way, I now wonder whether I have become the real homeless man, the truly out of place immigrant, one who is more interested in deciphering statements on the global human condition than in standing up for an ethnic principle. I have arrived at a certain consciousness of timelessness, one that seems better suited for a more universal, perhaps even primitive, understanding of what it means to be alive today. Ethnicities and nations may be durable, but we are human *avant tout*. We squabble over ethnic pride, for sure, but intellectuals should make every attempt to remain above the fray, not join narrowly defined sides.

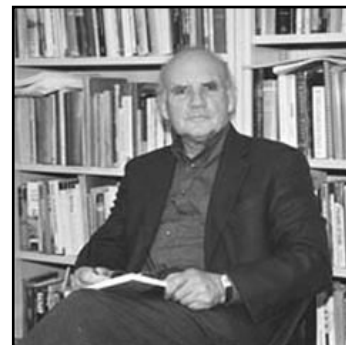
Edward Said was brilliant in the way he associated Western representations of the Orient with the suffering inflicted on Orientals, but I prefer to keep an open mind, even when accounts seem to be highly exaggerated. I knew as a kid, and know even more so now, that without its metaphorical Orient, the West would, indeed, be a desolate place. I only wish they could use it more wisely.

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Edward Said and the Two Critiques of Orientalism

Roger Owen

Due to an accident of history, I found myself traveling around the Middle East in 1955/6, and then studying at Oxford at the birth of modern Middle Eastern Studies in the West signaled, *inter alia*, by the creation of the Center of Middle Eastern studies at Saint Antony's College. There, I participated, in a very small way, in a process which required creating the subject more or less *de novo*, on the basis of a handful of scholarly books about the region. But I did it under the guidance of the brilliant Albert Hourani — an outsider himself, having never studied Near East languages and civilizations in the traditional Orientalist way, and who was thus better able to understand, and to critique, their basic structures of thought, most notably in his wonderful essay, "Islam and the Philosophers of History," while also following in the steps of his own mentor, Sir Hamilton Gibb.



Roger Owen

Given the vast changes in the world in the 1960s and the great desire to liberate ourselves from the world views of race and empire, it was only natural that young persons like me should have turned to the new fields of economic development, social history, sociology, and, particularly, social anthropology for our alternatives — using them, as best we could, to re-read, and then re-shape and re-use, major modern era texts like Gibb and Bowen's *Islam and the West*, Halil Inalcik's articles worrying at the notion of Ottoman decline, and Albert Hourani's own work on the so-called "Islamic city."

Given the temper of these times, it was also natural that those early social science critics of Orientalist scholarship should band together in workshops around joint projects designed to employ what we identified as the German-style 19th century "critique" — both to expose the lack of real explanatory value in traditional Orientalism and to begin to provide what we took to be a more useful way of studying the modern Middle East. This included, among many other issues, an attempt to come to terms with the way in which not just the traditional academic Orientalists but also several of the founders of Western social science, most notably Marx and Weber, held Orientalist-type views concerning a fundamental difference between East and West. Furthermore, also in anticipation of Edward Said, we had begun to discuss the ways in which our own social science disciplines, anthropology in particular, played a major role in what Talal Asad called the "Colonial Encounter."

Edward Said himself was well aware of what we were attempting — via our *Review of Middle East Studies* — having had his attention drawn to it by Fred Halliday, a very important figure in my story. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons, while Edward could commend us for working, as he put it, in "disciplines not fields," I do not think he had any real understanding of what practicing these disciplines actually involved. This was partly the result of his inclinations, character, and training. He was a humanist through and through, seeing the world via the optic of literature, music, and the arts, not by the use of supposedly value-free economics, political science, or sociology.

Just as important, as he explained to me, he had come to the end of his year at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Palo Alto tired out by writing Chapters 1 and 2 and in such a hurry to finish that he raced through Chapter 3, "Orientalism now," without either thinking through his argument as far as the relationship between Orientalism and the modern centers of modern Middle Eastern studies was concerned, or paying much attention to the alternatives which he left, clearly and specifically, to others. As he puts it in the book's rushed, last few pages:

... in conclusion, what of some alternative to Orientalism? Is this book an argument only against something, and not for something positive?

And then, having spent a sentence mentioning a number of what he called "new departures," including the work of my own group — called the Hull group after the venue of our first few workshops — he notes that he does not attempt to do

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... more than mention them or allude to them quickly. My project has been to describe a particular system of ideas, not by any means to displace the system of ideas, not by any means to displace the system with a new one.

HOW ORIENTALISM WAS RECEIVED

Reading and thinking about *Orientalism* when it was first published I, and some — but not many — of my colleagues, experienced a great sense of relief. After a decade or so of critique, our work had been overtaken and summed up by Edward in such a comprehensive way that, so it then appeared, we could all get on with what seemed the much more important task of finding better ways of studying the economies, societies, and political systems of the Middle East.

What we did not understand, and could probably not have understood at that time, was that this project was going to be much more difficult to conduct and harder to sustain than we had imagined. Probably none of us also understood how the presence of the book would complicate our new task, even though there were many indications of the problems and difficulties that lay ahead. One of these occurred during a 1979 trip in which I presented Edward's ideas to the members of the Israeli Oriental Society. The sense of the threat the book posed was palpable. Gabriel Baer's response was that the name of the Society would be changed "over his dead body." Shimon Shamir's response was that the book represented the ravings of a deranged Palestinian.

And so it has been ever since. *Orientalism* often continues to be regarded as dangerous, perhaps in particular by those who have never read it. Hence, the intense, ludicrous, alarming and, I would hope, unique way in which the field of modern Middle Eastern studies has become polarized between the followers of Edward Said and those of Bernard Lewis and, now between those belonging to the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and its newly-created rival, the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (ASMEA).

Given the fact that this "dangerous person" Edward Said appeared well-versed, if not in the social sciences then in post-structuralism and in what was soon to become post-colonial studies, meant that the motley band of persons identified as Saidians could all be tarred — regardless of what they actually said, regardless of what they actually taught — with the same brush as being purveyors of politically motivated, trendy, and ideologically dangerous gibberish. Such is the meretricious message which, without much elaboration, and without any obvious mental effort, remains as potent with some audiences as it did 30 years ago.

It also is worth noting that the personal tone of the book helped to make things even worse. The author himself, his reasons for writing the book, his genuine offense at the way Arabs and Muslim are objectified in such a reductionist way, is powerfully present in the text. He names names — Bernard Lewis' in particular. And certain passages are more easily read as political and polemical rather than as scholarly and academic, even if this was almost certainly not Edward's original intention.

All this has had unfortunate consequences. Critics use the personal and the political to muddy the waters, not only of Edward's critique itself but also of anyone who can reasonably, or unreasonably, be associated with it. Hence it provides a reason for not taking the work of a huge number of scholars of the Middle East with the academic respect it deserves, even when, as in the case of most social scientists at least, their work has little or nothing to do with Orientalism, either in praise or blame. By the same token, it allows those who still practice some version of an Orientalist approach to insulate themselves, and their students, from a powerful, alternative, point of view.

More seriously, the *ad hominem* attacks on Said and his band of alleged Pied Pipers also make it more difficult to sustain an attack on the role of Orientalists in authorizing certain aspects not only of American military and security policy but those of Israel as well. For all the books that castigate the malign influence of the State Department Arabists, none to my

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knowledge point to the policy impact of Israeli Orientalists as well as to the fact that, even in Israeli terms, their close association with the country's defense establishment has been counter-productive to what might be described as the country's national interests. Think of expert authorities like Gabriel Baer, who assured me, in the mid-1970s, that Egypt would never make peace with Israel. Think of those who created and managed the Palestinian "village leagues." Think of those who supported policies to encourage Hamas during the first *Intifada*. Think of those who argued that the Shi'a population could be lured into playing an anti-PLO, anti-Syrian role in South Lebanon.

Bad Orientalism encourages the notion that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Bad Orientalism, paradoxically, though based on the concept of a certain Middle Eastern timelessness, authorizes ambitious schemes of political and social engineering based on short-term considerations while lacking any way of anticipating unexpected long-term consequences.

BACK TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

When it comes to the immediate reception of Edward's work, it was not only many Orientalists, or near-Orientalists, who were upset but also many well versed in what they regarded as a progressive science of society. This certainly applied to persons such as Harry Magdoff, the New York editor of the *Monthly Review*, who asked me to review *Orientalism*, a book about which he had very mixed feelings. It was also true of colleagues such as Fred Halliday, who argued that *Orientalism* could easily be read as creating an irreconcilable division between East and West, thereby undermining one of the basic features of our universalistic approach.

No less telling was Fred's second argument that, for many peoples of the Middle East in the 1970s, works by the scholars Edward defined as Orientalists were sometimes the only source of data for understanding large parts of their own national history. Al-Azm was to make the same point only a few years later.

Several enormously important implications follow. The first is that we need the social sciences in Middle East studies not just for their own sake, but also to be able to continue to make use of works by persons we regard as Orientalists, though without falling prey to their assumptions and reductionism. This is the more significant as our own thinking contains either unexamined assumptions from the Orientalist period or, at the very least, questions which we cannot help students to answer properly because we do not know how to frame them or where to look for answers. A good example of this is what used to be called Islamic legal studies, studied only through certain canonic texts, and posited on the notion that the master story was one in which modern legal codes imported *tout court* from the West quickly supplanted so-called traditional *Shari'a* law, confining it simply to the area of personal status.

Second, we need to continue the good work of combining training in languages, history, and culture with training in the social sciences begun in most American and European centers of Middle Eastern studies. One without the other is no longer enough — and is no longer seen to be enough.

Third, the social sciences provide a necessary additive to works of analysis which operate simply at the level of discourse and the various ways this has been used to answer questions with little or no attention to what I would still want to call material reality.

Last, but not least, and in answer to those critics who accuse Said-influenced social scientists of managing to avoid most of the important political and ideological issues of the moment, we now have the tools to make important contributions to such vital contemporary Middle Eastern subjects as military occupations, religious politics, the explosive growth of the Gulf port cities, and Islamic banking, not to mention the enormous impact of globalization, where a knowledge of the history of the region has to be combined with an ability to pick out and to describe those underlying structures, dynamics, and trajectories which define them now and will continue to do so in the future.

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All this is good news, and would certainly be good news to Edward Said himself. Given that the field of modern Middle East Studies is only some 50 years old, that it had to extract itself from the hold of a first generation of scholars who still saw the Middle East in very reductionist, ahistorical terms, and that it takes time to build up a core of experts versed in language, history, local knowledge, and the social sciences, we finally have a set of praiseworthy scholars.

CONCLUSION

It is important to see Edward Said's work, and the mixed reception it received, in the round. This means reading *Orientalism* as carefully as its author would wish and then being able to understand its role as the first part of a project which required the construction of alternative methodologies as its complement. Inevitably, this alternative project proved to be much more difficult for reasons Edward himself could not anticipate and for which his own critique shares a small part of the blame.

Nevertheless, viewed from the perspective of modern Middle East studies, the present and the future look surprisingly good, with the ever expanding production of highly skilled graduate students around the world well-supplied with the tools not just to make use of whatever data the field contains but also to use their knowledge of the various social science disciplines to challenge the conventional wisdom and the old paradigms which continue to stand in the way of a proper understanding of how Middle Eastern societies, economies, and political systems really work.

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Orientalism and Religion

Lucy K. Pick

A decade or so ago, when I first wrote about Edward Said's *Orientalism* in the preface to a series of papers on Orientalism and Medieval Studies — collected by myself and edited by Larry J. Simon in the journal *Medieval Encounters*¹ — I was most preoccupied by the possibility of applying Said's three modes of Orientalism — academic, imaginative, and modern — to Medieval phenomena. Said himself argued that academic Orientalism had its formal beginning in the Middle Ages, in the establishment of chairs of Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca at the Council of Vienne in 1312.² However, I see this moment not as a beginning, but as a high water mark of Western Christian interest in Arabic and Hebrew texts, both scientific and theological, that had begun some two centuries earlier.



Lucy K. Pick

Imaginative Orientalism, Said's most slippery category, can be identified in a wide array of Medieval texts. Even Said's so-called "modern" Orientalism, defined by him as "a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient ... a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,"³ has medieval manifestations. I have argued elsewhere that the Cathedral of Toledo under Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada became such a corporation in the 13th century, and that his interest in the translation of Arabic and Islamic texts must be understood as part of a program of crusade, conquest, and colonization of Islamic Spain which includes the same kinds of categorizations of peoples and

1. Lucy K. Pick, "Edward Said, *Orientalism*, and the Middle Ages," *Medieval Encounters* Vol. 5 (1999), pp. 265-71.

2. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random, 1978), reprinted with a new afterword, 1994, pp. 49-50.

3. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3.

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accumulations of knowledge and territory that Said claims for modern Orientalism.⁴

I want to dwell in this essay on Said's modern Orientalism, not to amass more instances of how this category was manifest in the un-modern Middle Ages, though that would certainly be possible. Rather, I ask why it is so crucial for Said to label the phenomenon of a categorizing, imperializing Orientalism as "modern?" What strategies does he use for constructing this label? And what does this mean for the continuing utility of his model for understanding how the West constitutes itself and the rest of the world in its construction and representation of the "Orient?"

For Said, religion is the central factor that differentiates his modern Orientalism from whatever representations of the East were deployed during the Middle Ages. Modern Orientalism is indeed a "set of structures inherited from the past," but these structures have been secularized, rationalized, and given a scientific terminology. Said places the moment of this rupture between the Medieval and the modern in the post-Enlightenment period of Napoleon's campaign in Egypt (1798) and the scholarly careers of Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838) and Ernst Renan (1823-1892). The effect of this move is to orientalize the Middle Ages in much the same way Said claims the West orientalizes the East, projecting onto an imagined Medieval past all that the modern world claims to reject. Like the West, the modern is scientific, rational, and enlightened, while like the Orient, the Medieval is superstitious, irrational, and dark — requiring specialized knowledge and philological skills to understand. It is an awkward move for Said to make, because, as he recognizes, many of the features of Orientalism have deep roots, so modern Orientalism must keep reaching back into the past for content, while at the same time never fully escaping its religious origins, becoming instead a "naturalized supernaturalism."⁵

I am certainly not the first to notice the awkward place that the religious and the Medieval hold in Said's work. William Hart notes the disjuncture between modern Orientalism as a discourse created in the post-Enlightenment period and Said's discussion of how premodern thinkers like Dante "orientalize" Islam and Muslims.⁶ The problem emerges, Hart suggests, because Said fails to fully recognize that religion itself becomes a discourse, a "distinctively Western way of thinking." For Hart, what Said might call Medieval Orientalism is just religious discourse. Thus Islam is an object of religious discourse, and only secondarily an object of Orientalist discourse; Christian representations of Islam are better explained as simple products of interreligious conflict than as manifestations of Orientalism.⁷ Hart's solution is for Said to restrict his analysis of Islam to the way it was represented beginning in the 8th century, leaving the Medieval past behind him. For Hart, the rupture between Medieval and modern is not wide enough and the solution is to create an even bigger fissure between the two. I disagree, and to explain why, we need to consider what work the rupture does for Said in the first place.

Why does Said take such pains then to emphasize this break? Why is it so important for Said that his "modern" Orientalism be so decidedly modern? I think Said describes modern Orientalism as essentially and necessarily secular for political reasons. If Said had described Orientalism simply as a discourse that emerged within a particular Medieval religious climate and evolved as scholarship evolved in the Enlightenment, altering with shifting geo-political realities, it would be too easy for his readers, academics, and statesmen simply to disavow his interpretation of their representations. "I have no religious or apologetic interests," they could say, "So I am not an Orientalist." By situating Orientalism in the heart of modernity, Said compels us to take a look at ourselves and to question our understanding of the world around us. This is well worth doing. But Said's own hunch is clearly that Orientalism has significant pre-modern roots,

4. Lucy K. Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Thirteenth-Century Spain* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), pp. 19-20.

5. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 121; William D. Hart, *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 63; and Darren E. Dahl, "Criticizing 'Secular Criticism': Reading Religion in Edward Said and Kathryn Tanner," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, Vol. 31 (2002), pp. 361.

6. William D. Hart, *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture*, p. 70.

7. William D. Hart, *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture*, pp. 83, 85.

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despite his political need to emphasize its scientific and rational aspects.

At the same time, beginning the conversation about Orientalism only in the 18th century not only takes away from medievalists a useful analytic tool but also, of more general interest and concern, weakens our conversation about the very modern phenomena Said intends to describe. Seeing Orientalism as a continuum (though one reinvented and reinscribed in each generation) allows us to levy a more pointed critique against its representations, because one of the consequences of Said's separation of Orientalism from religion is that his explanatory model has become, to a degree, anachronistic. Said, writing in the mid-1970s, viewed American Orientalism as the most "modern" Orientalism, and also as the least religious, the least seduced by the images of the Orientalist literature, the most social scientific — divorced even from traditional modern Orientalism.⁸ But anyone paying attention to American orientalizing discourses, at least in the past decade, will recognize that Orientalism at the highest levels of American policy has been, above all, religious — we have only to recall President George W. Bush's description on September 16, 2001 of the battle against the terrorists as a "crusade." Said's theory as written leaves us poorly equipped to discuss this strange eruption of seemingly Medieval speech in a modern president, except to call it Medieval. According to Said, this religious discourse shouldn't be part of modern Orientalism, but it is. Nor is religious language and symbolism confined to American Orientalism. Many were shocked when Spain's army joined the "coalition of the willing" wearing the cross of Santiago, the emblem of the Medieval military religious order dedicated to ridding the Iberian peninsula of Muslims. However, Bush's "crusade" is not the same as that of Pope Urban II in the 11th century, and the Spanish military is not merely the Order of Santiago reborn; we need ways of making full sense of these phenomena.

The Danish anti-Islamic cartoons published by *Jyllands-Posten* on September 30, 2005 are an area where we can understand more fully the significance of representations of Muhammad and Muslims when we admit that the Orientalist discourse that the cartoonists participate in originates first in the Middle Ages, not the Enlightenment. Western international reaction to the cartoons has tended to see them as bigoted, perhaps, but as exemplifying valuable and worthy post-Enlightenment ideals of free speech. But foreshortening the historical context of the cartoons to merely the Enlightenment conceals the degree to which, far from being a bold and innovative defence of Western values, they are instead the latest manifestation of a long medieval European tradition of seeking out martyrdom by deliberately insulting Islam in general and the Prophet Muhammad in particular. Among possible precedents, I would point to the Christians in 9th-century Córdoba who cursed Muhammad and insulted Islam before the *qadi*, knowing that by doing this they would achieve martyrdom. There were also similar activities by 13th century Franciscans and Ramon Llull, who agonized about whether his destiny was to convert Muslims or to die a martyr. The title of the *Jyllands-Posten* piece, "Muhammeds ansigt [Muhammad's Face]" shows that the publication of the cartoons had no point other than to provoke a reaction by breaking known taboos — indeed without the title, it would be hard to know that the cartoons were supposed to be representing Muhammad specifically.

Finally, and most recently, we find Nicholas Sarkozy wishing to restrict Muslim practice in the name of secularism, Muslim women in France from wearing the *burqa* out in public. But are his objectives as secular as he claims? In a speech on Monday, June 22, 2009, Sarkozy said, "The *burqa* is not a religious sign. It is a sign of subservience, a sign of debasement." Here we have the spectacle of a "secular" French president asserting the "religious" authority to determine what is and what is not an authentic Islamic sign, claiming the role of *qadi* as it were. This follows hot on the heels of the 2004 law that prevented Muslim girls from wearing *hijab* in public schools and also restricted the Jewish *kippah*, but prohibited only "outsized" Christian crosses in a school system that still has no difficulty organizing itself around the Christian calendar.

These four examples are more than just "naturalized supernaturalism," science itself become myth, and to comprehend them, we need to recuperate and understand the religious content of modern Orientalism. Each of these examples

8. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 290-91

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dates from after September 11, 2001, and we may come to view this date as a turning point when religious Orientalism, never entirely absent, finally came back out of modernity's closet. Said had good reasons for stressing the secular side of modern Orientalism. But it is past time to recognize that this is just one side, albeit a crucial one. By reincorporating religious discourse as a mode among others of contemporary Orientalizing discourses, we can better understand both our past and our present.

Lucy K. Pick, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Senior Lecturer in the History of Christianity Divinity School, University of Chicago

Orientalism's Persistence in Mass Culture and Foreign Policy

Stuart Schaar

Edward W. Said's widow, Mariam, tells me that his books are still selling well. The academic community has been transformed, and the field of literary criticism has been revolutionized as a result of his legacy. The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) has in recent years elected a series of presidents reflecting non-orientalist approaches. At the last MESA annual meeting in Washington, DC in November 2008 a plenary session was devoted to Said's work. The large hall was packed.



Stuart Schaar

Orientalism as I knew it from 1958 to 1979 exists no more. Young scholars with excellent knowledge of both classical and colloquial Arabic have mastered the social sciences, history, and the new literary criticism, giving their students the chance to study Middle East and North African realities and their pasts within the frameworks of vigorous disciplines. Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, and other languages have become tools for study rather than philological ends in themselves. Texts, once viewed as the key to a people's *geist*, now share space in the curriculum with field research, oral history, and exciting new archeological findings. Many academics have criticized and challenged the civilizational approach to Islamic history as too general and inapplicable to a gigantic region extending from Morocco to Western China.

Yet, as Douglas Little in his book *American Orientalism* demonstrates, orientalist images still shape US foreign policy and mass attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims.¹ The octogenarian orientalist Bernard Lewis still writes best selling books that foster the ideas of "Muslim Rage" and "Clash of Civilizations," cleverly feeding into the paranoia produced by real terrorist attacks and the 9/11 syndrome.² Hollywood and the media have joined in, intensifying the volume of terrorist images all about us. These sell at box offices and newspaper kiosks, and produce high ratings for TV stations and talk radio. If writers want to get published by a reputable press that might help sell their books, it pays to put the words *jihad*, terrorism, Hamas, Hizbullah, etc. in the title, ensuring both publication and sales in a time of economic crisis.

Forty years after the publication of *Orientalism*, the same old stereotypes and clichés about Arabs and Muslims still predominate in mass culture. My undergraduate students at Brooklyn College over a period of nearly 30 years continued to call Arabs "towel-heads," "camel jockeys," "oversexed," etc. on the first day of classes when I asked them to jot down the first ten things that came to their minds when I mentioned the word "Arab." The field may have changed, but negative popular stereotypes have remained strong and public policy remains influenced by these mass images.

1. Douglas Little, *American Orientalism* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

2. See Bernard Lewis' "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1990). Samuel P. Huntington borrowed Lewis' image and wrote the best-selling book, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998) to explain the new paradigm of world politics (the West versus the Islamic world) after the end of the Cold War. In 2005 Lewis published *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (Modern Library).

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We now have an African-American President who won his election on the theme of change. Yet I wonder how much President Barack Obama's administration will really be able to transform US Middle East policies. His speeches certainly strike the right chords, and he has begun to withdraw combat troops from Iraq. Yet, US strategic interests dictate that some estimated 45-50,000 American soldiers, mercenaries, or veterans in mufti remain indefinitely to continue training Iraqi soldiers and police officers, ensure oil pipeline security, and keep open four projected super-military bases consolidated from more than 100. With Iraq's oil reserves second only to those of Saudi Arabia, I can't imagine US forces entirely abandoning the country.

Then there are Afghanistan and Pakistan, countries whose terrain and history should discourage any foreign presence or occupation, as the now defunct Soviet Union woefully discovered in the 1980s. The growing strength of the Taliban and the opium trade upon which that movement thrives, bodes ill for the Afghan and Pakistani people and their US protectors. As the President adds more troops to those already fighting in Afghanistan, and if the US military continues to send Predator drones over tribal territories in Afghanistan and Pakistan, many more civilians will lose their lives and the backlash against the US presence in both countries will escalate. Unless serious efforts are made to end warlordism (the very core of the political system) surrounding the Afghan presidency, reduce generalized corruption that has seeped into all levels of government in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and create meaningful jobs for the masses of Afghan and Pakistani unemployed, few gains for the United States can be expected. Pakistan, which I visited in 1980 and 2004, is creeping close to failed state status, with a weak executive and secret military intelligence forces at times acting independently of most central controls, often at cross purposes with governmental and US policies. Given the generalized worldwide economic crisis, the temptation of the US to stress military solutions rather than development, may in the end lead to stalemate and great losses.

The Palestinian-Israeli crisis, a major preoccupation of Said's, looms as another foreboding policy area facing the new President. Divisions within the Palestinian Hamas movement between hardliners living in Syria and those within Gaza who suffered dramatically from Israel's last invasion may present possibilities for fruitful negotiations with elements who might be willing to talk to US interlocutors. But the popular image of Hamas (portrayed by Israeli and US spokespeople) as uniformly hard-line and out only to destroy Israel make negotiations over long-term solutions difficult, if not impossible. Without engaging Hamas, however, any settlements reached between the US and Israel and the Palestinian Authority will be tenuous and short-lived. Hamas is increasingly implanting itself in the West Bank, and as the stalemate continues, their influence can only grow. Said rejected the Oslo solution of creating two states, dismissing a projected unarmed Palestinian state as no more than a Bantustan reminiscent of apartheid South Africa. Any such state seems too fragile to last, challenged as it would be by Israel and Hamas.

Crisis also looms with Iran. President Obama has been conciliatory despite charges of election fraud there, but the US still views a nuclearized Iran as an imminent danger. Vice President Joseph Biden's "green light" to Israel signaling its right to take out Iranian nuclear facilities may be just posturing to put more pressure on Tehran to stop enriching uranium, but the genie is now out of the bottle, awaiting the right crisis for action. In April 2009, the TV station *al-Arabia*, beamed into Rabat where I now live had an Iranian spokesperson tell a wide Arab audience that if Israel attacks Iran, it cannot by itself know where to strike and Iran is ready with new weapons to retaliate instantly if any bombardment takes place. We have seen that Iran has supplied Hamas and the Lebanese Hizbullah with a considerable number of missiles, which these proxies have fired into Israel. Longer range missiles, perhaps now in place in mountainous storerooms in Lebanon and tunnels in Gaza could probably hit Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem, causing greater destruction than Israel has yet experienced.

The Middle East tinderbox is aflame anew, and a new generation is growing up there more frustrated with their lives than ever. They, too, have their stereotypes (of the West) and have adopted forms of Arab Orientalism whereby they

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internalize through satellite TV, cyber space, and mass market magazines and newspapers some of the negative images of themselves portrayed abroad. Living mostly under dictatorships, they seldom can express themselves freely and must internalize their depression and frustrations with narrow choices, closed overseas frontiers, and rigid, overcrowded educational systems giving rare opportunities for second chances. The globalization of desires and access to new stunning real and virtual worlds in cyber space only stymie young people who increasingly feel closed in with few choices. The schizoid nature of reality — daily routines filled with frustration and debt juxtaposed with the cyber world filled with Hollywood-like images of wealth and luxury — clash with on-the-ground realities and intensify depression. Extremes can only flourish under such circumstances.

Edward Said may have downplayed the effect of terrorism in shaping governmental policies and mass phobias. Yet he would understand all too well how, since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the US government has effectively molded its foreign and domestic policy around a new paradigm of anti-terrorism as powerful as the “Cold War,” allowing it to infringe on citizens’ rights and use torture on terrorist suspects in the name of heightened security. If alive, Edward would probably be joining the battle in the United States to preserve what remains of the embattled Constitution while trying to convince the Obama administration of the futility of a two-state solution under present Middle Eastern conditions. The President, however, seems so vested in that policy, that such critics as Said would have little chance of influencing the reshaping of the administration’s fragile two-state strategy.

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Re-reading Said: Late Thoughts

Bryan S. Turner

When I published *Weber and Islam* (1974), there was relatively little literature on Max Weber’s fragmentary sociology of Islam. It was positively reviewed by Ernest Gellner (1975) in *Population Studies*, but my interpretation of Weber and Gellner’s response were later criticized, often informally, by people around the “Hull group” — a collection of radical social scientists outside what was seen to be the conservative scholarly establishment of professional Middle East associations — with whom I had become associated. As a reflection on this debate, I published *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (1978) which, influenced by Marxists such as Louis Althusser, took a critical look at the mainstream social science literature by scholars such as Daniel Lerner and Shlomo Avineri.



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Fortuitously, my overview of social science appeared in the same year as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1974). I was immediately captivated by Said’s approach and by the man, who combined comparative literary studies with political engagement and offered a model of the public intellectual. Said was attractive partly because most academics experience a sense of homelessness, which his autobiography *Out of Place* (1999) so perfectly captured. His persistent mood of exile and dislocation was expressed in his Western identity as “Edward” and his Eastern persona as “Said.” Although I have not changed my view of the man, I am now forced to admit that the whole debate about Orientalism in retrospect looks like a dead end, if not pernicious and corrosive.

Needless to say, Weber’s vision of Islam and more generally of “Asian religions” has been condemned as an example of Orientalism in which a dynamic West was contrasted with and counter-posed to a stagnant East.¹ Despite these ongoing

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ing criticisms, Weber's approach still commands attention as a general framework. The Weber legacy survives because, while Said's account of Orientalism provided some valuable criticisms of Western scholarship, it did not provide — and probably did not set out to provide — a convincing or systematic alternative. What, if anything, comes after Said's critique of Orientalism apart from more textual analysis and deconstructive investigation?

Said's work rightly became a powerful component of post-colonial literature, but I am doubtful about its lasting benefit in the social sciences. In retrospect, I am not convinced that any concrete methodological directives follow from Said's critique apart from some prudential recommendations to be self-reflexive about taken-for-granted assumptions, to become aware of persistent forms of bias or openly critical of hidden racist assumptions. However, such recommendations are not exactly original, and they are hardly likely to give rise to controversy. The nub of my response, therefore, is that the legacy of Said has been to add fuel to the assumption that research students do not have to collect data in the study of actual societies through ethnographic or other forms of inquiry; they merely need to examine texts. The result was to cast doubt on perfectly legitimate methodologies and research questions in favor of strategies of textual deconstructions. If there is a lesson — which I am the first to accept — from this debate, it is that academics are unconsciously prone to intellectual fashions and anxious to grasp the fig-leaf of literary theory and continental philosophy. Perhaps Michel Foucault's writings on the "spiritual revolution" in Iran might be another example of how fashion has obscured our understanding of social reality.² I would prefer my students to read Marshall G.S.Hodgson on *The Venture of Islam* (1974) or Andre Gunder Frank on *ReOrient* (1998) than any amount of work on genealogy or discourse or inter-textuality.

In any case I am not wholly convinced about the originality of Said's *Orientalism*. He was openly dependent on Raymond Schwab's *The Oriental Renaissance*, which in 1950 traced the early stages of Orientalism, especially the growth of Sanskrit studies, and provided the context for Said's own *Orientalism*. Schwab examined the problem of intellectual responsibility towards other cultures through a detailed analysis of the rise of translation and interpretation. Said wrote a sympathetic introduction to the English translation of Schwab, which was reprinted in *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Hence, Schwab rather than Foucault framed Said's agenda to understand Europe's cultural appropriation of Islam and the Middle East. From these studies, Said absorbed the original message of philology: that all human languages have a common origin. It was not until the Victorian age that human cultures were racialized and there emerged the view that humankind was differentiated by grammars that were largely incommensurable.

Criticisms of Said's work are now only too well known. First, he exaggerated the degree of coherence in Western academic writing on Islam and the Middle East, and consequently it is difficult to classify Louis Massignon, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Maxime Rodinson, and Marshall G.S.Hodgson within Said's paradigm. In any case, Said concentrated primarily on literary figures and not on historians and social scientists. Within the literary field, he was mainly concerned with French contributions.

Secondly, many radical writers have written sympathetically and intelligently about other cultures in order to attack Western colonialism. In recent years, I have taught courses on the sociology of Asian societies in which Said's *Orientalism* is at the head of my reading list, but in practice it is difficult to apply Said's framework to such literary works as *A Passage to India*, *Burmese Days*, or *A Quiet American*. Furthermore, the mainstream literature from sociology and anthropology — such as James Scott's *Weapons of Weak* or Theda Skocpol's *States and Revolution*, or Robert Bellah's *Imagining Japan* — can hardly be open to the accusation of Orientalism.

bica 43 (1996), pp. 412-33.

2. Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, *Foucault, Gender and the Iranian Revolution: The Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago, IL:University of Chicago Press, 2005).

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Thirdly, Said probably also contributed to the emergence of Occidentalism.³ Critics of Western imperialism often neglect the history of Japanese imperialism. For many Asians, economic imperialism means Japanese imperialism, and as a result the Orientalist debate understates the strength of racial images which have been generated against the West. Orientalism should be seen as relational and dialogic. The issue of the yellow cab women and general dislike of white foreigners, or *Gaijin*, give a clear expression of traditional Japanese ambiguity towards contact with the outside world.⁴ Asian stereotypes could be taken as an illustration of what we might call 'reverse orientalism'.

Finally, the debate about Orientalism cannot be separated from Middle East politics; therefore, it is almost impossible to achieve anything like an objective assessment of the issues. Generally speaking, the critique of Orientalism has not seen the ironic connection between two forms of racism, namely against Arabs and against Jews. To his great credit, this had clearly not escaped Said. In the introduction to *Orientalism*, he wrote that in "addition and by an almost inescapable logic, I have found myself writing the history of a strange secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism. That anti-Semitism, as I have discussed it in its Islamic branch Orientalism resemble each other is a historical, cultural and political truth that needs only be mentioned to an Arab Palestinian for its irony to be perfectly understood."⁵ In a reply to his critics, Said also noted the parallels between what he called "Islamophobia" and anti-Semitism. In *Religion and Social Theory* (1983), I argued that there are two related problems, namely the idea of Islamic gaps and Judaic contradictions. By this observation, I meant that, while Islam had been defined by its absences (of rationality, autonomous cities, independent bourgeoisie, asceticism and so forth), Judaism had been defined by the contradictory nature of its religious injunctions where its dietary laws transferred the quest for personal salvation into a set of ritualistic prescriptions according to Weber's *Ancient Judaism*. The West defined its identity in reference to the lazy sensual Arab and the untrustworthy Jew. In fact, precisely because Judaism and Islam shared so much in common (monotheism, prophetic and charismatic revelation, the religion of the Book, and a radical eschatology), the construction of these contrasted paradigms was especially tragic.

Towards the end of my career, I find I get more pleasure from Said's work on music such as *On Late Style* (2006), and therefore I come to criticize Orientalism, not to condemn the man. Humanistic values — the real legacy of comparative literature — flow abundantly from Said's work on the limitations and dangers of traditional Orientalism, from his vision of the intellectual exile, and from his political engagement with the Palestinian issue. The realization of those values was his constant concern, and the achievement of those values in modern scholarship has been rendered infinitely more difficult by his demise.

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3. James G. Carrier, ed., *Occidentalism. Images of the West* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1995).

4. K. Kelsky, "Flirting with the foreign: Interracial Sex in Japan's 'International' Age" in R. Wilson and Wimal Dissanyake, eds., *Global/Local. Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press, 1996). pp. 179-192.

5. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 27-28.

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