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Orientalism Reconsidered

Edward W. Said

There are two sets of problems that I'd like to take up, each of them deriving from the general issues addressed in *Orientalism*, of which the most important are: the representation of other cultures, societies, histories; the relationship between power and knowledge; the role of the intellectual; the methodological questions that have to do with the relationships between different kinds of texts, between text and context, between text and history.

I should make a couple of things clear at the outset, however. First of all, I shall be using the word "Orientalism" less to refer to my book than to the problems to which my book is related; moreover, I shall be dealing, as will be evident, with the intellectual and political territory covered both by *Orientalism* (the book) as well as the work I have done since. This imposes no obligation on my audience to have read me since *Orientalism*; I mention it only as an index of the fact that since writing *Orientalism* I have thought of myself as continuing to look at the problems that first interested me in that book but which are still far from resolved. Second, I would not want it to be thought that the license afforded me by the present occasion is an attempt to answer my critics. Fortunately, *Orientalism* elicited a great deal of comment, much of it positive and instructive, yet a fair amount of it hostile and in some cases (understandably) abusive. But the fact is that I have not digested and understood everything that was either written or said. Instead, I have grasped some of the problems and answers proposed by some of my critics, and because they strike me as useful in focussing an argu-

ment, these are the ones I shall be taking into account in the comments that follow. Others — like my exclusion of German Orientalism, which no one has given any reason for me to have *included* — have frankly struck me as superficial or trivial, and there seems no point in even responding to them. Similarly, the claims made by Dennis Porter, among others, that I am ahistorical and inconsistent, would have more interest if the virtues of consistency (whatever may be intended by the term) were subjected to rigorous analysis; as for my ahistoricity that too is a charge more weighty in assertion than it is in proof.

Now let me quickly sketch the two sets of problems I'd like to deal with here. As a department of thought and expertise, Orientalism of course refers to several overlapping domains: firstly, the changing historical and cultural relationship between Europe and Asia, a relationship with a 4000 year old history; secondly, the scientific discipline in the West according to which beginning in the early 19th century one specialized in the study of various Oriental cultures and traditions; and, thirdly, the ideological suppositions, images, and fantasies about a currently important and politically urgent region of the world called the Orient. The relatively common denominator between these three aspects of Orientalism is the line separating Occident from Orient, and this, I have argued, is less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production, which I have called imaginative geography. This is, however, neither to say that the division between Orient and Occident is unchanging nor is it to say that it is simply fictional. It is to say — emphatically — that as with all aspects of what Vico calls the world of nations, the Orient and the Occident are facts produced by human beings, and as such must be studied as integral components of the social, and not the divine or natural, world. And because the social world includes the person or subject doing the studying as well as the object or realm being studied, it is imperative to include them both in any consideration of Orientalism, for, obviously enough, there could be no Orientalism without, on the one hand, the Orientalists, and on the other, the Orientals.

Far from being a crudely political apprehension of what has been called the problem of Orientalism, this is in reality a fact basic to any theory of interpretation, or hermeneutics. Yet, and this is the first set of problems I want to consider, there is still a remarkable unwillingness to discuss the problems of Orientalism in the political or ethical or even epistemological contexts proper to it. This is as true of pro-

fessional literary critics who have written about my book, as it is of course of the Orientalists themselves. Since it seems to me patently impossible to dismiss the truth of Orientalism's political origin and its continuing political actuality, we are obliged on intellectual as well as political grounds to investigate the resistance to the politics of Orientalism, a resistance that is richly symptomatic of precisely what is denied.

If the first set of problems is concerned with the problems of Orientalism reconsidered from the standpoint of local issues like who writes or studies the Orient, in what institutional or discursive setting, for what audience, and with what ends in mind, the second set of problems takes us to a wider circle of issues. These are the issues raised initially by methodology and then considerably sharpened by questions as to how the production of knowledge best serves communal, as opposed to factional, ends, how knowledge that is non-dominative and non-coercive can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations, the positions, and the strategies of power. In these methodological and moral re-considerations of Orientalism, I shall quite consciously be alluding to similar issues raised by the experiences of feminism or women's studies, black or ethnic studies, socialist and anti-imperialist studies, all of which take for their point of departure the right of formerly un- or mis-represented human groups to speak for and represent themselves in domains defined, politically and intellectually, as normally excluding them, usurping their signifying and representing functions, overriding their historical reality. In short, Orientalism reconsidered in this wider and libertarian optic entails nothing less than the creation of new objects for a new kind of knowledge.

But let me now return to the local problems I referred to first. The hindsight of authors not only stimulates in them a sense of regret at what they could or ought to have done but did not; it also gives them a wider perspective in which to comprehend what they did. In my own case, I have been helped to achieve this broader understanding by nearly everyone who wrote about my book, and who saw it — for better or worse — as being part of current debates, conflicts, and contested interpretations in the Arab-Islamic world, as that world interacts with the United States and Europe. Certainly there can be no doubt that — in my own rather limited case — the consciousness of being an Oriental goes back to my youth in colonial Palestine and Egypt, although the

impulse to resist its accompanying impingements was nurtured in the heady atmosphere of the post-World War II period of independence when Arab nationalism, Nasserism, the 1967 War, the rise of the Palestine national movement, the 1973 War, the Lebanese Civil War, the Iranian Revolution and its horrific aftermath produced that extraordinary series of highs and lows which has neither ended nor allowed us a full understanding of its remarkable revolutionary impact.

The interesting point here is how difficult it is to try to understand a region of the world whose principal features seem to be, first, that it is in perpetual flux, and second, that no one trying to grasp it can by an act of pure will or of sovereign understanding stand at some Archimedean point outside the flux. That is, the very reason for understanding the Orient generally and the Arab world in particular was first, that it prevailed upon one, beseeched one's attention urgently, whether for economic, political, cultural, or religious reasons, and second, that it defied neutral, disinterested, or stable definition.

Similar problems are commonplace in the interpretation of literary texts. Each age, for instance, re-interprets Shakespeare, not because Shakespeare changes, but because despite the existence of numerous and reliable editions of Shakespeare, there is no such fixed and non-trivial object as Shakespeare independent of his editors, the actors who played his roles, the translators who put him in other languages, the hundreds of millions of readers who have read him or watched performances of his plays since the late sixteenth century. On the other hand, it is too much to say that Shakespeare has no independent existence at all, and that he is completely reconstituted every time someone reads, acts, or writes about him. In fact Shakespeare leads an institutional or cultural life that among other things has guaranteed his eminence as a great poet, his authorship of thirty-odd plays, his extraordinary canonical powers in the West. The point I am making here is a rudimentary one: that even so relatively inert an object as a literary text is commonly supposed to gain some of its identity from its historical moment interacting with the attentions, judgements, scholarship, and performances of its readers. But, I discovered, this privilege was rarely allowed the Orient, the Arabs, or Islam, which separately or together were supposed by mainstream academic thought to be confined to the fixed status of an object frozen once and for all in time by the gaze of Western percipients.

Far from being a defense either of the Arabs or Islam — as my book

was taken by many to be — my argument was that neither existed except as “communities of interpretation” which give them existence, and that, like the Orient itself, each designation represented interests, claims, projects, ambitions, and rhetorics that were not only in violent disagreement, but were in a situation of open warfare. So saturated with meanings, so overdetermined by history, religion, and politics are labels like “Arab” or “muslim” as subdivisions of “The Orient” that no one today can use them without some attention to the formidable polemical mediations that screen the objects, if they exist at all, that the labels designate.

I do not think it is too much to say that the more these observations have been made by one party, the more routinely they are denied by the other; this is true whether it is Arabs or Muslims discussing the meaning of Arabism or Islam, or whether an Arab or Muslim disputes these designations with a Western scholar. Anyone who tries to suggest that nothing, not even a simple descriptive label, is beyond or outside the realm of interpretation is almost certain to find an opponent saying that science and learning are designed to transcend the vagaries of interpretation, and that objective truth is in fact attainable. This claim was more than a little political when used against Orientals who disputed the authority and objectivity of an Orientalism intimately allied with the great mass of European settlements in the Orient. At bottom, what I said in *Orientalism* had been said before me by A.L. Tibawi, by Abdullah Laroui, by Anwar Abdel Malek, by Talal Asad, by S.H. Alatas, by Fanon and Césaire, by Pannikar, and Romila Thapar, all of whom had suffered the ravages of imperialism and colonialism, and who, in challenging the authority, provenance, and institutions of the science that represented them to Europe, were also understanding themselves as something more than what this science said they were.

Nor was this all. The challenge to Orientalism and the colonial era of which it is so organically a part was a challenge to the muteness imposed upon the Orient as object. Insofar as it was a science of incorporation and inclusion by virtue of which the Orient was constituted and then introduced into Europe, Orientalism was a scientific movement whose analogue in the world of empirical politics was the Orient's colonial accumulation and acquisition by Europe. The Orient was therefore not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent Other. From roughly the end of the eighteenth century, when in its age, distance, and rich-

ness the Orient was re-discovered by Europe, its history had been a paradigm of antiquity and originality, functions that drew Europe's interests in acts of recognition or acknowledgement but *from* which Europe moved as its own industrial, economic, and cultural development seemed to leave the Orient far behind. Oriental history — for Hegel, for Marx, later for Burkhardt, Nietzsche, Spengler, and other major philosophers of history — was useful in portraying a region of great age, and what had to be left behind. Literary historians have further noted in all sorts of aesthetic writing and plastic portrayals that a trajectory of “Westering,” found for example in Keats and Holderlin, customarily saw the Orient as ceding its historical preeminence and importance to the world spirit moving westwards away from Asia and towards Europe.

As primitivity, as the age-old antetype of Europe, as a fecund night out of which European rationality developed, the Orient's actuality receded inexorably into a kind of paradigmatic fossilization. The origins of European anthropology and ethnography were constituted out of this radical difference, and, to my knowledge, as a discipline anthropology has not yet dealt with this inherent political limitation upon its supposedly disinterested universality. This, by the way, is one reason Johannes Fabian's book, *Time and The Other: How Anthropology Constitutes Its Object* is both so unique and so important; compared, say, with the standard disciplinary rationalizations and self-congratulatory clichés about hermeneutic circles offered by Clifford Geertz, Fabian's serious effort to re-direct anthropologists' attention back to the discrepancies in time, power, and development between the ethnographer and his/her constituted object is all the more remarkable. In any event, what for the most part got left out of *Orientalism* was precisely the very history that resisted its ideological as well as political encroachments, and this repressed or resistant history has returned in the various critiques and attacks upon *Orientalism*, which has uniformly and polemically been represented by these critiques as a science of imperialism.

The divergences between the numerous critiques made of *Orientalism* as ideology and praxis, at least so far as their aims are concerned, are very wide nonetheless. Some attack *Orientalism* as a prelude to assertions about the virtues of one or another native culture: these are the nativists. Others criticize *Orientalism* as a defense against attacks on one or another political creed: these are the nationalists. Still others

criticize Orientalism for falsifying the nature of Islam: these are, *grosso modo*, the fundamentalists. I will not adjudicate between these claims, except to say that I have explicitly avoided taking stands on such matters as the real, true, or authentic Islamic or Arab world, except as issues relating to conflicts involving partisanship, solidarity, or sympathy, although I have always tried never to forsake a critical sense or reflective detachment. But in common with all the recent critics of Orientalism I think that two things are especially important — one, a rigorous methodological vigilance that construes Orientalism less as a positive than as a critical discipline and therefore makes it subject to intense scrutiny, and two, a determination not to allow the segregation and confinement of the Orient to go on without challenge. My own understanding of this second point has led me to the extreme position of entirely refusing designations like “Orient” and “Occident,” but this is something I shall return to a little later.

Depending on how they construed their roles as Orientalists, critics of the critics of Orientalism have either reinforced the affirmations of positive power lodged within Orientalism’s discourse, or much less frequently alas, they have engaged Orientalism’s critics in a genuine intellectual exchange. The reasons for this split are self-evident: some have to do with power and age, as well as institutional or guild defensiveness; others have to do with religious or ideological convictions. All, irrespective of whether the fact is acknowledged or not, are political — something that not everyone has found easy to acknowledge. If I may take use of my own example, when some of my critics in particular agreed with the main premises of my argument they tended to fall back on encomia to the achievements of what one of their most distinguished individuals, Maxime Rodinson, called “la science orientaliste.” This view lent itself to attacks on an alleged Lysenkism lurking inside the polemics of Muslims or Arabs who lodged a protest with “Western” Orientalism, despite the fact that all the recent critics of Orientalism have been quite explicit about using such “Western” critiques as Marxism or structuralism in an effort to override invidious distinctions between East and West, between Arab and Western truth, and the like.

Sensitized to the outrageous attacks upon an august and formerly invulnerable science, many accredited members of the certified professional cadre, whose division of study is the Arabs and Islam, have disclaimed any politics at all, while pressing a vigorous, but for the

most part intellectually empty and ideologically intended, counter-attack. Although I said I would not respond to critics here, I need to mention a few of the more typical imputations made against me so that you can see Orientalism extending its 19th-century arguments to cover a whole incommensurate set of late 20th-century eventualities, all of them deriving from what to the 19th-century mind is the preposterous situation of an Oriental responding to Orientalism's asseverations. For sheer heedless anti-intellectualism, unrestrained or unencumbered by the slightest trace of critical self-consciousness, no one, in my experience, has achieved the sublime confidence of Bernard Lewis, whose almost purely political exploits require more time to mention than they are worth. In a series of articles and one particularly weak book — *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* — Lewis has been busy responding to my argument, insisting that the Western quest for knowledge about other societies is unique, that it is motivated by pure curiosity, and that in contrast Muslims neither were able nor interested in getting knowledge about Europe, as if knowledge about Europe were the only acceptable criterion for true knowledge. Lewis's arguments are presented as emanating exclusively from the scholar's apolitical impartiality, whereas at the same time he has become an authority drawn on for anti-Islamic, anti-Arab, Zionist, and Cold War crusades, all of them 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.

Not quite as hypocritical, but no less uncritical, are younger ideologues and Orientalists like Daniel Pipes whose expertise as demonstrated in his book *In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power* is wholly at the service not of knowledge but of an aggressive and interventionary State — the U.S. — whose interests Pipes helps to define. Even if we leave aside the intellectually scandalous generalizing that allows Pipes to speak of Islam's anomie, its sense of inferiority, its defensiveness, as if Islam were one simple thing, and as if the quality of his either absent or impressionistic evidence were of the most secondary importance, Pipes's book testifies, I think, to Orientalism's unique resilience, its insulation from intellectual developments everywhere else in the culture, and its antediluvian imperiousness as it makes its assertions and affirmations with little regard for logic or argument. I doubt that any expert anywhere in the world would speak today of Judaism or Christianity with quite that combination of force and freedom that Pipes

allows himself about Islam, although one would have thought that a book about Islamic revival would allude to parallel and related developments in styles of religious resurgence in, for example, Lebanon, Israel, and the U.S. Nor is it likely that anyone anywhere, writing about material for which, in his own words, “rumor, hearsay, and other wisps of evidence” are the only proof, will in the very same paragraph alchemically transmute rumor and hearsay into “facts” on whose “multitude” he relies in order “to reduce the importance of each.” This is magic quite unworthy even of high Orientalism, and although Pipes pays his obeisance to imperialist Orientalism he masters neither its genuine learning nor its pretense at disinterestedness. For Pipes, Islam is a volatile and dangerous business, a political movement intervening in and disrupting the West, stirring up insurrection and fanaticism everywhere else.

The core of Pipes’s book is not simply its highly expedient sense of its own political relevance to Reagan’s America where terrorism and communism fade imperceptibly into the media’s images of Muslim gunners, fanatics, and rebels, but its thesis that Muslims themselves are the worst source for their own history. The pages of *In the Path of God* are dotted with references to Islam’s incapacity for self-representation, self-understanding, self-consciousness, and with praise for witnesses like V.S. Naipaul who are so much more useful and clever in understanding Islam. Here, of course, is perhaps the most familiar of Orientalism’s themes — since the Orientals cannot represent themselves, they must therefore be represented by others who know more about Islam than Islam knows about itself. Now it is often the case that you can be known by others in different ways than you know yourself, and that valuable insights might be generated accordingly. But that is quite a different thing than pronouncing it as immutable law that outsiders *ipso facto* have a better sense of you as an insider than you do of yourself. Note that there is no question of an *exchange* between Islam’s views and an outsider’s: no dialogue, no discussion, no mutual recognition. There is a flat assertion of quality, which the Western policy-maker, or his faithful servant, possesses by virtue of his being Western, white, non-Muslim.

Now this, I submit, is neither science, nor knowledge, nor understanding: it is a statement of power and a claim for relatively absolute authority. It is constituted out of racism, and it is made comparatively acceptable to an audience prepared in advance to listen to its muscular

truths. Pipes speaks to and for a large clientele for whom Islam is not a culture, but a nuisance; most of Pipes's readers will, in their minds, associate what he says about Islam with the other nuisances of the 60's and 70's — blacks, women, post-colonial Third World nations that have tipped the balance against the U.S. in such places as UNESCO and the U.N., and for their pains have drawn forth the rebuke of Senator Moynihan and Mrs. Kirkpatrick. In addition, Pipes — and the rows of like-minded Orientalists and experts he represents as their common denominator — stands for programmatic ignorance. Far from trying to understand Islam in the context of imperialism and the revenge of an abused, but internally very diverse, segment of humanity, far from availing himself of the impressive recent work on Islam in different histories and societies, far from paying some attention to the immense advances in critical theory, in social science and humanistic research, in the philosophy of interpretation, far from making some slight effort to acquaint himself with the vast imaginative literature produced in the Islamic world, Pipes obdurately and explicitly aligns himself with colonial Orientalists like Snouck Hurgronje and shamelessly pro-colonial renegrades like V.S. Naipaul, so that from the eyrie of the State Department and the National Security Council he might survey and judge Islam at will.

I have spent this much time talking about Pipes only because he usefully serves to make some points about Orientalism's large political setting, which is routinely denied and suppressed in the sort of claim proposed by its main spokesman, Bernard Lewis, who has the effrontery to disassociate Orientalism from its 200 year old partnership with European imperialism and associate it instead with modern classical philology and the study of ancient Greek and Roman culture. Perhaps it is also worth mentioning about this larger setting that it comprises two other elements, about which I'd like to speak very briefly, namely the recent (but at present uncertain) prominence of the Palestinian movement, and secondly, the demonstrated resistance of Arabs in the United States and elsewhere against their portrayal in the public realm.

As for the Palestinian issue — the question of Palestine and its fateful encounter with Zionism, on the one hand, and the guild of Orientalism, its professional caste-consciousness as a corporation of experts protecting their terrain and their credentials from outside scrutiny, on the other hand, account for much of the animus against my critique of

Orientalism. The ironies here are rich, and I shall restrict myself to enumerating a small handful. Consider the case of one Orientalist who publicly attacked my book (he told me in a private letter) not because he disagreed with it — on the contrary, he felt that what I said was just — but because he had to defend the honor of his profession!! Or, take the connection — explicitly made by two of the authors I cite in *Orientalism*, Renan and Proust — between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Here, one would have expected many scholars and critics to have seen the conjuncture, that hostility to Islam in the modern Christian West has historically gone hand in hand with, has stemmed from the same source, has been nourished at the same stream as anti-Semitism, and that a critique of the orthodoxies, dogmas, and disciplinary procedures of Orientalism contribute to an enlargement of our understanding of the cultural mechanisms of anti-Semitism. No such connection has ever been made by critics, who have seen in the critique of Orientalism an opportunity for them to defend Zionism, support Israel, and launch attacks on Palestinian nationalism. The reasons for this confirm the history of Orientalism, for, as the Israeli commentator Dani Rubenstein has remarked, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the destruction of Palestinian society, and the sustained Zionist assault upon Palestinian nationalism has quite literally been led and staffed by Orientalists. Whereas in the past it was European Christian Orientalists who supplied European culture with arguments for colonizing and suppressing Islam, as well as for despising Jews, it is now the Jewish national movement that produces a cadre of colonial officials whose ideological theses about the Islamic or Arab mind are implemented in the administration of the Palestinian Arabs, an oppressed minority within the white-European-democracy that is Israel. Rubenstein notes with some sorrow that the Hebrew University's Islamic studies department has produced every one of the colonial officials and Arab experts who run the Occupied Territories.

One further irony should be mentioned in this regard: just as some Zionists have construed it as their duty to defend Orientalism against its critics, there has been a comic effort by some Arab nationalists to see the Orientalist controversy as an imperialist plot to enhance American control over the Arab world. According to this seriously argued but extraordinarily implausible scenario, we are informed that critics of Orientalism turn out not to be anti-imperialist at all, but covert agents of imperialism. The next step from this is to suggest that the best way to

attack imperialism is either to become an Orientalist or not to say anything critical about it. At this stage, however, I concede that we have left the world of reality for a world of such illogic and derangement that I cannot pretend to understand its structure or sense.

Underlying much of the discussion of Orientalism is a disquieting realization that the relationship between cultures is both uneven and irremediably secular. This brings us to the point I alluded to a moment ago, about recent Arab and Islamic efforts, well-intentioned for the most part, but sometimes motivated by unpopular regimes, who, in attracting attention to the shoddiness of the Western media in representing the Arabs or Islam, divert scrutiny from the abuses of their rule and therefore make efforts to improve the so-called image of Islam and the Arabs. Parallel developments have been occurring, as no one needs to be told, in UNESCO where the controversy surrounding the world information order — and proposals for its reform by various Third World and Socialist governments — has taken on the dimensions of a major international issue. Most of these disputes testify, first of all, to the fact that the production of knowledge, or information, of media images, is unevenly distributed: its locus and the centers of its greatest force are located in what, on both sides of the divide, has been polemically called the metropolitan West. Second, this unhappy realization, on the part of weaker parties and cultures, has reinforced their grasp of the fact that, although there are many divisions within it, there is only one secular and historical world, and that neither nativism, nor divine intervention, nor regionalism, nor ideological smokescreens can hide societies, cultures, and peoples from each other, especially not from those with the force and will to penetrate others for political as well as economic ends. But, third, many of these disadvantaged post-colonial states and their loyalist intellectuals have, in my opinion, drawn the wrong set of conclusions, which in practise is that one must either attempt to impose control upon the production of knowledge at the source, or, in the worldwide media economy, to attempt to improve, enhance, and ameliorate the images currently in circulation without doing anything to change the political situation from which they emanate and on which to a certain extent they are based.

The failings of these approaches strike me as obvious, and here I don't want to go into such matters as the squandering of immense amounts of petro-dollars for various short-lived public relations scams, or the increasing repression, human-rights abuses, outright gangster-

ism that has taken place in many formerly colonial countries, all of them occurring in the name of national security and fighting neo-imperialism. What I do want to talk about is the much larger question of what, in the context recently provided by such relatively small efforts as the critique of Orientalism, is to be done, and on the level of politics and criticism how we can speak of intellectual work that isn't merely reactive or negative.

I come finally now to the second and, in my opinion, the more challenging and interesting set of problems that derive from the reconsideration of Orientalism. One of the legacies of Orientalism, and indeed one of its epistemological foundations, is historicism, that is, the view propounded by Vico, Hegel, Marx, Ranke, Dilthey, and others, that if humankind has a history it is produced by men and women, and can be understood historically as, at each given period, epoch, or moment, possessing a complex, but coherent unity. So far as Orientalism in particular and the European knowledge of other societies in general have been concerned, historicism meant that the one human history uniting humanity either culminated in or was observed from the vantage point of Europe, or the West. What was neither observed by Europe nor documented by it was therefore "lost" until, at some later date, it too could be incorporated by the new sciences of anthropology, political economics, and linguistics. It is out of this later recuperation, of what Eric Wolf has called people without history, that a still later disciplinary step was taken, the founding of the science of world history, whose major practitioners include Braudel, Wallerstein, Perry Anderson, and Wolf himself.

But along with the greater capacity for dealing with — in Ernst Bloch's phrase — the non-synchronous experiences of Europe's Other has gone a fairly uniform avoidance of the relationship between European imperialism and these variously constituted, variously formed and articulated knowledges. What, in other words, has never taken place is an epistemological critique at the most fundamental level of the connection between the development of a historicism which has expanded and developed enough to include antithetical attitudes such as ideologies of Western imperialism and critiques of imperialism, on the one hand, and, on the other, the actual practise of imperialism by which the accumulation of territories and population, the control of economies, and the incorporation and homogenization of histories are maintained. If we keep this in mind we will remark, for example,

that in the methodological assumptions and practise of world history — which is ideologically anti-imperialist — little or no attention is given to those cultural practises like Orientalism or ethnography affiliated with imperialism, which in genealogical fact fathered world history itself; hence the emphasis in world history as a discipline has been on economic and political practises, defined by the processes of world historical writing, as in a sense separate and different from, as well as unaffected by, the knowledge of them which world history produces. The curious result is that the theories of accumulation on a world scale, or the capitalist world state, or lineages of absolutism depend (a) on the same displaced percipient and historicist observer who had been an Orientalist or colonial traveler three generations ago; (b) they depend also on a homogenizing and incorporating world historical scheme that assimilated non-synchronous developments, histories, cultures, and peoples to it; and (c) they block and keep down latent epistemological critiques of the institutional, cultural, and disciplinary instruments linking the incorporative practise of world history with partial knowledges like Orientalism, on the one hand, and with continued “Western” hegemony of the non-European, peripheral world, on the other.

In fine, the problem is once again historicism and the universalizing and self-validating that has been endemic to it. Bryan Turner’s exceptionally important little book *Marx and The End of Orientalism* went a very great part of the distance towards fragmenting, dissociating, dislocating, and decentering the experiential terrain covered at present by universalizing historicism; what he suggests in discussing the epistemological dilemma is the need to go beyond the polarities and binary oppositions of Marxist-historicist thought (voluntarisms vs. determinism, Asiatic vs. Western society, change vs. stasis) in order to create a new type of analysis of plural, as opposed to single, objects. Similarly, in a whole series of studies produced in a number of both interrelated and frequently unrelated fields, there has been a general advance in the process of, as it were, breaking up, dissolving, and methodologically as well as critically re-conceiving the unitary field ruled hitherto by Orientalism, historicism, and what could be called essentialist universalism.

I shall be giving examples of this dissolving and decentering process in a moment. What needs to be said about it immediately is that it is neither purely methodological nor purely reactive in intent. You do

not respond, for example, to the tyrannical conjuncture of colonial power with scholarly Orientalism simply by proposing an alliance between nativist sentiment buttressed by some variety of native ideology to combat them. This, it seems to me, has been the trap into which many Third World and anti-imperialist activists fell in supporting the Iranian and Palestinian struggles, and who found themselves either with nothing to say about the abominations of Khomeini's regime or resorting, in the Palestine case, to the time-worn clichés of revolutionism and, if I might coin a deliberately barbaric phrase, rejectionary armed-strugglism after the Lebanese debacle. Nor can it be a matter simply of re-cycling the old Marxist or world-historical rhetoric, which only accomplishes the dubiously valuable task of re-establishing intellectual and theoretical ascendancy of the old, by now impertinent and genealogically flawed, conceptual models. No: we must, I believe, think both in political and above all theoretical terms, locating the main problems in what Frankfurt theory identified as domination and division of labor, and along with those, the problem of the absence of a theoretical and utopian as well as libertarian dimension in analysis. We cannot proceed, therefore, unless we dissipate and re-dispose the material of historicism into radically different objects and pursuits of knowledge, and we cannot do that until we are aware clearly that no new projects of knowledge can be constituted unless they fight to remain free of the dominance and professionalized particularism that come with historicist systems and reductive, pragmatic, or functionalist theories.

These goals are less grand and difficult than my description sounds. For the reconsideration of Orientalism has been intimately connected with many other activities of the sort I referred to earlier, and which it now becomes imperative to articulate in more detail. Thus, for example, we can now see that Orientalism is a praxis of the same sort, albeit in different territories, as male gender dominance, or patriarchy, in metropolitan societies: the Orient was routinely described as feminine, its riches as fertile, its main symbols the sensual woman, the harem, and and the despotic — but curiously attractive — ruler. Moreover, Orientals like Victorian housewives were confined to silence and to unlimited enriching production. Now much of this material is manifestly connected to the configurations of sensual, racial, and political asymmetry underlying mainstream modern Western culture, as adumbrated and illuminated respectively by feminists, by black studies

critics, and by anti-imperialist activists. To read, for example, Sandra Gilbert's recent and extraordinarily brilliant study of Rider Haggard's *She* is to perceive the narrow correspondence between suppressed Victorian sexuality at home, its fantasies abroad, and the tightening hold of imperialist ideology on the late 19th-century male imagination. Similarly, a work like Abdul JanMohamed's *Manichean Aesthetics* investigates the parallel, but unremittingly separate artistic worlds of white and black fictions of the same place, Africa, suggesting that even in imaginative literature a rigid ideological system operates beneath a freer surface. Or in a study like Peter Gran's *The Islamic Roots of Capitalism*, which is written out of a polemically although meticulously researched and scrupulously concrete anti-imperialist and anti-Orientalist historical stance, one can begin to sense what a vast invisible terrain of human effort and ingenuity lurks beneath the frozen Orientalist surface formerly carpeted by the discourse of Islamic or Oriental economic history.

There are many more examples that one could give of analyses and theoretical projects undertaken out of similar impulses as those fueling the anti-Orientalist critique. All of them are interventionary in nature, that is, they self-consciously situate themselves at vulnerable conjunctural nodes of ongoing disciplinary discourses where each of them posits nothing less than new objects of knowledge, new praxes of humanist (in the broad sense of the word) activity, new theoretical models that upset or at the very least radically alter the prevailing paradigmatic norms. One might list here such disparate efforts as Linda Nochlin's explorations of 19th-century Orientalist ideology as working within major art-historical contexts; Hanna Batatu's immense re-structuring of the terrain of the modern Arab state's political behavior; Raymond Williams's sustained examinations of structures of feeling, communities of knowledge, emergent or alternative cultures, patterns of geographical thought (as in his remarkable *The Country and The City*); Talal Asad's account of anthropological self-capture in the work of major theorists, and along with that his own studies in the field; Eric Hobsbawm's new formulation of "the invention of tradition" or invented practises studied by historians as a crucial index both of the historian's craft and, more important, of the invention of new emergent nations; the work produced in re-examination of Japanese, Indian, and Chinese culture by scholars like Masao Miyoshi, Eqbal Ahmad, Tarik Ali, Romila Thapar, the group around Ranajit Guha

(*Subaltern Studies*), Gayatri Spivak, and younger scholars like Homi Bhabha and Partha Mitter; the freshly imaginative reconsideration by Arab literary critics — the *Fusoul* and *Mawakif* groups, Elias Khouri, Kamal Abu Deeb, Mohammad Bannis, and others — seeking to redefine and invigorate the reified classical structures of Arabic literary performance, and as a parallel to that, the imaginative works of Juan Goytisolo and Salman Rushdie whose fictions and criticism are self-consciously written against the cultural stereotypes and representations commanding the field. It is worth mentioning here too the pioneering efforts of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, and the fact that twice recently, in their presidential addresses an American Sinologist (Benjamin Schwartz) and Indologist (Ainslee Embree) have reflected seriously upon what the critique of Orientalism means for their fields, a public reflection as yet denied Middle Eastern scholars. Perennially, there is the work carried out by Noam Chomsky in political and historical fields, an example of independent radicalism and uncompromising severity unequalled by anyone else today. Or in literary theory, there are the powerful theoretical articulations of a social, in the widest and deepest sense, model for narrative put forward by Fredric Jameson; Richard Ohmann's empirically arrived-at definitions of canon privilege and institution in his recent work; revisionary Emersonian perspectives formulated in the critique of contemporary technological and imaginative, as well as cultural ideologies by Richard Poirier; the decentering, redistributive ratios of intensity and drive studied by Leo Bersani.

One could go on mentioning many more, but I certainly do not wish to suggest that by excluding particular examples I have thought them less eminent or less worth attention. What I want to do in conclusion is to try to draw them together into a common endeavor which, it has seemed to me, can inform the larger enterprise of which the critique of Orientalism is a part. First, we note a plurality of audiences and constituencies; none of the works and workers I have cited claims to be working on behalf of One audience which is the only one that counts, or for one supervening, overcoming Truth, a truth allied to Western (or for that matter Eastern) reason, objectivity, science. On the contrary, we note here a plurality of terrains, multiple experiences, and different constituencies, each with its admitted (as opposed to denied) interest, political desiderata, disciplinary goals. All these efforts work out of what might be called a decentered consciousness, not less reflective

and critical for being decentered, for the most part non- and in some cases anti-totalizing and anti-systematic. The result is that instead of seeking common unity by appeals to a center of sovereign authority, methodological consistency, canonicity, and science, they offer the possibility of common grounds of assembly between them. They are therefore planes of activity and praxis, rather than one topography commanded by a geographical and historical vision locatable in a known center of metropolitan power. Second, these activities and praxes are consciously secular, marginal, and oppositional with reference to the mainstream, generally authoritarian systems from which they emanate, and against which they now agitate. Thirdly, they are political and practical in as much as they intend — without necessarily succeeding in implementing — the end of dominating, coercive systems of knowledge. I do not think it too much to say that the political meaning of analysis, as carried out in all these fields, is uniformly and programmatically libertarian by virtue of the fact that, unlike Orientalism, it is not based on the finality and closure of antiquarian or curatorial knowledge, but on investigative open models of analysis, even though it might seem that analyses of this sort — frequently difficult and abstruse — are in the final count paradoxically quietistic. I think we must remember the lesson provided by Adorno's negative dialectics, and regard analysis as in the fullest sense being *against* the grain, deconstructive, utopian.

But there remains the one problem haunting all intense, self-convicted, and local intellectual work, the problem of the division of labor, which is a necessary consequence of that reification and commodification first and most powerfully analysed in this century by Georg Lukács. This is the problem sensitively and intelligently put by Myra Jehlen for women's studies: whether in identifying and working through anti-dominant critiques, subaltern groups — women, blacks, and so on — can resolve the dilemma of autonomous fields of experience and knowledge that are created as a consequence. A double kind of possessive exclusivism could set in: the sense of being an excluding insider by virtue of experience (only women can write for and about women, and only literature that treats women or Orientals well is good literature), and second, being an excluding insider by virtue of method (only Marxists, anti-Orientalists, feminists can write about economics, Orientalism, women's literature).

This is where we are now, at the threshold of fragmentation and

specialization, which impose their own parochial dominations and fussy defensiveness, or on the verge of some grand synthesis which I for one believe could very easily wipe out both the gains and the oppositional consciousness provided hitherto by these counter-knowledges. Several possibilities propose themselves, and I shall conclude simply by listing them. A need for greater crossing of boundaries, for greater interventionism in cross-disciplinary activity, a concentrated awareness of the situation — political, methodological, social, historical — in which intellectual and cultural work is carried out. A clarified political and methodological commitment to the dismantling of systems of domination which since they are collectively maintained must, to adopt and transform some of Gramsci's phrases, be collectively fought, by mutual siege, war of maneuver *and* war of position. Lastly, a much sharpened sense of the intellectual's role both in the defining of a context and in changing it, for without that, I believe, the critique of Orientalism is simply an ephemeral pastime.

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