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IMPACT OF A BOOK

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The aim of the study is to identify the areas of scholarship where Professor Edward Said's work *Orientalism* (1978) has laid foundations for new forms of enquiry or where new approaches are being formulated replacing those seriously undermined by the book. The first category covers the production of what is referred to as 'postcolonial studies', the second deals with the attempts to find an alternative to orientalism.

25 years ago Professor Edward Said's book *Orientalism* caused a major upheaval among the orientalist brotherhood and even beyond.[1] The work was rejected outright by some, applauded by others and criticized by most. The dust of the battle having settled, what traces – if any – has the book left in the scholarship of today? The author's death this year, remembered in the last issue of the African and Asian Studies, makes our meditation over the text and its passage through time the more appropriate.

To begin it would be useful to remind ourselves of the cultural and political atmosphere of the late seventies in the West, especially in America, and, above all, of the main theses *Orientalism* presented.

Said's critique in *Orientalism* reacted to the new dimension orientalism acquired through its expansion into the media discourse in America. The oil crisis, the Iranian revolution and the insurgence of Islamic fundamentalism resulted in the theorem "crisis – oil – Arabs – Islam". In his later work, *Covering Islam* (Said 1981:33) Said gives the reasons which made him engage with "Western and especially American reactions to the Islamic world". He comes to the conclusion that it was raising the prices of oil by OPEC that started the process of subsuming everything relating before to particular groups, such as Arabs and Iranians, under the slogan "Islam". Said did not hesitate to explain this phenomenon through the deep sedimented defensive and age-old image of Islam surviving in the memory of the West.

[1] *Orientalism* (pp. 368 +xi) was published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Henley/Pantheon Books, New York, 1978. Numerous editions followed, since 1994 with the author's Afterword.

To build up his critique of orientalism, Said turned to the writings of Michel Foucault, a prominent representative of French poststructuralism, and Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist theorist. Foucault contends that knowledge is constructed according to a discursive field which creates a representation of the object of knowledge, its constitution and its limits; any writer has to conform to this in order to communicate and to be understood and accepted.[2] "Every society has its own regime of truth, its ‚general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (Foucault 1973: xvii). For Foucault, a discourse is a strongly bounded area of knowledge, a system of statements within which the world can be known. Discourse constructs its knowledge. There are certain unspoken rules controlling which statements can be made and which cannot, and these rules determine the nature of the discourse (Ashcroft 1998: 70). The analysis of knowledge/power as provided by Foucault enabled Said to treat orientalism as a discourse of power in the context of geopolitical struggle between the West and the Middle East. It was the notion of discourse that offered an alternative way of thinking about the operations of ideology, both as a form of consciousness and as a material practice (Young 1995: 159). Gramsci's idea of hegemony, the capacity of the ruling class to convince other classes that its interests are the interests of all, helps Said identify orientalism as an important factor in the development of imperialism. It was the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized that was the most potent operation of the dominating power in colonized regions. By combining Foucault´s ideas on discourse with Gramsci´s thoughts on hegemony Said built up a powerful critique which questioned the validity of orientalism.

Said rejects the claim of orientalism to be a neutral scholarly activity, which studies the cultures of the Orient[3] and demonstrates the complicity of academic forms of knowledge with the institutions of power. He contends that orientalism was made possible by the imperialist expansion into the Muslim world and, at the same time, the imperialist expansion was made possible by orientalism. In his book he wants to demonstrate how philology, lexicography, history, literature contributed to the production of orientalism as an imperialist tradition. Said (1979: 300-1) distinguishes four principal dogmas of orientalism: first, "the absolute and systematic difference" between the West and the Orient. Second, rep-

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[2] In his newspaper article "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals" (*Independent* Sept. 17, 2001) Said admits that owing to the development of the electronic media "our ideas today of discourse and archives must be radically modified and can no longer be defined as Foucault painstakingly tried to define them mere two decades ago".

[3] According to W. Mignolo (1998: 46) the origins of orientalism consist in the complicity between the civilizing mission articulated in colonial discourse and the civilizing processes articulated as an object of study of the human sciences. The power of this configuration of knowledge consists in denying epistemological possibilities to the barbarians. "Cultures of scholarship were precisely what people outside Europe either lacked (like the Aztecs and the Incas) or, if they happened to possess them (like China, India and the Islamic world), they became an object of study (e.g., the rise of "Orientalism")."

resentations of the Orient are based on classical texts rather than direct evidence drawn from "modern Oriental realities", third, theOrient is eternal, uniform and incapable of defining itself, fourth, the Orient is either to be feared or to be controlled.

It is remarkable that Said was not deterred from the enterprise either by the lack of qualification for such work or by the sheer size of the field, its enormous geographical diversity and temporal extension. Understanding that it was necessary to cut the material available to manageable proportions, Said decided to concentrate on the Anglo – French – American experience of the Arabs and Islam. Selecting the area he was most familiar with he had to leave out some important politico-linguistic divisions of orientalism: Italian, Dutch, Russian and, above all, German, and thus made himself open to serious criticism. The contributions of German orientalism are such that no serious student of the field would allow himself the luxury of ignoring them. Said is aware of this fact and reproaches himself for it., offering two reasons. He argues that the Germans were only studying materials gathered by others, and that Germany was not present in the Middle East (Said 1979: 19).

But, considering the latter argument, how does the case of Germany connect with the thesis of the relationship between orientalism and imperialism? "By failing to examine German scholarship, *(Orientalism)* shies away from confronting the crucial issue of what may be attributable to colonial conditions and what may not" (Rocher 1993, 215). Germany aside, ignoring the European Rest is a case in itself. The production and acceptance of knowledge, besides being to a great degree dependent on the language in which it is formulated, must be seen in the context of the geocultural divisions of the world as well, a fact that needs closer scrutiny.

Critics of Said´s work argued that orientalism cannot be sufficiently explained by colonialism. Orientalism existed before the age of European imperialism, and as mentioned above, flourished in countries which had no colonies in the East. And was it indeed possible for orientalism in the imperialist countries not to be influenced by imperialism? (Mani – Frankenberg 1985: 175). In the opinion of other critics (Ludden 1993: 250) Said´s conception of orientalism is rich in theory but poor in facts. Saids makes provocative associations between the texts of orientalism and the dynamics of the European power, but the particularities connecting the two are missing. By collapsing the entire history of orientalism into a consistent discourse, Said neglects the precise relations between the origins and uses of the particular forms of knowledge and their immediate historical connection, obscuring the intricate relations between the pursuit of knowledge and governmental pursuits. Some argued Said´s approach was ahistorical, inconsistent and nativist, others accused him of using the guilty conscience of Western intellectuals to silence them.

In the opinion of A. Salvatore (1997: 156)... "the pamphletistic character of Said´s work, his plain mistakes, wholesale judgements, and finally his lack of competence in analysing orientalism, might have rightly pointed to a constitutive weakness of this book. These accusations do not diminish, however, its val-

ue in consecrating an epistemic rupture. The innovative strength of Said's fresh problematization of orientalism is to be seen ... in its capacity to reduce to a common denominator the scattered elements of former critiques of orientalism, and thereby grounding a virtually new tradition of discourse".

Indeed it seems that Said's major theoretical achievement was the creation of an object of analysis called 'colonial discourse'. Colonial discourse has since become an important and significant area of research and the analysis of the power structures of imperialism has even been extended to categories such as 'minority discourse', which means that it is being used to describe power structures within the West itself (Young 1990: 173). Although the resistance to colonial systems of representation and the attempt to decolonize history and culture started long before *Orientalism* with the works of Franz Fanon and others, the influence of Said's book on further development of this kind of theorizing is overwhelming. In the wake of *Orientalism* an unexpectedly broad spectrum of projects appeared which became engaged with colonial discourse, often in connection with feminist and Afro-American production and critical evaluation of the Western literary canon. Within the framework of literary criticism a new subdivision emerged labeled *postcolonial theory* or *colonial discourse analysis*.[4] Its main purpose was to demonstrate to which extent colonialism, in the British example, was not simply a marginal activity on the edge of English civilization, but fundamental in its own self-representation (Young 1990: 174). The obvious objects of postcolonial criticism have become authors clearly connected with the colonies, such as R. Kipling, J. Conrad, E.M. Foster and R.L. Stevenson. Such writers as Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte have not escaped either. Postcolonial critics demonstrate how the existence of the empire influenced the structure and mores of the society these writers depict and also the way they depict it. They are trying to show that colonization was never simply external to the societies of the imperial metropolis.

Since the late seventies studies of 'third world' histories and cultures have come to draw to a very considerable extent upon the theoretical perspectives provided by poststructuralism and postmodernism. After the publication of *Orientalism* these perspectives, now extended into a distinctive amalgam of cultural critique, Foucauldian approach to power, and postmodernist emphasis on the decentered and heterogenous began to be appropriated for the study of non-European histories and cultures (O'Hanlon and Washbrook 1992: 141). Although Said's attention was focused at the Middle East and Islam, his work found special resonance in the Indian subcontinent. In the field of Indian colonial history, the Saidian model has become a paradigm for a new generation of historians and anthropologists. Gyan Prakash, Ashis Nandy, Nicholas B. Dirks and especially Ranajit Guha, editor of *Subaltern Studies* can be mentioned here. Charac-

[4] Besides the terms 'postcolonial theory' and 'colonial discourse analysis' the term 'postcolonial criticism' is also used. Some authors view 'postcolonial criticism' as a separate field of activity, using traditional methods and approaches.

terizing the new approach Gyan Prakash says: "One of the distinct effects of the recent emergence of postcolonial criticism has been to force a radical re-thinking and re-formulation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and Western domination. This is not to say that colonialism and its legacies remained unquestioned until recently: nationalism and Marxism come immediately to mind as powerful challenges to colonialism. But both of these operated with master narratives that put Europe at the centre ... postcolonial criticism, on the other hand, seeks to undo Eurocentrism" (Prakash 1992:8, in: Dirlik 1994:329).

Postcolonial criticism is concerned above all with the process of creating 'the Other'. Homi Bhabha, one of the main representatives of postcolonial theory, is interested in the relations between the colonizers and the colonized. He speaks of *hybridization* as the result of the transfer of ideas from metropolis to periphery, and of *mimicry*, which he sees as one of the basic features of the colonial relations. After the colonized has acquired all the knowledge from the colonizer, he has become like him, but not quite. He has not become a sovereign citizen, but he is no longer totally different. Mimicry shatters the dividing line between the two and undermines the authority of the colonizer.

Another prominent representative of postcolonial theory, Gayatri Spivak, has her own style and her choice of themes. Rather than on colonial discourse her emphasis is on various projects representing counterdiscourse such as the historiography of the Indian Subaltern Studies group. In her opinion postcolonial analysis has to stress heterogeneity in the cultures of colonialism and postcolonialism. Unlike Said, who homogenizes colonized peoples (he rarely mentions them) Spivak recognizes the heterogeneity of the (post)colonial subjects. Unlike Said, who refuses to see any positive aspect in Western domination, Spivak's work offers a more complex vision of the effects of colonialism for the colonized peoples. In some respect her vision shows analogy with later Said, who in *Culture and Imperialism* offers much more generous views of colonial history than in his first work. Although Spivak never doubts imperialism was a highly destructive force in the history of the colonized peoples, she also recognizes its positive influence, using expressions like 'enabling violence'. Speaking of her own career as one of the leading figures in the humanist scholarship today she does not hesitate to say: 'it is the structures of cultural imperialism that have enabled me'. An important part of Spivak's work demonstrates consistent concern with education both in its practical and political aspects. Her ambition is to establish a transnational study of cultures. She says (1993: 186)... "it seems to me that institutes and curricula for a historically sophisticated transnational study of culture have become an item on the agenda... The point is to negotiate between the national, the global, and the historical as well the contemporary diasporic. We must both anthropologize the West and study the various cultural systems of Africa, Asia, Asia Pacific and the Americas as if peopled by historical agents. Only then can we begin to put together the story of the development of a cosmopolitanism that is global, gendered and dynamic".

It was not long before so-called 'postcolonial studies'[5] emerged as a new disciplinary field on the academic scene in the West. Within a short time it grew rapidly producing its own journals, book-publishing series, conferences, and jobs, and acquired considerable institutional cachet. At the same time the new scholarship had to face criticism from both inside and outside its discursive field. The most damaging of the objections levelled at postcolonial theory has been the charge that far from being a liberatory form of cultural practice, it is complicit in the operations of the neo-colonial world order. O'Hanlon and Washbrook (1992: 166) as well as many other critics express the view that the growing stress on the self-representation of third world peoples is little more than a reflection of the multiminoritarian academic culture of the United States, influenced by the immigrant intelligentsia from the former colonies. The exclusion of class and the materialist critique of capitalism from the agenda of scholarship, argue the authors, has absolutely critical consequences. "What it means is that the true underclasses of the world are only permitted to present themselves as victims of the particularistic kinds of gender, racial, and national oppression which they share with preponderantly middle-class American scholars and critics, who would speak with or in their voices. What such underclasses are denied is the ability to present themselves as classes: as victims of the universalistic, systemic and material deprivation of capitalism which clearly separate them off from their subaltern expositors" (ibid).

There is no doubt that the appearance of third world intellectuals on the academic scene of America, 'voyage in', has been the decisive factor for the emergence of postcolonial criticism. The most prominent representatives of the discourse are Edward Said, a Palestinian Arab, and immigrants from India Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, the so-called "holy trinity" of postcolonialism. W. Mignolo (1998: 53) offers an explanation: "... postcolonial critical thinking is, to intellectuals who have experienced colonial legacies, what critical theory (Frankfurt School) is to those who have experienced the limits of modern reason and the racial persecution of the Jews".

Besides, this 'voyage in' has to be seen as part and parcel of the growing stream of immigrants, refugees, exiles and other moving groups and persons. They constitute an essential feature of the world today and contribute to the way people see themselves and others. This is what Rushdie has called the 'empire within'. So it seems that besides the influence of post-structuralism, new ways of thinking about Marxism and the impact of feminism there is another important factor that has to be recognized as constitutive in the transformation of critical thinking that produced postcolonial theory. This factor is third world sensibilities which so far have not been taken seriously.

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[5] The term 'postcolonial' refers to global conditions after colonialism, in a sense it functions as a substitute for the formerly used term 'Third World'. In a more specific sense it can mean a literary description of the situation in postcolonial societies or a discourse of such a situation.

It has to be stressed that post-colonialism does not present a totalizing perspective on the formation and dynamics of the past and the contemporary world. However, material relations and global capitalism should be dealt with as much as literary production and cultural representations. The fact that much of postcolonial scholarship is practiced by literary critics who do not sufficiently engage with such disciplines as sociology, anthropology, economics and political science can explain some of its shortcomings. Or, in the view of Nadje Al-Ali (2000: 21), "many anthropologists, sociologists, economists and political scientists have not yet taken on board the theoretical, methodological and political stipulations generated by post-colonial sholarship".

So far we have discussed *Orientalism* as the founding text of the colonial discourse analysis. *Orientalism*, however, was primarily concerned with orientalism. And mainly with the orientalist way of representing Islam. How did the scholarship respond to Said´s attack on the integrity of the disciplinary field besides producing reviews?

Said himself does not offer any alternative to orientalism. In one of his newspaper articles he says:

"Even though I took great pains in the book to show that current discussions of the Orient or the Arabs are fundamentally premised upon a fiction, my book was often interpreted as a defence of the "real Islam". Whereas what I was trying to show was that any talk about Islam was radically flawed not only because of an unwarranted assumption was being made that a large ideologically freighted generalization could cover all the rich and diverse particularity of Islamic *life* (a very different thing) but also because it would simply be repeating the errors of orientalism to claim that the correct view of Islam was X or Y or Z. And still I would receive invitations from various institutions to give a lecture on the true meaning of an Islamic Republic or on the Islamic view of peace. Either one found oneself defending Islam – as if the religion needed that kind of defense – or by keeping silent, seeming to be tacitly accepting Islam´s defamation.

But rejection alone does not take one very far, since if we are to claim, as we must, that as a religion and as a civilization Islam *does* have a meaning. . . we must first be able to provide something in the way of a space in which to speak of Islam. Those who wish either to rebut the standard anti-Islamic and anti-Arab rhetoric that dominates the media and liberal intellectual discourse, or to avoid idealization of Islam (to say nothing of its sentimentalization), find themselves with scarcely a place to stand on, much less a place in which to move freely" (Independent, April 26 1980 issue).

At this point it is useful to mention two forms of orientalism, which B.S. Sayyid discerns in *Orientalism*. The first sees orientalism from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge: here the critique tries to show how Western scholarship was subverted by its complicity with Western imperialism. This he calls ´weak orientalism´. The other form theorizes the orientalist enterprise with regard to how orientalism actually constitutes the Orient. Orientalism does not just distort the ´real´ Orient, the Orient itself becomes the creation of orientalism. This is the ´strong´ form of orientalism (Sayyid 1997: 32). It is the strong

orientalism Said reacts to in the above quotation. He understands that if he starts to speak about Islam, he will be reincorporated into orientalism. To be able to speak he has to de-orientalize himself, which means he has to find another place from which to speak.

Said´s reticence about an alternative to orientalism has led a number of scholars to formulate an alternative. The anti-orientalists, noting that Said criticizes orientalism for its monolithic caricature of Islamic phenomena, concentrated on anti-essentialist theorization of Islam. The ability of Islam to be used in a variety of contexts led some to a conclusion that there is no such thing as Islam. They believe that by showing the great variety of Islamic practices they are making an argument against essentialism. In orientalism local phenomena are explained by reference to the essence of Islam, in anti-orientalism Islam is disseminated in local events. The dissolution of Islam leaves us with a series of ´little Islams´, local articulations of Islamic practices, reflecting the various economic, ethnic and social factors of the variety of Muslim communities. The problem of identifying these ´little Islams´ is displaced to other categories. In most cases Islam is seen as an ethnic marker or an ideology. (Sayyid 1997: 38). Islam, which is not reducible to the ´little Islams´ is nothing more than a label and has no importance in itself, any significance it may have comes from the contents attached to that label (Halliday and Alavi, 1988: 6). The question remains, however, why is it, that it is the name of Islam, rather than another name, that has become central in Muslim politics? It is only by theorizing Islam that one can hope to understand current attempts at Islamization (Sayyid 1997: 39-40).

In which direction this kind of anti-orientalist scholarship will develop remains to be seen.

The term ´anti-orientalism´ in recent usage also refers to certain reticence to speak for others. As an adjective, anti-orientalist, it means anti-representational. Said´s *Orientalism* generated a new alertness to the pitfalls of representational works, and thus inspired a greater sensitivity in appraising the West´s view of the Middle East. Many Western scholars began to feel uncomfortable about the way in which they had spoken for, rather than listened to those they referred to as inhabitants of ´the Orient´. *Orientalism* created an anti-representational way of thinking, leading to ethnico-epistemological denial of anyone´s right to represent the other. This trend, labeled anti-orientalist, has found a welcome home among scholars of gender relations in Muslim countries.

Colonialism, feminists argued, by making the Muslim woman and her rights central to imperial policy in the Middle East, reduced Muslim identity to the control of women´s moral conduct and their appearance in colonized Islamic lands. Polygamy, women´s seclusion and mandatory veiling became primary targets of criticism. Western colonial establishments, although themselves patriarchal, began to attack those traditions as primary reasons for Muslim backwardness and obstacles for the progress to civilization. Women´s issues became fused with Islamic culture as a whole (Stowasser 1994: 128). Leila Ahmed (1992: 129) argues: "... those who proposed an improvement in the status of women in Muslim countries from early on couched their advocacy in terms of

the need to abandon the (implicitly) 'innately' and 'irreparably' misogynic practices of the native culture in favour of the customs of another culture – the European ... it was in this context that the links between the issue of women and the issues of nationalism and culture were permanently forged".

As mentioned above, in the late seventies a wave of Islamophobia struck the West. Once more the maltreatment of women and their exotic attire became the focus of representational discourses on the Middle East, providing evidence for the moral, cultural and political inferiority of the Islamic world. To counter-balance and neutralize this imagery became the task of the day. The pressure of the political moment required and inspired anti-representational and self-affirmative studies of gender and Islam. By surveying women's roles and statuses in various Muslim societies, a large number of sophisticated studies and papers called attention to the heterogeneity of women's situations across class and location on one hand, and to Muslim women's strength, resilience and resistance on the other.

However, we are warned (Moghissi 1999: 38) there are inherent dangers in such defensive attitudes. The anti-orientalist studies of gender and Islam, trying to counter anti-Muslim prejudices and neo-orientalist representation of Muslim women can easily get caught in an apology of Islamic gender practices or justification of the role of the Islamic legal institutions in maintaining the patriarchal order in Muslim societies.

It has to be stressed that a significant number of scholars in the field approach their task in a balanced way. They believe that Islam is not the only explanation for the situation of women in the Muslim countries, but not of little consequence either. The patriarchal structures reflected in the historical articulation of Islam together with material, political and cultural factors are components determining women's access to education, employment and political participation. At the same time they emphasize women's struggles rather than their victimization. Besides, they take into consideration other social realities in the Middle East, including global economic and political interests.

Other feminist scholars in their work about women in Muslim societies focus on presenting women as social and political agents not in spite of Islam, but because of it. To Muslim feminists of the group only 'the ethical, egalitarian voice' in Islamic message matters, not its 'legalistic voice'. Because although Islam 'instituted a sexual hierarchy, it laid the ground, in its ethical voice, for the subversion of hierarchy' (L. Ahmed, 1992: 238). In a similar mode Hassan (2002: 203) says: "... Koran, as God's Word, cannot be made source of human injustice, and the injustice to which Muslim women have been subjected cannot be regarded as God-derived. The goal of Koranic Islam is to establish peace which can only exist within a just environment". According to Hassan Muslim women are not aware that their Islamic rights have been violated by the male-centred societies in which they live. She envisages a 'post-patriarchal Islam' which will secure women's legal and social rights. This will be possible by liberating Islamic orthodox scripture from the burden of male-centred interpretation as laid down over the years.

However, some feminists among this group such as El Guindi (1996) accept the Islamic framework in its totality and come close to denying the overpowering influence of Islamic practices on the status of women altogether. Besides, surprising as it may be, an increasing number of secular women seem to have suddenly discovered that the Islamic path to women's emancipation is the only viable and culturally appropriate alternative to feminism, Marxism and liberalism (Moghissi 2002: 40). This means that female seclusion, sex segregation and the veil should not be seen as symbols of male control over female sexuality. We should see the veil as a democratic practice which erases class origins and gives women a greater degree of social mobility and at the same time preserves their native culture (Ahmed 1992: 225).

In the opinion of Moghissi (1999: 42) it is true that some women have been able to use the veil to break certain barriers to their participation in public life, but her concern is the fact that in the name of validating women's self-perception and 'hearing women's own voices' only the voices of particular groups of women are heard and these voices are broadcast as the unanimous expression of 'women in Islamic societies'. She argues that 'the Muslim woman' who emerges in some academic writings which oppose negative imagery can be as one-sided and illusory as traditional accounts. In the new understanding Islam is an entity defining everything there is in Muslim societies with the difference that the 'Muslim woman' has suddenly become a wholy dignified, spiritually empowered being. "If, in its orientalist version, Islam is condemned for its unreformed and unreformable gender-oppressive character, in this neo-orientalist version, it is applauded for its woman-friendly adaptability, its liberatory potential" Moghissi (2002: 7). In the author's opinion the debates on the'Muslim woman' have been strongly influenced by anti-orientalism and identity politics combined with postmodern relativism. She admits that "anti-orientalism and postmodernism may have opened new possibilities for cultural enquiry, but in their rush to give voice to those constructed as Other, they have entrapped themselves in the headlong pursuit of the 'exotic'and 'native'. If the Orientalists created an illusory, shimmering image of Oriental Muslim women, the postmodernists confront them by turning the genre on its head. In the process of validating Muslim women's experience, the harsh edges of fundamentalism are softened; and the image that fundamentalists transmit of Muslim women as emblematic of cultural revival, integrity and authenticity is validated" (ibid. 8). To sum up, the anti-orientalist scholarship on Islam and gender can become a convergence of the radical, anti-representational view with a fundamentalist conservativism. So far a clear distinction between the position of fundamentalists and that of a large number of anti-representational postcolonial feminists has not been drawn.

Acknowledging the pathbreaking importance of *Orientalism* Nadje Al-Ali (2000: 22) points to the fact that Said's own theoretical shift in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), indicating a move away from essentializing differences between the 'East'and the 'West', has not been sufficiently acknowledged. In her view *Culture and Imperialism* offers a way out of the impasse of essentialism

and reductonism that Said criticized in *Orientalism,* yet had reproduced to some extent himself.

In an article on the public role of writers and intellectuals published two years before his death Said mentions three forms of struggle profoundly amenable to intellectual intervention and elaboration. One of the three is the task "to construct fields of coexistence rather than fields of battle as the outcome of intellectual labour. There are great lessons to be learned from decolonization: first, noble as its liberatory aims were, it did not often enough prevent the emergence of repressive nationalist replacements for colonial regimes; second that the process itself was almost immediately captured by the cold war, despite the nonalignment rhetorical efforts; and thirdly that it has been miniaturized and even trivialized by a small academic industry that has simply turned it into an ambiguous contest among ambivalent opponents".

The last sentence can only be understood as bitter critique of academic institutions and their protagonists with their conflicting interests. Moreover, the impression of disillusion in the author's words can hardly go unnoticed. In connection with the urge "to construct fields of co-existence rather than fields of battle" it seems that he has recognized the limits of his own intervention. He has not become prisoner of his own thinking, which, in our view, is a rare achievement.

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