Chapter One
Orient, Occident and the Constitution of Subjectivity

Disciples of Said have been content too frequently to take the critique of Orientalism for granted, merely exploring further complexities in the divisions between Occident and Orient. Said’s purpose by contrast was not merely to understand these divisions of discourse, but to overcome them (Bryan Turner, “Edward Said: Overcoming Orientalism” 174).

For Said, orientalism signifies a whole cultural discourse, one that habitually represents the east as indolent, treacherous, passive, inscrutable, devious, feminised and inferior. He is speaking of an ideological formation pervasive throughout western history (Terry Eagleton, “Eastern Block”).

This chapter primarily investigates the notion of subjectivity implicated in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. Focusing on this seminal work, the study looks into the construction of subjectivity of the Oriental, (and to a certain extent the Occidental), and of Said himself. As the huge corpus of Said’s subsequent writings evolves out of the premises of *Orientalism*, the chapter elaborately examines Said’s survey of the discourse of Orientalism. Though *Orientalism* is often called a flawed book, it is an intentionally flawed one (as Said himself claims) out of which Said makes an ordered and critical intervention.

Since the politics of colonial experience resonates through and gives shape to the entire Saidian protocols, my attempt is to discover the possibility of rethinking our understanding of Said’s work primarily from his own perspectives in *Orientalism*, despite the plethora of

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17 *Orientalism* as the title of Said’s work will be given in italics. But the term when not in italics, refers to the discourse of Orientalism.

18 “*Orientalism* is a partisan book, not a theoretical machine” (*Orientalism* 340). Again, in an interview with Salusinszky, Said observes quite disarmingly: “*Orientalism* is theoretically inconsistent, and I designed it that way” (qtd. in Brown 551).
criticism raised against it. I consider this work as a manifesto on the subject formation of the colonized/Orientals. Tracing the personal dimension in the composition of *Orientalism*, the chapter proceeds to examine how the extensive discourse of Orientalism constructs the Orient and the Orientals through its multi-dimensional discursive strategies. The concepts such as power, knowledge, imaginative geography, ideology, and so on will be analyzed here based on Said’s “rethinking of what had for centuries been believed to be an unbridgeable chasm separating East from West” (*Orientalism* 352). The chapter concludes by addressing some of the major criticisms against *Orientalism*, and with a discussion of its relevance in the contemporary socio-political and cultural scene.

**The Personal Investment**

The personal dimension in *Orientalism* is evidenced by Said’s invocation of Antonio Gramsci, the great Italian Marxist:

In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci says: “The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is “knowing thyself” as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory”...“therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory” (25).

Hence, it is right to argue that, Said endeavors to “inventory the traces upon [him], the Oriental subject, of the culture whose
domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals” (25). Though Said doubts whether what he has achieved is the inventory prescribed by Gramsci, he always felt it obligatory to be conscious of producing such an inventory. Towards this objective, he attempts to “maintain a critical consciousness” and to employ “those instruments of historical, humanistic, and cultural research” effectively (26). Said explains that much of his personal investment in the study on Orientalism derives from his “awareness of being an “Oriental,” as a child growing up in two colonies (Palestine and Egypt). Though his education in these colonies and in the United States, was Western, “that deep early awareness [of being an Oriental] has persisted,” throughout his life. And, even while exercising the benefits and fortunes of Western education to compose his study on Orientalism, Said never “lost hold of the cultural reality of, the personal involvement in having been constituted as, an Oriental” (26). Though Orientalism, in one sense, is a validation of his ‘personal subject position’ (that is heterogeneous, complex and contradictory), it also invariably represents the fundamental subject formation of all the Orientals. Rashmi Bhatnagar sees the political relevance of the oriental subject production in the context of the critique of colonialism:

The complex processes by which the colonized people are awarded a self-image, their culture explained to them, the ways in which they are newly named and interpreted to themselves—this would seem to be what is meant by the
(re)production of the colonized subject. The colonial subject has become central to theories of subject-production both for the continuing political value of colonial struggles, as also because colonialism marks, in Fanon’s phrase, violence in its natural state (3).

This observation is a cue for a proper understanding of Said’s oblique discussion of subjectivity in his *Orientalism*. It is indisputable that the “colonized subject was and continues to be produced by cultural practices, historical documents, institutions, archives and literary texts” (3), because all the apparatuses of colonial ideology do not simply disappear as soon as the colonies become independent.

Said relates historical circumstances which made possible the composition of his study on Orientalism. He maintains that, since the beginning of the second half of twentieth century, life in the West, particularly in the United States, has been extraordinarily turbulent because of the growing dichotomy between the East and the West. The East continues to signify danger and threat, and “there has been a reinforcement of [these sort of] stereotypes by which the Orient is [always] viewed” (*Orientalism* 26).

Introducing the socio-political context of his composition, Said speaks of the “academic and imaginative demonology of “the mysterious Orient,”” the anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice, the struggle between the Arabs and Israeli Zionism, and its effects upon American Jews, the cultural sphere and civil society; the Great Power
politics in the Middle east, oil economics, and the establishment of an unequal and “simple-minded dichotomy of freedom-loving, democratic Israel, and evil, totalitarian, and terroristic Arabs” (26, 27). His own experiences of these matters, in part, made him write this book. Commenting on the distressing existence of the Palestinian, Said says:

The life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening. There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental. The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny (27).

The constitution of Said’s own subjectivity is therefore the passion behind Orientalism. In other words, it is the work of a writer whose identity has been constructed in part by the discourse of Orientalism: “The nexus of knowledge and power creating “the Oriental” and in a sense obliterating him as a human being is therefore not for [him] an exclusively academic matter” (27). In a much later article “Orientalism Reconsidered,” Said observes that “the consciousness of being an Oriental goes back to [his] youth in colonial Palestine and Egypt, although the impulse to resist its accompanying impingements was nurtured in the post-Second World War
environment of independence” (*Reflections* 200).

It was the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israel war that had magnified Said’s subjective sense of the Palestinians’ objective national loss. After the war, there was an explosion of interest in the Middle East in the Western media and academic circles. Amidst this, “[Said] felt that [his] own history, which had been enmeshed with the West in various ways, had never really responded to the challenge of the West” (Paul 32). As his “generation had grown up in the shadow of direct colonialism and then imperialism,” he found it necessary to compile an inventory of their experience. But the “thrust to actually write [*Orientalism*] with the force that it had owed to the emergence of Palestinian movement.” In a sense, through its composition, Said was attempting to “act as an interlocutor rather than as a silent and inert Other” (32). His early essay “The Arab Portrayed” (1968), written in the aftermath of the war at the behest of Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, later became the central theme of *Orientalism* that is simultaneously the history of his personal loss and national disintegration. Nevertheless, apart from considering himself as a *subjected subject* Said analyses the ways in which the ‘Oriental subject’ as a category has been constituted over the past several years.

**Knowledge, Power and the Oriental Subject**

19 Sabry Hafez observes: “The disastrous Arab defeat of 1967 and the encounter with Ibrahim Abu-Lughod around the same time played a decisive role in Edward Said’s intellectual re-orientation toward his Arab identity and culture. Abu-Lughod recruited him to the Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG) and, at the height of the anti-Arab media frenzy in 1968, asked him to write an article about the Arab character in English literature for a special issue of the *Arab World* that he was editing” (80). Thus he wrote “The Arab Portrayed” that looked at the image of the Arab in the media, popular literature and cultural representations.
The discourse of Orientalism “refers not merely to how Europe experienced the Orient, but also to the way it gave expression to that experience” (Balagangadhara 108). Presenting Orientalism as a metadiscourse in Foucauldian terms, Said tries to define it primarily as a manifestation of power/knowledge. He explains how the many interlocking discourses and institutions of colonial conquest always required knowledge of the conquered people. This knowledge about the Orient was essential to the Western powers as it helped them to vindicate and rationalize their desires to pursue imperial expansion. Said demonstrates that our ‘received knowledge’ of the Orient and the Oriental has always been historically produced and that the discourse of Orientalism treats both the Orient and the Oriental as objects that can be scrutinized and understood. This objectification involves the assumption that the Orient is fundamentally monolithic. While the Orient has only a static history, the Occident is viewed as a dynamic entity with an active history. Ultimately, the Orient and the Orientals are taken to be passive subjects of study. By demonstrating this, Said tries to establish a chain of linkage from colonialism through the construction of cultural identities to the production of subjects.

This subject formation of the Oriental takes place at different levels and dimensions. As Said notes, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Orientalism 3). The Oriental is variously represented as a fixed and unchanging other, lacking
subjectivity or variation. This depiction of the Oriental as conquerable, inferior, or as those in need of western guidance and patronage remarkably differentiates them from the Occidental subject. In effect, this difference helps the Europeans to ascertain the binary opposition and thereby to establish their own identity.

It is mainly through geographical imagination that the entities such as Orient were always constructed; and the power usually attributed to the Occident is mainly derived from the construction of knowledge about the Orient. The knowledge of the Orientals makes their administration easy and beneficial: “knowledge gives power; more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control” (*Orientalism* 36). Thus it becomes inevitable for the Occident to create the Orient as the Other, so that the Occident can define itself and fortify its own identity by invoking this opposition. If this binary, Orient and Occident were to disappear altogether, says Said, “we shall have advanced a little in the process of what Raymond Williams has called the “unlearning” of the inherent dominative mode” (28).20

There is a sense in which one can assume that colonialism would not have been possible without a range of discursive practices and cultural institutions. This great lesson is amply demonstrated in *Orientalism*. It also points to the powerful role that ‘hegemony’ plays in the process of colonial subjugation, which requires, at a general level, the consent of the colonized people, expressed through their

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general acceptance of hegemonic discourses. Underscoring the inextricable interconnection between literature, history and politics, *Orientalism* opens up questions about the construction of the Orient and of Oriental people by Western scholars, travelers and imperialists. This relation between representation, knowledge and power provides Said a plethora of insights into the equation between the West and the East. He sets out to maintain that, “European culture was able to manage--and even produce--the orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (3). This taming or management of the Orient was a discursive production. It was made possible through the discourse of Orientalism that turned the Orient into an object of knowledge and an object of power. Again, these forms of power were working through different disciplines that dominated the cultural and political scenario, thereby facilitating the political, economic and military policies of colonial rule. Largely drawing upon the Foucauldian notions of power, knowledge and discourse, Said carefully analyzes the western constructions of the Middle East that his major writings are focused upon.\(^{21}\) He combined these notions with Gramscian concept of hegemony.\(^{22}\)

The Gramscian framework of the book was significant for the

\[^{21}\text{Said’s use of Foucault and his subsequent disengagement with him will be discussed in Chapter Five. For a comprehensive analysis of the theme of origins in *Orientalism* with reference to Foucault, see Bhatnagar 3-22.}\]

\[^{22}\text{Hegemony tends to make the subaltern “accept inequality and oppression as natural and unchangeable” (Simon 26). See Chapter Five for a further discussion on Gramscian hegemony and Said’s use of it.}\]
people who were trained in Marxism. As Catherine Hall remarks, “Orientalism contributed to the efforts to delineate what it might mean to take empire as central to British society and history” (238). She was trying to trace the significance of Orientalism particularly in the British cultural context. The English/British identities, she argues, were always associated with the idea of the English as an ‘imperial race’. For people like Macaulay, the English were an imperial race qualified to colonizing and civilizing others. But the years between 1945 and 1960 saw a rapid disintegration of the empire. Decolonization appeared to take place gradually, expounds Hall, without much noise and crisis over questions of British identity. But since the 1960’s there slowly emerged an apparent crisis in English identity particularly because of the heterogeneous non-white population in England. And ‘race’ was no more lived at a distance thereafter: “The geographical gap between metropole and colony was,” Hall argues, “critical to the rule of colonial difference, and makes British history in relation to ‘race’ and other-ness very different from that of the US” (239). The ‘others’ who were present inside Britain were sometimes racialized and often constructed as aliens. The conservative party orthodoxy under Margaret Thatcher slowly adapted this new form of racism. The empire was within the nation and it seriously challenged the hitherto received notions of what it meant to be English/British. Catherine Hall observes:

This was Britain’s post colonial moment, the time of
transition, as Simon Gikandi puts it, when the foundational histories of the metropole began to unravel a disjunctive moment when imperial legacies came to haunt English and postcolonial identities. *Orientalism* provided a critical tool through which to read this transition (239).

*Orientalism* in fact generated a perspective about a spatial ordering of the world that disrupted the East/West binary created through the colonial mindset. It helped to foster an understanding that the relations of power not only constructed class and gender identities but also national, racial and ethnic identities, and thereby gave a political dimension to the question of Otherness. In one of the subsections, titled “Knowing the Oriental,” Said details the articulations of Orientalists like Arthur James Balfour and Lord Cromer, the two representative figures of British Colonialism. While justifying the English rule over Egypt, Balfour with his unwavering sense of supremacy asserts: “We know the civilization of Egypt better than we know the civilization of any other country. We know it further back; we know it more intimately; we know more about it” (qtd. in *Orientalism* 32).

Balfour’s justification of England’s domination of Egypt, in the House of Commons, was purely based on the tautological stereotypes of the Orient. It also demonstrates how knowledge and dominance go hand in hand. “Knowledge to Balfour,” Said says, “means surveying a civilization from its origin to its prime to its decline” (32). Furthermore,
for Balfour, “Western nations as soon as they emerge into history show the beginnings of those capacities for self-government...having merits of their own. But in the history of the whole Orientals...you never find traces of self-government” (qtd. in Orientalism 32, 33). And thus, Balfour concludes that it is the duty of England to rule over Egypt. Egypt was conceived thus by people like Balfour not just as an example of colony but as a case for the vindication of Western imperialism and an academic example of Oriental backwardness. For them, Orientals were “a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves” (35).

Said ridicules this strange logic of Balfour that “Egypt requires, indeed insists upon, British occupation” (34). Balfour’s argument is based on two great themes: knowledge and power. It never occurs to Balfour to let the Egyptian speak for himself and hence, the British knowledge of Egypt is the ‘real’ Egypt for Balfour. He seems to be totally blinded by the Orientalist ideology that, to have knowledge over a thing is to dominate it or to have authority and power over it. Said effectively demonstrates this link between knowledge and power throughout his study. Since Orientalism is a fabricated construct it always imposes upon the Orient notions of reality contrived and manipulated by the West. As an institution, this discourse developed not directly through coercive forces. The knowledge about the Orient was circulated as reliable truths. Endorsing Said’s view, Rana Kabbani
says: “the ideology of Empire was hardly ever a brute jingoism; rather, it made subtle use of reason, and recruited science and history to serve its ends” (6).

Balfour richly praises Lord Cromer, a more astute administrator, “for his services...which have raised Egypt from the lowest pitch of social and economic degradation” (Orientalism 35). In a sense, Balfour’s ‘Orientals’ are Cromer’s ‘subject races’. Both Balfour and Cromer saw themselves as representative guardian angels who directed Egypt to its present eminence. Cromer realized the dangers inherent in coercively bringing the Oriental to the logic of colonialism. Instead he believed in what the present day intellectual Noam Chomsky would call, ‘manufacturing [their] consent’. The colonizer has to understand the limitations of the Oriental and work towards the contentment of the ‘subject race’ and thereby facilitate a stronger bond between the two. He believed that ‘subject races’ did not have it in them to know what was good for them, and that Orientals were almost everywhere nearly the same (38). The academic and practical knowledge of Orientals, their race, character, culture, history, traditions, society, and so on helped Cromer to govern Egypt. Referring to the extremely revealing and condescending chapter from Cromer’s Modern Egypt, Said says: “Want of accuracy” is in fact the main characteristic of the Oriental mind according to Cromer. When the European is a “close reasoner” and a “natural logician”, for Cromer, the Oriental is “wanting in symmetry” and “deficient in logical
faculty” (38). Cromer adds that the Oriental “will often break down under the mildest process of cross examination” and that “somehow or other the Oriental generally acts, speaks, and thinks in a manner exactly opposite to the European” (qtd. in *Orientalism* 38, 39).

Said sees Orientalism as “a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (Orient, the East, “them”)” (43). This discourse was deeply pervaded by the traditional metaphysical distinction between the inside and the outside. In this hierarchical dualistic structure, the European was represented always as rational and mature and the Oriental as irrational and childlike. It worked this way because the intellectual accomplishment of Orientalist discourse was always managed by the imperial power. The growing systematic knowledge about the Orient in the West, strengthened by the colonial encounters and different developing disciplines such as ethnology, anatomy, philology, history and so on was again furthered by volumes of literature produced by novelists, poets, translators, and gifted travelers. This period of tremendous progress in the institutions of Orientalism, maintains Said, coincides exactly with the period of unparalleled European expansion, particularly between 1815 and 1914.

It would be interesting to take a look at the stereotypical epithets on ‘Oriental subjects’ propounded by Cromer and Balfour: Orientals were often stamped as inveterate liars, lethargic, suspicious,
cunning, unkind, and lacking the clarity, directness and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race. And “any deviation from what were [generally] considered the norms of Oriental behavior was believed to be unnatural.” A few lines later he adds: “The absolute demarcation between East and West which Balfour and Cromer accept with such complacency, had been years, even centuries, in the making” (39). When categories such as the Orient and the Occident are used as the only criteria for analysis, research, and public policy, this will inevitably result in a further polarization of the distinction. But Said is conscious of the fact that “any account of Orientalism would have to consider not only the professional Orientalists and their work, but also the very notion of a field of study based on a geographical, cultural and linguistic, and ethnic unit called the Orient” (50). He makes it clear that Oriental experts were produced with the use of knowledge (as in expertise/administrative requirements) and power (as in colonial arrangements) that is well expressed in Disraeli’s famous statement: *The East is a career*. Throughout his book Said maintains subtly that Orientalism is a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. By relentlessly constructing its subject within the discourse of Orientalism, European knowledge was able to maintain hegemonic power over it.

The main concern of Said is therefore to investigate how non-coercive and non-dominative knowledge can be produced in a world
that is deeply inscribed with coercive politics and dominative strategies of power. In proceeding with this endeavor in *Orientalism*, Said makes use of Foucault’s notions of power, which is not based on simple repression. For Foucault, power does not percolate downwards in a pyramidal fashion from institutions; rather it operates through discursive practices. In the words of Bart Moore-Gilbert, “Foucault sees power as an ‘impersonal’ force operating through a multiplicity of sites and channels...through which it seeks to control its subjects by ‘re(-)forming’ them, and in so doing, making them conform to their place in the social system as objects of power” (36).

However, there are a few differences between Foucault and Said with regard to the possibilities and forms of resistance to the dominant. Said, quite unlike Foucault, “retains a conception of the individual’s capacity to evade the constraints of both the dominant power and its normative ‘archive’ of cultural representations” (37). He draws this model of agency and intentionality not only from the humanist tradition but also from Marxism.\(^{23}\)

**The Imaginative Geography**

The discourse of Orientalism involves several overlapping aspects but the common denominator among these aspects of Orientalism is the line separating Occident from Orient. And this spatial separation is what Said calls the “imaginative geography” which is “less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production”

\(^{23}\) See, for example, an analysis of Said’s interface with humanism and Marxism in Chapter Four and Chapter Five respectively.
(Reflections 199). The Orient and the Occident and the division between them are not simply fictional, for Said, and hence they must be studied as integral components of the social world. He categorically makes it clear that, “there could be no Orientalism without, on the one hand, the Orientalists, and on the other, the Orientals” (199).

“[The] universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is “ours” and an unfamiliar space beyond “ours” which is “theirs” is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary” (Orientalism 54). This spatial demarcation sometimes acquires emotional and even rational dimension “by a kind of poetic process” and thereby the “vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning.” Whatever we know about time and space or about history and geography is primarily imaginative, according to Said. Hence “the Orient was something more than what was empirically known about it” (55). Moreover, the Orient was subdivided into Near Orient, Far Orient and a Familiar Orient by most of the Orientalists. But since antiquity, it was the Near Orient that was posited as the complimentary opposite of the West.

Orient was experienced through different lenses like histories, travelogues, fables, stereotypes, anecdotes and so on. These lenses “shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West” (58). Orientalists in the European West experienced the Orient most often through this kind of mental operations. For example, some Christian thinkers of the West tried to understand
Islam through an imaginative analogy: “since Christ is the basis of Christian faith, it was assumed—quite incorrectly—that Mohammed was to Islam as Christ was to Christianity” (60). In the eyes of some of these thinkers, though Mohammed is in some ways ‘like’ Jesus, he was after all not like him rather he was pretending to be like Jesus (72). This Christian picture of Islam was intensified in different facets, specifically by vilifying the Islamic religion and Mohammed in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance (60-63). Said demonstrates, by examining one of the monumental works of Western literary canon, Dante’s *Inferno*, how Islam was posited as the very epitome of an Other, against which the whole European civilization from the Middle Ages on, was founded.

This being the case, it is important to understand that Orientalism is not merely a fabricated construct but a series of images about the Orient in the mind’s geography of the West. Or, as Asha Varadharajan observes in her *Exotic Parodies*, “Said wants to move away from a conception of Orientalism as a lie that can be contradicted and toward an understanding of the ways in which the representations of orientalism actively displace the Orient in the imagination of the West” (124). The Western views of the Orient are not purely based on what is observed to exist in the Oriental lands. The dreams, fantasies and assumptions of the West about the unknown, different and contrasting place called Orient also contributed to this discourse. Thus, “Said revealed the Orient to be a
representational chimera, a fantastical image projected from the Occident” (Cairns 73). Consequently, in a particular sense, the subject formation of the Oriental itself is the result of this imagination. It is a pre-established subject position imposed upon the Oriental. So the discourse of Orientalism, forces upon the Orient and Oriental subject specifically Western views of its ‘reality.’ Yet this does not mean that the Western construct of the imaginative geography makes the Orient an eternally remote and unreachable world. “Orientalism may be fundamentally imaginative, but material effects result from its advent” (McLeod 42). The initial description of Orientalism as a learned field acquires new dimension and concreteness through the niceties of its multifaceted development. Said argues that, as a representation of the institutionalized Western knowledge of the Orient, Orientalism “exerts a three way force, on the Orient, on the Orientalist, and on the Western “consumer” of Orientalism” (Orientalism 67):

[The] Orient is thus Orientalized, a process that not only marks the Orient as the province of the Orientalist but also forces the uninitiated Western reader to accept Orientalist codifications...as the true Orient. Truth, in short, becomes a function of learned judgment, not of the material itself, which in time seems to owe even its existence to the Orientalist (67).

In the Orientalist discourse, argues Said, a set of representative figures or tropes were marshaled by the writers, whenever they spoke
about the Orient. And the imaginative geography of the Westerner has always tried to legitimate a “vocabulary, a universe of representative discourse, peculiar to the discussion and understanding of Islam and the Orient” (71). In the *Bibliotheque Orientale* by d’Herbelot, for example, Mohammed *is* always the imposter and always the Oriental, and diametrically opposite and inferior to Jesus Christ. And, most of the Orientalists such as Humphrey Prideaux, (who subtitled his biography of Mohammed as (“The True Nature of Imposture”) used declarative and self-evident phrases and constructed sentences in a “timeless eternal,” mode to convey an impression of repetition and strength, and thereby attempted to arrest the Oriental in a fixed posture (72). Thus the discourse of Orientalism constructs the Oriental as a *subjected subject* through its vocabulary, language, stereotypes, and representations and by drawing its dramatic boundaries of imaginative geography around him.

Drawing from colonial texts, literature, philology, religious discourses, travel writing and several other sources, Said examines the way in which the Oriental world became a defined region. By providing an archaeology of the notion of the East, he demonstrates how the Orient effectively helps to define Europe (or the West, or the Occident) as a contrasting image and cultural site. As Martin Weegmann argues “no identity stands alone, in nude presence as it were, but is defined by or in distinction from something else, which is there besides” (391). The binary distinctions such as
Christian/Heathen, Civilized/Barbarian, are particularly powerful because they simplify and reassure the equation: ‘We’ are not like ‘them’. This polarization can happen in all groups, large and small, social and therapeutic, informal and institutional, according to Weegmann. As we know, the role of binaries and contrasts, such as ‘black/white’, is also part of the process of racialisation in contemporary society.

Through far-ranging historical and literary investigations, *Orientalism* uncovers this basic antagonism between the Occident and the Orient. Focusing on the construction of the Orient and of the Oriental people by Western scholars, travelers and imperialists, Said sets out to establish how the main historical, philological, and creative writers in the nineteenth century drew upon a tradition of knowledge that allowed them to textually construct and control the Orient. The West was always represented as actively constructing its identity and the Orient was the mere recipient of a weak and demeaning counter-identity. This construction of the Orient served the colonial administration and thereby helped them to utilize this knowledge to institute a system of rule. And the colonialist modes of representations, according to Said, still persist in the contemporary world in one form or the other; and therefore the Oriental is called upon constantly to take up a subject position. As Harry Harootunian maintains, Said’s *Orientalism* was

committed to revealing how representational strategies
were implicated in figuring colonial otherness, from teasing out the political unconscious of novels to showing the involvement of scholarly research in constructing images of the colonized that would serve the interests of policy and domination. Here culture and representation were plainly seen as functioning to satisfy the requirements of politics (436-437).

These representations, mediated by received cultural conceits and political necessity, were indirectly linked to the colonizing project. With a seemingly legitimate claim on authoritative knowledge and experience, these representations supplied the means with which to deprive the subjective agency of native populations, while *subjecting* them to close surveillance and control. Said questions this epistemological model of surveillance, “the increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control” (*Orientalism* 36) implicit in the discourse of Orientalism. Examining the issues connected with the relation between representation, knowledge and power, Said argues that the discourse of Orientalism is fundamentally based on a transcendental dichotomy between the West and the Orient. East and West according to him are positioned through the construction of this unequal dichotomy. In other words, Orientalism constructs and perpetuates this binary opposition between the Occident and the Orient continually.

This continued perpetuation of dichotomy indicates that the
powerful cultural hegemony of Orientalism is still at work in contemporary discourses, in as vigorous a manner as in the past. It is to be noted that, the range and depth of the discourse of Orientalism is evidenced not only by its political manifestations in the contemporary world but also by its infiltration into the innermost interstices of cultural articulations in/about the Orient. A rather subtle example provided by Mundoli Narayanan proves the point. He cogently demonstrates how the strategies of Orientalism misrepresent one of the oldest surviving forms of Sanskrit theatre in India, called Kutiyattam. Even the most recent Western discourses depict this performance form merely as a “ritual steeped in mystery—devoid of history, artistic value, or rational thought,” implicitly placed in contrast to the modern theatre of the West. These Western discourses with their reductive and “exoticist” approaches, are “practically positing ritual and performance as mutually exclusive categories.” “[T]hrough this contrast,” Narayanan argues, “an “other” is established, which reproduces in a new context the old colonial binary oppositions between the East and the West, the ritualistic and the rational, the backward and the developed, the uncivilized and the civilized” (50).

Thus if the West is assumed as the seat of knowledge and learning, consequently the Orient is the place of naiveté and ignorance. The Orientalist model promoted this dualism of inside/outside, familiar/unfamiliar and thereby led to the hierarchical positioning of the European as rational, mature and normal and the
Oriental as irrational, childlike and deprived. The West was the Knower and the Orient only the receiver of knowledge. Hence Said defines Orientalism not only as a discourse, but also as a “style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”” (Orientalism 2). As his theory is greatly dependent on the epistemological validity of the concept of the “other”, it enables us to understand the odd logic of this binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident even in the present-day discourses. Said has illustrated this by demanding ‘permission to narrate’ the Palestinian history and experience that has been continuously distorted by the US and Israel. No doubt, “there is an essential continuity between Said’s theoretical work on Orientalism and his political activism regarding the question of Palestine” (Rizvi and Lingard 298).

Scholarly, Scientific and Geopolitical Projects

As an academic tradition of study and research, and as a Western style of dominating and restructuring and having authority over the Orient, Orientalism has basically to do with scholarly, scientific and geopolitical projects. For example, Napoleon’s military acquisition of Egypt (which coincided with the publication of Description de Egypte) and the construction of Suez Canal are taken as key symbols indicating the material and textual European domination of the Orient. This close coalition and mutual interdependence between scholarly research on the one hand and
military administration and state policy-making on the other, was such that the scholars (scientists, geographers, historians, and archeologists) in Said’s words became the “learned division” (*Orientalism* 84) of the army. The images of the East and its inhabitants are not necessarily derived from empirical evidences or experiences but from textual representations by these scholars. By realizing the potential in employing Orientalists like William Jones and Edward William Lane, the British in India linked the Orientalist intellectual tradition with outright political domination. In other words, Orientalism operated with a *textual* attitude. These texts contain along with the discourse and the archive that regulate them, a collection of statements that constitute the objects, subject positions, and themes of Orientalist discourse.

William Jones, as the first president of the Asiatic society of Bengal and as magistrate, “acquired the effective knowledge of the Orient and of Orientals that was to make him the undisputed founder ... of [modern] Orientalism” (78). His eulogy on the Sanskrit language as “more perfect than the Greek, [and] more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either” (79), triggered an ‘Indomania’ in scholarly circles. According to him, no philologer could examine all these three languages (Sanskrit, Greek and Latin), “without believing them to have sprung from some common source” (79). These pronouncements, made in the Asiatic Society of Bengal, were capable of even changing the intellectual atmosphere of Europe.
European scholars, who started probing Sanskrit and other Indo-European languages, became irresistibly obsessed with the Orient. The field of philology was expanded. Historians and ethnologists also felt that by tracing the roots of Indo-European languages, the roots of European civilization could be unearthed. William Jone’s pronouncement ushered in a new notion of linguistic history, “because language was so implicated in concerns about national and cultural identity” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 58). And it is to be noted that “the link between language and identity, particularly the link between the diversity of languages and the diversity of racial identity gave rise to the discipline of ethnology, the precursor of modern anthropology” (58).

Said argues that the “[p]roper knowledge of the Orient proceeded from a thorough study of the classical texts.” Orientalists took from the classical Oriental past, a vision and grandeur, which they thought, only they could employ, to the best advantage of the modern Orient, and to “facilitate ameliorations” to the Oriental subjects (Orientalism 79). The translations, anthologies, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and the field of philology compiled and developed by Orientalists assisted in the imperial control of the East. Thus, scholarly attainments and projects always supported and served the hierarchical webs of the authority. For example, Napoleon planned to build a sort of living archive for his expedition, “in the form of studies conducted on all topics by members of the Institut d’ Egypte that he founded.” He
learnt from Orientalists like Comte de Volney, Chateaubriand and Lamartine about “the obstacles to be faced in the Orient by any French expeditionary force” (81) to Egypt. He made Egypt almost like a department of French learning. Through the instruments of Western knowledge and power—what Althusser would call ISAs and the RSAs—Napoleon tried to instruct the Orient and the Oriental subject, in the ways of the modern West and the Westerner. He tried to convince the Orient about its “natural” role as an appendage to Europe. And primarily, it was *Description de l’Egypte* published in twenty three volumes between 1809 and 1828 that enabled Napoleon to formulate the Orient, to give it shape, identity and definition. It became “the master type for all further efforts to bring the Orient closer to Europe, [and] thereafter to absorb it entirely” (87). Apart from the scholarly, artistic and textual work, Said observes that, there were scientific as well as geopolitical projects to contain and control the Orient. For example, the geopolitical project of Suez Canal, according to Said, is the logical conclusion of the Orientalist thought. It was the French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps, who got permission from the then Egyptian ruler, Sa’id Pasha, to cut a canal linking Mediterranean Sea with the Indian Ocean. This construction provided Europe with a quick ship route to the East. Asia henceforth was no more distant and alienated for the West. It no more belonged to another world, and there was only ‘our’ world for the Westerner: “De Lesseps had melted away the Orient’s geographical identity by (almost literally) dragging
the Orient into the West and finally dispelling the threat of Islam” (92). And thereafter, knowing the Orient and *subjecting* the Oriental became easier for the West. In short, the scholarly, scientific and geopolitical projects enabled the Orientalist ideology to interpellate the Oriental as a *subjected subject*, and the Orient was “transubstantiated from resistant hostility into obliging and submissive, partnership” (92).

Gradually, the Orientalist transported the Orient into modernity and posed as a hero who rescued “the Orient from the obscurity, alienation, and strangeness which he himself had properly distinguished” (120). The Napoleonic expedition, in one sense, was a sort of first enabling experience for modern Orientalism. Said considers its inaugural heroes like Silvestre de Sacy, Ernest de Renan and Edward William Lane as the builders and progenitors of the modern Orientalist brotherhood. They placed Orientalism on a scientific and rational basis. When Sacy is viewed as the inaugurator of the discourse of Orientalism, Renan is seen as the writer responsible for establishing “its intellectual and worldly institutions” (130). Scholarly Orientalism with the intervention of writers like Edward William Lane (the scientific or impersonal writer), Chateaubriand (the creator of the personal aesthetic) and T. E. Lawrence and Charles Doughty (the intermediate type) grew and developed as an institution along with the expansion of the colonialist and imperialist structures.

Said demonstrates that the writings and representations of these
writers in the nineteenth century created “a modern professional terminology and practice,” the existence of which, “dominated discourse about the Orient” (156). “Sacy and Renan were instances of the way Orientalism fashioned, respectively, a body of texts and a philologically rooted process by which the Orient took on a discursive identity that made it unequal with the West” (156). Another case in point, Edward Lane’s classic, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) tries to “make Egypt and Egyptians totally visible, to keep nothing hidden from his reader, to deliver the Egyptians without depth” (162). Thus Said examines an array of nineteenth century French and British novelists, poets, politicians, philologists, historians, travelers, and imperial administrators and reveals the representation of the Orient as “less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone’s work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these” (177).

The major change in Orientalism since 1870 was one “from an academic to an *instrumental* attitude” (246). This instrumental attitude had taken different forms in British and French Orientalism in the period specifically prior to and after World War I. Said brings Sir Hamilton Gibb and Louis Massignon together as the last two major representatives of British and French Orientalism. Taking their writings as a template, Said isolates the modalities of the representation of
Oriental subject in general. According to him, these representations in European culture amounts to a consistency, which was a form of “cultural praxis or a system of opportunities for making statements about the Orient. And as all representations do, it operates for a purpose in a specific historical and even economic setting” (273). Ultimately, contemporary Orientalism manifests itself mainly in the way in which Islam and Arabs are represented in the American media and elsewhere. With its implied emphasis on the inextricable link between power and knowledge throughout, the discourse of Orientalism at times seems to include, as Bart Moore-Gilbert says, the material structures and processes—military, political and economic—which have since the eighteen century at least kept the East subordinate to the West. Each aspect of the Orientalist formation reinforces the others. Thus military conquest makes available new peoples and cultures for study. Such study in turn enables hegemony to be confirmed or extended, for instance by providing knowledge of the customs of subject peoples, which then forms the basis for administrative policy and action (40).

Said distinguishes between latent Orientalism and manifest Orientalism so as to emphasize the connection between the imaginative assumptions of Orientalism and its material effects. The former is an almost “unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity” while the latter refers to “the various stated views about
Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth” (*Orientalism* 206). Manifest Orientalism changes from writer to writer and period-to-period, whereas latent Orientalism “has strong affinities with certain concepts of ideology, particularly the “negative” version of ideology as false consciousness” (Childs and Williams 101). Or more precisely, in Said’s scheme, latent Orientalism refers to ‘the deep structure’ of Orientalism, and manifest Orientalism signifies ‘the surface detail.’ The deep structure supposedly remains unchanged with its political positioning and will to power, whereas the surface structure changes with its individual discipline, cultural work and scholarly tradition. For example, says “a Victorian travel writer and Edwardian journalist might produce texts about the Orient which on the surface appear to differ, but their assumptions about the division between East and West and the character of the Orient (and of Orientals) will, at a deeper level, be alike” (McLeod 43).

**Ideology and the Interpellation of Oriental Subject**

As the prominent Marxist Terry Eagleton observes, “[f]or Said, [O]rientalism signifies a whole cultural discourse, one that habitually represents the east as indolent, treacherous, passive, inscrutable, devious, feminized and inferior. He is speaking of an *ideological formation* pervasive throughout western history” (“Eastern Block”). The structure of *Orientalism* has been designed in a way to lay bare this operation of ideology. In the first chapter, Said has examined the scope and nature Orientalism, particularly, the British and French
experiences of and with the Near Orient, Islam and Arabs. He attempts to discover in these experiences an intimate dichotomy between the Orient and the Occident:

The boundary notion of East and West, the varying degrees of projected inferiority and strength, the range of work done, the kinds of characteristic features ascribed to the Orient: all these testify to a willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West, and lived through during many centuries (*Orientalism* 201).

In the second chapter he narrows down the focus and concentrates on the earliest phases of modern Orientalism, which began during the latter part of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth. Without limiting his study as a narrative chronicle of the development of Oriental studies in the modern West, Said provides a comprehensive account of the “rise, development, and institutions of Orientalism as they were formed against a background of intellectual, cultural and political history” (201). And in the third chapter, he focuses on the modern day variations of French and British Orientalism, together with an analysis of the present intellectual and social realities of Orientalism in the United States.

In doing this, Said contends that Orientalism is basically a political and ideological doctrine willed over the Orient “because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness” (204). In the imaginative geography of the West,
the Orient was “a locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption” (206). It existed as a place isolated from the mainstream of European progress in science, art and commerce. And the Oriental subject was characterized by “its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, [and] its supine malleability” (206). Nineteenth century theses on Oriental backwardness, degeneracy and inequality with the West were associated with notions about the biological bases of racial inequality. For example, works like Robert Knox’s The Dark Races of Man, Said observes some stark racial classifications. Theories such as the second-order Darwinism accentuated “the “scientific” validity of the division of races into advanced and backward, or European-Aryan and Oriental African.” With this logic, the nineteenth century notions on imperialism carried forward “the binary typology of advanced and backward (or subject) races, cultures and societies” (206). Said shows how Oriental subjects are viewed from within the frame-works constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. They were often linked usually to, what is called elements in Western society, such as delinquents, the insane, women and the poor, always not looked at but seen through. The logic was very simple: “Since the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected” (207).

The relation between the Orientalist and the Oriental accordingly was always hermeneutical as the former always tried to reduce the
obscurity of the latter through translation and sympathetic portrayals. Said brings the metaphor of panopticon, to elaborate the nature of the gaze of the Orientalist.

The Orientalist surveys the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him—culture, religion, mind, history, society. To do this he must see every detail through the device of a set of reductive categories (the Semites, the Muslim mind, the Orient, and so forth). Since these categories are primarily schematic and efficient ones, and since it is more or less assumed that no Oriental can know himself the way an Orientalist can, any vision of the Orient ultimately comes to rely for its coherence and force on the person, institution, or discourse whose property it is (239).

The Orientalist presumes that the whole Orient can be seen panoptically (240).²⁵ This Orientalist gaze of all-surveillance is also the gaze of the dominant ideology. The Oriental subject is constantly under the impression that he is being watched from above without ever getting a chance to directly perceive the “invisible” Orientalist gaze. Still he is destined to redefine his subjectivity as the ideology directs or calls upon (interpellates) him to do. The subject, in this

²⁵ Said takes this idea probably from Foucault. And Foucault derives the concept of panopticism from a diagram drawn by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Bentham’s Panopticon was a model prison in which supervisors could observe prisoners in their individual cells without being seen themselves. Foucault argues that this constant surveillance and visibility is what characterizes the development of disciplinary societies. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. 
context, is rendered vulnerable to scrutiny and reduced almost to an object, or as Asha Varadharajan says “to a fundamentally ontological and stable fact over which observers have authority” (125). Questions such as how colonialism produces a particular subjectivity of the colonized or how it closes off the possibility of subjectivity involves, as Benita Parry observes, “theorizing the specificities of a polymorphic postcolonial condition, understood almost entirely in terms of identity and subjectivity” (33). Endorsing Parry’s observation Lawrence Grossberg argues:

[The] use of Said also raises questions about how (post) colonial subjects (via cultural production and practices) subvert western colonial authority (usually as it is embodied in cultural forms themselves). Or finally, it can be used to raise questions about the very politics of subjectivity and the search for a subject position for the colonial subject, because subjectivity is only possible in the places constructed by the colonizer (96).

If one asks whether there is an existence of the Oriental apart from Orientalism, normally the response would be negative. However, Grossberg maintains that there can be a number of possible explanations for this. “One possible interpretation of the existence of the Orient is tautological: since the Orient and the Oriental are constructions of colonial discourses, they cannot exist outside of those discourses. The [O]rient as an object of knowledge is the product of
colonial relations of power” (95). Furthermore, Orientalism reveals less about the colonized people than it does about the perspective and interests of the western people who study them and seek to exercise hegemony over them. David Richards rightly points out in his *Masks of Difference* that “[t]he representation of other cultures invariably entails the presentation of self-portraits, in that those people who are observed are overshadowed or eclipsed by the observer” (289).

Though Said does not discuss at length the modes of defensive strategies of the colonized in *Orientalism*, he works them out elaborately in *Imperialism*. This is where one can see the tinge and resonance of Althusser in Said. Just as Althusser’s theory of ideology was criticized for its ‘pessimism’ and ‘political bleakness,’ Said’s *Orientalism* too was targeted for representing a ‘passive colonized subject’. Nevertheless, it is by perceiving the strategies of interpellation that the question of agency and resistant subject can be taken up.26 Said’s later writings amply prove that he is championing the relevance of the human subject and agency. His affiliation with the humanist tradition and his affinities with a few Western Marxist thinkers prove his credentials to be a theoretician of the political subject.

In a certain way, *Orientalism* is an oblique theorization of the dichotomy between the Orient and the Occident and consequently a hypothesis on the subjectivity of the colonized and the colonizer. By

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26 See the “Introduction” to this thesis, for a brief analysis of Althusser’s notion of Ideological interpellation.
listing out encyclopedic descriptions on the construction of the Orient and the Oriental, Said prepares his ground to formulate his later protocols. He sums up his notion on subjectivity in his “Afterword” to *Orientalism* in following terms:

My way of doing this has been to show that the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another different and competing *alter ego*. The construction of identity... involves establishing opposites and “others” whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from “us.” Each age and society re-creates 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 (332).

Said sometimes uses the term ‘identity’ to mean ‘subjectivity’ in the sense the term has been employed in the “Introduction” to this thesis. As argued in *Orientalism*, it is through the definition of the ‘other’ that the ‘self’ derives its own meaning. In other words, it is by attempting to define the Oriental that the Occidental discovers its self and meaning. Hence the binary opposition between the self and other is indispensable in the Saidian paradigm to arrive at the formulation of subjectivity.
Though Said recognizes the ideology that perpetuates this binary opposition, he does not theorize at one go the formulation of a resistant subject. Firstly, the interpellated colonized subject has to identify and recognize his subject position, which is the central concern of *Orientalism*. Next comes the formulation of counter subjectivity and human agency capable of overcoming the ideological moorings. His later works such as *Palestine, Islam, Representations, The Politics of Dispossession* and *Humanism* concentrate on this aspect. *Imperialism*, as noted earlier, is the most important and overt manual for constructing this resistant subjectivity. In sum, through his protocols, Said continuously seeks to construct a political subject capable of successfully engaging in political action.

**Defending Orientalism**

*Orientalism* is the political manifesto of colonial subjects irrespective of the vigor and range of criticisms lavished against it. In fact, these criticisms reveal how great its influence has been for the past several years. Critiquing Said for his theoretical inconsistencies and glaring contradictions has been a fashionable exercise in many an academic quarter. As Ashcroft and Ahluwalia observe,

To historians he is unhistorical; to social scientists he conflates theories; to scholars he is unscholarly; to literary theorists he is unreflective and indiscriminate; to Foucauldians he misuses Foucault; to professional Marxists he is anti-revolutionary; to professional conservatives he is

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27 Abbreviated hereafter as *Dispossession*. 
Critics by and large have attacked the paradoxical nature of Said’s identity and the nature of its representation in his writings. But most of these criticisms were founded on epistemological assumptions and disciplinary authority, the very things *Orientalism* attempts to write back to and resist by continually reasserting its belief in the indisputable reality of the Oriental subject’s experience and its very worldliness. It is this worldliness of *Orientalism*, which acts as a source of its critical and intellectual energy. However, there are some criticisms, which ought to be addressed seriously. For instance, Aijaas Ahmad in his *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* pungently attacked Said for assembling all sorts of eclectic procedures to ascertain “that Europeans were ontologically incapable of producing any true knowledge about non-Europe” (178). He feels that Said never thinks about how Western representations “might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsias of the colonized countries” (172). Or in other words, Ahmad finds that *Orientalism* offers no alternative to the discourse it critiques. However, as I pointed out earlier, *Orientalism* is intended more as an extensive account of the construction of the Orient and Oriental. It is a preface to Said’s later writings that take up the task of critiquing the discourses of Orientalism and Imperialism more vigorously.

Aijaas finds a few contradictory currents and theoretical

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28 See also Chapter Five for a further discussion on Aijaas Ahmad’s critique of Said.
difficulties running in Saidian protocols, particularly in his methodological merger of Foucault's anti-humanistic discourse with a humanistic absorption of the textualities of the western canon. However, he admits: “Said is our most vivacious narrator of the history of European humanism's complicity in the history of European colonialism” (163). In spite of the rejection of authorial approach in Foucault’s discourse, Said never hesitates to invoke him, particularly in *Orientalism*. He blends, says Aijaas, the authorial textuality of the humanist tradition with Foucault's suggestions of the “death of the author.” He also questions Said's assumption of the position of an “oriental subject” despite his “cultural apparatus [being] so overwhelmingly European” (171). But it is to be noted that Said’s notion of filiation and affiliation\(^{29}\) is very crucial in defining his subjectivity. Though Said lacks the elements of a real Oriental subject, as Sudipta Kaviraj argues, the insufficiency of his Oriental subjectivity in fact helps him to explicate his theory more appropriately:

> Being someone, as we all find out, is only partly under our own control. There is a constant play of being for self and being for others....The task of a critical intellectual is to use each of those partial anchorings of his self to invigilate the temptations of others, to prevent the usual slide into insensitivity or self-deception. What is surely questionable is Said’s claim that the West, through Orientalism, has

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\(^{29}\) His notions on filiation and affiliation are inextricably linked to his ideas of exile. A more convenient and elaborate discussion on this aspect is available in Chapter Three.
always silenced the Orient, an astonishing statement, to say the least. And Said could assert this so unproblematically precisely because of his insufficiency as an Oriental subject (536).

Again as Mustapha Marrouchi’s says, “One would expect Ahmad to see the politics of identity that is at the heart of the imperial cultural enterprise that Said analyses in both *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*” (“Counternarratives” 223). Against Ahmad’s sweeping categorization of *Orientalism* as a defective work, Marrouchi suggests a proper perception of this politics of identity that is very crucial to the reading of it. He continues: “The politics of identity had needed to assume, indeed to believe, that what was reproduced (stereotyped features, ideas, phrases) about Orientals was always done according to one and the same fixed pattern set by the Europeans” (223-4). Aijaas, uncomfortable with Said’s stance with respect to Marxism, repeats many of the earlier criticisms against Said, says Marrouchi. He finds fault with Ahmad’s pretentious conception of *Orientalism* as too complex, various and ambivalent. Ahmad is “misreading a significant amount of historical experience” through his tactic, remarks Marrouchi:

For in writing a book such as *Orientalism* Said not only rereads the canonical cultural works not to degrade them but to reinvestigate some of their assumptions, going beyond the stifling hold on them of some version of the
master-slave binary dialectic, but also gives voice, and this is perhaps more important, to the wretched of the earth (Orientals and others) to talk back to a West they no longer see as one homogeneous bloc (225).

Another critic, Ziauddin Sardar in his book Orientalism (2002) finds that, instead of offering resistance to Eurocentrism, “Said’s construction of Orientalism takes the project of secular and Eurocentric discourse towards a new trajectory” (75). While trying to define Orientalism as ‘a style of thought based on the epistemological and ontological distinction,’ Said in fact was draws a direct parallel to the binary opposition between the Orient and the Occident: a new binary duality between the “Secular world” and the “Religious world,” says Sardar. Hence for Sardar, Said’s “Orientalism is not an anti-Western polemic nor is it pro-Islamic” (69). He even goes to the extent of saying that “Said’s own treatment of Islam betrays a serious ignorance of Islamic history and spirituality.” But this seems to be quite an unfair charge, as Said throughout his life was advocating for the Palestinians. He always fought against the demonization of Islam through the media and by dominant power structures as he explicated in his Islam. Moreover, his concept of “secular world” should be read along with his notions on intellectuals and exile.\(^{30}\) In fact, his notion of secularism is not necessarily positing the “religious world,” or “Islamic world” as its antithetical binary, as Sardar conceives it to be.

\(^{30}\) This point is further explained in Chapter Three. For a brilliant analysis of Said’s notion on secular criticism see Mufti, “Auerbach in Istanbul” 95-125.
Robert Young in his *White Mythologies* asks a crucial question about Said’s postulation on imaginary representations. If Orientalism consists of nothing but representation which has little to do with the ‘real Orient’, asks Young, how is it possible for this imaginary construction and knowledge to be put in the service of real imperialism, colonial conquest, occupation and administration?

This means that at a certain moment Orientalism as representation did have to encounter the ‘actual’ conditions of what was there, and that it showed itself effective at a material level as a form of power and control. How then can Said argue that the ‘Orient’ is just a representation, if he also wants to claim that ‘Orientalism’ provided the necessary knowledge for actual colonial conquest? (122).

Young here seems to disregard the fact that the imaginative construction of the Orient by the West was obviously having its ramifications and material effects upon the Occidental as well as on the Oriental subjects. Said was stressing the importance of geographical fantasies of the West on the East before they dominated the East. And he makes it very clear that “[g]eography was essentially the material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient. All the latent and unchanging characteristics of the Orient stood upon, were rooted in, its geography” (*Orientalism* 216).

Amongst these critiques on *Orientalism*, the Marxist sociologist
Bryan Turner’s observations seem to be very relevant. In his article “From Orientalism to Global Sociology,” Turner argues that “[t]he [O]rientalist discourse was ultimately about the origins of the West, not the origins of the East” (370). It is “dangerous to disagree”\(^\text{31}\) with Turner when he finds two dangers involved in the critique of Orientalism. Firstly, it promotes a “naïve trust in the ‘native’ or the pre-modern as a form of humanity which is not corrupted by Westernization or modernization.” Secondly, it “leaves open to a peculiar form of indigenous conservatism posing as progressive anti-Westernism” (373). These observations prompt one to think of the nature of pre-modern or pre-colonial subjectivities in the Orient. Were the Orientals not been subjected by any other discourses or ideologies in the pre-modern period? That Said’s *Orientalism* partly eclipses this aspect of the construction of subjectivities within the pre-modern period is a crucial question to be addressed. Given this argument, however, in *Orientalism*, Said’s intention was not to recover a reality behind the European deformation and falsification but instead to focus steadily on the production of the Orient as a textual construct. This is evident from his following statement: “It is clear, I hope, that my concern with authority does not entail analysis of what lies hidden in the Orientalist text, but analysis rather of the text’s surface, its exteriority to what it describes” (*Orientalism* 20). Said recognizes that the search for origin sometimes leads to a yearning for an impossible purity and a longing for a fullness of meaning that would even serve

\(^{31}\) Said uses this phrase while referring to Raymond Williams. See *Imperialism* 98.
the reactionary communal forces, which has been proved by the contemporary politics. Hence for Said “Orientalism is premised upon exteriority” and “[t]he principal product of this exteriority is of course representation” (20-21). This idea of exteriority has been partly appropriated from Foucault, “as an enabling structure that allows the Orientalist to objectify the Orient, with no real concern for its actuality” (Rubin, “Techniques of Trouble” 873). Elsewhere Said observes:

Thus in talking about the Orient, hitherto believed to be a simple fact of nature, I tried to uncover the longstanding, very varied geographical obsession with a distant, often inaccessible world that helped Europe to define itself by being its opposite. Similarly I believed that Palestine, a territory effaced in the process of building another society, could be restored as an act of political resistance to injustice and oblivion (Reflections 566).

Hence, Turner’s apprehension of an “indigenous conservatism”, which presupposes “an unwarranted essentialism” (“From Orientalism” 373), has to be contextualized within the above-mentioned idea of exteriority. However, it seems that, Turner’s proposal to develop a method of developing an alternative to Orientalism, not by exchanging “an outdated orientalism for an equally prejudicial Occidentalism” (373), will be acceptable even to Said. Said’s mode of inquiry, no doubt, is characterized by his commitment to a new kind of history imbued with politics, that is
based on counter-memory, as opposed to history as mere reminiscence and recognition.

Another relevant criticism by Sadik Jalal Al-Azm has to be juxtaposed with Turner’s observation. Al-Azm charges Said for encouraging an Orientalism in Reverse, by which non-Western thinkers produce ahistorical, essentializing, and wildly misleading images of cultural difference. These are, Al-Azm suggests, just as insidious and damaging as “reactionary, mystifying, ahistorical, and anti-human” as Western ones have been and are indeed largely derivative of the latter (237). In other words, Al-Azm seems to accuse Said for promoting a tendency among the non-western scholars to essentialize the Occident in much the same manner of the Orientalists’ essentializations of the Orient. No doubt, it is the task of the Saidian interlocutors to analyze this aspect of the “Ontological Orientalism in Reverse” and work towards a non-essentializing politics, which Said always preached. Said’s repetitive strategies in his later works make it clear that he was not presupposing any anti-human or essentializing strategies.

One of the major discrepancies of Orientalism appears to be its abject neglect of the factors of class and gender. And another important methodological problem appears when Said deals with the questions of truth and ideology. On the one hand, Said argues that the Orient is a construction and that all knowledge is tainted, but on the other, he seems to suggest that there might be a real Orient that is knowable. But we see this ambivalence between knowledge and

Next major charge against Said’s *Orientalism* seems to be about his “misappropriation of Foucault.” The epistemological tension between the poststructural and traditionally humanist impulses in *Orientalism* is partly indebted to the poststructural work of Foucault. Dilemmas of this irresolvable tension are seen in Said’s entire protocols. However, Said replies to the charges against this theoretical incongruence in the “Afterword” to *Orientalism*:

> Among American and British academics of a decidedly rigorous and unyielding stripe, *Orientalism*, and indeed all of my other work, has come in for disapproving attacks because of its “residual” humanism, its theoretical inconsistencies, its insufficient, perhaps even sentimental, treatment of agency. I am glad that it has! Orientalism is a partisan book, not a theoretical machine. No one has convincingly shown that individual effort is not at some profoundly unteachable level both eccentric and, in Gerard Manley Hopkins’s sense, *original*; this despite the existence of systems of thought, discourses and hegemonies (although none of them are in fact seamless, perfect or inevitable) (340).

As a further extension of the points made earlier, it can be said that, *Orientalism* is a study of the ways in which the power,

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33 His grand slogan “speaking truth to power,” in fact, emphasizes the necessity of ideology critique. See, for example, Said’s *Representations* 63-75.
scholarship and imagination of a two-hundred-year-old tradition in Europe and America viewed the Middle East, the Arabs, and Islam. Said demonstrates that it is always through authority and knowledge that the West tried to fabricate its self into a coherent identity. The West established the law of empire and colonialist regime projecting itself as the beginning and end of all knowledge and gradually calling it humanism. Nevertheless, unlike Foucault, Said reinvents the concept of humanism as a force of liberation, in his later works. Furthermore, Said quite distinctively formulates a twofold method of resistance, marking a great departure from Foucault: He was more particular about knowing the Orient outside the discourse of Orientalism. And the representation and presentation of this knowledge to the Orientalists is understood as a great resistance by Said. This notion of non-coercive knowledge at the end of Orientalism is perhaps anti-Foucauldian. In spite of the accusations that he misappropriated Foucault, Said claims that the theoretical inconsistency of Orientalism was intentional. In a certain sense, the whole Saidian strategy of resistance depends on his notions about the role of intellectuals. And, intellectuals, he believed, are supposed to exercise their critical consciousness towards the construction of counter hegemony against imperial discourse. They have also the great responsibility of producing non-coercive forms of knowledge and ideology. On his part, no doubt, Said was relentlessly attempting to do the same task.

Orientalism transformed the humanities and demonstrated a

34 This point will be further elaborated in Chapter Four.
new way of understanding colonialism and the historical construction of the Orient as an object of western gaze, variously represented as alien, barbaric, uncivilized, sensual or exotic. “Its contribution to the demythification of the Orientalist discourse cannot be overlooked” observes Ramachandran, despite his many objections against Said (20). A few years after the publication of the book, Said also had felt that Orientalism had infused a new thinking strategy in the consciousness of women, minorities and marginals. Through his strategies of selective appropriation, incorporation, and rearticulation of western ideologies, cultures, and institutions alongside the heritage of the Middle East, Said engaged in the critical practices against the western dominance. Ania Loomba in his tribute to Said crystallizes the contemporary significance of Orientalism thus: “One of the most valuable achievements in Orientalism was not simply to establish the connection between scholarship and state power in the colonial period, but to indicate its afterlife in a “postcolonial” global formation with the U.S. at its epicenter” (“Remembering Said” 14). One cannot fail to see, the existence of this work relentlessly transgressing the boundaries drawn by disciplines of knowledge and imperial governance. Orientalism with its strategies of reading literary texts as historical and theoretical events forced open the authoritative modes of knowing the Other. As Stathis Gourgouris remarks:

Though essentially propelled by an analytical, disintegrating glance on historical and geographical
structures embedded and institutionalized in dominant discourses and practices, and though self-critically aware of the trappings of facile projections and resolutions, *Orientalism* provides us with a brilliant armory for engaging the institutions and structures of our historical present ("*Orientalism* and the Open Horizon” 12).

The proliferation of texts ‘writing back’ against western hegemony would have been unimaginable without *Orientalism*. In other words, it brought about indeterminacy in the authority of western knowledge and subsequently provoked the readers to rethink the modern West from the perspective of the colonized subject.

The underlying intention behind the composition of *Orientalism* is obviously political. When critics by and large find fault with the theoretical flaws of *Orientalism* they tend to forget the politics or resistance emerging throughout Said’s writing. He finds it necessary to “defend people and identities threatened with extinction or [are] subordinated because they are considered inferior.” And this is very different from “aggrandizing a past invented for present reasons” (*Reflections* 567). Though the hegemonic and ideological apparatuses of the Orientalist structure always gave little way for resistance, Said seems to be making subtle references to the dimensions of resistances when he says: “the internal constraints of [hegemonic systems] upon writers and thinkers were productive, not unilaterally inhibiting” (*Orientalism* 14). More importantly, the constitution of his subjectivity
and self-representation has always been inseparably connected to the tensions between resistance and domination. In one of his last essays, titled “Orientalism Once More,” Said emphasizes the significance of humanist critique. This marks a great shift in his perspective, which was often charged for its Foucauldian element. He uses the term “humanism” stubbornly, “despite the scornful dismissal of the term by sophisticated postmodern critics” (“Orientalism Once More” 874). And, humanism for Said is “centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition” (878).

Said’s politics of representation as stated earlier, started with an article “The Arab Portrayed” (1968), a few years before the publication of Orientalism, where he describes “the image of the Arab that had been manipulated in journalism and some scholarly writing” (Reflections 563). Therefore, it can be presumed that, Said examines the constitution of Oriental subjectivity, taking off from his reflections on the construction and representations of Arab identity. As a result, what concerned him was “how a subject was constituted, how a language could be formed—writing as a construction of realities that served one or another purpose instrumentally” (563). Thus starting with Orientalism, Said seeks possibilities of a better understanding of the East, the Orient and consequently, in an oblique way, the problem of Palestine and his own belonging to that “lost world.”35 That Said’s

35 Homi Bhabha says: “I cannot read a line of Said’s work without being reminded of the salience he gives to the Palestinian situation; and I do not encounter a word of his writings without being made aware of his concern of the human condition” (“Adagio” 374).
Palestine and Islam attempts to rewrite the history of the Middle East conflict clearly indicates that his intention is to connect history not just with culture and politics, but also with subject formation. As Asha Varadharajan points out:

His book Orientalism produces knowledge and representation of the Orient or of the colonized; however, their identity is negatively determined. The nature of the object is contained in the inventory Said, in the manner of Gramsci, compiles of the infinity of traces deposited by the historical process in the self of the colonized and the geography of the Orient (124).

She observes further that “in the course of interpreting the paranoiac form of thought that relentlessly estranges the [O]ther, Said produces thought that breaks with its own frames to include the [O]ther” (127).

To conclude, as the contemporary Marxist critic Terry Eagleton observes, “[Said’s] central argument was basically right. The [W]est’s denigration of the [E]ast has always gone with imperialist incursions into its terrain” (“Eastern Block”). In other words, even in the present day, the Orient exists per se, and Orientalism continues its representation through the legitimation of Occidental domination. And as a manifesto of colonial subjects, Said’s Orientalism represents truly and politically a statement of his own subjectivity as an Oriental as well as the subjectivities of conquered and marginalized people.

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36 See Terry Eagleton, New Statesman 13th February 2006. He makes this somewhat laudatory remark while reviewing Robert Irwin’s For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies.