Orientalism: From Postcolonial Theory to World History

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Introduction to E. Burke and D. Prochaska eds., Genealogies of Orientalism: History, Theory, Politics (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008)

Orientalism is over. Or so some stoutly maintain. Unfortunately, the rumors of its demise have been greatly exaggerated. In the post-9/11 United States, the debate over orientalism is far from being over. Indeed, in many ways it has just begun. Although orientalism, the philologically-driven discipline of the study of Asian languages no longer exists as such, orientalism, the discursive practice linking culture and power is more important than ever. Today the United States peers at the Middle East through orientalist spectacles. Their special properties miraculously filter out historical context and complexity, the better to spotlight the supposedly essential cultural features of Middle Eastern culture that make “them” hate “us.” Seen through an orientalist lens, causality is reversed, and morality is readily assigned to the Good Guys.

If we trace the genealogy of the critique of orientalism, we can now see that the publication of Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) marked a paradigm shift in thinking about the relationship between the West and the non-West. Said sought to untangle the ways in which Western political, literary, and scholarly representations of the Middle East were fatally inflected by political power. In demonstrating that Michel Foucault’s ideas could be brought to bear upon the representation of Middle Eastern cultures and societies in European thought, Said
coupled his critique of European discourse on the Middle East to issues of representation generally, demonstrating that Western discourse on the Middle East was linked to power, trafficked in racist stereotypes and continually reproduced itself. In naming this discourse “orientalism,” Said performed a major political as well as intellectual service, and made it available to all who had been seeking an effective means of intellectually opposing the canon in its various disciplinary manifestations. Subsequent work by Said and other scholars has deepened and extended, as well as contested, Said’s original vision (Ansell-Pearson, Parry and Squires, 1995; Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 1999; Bové 1998; Said 1993; Sprinker 1992). There is a broader stake for us here as well. Since Said’s book became one of the foundational texts not only in the field of orientalism but in the larger field of post-colonial studies and cultural studies, much of the argument we develop below can be applied to these other fields of inquiry as well (Loomba 1998; Nelson, Grossberg, Treichler 1992; Young 1990).

Thanks to the scholars of the first generation of the critique of colonial forms of knowledge—Edward Said and those inspired by him (including ourselves)—questions of the role of colonial representation in shaping the discourse of imperialism have assumed an important place on the academic agenda. The critique of orientalism launched by Said’s book has thus far proven most fruitful to scholars based in literary theory, as a result of which, history has been deemphasized. These scholars have primarily focused their critique at the level of epistemology and meta-commentary upon the discourse of orientalism, where they have indeed made a vital contribution. However, despite important achievements in theorizing orientalism as a discourse and some notable work that explores specific instances of how it shaped and was shaped by colonialism,
the critique of colonial representations appears increasingly abstract and
disengaged with both its own history as well as the specific colonial histories
which it seeks to explain. We believe it is time not only to reevaluate the
achievements of the critique of orientalism, but also to recognize some of its
weaknesses.

As historians with a stake in the complex issues raised by the critique of
colonial forms of knowledge, we contend that while colonial representations
have been theorized, they have yet to be adequately historicized. More tellingly,
*Orientalism* and the works inspired by it have failed to consider the political
contexts in which it arose. A knowledge of this history can help us to understand
what was lost in the move to view orientalism primarily as a discursive
intervention. We accept that the critique of orientalism has had implications for
the ways in which we understand colonialism and its relationship to the
Enlightenment. Colonial representations were instrumental in shaping the
culture worlds inhabited by colonizers and colonized, because they were deeply
infused with power. However, by presenting orientalism as the discourse of
power by which imperialism rationalized itself to itself, justifying its domination
while distorting the image of the colonized, Said in effect imported the very
dichotomies between powerful, active colonizers and passive peoples he
otherwise sought to refute. This essentially Foucaultian insight is scarcely
adequate to explain the relationship between "the West" and "the Rest." By
homogenizing and totalizing the Enlightenment (viewed primarily as a discourse
of power) and evacuating history, this approach leaves us stuck in the same old
binaries it purports to reject.
The essays in this book propose an alternative approach to the critique of colonial representations advanced by Said and some of those inspired by him. Our basic premise is that further progress in the understanding of how both colonial forms of knowledge and colonial cultures operated requires a deeper engagement with the historical contexts in which they developed (as at least some works in this field assume). We accept that the discourse of orientalism shaped the culture of colonialism in diverse ways. But we disagree that the discourse of orientalism was alone in so doing. Theoretically informed but deeply committed to inscribing themselves in the histories they survey, the authors of the chapters in this book suggest that a deeper historicization of the contexts and contents of colonial representations can help us reimagine the relationship between the West and colonialism. This volume is thus about the need for historicizing: both of the critique of orientalism and of its place in the history of the human sciences over the last quarter century.

In this introduction we seek to accomplish several things. First, in an effort to evaluate Said’s achievement, we present a brief historiographical review of the field since 1978 when Orientalism appeared, and seek to identify the limitations of Said’s original insights, as well as how they have continued to inform scholarship on orientalism and post-colonialism. We ask: what has become of the critique inspired by Said over the past twenty five years? What has it enabled us to see more clearly, and what topics has it occluded? Said’s book provides a place from which to evaluate the impact of the so-called linguistic and cultural turns both upon the wider intellectual field, as well as the field of orientalism, from the standpoint of history. To this end, in the pages that follow we seek to locate it in the larger context of the transformation of the intellectual field in Britain, France
and the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the move from social history to the linguistic and cultural turns.

In order to appreciate the precise character of Said’s intervention, we must next seek to insert it in the political and intellectual contexts in which it appeared. To this end, we ask: what was the state of the critique of colonial forms of knowledge prior to 1978? How did it manifest itself in Britain, France and the U.S.? How did *Orientalism* differ from the works it ultimately displaced? In what ways, despite its undeniable achievement, might we see its appearance as representing an intellectual and political regression? To this end, we trace the genealogy of the critique of colonial forms of knowledge in Britain, France and the U.S. from the mid-1940s to 1978. We’ll discover that *Orientalism* did not emerge from nothing, but rather was linked to a deep history of anti-imperialist thought and activism in the metropole as well as in the colonies. Following this critical review, we turn next to a presentation of the essays included in this volume.

**History and Postcolonial Studies**

One place to start such a review is to ask: where does the critique of orientalism fit into the larger transformation of the human sciences since the 1950s? As a result of the interventions of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and other post-structuralist thinkers, the organization of knowledge was transformed and its epistemological premises questioned. Central to these changes was a profound shift in the categories of culture, power and history, which underwent a melt-down as disciplinary canons were overthrown. Thus anthropologists, for whom culture was a central term, had previously conceived
of cultures as homogenous, stable and clearly bounded. Historians had operated with a sense of the pastness of the past shaped by empiricism; the facts, once discovered, would speak for themselves. Power had previously been held to reside in states and governments, or in economic and social structures. Neither diffuse nor impermanent, it "had an address," that is, an institutional point of attachment to society. In the aftermath of the transformations of the past quarter century, each of these previously stable categories underwent a profound shift. In the next few pages we’ll briefly discuss each in turn, before returning to the question of where the critique of orientalism fits into this turbulent period of intellectual and cultural change.

In retrospect, we can see that Orientalism involved two distinct intellectual operations. The first was Said’s appropriation of Foucault’s re-visioning of Enlightenment science as deeply invested in the project of control. Here Foucault’s work on institutions like the prison, the school, the medical clinic and the mad house provided instances of how knowledge and power were fused in Enlightenment thought and practice (Foucault 1965, 1973, 1979). The second operation involved revealing the racist implications of the Enlightenment. Said argued that European representations of the non-West were deeply imbricated in the discourse of imperialism, while his harnessing of continental post-structuralist theories to post-Vietnam war era liberation politics constituted a major move that gave opponents of the established literary canon enormous critical power. Here, precisely, Orientalism had its greatest impact. This permitted him to argue that orientalism was a European discourse of control and domination of the non-West.
The advantage for Said in adopting Foucault’s methodology was the apparent rigor it lent his analysis (discourse as omnipotent) and how it enabled him to weld text (knowledge) and context (power) together (Said 1983: 178-225). This made clear the functioning of the binary logic of orientalism, as well as its deeper roots in European culture. However, this operation entailed some significant intellectual losses. As we will see in the next section, the older Marxist critique was more complex and historically engaged. Not only did it accord a larger role to social structural context, it also claimed to provide an explanation for nationalism and resistance.

Ours is emphatically not a narrow disciplinary reaction. On the one hand, even as literature specialists assumed the lead in orientalism and postcolonial studies, they negotiated their own “historical turn,” notably in the form of the so-called “new historicism,” and moved considerably away from primarily formalistic analyses of texts (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000; Greenblatt 1991; Veeser 1989, 1994). We discuss below Said’s criticism of Derridean deconstruction and situate his more historically-minded approach within the field of literary studies at the same time as we position him vis-à-vis historians by qualifying his use of “history.” On the other hand, we emphasize how variously historians have responded to literary studies generally and to Orientalism specifically. A widespread reaction to the postcolonial challenge generally has been to assert history’s continuing relevance and then proceed to conduct business as usual. But the problem is that asserting the continued importance of history cannot substitute for demonstrating exactly where and why a historical perspective is intellectually efficacious.
What do we mean when we call for the historicization of the critique of orientalist forms of knowledge? For us this entails three distinct but related operations. First, when we call for historicizing the critique of orientalism, we seek to relocate it in the wider history of the human sciences (that is, after the linguistic and cultural turns). Only by doing this will we be able to evaluate both its accomplishments and its weaknesses. We also see a second operation as being required as well: it is the insertion of the object of study (and its author) into its political and intellectual fields. (We borrow the concept of fields from Pierre Bourdieu, whose work has provided a stimulus for some of the reflections developed here. We return to Bourdieu and how he can help us below). Finally, because there has been a tendency by some authors influenced by Said to see orientalism as a uniquely Western phenomenon, we insist thirdly that a more adequate historicization of orientalism necessarily implies the re-inscription of the colonial moment in the context of world history, and not just that of the West. (We return to this point elsewhere in this introduction). Why are we so insistent upon a full and adequate historicization of the critique of orientalism? Far from being over (“done that”), the critique of orientalism has much to offer scholars interested in questions of history and theory, knowledge and power, and the relations between metropoles and colonies. But for this rethinking to yield its fruits, there must be a careful rehistoricization of orientalist texts and contexts, in the multiple fields in which they exist. The section which follows is an attempt to perform this operation for the critique of orientalism.

We begin by reconsidering from the standpoint of the discipline of history, the paradigm shift known as the linguistic or more generally the cultural turn. In the early 1970s history was in the methodological forefront of the
human sciences, led by the *Annales* school in France and the “new social history” in Britain and the U.S. (Burke 1990; Dosse 1994; Hexter 1979). Even as Geertzian cultural anthropology began exerting its influence within the social sciences in the 1980s, history continued to be in the intellectual ascendancy (Geertz 1973, 1983; Hunt 1989). But things were rapidly changing. Developments within linguistic philosophy, including semiotics, structuralism and poststructuralism were already beginning to transform the human sciences, starting with literary theory. As deconstruction and postmodernism took hold in the late 1980s and 1990s, the linguistic and cultural turns became ascendant. It is in this intellectual field that orientalism and postcolonial studies emerged, transforming in turn the human sciences. In the critique of orientalism and postcolonial studies that has ensued, the linguistic and deepening cultural turns have been the main driving intellectual force (Bonnell and Hunt 1999; Toews 1987, McDonald 1996, Jay 1993b: 158-166, Rabinow and Sullivan 1987).

At this point it is useful to state our own position on the relationship between society and culture, history and literature, contexts and texts which we summarize as follows. Non-historians like Said turn to history either for specific information about a historical topic, or for knowledge a particular historical approach provides. In the latter case, any given historical approach already entails (even if only implicitly) a way of modeling history, and thus involves choices about competing intellectual approaches, such as cultural versus social history, or discursive versus social structural approaches. Historians who view “new historicist” literary critics -- to consider only those literature specialists closest to historians -- as not “historical” enough usually argue that they commit the fallacies of “culturalism” and “textualism.” The culturalist fallacy is to
construe the historical context as a cultural system, which social historians find impoverishing. The textualist fallacy considers the relationship between texts and the cultural system so construed as “intertextual,” that is, as a relationship between a literary text and a cultural “text.” The textualist fallacy is faulted, therefore, for being doubly reductive: first it reduces the social to a function of the cultural, and then further reduces the cultural to the status of a “text.”

The key issue, as we have been insisting throughout this discussion, turns on the relationship between texts and contexts, culture and society: are they relatively autonomous, or does one or the other function as an independent causal variable? Historians who criticize new historicists (and others) usually argue that they privilege literary texts over historical contexts, idealism over materialism. We reject the view that cultural products are primary and in some sense determine their historical contexts, but we also reject as equally reductive the reverse argument that the historical context is necessarily determinative and that cultural artifacts simply mirror or reflect this context. In keeping with much recent work in history and postcolonial studies, we contend instead that both literary texts and historical contexts are relatively autonomous, entwined dialectically, and mutually constitutive of each other.

It is here that we come to Said’s use of history (or uses, as his position has evolved, and a discussion of the sequences is instructive). First, we can observe that compared to the many literature specialists who adopt one or another formalist approach to literary texts, Said paid relatively greater attention to context, to what goes on outside the text, an approach he glossed as “worldly criticism” (Said 1983). Thus, he ranged himself squarely against deconstruction, for example, according to which “there is nothing outside the text.” He criticized
literary theory for having “retreated into the labyrinth of ‘textuality’” and observed that “[t]extuality has therefore become the exact antithesis and displacement of what might be called history” (Said 1983: 3-4 emphasis added).

But what exactly is that which “might be called history”? We argue that for Said “history” actually amounts to the “history of literary criticism.” Note in the following passage the slippage that occurs from the former to the latter. “This insensitivity to history spoils the very matter being anthologized; history is irrelevant... These distortions stem in part from a peculiar disorder in modern criticism itself. As a discipline, criticism has given very little notice to its history as a discipline” (Said 1983: 149, emphasis added). Moreover, the payoff for Said in doing the history of literary criticism is that “[i]f we could have accounts by critics of what led them to a given project, why and how they fashioned the project, how they undertook its completion and in what context, we would have opportunities for future study of a very important sort” (Said 1983: 153-4). But, again, Said has no theory for how such information relates either to individual texts, or to the history of criticism, or to the relationship between literary texts and historical contexts.

Consonant with this position is Said’s preference for Foucault over Derrida, which is based on his view that Derrida deals with texts while Foucault engages power, history, and context (Said 1983: 144). Said generally failed, however, to consistently apply Foucault’s method. He stressed the discursive context, but (as James Clifford has pointed out) he also sought to restore the preeminent position of the canonical author. “In attempting to derive a ‘discourse’ from a ‘tradition,’ Said abandons the level of cultural criticism proposed by Foucault and relapses into traditional intellectual history” (Clifford
1988: 268). Part of Said’s relapse “into traditional intellectual history,” of reinscribing individual authors in a historical tradition, is that in doing so, he fell back on a biographical, even psychological explanation to account for motivation and in the process moved even further away from a historical, contextual approach (Said 1983: 153).

Later, in his Culture and Imperialism, Said jettisoned Foucaultian discourse (as his method for connecting texts and contexts, literature and history,) and substituted what he termed “contrapuntal analysis” (Said 1993: 32, 51, 66-7, 318). In fact, contrapuntal analysis was not a theory but a metaphor or figure Said used to describe his reading practice—a metaphor that derived from his experience as a pianist (where he utilized it more precisely) (Said 1991: 102). He employed it first to characterize his personal experience of exile, and only later as a metaphor for his approach as a literary critic (Prochaska n.d.).\(^1\) We can note that just as Said did not theorize his use of contrapuntal, so, too, he did not engage new historicism as a theoretical practice and the stakes involved in its approach to the relationship between literary texts and historical contexts.\(^2\) We may conclude by saying that Said is interested in history as a body of information efficacious for fleshing out the context of a literary work, but he does not self-consciously employ historical models or theories to the historical data he uses. Within literary studies Said employs a more historical approach than his more formalist colleagues, but within historical studies most historians, including us, argue that he fails to sufficiently historicize the discourse of orientalism (Said 1978, 1993). If we examine the political and intellectual context in which Said wrote, the stakes and consequences of his move away from history appear even more vividly.
The Critique of Orientalism: A Historical Genealogy

We turn next to a historical genealogy of the critique of orientalism as a colonial form of knowledge. The critique of orientalism itself has a history which is not limited to the history of the British empire -- although generally this is what its history is taken to be. What was the critique of orientalism before the appearance of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978)? The question, and the answers to it, help us both to historicize Said's work and to understand how he innovated, and where he built upon the work of others. An exploration of the genealogies of the study of colonial discourse also helps frame some of the larger objectives of this volume: to understand the world historical contexts in which orientalism flourished (as well as that in which the critique of orientalism might also take root), and in the process to encourage new reflection on the areas of weakness as well as the strengths of Said's intervention.

What, to begin with, was orientalism? In the primary sense of the term, orientalism referred to the academic discipline based on the philological study of original texts in Asian languages which flourished in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As one stream of Enlightenment thought it sought to uncover the allegedly essential features of civilizations possessing developed writing systems through the critical philological study of their allegedly central cultural texts. Prior to the emergence of the social sciences, orientalism derived its prestige from its claim to be the “science of society” by which Asian civilizations and peoples might be understood and classified according to their level of development. In the nineteenth century division of academic labor, orientalists adopted as their field the study of societies with writing systems,
while those without writing became the province of the emergent discipline of ethno-
logy. Scholarly work on orientalism in this primary sense was the principal subject of Said’s 1978 book. The essays in Part One provide an overview of the British and French traditions of textual orientalism.

In the same period orientalism came to acquire a second meaning -- as a term referring to the romantic and exoticizing impulse of nineteenth century European artistic culture. In the nineteenth century orientalist representations of supposedly exotic cultures became commonplace themes in art, literature and music. Many leading artists (and many not-so-leading ones) including Mozart, Flaubert and Delacroix (to mention but three) made extensive use of orientalist settings, motifs and tropes in their work. Since the publication of Said’s book in 1978, and especially his _Culture and Imperialism_ (1993) the critical study of orientalism as culture has received a new impulsion and has become a major area of research. A host of studies have been produced which spanned everything from Hollywood movies to high culture, including art, architecture, colonial expositions, dance, music, opera and photography. The essays in Part Two direct our attention to some of the key interventions in the exploration of orientalism and culture.

Finally with twentieth century nationalist movements of decolonization, orientalism acquired a third meaning, when some nationalist activists and scholars argued that the scholarly discipline of orientalism could not be understood apart from the circumstances of its production, namely, Western imperialism. Thus was born the debate over orientalism, a debate which primarily occurred in the French-speaking world around the issue of Algerian independence, and which initially presented itself as a struggle “to decolonize
history” (Burke 1995). Yet neither Said nor the other scholars of the first generation seem aware of this struggle. Only in his *Culture and Imperialism* does Said even mention the role of Frantz Fanon. Why is this so? To pose this question is to begin to realize that *Orientalism* and the works inspired by it have failed to consider the political contexts in which they arose. The critique of orientalism has forgotten its own history, which is rooted in the anti-imperialist struggles of the past century.

Anti-imperialism was an increasingly powerful political force over the period between the end of World War II and 1978 (when *Orientalism* was published). Opposition to European empire in Asia, Africa and Latin America importantly shaped the politics of the post-war world, both in the metropolitan centers as well as in the former colonies. In this process, the leading role was played by Third world nationalisms. Among the chief arenas of conflict were the independence struggles in India, Palestine, Ghana, the Congo, Suez, Southern Africa, Algeria, and of course Vietnam. It was the Vietnam war, in particular its American phase (1964-1975), that led to unparallelled levels of mobilization throughout the world, especially in the U.S., Europe, and other industrialized countries. This political mobilization was matched by the emergence of anti-imperialism as a cultural and intellectual force in the period. Thus, we may usefully ask: how were critiques of imperialist thought framed before 1978, when the term “orientalism” became available? Which disciplines were most affected? The essays in Part Three explore the complex imbrications of orientalism, imperialism and nationalism.

In order to gain a sharper sense of the stakes involved and the possibilities of “unthinking” imperialism at the time, we briefly consider in parallel the British
and French traditions of the critique of imperialist culture. In each case we examine first the conditions that shaped the political field in which contestation over empire existed, before taking up the question of intellectual field. For Bourdieu, from whom we borrow the concept of intellectual field, the champ scientifique is constituted by the grid of intellectual and scientific influences which act upon and are reflected in intellectual products and artistic works. The political field, the champ politique, encompasses the larger political and social context which a particular intellectual product occupies (Bourdieu 1976, 1977b, 1993). We begin with a consideration of the critique of imperialism in Britain and the U.S.

The British and U.S. Critiques of Imperialist Thought

Opponents of British colonialism in the 1950s and early 1960s did not lack detailed critiques of British rule, but stressed denunciations of imperialism as a system linked to capitalism or general critiques of racism in the colonial situation, rather than a critique of colonial representations, as such (Kiernan 1969; Woodruff 1953). In their rereading of colonial histories produced by Europeans, nationalist critics of European empire replaced colonial and racist representations of their societies with nationalist ones. But they were unable to see colonialism either as a discursive system, or colonial forms of knowledge as situated knowledges. (Which is where Said’s intervention was such a stimulus to further thought and analysis). When a theorized critique of British colonialism in India eventually did appear, it was not during the Indian freedom struggle, but more than a generation later with the emergence of the Indian Subaltern Studies group in the 1980s. (We return to this topic in the conclusion, below). In the United States, the critique of imperialism was poorly developed prior to the emergence
of a movement in opposition to the Vietnam war. While there were some currents of opposition on the Left, the general post-1945 mood stressed material success and conformity.

By the late 1960s the radicalization of politics and thought in both Britain and the United States, fueled by the Vietnam war and the development of the civil rights movement, gave rise to movements for social and political change. When the critique of colonial forms of knowledge emerged in both countries, however, it was largely limited to the discipline of anthropology, which was particularly exposed because of the interrelated histories of anthropology and empire. Most critics were strongly influenced by currents of Marxist and anti-imperialist thought (Stocking 1982; Fabian 1983; Wolf 1970; Hymes 1972; Anon. 1968). They concluded that anthropology was fatally impregnated with racist and colonialist attitudes, and that such standard anthropological tropes as “the primitive” were merely the theoretical masks of this underlying ideology. The other discipline open to radical currents of thought was history. While influenced by Marxism (in the form of the “new” social history) and the nationalist critique of imperialism (especially the histories of Third World countries) history as a discipline adhered to the nation as the appropriate frame for analysis and fetishized written sources. Both tended to limit the impact of radical critiques that crossed national boundaries. As for literature, it was at this time was under the influence of the so-called new criticism and post-structuralism. Moreover, the theorization of race and gender as categories of analysis were just beginning to emerge in the 1970s.

Efforts to broaden the critique of colonialism and imperialism beyond anthropology to encompass history and other disciplines failed to take hold in
Britain and the United States during the 1960s and 1970s for several reasons. Rather than raise troubling questions about the situated character of all knowledges, anti-imperialist Western historians in the 1950s and 1960s tended to reinscribe nationalist re-writings of history as their own. Questions about the politics of representation -- who owns colonial history? nationalists or Europeans? -- were not yet on the intellectual agenda (Burke 1998). Lacking a more philosophically grounded critique, particularly a theory of representations, anti-imperialist Marxists in Britain and the United States were unable to transcend the politics of anti-imperialism and anti-racism or to develop a critique of the anti-humanist political tendencies within progressive nationalisms. Nonetheless Marxist critiques of imperialism possessed some important advantages over the discursively-based critiques that came along with Orientalism because they were in some respects better able to imagine the mental world of imperialism as shaped by complex world historical processes.

Two works that exemplify this phase of the critique are Asad (1973) and Turner (1978). The contributors to Talal Asad’s volume, Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter, sought to move beyond the ritual denunciation of colonial social science to engage the historical contexts in which it had flourished. In his introduction Asad noted that anthropology was a child not only of the Enlightenment, but also of unequal power relations between the West and non-West (Asad 1973: 16-17). He called into question the uses to which anthropological knowledge had been put and noted that anthropological declarations of political neutrality had had important consequences including the inability of the field to study the colonial system as such. Anthropology was not just the reflection of colonial ideology, Asad argued, but as a product of an
inherently ambiguous and often contradictory bourgeois consciousness, it was capable of developing more complex and historically situated understandings of its own history and its relationship to colonialism.

Bryan Turner’s *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (1978) was an intervention in the field of Middle Eastern studies (linked in some ways to the activities of the so-called Hull group of progressive scholars including Talal Asad and Roger Owen). Published the same year as *Orientalism*, it anticipated certain of Said’s main themes. Without once using the word “discourse” or invoking the work of Foucault, Turner was the first to argue that Middle Eastern area studies was linked to the Orientalist study of art, literature, history and religion (Turner 1978: 6). At the same time Turner’s book responded to debates within 1970s British Marxism sparked by the introduction of Althusserian interpretations of Marx concerning precapitalist formations (Hindess and Hirst 1975; Wolf 1982). For Turner, Marx’s assumptions that history proceeded in stages, that Europe was at the leading edge of progress, and the efforts to distinguish an Asiatic mode of production derived from the penetration of Marx’s thought by orientalist categories and assumptions. It was the Hegelian (and Orientalist) epistemological limitations of Marxist thought about the Middle East that needed to be queried, so Turner argued. While *Marx and the End of Orientalism* shows that something was in the air, and may help to explain why Said’s book was so rapidly taken up, it remained fundamentally linked to Marxist structuralist thought. This suggests that British and American Marxist thought alone would have been unlikely to achieve Said’s intellectual breakthrough. But what of the critique of imperialist thought in France? Here the situation was more complex, but as we’ll see also rather different.
The French Critique of Imperialist Thought

Because the history of the intellectual critique of colonialism in France is less well known than in the case of Britain, we provide a more detailed account here beginning with the political field. The decolonization of the French empire, especially the struggle over Algeria, produced a prolonged debate which questioned both the contents of French colonial science and the nature of the colonial relationship. Since the Algerian war involved not a distant colonial territory but a part of France itself, the intellectual struggle within France was far more bitter than debates spawned by the end of the British empire or by Vietnam in the United States (Le Sueur 2001; Gordon 1964, 1971; Schalk 1991; Sorum 1977). It is one thing to relinquish control over a foreign territory, quite another to yield part of what is considered national territory. The French debate over Algeria came in the midst of the turmoil over decolonization in Southeast Asia, Africa and the Maghrib, and badly split both political Left and Right. But mobilization was slow to emerge because of the success of defenders of empire in portraying the struggle as one over France herself, widespread racist attitudes toward colonial peoples in France, and restricted media coverage of the war. Until late in the game, large majorities within the major political parties from the Communists on the left to the Gaullists on the right supported holding onto l’Algérie française, while the cause of independent Algeria received support from a small coalition of ex-Resistance fighters, nationalists and left Catholic intellectuals. Support for the FLN remained, however, a minority position in France until the eve of Algerian independence.
As the Algerian struggle grew more intense, the cultural battle widened. Algerian intellectuals and their French allies launched a no-holds-barred attack on colonial history and social science (Vatin 1983). Unlike Britain and the United States, the critique of colonial knowledges in France embraced a larger intellectual field, encompassing not only anthropology, but also history and the social sciences generally. Inspired by Sartre's example, young Third World intellectuals like Albert Memmi (1965 [1957]) and Frantz Fanon (1967 [1952], 1968 [1961]) wrote biting critiques of colonial racism in the late 1950s. Sartre's journal, *Les Temps modernes*, became a major venue for colonial critique. Portions of Fanon's brilliant counter-ethnography, *A Dying Colonialism* (1965 [1959]) first appeared there as well as the work of Algerian nationalist historians Mostafa Lacheraf (1965) and Mohamed C. Sahli (1965), who demolished the colonial historiography of Algeria and argued for the necessity of "decolonizing history." Left Catholic publications, in particular *Esprit* and *Témoignage chrétien*, were also important venues for intellectual attacks on colonialist thought (Mandouze 1961, Mandouze, 1998). In "The Crisis of Orientalism" Anouar Abdel-Malek (1963), a francophone Egyptian Marxist scholar, broadened the critique to colonial knowledge more generally in an intervention that influenced later commentators including Said (Tibawi 1963, 1979).

The most important work by far to come out of the French decolonization struggle was, however, that of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1968 [1961]). Simultaneously an anti-imperialist militant's manual and a scathing analysis of colonialism as a system of racist violence and oppression, *The Wretched of the Earth* systematically challenged the assumptions of colonial social science and presented a brilliant counter-analysis (Burke 1976). Contesting the view that the
French simply practiced colonization as *mise en valeur* in Algeria, Fanon emphasized the harshness of French colonialism as an across-the-board project of mental and material domination. At the same time, however, Fanon did not consistently distinguish between the Algerian case and the rest of the Third World he generalized about. The slippage from Algeria to the Third World generally led Fanon to emphasize violence, a Manichean all-or-nothing struggle, which was more characteristic of settler colonialism in Algeria than European colonialism elsewhere (Fanon 1968: 40-2, 84, 86, 88-9, 93-4; Prochaska 1990a).

Very much influenced by Fanon were later critiques by Philippe Lucas (1969) and Jean-Claude Vatin (Lucas and Vatin 1975), Gerard Leclerc (1972), and Jean Copans (1975). The decolonization struggle continued to haunt French culture into the early 1970s when *Les Temps modernes* published two separate double issues on the theme of “Anthropology and Imperialism” (Nos. 253-254, 299-300, 1970-1971). While it may be surprising to some, nothing like the breadth and amplitude of the French critique can be found in the English-speaking world. After a period of relative neglect, today a new generation of scholars is discovering Fanon and the French legacy of the critique of colonial forms of knowledge (Bhabha 1994: 40-65; Gordon, Sharpley-Whiting and White 1996; Alessandrini 1999; Gibson 1999).

Let us assess the French critique of colonial knowledge up to this point beginning with the political field. The ambiguous legacy of the anti-Nazi resistance was politically crucial for the way it legitimized struggles against foreign occupation and provided a ready-made political vocabulary (resisters and collaborators) for understanding anti-colonial nationalism. One indication of this link was the publication of Henri Alleg’s *La Question* (1958) by the formerly
clandestine resistance publisher, Editions du Minuit. Alleg’s condemnation of the systematic use of torture in Algeria by the French authorities helped to build opposition to the war among the French public (Le Sueur 2001). In short, the political instability of the Fourth Republic, the Cold War atmosphere of contestation, Soviet support for Third World nationalism, and the fact that Algeria was juridically part of France all worked together to heighten the feeling, especially on the Right, that the fate of France itself was at stake in Algeria. This political context figures importantly in understanding why the French critique went further than that in Britain and the United States.

If we look at the intellectual field, we note that although the dominant intellectual influence was anti-imperialist Marxism as in Britain and the United States, a number of specifically French determinants were also present. Post-war French thought was profoundly shaped by the broad context of underlying philosophical contestation of Cartesian rationalism, including a suspicion of the faculty of sight, together with a fascination with the ethical position of the Other (l’autrui) (Jay 1993a; Poster 1975, 1989). From different angles the thought of philosophers such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas and Vladimir Jankélévitch, as well as anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss all converge (Dosse 1998; Descombes 1993). Out of this broad intellectual ferment was eventually to come post-structuralist thought and critical theory. Although Sartre’s engagement on behalf of anti-colonial nationalists did the most to legitimize support for Algerian independence in France and Europe more generally, others also played important roles (Sartre 1968). In retrospect, it is significant that while Foucault’s first works were published in the early 1960s, their relevance to the critique of colonial forms of knowledge was mostly

The state of the question in the mid-1970s emerges clearly in *Le Mal de voir* (“The Difficulty in Seeing”) (Moniot 1976). The result of a 1974 conference organized by Africanist Henri Moniot and a younger generation of scholars drawn from a variety of disciplines and areas of specialization including Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Arab world, the conference included established anti-colonial intellectuals such as Jean Chesneaux and Maxime Rodinson. *Le Mal de Voir* show-cased the work of scholars who had been directly involved in Algeria, notably Pierre Bourdieu and Fanny Colonna, that reconsidered the legacy of the French ethnology of colonial Algeria. The conference volume provides a window into the French critique of colonial knowledge in the mid-1970s similar to that provided for Britain by Asad (1973), although its critique was more far-reaching. It evidenced a deep concern with problems of representation and foregrounded the importance of historicizing the production of colonial forms of knowledge. *Le Mal de voir* is intellectually dominated by Bourdieu (Calhoun, LiPuma and Postone 1993; Robbins 1991). Although a significant proportion of Bourdieu’s sociological work concerns Algeria, Bourdieu writes about his Algerian experience only rarely (Bourdieu 1990a: 3, 1990b: 23; Mudimbe 1993). Because of his impressive productivity, it is easy to forget that he taught at the University of Algiers during the Algerian war and continued to do research there, some of it in collaboration with Algerian scholars, until 1970.

Bourdieu’s contribution to *Le Mal de Voir* theorizes from the vantage point of the sociology of knowledge the position of individual intellectuals in the context of the political and intellectual fields they occupied in their society. As
defined above, the intellectual field, or champ scientifique, refers to those intellectual and scientific influences on a given intellectual product. The political field, or champ politique, encompasses the larger political and social context of a particular intellectual work (Bourdieu 1976, 1977b, 1993). As sociological categories, fields constitute useful tools for performing a sociology of knowledge as we do here. To place the political field in relation to the intellectual field forces scholars to pose questions which generally go unasked. Yoking the fields in tandem works in particular against presentism, against anachronistic readings, because the logic of fields links the intellectual field with the political field contemporaneous with it. Similarly, Said’s contrapuntal analysis avoids what he terms the “rhetoric of blame,” but this is not intrinsic to the contrapuntal analytic (1993: 96). Mapping the positions of intellectuals on both grids is more efficacious, for example, than Foucault’s less specific concept of knowledge/power. Finally, it seems important to note that the idea of fields works well for France where it is relatively straightforward to institutionally locate intellectuals in an empirical manner: agregé or not, grands écoles or not, and positions held.

While Bourdieu’s notion of “fields” is efficacious for conducting a sociology of knowledge, it is not without problems as a philosophy of knowledge. As a typology, fields have no inherent explanatory power in and of themselves, nor does Bourdieu explain how they are linked. The concept of fields implicitly assumes a level of rationality difficult to square with the often directionless nature of quotidian life. Moreover, the concept assumes that individual acts and utterances neatly fall into one or another discrete field, an assumption that poststructuralism and postmodernism show cannot be
sustained. Although conceptual alternatives to fields have been proposed (Fish; Jay 1993b: 158-166; Kuhn 1962; Lyotard 1984; Miller 1986), especially “interpretive communities,” the key point is that all such concepts underscore the situatedness of knowledge, including orientalist knowledge, in a way rarely done prior to *Orientalism*. Thus, we retain the notion of fields here which we employ as a heuristic device.

In the present context, we find Bourdieu’s sociological approach of intellectual and political fields more useful than Said’s biographical-cum-psychological approach to authorial “position.” One preliminary conclusion that clearly emerges from this review is the relatively greater methodological sophistication of the French tradition of the critique of orientalism, especially in work concerning Algeria and the Maghrib, as opposed to the British and American critiques of imperialism, which were imbued with what strikes us now as an under-theorized Marxism.

At this point it is worth pausing to recall the historical contexts on the eve of the publication of Said’s book. We look first at the intellectual field, then at the political field. The critique of imperialist thought was no longer an urgent intellectual project in the Britain, with the exception of Turner and a few others in the Hull group. In the U.S., while the anti-colonial struggle had provoked broad intellectual questioning of colonial knowledges (notably in anthropology) by 1978 this had not led to a break with the established progressive, Marxist-derived language of anti-imperialism and anti-racism. Barring the emergence of a new intellectual paradigm such as that eventually brought about by the linguistic turn, academic Marxism was definitively stalled. It was insufficiently powerful to develop a broadly appealing critique of patriarchy, race, and culture (on all of
which points Marxism had strayed but little from Marxist orthodoxy). Instead, the end of the Vietnam war and the waning of the social and political struggle over de-colonization was a period in which intellectual energies were shifting in other directions in Britain and the United States.

In retrospect we can see that 1978 was a political watershed as well. Externally with the end of the Vietnam war, Third World progressive nationalism and solidarity appeared poised for further victories, while in the U.S., the civil rights and anti-war coalition remained for the moment intact. To many observers, progressive Arab nationalism seemed on the verge of triumph in the Middle East, and the PLO was at the apex of its power. But things were about to change. Abortive revolutions in Afghanistan and Lebanon, the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent expulsion of the PLO from Beirut were soon to completely reshape the Middle Eastern political context. Meanwhile, the rise of Thatcher in Britain and of Reagan in the U.S. marked the end of a political era. In a twinkling, Third World nationalism was finished, along with the Marxist critique of imperialist thought. This is where the fate of *Orientalism* is drenched in irony. By the date of its publication, the political and intellectual contexts in which it had been conceived were already in the process of transformation. Although *Orientalism* played a key role in stimulating these changes, this possibility was entirely unforeseen by its author.

In this context we can more clearly evaluate the historic achievement of Said’s book. On the one hand, by seeing orientalism as a discourse, Said opened a new (incipient) post-Marxist cultural space of contestation, and (as we have seen) forged political as well as intellectual links between feminists and peoples of color
at home and abroad. On the other hand, at the political level, in abandoning the Marxist critique of imperialism, he also abandoned historical explanations of imperialism. And by conceiving of orientalism as the manifestation of imperialism at the discursive level, Said made it difficult to explain where nationalism came from, and undermined the agency of colonized peoples. (If orientalism was viewed as a hegemonic discourse, in what space could resistance arise?) At its best, the pre-1978 Marxist critique of imperialist thought was aware of the situatedness of colonial knowledges, complex in its analysis of orientalist representations and their connections to power, morally clear in its opposition to imperialism. In this respect, it provided a more successful and historically engaged critique than the concept of “orientalism” that replaced it. However, despite the pertinence of its analysis, the Marxist critique was unable to move beyond its relative academic isolation to transform the intellectual field because the emergent strands of cultural critique found no home within confines of the Marxist critique. While much was gained with the move to discursive analyses of orientalism, an awareness of the complex genealogy that we have just reviewed teaches that much was lost as well when the Marxist critique of imperialist thought was abandoned. Finally (a point developed further by the essays in Part Three), the discursive interconnections between orientalism and nationalism which were (ironically) opened by Said’s 1978 book were poorly understood in the 1970s. Not only was the conceptual and theoretical language for discussing nationalism as a discourse unavailable until after the maturing of the critique launched by Said, but also it was all but impossible to enunciate criticisms of progressive Third World nationalism.
Having noted the multiple political and intellectual contexts in which Said’s book intervened and the historiographical record it has left, we are now ready to turn to a consideration of the essays included in this book. For convenience sake, we have grouped the essays that follow under the headings of History, Culture and Power. These categories map the larger discursive dimensions of the critique of orientalism, and remind us of the larger intellectual context in which it occurred. This is of course a heuristic device. Crucially, all three vectors shaped the context of action (though not all to the same degree).

The essays in the first section, "History," seek to provide a more complex and historically situated genealogy for the critique of orientalism. Counter to the approach taken by Said and those who have followed him, which has assumed the essential similarity of the British and French colonial experiences, we insist on their difference. This is in part because of the divergent cultural forms taken by Enlightenment narratives in the two countries (which in turn were somewhat differently deployed in the colonial world). In part it has to do with the differences in the divergences between the two modal colonial societies: India for the British empire, Algeria for the French empire. Finally, we argue that it has to do with the divergence of their respective histories of de-colonization. The selected essays broaden the focus from the Middle East and India (upon which most previous work has been done) to other Asian societies.

The next two sections contain essays that continue our focus on the Middle East and India, even as they broaden to the rest of Asia. The essays by Julia Clancy Smith and Jenny Sharpe in Part Two, Orientalism and Culture, explore the entanglements of history, gender and orientalism in Algeria and India. Much important work has been done on artistic representations of colonial
subjects. David Prochaska examines the complex place of colonial photography in contemporary India and Algeria. Leila Celik and Leila Kinney present a skeptical ethnography of one aspect of Parisian culture: the representations of Islamic culture in world’s fairs and of working class women in the dance halls of Monmartre. Through their complex historicization of popular dance (the belly dance and can-can) they trace the imbrications of popular culture between the metropole and the colonies.

In Part Three, Orientalism and Power, we take up the ways in which colonialism reimagined the world, and consider how orientalism and power came to define it. We consider first a pair of essays by Arif Dirlik and Alan Christy which explore the complex appropriations of the new technologies of power by East Asian societies in their efforts at self-imagining as modern states. Broadening our focus beyond the Middle East and South Asia these chapters consider how power/knowledge questions have played themselves out in the quite different histories of China and Japan. Our final two essays by Ella Shohat and Nicholas Dirks explore the complex interrelationship of orientalism and nationalism even as they reframe the Middle Eastern and South Asian comparison.

[The introductionss to the three sections have been deleted in the interest of brevity. We jump to the conclusion. If you want the Full Monty, just ask. Eds.]

**From Postcolonial Theory to World History**

A central theme of this introduction (and of the essays in this volume) is that the critique of orientalism is far from exhausted. The essays included here
argue collectively that orientalism was a far more complex phenomenon than many have suspected, homogenous neither culturally nor over time, and deeply embedded in the collective re-imaginings that were (and are) nationalism. They also enable us to see the complex ways in which modern cultures have drawn upon orientalist representations as well as indigenous self-representations. However, as we have also argued, in important ways the critique (at least at the theoretical level) has increasingly arrived at an impasse. For the critique to prosper, it must now make an historical turn, and rethink the way in which modernity is theorized as well as historicized. Both are necessary. On the one hand, scholars influenced by postcolonial theory, convinced that there is no master narrative that cannot be destabilized, resist engagement with world history because of the latter's residual teleology and resistance to the linguistic and cultural turns. World historians, on the other hand, resist postcolonial theory because of its abstract conceptual approach and its historically ungrounded theorizations. As we argue below, both need to recognize the validity of one another’s approach. The critique of orientalism, by opening up new theoretical and historical perspectives, is in the process of transforming itself again.

First, let’s reprise the political and intellectual history that underlies our discussion so far. We’ve argued that the critique of orientalism must be viewed as a manifestation of the linguistic and cultural turns. Where Foucault had distinguished the discursive bases of modernity within the West, Said pointed out that the fact of European dominance was inseparable discursively from its deep eurocentrism and power-laden character. Whereas Foucault's work opened up the study of the discursive bases of power in modern Europe, Said’s
intervention directed the critique outward to the discursive roots of the modern world. He argued that by producing the intellectual grid through which Europe saw the rest of the world, the discourse of orientalism sustained and justified European dominance. At the same time, his critique stripped Western dominance of its moral authority, and exposed the eurocentrism in most western accounts of the origins of modernity. What happened next was that the critique of orientalism provided the missing piece of the puzzle making it possible to link the critique of imperialist thought with other on-going projects of critique (feminist studies, ethnic studies and queer studies). Postcolonial studies was the result. With its emergence, it was possible for the first time to theorize the ways in which race and power shaped the modern world, linking the fates of peoples of the ex-colonial world and those of the internal minorities within the West. However, the effects of especially the linguistic turn (and thus of the critique of orientalism) did not stop there. They soon led to the contesting of all homogenous and foundationalist narratives, which ran the risk of leading away from an engagement with history.

The essays in this volume point toward one possible solution. We have earlier invoked a useful distinction made by William Sewell between Geertzian “thick description” with what he calls “thin description” (Sewell 1999). Historically, orientalism as an outgrowth of Enlightenment thought tended to construct an essentialized or “thickly” coherent Orient based on alleged “primordial essences.” Thick description generates homogenous narratives, and stands outside history. To view culture as “thinly” coherent is to move beyond orientalist views of the Middle East. Where an orientalist view of Islamic culture based on “primordial essences” is congruent with a general view of culture as
“thickly” coherent, the essays in this book reflect more a view of Islamic culture (India, China) as “thinly” coherent. Celik and Kinney demonstrate the hybrid French and Islamic construction of Parisian belly dance. Shohat shows how Sephardic Arab Jews disrupt Zionist narratives of Arab versus Jew. Prochaska documents how Indian photographer Lala Deen Dayal employed different photographic styles to cater to different Indian and European communities. Rather than “active” Europeans and “passive” Chinese, Dirlik characterizes orientalist texts in China as a joint co-production hammered out in colonial contact zones.

The view of culture as “thinly” coherent links us with the linguistic turn (including deconstruction and other critical practices) insofar as such practices also assume that the coherence of symbol systems is “thin.” Deconstruction “demonstrates over and over that what are taken as the certainties or truths of texts or discourses are in fact disputable and unstable” (Sewell 1999: 50). What is “disputable and unstable” are precisely those constitutive elements of contestation and difference that render a culture “thinly” coherent. As we’ve seen, Said and Orientalism are tied directly to Foucault and poststructuralism, because Said took the poststructuralist critique in a postcolonial direction and trained it on orientalism as a situated knowledge.

The essays in this volume exemplify in varying degrees a poststructuralist sensibility combined with a “thinly” coherent concept of culture. Such an approach continues and also takes in new directions Said’s original insights. Cohn’s “investigative modalities” correspond to Foucault’s discourses. This introductory essay plus those by Colonna and Burke all employ Bourdieu’s notion of fields to situate orientalism. Colonna gauges the contributions of
Berque and Desparmet by locating them in their respective intellectual and political fields. Burke considers the French tradition of the sociology of Islam as a Foucaultian discourse in which the facts cannot be separated from the theories but derive from the theories that in turn verify their facticity. Collectively, they take us from the critique of orientalism to those colonial forms of knowledge that were hammered out interactively in colonial contact zones.

There is a second direction in which the further development of the critique of orientalism may lead us: it is toward a rehistoricization of the place of Europe in world history (and not just to the further critique of Eurocentrism). Although it is now clear that colonial culture was more complex than previously figured, it makes little sense to debate whether colonial modernity was comparative or derivative. Rather, it was shaped by all the world historical contexts (as well as the outcomes of specific histories of contestation and appropriation) in which it was embedded. By locating modernity as derivative of European culture, rather than of the prior history of all of humanity, postcolonial theory inadvertently reproduces the same binaries of the West and the Rest it sought to overthrow. This leads to some strange history. In effect, postcolonialism sees the Rest (portrayed as the repository of authenticity) as untimely ripped from a supposed Edenic state by the predatory West, fueled by capitalism and the Enlightenment. Despite recent laudable efforts to “deprovincialize Europe” (in the phrase of Dipesh Chakrabarty), a re-theorization of the place of Europe in global modernity by itself cannot lead us out of the impasse in which we find ourselves currently (Chakrabarty, 2000). We must rethink the way in which modernity is theorized as well as historicized. In world historical terms, there is but one modernity, though it may have taken a
variety of cultural forms in response to the specific historical experiences of individual societies.

Refiguring the history of modernity, including the Enlightenment-derived narrative of orientalist history, entails rethinking the relations between world regions and world cultures. Throughout the essays in this volume, the authors contest the tendency historically to configure the “orient” reductively and bracket it off as different and antithetical to the west. We have seen how such essentializing strategies were part and parcel of the Enlightenment’s view of nonwestern cultures. For example Cohn urges that metropole and colony be placed in the same “unitary field of analysis” (Cohn 1996: 4; Cooper and Stoler 1997). More radically, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam call for a “relational approach” which focuses on the conflictual hybrid interplay of communities within and across borders, rather than segregating historical periods and geographical regions into neatly fenced off areas of expertise (Shohat and Stam, 1994). They stress the horizontal and vertical links threading communities and histories together in a conflictual network, in an effort to transcend some of the politically debilitating effects of disciplinary and community boundaries. In an essay not included here, Burke eschews a perspective which views Islam as a bounded and closed social and cultural system, and argues instead that to fully understand the history of Islamist movements we must situate Islam in a world context and recognize the multiple ways the Middle East is connected to rather than closed off from other world regions (Burke 1998a).

The critique of orientalism is not just about the non-Western other, but also is about the historical self-fashioning of the West itself. The West itself (accepting for the moment the premises of this shopworn intellectual construct)
also engaged in large-scale acts of appropriation, mostly unacknowledged, of cultural innovations from outside the region -- gunpowder, the compass, the sternpost rudder and printing, among other notable examples. It was quite as active in developing representations of itself as it was of others. Indeed we can say that western civilization is the form of auto-orientalism by which the West represented itself to itself, a form of self-blinding quite as destructive ultimately as any orientalist representation of a non-Western society. In response to the orientalist essentialisms, the critique of orientalism has insisted increasingly upon the heterogeneous and often hybrid character of non-Western societies, their internal variety and difference. It has until recently denied difference to European societies, grounding its analysis of the Enlightenment in such homogeneous categories as Western modernity. This seems increasingly implausible. The way out requires not more and better theory, but a deeper historicization of European history. One likely result of this process will be to help us disaggregate Western modernity, and to become more alert to its different forms within Europe. As modernity etched rather different cultural fault lines in each European society, the sites of cultural struggle also differed. Here, it is well to recall that not only non-Western societies were affected. The same processes also tossed Western societies upside down, sparking contrasting internal cultural struggles within Europe. And they did so in ways that bring out the differences among European states. Thus the sites of cultural struggle differed within Europe, as did the ways in which the rise of the state, and the emergence of a world economy were experienced. Thus for example, the conflict between church and state that so divided France has no counterpart in British history, while the British experience of race (starting with their representation of
the Irish) structured a rather different set of relationships than the ways in which race was experienced in France (Burke 2001). What’s true for Britain and France is true for other European states, each of which had somewhat different relationships to the Enlightenment and the democratic and industrial revolutions, which tended to shape somewhat different orientalisms, and thus imperial histories. Finally, while both Britain and France were profoundly affected by decolonization and the linguistic turn, they were affected differently. As a result, the forms assumed by the critique of colonial forms of knowledge differed as well.

A comparative and interactive approach to the history of modernity takes us away from high theory and toward a more fine-grained, more historically situated understanding of the contexts in which orientalism existed, as well as the facts and representations of orientalist and other discourses of western dominance. Ultimately a reconsideration of orientalism leads us to rethink the Enlightenment from a world historical point of view. Put differently, it leads to rethinking the place of the West in the long-term history of humanity. In calling for the insertion of the history of modernity in world history, we must recognize that it will have to be a different world history than the one that exists now. The refusal of world history to develop a theoretical understanding of modernity, that is, a way of theorizing it, has blunted its persuasiveness and left it vulnerable to charges that it, too, remains stuck in the West-and-the-Rest model. It needs to move beyond its own narrative -- world history as the rise of the West, or as a history of civilizations, or as some version of world systems theory. After some notable advances in thinking the history of modernity in world terms, the post 9/11 terrain has seen a regrettable regression toward civilizationist narratives. If
a case can be made for the historicization of the critique of orientalism, then an equally powerful case can be made for a more philosophically adequate theorization of modernity in world history. A-theoretical world historians, whose attachment to largely unexamined and putatively empirical explanations can only seem touching (if not politically dangerous) have much to learn from the linguistic and cultural turns. This is where the critique of orientalism launched by Said, and the linguistic and cultural turns more generally, can help. While the new world history has made it possible for the first time to begin to see the history of humanity whole and entire -- and the place of modernity within it -- it has yet to be theorized. Here is a task worthy of the next generation of scholars.

We conclude where we began. The critique of orientalism is not over. Indeed, it is not even past. In the post 9/11 era, the war on terrorism and the Iraq war have acquired a discursive power to shape the political field akin to the phase of high imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The absence of debate over the colonial character of the American presence in Iraq, and the Middle East more generally, is a telling index of the invasion of the intellectual field by the political field. So, too, is the extent to which the discourse on terrorism has come to suffuse political discourse. Thus, the extent of Israeli dominance over the Palestinian people has reached an all time high, leading to levels of economic deprivation among Palestinians never before observed, yet the colonial context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine is almost entirely occluded by the discourse on terrorism. The land question that underlies the Arab-Israeli conflict is banished altogether from political discourse. Unless proven otherwise, Palestinians are presumptively considered terrorists. More
broadly, such is the overwhelming power of the discourse on terrorism that the complex realities of 1.2 billion global Muslims can scarcely be admitted, let alone discussed. Linked to this is the unprecedented concentration of media into the hands of a few extremely wealthy and powerful individuals that helps ensure that deviant opinions are marginalized. In this regard, it is not surprising that to claim the existence of an Israel lobby powerfully influencing and directing American foreign policy is met with vehement criticism. Taken together, the hegemony of the discourse on terrorism and on Muslims is an act of self-blinding perhaps unique in the modern era. It shapes perceptions, channels discussion and forestalls critique. In a Bourdieuian sense, the political field has truly swamped the intellectual field. No, the study of colonial forms of knowledge is not just an esoteric academic pursuit. It is crucial to the political and intellectual future of the United States, of the US in the world.
Endnotes

1 “Instead of the partial analysis offered by the various national or systematically theoretical schools, I have been proposing the contrapuntal lines of a global analysis, in which texts and worldly institutions are seen working together” (Said 1993: 318). “Texts and worldly institutions... working together” is how Said connected culture and imperialism, culture and society. However, applying his contrapuntal approach does not improve on Foucaultian discourse analysis, because Said did not think through sufficiently the theoretical implications of his mostly unreflective practice. Thus, he placed what remains at base a formalist approach that privileges canonical texts and authors -- Jane Austen, Albert Camus -- alongside a contextual or discursive approach in which he mined history for bits and pieces of data to flesh out the imperial contexts of his literary texts (Said 1993: 80-97, 169-85). But the central difficulty is that the principle of selection -- what data to include and exclude -- is not spelled out, and this is because Said did not consider the historiographical stakes – the competing views of rival “schools” or approaches -- involved in choosing this or that historical datum. Thus, Said laid his contrapuntal readings side by side, but ultimately canonical texts and imperial contexts were not connected logically or theoretically.

2 What is significant here is not the connection between Said’s contrapuntal approach, for example, and new historicism, but the lack of connection. On the one hand, Said was critical of “cults like post-modernism, discourse analysis, New Historicism,
deconstruction, neo-pragmatism” because of their “astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history” (Said in Ansell-Pearson, Parry and Squires 1997: 8). On the other hand, the key is that Said was a practicing literary critic, not a literary theorist. Interviewed in the early 1990s, Said stated, “I simply lost interest in literary theory about ten years ago... I watched with some interest and eagerness the emergence of something called the New Historicism, its peak and its now apparent sliding into an orthodoxy... I still don’t quite know what it is” (Said in Sprinker 1992: 247-48).

3 Although Islamic science and philosophy attracted the interest of such scholars as Roger Bacon and Leibniz, earlier Western studies of Islam had been marked by Christian precommitment. Voltaire and Montaigne utilized Muslim locales to develop utopias and dystopias the better to criticize European governments and propose reforms.

4 Kiernan was a member of the British Communist historian's group (Cornforth 1978).


7 Opponents of empire included Catholics Emmanuel Mounier (editor of the monthly review, Esprit) and novelist François Mauriac, resistance heroes Jean Daniel, editor of Le Nouvel Observateur, Sartre and (more ambiguously) Camus. Although some French academics distinguished themselves in the decolonization struggle, none held important positions in the French university system or in the larger French intellectual field.
In France a major debate emerged, especially during 1998-2002, concerning torture in Algeria. For an overview, see among others Prochaska 2003b and the references cited there.

For a different view, see Judt (1998).