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FRANCIS V. TISO (2005)

**ORIENTALISM.** Once associated with the exotic "Eastern" themes and styles of Eugene Delacroix's, James McNeill Whistler's, and John Singer Sargent's paintings; Victor Hugo's *Les Orientales*; and Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbô* (though related representations also can be found in subjects ranging from world fairs to such Hollywood films as *The Thief of Baghdad* and *Lawrence of Arabia*), the term *Orientalism* has come to denote a broader complex of discursive assumptions and institutional (especially academic) practices that regulate the understanding, appreciation, and domination of the West's—more precisely, Europe's—supposed "Other." In the study of religion, both from confessional dogmatic and secular comparatist perspectives, *Orientalism* evokes the tendency to mystify, caricature, homogenize, and petrify Asian and North African cultural systems, whether via idealization or via demonization, viewing them as contrasting to and often opposing such "Western" concepts as privatized and rationalized belief or the separation of church and state. Indeed, the modern definition and application of the concept "religion" as a universal category seems a first large step in the direction of Orientalism, as scholars such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Talal Asad have argued.

The work of Edward W. Said (1935–2003), especially his path-breaking *Orientalism* (2003), first published in 1978, initiated this shift in the meaning of the term. His *Orientalism* offers trenchant criticism of "Orientalist" scholarship and calls for a theoretical and interdisciplinary rearrangement of knowledge in relation to questions of power and empire that would seek not a new field of research but more integrated and self-reflective approaches in the scholarly study of the global South and East. Subsequent post-colonial, subaltern, and, more broadly, cultural studies, all of which attempt to shed light on increasingly manifold forms of multicultural identities, have greatly benefited from his work. Said himself, however, retained an allegiance to his early literary training in close reading and philology (a training evident in his scrupulous and detailed analyses), and he was at times, as in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), somewhat dismissive of "contemporary critics who prefer what is implicit to what the text actually says" (p. 88).

Said's definition of the term *Orientalism* has multiple facets. In his book *Orientalism* he seeks to present and interpret it "as a historical phenomenon, a way of thought, a contemporary problem, and a material reality" (p. 44). In part, this complexity results from his historical insight into the "Orient" as "that semi-mythical construct which since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in the late eighteenth century has been made and re-made countless times by power acting through an expedient form of knowledge" (p. xiii); in part, it hinges on his conviction that the "sometimes sympathetic but always dominating scrutiny" (p. 57) directed toward things "oriental" entails, not just an economy and an anthropology, but an entire epistemology and ontology, whose axioms and protracted effects must be uncovered by a patient "genealogy."

Although European characterizations of the Orient date back to the Athenian plays of Aeschylus (*The Persians*) and Euripides (*The Bacchae*), and the exploration and exploitation of its central tropes can already be traced in Herodotus and Alexander the Great, Said dates the fateful, as it were official, beginnings of the hegemonic regulation and objectification of this geographical referent and its accompanying imagery much later. Greece and Rome had conceptions of the "primitive," as Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas document in their classic *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935 [1997]), but only in the Christian Middle Ages did Orientalism find its first expression as "a field of learned study." In *Orientalism* Said writes: "In the Christian West, Orientalism is considered to have commenced its formal existence with the decision of the Church Council of Vienna in 1312 to establish a series of chairs in 'Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca'" (pp. 49–50, quoting Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*). These chairs were not exactly disinterested, given that the suggestion came from Raymond Lull, who recommended the study of Arabic out of zeal to use it as a tool in converting Muslims and refuting Arabic

philosophy. But such instrumentalization was always counterbalanced by an ambiguous fascination, so that “between the Middle Ages and the eighteenth century such major authors as Ariosto, Milton, Marlowe, Tasso, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and the authors of the *Chanson de Roland* and the *Poema del Cid* drew on the Orient’s riches for their productions, in ways that sharpened the outlines of imagery, ideas, and figures populating it” (p. 63). Said cites “the Sphinx, Cleopatra, Eden, Troy, Sodom and Gomorrah, Astarte, Isis and Osiris, Sheba, Babylon, the Genii, the Magi” (p. 63), but other examples of the lure of the “exotic” are legion.

In the central pages of *Orientalism* Said traces the academic establishment of the field from the late eighteenth century onward, focusing especially on the insinuation of power into even the most recondite fields and its imbrication in their constitution. Key representatives in this development are Johann David Michaelis and Friedrich Schlegel in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany, Ernest Renan and Louis Massignou in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France, and C. Snouck Hurgronje in the twentieth-century Netherlands. In their very different approaches to the biblical text, the “wisdom of India,” the figure of Jesus, and the mystical elements in Islam, these scholars all seemed to agree on “the linguistic importance of the Orient to Europe,” as well as on the “unchanging, uniform, and radically peculiar” nature of the Orient as an “object” whose golden age was steadily projected into a bygone past and whose present was therefore historically tied to a “latent inferiority” (pp. 98, 209).

Preoccupation with the Orient led to the founding of many learned and trading societies, just as perceived interest in safeguarding a seemingly undivided Christian West motivated the establishment of explicitly missionary organizations such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (founded in 1698), the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (1701), the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), and many others. The institutional embedding of “Orientalism” was thus also—if not first and foremost—religiously or theologically-inflected. The genealogy of “Orientalism” Said proposes needs to unravel this connection.

Said’s analysis is based upon a certain conception of humanism and humanistic studies, however, and therefore on the opposition between “secular criticism” and “religious criticism,” a distinction introduced in *Orientalism* and elaborated in his later *The Word, the Text, and the Critic* (1983) and *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2003). In the preface to the twenty-fifth-anniversary edition of *Orientalism*, he asserts that there is “a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion” (p. xix), a claim juxtaposed to his ambition to “use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle” (p. xxii). Can his appeal to “worldly secular discourse” and to the “secular world” as “the

world of history as made by human beings” (p. xxix) admit a nuanced assessment of the role of religion in his narrative? An attempt to answer this question yields two conflicting elements.

On the one hand, Said’s analysis undoes certain preconceptions in the study of Islam, especially concerning Islam’s relation to modern notions of private faith, religious experience, violence, and democracy. Stressing the many communities of interpretation and the need to differentiate between historical periods, geographical locations, and individual thinkers, he insists on the importance of avoiding generalizations and stereotypes, including where “religion” is at issue.

On the other hand, Said’s project remains based on an unapologetic “residual” humanism” (p. 339), which sees in religion, even in its broadest and richest definition, stripped of its narrow Protestant and Enlightenment association with a privately held faith, a limited and far from perennial constituent in the psychic and social dimensions of power and knowledge. As Said notes in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), religion, in this view, is “an agent of closure, shutting off human investigation, criticism, and effort in deference to the authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the other-worldly” (p. 290). One can understand Said’s reluctance to give in to the “contemporary Manichean theologizing of the ‘Other’” (p. 291), but here, in fact, may lie the greatest weakness of his overall project: the suggestion in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that all “returns” to culture and tradition” go hand in hand with intellectual and moral codes that undercut “such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism” and in decolonized countries lead largely to “varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism” (p. xiii). Although he seems aware of the historical, geopolitical, and imaginative role of “public religion” (the expression is from José Casanova in *Public Religions in the Modern World* [1994]) in the transition from secular nationalism to different formations of political Islam, well beyond his general observations in *Orientalism* that “what appears in the West to be the emergence, return to, or resurgence of Islam is in fact a struggle in Islamic societies over the definition of Islam,” and that no “one person, authority, or institution has total control over that definition” (p. 332), Said apparently does not count “religion”—or the theologico-political—as a potentially emancipatory or empowering, let alone democratizing and humanizing force per se. The remarkable “return to religion” reinforced and refracted by the complicated economic and cultural processes of globalization and driven by the newest technological media therefore poses an anomaly that his overall historical and cultural analysis has difficulty in assessing. In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2003) he speaks of religion mostly in terms of “religious enthusiasm,” which he considers “perhaps the most dangerous of threats to the humanistic enterprise, since it is patently antiseccular and antidemocratic in nature, and, in its monotheistic forms as a kind of politics, is by definition about as intolerantly inhumane and downright unarguable

as can be" (p. 51). In Said's account, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu fundamentalism are not fundamentally different in this respect.

This being said, the premises and arguments of Said's project nonetheless provide a model for analyzing processes of religious conflict and dialogue, missionary expansion and ecumenical cooperation, proselytizing and conversion, apologetics and the self-explication of faith seeking understanding in confrontation with different epochs, locations, and cultures.

In *Orientalism* Said leaves no doubt that the critique of Orientalism should not be confused with "anti-Westernism" (pp. 330, 334). He distances himself from the claim, imputed to Orientalism, that the historical phenomenon of Orientalism is "a synecdoche, or miniature symbol, of the entire West, and indeed ought to be taken to represent the West as whole" (pp. 330–331). On the contrary, Said emphasizes repeatedly that he "has no 'real' Orient to argue for," which is a way of saying that "neither the term *Orient* nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability," each being "made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other," and also that "words such as 'Orient' and 'Occident' correspond to no stable reality that exists as a natural fact," meaning that "all such geographical designations are an odd combination of the empirical and the imaginative" (p. 331). Ultimately, Orientalism and its related studies thus seek to effect a process of *unlearning* (a term from Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* [New York, 1958]) in which—at least the dominant mode of interpreting—the "Orient" and the "Occident" will be eliminated altogether (p. 28). Yet Said leaves no doubt that in this and similar relationships of opposition, polarity, and mirroring, "the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another, different and competing alter ego. The construction of identity . . . involves the construction of opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'" (p. 332).

Indeed, Said writes, "even the primitive community we belong to natively is not immune from the interpretive contest," and the constructed "others" upon which the construction of identity depends may be "outsiders and refugees, or apostates and infidels" (p. 332). All others are not created equal, however. Orientalism and Hellenism are crucially different, for example: "The former is an attempt to describe a whole region of the world as an accompaniment to that region's colonial conquest, the latter is not at all about the direct colonial conquest of Greece in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; in addition, Orientalism expresses antipathy to Islam, Hellenism sympathy for classical Greece" (p. 342).

Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism*, however, that the relationship between European expansion and the non-West was never merely unilateral: "there was always some form of active resistance [armed or cultural], and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won

out" (p. xii). Such a conclusion defies the modern understanding of *identities* and requires, in the historiography of *Orientalism* and *empire*, an approach that is no longer "linear and subsuming," but "contrapuntal and often nomadic," not least because "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogenous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (p. xxv).

Said's work has been taken to task by critics, notably Bernard Lewis in his *Islam and the West*, as lacking in nuance and attacking scholarship that can claim more disinterest than Said allows. Others have pointed out that some Orientalists were themselves active opponents of colonialism and imperialism (and not just in the name of an idealized "Orient"), and that non-Western nationalists were, in turn, inspired by Western "Orientalist" writings or adopted the caricatures of themselves as "Other." Still other critics have decried Said's political engagement, since 1967, in the Palestinian cause for national self-determination (as he himself notes in *Orientalism*, "with full attention paid to the reality of the Jewish people and what they suffered by way of persecution and genocide" [p. xxiii]).

Yet Said views the psychological, ideological, and social complex of "Orientalism" as the counterpart and "secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism" (p. 27). As in the writings of the early Frankfurt School, notably "Elements of Anti-Semitism" in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's classic *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the analysis of "Orientalism" details a historically and culturally determined structure and comportment of prejudice ultimately based upon a mechanism of projection. Depictions of Islam that start from analogy to Christian premises—namely, that "Mohammed was to Islam as Christ was to Christianity" (p. 60)—then proceed to erroneous and pejorative characterizations of Islam as "Mohammedanism" and of Muḥammed as an "impostor" are just one example of how the imaginary geography of Orientalism transposes a never-ending list of qualifications onto a supposedly amorphous "Other" whose contours and meaning, let alone intentions and self-interpretations, seem all but irrelevant: "the Orient acquired representatives . . . and representations, each one more concrete, more internally congruent with some Western exigency, than the ones that preceded it. It is as if, having once settled on the Orient as a locale suitable for incarnating the infinite in a finite shape, Europe could not stop the practice; the Orient and the Oriental, Arab, Islamic, Indian, Chinese, or whatever, become repetitious pseudo-incarnations of some great original (Christ, Europe, the West), they were supposed to have been imitating" (p. 62).

Although in their accounts of primitive myth, magic, and shamanism the neo-Marxists of the Frankfurt School's first generation continued the Orientalist blind spots Said identifies in Marx's own 1848 *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and 1853 articles on British rule in India (as did, after them, Jürgen Habermas in adopting Max Weber's acceptance of European exceptionalism vis-à-vis China into

*Theory of Communicative Action*), one of Horkheimer and Adorno's insights is important here. They knew well that where imitation fails (and it necessarily does), discriminatory judgment and ultimately persecution must result.

By contrast, Said offers a non-Marxist critique of power and knowledge based on the heterodox ideas of Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, notably his concept of "hegemony," and on the concept of "discursive formation" from Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*. Although, as discursive formation, Orientalism could be seen as a "system for citing works and authors," Said in *Orientalism* corrects Foucault in order to recognize "the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise collective body of texts" (p. 23), the way they count for something in the constitution of its power.

Since the publication of *Orientalism*, scholars have pursued its line of thought in many different geographical and imaginative contexts. Said's own *Culture and Imperialism* broadens his earlier perspective by including critical studies on "a more general pattern of relationships between the modern metropolitan West and its overseas territories" (p. xi), such as Africa, the Caribbean, and Australia, whereas other scholars have focused on the construction of identity in the Western approach to the "religions of the East," whether on the Indian subcontinent or in Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. Thus, the volume *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (1993), edited by Carol E. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, explores the ways in which colonial administrators constructed knowledge about the society and culture of India and the processes through which that knowledge has shaped past and current perceptions of Indian reality. These and other contributions to "modern cultural theory" would seem to confirm Said's view, expressed in his 1994 afterword to *Orientalism*, that "cultures are hybrid and heterogenous and . . . that cultures and civilizations are so interrelated and interdependent as to beggar any unitary or simply delineated description of their individuality" (p. 347).

More recently, the discussion around Orientalism has been shadowed by a parallel consideration of "Occidentalism," as if to challenge Said's claim that "no one is likely to imagine a field symmetrical to [Orientalism] called Occidentalism" (p. 50). In *Occidentalism* (2004) Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit describe Occidentalism as the "Orientalist view upside down" (p. 10) and hence as the "dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies," directed at the scientific and secular worldview, global capitalism, sexual liberties, pop culture, and a "cluster of prejudices" whose "historical roots," they argue, lie in Europe and its Enlightenment (p. 5). This "hateful caricature" of Western modernity in terms of a mechanical or "machine civilization" is contrasted by Occidentalists to a (lost) ideal of organic and totalizing spirituality (pp. 6, 7).

In contrast to the hardening of opposites in Occidentalism, the true legacy of the Orientalism discussion will surely

lie not only in a far more complex understanding of cultural interrelation but in unsettling the categories of Orient and Occident themselves. French phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas has likewise come, via a different, philosophical route, to the conclusion that the categories of the West and the non-West should be demythologized, indeed, deontologized. He repeatedly claims that Western metaphysics, which he associates with Greece and especially Athens, has fallen prey to a disorientation (*désorientation*), a certain forgetfulness or faithlessness with respect to what one might term its *Oriental Other* (or at least one of them): the monotheistic tradition of the Bible and Jerusalem.

Setting Levinas alongside Said highlights a weakness in the former, namely, that an all too abstract conception of the Orient tends to elide precisely the Arab populations Said, in his writings and his life, worked tirelessly to advocate. Yet in Levinas's view Greek thought has rightly destroyed the idolatrous and primitivist yearning for participation in diffuse, irrational totalities (of nature, people, collective sentiment). Moreover, Levinas's recognition of an intrinsic instability in both the truths of philosophical reason and the revelation of religious tradition can give us a new perspective on the significance of Orientalism. In critical opposition to both Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitive Mentality* and Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind*, Levinas insists that Europeanization—the philosophical project of Western modernity—and de-Europeanization, including decolonialization and the critique of imperialism, go hand-in-hand. The deconstruction of Europe's investment in knowing and dominating a constructed Other itself relies on eminently European notions of rational discourse, scriptural learning, and hermeneutic sensibility. But to say that all passes through "the West," Levinas knows, is not the same as to claim that everything originates—or ends—there.

Said's *Orientalism*, informed by its author's commitment to European humanism and his training in the field of comparative literature, with roots in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Germany and especially philology, is an excellent example of the de-Europeanization for which Levinas calls. Moreover, Europe's Orient, as Said points out in *Orientalism*, is a reminder that constructions and projections of the Other may not be so distant from the self after all: historically, "the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe," not only its "cultural contestant," but also "the source of its civilizations and languages" (p. 1)—and, we might add, of what historically have been its dominant religions.

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Carol E. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia, 1993); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, N.J., 2000); and a volume published on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Orientalism*, Inge E. Boer, ed., *After Orientalism: Critical Entanglements, Productive Looks* (Amsterdam, 2004). On the question of religion, see: Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York, 1962); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (London, 1993); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the "Mystic East"* (London, 1999); William D. Hart, *Edward Saïd and the Religious Effects of Culture* (Cambridge, U.K., 2000); and José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, 1994). For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century examples of Orientalist biblical scholarship, see: Jonathan M. Hess, "Johann David Michaelis and the Colonial Imaginary: Orientalism and the Emergence of Racial Antisemitism in Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 2 (2000): 56–101; and Halvor Moxness, "Renan's Vie de Jesus as Representation of the Orient," in *Jews, Antiquity, and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, edited by Hayim Lapin and Dale B. Martin, pp. 85–108 (Bethesda, Md., 2003). On the representation of Islam, see R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962) and Edmund Burke III, "Orientalism and World History: Representing Middle Eastern Nationalism and Islamism in the Twentieth Century," *Theory and Society* 27, no. 4 (August 1998): 589–607. On what could be called Orientalism's predecessor concept, primitivism, see Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, with supplementary essays by W. F. Albright and P.-E. Dumont (Baltimore, 1935; reprint 1997). On the relationship between Marxism and Orientalism, see Karl August Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New York, 1981), which attempted to do for non-Western societies, notably China, what Marx and Engels had done for Europe. Marx had used this terminology in 1853 in his articles on British rule in India. See also Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (London, 1958). On Orientalism's parallel concept, "Occidentalism," see Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York, 2004) and Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York, 1995). On Kant and the religious construction of identity and ethnicity, see Hent de Vries, *Religion and Violence: Philosophical Perspectives from Kant to Derrida* (Baltimore, 2002). Emmanuel Levinas's most representative writings on the question of Europe and the West are *Difficile liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme* (Paris, 1976), translated as *Difficult Freedom* (Baltimore, 1990), and *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (the Hague, 1961), translated as *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh, 1969). On the question of globalization and the technological media, see Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, eds., *Religion and Media* (Stanford, Calif., 2001).

HENT DE VRIES (2005)

**ORIENTATION.** Symbols of space and its order most clearly illustrate the religious act of orientation, that is, the fundamental process of situating human life in the world. Orientation is the conscious act of defining and assuming proper position in space. Fixing the human place in existence in a significant way is a religious act when it orients a human being toward the sacred. This fundamental disposition toward the sacred extends its significance from the points of orientation to all individual and social acts, as well as to all cosmic structures. In relation to the sacred, inhabited space and history become apprehensible. Various kinds of human living spaces define their order and meaning in relation to the sacred: the cosmos, the city, the village or residence space, the house, and the individual. They are described together with those manifestations of the sacred toward which they are oriented.

**SYMBOLIC FORMS.** The technology of calculation and measurement used in orientation would make an interesting and controversial study in the history of science. It would include treatment of geomancy, astronomic calculation, use of the gnomon, the astrolabe, and the plumb line, canons of measure derived from human body measurements, and determinations of magnetic north, among other techniques. However, this article's purpose is limited to the religious meaning of the act of orientation and a description of the sacred nature of the points toward which the human situation is aligned. Because orientation involves relating an entity to a reality other than itself, it always entails a conjunction of beings and, in this sense, creates a center where all realities meet.

According to Latin historians, Romulus founded the city of Rome by drawing a circular furrow around the Palatine hill with a plow. The trench around which the furrow was cut, and toward which it was oriented, was called the *mundus* ("world"), the same name applied to the universe. The *mundus* was a pit, an opening between the earthly world and the underworld. For the living it provided a link not only with the sphere of the dead but also with the celestial sphere, for the outline plan (*limitatio*) of the city, especially its division into four quarters, was based on a model of heavenly origin. The *mundus* itself, being a detailed image of the cosmos, was divided into quadrants. Rome was habitable because the city was built in the image of the cosmos—according to a heavenly model of the universe—around a life-giving center, a navel of the world, which permitted contact with all realms of being.

The universe itself possesses a place where communication among all cosmic realms is possible. It is to this center of the world that all other meaningful structures in the cosmos are directed and from which they derive. For the religious life of Indians in the Qollahuaya region of the central Andes, Mount Kaata is the sacred center of all reality. Everything that is whole, whether it be the microcosm of the human body or the universe itself, may be identified with it. Indeed, all integrity derives from it. An individual's life cycle