CHAPTER I

ORIENTALISM

Edward Said defines the term Orientalism, in his famous book by the same title, as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient".¹ This term is used to mean different things by different authors. It is Said who provided an extensive view and interpretation of the notion of orientalism for the purpose of providing a devastating critique. He brings forth three different but interdependent levels of meaning of this term in his work. First is the "most readily accepted designation for Orientalism", the academic meaning: "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient . . . either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism".² Second is "a more general meaning", generated out of the East-West distinction: "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the

¹ Edward W. Said, Orientalism (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 1. Several editions and reprints of this book are available. All references henceforth are from this original edition, unless otherwise stated.

² Ibid., p. 2.
Occident". The third meaning is "more historically and materially defined than either of the other two":

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient--dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.4

Orientalism: The Critical Tradition

Before going into other aspects of Saidian notion of orientalism and its theoretical and philosophical basis, it should be stated that Said's critique of orientalism falls within, and at the same time providing a significant break from, the tradition of an array of critical expositions by various scholars emanating from different perspectives from the 1960s onwards. Anouar Abdel-Malek, Norman Daniel, R. W. Southern, Romila Thapar, A.L. Tibawi, Abdallah Laroui, Ralph Coury, Bryan Turner, to name a few, came forward with critiques of orientalism from different angles and perspectives.

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 3.
Norman Daniel, in his well-documented study, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, wrote about the way in which Islam was perceived by the Christendom of the West from the Middle Ages. He brought forth the manner in which a "communal opinion" was established during that period, when the Christian West talked about Islam in a "near unanimity of opinion" from within the enclosure of its own belief system. He noted that, in general, if individuals "tend to exclude alien ideas", such an exclusion "applies even more to the body of opinion received by the societies to which an individual belongs". If the process of exclusion of "dangerous thoughts" may be an unconscious process in individuals, in the case of societies it "is likely to be more deliberate". It is this kind of an excluding process that contributed to making "Christian views impenetrable by any open concept of Islam". Daniel also noted that, as such, "a sympathetic exploration" of the beliefs of "strange and remote societies" was very rarely seen. It should be noted that this applies to Western views of Islam in general, views which still are informed by the "iron curtain" of the Middle Ages.


6. Ibid., pp. 251-52.

7. Ibid., p. 251.
Similarly, R. W. Southern's study, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, pointed out that "In understanding Islam, the West could get no help from antiquity, and no comfort from the present. For an age avowedly dependent on the past for its materials, this was a serious matter". 8

This serious anchorlessness in any meaningful understanding of Islam emanated from the Western legacy of an array of attempts without breaking the barriers of knowing other cultures and people; a legacy which did not help the West for an equitable interaction with the societies of the 'orient', but certainly helped it in promoting its interests of economy and power.

Southern observed that the "Western sense of superiority in every sphere of endeavour", which "has scarcely been challenged for three hundred years", came to stay as "part of our heritage, most painful to abandon or adjust". 9

Anouar Abdel-Malek in his seminal article "Orientalism in Crisis" offers a penetrating critique of what he called "traditional orientalism" and "neo-
orientalism". His critique came out of the understanding that "it is urgent to undertake a revision, a critical reevaluation of the general conception, the methods and implements for the understanding of the Orient that have been used by the West, notably from the beginning of the last century, on all levels in all fields". The profound changes of political nature that were developing within the third world, especially the victorious culmination of various national liberation movements, provided the context of the crisis of orientalism and therefore for a critical analysis of its theory and practice. According to Abdel-Malek, "the crisis strikes at the heart of orientalism: since 1945, it has been not only the 'terrain' that has escaped it, but also the 'men', until yesterday the 'object' of study, and, henceforth, sovereign 'subjects'". The conceptual critique offered by him strikes at the essentialising tendency of orientalism. He shows that orientalism treats "the Orient and the Orientals as an 'object' of study, stamped with an otherness--as all that is different, whether it be 'subject' or 'object'--but of a constitute otherness, of an essentialist character".

11. Ibid., p. 103.
12. Ibid., p. 104.
essentialist view, "which expresses itself through a characterized ethnist typology", which sometimes leads towards the level of racism, is further elucidated by Abdel-Malek:

According to traditional orientalists, an essence should exist--sometimes even clearly described in metaphysical terms--which constitutes the inalienable and common basis of all the beings considered; this essence is both "historical", since it goes back to the dawn of history, and fundamentally ahistorical, since it transfixes the being, "the object" of study, within its inalienable and non-evolutive specificity, instead of defining it as all other beings, states, nations, peoples and cultures--as a product, a resultant of the vection of the forces operating in the field of historical evolution. 14

A. L. Tibawi offered a well-studied critique of academic orientalism15 pointing out that "there is scarcely any academic pursuit, in the realm of the humanities, which has more unfortunate antecedents than


Islamic and Arabic studies in the West." According to him, studies on Islam produced by orientalists are, of course, "distinguished by erudition" with "learned footnotes and the array of sources", but going deeper into it, "one is bound to detect an alarming degree of speculation, guesswork and passing of judgement for which little or no concrete evidence is produced". He says that if history "in general is one of the most vulnerable of disciplines to the invasion of people from outside", this is especially true of the history of Islam, which could be written "almost unconsciously" by the orientalists. He states that unfortunately in orientalist study of the religion of Islam, "logical and natural order of representation is seldom followed and is often inverted".

Tibawi also writes about the wide discrepancy in the meaning of Islam to the followers of that religion and the image of it projected by orientalists. Even though advancement is made in studying Islam in the academic way, "the late medieval image of Islam remains substantially unaltered; it has only discarded old-fashioned clothes in favour of more modern attire". He observes that

16. Ibid., p. 185.
17. Ibid., p. 190.
18. Ibid., pp. 190-91.
19. Ibid., p. 195.
"Orientalism has on the whole failed to come to terms with Islamic thought and methods".\textsuperscript{20} Sixteen years later Tibawi published a second critique of orientalism\textsuperscript{21} in which he notes, by way of conclusion:

First, with certain honourable exceptions the professional Orientalists still persist in the distortion and misrepresentation of Islam . . . . Secondly, there is disturbing evidence of increased hostility to the Arabs, and by extension to Islam, originally created by Orientalists, and virtually recreating the medieval bigotry against the 'Saracen'.\textsuperscript{22}

Romila Thapar criticised orientalists like Vincent Smith and others for fostering an image of India nowhere near to reality in their writings. Orientalists focused on the study of dynasties rather than the people. She observed that their attention on dynastic history was due to "the assumption that in 'Oriental' societies the power of the ruler was supreme even in the day-to-day

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 312.


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 43.
functioning of the government". Moreover, that the study of institutions did not receive much emphasis was in part due to the belief that they did not undergo much change: an idea which also fostered the theory that Indian culture has been a static, unchanging culture for many centuries, largely owing to the lethargy of the Indian and his gloomy, fatalistic attitude to life. This of course is an exaggeration.

This prejudiced and exaggerated orientalist view of India obviously matches well with those views of Islam.

The methodological orientations of orientalism were subjected to scathing criticism by Abdallah Laroui in an important Diogenes article published in 1973. In Western orientalism, he observes "a narrowing of the methods used elsewhere". He attributes this methodological narrowness to "the structure of the research, the choice of postulates, the objectives being sought" and many other reasons. Laroui, at the onset,

26. Ibid., p. 12.
warns about the "cultural protectionism, in which each party will keep its patrimony for itself and forbid anyone else to have access to it",\textsuperscript{27} since this kind of a tendency was visible both within orientalism and its Muslim critiques.

Analysing G. von Grunbaum's works on Islam,\textsuperscript{28} Laroui points out that orientalism of the Grunbaum variety conceived culture as a "principle of elimination" with the consequence that "culture forms a closed system".\textsuperscript{29} Islam itself is viewed as culture in such works. The cultural "matrix" of Islam is at the centre of their logic. The undifferentiated use of Islam in such works goes to the level where "there is no difference between classical Islam and mediaeval Islam, or just Islam" so much so that

27. Ibid., pp. 13-14.


29. Laroui, n. 25, p. 18.
"one can draw examples from any period and from any source one chooses". 30

See, for example, an orientalist assertion of von Grunebaum:

It is essential to understand that Islamic civilization is a cultural entity which does not share our [the West's] profound aspirations. It is not vitally interested in rational introspection, and even less interested by the study of the structures of other cultures, neither as an end in itself nor as a means of reaching a better understanding of its own peculiarities and its own past. 31

Laroui finds that, in the end, a "quasi-equation" of the following sort results: "(Islam) (culture) (Arab culture) (pre-modern culture) (negative of modern culture)". Then in such a methodological realm, "agreements and contrasts are in fact states which exist between the modern West and pre-modern cultures". 32 This uneven temporality of comparativism and analysis is at the heart of orientalist scholarship.

30. Ibid., p. 27.

31. G. von Grunebaum, Modern Islam, n. 28, p. 55. This is quoted in Laroui's footnote on p. 34.

32. Laroui, n. 25, p. 35.
In an article entitled "Why Can't They Be Like Us?", Ralph Coury puts forth nakedly the orientalist assumptions on Islam:

One of the most pernicious and long-lived thematics of Western Orientalism has centred on the conviction that Islam and Islamic society are by nature totalitarian, that they are based upon the right of brute force unchecked by any mechanisms which work for self-criticism or which might lead toward a democratic and egalitarian humanism. It has been the conviction that Islamic society is by necessity a closed society in which force and violence and those who wield them are sanctified by religious and political traditions that are passively and unquestioningly accepted by a cowering people. 33

This orientalist thematic developed through the Middle Ages "played a new and specific role in the age of imperialism". 34 It, according to Coury, served imperialism as a political and ideological weapon, and to him, American and Israeli military interventions in the Arab World have been manifestations of the fact of ideas on Islam serving imperialist power.

34. Ibid., p. 125.
The Western Orientalist has often perceived a cultural and intellectual vacuum or vacancy which has its counter-part in the power vacuum perceived by the political and military strategists and the economic interests -- always in search of more lebensraum -- whom they serve. Vacuums, as we know . . . must be filled. 35

Bryan Turner tried to analyse the assumptions of orientalism and offered its critique at the social science realm. His explanation of orientalism goes thus: 'By 'Orientalism', I mean a syndrome of beliefs, attitudes and theories which infects, not only the classical works of Islamic studies, but also extensive areas of geography, economics and sociology'. 36

The basic arguments of the "syndrome" of orientalism are:

(i) social development is caused by characteristics which are internal to society;
(ii) the historical development of a society is either an evolutionary progress or a gradual decline; (iii) society is an 'expressive

35. Ibid., p. 128.

'totality' in the sense that all the institutions of a society are the expression of a primary essence.\(^{37}\)

According to Turner, through such arguments, the orientalists were able to establish two essentially dichotomous worlds of the Western society and the Islamic society, the former continuously progresses towards "democratic industrialism" and the latter destined to be "timelessly stagnant" or is in perpetual decline from its very formation.\(^{38}\)

Turner suggests, in other words, that "Orientalism is based on an epistemology which is essentialist, empiricist and historicist".\(^{39}\) These characteristic features of the orientalist epistemology are explained by Turner as follows:

The essentialist assumption is present in the notion that 'Islam' is a coherent, homogeneous, global entity, and also in the decline thesis where Islam is seen as declining because of some flaw in its essence. Social and political decline is a consequence of some historically

\(^{37}\) Ibid.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., p. 7.
ever-present element--authoritarianism, the lack of autonomous oppositional groups or laws, slavish adherence to formal custom or the failure of ruling institutions. The inner, flawed essence unfolds in history as a teleological process toward some final end-state which is the collapse of Islam and its civilisation. In this historicist approach, the dynamic history of Western civilization, punctured by constant, progressive revolutions, is contrasted with the static history of Islam in which popular uprisings are merely an index of despotism and decay. In this kind of Orientalist analysis, issues of epistemology and method are avoided.40

Even though Perry Anderson wrote the chapter "The House of Islam" in his book Lineages of the Absolutist State drawing a lot from orientalist sources, the concluding remark he makes is worth noting here:

But one procedural lesson is absolutely plain: Asian development cannot in any way be reduced to a uniform residual category, left over after the canons of European evolution have been established. Any serious theoretical exploration of the historical field outside feudal Europe

40. Ibid.
will have to supersede traditional and generic contrasts within it, and proceed to a concrete and accurate typology of social formations and State systems in their own right, which respects their very great differences of structure and development. It is merely in the night of our ignorance that all alien shapes take on the same hue.41

From the above analysis of the critiques of orientalism, varied observations were forthcoming but with certain central common themes. It is necessary then to search for a theoretical and methodological field within which one's understanding of orientalism attains some coherence. Obviously Abdel-Malek, Laroui and Turner provided the ground for such an endeavour and Said developed it further.

'Orient' as the Other

Understanding other peoples and cultures remained, and remains to be, problematic; not to speak about generating a tradition of knowledge or scholarship on them. Edward Said asserts that "the fundamental problem is . . . how to reconcile one's identity and the

actualities of one's own culture, society and history to the reality of other identities, cultures, peoples". Bryan Turner also points to this particular question when he says that "the way we talk about other people is a central problem of all human interaction and one of the constitutive debates within the social sciences".43

Generating knowledge requires the knower to identify and speak about an object. In other words, it is through the Self dealing with its object, the Other, that knowledge is produced. Within the social sciences, one is talking about the researcher, the teacher, the policy-analyst, including the sociologist, the anthropologist, the political scientist, the strategist, the diplomat, etc. constituting himself/herself as the subject, tackling the object namely a particular society, political system, religion or tribe with its own peoples and cultures.

Conventionally, in social sciences, the subject studies, interprets or deals with the object with the tools in one's command by treating the object as a static entity. The possibility, that the object of study—in the social science field it is the people of a particular


society or culture—in itself possesses the ability, or, is in a position to challenge the hypotheses and notions put forth from the subject position, is not properly taken care of. This remains a major problem area for such researches and studies.

Another important matter to be considered in this context is the fact that, as Long and Borneman put it, "our own discursive practices are indubitably no less rooted in particular institutional situations and concerns than are those we describe". In other words, it is a flawed view that emerges from any study, research or perception of a particular social or political system, of which the one who studies deals only with his/her object's several aspects of institutional contexts and not with the context of the subject's own position. The self/other dichotomy has to be approached as a relationship of contextualities rather than distant and neutral entities, in order that any worthwhile knowledge is produced.

Edward Said, in a recent piece, puts forth some of the fundamental methodological assumptions of his writings, in which he claims to have unravelled the connections between the "struggle for control over

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"territory" and the "struggle over historical and social meaning". Those assumptions include the idea that the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another different and competing alter ego. The construction of identity—for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction—involves establishing opposites and "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from "us". Each age and society recreates its "others". Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of "other" is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies.45

Simone de Beauvoir established long back that "no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself" and that "no

subject will readily volunteer to become the object, the inessential; it is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One: The Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One". 46 For Jacques Lacan, the Other signifies many things: the Other is the structure that produces the subject and it is also the location the subject positions itself. 47

In a sense, then, the idea of the Other becomes operational when one tries to know oneself. "The need to ascertain what makes up our own being, to define our very identity and the features of the world in which we live, that is, the need to have knowledge of ourselves and our culture, has always to be gratified by an act of differentiation", says Zhang Longxi. 48 In that cognitive order, Longxi observes further that "East or the Orient, which stands for the Other over against which the West has


been able to identify itself, is indeed a conceptual given in the process of self-understanding of the West, and an image built up in that formative process as much as the West itself".\textsuperscript{49}

As noted before, Anouar Abdel-Malek has shown how orientalism considers the orient and the orientals as an object stamped with a constitutive, essentialist otherness.\textsuperscript{50} In this tradition, Said observes:

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 politics was the Orient's colonial accumulation and acquisition by Europe. The Orient was, therefore, not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent other.\textsuperscript{51}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 114.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Abdel-Malek, n. 10, p. 107.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", \textit{Race and Class}, Vol. 27 (1985), pp. 4-5; emphasis added.
\end{itemize}
This idea is expressed clearly by Said in *Orientalism* when he stated that "the limitations of Orientalism are . . . the limitations that follow upon disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region".\(^{52}\) He further notes that orientalism perceives "the Orient as something whose existence is not only displayed but has remained fixed in time and place for the West" so much so that "entire periods of the Orient's cultural, political, and social history are considered mere responses to the West" and in such a theatre, the "West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior".\(^{53}\)

If the orient is frozen temporally and spatially for the advantage of the West, the Western subject positions itself outside time and space. As Nancy Hartsock argues, "the philosophical and historical creation of a devalued 'Other' was the necessary precondition for the creation of the transcendental rational subject outside of time and space, the subject who is the speaker in Enlightenment Philosophy".\(^{54}\) And this "universalist claims of modern

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52. Said, n. 1, p. 108.
Western social philosophy are themselves limited by the contingencies of global power.\textsuperscript{55} To put it differently, "the very notion of a distinctive 'occidental' tradition (against which all that is Other can be generically homogenized and contrasted)" of orientalism "is itself a modern creation, and one not wholly unconnected with capitalism's global expansion."\textsuperscript{56}

The self/other dichotomy viewed in the context of a critique of Enlightenment or modernist philosophical tradition posits questions of 'representation' and of the possibility of knowledge itself. As Bryan Turner points out, even while one encounters philosophical problems in making valid comparisons, "it would be difficult to conceive of knowledge which was not comparative. To know something is, in principle, to be able to speak about it, and language necessarily involves contrasts and comparisons between sameness and difference."\textsuperscript{57} Language in itself is a major focus of philosophical attention for thinkers from varied theoretical moorings like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Partha Chatterjee, \textit{The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories} (New Delhi, 1994), p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Turner, n. 43, p. 10.
\end{itemize}
Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Charles Taylor and others. In the contemporary theoretical milieu, with the erosion of classical consensus, words no longer comprised a transparent medium through which Being is shone. Instead, language as an opaque and yet strangely abstract, ungraspable essence was to emerge as an object for philological attention, thereafter to neutralize and inhibit any attempt at representing reality mimetically.\(^{58}\)

As Said observes,

representation has . . . had to contend not only with the consciousness of linguistic forms and conventions, but also with the pressures of such transpersonal, transhuman, and transcultural forces as class, the unconscious, gender, race, and structure . . . . To represent someone or even something has now become an endeavor as complex and as problematic as an asymptote, with consequences for certainty and decidability as fraught with difficulties as can be imagined.\(^{59}\)

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59. Ibid.
The intertwining of knowledge and power again complicates the self/other relations. In most cases, the Other becomes the site of exercising power by the subject. The Western tradition of knowledge on the orient, that is, orientalism, is then fraught with mechanisms of power. In dealing with the question of representing the orient, the concept of a discourse rather than language proper will be useful. One could approach the system of knowledge on the orient, that is, orientalism as discourse, a discourse of power, in order to comprehend the actuality of this representation. This point will be taken up after a while.

On resolving the problem of knowing about other cultures, Edward Said suggests a certain cautious path. He is of the opinion that such a knowledge is possible if two conditions are met. First, one who studies another culture "must feel that he or she is answerable to and in uncoercive contact with the culture and the people being studied". Second, since knowledge about other cultures and for that matter human society itself rests upon interpretation, and since "no interpretation is complete without an interpretation of the situation", one who studies another culture should be conscious of the social and situational nature, rather the context of the interpretation of texts. "Interpretation is first of all
a form of making: that is, it depends on the willed intentional activity of the human mind, molding and forming the objects of its attention with care and study".60 Said calls for "conscious willed effort of overcoming distances and cultural barriers", distances in both time and space of the texts produced in alien cultures. And he reminds that "there is never interpretation, understanding, and then knowledge where there is no interest".61

As hinted above, considering the fact that orientalism is a way of dealing with the orient, positioning the latter as the Other, and that the tradition of orientalism is subjected to global power, it is imperative, on the one hand, to treat orientalism as a discourse centering its object, the orient, and, on the other, to unravel the linkages of the orientalist discourse to relations of power. First, let the conceptual framework of a discourse be provided in order to grasp the operation of orientalism as a discourse.

The Discourse of Orientalism

In identifying and elaborating the phenomenon of orientalism, Michel Foucault's idea of a 'discourse' seems

61. Ibid., pp. 156-58; emphasis in the original.
to be highly useful. Edward Said's own expositions on orientalism have substantially been influenced by the Foucauldian notion. Said acknowledges this at the very outset of his book Orientalism and remarks:

My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.62

It is by treating orientalism as a discourse that Said has been able to deal with its expanse, both temporal and spacial, with some degree of coherence. It will be useful, on the one hand, to have a discussion on the basic tenents of the notion of a discourse and, on the other, to extent such a discussion beyond the Saidian adaptation in order that newer meanings are generated on the orientalist discourse.

Foucault's idea of a discourse refers to "delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a

legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and
the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts
and theories". As Foucault himself mentions in
The Archaeology of Knowledge, the term ‘discourse’ is used
equivocally, in "many different senses". Notwithstanding
his allusion to equivocal usage, he tries to evolve the
idea somewhat systematically. He defines ‘discourse’, at
the primary level, as "a group of verbal performances" and
furthers it to mean "that which was produced (perhaps all
that was produced) by the groups of signs". This is
modified further in the following way: "discourse is
constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as
they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be
assigned particular modalities of existence". Finally, he
defines it "as a group of statements that belong to a
single system of formation". It is in this sense that
Foucault speaks of clinical discourse, economic discourse,
etc.

According to Joan Scott, a "discourse is not a
language or a text but a historically, socially, and
institutionally specific structure of statements, terms,

63. Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory and
Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, Donald F.

64. Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, A. M.

65. Ibid.
categories, and beliefs". Diane Macdonell says, "discourse is social". "Discourse is a political commodity", says Colin Gordon. According to him, discourses are "bound by regulations enforced through social practices of appropriation, control and 'policing'". In short, a discourse is temporal-spacial specific.

The contextuality of a discourse is stressed by well-known discourse theorist, Michel Pecheux:

One should not pretend that any discourse would be a miraculous aerolite, independent of networks of memory and the social trajectories within which it erupts . . . . Any given discourse is the potential sign of a movement within the sociohistorical filiations of identification . . . .


This he says along with the assertion that "a discourse by its very existence, marks the possibility of a destructuring-restructuring of these networks and trajectories".  

According to Pecheux, discourse analysis can function if there is space for interpretation. He notes that "there is something of the 'other' in societies and in history, a link (identification or transference) corresponding to this 'other' proper to discursivity is possible, that is, a relation that opens up the possibility of interpretation". 

In this sense, orientalism could be analysed as a discourse wherein the orient is identified as the Other. Not only that orientalism functions as a discourse, it functions as a discourse embedded with power. In this context, therefore, it is important to discern Michel Foucault's conception of a discourse in relation to the power-knowledge nexus; a relationship which he exposes in his different works.

**Discourse and the Power-Knowledge Nexus**

Foucault brings in the play of power in the production of knowledge. The power-knowledge relations

70. Ibid.
71. Ibid., p. 647.
are explained very well in the following passage.

Perhaps . . . we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical
transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.\textsuperscript{72}

This Foucauldian concept of mutual implication of power and knowledge is vital in understanding the constitutive and distributary processes of the orientalist discourse. The inextricable power-knowledge linkage effect and imply the constitution of the subject-object (occident-orient) positions and the mode of orientalist scholarship, disguised as 'pure' knowledge. Foucault further expresses the power-knowledge nexus vividly in another context:

No body of knowledge can be formed without a system of communications, records, accumulation and displacement which is in itself a form of power and which is linked, in its existence and functioning, to the other forms of power.

\textsuperscript{72} Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Alan Sheridan, trans. (Harmondsworth, 1979), pp. 27-28; emphasis added.
Conversely, no power can be exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge. On this level, there is not knowledge on the one side and society on the other, or science and the state, but only the fundamental forms of knowledge/power . . . .

What Foucault has been trying to show was that "how knowledge is always conditioned in a certain system, and how difficult it is to get out of the confinement of the historical a priori, the epistemes or the fundamental codes of Western culture". The classificatory and ordering mechanisms and the epistemic system evolved out of them, within which discourses operate, are infested by relations of power.

Maxime Rodinson opines that the present state of affairs within the field of Islamic studies or orientalist scholarship has its origins in a "unified system of thought" developed in Europe. He says: "I am unsure whether this system should be called episteme, using Michel Foucault’s term for systems more or less similar to this one". It was through many influences during the nineteenth century, writes Rodinson, that "this system of

73. Michel Foucault, quoted in Alan Sheridan, Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth (London, 1986), p. 131.
74. Longxi, n. 48, p. 110.
thought, or collective scientific outlook" evolved. Edward Said points out that the "inauguration of Orientalism was a considerable feat" in the following ways:

It made possible a scientific terminology; it banished obscurity and instated a special form of illumination for the Orient; it established the figure of the Orientalist as central authority for the Orient; it legitimized a special kind of specifically coherent Orientalist work; it put into cultural circulation a form of discursive currency by whose presence the Orient henceforth would be spoken for; above all, the work of the inaugurators carved out a field of study and a family of ideas which in turn could form a community of scholars whose lineage, traditions, and ambitions were at once internal to the field and external enough for general prestige.


76. Said, n. 1, p. 122; emphasis in the original.
Thus orientalism as a system of knowledge with a gamut of procedures was established in the nineteenth century. As noted earlier, Foucault was talking about the formation of a body of knowledge with its own system of accumulation, communications, etc., which in turn is a process of power. In this line, Said argues that modern orientalism, unlike precolonial imagination and awareness, "embodies a systematic discipline of accumulation". The power of such a system is expressed by Said when he says that "far from this being exclusively an intellectual or theoretical feature, it made Orientalism fatally tend towards the systematic accumulation of human beings and territories".

The orientalist epistemic order evolved a consensual intellectual field for its practitioner.

A field like Orientalism has a cumulative and corporate identity, one that is particularly strong given its associations with traditional learning (the classics, the Bible, philology), public institutions (governments, trading companies, geographical societies, universities), and generically determined writing (travel

77. Ibid., p. 123.
78. Ibid.
books, books of exploration, fantasy, exotic description). 79

Orientalism, for Said, then, with all its corporate character, is "fundamentally a political doctrine". 80

Foucault says thus: "Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together". 81 To him, discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. 82

It is in this Foucauldian line that John Frow writes: "The clash of voices is a clash of power, and the analysis of discourse is an analysis of and an intervention in this politics". 83 The discourse of orientalism, then, is an intersection, a site of power and its contention. There is need to come back to the question of resistance later.

80. Ibid., p. 204.
82. Ibid., p. 101.
Discourse and Discipline

In his inaugural lecture at the College de France on 2 December 1970, Michel Foucault pointed out that discourses are controlled and delimited by procedures of "exclusion".84 According to him, in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.85

Foucault talked about "another principle of limitation in what is called, not sciences but 'disciplines': a principle which is itself relative and mobile; which permits construction, but within narrow confines". In other words, he was talking about "disciplinary" barriers to discourses. He defines a discipline as "a domain of objects, a set of methods, a corpus of propositions considered to be true, a play of rules and definitions, of

84. See, Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse", Ian McLeod, trans. in Robert Young, ed., Untying the Text (Boston and London, 1981), pp. 51-77; reprinted in Michael J. Shapiro, ed., Language and Politics (New York, 1984), pp. 108-38. Another translation by Rupert Swyer was first published in Social Science Information, April 1971, pp. 7-30; and was reprinted as an appendix to Foucault, n. 64, pp. 215-37. Reference here is to the Shapiro reprint.

85. Ibid., p. 109.
techniques and instruments". It is "at the disposal of anyone who wants to or is able to use it", and it is functionally independent of and in opposition to the principle of the author. Also, in Foucault’s view,

contemporary Western societies can be characterized as "disciplinarian", and that discipline, as a strategy for normalizing individual conduct or administering the affairs of social collectivities, has become the general formula for domination in these societies.

The above Foucauldian understanding is elaborated by Mark Blasius in the context of "world order" studies. He deals with discourse as "a language of political experience". In his words, the discourse,

not only organizes our understanding of daily life, that is, our understanding of the human condition and its relation to the way in which our society is ordered, but sets definite limits upon what we can do, because it is discourse

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86. Ibid., p. 118. For an elaboration of the Foucauldian notion of a "discipline", see also, Jan Goldstein, "Foucault Among the Sociologists: The 'Disciplines' and the History of the Professions", History and Theory, Vol. 23 (1984), pp. 170-92.

itself that defines subjective experience and ensures that only a certain kind of communication can take place between individuals and groups.  

Blasius notes that a discourse implies what Charles Taylor called a "common reference world" of meanings, institutions and practices. In his opinion, the study of discourses is central to studying world order. In such an endeavour, following Sheldon Wolin, he distinguishes three discourses: theoretical, strategic and rhetorical, which "together constitute a discursive practice of world order". 

Theoretical discourse is the fulcrum of this discursive field. "It is a constitutive knowledge that makes a claim to the truth about the nature of the reality in which world order is or should be grounded". Strategic discourse, in the contemporary state-system, is related to the language of "policymaking". "It is increasingly the language of administrators and others who are in the position of having to make decisions by choosing more or less narrowly defined alternatives". It is concerned with the "instrumentalities" of operationalising the constitutive principles. Even when strategic discourse


89. Ibid., pp. 245, 246, 247.
"presupposes a theoretical understanding of world order", it "has increasingly exercised a hegemony over all the modes of discourse of world order". The hegemony of this discourse allows the state to practice greater social control. Such "discourses act both to normalize all social relations and to accumulate power over the means of domestic survival, the institutional manifestations of which are monitored and regulated by the state". Rhetorical discourse "presupposes a context within which divergent views can be shared about the best instrumentalities by which to effect the constitutive principle of political life. It thus relies upon formal structures of communication and rules about their use". Blasius underlines the significance of rhetorical discourse by pointing out its transformation in recent times:

Rhetorical discourse is progressively becoming more of a "language of connotation" . . . . As it has become less reliant upon direct and verbal communication, it has become more invested with the covert communication of meaning. That is to say, it employs not just gestures, tone of voice, and other nonverbal elements, but cultural symbols that do not rely upon rational or critical faculties for their communication.90

90. Ibid., pp. 247, 249, 250, 251, 253.
In a way, the layers of discourses, especially the three mentioned above, operating within the discursive field of world order studies or international relations have their correspondence with the discursive and disciplinary realm of orientalism. The Foucauldian notion of a discourse, with its function of exclusion and the boundaries imposed on it by disciplines, helps a great deal in dealing with orientalism.

There have been claims by authors that oriental studies constitute a science or according to some, an integral science. Whatever be the validity of such a claim, in understanding orientalism the conceptual framework of a 'discipline' provided by Foucault seems to be in place. It is pertinent to note that Foucault himself moves away from the standard view that there is a deep gap between valid science and ideologically influenced inquiry and leads us to see scientific objectivity and ideological bias as two intertwined aspects of a discipline's rootedness in a discursive formation.

91. For example, see, Rodinson, n. 75 and V. M. Alexeyev, Science of the East: Articles and Documents, compiled by M. V. Bankovskaya (Moscow, 1982). See also the reviews of this book by S. L. Tikhvinsky, A. S. Martynov and I. S. Smirnov in Oriental Studies in the USSR, Annual 1987 (Moscow, 1988), pp. 263-85.

The mechanism of exclusion, acting within the disciplinary world of orientalism, filters certain thoughts and elements regarding the orient in such a way as to produce an orientalist discourse that suits well with the subject position defined and strategically placed by the cognitive, cultural and political imperatives of a world order with its constituent regimes of state and imperialism. The functioning of this filtering grid makes the orientalist discourse so monofaceted and so unmindful of and unconnected with the realities of oriental societies. With all this, and with much more "ideological" bandwagon connected to the orientalist epistemology, oriental studies still is able to claim and retain "scientific" credentials.

The "Regime" of Orientalism

Foucault talks about a "regime" of truth in the context of an analysis of the linkage between truth and power. Knowledges, discourses, disciplines and the very ordering of social practices are integrally linked with claims to truth which in turn is infested with power. The operation of discourses and disciplines has to be viewed within this Foucauldian regime of truth. This demystification and politicisation of truth by Foucault demands attention.
Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.93

Knowledges are connected to the grid of power in such a way that the regime of truth functions in a given society validating certain discourses or body of knowledge as "true knowledge".94 This legitimated body of knowledge "becomes the basis of policy formation" while another "whole set of knowledge" is being considered a "suspect, discredited, excluded, and disqualified" lot.95

93. Foucault, n. 68, p. 131; See also, Rudi Visker, Michel Foucault: Genealogy as Critique, Chris Turner, trans. (London, 1995), pp. 112-16.


95. Ibid.
As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Edward Said holds the view that orientalism should be approached as a discourse in order to grasp the discipline by which Europe was able to manage/produce the orient in various ways. Elsewhere he maintains that "Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice".\(^96\) This dual usage of orientalism as a discourse and as a discipline need not be unproblematic. In order to generate useful meanings out of this duality, the concept of a "regime" can be introduced here. This "regime" is understood in terms of a "discourse/discipline set".\(^97\) According to James Keeley,

96. Said, n. 1, p. 73; emphasis added.

This politicised, ordered space or area of activity with the occupant actors and their specific relationships is referred to as a regime. The discourse/discipline set in the Foucauldian parameter is operational in the case of a regime in such a way that these actors are defined and become visible as targets of observation and control: they are open to inspection and action and thus are no longer private. The ordering techniques provide means for observing, documenting, classifying, comparing, assessing, and individualizing target actors as well as for correcting behavior, punishing or repressing undesired behavior, and producing desired behavior.

The concept of a regime is invoked basically to describe and strengthen the idea that orientalism constitutes a site of operation of power and, as mentioned earlier, to show that orientalism normalises, regulates and filters behavior of the actors involved in such a way that its functions in international politics give rise to conformative discourses and policy options.

98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
Biopower, Hegemony and Orientalism

Conventional political theory has been preoccupied with notions of power operating from above and its major concern has been "state power". But thinkers like Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault have departed considerably from that tradition by locating power "largely outside the boundaries of the juridical state". Gramsci's "bottom to top" approach deals with "hegemony" which "the dominant group exercises throughout society", and according to him, this form of power operates in the superstructural "level" called "civil society" which is "the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private'". The deployment of power in the form of "hegemony" is placed by Gramsci along with that of "direct domination" at the "level" of "political society" or "state". According to Joseph Femia, Gramsci's theory of hegemony involves two major claims:

The first is an analytic explanatory one: that consensus over values and beliefs is the major source of cohesion in bourgeois society. The


second claim is empirical: that existing
capitalist societies do indeed exhibit consensual integration.\textsuperscript{102}

This consensual, integrative and disciplining nature of
hegemony help explain orientalism as a site of power.\textsuperscript{103}
Edward Said finds that "it is hegemony, or rather the
result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives
Orientalism the durability and the strength . . . ."\textsuperscript{104}

Foucault has been concerned not with "power" \textit{per se}
but with "relationships of power". As he mentions in an
interview,

when one speaks of "power", people think
immediately of a political structure, a
government, a dominant social class, the master
facing the slave, and so on. That is not at all
what I think when I speak of "relationships of power". I mean that in human relations, whatever
they are--whether it be a question of
communicating verbally, . . . or a question of a
love relationship, an institutional or economic


\textsuperscript{103} For a discussion on the nature of "consensus" politics in the US, see Chapter II.

\textsuperscript{104} Said, n. 1, p. 7.
relationship—power is always present: I mean the relationship in which one wishes to direct the behavior of another. 105

This notion of power in Foucault is referred to as "bio-power". 106 He has been pointing towards the "capillary form of existence" of power, "the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives". 107 Even when Foucault puts forward a theory of power from below, like Gramsci, he notes the significance of the state in the relations of power. For him, "the state is not simply one of the forms or specific situations of the exercise of power—even if it is the most important—but in a certain way all other forms of power relation must refer to it". 108 This, to Foucault, is not because power relations are derived from the state;


106. See, Foucault, n. 81, pp. 140-44, for details on this concept.


it is rather because power relations have come more and more under state control (although this state control has not taken the same form in pedagogical, judicial, economic, or family systems). In referring here to the restricted sense of the word "government", one could say that power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of or under the auspices of, state institutions. 109

Thus, this Foucauldian notion of relations of power operating at and reaching into individual bodies and their relationships, but at the same time, "governmentalised" in or under state mechanisms, viewed conjunctionally with the Gramscian conception of hegemony serves to explain the depolyment and function of orientalist disciplinary order and discourses as a network of limitation, control and domination, thus availing consensual opinions and attitudes continually reinforced within such a network.

Strategic Imagery of Power Relations

Foucault's analysis of power has been fraught with "images of war, conflict, and resistance", or as Joseph Rouse puts it, Foucault "explicitly proposed a martial

109. Ibid.
imagery in order to emphasize the dynamics and non-
systematicity of power and knowledge". 110 The Foucauldian
project of analysis of power "from the ground up" has been
focusing "at the level of tiny local events where battles
are unwittingly enacted by players who don't know what
they are doing". 111 According to Rouse, Foucault's
"conception of power as constituted by the enactment or
reproduction of social alignments explains why Foucault is
drawn toward conceiving power in terms of war or struggle,
and its intelligibility in terms of strategy and
tactics". 112 Foucault explains his position why he has
been behind "military metaphors" to talk about power
relations in very simple terms in an interview:

One thing seems certain to me; it is that for the
moment we have, for analysing the relations of
power, only two models: a) the one proposed by
law (power as law, interdiction, institutions)
and b) the military or strategic model in terms
of power relations. The first one has been much
used and its inadequacy has, I believe, been
demonstrated: we know very well that law does not
describe power.

110. Joseph Rouse, "Power/Knowledge", in Gary Gutting,
ed., The Cambridge Companion to Foucault (Cambridge,

111. Ian Hacking, "The Archaeology of Foucault", The New

The other model is also much discussed . . . we use ready-made ideas or metaphors ("the war of all against all", "the struggle for life"), or again formal schemata (strategies are very much in vogue among certain sociologists and economists, especially Americans). I think this analysis of power relations would have to be tightened up. 113

In the case of discourses, Foucault points out the benefits of employing "military metaphors": "Endeavouring . . . to decipher discourse through the use of spacial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power". 114

In his analysis of the interrelationship between relations of power and relations of strategy, Foucault suggests that one may call power strategy the totality of the means put into operation to implement power effectively or to maintain it. One may also speak of a strategy proper to power relations


114. Foucault, n. 68, p. 70.
insofar as they constitute modes of action upon possible action, the action of others. One can therefore interpret the mechanisms brought into play in power relations in terms of strategies. But most important is obviously the relationship between power relations and confrontation strategies. For, it is true that at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, then there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle...\textsuperscript{115}

Discourse, Power and Resistance

As seen in the above quotation, and as Foucault explains elsewhere, "in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance".\textsuperscript{116} In spite of his claim that there exists the possibility "of violent resistance, of escape, of ruse, of strategies that reverse the situation",\textsuperscript{117} Foucault’s conception of power

\textsuperscript{115} Foucault, n. 108, p. 793-94.

\textsuperscript{116} Foucault, n. 105, p. 123.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
relations attracted a lot of critical attention. Edward Said, who himself benefited from the Foucauldian notion of power-knowledge, points out that "Foucault's imagination of power is largely with rather than against it", or in other words, "Foucault was mainly attracted to... thinking about power from the standpoint of its actual realization, not of opposition to it".\textsuperscript{118} According to Said, there is a paradox in Foucault: "Foucault's imagination of power was by his analysis of power to reveal its injustice and cruelty, but by his theorization to let it go on more or less unchecked".\textsuperscript{119} In the same vein, Keith Gandal notes that Foucault's politics was a "radical reformism" in the sense that his radicalism was not one attempting to avoid cooptation but one that accepted the latter from the beginning as inevitable and necessary.\textsuperscript{120} Critics of Foucault also point out that within the "spiderless web of power" which he enunciated, "acts of resistance hardly seem sustainable".\textsuperscript{121}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ibid., p. 152.
\end{itemize}
Charles Taylor offers a critique of Foucault by describing his historiography as "strategies without projects" and by stating that a "strategic pattern cannot just be left hanging, unrelated to our conscious ends and projects". Peter Dews notes that "Foucault's thought is rooted in a highly individual historical vision . . . and is concerned with the forms of knowledge and modes of social organization characteristic of capitalist modernity" and therefore "his theoretical formulations on the nature of power" could be comprehended within the contextual realm of such a vision. In such a context, in Said's words, "the undifferentiated power he [Foucault] seemed to ascribe to modern society" in itself becomes problematic to the effect that

With this profoundly pessimistic view went also a singular lack of interest in the force of effective resistance to it, in choosing

122. Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", in Charles Taylor, Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers, Vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 169, 171. This article, an insightful critique of Foucault, was first published in Political Theory, Vol. 12 (1984), pp. 152-83, and was reprinted in Hoy, n. 118. Taylor suggests that Foucault was moving in his later works towards freeing his analysis from the paradox visible within his theoretical universe. For an assessment of the shift in Foucault in his last phase, see, Peter Dews, "The Return of the Subject in Late Foucault", Radical Philosophy, No. 51 (1989), pp. 37-41.

particular sites of intensity, choices which, we see from the evidence on all sides, always exist and are often successful in impeding, if not actually stopping, the progress of tyrannical power. 124

The strategy of confronting domination involves a project, as Taylor aptly suggests. If one is thinking of a project of decolonisation, it involves, at the level of discourse, attempts to comprehend and delineate the nature of dominant discourses like orientalism and to operationalise counter-discursive strategies enabling the assertion of the subjugated self. The following remarks by Said seem to be compelling:

To the extent that modern history in the West exemplifies for Foucault the confinement and elision of marginal, oppositional and eccentric groups, there is, I believe, a salutary virtue in testimonials by members of those groups asserting their right of self-representation within the total economy of discourse. Foucault is certainly right--and even prescient--in showing how discourse is not only that which translates struggle or systems of domination, but that for which struggles are conducted . . . . What he

seemed not quite as willing to grant is, in fact, the relative success of these counter-discursive attempts first to show the misrepresentations of discursive power, to show, in Fanon’s words, the violence done to psychically and politically repressed inferiors in the name of advanced culture, and then afterwards to begin the difficult, if not always tragically flawed project of formulating the discourse of liberation.125

It is true that Foucault talks about an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" in the critical field.126 What Taylor and Said try to put across on the question of self-representation and the project of liberation seems to be of crucial significance in the context of the working of dominant power and discourses that deny the scope for self-assertion.

Orientalism as a Colonial Discourse

Said has spoken about orientalism as "the system of European or Western knowledge about the Orient" which "becomes synonymous with European domination of the

125. Ibid., p. 153; emphasis in the original.
126. Foucault, n. 68, pp. 81-83.
Orient".  

It is in the context of this colonial character of orientalism that thoughts about a liberating counter-discourse or a decolonisation strategy become significant. Tackling this tradition of a power-packed discourse is in no way an easy proposition. Orientalism's influence and longevity, which cannot be glossed over when considering such a strategy, emerge out of its specific character.

Orientalism staked its existence, not upon its openness, its receptivity to the Orient, but rather on its internal, repetitious consistency about its constitutive will-to-power over the Orient. In such a way Orientalism was able to survive revolutions, world wars, and the literal dismemberment of empires. 

Gyan Prakash, reflecting on Said's analysis of orientalism mentions three key elements contributing to its coherence: first, its authoritative status; second, its fabrication of the Orient in terms of founding essences invulnerable to historical change and prior to their representation in knowledge; and third, its incestuous relationship with the

128. Ibid., p. 222.
Western exercise of power over what we call the third world.129

The epistemological-cum-political function of orientalism not only effect domination in the West's dealings with the third world but also generate such a phenomenon within these national contexts. Said's contribution in this regard is stressed by Xiaomei Chen when she says that

Said seeks to show how Western imperialist images of its colonial others--images that, of course, are inevitably and sharply at odds with the self-understanding of the indigenous non-Western cultures they purport to represent--not only govern the West's hegemonic policies, but were imported into the West's political and cultural colonies where they affected native points of view and thus served as instruments of domination themselves.130


Bringing in the coloniser/colonised dichotomy seems to be in place for explaining the operations of the discourse of orientalism. Said has been trying to expound, throughout his book, the way in which the orient is being 'orientalised' through such a discourse of power.131 It is not only the 'Oriental' who is implicated in the operation of this political discourse but the 'Westerner' as well. Most works on colonial subjectivity, following those of Said, argued for seeing "both the coloniser and the colonised as inscribed in a range of subject positions which are shifting and contradictory rather than unitary and stable".132 The colonisers were "drawing racial, sexual, and class boundaries in terms of social, spatial and symbolic distance" and were "actually formulating these as integral to the maintenance of colonial rule".133 They were defining "authority and

131. Said, n. 1, pp. 5-6; 65-67 and many other instances.

132. Reina Lewis, "'Only Women Should Go to Turkey': Henriette Browne and the Women's Question", Third Text, No. 22 (1993), p. 54. Most of the work on colonial discourse talk about the 'colonised subjects' and not the 'colonising subject', says David Trotter, whose following article provides a discussion on this aspect: David Trotter, "Colonial Subjects", Critical Quarterly, Vol. 32 (1990), pp. 3-20.

legitimacy through the difference rather than commonality of rulers and 'natives'".  

Albert Memmi, in his classical work, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, shows how this difference becomes a foundational thematic in the interaction between the coloniser and the colonised:

the colonialist stresses those things that keep him separate rather than emphasizing that which might contribute to the foundation of a joint community. In those differences, the colonized is always degraded and the colonialist finds justification for rejecting his subjectivity. But perhaps the most important thing is that once the behavioural feature or historical or geographical factor which characterizes the colonialist and contrasts him with the colonized has been isolated, this gap must be kept from being filled. The colonialist removes the factor from history, time and therefore possible evolution.  

134. Ibid.  
Their differences are a creation of a historical system. As Frantz Fanon points out, "the settler and the native are old acquaintances. For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say his property, to the colonial system". Therefore, decolonisation, which "is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature", is a historical process emerging out of the colonial condition.

It is in this context that one could talk of orientalism as a colonial discourse, exposing the strategies of which is necessary to advance counter-discursive decolonisation agenda. Gayatri Spivak also stresses on the need for historicising colonial power for a critique of imperialism, but rejects the concept of the binary opposition coloniser/colonised. She points towards the need to be "knowledgeable in the history of imperialism, in the epistemic violence that constituted/effaced a subject that was obliged to cathect (occupy in response to a desire) the space of the Imperialist's self-...

137. Ibid., pp. 27-28.
consolidating other". This objectified and battered subject constituting the Other, as explained earlier, has to be located in the context of neo-colonialism within a dominating discourse like orientalism.

Orientalism is treated as a colonial discourse in a more or less similar sense in which Homi Bhabha describes the latter. According to Bhabha, "the predominant strategic function" of a colonial discourse "is the creation of a space for a 'subject peoples' through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised". Further, a colonial discourse, notes Bhabha, seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. Despite the play of power within colonial discourse and the shifting

positionalities of its subjects (for example, effects of class, gender, ideology, different social formations, varied systems of colonization and so on), I am referring to a form of governmentality that in marking out a 'subject nation', appropriates, directs and dominants its various spheres of activity. Therefore, . . .

colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible. It resembles a form of narrative whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality. It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to realism.139

Bhabha suggests that "it is in order to intervene within that system of representation that Edward Said proposes a semiotic of 'Orientalist' power, examining the varied European discourses which constitute 'the Orient', as a unified racial, geographical, political and cultural zone of the world".140


140. Ibid., p. 71.
Said's own critique of orientalism stems from the view that "Orientalism as a subject fairly screams out for an open understanding of its unpleasant ethnocentric and colonial background".\(^{141}\) His attempt, in general, has been to provide that open understanding. As seen above, the orientalist discourse is circumscribed and haunted by power in a colonial fashion. On the other side, this political discourse has to be approached and subjected to criticism not from a non-political point of view. Said observes that "Orientalism calls in question not only the possibility of nonpolitical scholarship but also the advisability of too close a relationship between the scholar and the state".\(^ {142}\) The issue obviously is not of scholarship alone.

The archival dignity, institutional authority, and patriarchal longevity of Orientalism should be taken seriously because in the aggregate these traits function as a worldview with considerable political force not easily brushed away as so much epistemology. Thus Orientalism \ldots \) is a structure erected in the thick of an imperial


contest whose dominant wing it represented and elaborated not only as scholarship but as a partisan ideology. 143

It is in challenging this "worldwide hegemony of orientalism and all it stands for" that Said wanted to make his contribution. 144 Thus, through his critique of orientalism, Said has been attempting to contribute to the process of decolonisation, in which he has been successful to a great extent. Interestingly, Bryan Turner considers his book Marx and the End of Orientalism as an attempt "to challenge the influence of Orientalism" including those influences in his own previous works; it is "in a large measure a work of personal de-colonisation". 145 This decolonisation thematic is recurring in critiques of orientalism.

Orientalism: Critique of the Critique

The preceding discussion on the discourse of orientalism and its linkages with power has been showing the multifaceted dimension in which the critique of orientalism was possible. Even while Saidian notions of a

143. Said, n. 58, p. 211.
144. Said, n. 1, p. 328.
coherent disciplinary tradition of orientalism and a field of power in which such a discourse operates have been analysed, it is essential to note that the whole project is not without its own problems and inconsistencies. A number of authors offer their critiques of the Saidian critique of orientalism from different angles and perspectives. This section is intended to provide a discussion on this critical points and positions and to suggest certain views that could be held in the context and in spite of such critiques. Only a few such critiques are analysed, they being selected and scrutinised keeping in view of their import and their relevance to our study.

Michael Beard writing in *Diacritics* acknowledges the value of *Orientalism* that "it puts the anticolonial argument in a new language free of predictable polemic violence which has become traditional", while pointing out one major conceptual problem. It concerns the relationship between the discipline and the discourse of orientalism: "to what extent it is a willed, conscious and homogenous connection" remains an unanswered question throughout Said's work. To Beard, "the act of definition which assimilates the discipline and the

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147. Ibid., p. 4. This problem has otherwise been identified earlier in this chapter.
discourse of Orientalism under one term . . . is at once the source of Orientalism's polemic strength and the source of its conceptual brittleness", and this act obscures "the detail of relationship between Orientalisms--academic Orientalism, its popular equivalents, and the framework of colonial and neocolonial power which both tend to justify".148 While saying that the treatment of orientalism as a "coherent whole" might be a "tactical necessity", Beard points out that "it leaves his attack incomplete".149

In a perceptive critique of Orientalism, James Clifford also writes about what he calls "an oppressive systematicity" of the orientalist discourse in Said. "Orientalism is always too broadly and abstractly pitched, and it is always overly systematic".150 In Clifford's estimation, the "key theoretical issue raised by Orientalism concerns the status of all forms of thought and representation for dealing with the alien".151

148. Ibid., p. 10.
149. Ibid., p. 14.
151. Ibid., p. 261; emphasis in the original.
According to him, in dealing with the orient, there is an ambivalence which at times become a confusion in Said. This ambivalence pertains to whether Said is talking about the orient as a construct in the discourse of orientalism or an actual entity called the orient. It is worthwhile referring to what Peter Novick says about this ambivalence:

Edward Said in Orientalism, analyzed at length the "discursive consistency" with which Western scholars had constituted the East. He (ambiguously) disavowed the notion that there was "such a thing as a real or true Orient" which he was counterposing to the construction of the Orientalists . . . . Edward Said seemed to be trying to have it both ways by denying the existence of a "real" Orient, and savaging Orientalists for misrepresenting it.152

Another problem the anthropologist James Clifford finds in Said is "the absence in his book of any developed theory of culture as a differentiating and expressive ensemble rather than as simply hegemonic and disciplinary".153


153. Clifford, n. 150, p. 263.
There is also the contention in Said between his humanist views and the Foucauldian method he uses, the latter basically being derived from a critique of humanism. There is no imitation of Foucault in Said’s work. Earlier, the critique of Foucault by Said has been discussed. Clifford finds that Said’s "attempt to extend Foucault’s conception of a discourse into the area of cultural constructions of the exotic is a promising one".\textsuperscript{154} This is especially important taking into consideration the problem in Foucault of a "scrupulously ethnocentric" method of viewing culture, where the Western civilisation is the referential world. What Clifford observes in the end, in the context of Said’s not-so-harmonised relations with Foucauldian anti-humanism, is that "a wide range of Western humanist assumptions escape Said’s oppositional analysis, as do the discursive alliances of knowledge and power produced by anticolonial and particularly nationalist movements".\textsuperscript{155}

The restrictive way in which Said approaches Western knowledge tradition in the orient, on the one hand, by dealing only with Arab West Asia leaving out much of East and South Asia, non-Arab West Asia and Arab North Africa; and on the other hand, by analysing only British and

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., p. 264.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., p. 266.
French and recent American strands of orientalism omitting German, Italian, Spanish and Russian orientalist enterprises, has attracted criticism from Clifford and many other writers. Take, for example, Maxime Rodinson's critique:

It is too easy to choose . . . only English and French Orientalists as a target. By so doing, he [Said] takes aim only at representatives of huge colonial empires. But there was an Orientalism before the empires, and the pioneers of Orientalism were often subjects of other European countries, some without colonies . . . . Moreover, his nationalistic tendencies have prevented him from considering, among others, the studies of Chinese or Indian civilisation, which are ordinarily regarded as part of the field of Orientalism. For him, the Orient is restricted to his East, that is, the Middle East.156

Said’s response to such a criticism was that none of the critics provided any reason for him to have included other countries, regions or traditions of orientalism and he rejected it as "superficial".\textsuperscript{157} As the major concern in this thesis is on the methodological aspect, it will not be fruitful to have a lengthier discussion on this issue.

James Clifford is of the opinion that the "unrestful predicament of Orientalism, its methodological ambivalences", which were pointed out earlier, "are characteristic of an increasingly general global experience"; an experience also representing the author’s own position of a radical critic of, and one who is rooted in, Western cultural tradition. Another important aspect to be noted is that concerning a counter-discourse. Said has asserted at the end of Orientalism that "the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism".\textsuperscript{158} In spite of

\textsuperscript{157.} Said, n. 51, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{158.} Said, n. 1, p. 328.
such a rejection, Clifford says that "Said’s discourse analysis does not itself escape the all-inclusive 'Occidentalism'".\textsuperscript{159}

It is here that one comes to the significant contribution of Sadik Jalal al-'Azm. As the title of his article suggests, he has been interested in a critique of not only orientalism proper but of what he calls "Orientalism in Reverse".\textsuperscript{160} Before going into the above concept, let his analysis of orientalism through various categorisations be noted. He writes about "Institutional Orientalism", "Cultural-Academic Orientalism" and "Ontological Orientalism". In his words,

Orientalism may be seen as a complex and growing phenomenon deriving from the overall historical trend of modern European expansion and involving: a whole set of progressively expanding institutions, a created and cumulative body of theory and practice, a suitable ideological

\textsuperscript{159} Clifford, n. 150, p. 271.

\textsuperscript{160} Sadik Jalal al-'Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse", \textit{Khamsin}, No. 8 (1981), pp. 5-26. This article is reprinted in the book \textit{Forbidden Agendas: Intolerance and Defiance in the Middle East}, selected and introduced by Jon Rothschild (London, 1984), pp. 349-76. Reference here is to the original \textit{Khamsin} print.
superstructure with an apparatus of complicated assumptions, beliefs, images, literary productions, and rationalisations (not to mention the underlying foundation of commercial, economic and strategic vital interests). I shall call this phenomenon Institutional Orientalism.\textsuperscript{161}

"Cultural-Academic Orientalism" denotes the realm of learning, of "scientific" research and study, with all its claims of "disinterested pursuit of truth". "Ontological Orientalism" stands for the "ahistorical, anti-human and even anti-historical 'Orientalist' doctrine" which essentialises and attributes fundamental unchangeable identities to both the 'orient' and the 'occident'.

Sadik al-‘Azm finds in Said "an act of retrospective historical projection" whereby Said has been tracing the genesis of orientalism "all the way back to Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides and Dante". He notes that in Said, the notion of orientalism, thus, becomes not a modern phenomenon but "the natural product of an ancient and almost irresistible European bent of mind to misrepresent the realities of other cultures, peoples, and their languages, in favour of Occidental self-affirmation,\textsuperscript{161. Ibid., p. 5.}
domination and ascendancy". He is of the opinion that this kind of interpretation on the origins of orientalism by Said gives credentials to "Ontological Orientalism" which Said wants to demolish. According to al-'Azm,

Orientalism, like so many other characteristically modern European phenomena and movements (notably nationalism), is a genuinely recent creation—the product of modern European history—seeking to acquire legitimacy, credibility and support by claiming ancient roots and classical origins for itself.163

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162. Ibid., p. 6. There are also writers like Shiraz Dossa, who asserts that there "is a critical and unnoticed sense in which Orientalism is not at all a modern phenomenon". According to him, its origins have to be traced to Greek political thought: "As a style of thought, arguably a state of mind, Orientalism is the patrimony of ancient political philosophy: it is in fact coeval with the rise of formal political philosophy in the West"; Shiraz Dossa, "Political Philosophy of Orientalism: The Classical Origins of a Discourse", Alternatives, Vol. 12 (1987), p. 343. Dossa analyses the political philosophy of Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle and others to show the emergence of the idea of orientalism. There is a critique of Said in an article by Catherine Martin where she refers to Herodotus's idea of a discourse; Catherine Gimelli Martin, "Orientalism and the Ethnographer: Said, Herodotus, and the Discourse of Alterity", Criticism, Vol. 32 (1990), pp. 511-29. She says: "Herodotus's discursive strategies ideally fit him to supply the figure of the prototypical Western Orientalist". (p. 517).

He observes that the "unilinear conception of 'Orientalism' as somehow flowing straight through from Homer to Grunebaum" to be found in Said "produces a picture which says that this cultural apparatus known as 'Orientalism' is the real source of the West's political interest in the Orient, ie, that it [sic] is the real source of modern Institutional Orientalism".164

Thus, Said falls into a view that colonial and imperialist political interests of Europe and America in the orient are created by the orientalist cultural tradition. Basim Musallam, in his sympathetic review of Orientalism, congratulates Said for bringing forth the intimacy of the connection between orientalism and imperialism. At the same time, Musallam notes a "highly problematic conclusion" reached by Said where the latter "seems to be saying that imperialism is the highest stage of Orientalism".165 According to him, even though imperialism and orientalism have been "compatible partners", they should be kept separate for obvious reasons.166

164. Ibid., p. 7.


166. Ibid. See next chapter for a discussion on the relationship between imperialism and orientalism.
Sadik al-'Azm points out that "Ontological Orientalism is the foundation of the image created by modern Europe of the Orient", wherein the enduring cultural, psychic or racial essence of the orient is projected. He says that, as Said has shown, "this image makes more genuine and instructive revelations about certain European states of affairs, than it does about its supposed object". Gordon Pruett explains:

As Professor Said argues, Orientalism tells us more about the Orientalist than about the Orient; and what it tells us is most unattractive. When we are convinced of the presence and power of Orientalism we realize that the West's own self-understanding is comprised of a history of surpassing disability. Bluntly, we realize that Western identity, and especially its sense of superiority, depends upon the denigration of that which is not itself. A single term for such a view when applied to persons is racism.168

This process of the subject being implicated in its discourse about the object is dealt with earlier in this chapter at a general theoretical level.

What al-‘Azm wants to emphasise is the profound impact of the image projected by Europe of the orient on ontological lines on the "Orient’s modern and contemporary consciousness of itself". In spite of Said’s "important warning to the subjects and victims of Orientalism against the dangers and temptations of applying the readily available structures, styles and ontological biases of Orientalism upon themselves and upon others", such applications, according to al-‘Azm, not only existed in the past but are continuing in a wide variety of ways and measures. It is in this context that he identifies the phenomenon of "Orientalism in Reverse".169 According to him, "Ontological Orientalism in Reverse is . . . no less reactionary, mystifying, ahistorical and anti-human than Ontological Orientalism proper".170

This reverse orientalism or "occidentalism" as some authors call it is very powerful among various epistemological, political and ideological quarters of the third world. Earlier in this chapter, Said’s rejection of and Clifford’s apprehension about occidentalist

170. Ibid., p. 25.
alternative to orientalist notions have been pointed out. In line with al-ʿĀzm, Xiaomei Chen also notes that "it would be . . . misleading to argue that Occidentalist discourse is less tied to power relationships and strategies of domination than its Orientalist counterpart".¹⁷¹ She asserts that there is need for at least attempting "to find a reasonable balance between Self and Other, between East and West, so that no culture is fundamentally privileged over its Others"; even though she is aware that perhaps "the realities of history cannot allow such a balance to be fully realized".¹⁷²

Like Clifford, Mona Abaza and Georg Stauth also find that Said's critique of orientalism with its Foucauldian moorings generate scope for reverse orientalism. They want to demonstrate how a reductionist Foucaultian discourse on epistemes of cultural classification of the Other, his paradigm of knowledge/power and attempts at better and deeper understanding of the Other, and thus of doing less injustice to the local, indigenous people, brings about a false framework of indigenous culture and

¹⁷². Ibid., p. 712.
religion which denies a long history of productive cultural exchange. 173

They find that in various academic disciplines like sociology, an 'indigenisation' trend has come forth. This is also true with socio-political movements. Emmanuel Sivan, like some other critics, points out that Said's Orientalism, "endowed with the prestige of the author's Western academic credentials, lends itself easily to an all-embracing smear of the West and glorification of the East (or Islam)". 174


The author of this study heard Arab intellectuals like Hassan Hanafi speaking on the need for developing an occidentalist paradigm to counter the Western epistemological project of orientalism. Hanafi wants the situation of "Islam observed" to be changed to "Islam observing". According to him, "occidentalism" calls for the transformation of the "Object" (the position which is granted by orientalism) to that of the "Subject", the "knower". He says: "I can speak of a European mentality" as Europe until now was speaking of an oriental mentality. He wants new images of the West being created and operationalised so that there is an "authentic" occidentalism functioning.\textsuperscript{175} Many authors like Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas have been arguing for "dewesternization" of knowledge and for rooting learning and action in Islamic values and philosophy.\textsuperscript{176}

Syed Farid Alatas, in a recent article, calls for indigenisation of social science in the third world.\textsuperscript{177} He wants to qualify his argument for indigenisation with the assertion that it is not the same as calling for

\textsuperscript{175} Hassan Hanafı, "From Orientalism to Occidentalism", Paper presented at the Second International Symposium on Comparative Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, Cairo, 20-22 December 1992.


nativism or orientalism-in-reverse. "Indigenization is to be seen as a simultaneous call to internationalization as long as the latter is understood not as a one-sided process but rather as one emanating from developing societies while incorporating selectively the Western social sciences". 178 While he agrees that indigenous discourses themselves may wield power through disciplining and normalisation processes, he sets aside that question by stating that "this would be a different regime of power requiring separate treatment". 179

On the one hand, orientalism operates, in Michael Gilsenan's words, "within a tradition that had become ossified, seeing texts to be commented on often with the reverence of a medieval divine, adoring Islam, but suspicious of Muslims, and frequently downright hostile to and uncomprehending of political movements in the contemporary Middle East". 180 And on the other hand, there is the reverse trend, as Mohammed Arkoun sarcastically remarked as early as 1972--an exaltation of Islam:

The intellectual with scarcely a smattering of historical and philosophical culture, the

178. Ibid., p. 334.
179. Ibid.
militant fed on massive certitudes, the fervent believer, the za’im overwhelmed with responsibility— they all follow the same pattern: Islam is a perfect religion; it largely anticipated the socialist and democratic experiences which Europe came to more lately; nothing in its background denies economic or social development; historical accidents and notably, imperialism have hindered the complete fulfilment of all its spiritual and temporal wealth! 181

Sadik al-’Azm talks about ”Islam is always Islam” argument as an example of ontological orientalism-in-reverse and he quotes Ayatollah Khomeini’s words: ”The term Islam needs no adjective, such as democratic, to be attributed to it . . . . The term Islam is perfect, and having to put another word right next to it is, indeed, a source of sorrow”. 182 Such essentialist claims are part of far right religio-political ideologies not only in the Islamic world but also in other societies and cultures.


Another important point is raised by Akeel Bilgrami:

Recent powerful, trenchant and much-needed critiques of orientalism have forced scholars to shun the essentialising tendency in studies of Islam and the third world, and they have taught them to pay attention to the detail and diversity of their subject. This effort is laudable. But they have also created a bandwagon effect that inhibits self-criticism in the fear that one is playing into western and 'orientalising' caricatures of Islam and the third world.183

Orientalism cannot be combated by projecting its mirror image, orientalism-in-reverse. There is need for undertaking the kind of criticism being pointed out earlier for facing and tackling orientalism. There is also need for self-criticism from within the third world societies so that dangers of power associated with occidentalist discourse and politics be exposed.

Edward Said himself finds the nativist or reverse orientalist argument that "all evils in the world come from the West", "extremely tiresome and boring". The notion of "us versus them" and the obsession about

"returning to yourself: only in the community, and the purer form of the community, is my salvation"—this, according to Said, is "a form of perdition". To him, it is "the end of the best things about our civilisation, and it is something I completely oppose".  

Said, at the end of his book *Culture and Imperialism*, remarks that just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things...  

Now, let some of the arguments raised by Aziz Al-Azmeh pertaining to orientalism and Islamic essentialism be discussed. In a well-written scholarly work published


recently, Aziz Al-Azmeh describes orientalism in the following words:

I understand by orientalism the deliberate apprehension and knowledge of the orient; I see orientalism as an ideological trope, an aesthetic, normative and ultimately political designation of things as oriental in opposition to occidental. It endows such things with changeless, "oriental" properties, some repellent and others charming, that go beyond history, that violate the changing nature of things, and that confirm them in a distant and irreducible specificity transcending the bounds of reason and forever valorizing common fantasy and folklore.186

Al-Azmeh's main contention is that "there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it".187 He further deals with the cultural particularism of the recent years; a phenomenon where "each 'culture' is represented as a monadic universe of solipsism and impermeability, consisting in its manifold instances of

expressions of an essential self, with each of these instances being a metaphor for the primary classifier—the West, Islam. At one place Al-Azmeh talks about "fundamental heterogeneity and fundamentalist homogenization" of Islam. Yet another observation also seems to be relevant here: "The discourse of political Islamism shares many features with the category of Islam common in the social imaginary of 'the West' . . . ., this is due to the fact that the two categorical formulations share common theoretical and historical conditions of emergence."

Making sense of these seemingly disjointed statements from Al-Azmeh's book, the following points emerge: one, polyvalent Islam is homogenised by fundamentalists or Islamists; two, there is an essentialising tendency projected centering the West and Islam; and three, the orientalist notion of Islam and fundamentalist Islam or political Islamism share common features. Thus, Al-Azmeh has been providing an insightful critique of both orientalism and Islamism by employing a methodology distinct from Said and others.

188. Ibid., p. 21.
189. Ibid., p. 60.
190. Ibid., p. 24.
Aijaz Ahmad offers a critique of orientalism and a critique of Said in a comprehensive manner. In his Studies in History article, Ahmad enumerates the methodological problems of Orientalism:

(a) Said tries to occupy theoretical positions which are mutually contradictory; (b) defines his object of knowledge, Orientalism, in ways which also mutually incompatible; and (c) disables himself from acquiring a coherent anti-imperialist position by adopting an attitude toward Marxism so antagonistic as to be virtually hysterical. 191

The first two criticisms have already been considered while discussing the critiques of Clifford and others.

Concerning the third criticism, Sadik al-'Azm set the tone for a Marxist critique of Said's notion of Marx's orientalism. Said, on his part, finds, in the context of dissecting Marx's views on British rule in India, that "Marx's economic analyses are perfectly fitted . . . to a standard Orientalist undertaking, even though Marx's humanity, his sympathy for the misery of people, are

191. Ahmad, n. 156, p. 140.
clearly engaged". 192 Sadik al-'Azm notes that Said finds "labels of Orientalism, its vocabulary, abstractions and definitions came to dominate his [Marx's] mind and emotions". 193 According to him, Said finds that "Marx forms no exception to all the Europeans who dealt with the East in terms of Orientalism's basic category of the inequality between East and West". 194 He observes that such an idea of Said "derive plausibility only from the ambiguity underlying his own discussion of this matter". al-'Azm brings forth the fact that Europe in the nineteenth century was superior to Asia in terms of scientific and technological development, productive capacities, social organisation, military strength, etc. This being the historically contingent reality, Orientalism, with its ahistorical bourgeois bent of mind, did its best to eternalise this mutable fact, to turn it into a permanent reality past, present and future. Hence Orientalism's essentialistic ontology of East and West. Marx, like anyone else, knew of the superiority of modern Europe over the Orient. But to accuse a

radically historicist thinker such as Marx of turning this contingent fact into a necessary reality for all time is simply absurd.\textsuperscript{195}

Aijaz Ahmad finds al-'Azm's critique of Said's treatment of Marx fruitful. He proceeds with his own Marxist analysis of Orientalism and other works of Said in a well-written essay published in 1992.\textsuperscript{196} Ahmad disagrees with Said "so fundamentally on issues of both theory and of history that our respective understandings of the world . . . are simply irreconcilable".\textsuperscript{197} He notes that the kind of attitude Said takes on Marxism amounts to rejecting its politics, on the one hand, and, at the same time, upholding and utilising the works of Marxists like Gramsci, Lukacs and others, on the other. Ahmad, while stating that many Eurocentric notions prevalent in the nineteenth century may have their impressions on Marx's writings, asserts that resistance to colonialism was celebrated by Marx and Engels. He argues with examples that critical understanding of both European

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., pp. 15-16.


\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., p. 159.
and colonial societies was available in Marx's works, if taken together. This point need not be elaborated further; it is sufficient to note Ahmad's Marxist defence and another salient point he makes. According to him, all ethical positions while closing off certain possibilities, opens up certain others and this is true of Marxism as well. Therefore, it doesn't make sense to unilaterally talk about the closures without reference to the possibilities available in any position. In Ahmad's words, the "resolution of the kind of ambivalences and self-cancelling procedures which beset Said's thought requires that some positions be vacated, some choices be made, some of these 'great deal of things' be renounced".  

There is no point in outrightly rejecting or uncritically accepting any theory or standpoint provided it belongs to the critical, oppositional tradition. As said earlier, a Foucauldian method and a humanist commitment put Said in an ambivalent position. The "strategic positioning" of a postcolonial intellectual like Said, "who is able to maintain a perpetual distance  

198. Ibid., pp. 228-29. See, Banerjee, n. 156, for Marx's own description of European observers and colonial officers which obviously stand against the orientalist charge.

199. Ibid., p. 219.

200. Ibid.
vis-a-vis the official discourses which is far enough for him to see its rupture and near enough to imagine another episteme", which requires a "perpetual distance", explains the Saidian dichotomy.  

Said's ambivalence is that of "an intellectual negotiating universal and local trajectories of power". Conceptions of discourses and disciplines of power in the light of a critique of Enlightenment epistemology are bound to have an unsettled existence when approached from a political position derived out of that knowledge tradition.

As Madhava Prasad remarks, the problem with abandoning the "classic narrative" (like Marxism, say, of Gramsci or Lukacs) is that "it alone seems to offer any possibility of a 'distinction' for the postcolonial intellectual". The myriad ways in which the colonial and postcolonial state and imperialism function, attain legitimacy or face resistance; the linkages between imperialism, state and culture and the underlying political economy logic of all these phenomena cannot be


grasped by leaving aside the anchor role of, "committed", at the same time, critically "distinct", tradition of analysis. What Charles Taylor says about power is relevant in this context:

The grand strategies of the macro-contexts--state, ruling class, or whatever--form the context in which the micro-relations come to be, modify or reproduce themselves, while reciprocally these provide the soil and point of anchorage for the grand strategies. Thus, more than saying that power comes from the bottom, we should say that there is endless relation of reciprocal conditioning between global and micro-contexts.204

In analysing orientalism, there is need, then, to consider both the discursive and historical elements. As Mani and Frankenberg put it, "Orientalism is implicitly and from the beginning a discourse of power that characterised a particular set of social, economic and political relations . . . ".205 Their treatment of orientalism, emphasising the interconnectedness of

204. Taylor, n. 122, p. 168.

knowledge, power and historical specificity, seems to be valid in understanding its multiple facets.\textsuperscript{206} As the power-knowledge nexus has already been discussed at length earlier in this chapter, the historically constituted alliance between orientalism and imperialism has to be explained further keeping in view of the context of this study. The next chapter is an attempt at analysing such a linkage.

\textsuperscript{206} See, Ibid., pp. 177-78.