These intellectual shifts were also bound up with a changing political climate in the field. The debacle in Vietnam, Watergate and other political scandals, and revelations of the pernicious ties in which scholarly knowledge could be put by the government had reinforced the intellectual and political critiques offered by dissidents, all of which served to erode the once easygoing and close links between academics and policymakers. At the risk of generalizing, it may be said that during the 1970s scholars and academic institutions began to grow more wary about conducting research too closely tailored to fit the agendas of the military or intelligence agencies and about accepting funding that could be seen as compromising their independence and integrity. Over time the once powerful Cold War consensus broke down, and many scholars engaged in Middle East studies, like their counterparts in other area studies fields, came to be increasingly alienated from, or openly critical of, the policies of the United States government toward the part of the world they knew best. Of course, there continued to be some who adhered to the model of the 1950s and 1960s and saw it as their responsibility to use their expertise to serve the foreign policy interests of the United States as defined by the government. But this was less common than it had once been, signaling the emergence of a growing gap between the intellectual concerns but also the political views of many Middle East studies specialists, on the one hand, and the policymakers’ vision of the world and the kinds of knowledge they wanted, on the other.

So significant changes were well under way in US Middle East studies by the later 1970s. However, much of what was going on in the field in this period would be eclipsed or subsumed by an intellectual intervention produced by someone based entirely outside of Middle East studies. This intervention — Edward W. Said’s book Orientalism, published in 1978 — would have a very powerful effect not only on this field but on many others as well, touching off widespread (and often vociferous) debates, opening up new avenues of research, and even helping to spawn entirely new academic fields. It is to Said’s book, responses to it, and its intellectual and other consequences that I turn in the next chapter.
what he saw as the errors and failures of the Palestinian leadership. By that time Said had achieved global recognition as one of the pre-eminent literary scholars of his generation. Said’s deepening political engagement in the 1970s led him to criticize the ways in which Arabs and Muslims were often depicted in the Western media – for example, as ‘Arab’-led revolutions or as terrorists – and then to a more scholarly analysis of the Western study and images of, as well as policies toward, Islam and the Middle East. Three major books (along with numerous articles, essays, lectures and op-ed pieces) came out of this phase of Said’s work. I will discuss the first, *Orientalism*, published in 1978, in some detail. The second, *The Question of Palestine*, came out in 1979 and was a critical study of the traumatic displacement, subordination and ongoing suppression which the Palestinians had experienced at the hands of Zionism and Israel. The third book in this series was *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, published in 1981, which reiterated some of the key themes of *Orientalism* while addressing what Said saw as distorted and pernicious US media coverage of the Iranian revolution of 1978–1979 and its aftermath, and of the threat which Islam allegedly posed to the United States.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the intellectual impact of Said’s *Orientalism*. As I discussed in Chapter 5, critiques of Orientalism were already in circulation and beginning to make a difference in US and British Middle East studies (and elsewhere as well) even before the publication of Said’s *Orientalism*. But that book reached a much wider audience within and beyond academia, aroused a great deal of controversy and, translated into many languages, stimulated scholars across a range of fields and disciplines to rethink what they were doing and grapple with new intellectual problems in innovative ways. One observer who was critical of much of the book nonetheless accurately characterized its impact on both literary studies and Middle East studies as “electrifying,” while a leading historian of the modern Middle East called the book a “bombshell.” However, as I will discuss toward the end of this chapter, *Orientalism*, and the controversies and trends it generated, tended to obscure the fact that a substantive and wide-ranging critique of Orientalism had already begun to be elaborated before its publication, largely from a political economy perspective, which ended up being rather marginalized.

Orientalism is a long, complex and sometimes difficult book, and it is therefore not easy to summarize in a way that does it justice. It could be, and was, read in different ways by different audiences, but one important way in which it operated was as a polemic – that is, a work whose goal...
Orientalism as a discourse

For Said, Orientalism was very much a discourse in the sense that it used the term in a specific form of knowledge, with its own object of study, "the Orient," premises, rules, conventions and claims to truth. Orientalism as a form of knowledge simultaneously was produced by, and perpetuated, certain power relations, in this case the power which Western states and authoritative individuals exercised (or sought to exercise) over objects of study and how they could be understood. Much of Foucault's work explored the emergence of new discourses, and the institutions to which they gave birth, in the modern era.

However, Foucault did not see specific forms of knowledge, that is discourses or "regimes of truth," as emerging out of nowhere. He insisted that their emergence and dissemination were always bound up with, indeed produced by power. Foucault rejected the liberal Enlightenment view that power was something held or exercised by states, rulers or institutions, and thus always a repressive or negative force which could be excluded from a potentially widening sphere of human freedom or could be absent from the very core of our beings. Rather, he saw power as an inherent feature of all human social relations, and moreover as productive: it was in the matrices of the power relations that permeated social relations that discourses, practices and institutions were generated, including even our own subjective sense of ourselves, rooted in the modern notion that we are largely autonomous, self-governing, rational individuals.

Foucault used the Panopticon—a new kind of prison envisioned by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in which all the prisoners could be constantly observed by the guards, who could not themselves be seen—as a metaphor for the new kind of power that he saw as having structured a host of institutions, disciplines and practices from the nineteenth century onward, as well as the discourses which gave them meaning. These included the penitentiary, the hospital, the mental hospital, the school and the social sciences as well as new modes of classifying and governing populations, with their attendant technologies of control which operated not so much through the threat or infliction of physical punishment as by inciting new notions and modes of human personality and behavior. Foucault argued that like the prisoners in the Panopticon, who must act as if they are always being observed, modern people have been "disciplined" in new ways by modern forms of knowledge and power, even in what we like to think are our basic conceptions of who we are, our private thoughts and feelings, and our intimate relations.
the Orient. There was no objectively existing Orient; that entity, Said argued, came into being with a specific meaning for Europeans (and later other Westerners) through the very operation of the discourse of Orientalism, which defined its object in a certain way, produced widely accepted "truths" about it, and thereby made a certain representation of it appear real. Seeing Orientalism as a discourse in this sense, Said argued, enabled one to understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment era. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe that no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations in thought and action inspired by Orientalism. (p. 3)

At the same time, and just as importantly, Orientalism served as a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all 'those' non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (p. 7).

Orientalism for Said was thus not primarily about ignorance, prejudice, bias or racism on the part of individual scholars, officials, or writers, though as he showed there was plenty of that to go around. It was fundamentally about partaking of a representation of the Orient that assumed that it was ontologically—i.e., in its very being or essential nature—radically different from (and usually inferior to) "our" own Western world, a stance that could (and was) adopted even by those who were unprejudiced or even sympathetic to Arabs, Muslims, Islam and so on, or indeed by "Orientalists" or Muslims themselves.

This was not to say, Said continued, that "Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when peculiar entity 'the Orient' is in question" (p. 3). And unlike Foucault, Said insisted on the "determining imprint of individual authors upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism" (p. 23). Nonetheless, Said argued that the linkage between European power and Orientalism as a form of knowledge could be discerned in virtually every text on the Orient produced in Europe and the United States:

For it is true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, then it must also be true that for a European or American studying

In the chapters that followed Said ranged very widely, surveying European representations of the Orient from the ancient Greek playwright Aeschylus' depiction of the Persians to medieval images of Islam, to the Enlightenment, to nineteenth-century thinkers like Karl Marx and Ernest Renan and colonial officials like Cromer (discussed in Chapter 3 of this book), and to Hamilton Gibb (discussed in Chapter 4). Along the way he devoted close attention to the ways in which several influential nineteenth-century French writers who had traveled in Muslim lands, among them Chateaubriand, Nerval and Flaubert, had depicted the Orient and Orientalism. But for the most part Said chose to ignore nineteenth-century German Orientalist scholarship, on the ground that the main contours of Orientalist discourse could be adequately delineated from an exploration of texts produced by British, French and later American writers, scholars and officials.

As an academic tradition but also through the writings and doings of Western travelers, scientists, authors, artists, officials, pilgrims and others, Said argued, Orientalism emerged as a coherent discourse, a system of Western knowledge about the Orient that was pervasive, powerful and durable, despite having little to do with what actually went on in the part of the world designated by Westerners as the Orient. This Western representation of the Orient was predicated on the assumption that "East" and "West" were radically and irreducibly different, and (using primarily ethological methods) drew on presumably authoritative texts to produce and sustain certain ideas about the Orient, among them Oriental despotism and Oriental sensuality. Moreover, Said insisted, the contours of Orientalist discourse were profoundly shaped by a Western will to dominate the Orient, finally realized with the colonial conquests of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In fact the book's final section, "Orientalism Now," addressed the ways in which, from the late nineteenth century down to the present, Orientalism had been (and, Said argued, remained) a form of knowledge which authorized and justified the assertion of Western power over the predominantly Arab and Muslim lands of Western Asia and North Africa. Here too Said ranged widely, from Rudyard Kipling to T. E. Lawrence to various French and British scholars of Islam. In a final chapter, "The
Latest Phase,” Said discussed the ways in which “the Arab Muslim” had recently become “a figure in American popular culture” and of particular interest to business circles and policymakers (p. 285). Since the 1973 war and the Arab oil boycott that accompanied it, Said went on, the Arab had come to appear as “something more menacing” — the leering, mustached oil sheik with stereotypical “semite” features, “the disrupter of Israel’s and the West’s existence,” and so on.7 Said castigated what he saw as the persistence of central elements of classical Orientalism in contemporary scholarship, citing Abdallah Laroui’s critique of Gustave von Grunebaum and echoing Roger Owen’s critique of the Cambridge History of Islam (see Chapter 5), along with examples of what he saw as racist or otherwise distorted academic and popular depictions of Arabs and Muslims and of Islam. He devoted particular attention to Bernard Lewis, for his essay “The Return of Islam” (also discussed in Chapter 5) and for other work which Said deemed polemical, tendentious and grossly inaccurate — as well as constituting prime examples of the persistence of the most pernicious forms of Orientalism.

Said concluded by posing the question of whether there were any alternatives available to what he saw as a still powerful Orientalist discourse, now linked with US involvement in, and imperial designs on, the Middle East. In response he mentioned some of the critical projects of the 1970s discussed in the previous chapter and went on to insist that he continued to believe “that there is scholarship that is not as corrupt, or at least as blind to human reality, as the kind I have been mainly depicting.”

Today there are many individual scholars working in such fields as Islamic history, religion, civilization, sociology, and anthropology whose production is deeply valuable as scholarship. The trouble sets in when the guild tradition of Orientalism takes over the scholar who is at once vigilant, whose individual consciousness as a scholar is not on guard against idle rhetoric or too easily handed down in the profession. Even scholars and critics who are trained in the traditional Orientalist disciplines are perfectly capable of falling down from the old ideological stairs. (p. 326)

Scholars had to be self-aware and self-critical, Said insisted, and begin to address the questions which he saw as central to his project in Orientalism:

How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one’s own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the “other”)? . . . How do ideas acquire authority, “normality,” and even the status of “natural” truth? What is the role of the intellectual? What importance must he give to an independent critical consciousness, an oppositional critical consciousness? (pp. 325-326)

The answer to Orientalism was not Occidentalism, Said concluded, which would be just as essentializing. "If the knowledge of Orientalism has any meaning, it is in being a reminder of the seductive degradation of knowledge, of any knowledge, anywhere, at any time. Now perhaps more than ever" (p. 328).

Bernard Lewis responds

There is much more to Orientalism, which many regard as one of the most influential scholarly books published in English in the humanities in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Perhaps the best way to enter into an appraisal of the book and its intellectual significance is by discussing some of the responses to it. I will begin with one of its chief targets, Bernard Lewis, who not surprisingly vehemently rejected Said's analysis of Orientalism without really engaging with the substance of Said's critique.

In an essay on the “The Question of Orientalism,” published in The New York Review of Books in June 1982, four years after the appearance of Orientalism, Lewis claimed that Said and other critics of Orientalism had accused all those scholars who studied Islam and the Middle East of engaging in a “deep and evil conspiracy” in the service of Western domination.8 Such attacks on Orientalism were not really new, according to Lewis: he rather insinuatingly mentioned an earlier “outbreak,” allegedly inspired by Nazi-Linked antisemitism, originating in Pakistan in the mid-1950s, as well as Anouar Abdel-Malek’s critique (discussed at the beginning of Chapter 5), which Lewis deemed to have remained “within the limits of scholarly debate.” Recently, however, Arabs motivated primarily by their ideological opposition to Zionism and Israel and/or by an allegiance to Marxism had initiated a series of crude and intemperate polemical assaults on Orientalism, and among these Edward Said was the leading culprit.

Lewis accused Said of launching reckless and grossly inaccurate attacks, often couched in violent language replete with sexual overtones, on respectable scholars and scholarship. Said was moreover arbitrary in his choice of targets, ignoring major scholars and studies and focusing on marginal figures and unimportant texts, and he was also guilty of neglecting or maligning Arab scholarship while treating the admittedly crude utterances of colonial officials like Cromer on a par with scholarly Orientalist writing. This was, Lewis suggested, because Said knew little or nothing about the scholars and field he presumed to criticize, which led him to ignore very important German and Soviet Orientalists and commit egregious errors of fact. More broadly, Lewis argued, the
Said's Orientalism: a book and its aftermath

Lewis’ defense of Orientalism was, Said went on, “an act of breathtaking bad faith, since as I shall show, more than most Orientalists he has been [not the objective, politically disinterested scholar he presented himself as but rather] a passionate political partisan against Arab causes in such places as the US Congress, Commentary, and elsewhere.” Lewis was, for example, “a frequent visitor to Washington where his testimony before the likes of Senator Henry Jackson made standard Cold War bellicosity with furtive recommendations to give Israel more, and still more, arms presumably so that it may go on improving the lot of Muslims and Arabs who fall within the range of its artillery and airpower.”

Lewis’ next response to Said added little of value to the exchange. “It is difficult to argue with a scream of rage,” Lewis began, and he concluded by asserting that while the question of how societies perceive each other was of profound significance, “[t]he tragedy of Mr. Said’s Orientalism is that it takes a genuine problem of real importance, and reduces it to the level of political polemic and personal abuse.” At its 1986 annual meeting, held in Boston, the Middle East Studies Association featured a debate between Said and Lewis, each of whom was (in the manner of an old-fashioned duel) accompanied by a “second.” But while the event may have been good theater, it did not yield much useful elucidation of the intellectual issues at stake. Lewis was apparently never able to grasp (or cogently address) Said’s treatment of Orientalism’s defects as the product of its character as systematic (and power-laden) discourse, rather than as a problem stemming from error, bias, stereotyping, racism, evil-mindedness or imperialist inclinations on the part of individual scholars. Nor could Lewis accept Said’s premise that, like all human endeavors, Orientalist scholarship was at the very least partially shaped by the contexts within which it was conducted and thus that it was not hermetically sealed off from wider cultural attitudes about, and political engagements with, Islam and the Muslim world, for centuries Europe’s (often threatening) “other” and an ongoing “problem” for the United States. This left the two with little or no common ground on which to conduct a useful debate, had they even wanted to.

Critical engagements

Said’s critique of Orientalism generated a large number of more complex, nuanced and interesting responses, of which I will discuss only a few in order to convey something of the range of reactions to the book and of its intellectual impact.

claim that “Orientalists were seeking knowledge of Oriental peoples in order to dominate them, most of them being directly or, as Abdel-Malek allows, objectively (in the Marxist sense) in the service of imperialism,” was “absurdly inadequate.”

Some Orientalists, Lewis acknowledged, may have “served or profited from imperial domination,” but the European study of Islam and the Arabs began centuries before the age of European expansion and colonialism, and that study flourished in countries (like Germany) which never exercised domination over Arabs. “The Orientalists are not immune,” Lewis asserted, to the dangers of bias, “stereotypes and facile generalizations; nor are their accusers. The former at least have the advantage of some concern for intellectual precision and discipline.” Said’s baseless critique had focused on the “putative attitudes, motives, and purposes” of Orientalist scholars while ignoring their actual scholarly writings; in fact, Lewis concluded, “the most rigorous and penetrating critique of Orientalist scholarship has always been and will remain that of the Orientalists themselves.”

Said responded in kind in the pages of the same journal two months later – at the height, it is worth noting, of Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, as its army was bombarding besieged Beirut and tempers were running very high on all sides. “Insinuous, outrageous, arbitrary, false, absurd, astonishing, reckless – these are some of the words Bernard Lewis uses to characterize what he interprets me as saying in Orientalism (1978). . . . Lewis’s verbosity scarcely conceals both the ideological underpinnings of his position and his extraordinary capacity for getting everything wrong.” Said asserted that Lewis had attacked him by “suppressing or distorting the truth and by innuendo, methods to which he adds that veneer of omniscient tranquill authority which he supposes is the way scholars talk.”

Said insisted that he never said that “Orientalism is a conspiracy” or that “the West is evil . . . On the other hand it is rank hypocrisy to suppress the cultural, political, ideological, and institutional contexts in which people write, think, and talk about the Orient, whether they are scholars or not.” Said continued:

And I believe that it is extremely important to understand the fact that the reason why Orientalism is opposed by so many thoughtful Arabs and Muslims is that its modern discourse is correctly perceived as a discourse of power. In this discourse, based mainly upon the assumption that Islam is monolithic and unchanging and therefore marketable by “experts” for powerful domestic political interests, neither Muslims nor Arabs recognize themselves as human beings or their observers as simple scholars.
For its review of Orientalism, The New York Times Book Review turned to J. H. Plumb, professor of history at Cambridge University and an authority on eighteenth-century England. Plumb wrote, "There is a profoundly interesting concept in this book," and underlined the self-posturing verbiage there is an acute analytical mind at work, but the book, unfortunately, is almost impossible to read." Plumb actually agreed with much of what Said had to say and asserted that "there is much in this book that is superb as well as intellectually exciting... The fundamental concept that one society's view of another's culture may be used, like an interpretation of the past, to sanctify its own institutions and political agenda, is a very fruitful one that could be applied, and should be, to other constellations of nationalism or racist thought." But Plumb complained that the book was "so pretentiously written, so drenched in jargon." It is perhaps not surprising that Plumb, an older, rather mainstream historian, was put off by Said's heavy recourse to contemporary European theory (especially Foucault) as well as by the dense, allusive and sometimes elusive mode of writing not uncommon in literary studies but often seen by historians as unnecessarily convoluted and impenetrable. More broadly, while a good many historians -- especially those who studied parts of the world outside the West -- saw Orientalism as a work of major intellectual importance and were prepared to accept much or all of its central thrust, there was also unease with what some saw as the book's sometimes extravagant language, sweeping arguments, heavy focus on literary texts, and insufficient interest in carefully situating individuals, texts and institutions in their historical contexts.

One of the key reviews of Orientalism from within US Middle East studies was written by Malcolm H. Kerr (1931–1984) and published in 1980 in the field's leading scholarly journal, the International Journal of Middle East Studies. Kerr's parents taught at the American University of Beirut for many years, so Kerr spent much of his childhood and youth in Lebanon. He studied international relations at Princeton under Philip Hitti and received his Ph.D. in that subject from Johns Hopkins University, though he wrote his dissertation largely under the guidance of Hamilton Gibb of Harvard (see Chapter 4). Kerr spent twenty years teaching at UCLA but returned often to the Arab world, and in 1982 he assumed the presidency of his beloved American University of Beirut. He was assassinated outside his campus office by radical Islamist gunmen two years later.

Kerr described Orientalism as "a book that in principle needed to be written, and for which the author possessed rich material. In the end, however, the effort misfired."

The book contains many excellent sections and scores many telling points, but it is spoiled by overzealous prosecutorial argument in which Professor Said, in his eagerness to spin too large a web, leaps at conclusions and tries to throw everything but the kitchen sink into a preconceived frame of analysis. In charging the entire tradition of European and American Oriental studies with the sins of reductivism and caricature, he commits precisely the same error.

Said had demonstrated convincingly that many French and British writers, travelers and scholars had depicted the Middle East in an essentialist and derogatory fashion; but then, Kerr went on, he "turns from an imaginative critic to a relentless polemicist," assuming what he purports to demonstrate and forgiving the opportunity to test his claims by examining the work of Orientalist scholars who were neither French nor British. Said's sample of US-based scholars was unrepresentative, Kerr argued, and had he "looked further afield he would have gotten quite different results," including a great deal of work which manifested "consistent resistance to the themes of denigration and caricature of Eastern peoples of which Said complains." Middle East studies in the United States had its shortcomings and prejudices, Kerr acknowledged; but "whether it is the Western tradition of Orientalist scholarship that is primarily to blame -- in fact, whether that tradition has, in the net, really contributed to the problem -- is another question." Said's claim that "whatever the individual goodwill of the scholars, they are all prisoners of the establishment" and guilty of "propagating the old racist myths of European Orientalism in order to further the cause of Western imperial domination of the East" is at best "a preconceived argument, and a highly debatable one."

Maxime Rodinson, the French Marxist scholar whom we encountered at the beginning of Chapter 5 and whom Said himself cited approvingly as a scholar who had been trained as an Orientalist but had nonetheless produced important and honest scholarly work, assessed Orientalism along somewhat similar lines. Rodinson acknowledged that there were "many valuable ideas" in Said's book. "Its great merit, to my mind, was to shake the self-satisfaction of many Orientalists, to appeal to them (with questionable success) to consider the sources and the connections of their ideas in cease to see them as a natural, unprejudiced conclusion of the facts studied without any presumptions." Unlike Lewis, Rodinson understood what Said was trying to get at by examining Orientalism as a coherent, systematic discourse. But he also noted what he found problematic in Said's critique:

[From Said's] brilliant stand lies his repeatedly make excessive statement. This problem is accentuated because as a specialist of English and comparative literature, he is inadequately versed in the practical work of the Orientalists. It is too easy to choose, as he does, only English and French Orientalists as a target. By
so doing, he takes aim only at representatives of huge colonial empires. But there was an Orientalism before the empires, and the pioneers of Orientalism were subjects of other European countries, some without colonies. Much too often, Said falls into the same traps we old Communists fell into some forty years ago [i.e., of being excessively polemical, partisan and schematic]... The growth of Orientalism was linked to the colonial expansion of Europe in a much more subtle and amicable way than he imagines. Moreover, his nationalism tendencies have prevented him from considering, among others, the studies of Chinese or Indian civilization, which are ordinarily regarded as part of the field of Orientalism... even Arab nations in the West receive less than their due in his interpretation.

The Oxford historian of the modern Middle East Albert Hourani, discussed at the beginning of Chapter 3, shared much of Robinson's appraisal of Orientalism, as did Roger Owen, a historian of the modern Middle East who as we also saw in that chapter had been among the early critics of Orientalism and a champion of political economy as an alternative approach. In an early review of the book Owen offered strong praise for Said's critique of Orientalism: "But like Robinson, Hourani and others, Owen lamented the fact that Said had ignored German and other European scholars and suggested that Said's exploration of Orientalism was at times overly broad and lacked nuance and subtlety. Owen also rejected Said's embrace of a postcolonial (or poststructuralist) approach: "if we cannot make any connection between such studies of the Middle East and the reality they are supposed to describe, there is no way of showing how they have changed as a result of changing Middle Eastern (and not just European) circumstances. Nor is it possible to suggest how they might be improved in the future." Owen further faulted Said for a lack of interest in how the study of the Middle East could be made better. "It is not a question of first destroying the old and then rebuilding the new. The old contains material and concepts which need to be examined, to be challenged, and in some cases to be reconstructed, in terms of exigence of society which transcends national boundaries and in the use of which everyone, Middle Eastern or European or American, can share." For Owen (as for the sociologist Bryan Turner somewhat earlier), that "science of society" was some variant of political economy, which left him unhappy with Said's relentless focus in Orientalism on how Western cultures represented the Orient, hence on images, texts, ideas and discourses, rather than on economic, social and political structures, relations, interests and conflicts.

In an important 1981 essay titled "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," the noted Syrian philosopher Sadik Jalal al-'Azm addressed what he saw as the strengths and weaknesses of Said's Orientalism from a perspective that, like Robinson's and Owen's, was influenced by Marxism. Writing in the journal *Khamsin*, which as I explained in Chapter 5 had emerged in the 1970s as a forum for a group of exile Middle Eastern left-wing intellectuals, al-'Azm suggested that Said had used Orientalism in two distinct senses: Institutional Orientalism, by which al-'Azm meant the whole set of institutions, ideologies, beliefs, images and texts linked to European expansion, and Cultural-Academic Orientalism, by which al-'Azm meant "a developing tradition of disciplined learning whose main function is to 'scientifically research' the Orient."

Al-'Azm agreed that Said had very usefully devoted the bulk of his book to deflating the latter's "self-righteous" claims to impartiality and truth, "its racist assumptions, barely camouflaged mercenary interests, reductionistic explanations and anti-human prejudices," and to demonstrating its links to Institutional Orientalism. And Said had quite accurately shown that both forms of Orientalism shared a "deep-rooted belief... that a fundamental ontological difference exists between the essential natures of the Orient and the Occident, to the decisive advantage of the latter. Western societies, cultures, languages and mentalities are supposed to be essentially and inherently superior to the Eastern ones."

However, al-'Azm went on, "the stylist and polemicist in Edward Said very often runs away with the systematic thinker."

In an act of retrospective historical projection we find Said tracing the origins of Orientalism all the way back to Homer, Aeschylus, Herodotus and Dante. In other words, Orientalism is not really a thoroughly modern phenomenon, as we thought earlier, but is the natural product of an ancient and almost inevitable European (or mind) to misrepresent the realities of other cultures, peoples, and their languages, in favor of Occidental self-affirmation, domination and ascendency. Here the author seems to be saying that the "European mind," from Homer to Karl Marx and H. A. R. Gibb, is inherently biased on distorting all human realities other than its own for the sake of its own aggrandizement.

This way of construing the origins of Orientalism, al-'Azm argued, drew on the same essentializing dichotomy between East and West, and the same monolithic and static conception of culture, which Said saw as central to Orientalism and set out to demolish. It made much more sense, al-'Azm argued, to treat both forms of Orientalism as modern phenomena rather than as pervasive in some timeless, monolithic and inevitably essentialized "Western culture" since its very inception. Al-'Azm also found problematic what he saw as Said's implication that it was Orientalism as a deeply rooted Western cultural tradition which was the real source of Western political interest in the Orient. As al-'Azm understood him, Said seemed to be arguing (implicitly or explicitly) that it
was Cultural-Academic Orientalism which had given rise to Institutional Orientalism. "One cannot escape the impression," al-'Azm went on, "that for Said somehow the emergence of such observers, administrators and invaders of the Orient as Napoleon, Cromer and Balfour was made inevitable by Cultural-Academic 'Orientalism', and that the political orientations, careers and ambitions of these figures are better understood by reference to the Enlightenment thinker d'Herbelot and Dante than to more immediately relevant and mundane [political, strategic and economic] interests."

Al-'Azm also found troubling Said's suggestion that the Orient was essentially a representation, a projection by the West, and that all representations of one culture by another are inevitably misrepresentations. If as Said says, "the Orient studied by Orientalism is no more than an image and a representation in the mind and culture of the Occident...then it is also true that the Occident in doing so is behaving perfectly naturally and in accordance with the general rule - as stated by Said himself - governing the [inevitably distorting] dynamics of the reception of one culture by another." Moreover, al-'Azm argued, Said's criticism of Gibb and others for making broad declarative statements about the character of the Orient, Islam, etc. was misplaced. The problem was not that all these assertions were entirely wrong, for they often contained some grain of truth; the problem was that they were overly broad, grossly ahistorical, did not allow for the possibility of change, and were often linked to ongoing European efforts to dominate the Orient.

On the same ground al-'Azm defended Karl Marx against Said's depiction of him as "no exception to all the Europeans who dealt with the East in terms of Orientalism's basic category of the inequality between East and West." Al-'Azm insisted that the contrary was true: "there is nothing specific to either Asia or the Orient in Marx's broad theoretical interpretations of the past, present and future... Marx, like anyone else, knew of the superiority of modern Europe over the Orient. But to accuse a radically historicist thinker like Marx of turning this contingent [i.e. temporary] fact into a necessary reality for all time [as did the Orientalists] is simply absurd."

In concluding, al-'Azm reiterated his appreciation of Said's forceful critique of the assumption - central to Orientalism - that the differences between Islamic cultures and societies on the one hand and European ones on the other are neither a matter of complex processes in the historical evolution of humanity nor a matter of empirical facts to be acknowledged and dealt with accordingly but rather "a matter of emanations from a certain enduring Oriental (or Islamic) cultural, psychic or racial essence, as the case may be, bearing identifiable fundamental-unchanging attributes." However, al-'Azm warned, some in the Arab

and Muslim lands had succumbed to what he called "Orientalism in Reverse," which accepted the basic dichotomy between East and West but insisted that it was the East (or Islam) which was superior to the corrupt, decadent, materialistic West. He had in mind (among others) Islamists who rejected secularism, nationalism, Marxism, democracy, etc. as alien. Western imports and insisted that only (their interpretation of) Islam was authentic and could solve the political, economic, social and cultural problems facing their societies. For the Islamists as for Hamilton Gibb and Bernard Lewis, Islam was always Islam, an essence with a single, unchanging meaning, except that whereas the latter saw Islam as defective, inferior and in decline, the former saw it as perfect and perceived the West as spiritually and morally inferior. "Ontological Orientalism in Reverse," al-'Azm concluded, "is, in the end, no less reactionary, mystifying, ahistorical and anti-human than Ontological Orientalism proper."

A less balanced and more stridently negative assessment of Orientalism came from the Indian Marxist literary scholar Aijaz Ahmad. In an essay published in 1992, Ahmad acknowledged that Said was one of the most significant cultural critics writing in the English language and that his own thought had long been deeply engaged with, and influenced by, Said's. He also expressed deep admiration for Said's courage in risking his standing as a scholar, and even his life in the face of death threats, by speaking out as a Palestinian critical not only of Zionism but also of various Palestinian and Arab leaders and policies. Nonetheless, Ahmad proclaimed himself in fundamental disagreement with Said. Like others, Ahmad criticized what he saw as Said's theoretical and methodological inconsistencies and eclecticism as well as his implication that there was a more or less continuous Western tradition or discourse of Orientalism stretching from the ancient Greeks down to the present, a claim that Ahmad deemed both un-Foucauldian (since Foucault rejected such long-term continuities) and ahistorical. Moreover, Ahmad complained that Orientalism examines the history of Western textualities about the non-West quite in isolation from how these textualities might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intellectuals of the colonized countries: not as an undifferentiated mass but as situated social agents impelled by our own conflicts, contradictions, distinct social and political locations of class, gender, religious affiliation, and so on... the only voices we encounter in the book are precisely those of the very Western canonical which, Said complains, has always silenced the Orient. Who is silencing whom, who is refusing to permit a historicized encounter between the voice of the so-called "Orientalist" and the many voices that "Orientalism" is said so utterly to suppress, is a question that is very hard to determine as we read this book.
Like al-'Azm, Ahmad felt that Said had not only essentialized the West but implied that the Western assertion of power over the Orient had its roots in a basically literary Orientalism, thereby ignoring other more material causes and factors. And also like al-'Azm, Ahmad was unhappy with Said's apparent rejection (following Foucault) of the possibility of true statements, of accurate representation. This led, Ahmad claimed, both to a form of irrationalism, which had had pernicious intellectual but also political effects and to pandering to “the most sentimental, the most extreme forms of Third-Worldist nationalism.” By not only jettisoning but trying to discredit Marxism as unredeemably corrupted by Orientalism, and by blaming colonialism not only for “its own cruelties but, conveniently enough, for ours too,” like communalism, tribalism and the caste system, Said's critique of Orientalism had, Ahmad charged, helped “upwardly mobile professionals” from Third World countries immigrating to the West develop “narratives of oppression that would get them preferential treatment...” All in all, Ahmad put forward a harsh critique not only of Orientalism but of Said's work and intellectual stances more generally.

In a widely cited essay on Orientalism published in his 1988 book *The Predicament of Culture*, the anthropologist James Clifford offered a more appreciative (though by no means uncritical) appraisal of Said's book from a non-Marxist perspective. Indeed, the effect of his argument is “not so much to undermine the notion of a substantial Oriental as it is to make problematic ‘the Occident.’” Said’s work thus contributes to, and furthers, the effort to move beyond “casual [and largely unquestioned] references to ‘the West,’ ‘Western culture,’ and so on” and examine concretely the ways in which “the West” came to be constituted as a category in relation to various “others,” including Muslims, other “exotic” cultures, fictions of the primitive, and so on.

Clifford saw Said's own background as importantly related to his own "complex critical posture." As a Palestinian nationalist educated in Egypt and the United States, a scholar deeply imbued with the European humanities... Said writes as an 'oriental,' but only to dissolve the category. He writes as a Palestinian but takes no support from a specifically Palestinian culture or identity, turning to European poets for his expression of essential values and to French philosophy for his analytical tools. A radical critic of a major component of the Western cultural tradition, Said derives most of his standards from that tradition.” Said’s complex location is not “aberrant,” Clifford insisted; the “unrestful predication of Orientalism, its methodological ambivalences, are characteristic of an increasingly general global experience, and in that sense we can see Said's idealistic commitment to humanism as “a political response to the present age in which, as [Joseph] Conrad wrote, 'we are camped like bewildered travelers in a garish, unrestful hotel.' It is the virtue of Orientalism that it obliges its
readers to confront such issues at once personally, theoretically, and politically."

Edward Said shared his own thoughts on the critical reception of Orientalism and on the tasks facing left-wing intellectuals in a 1985 essay titled "Orientalism Reconsidered." He noted what he saw as "a remarkable unwillingness to discuss the problem of Orientalism in the political or ethical or even epistemological contexts proper to it. This is as true of professional literary critics who have written about my book as it is of course of the Orientalists themselves." Yet nothing. Said insisted, "not even a simple descriptive label, is beyond or outside the realm of interpretation," to be taken as "plain fact" or absolute truth. He went on to acknowledge earlier critiques of Orientalism, by Anouar Abdel-Malek and Talal Asad among others (see Chapter 5), who had received little attention in his book, and to attack the unregenerate Bernard Lewis as well as Daniel Pipes, a younger right-wing writer on the Middle-East and Islam whom I will discuss in Chapter 7.

Said also praised recent efforts, by scholars as well as writers and activists in many parts of the world, to "dissolve" and "decenter" dominant and oppressive forms of knowledge and move beyond them to new and potentially liberatory approaches. He envisioned these disparate efforts, addressing many different issues and diverse audiences, as part of a common endeavor that was "consciously secular, marginal and oppositional" and sought "the end of dominating, coercive systems of knowledge." However, he warned against the danger of "possessive exclusivism," for example the claim that "only women can write for and about women, and only literature that treats women or Orientalism well is good literature. . . . [or] that only Marxists, anti-Orientalists, feminists can write about economics, Orientalism, women's literature." The emancipatory intellectual project Said envisioned called for "greater crossing of boundaries, for greater interventionism in cross-disciplinary activity, a concentrated awareness of the situation -- political, methodological, social, historical -- in which intellectual and cultural work is carried out . . . Lastly, a much sharpened sense of the intellectual's role both in the defining of a context and in changing it, for without that, I believe, the critique of Orientalism is simply an ephemeral pastime."

**Poststructuralism and the "linguistic turn"**

As James Clifford and others noted, and as I discussed earlier, one of the distinctive features of Said's Orientalism was the way in which it drew on the thought and methods of Michel Foucault. Foucault's own work had focused exclusively on the European origins and character of the modern Western "episteme" -- the field or space within which knowledge had been constructed along certain lines. By applying elements of Foucault's approach to Western representations of a part of the "non-West" and by insisting that "the West" itself took shape in relation to what came to be defined as the "non-West," Said thus used Foucault's approach to chart very new intellectual terrain. In so doing, Orientalism contributed significantly to the dissemination of elements of French poststructuralist thought in American academia, a development that had already been under way in literary studies but which gathered much more momentum, and added a broader range of fields and disciplines, in the course of the 1980s.

In the years just before his death in 1984, Foucault's ideas, and perhaps even more his terminology, began to gain widespread currency among academic scholars in the humanities in the United States. Of course, a great many scholars and other intellectuals explicitly and vigorously rejected Foucault and other forms of poststructuralist thought on various grounds, political as well as intellectual, and many others displayed no interest in them. Nonetheless, the "invasion" of French theory in various forms in the 1970s and 1980s certainly stimulated vigorous intellectual debates and important developments in many fields.

For our purposes here, perhaps the most significant of these was the paradigm shift -- often referred to as the "linguistic turn" -- embraced by significant numbers of scholars in a broad range of disciplines and fields, a shift which drew on poststructuralism but had other sources and influences as well. It was rooted in the view that language -- by which was meant any coherent and structured meaning-bearing system, from actual human languages to social customs to mainstream economics to Marxism to Orientalism to biology -- provided the best metaphor for society and social relations. Language in this sense was not conceived simply, as one scholar put it, as "a medium, relatively or potentially transparent, for the representation or expression of a reality outside itself," a form expressing an essential or "real" content outside itself. Instead, language was to be seen in more or less the same way Foucault had used the term "discourse,"

[**LINGUISTIC TURN**]

as a self-contained system of "signs" whose meanings are determined by their relations to each other, rather than by their relation to some "transcendental" or extralinguistic object or subject . . . Such a commitment would seem to imply that "language not only shapes experienced reality but constitutes it that different languages create different, discontinuous, and incommeasurable worlds, that the creation of meaning is impersonal, operating "behind the backs" of language users whose linguistic actions can merely exemplify the rules and procedures of languages they inhabit but do not control, that all specialized language usages in a culture (scientific, poetic, philosophical, historical) are similarly determined by and constitutive of their putative objects."
For those who embraced the linguistic turn most fully—and scholars engaged with it in a wide variety of ways—the task of scholarship was thus to determine how these systems of meaning, these discourses, which governed what people did and how they understood who they were, did or did not accurately reflect or represent some "underlying" reality, social structure, historical process or fixed identity. In fact, poststructuralism insisted, no access was possible to reality as such, and hence philosophy's traditional quest for absolute, objective truth was a waste of time. We can only seek to understand the myriad ways in which human beings have made meaning for themselves, i.e. the systems of representation they have produced and which govern their lives, and these cannot be directly linked to, or explained as simple products or reflections of, social location or some essentialized identity or any overarching historical process or logic or social structure outside of discourse. The proper task of scholars was therefore to study those nexuses of knowledge and power in which we are all enmeshed, indeed which make us what we are, and to explore how these very systems created various representations of "reality" as they are understood and lived by human beings whose "subjectivity" was itself the product of those discourses.

This meant, among other things, abandoning the idea of "experience" as denoting what human beings purportedly learn from their encounters with the real world, since there were no such encounters that were not already and always mediated, structured, filtered by some discourse. What an individual or group "learned" from some "experience"—for example, of exploitation or oppression—depended crucially on the discourse which structured how that experience was made sense of. More broadly, a rigorous application of poststructuralism entailed rejecting all approaches to understanding the world which presume the existence of a objectively existing "real world" whose features and dynamics gave rise to the representations through which human beings make sense of what they are and what they are doing.

To put it slightly differently, poststructuralism rejected all philosophical, theoretical and historical approaches which assumed the existence of some "real" essence or foundation from which representations were derived and as reflections of which they could be adequately explained. This meant abandoning key elements of Marxist thought, most variants of which posit material factors, and the class conflict they produce, as the driving force in historical change and assume that one's relationship to ownership of the means of production, or more broadly one's location in an objectively existing social structure, will ultimately determine one's consciousness and behavior. But it also meant abandoning liberal theory, which seeks to preserve (and possibly extend) a realm of freedom purportedly outside the purview of power; modernization theory, which imputes a teleology to human social evolution; and so on. And of course any approach which posited that human beings possess a fixed or innate identity, individual or collective, was deemed essentialistic or "foundational" and was therefore to be rejected.

This is not to say that a committed poststructuralist would not scrupulously insist on the sway of a speeding car, as if she or he rejected the reality of that vehicle and its ability to hurt or kill him or her. It is rather to say that she or he would deem it a waste of time to devote a lot of attention to the philosophical question of whether the car objectively existed and whether our faculties enabled us to perceive it accurately or as it really was. The more interesting and important questions concerned the systems of meaning in which human beings were enmeshed and which structured what they took to be reality and governed their ideas, feelings, practices and institutions.

Scholars who specialized in Middle East literature may well have begun to draw on European modes of literary analysis informed by one or another strand of poststructuralist thought earlier, but it is fair to say that it was Timothy Mitchell's 1988 book *Colonising Egypt* which most dramatically introduced poststructuralism into Middle East studies. Most older scholarly work on modern Egyptian history had understood Egypt's colonization to have begun with that country's occupation by British forces in 1882 and the imposition of an informal protectorate; more recent work influenced by political economy had tended to highlight the ways in which Egypt's integration into a Europe-centered world market during the nineteenth century had led to the British occupation. Mitchell used the term "colonizing" very differently; he understood it as the process whereby more or less the same new regime of power and knowledge whose emergence Foucault had explored in western Europe unfolded in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Egypt. This process was manifested in new institutions (including a modern army, new public schools and hospitals, model villages for peasants, and the reconfiguration of urban space), new discourses (among them the moral reform and social uplift of the lower classes, new conceptions of political authority, and eventually Egyptian nationalism) and new practices (such as new modes of writing, learning and sociability). Mitchell also drew on the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida to argue that this process was crucially bound up with the elaboration of what he saw as a uniquely modern opposition between "reality" and its representation which underpinned this new system of truth and order in Egypt as it had elsewhere.

Many scholarly reviewers hailed Mitchell's book as original, important and challenging, even if they did not agree with everything in it. As one
of the earliest attempts to explore how Foucault and Derrida might be used to understand non-Western histories and societies, *Colonizing Egypt* was widely read and cited well beyond Middle East studies and facilitated the engagement of scholars in this and other fields with poststructuralism. At the same time, the new way of understanding modern Egyptian history which Mitchell proposed was drawn upon and developed in various ways.

**Colonial discourse and postcolonial theory**

Even though, as we have seen, Said's *Orientalism* played a significant role in introducing elements of Foucault's thought to an American academic audience, it is nonetheless important to emphasize (as many of his critics pointed out) that in this book Said's embrace of Foucault was always partial and ambivalent. He acknowledged the influence of other thinkers, for example the English Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams (1921–88) and the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), whose concept of "hegemony" said drew on to explain the strength and durability of Orientalism—though as several critics noted, in *Orientalism*, Gramsci was largely overshadowed by Foucault, and the two thinkers' approaches are, in any case theoretically inconsistent, if not incompatible.

In the years that followed the publication of *Orientalism*, Said tended to distance himself from poststructuralist rather stark and bleak view of the human condition and of hope for a better world, instead embracing a more humanistic position that sustained human agency, active political engagement, and the possibility of noncoercive, nondominating kinds of knowledge. For example, in an influential 1982 essay, "Traveling Theory," Said criticized what he characterized as Foucault's "overblown" conception of power and praised the insistence of the linguist (and political activist) Noam Chomsky on not only opposing repression and injustice in the present but also continuing to insist on the possibility of a more just future society—"a utopian impulse that was absent from Foucault's vision of the world." 23

Said's pioneering effort to understand Europe's encounter with the rest of the world by focusing on the question of representation, on the discourse(s) which shaped how Westerners perceived the non-West (and thus themselves as well), helped stimulate the development of two important new domains of scholarly inquiry. One of these revolved around the study of "colonial discourse"—what the editors of an important collection of writings on the subject defined as "the variety of textual forms in which the West produced and codified knowledge about non-metropolitan areas and cultures, especially those under colonial control." 24 Inspired in large measure by Said's analysis of the knowledge-power nexus at the heart of Orientalism, a host of scholars began to explore the ways in which European (and later American) scholars, travelers, officials, and others had perceived the non-Western peoples and cultures over whom Western power was increasingly being exerted during the colonial era and after, leading to a veritable explosion of innovative work.

One could cite endless examples of scholarly work on colonial discourse from the 1980s onward, dealing with many parts of the world. Here I will mention only Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797*, whose focus is evident from its title, as well as work on India by such scholars as Ronald B. Inden and Bernard Cohn. In a 1986 article and then at much greater length in a 1990 book, *Imagining India*, Inden drew on Said's understanding of Orientalism as an apparatus by which Westerners had produced a certain representation of the Orient to show how, going back to the eighteenth century, Western Indologists had constructed a highly distorted image of Indian society that depicted caste as its central institution. For his part Cohn examined (among other things) the key role which British colonial censuses played in producing new ways of classifying India's population and in strengthening British control over it. 25

Along the way scholars involved in the study of colonial discourse increasingly came to refine their analyses and incorporate new elements into them, building on Said's general approach but also rendering it more complex, nuanced, and concrete in various ways. For one, there was a growing insistence that one could not look simply at what Westerners thought, said, and did about the non-Westerners over whom they exercised power. A proper understanding of the "colonial encounter" also required attention to the ways in which colonial discourse, as well as the practices and institutions of colonial rule, were themselves profoundly shaped by what non-Western colonial subjects thought, said, and did. By extension, just as reflected societies were profoundly affected by the imposition of foreign rule, so were the colonizers and their societies profoundly affected by empire, in ways that had rarely received much attention. Just as one could not really make sense of the elaboration of the notion of the West without taking proper account of the ways in which that notion had been profoundly shaped by the interactions which those who would come to see themselves as Westerners had with those who would come to be defined as non-Westerners, so the relations between colonized and colonizers had to be seen as always complex, contradictory, and reciprocal.
To give just a few examples: Uday Mehta offered a new understanding of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British liberalism by exploring the ways in which this purportedly universalistic ideology nonetheless justified the denial of political rights to certain categories of people, particularly colonial subjects in India. Susan Thornbury challenged the downplaying of the significance of empire in conventional historical accounts of nineteenth-century England by examining how concepts of race and class intersected and helped shape each other, among other ways through the work of foreign and domestic evangelical Christian missions. Ann Laura Stoler argued that evolving definitions of national and racial identity in European countries were the product not only of contestation in the metropole but also crucially involved the proper categorization of European and “mixed-blood” populations in the colonies as well. Numerous other scholars elucidated the ways in which the colonized were not mute victims but actively participated in shaping the modern world through various forms of resistance to colonialism but also by selectively appropriating and recasting elements of European and colonial discourse and deploying them in unexpected ways. As two leading scholars of colonialism articulated the premises underpinning this approach: “[T]hinking about empire as much as the daily efforts to manage it were deeply affected, in every dimension by the actions of the ‘colonized,’” such that one had to question the “very dualism that divided colonizer from colonized” and explore “the processes by which they were mutually shaped in intimate engagement, attraction, and opposition.” Work in this emerging field was often distinguished by its interdisciplinarity and its strongly comparative character, with scholars feeling free to cross conventional intellectual boundaries to forge innovative theoretical concepts and research methods and to engage in wide-ranging scholarly conversations across the disciplines.

Edward Said himself would delve further into one key aspect of the complex and reciprocal relationship between “the West” and “the rest” in his 1993 book Culture and Imperialism. We tend to assume, Said suggested, that “colonial underclasses were marginal and perhaps even ecocentric to the central activities of the great metropolitan cultures.” In fact, Said insisted, empire was central to modern European culture, and one could not make sense of that culture without taking it into account. Scholars of European literature thus had to locate the works they studied in relation to the broader historical contexts which had helped shape them. So, for example, a key chapter of Culture and Imperialism argued that a fuller understanding of a novel like Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park, first published in 1814, required critical awareness of the fact that it was colonial slavery which produced the wealth that made possible the social world Austen depicted—a reality only partially and indirectly acknowledged in the text itself yet central to it. The point was not to belittle Austen as a writer or diminish the importance of her novels; it was rather to encourage a deeper awareness of the links between the nineteenth- and twentieth-century European novel (and European culture more broadly) and contemporary European colonialism and imperialism. Building on and extending the argument he had made in Orientalism fifteen years earlier, Said thus demanded that scholars not treat the West and the rest of the world as if they were separate worlds, each with its own distinctive essence and historical trajectory, but instead explore the ways in which they had powerfully influenced—indeed, constituted—each other in the modern era.

As the study of colonialism flourished in the years that followed the publication of Orientalism, scholars exploring domains first charted by Said further developed, and inevitably modified, his approach in other important ways. For example, perspicacious readers will have noted that gender was not a central concern of Orientalism, though Said had certainly pointed out how the Orient and Orientals were often not only eroticized, but also depicted as effeminate, weak, and passive, in contrast with a West portrayed as active, powerful, and male, and he had also discussed various writers’ depictions of Oriental women. Yet Orientalism appeared just as feminist theory, women’s studies, and the study of gender were beginning to dramatically transform American academia, a trend that would gather strength in the decades that followed. Increasingly, scholars engaged in the study of colonialism would use gender as a key category of analysis, which had the effect of rendering the critique of Orientalism much more nuanced and complex.

A good part of the new work on women and gender in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world discussed in Chapter 5 enriched colonial discourse analysis in just this way. One relatively early example is the Algerian writer Malek Alloula’s 1986 book The Colonial Harem, which creatively examined the ways in which (often lewd) picture postcards of Algerian women sent by French settlers in or visitors to Algeria early in the twentieth century manifested prevailing European ideas and fantasies about these women and the lives they supposedly lived in the “harem.” Similarly, Sarah Gfröer-Brown’s 1988 Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860–1950 built on, but also extended, Said’s critique of Orientalism by exploring how the new technology of photography affected the depiction of Middle Eastern women. Inevitably, some of the new feminist work on women and gender challenged aspects of Said’s approach. Billie Melman, in her 1992 Women’s Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718–1918, lamented the
fact that women had been largely omitted from studies of Orientalism and imperialism, including Said's. Her research into travel writing on the Middle East by English women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries convinced her that "Europe's attitude towards the Orient was neither unified nor monolithic. Nor did it progress (or regress) linearly. Nor did it necessarily derive from a binary vision sharply dividing the world into asymmetrical oppositions: male-female; West-East; white-nonwhite and Christian-Muslim, nor from that universal propensity to 'think in pairs.'" Rather, Melman argued, alongside the dominant, male, Orientalist and imperialist vision of the Middle East Said had accurately described, there developed an alternative view, found in many of the writings by women travelers, which often challenged "middle-class gender-ideology," led to "self-criticism rather than cultural smugness" and sometimes even produced "identification with the other that cut across the barriers of religion, culture and ethnicity."

In the preface to her book's second edition, Melman explicitly criticized Said for his "gender-blindness" in Orientalism. Happily, she went on, the ways in which "the colonies and the colonial experience constituted the gendered British identity and the experience of women and men, mainly the middle classes," were now coming to be central to studies of Western society during the age of empire, even as "students of the colonial experience now begin to realize how useful the historical category of gender is to our comprehension of that central experience and its changing representations." Melman insisted that "Western knowledge of and knowledge about the Orient was not monolithic or systematically constructed; that there was not one and totality view of the West's cultural other," as Said had seemed to suggest in Orientalism. This line of argument was echoed by others, among them the literary scholar Lisa Lowe, who argued that "Orientalism is not a single developmental tradition but is profoundly heterogeneous," the product of many different (and sometimes discordant) discourses intersecting and interacting, leading to complexities and contradictions. Similarly, in his study of the reception of "Oriental" influences in nineteenth-century European culture, the British historian John MacKenzie criticized what he saw as the simplistic binary oppositions characteristic of the Saidian critique of Orientalism, which had thereby committed "that, most fundamental of all historical sins, the reading back of contemporary attitudes and prejudices into historical periods." "The approach to the eastern Other can only be fully understood through a recognition of the complexity of the range of Others which constituted at once both threat and potential liberation [for the arts in Europe]." MacKenzie argued that "a fascination with Orientalism was as likely to be [politically as well as culturally] oppositional as consensual in relation to established power structures, a promoter of a ferment in ideas as in-artistic innovation...It is difficult to discover in any of the arts at whatever period sets of clearly delineated binary oppositions, sharp distinctions between the moral Self and the depraved Other...In reality, Orientalism was endlessly protean, as often consumed by admiration and reverence as by denigration and depreciation."30

However one judges the various critiques, revisions, and elaborations of Said's original approach, it is clear that from the 1980s onward there was a proliferation of innovative, scholarly work—on colonialism and empire in the metropole as well as in the colonies. This flourishing and strongly interdisciplinary field was increasingly characterized by the use of gender, along with class and race, as key analytical categories and by increasingly sophisticated work that sought to transcend simple binary oppositions and trace the mutually formative interactions which shaped many of the contours of the world we still live in today.31

This brings us to the second of the two domains of scholarly inquiry to which, as I suggested at the beginning of this section, Said's Orientalism had helped give birth and for which it was a central text. This was "postcolonial theory" or "postcolonial studies," which also emerged as a distinct intellectual enterprise in the 1980s and overlapped with (and for some even subsumed) colonial discourse analysis. It was (and remains) less a coherent, clearly defined theoretical position with a well-defined research agenda than an intellectual stance with a loosely knit set of interests, concerns and questions.

Postcolonial theory sought to develop intellectual tools that could be used to make sense of the world as it had evolved since the end of formal colonial rule—hence the "post" in its name—though it insisted on due attention to the enduring legacies of colonialism as well. However, as Leela Gandhi put it, while "postcolonialism has taken its place with theories such as poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and feminism as a major critical discourse in the humanities" and "has generated an enormous corpus of specialized academic writing...postcolonialism itself remains a diffuse and nebulous term." While, Gandhi argued, postcolonial studies had "enabled a complex interdisciplinary dialogue within the humanities, its uneasy incorporation of mutually antagonistic theories—such as Marxism and poststructuralism—confounds any uniformity of approach. As a consequence, there is little consensus regarding the proper content, scope and relevance of postcolonial studies."32

Robert Young, the author of a recent book on postcolonial studies, described its intellectual aims this way:
First, investigating the extent to which not only European history but also European culture and knowledge was part of, and instrumental in, the practice of colonization and its continuing aftermath. Second, identifying fully the means and causes of continuing international depression and exploitation, and analysing their epistemological and psychological effects. Third, transforming those epistemologies into new forms of cultural and political production that operate outside the protocols of metropolitan traditions and enable successful resistance to, and transformation of, the degradation and material injustice to which disempowered peoples and societies remain subjected. Since this field is only tangentially related to the main themes of this book, I will not elaborate further, except to note once again that Said’s Orientalism contributed significantly to the burgeoning of postcolonial theory, providing additional evidence of the tremendous intellectual impact that work across the humanities.

Before concluding, it is important to reiterate one other important intellectual consequence of the focus on representation to which Said’s Orientalism contributed so significantly. As I discussed in Chapter 5, much of the critique of Orientalism which had developed in the 1970s, before the publication of Said’s book, was predicated on the belief that it was indeed possible to produce accurate knowledge of the Middle East and the Muslim world. This accurate knowledge—which, it was hoped, would not serve the interests of Western power over the region—was to be attained by using the analytical tools of political economy, thereby excusing the cultural essentialism that characterized much of Orientalism and the simplistic teleology that characterized modernization theory. This meant giving explanatory primacy to such things as social structure, the local, regional, and global dynamics of capitalist development, and political and social struggles in their historical contexts, rather than to questions of culture.

While Said was certainly aware of the critical work under way before Orientalism, he was in that book centrally focused on the question of representation, how societies perceive and depict themselves and one another. As such, he did not have the intention, and many read him as not only depicting Marx himself as an Orientalist but also as rejecting Marxist modes of historical explanation and social analysis, including political economy, in favor of an analytical framework in the wave of scholarly writing on colonialism and the postcolonial world that followed along the path Said had marked out, often theoretically informed by one or another variant of poststructuralism or more broadly by the linguistic or cultural turn in the humanities, the kind of materialist analysis which had inspired much critical and innovative work in the late 1960s and 1970s was often shunted aside.

While Bhabha, Said, and other strains of poststructuralism and postcolonialism,

Marxian and political economy approaches came to be seen by many in the 1980s as too narrow in their insistence on the centrality of class as a category, too essentialist in their commitment to structural economic causation, and too teleological in their positing of large-scale and long-term historical trajectories. As they also seemed to ignore, or at least marginalize, discourses, culture, or more broadly questions of meaning, which were the key focus of the new work on representation. Not (as I noted in Chapter 5) did such approaches initially seem able to offer adequate explanations of such phenomena as the persistence and politicization of religion, in the Middle East (the Iran revolution, the rise of Islamic movements, the growth of messianic religious nationalism in Israel, etc.) or for that matter elsewhere (e.g., the growth of right-wing evangelical Protestantism in the United States).

As a consequence, the influence of political economy-inspired approaches, including social and economic history, waned somewhat. Many younger scholars turned instead to the question of representation as the hot new thing, and pride of place was given to discourse analysis, to cultural studies and to cultural history. These were all worthwhile and often very productive approaches and generated much excellent work, but in some cases they were pursued exclusively through the critical reading of texts (literary, official, and so on) without sufficient interest in grounding those texts in the social, political and other contexts which had produced them and within which they did their “work.” This trend was perhaps especially significant in literary studies, but it also afflicted at least some scholars in other disciplines who had embraced the linguistic turn. This was in part what prompted Aljaz Ahmad to be so critical of Said, though Said had himself been quite deeply politically engaged throughout the last three decades of his life; Ahmad held him (rather unfairly) in large measure responsible for launching an intellectual trend that had led to what he saw as a pernicious retreat from engagement with the way the bulk of the planet’s population actually lived and struggled to survive, that is, with the realities of politics, economics, power, and oppression, and an accompanying turn toward what he saw as the abstract, depoliticized and historical analysis of texts.

Over time, as the first flush of excitement over the possibilities opened up by the linguistic turn waned and as academic sensibilities shifted, there was a growing sense that it was possible—indeed, intellectually necessary—to combine due attention to the question of representation with due attention to social and political dynamics, hierarchies of power and historical contexts, and to explore how these domains are intertwined. This was not to be accomplished by positioning, as classical Marxism had done, that ideology and culture were merely reflections or expressions
of society's "real" economic base, but by developing methods of analysis that took all meaningful human social activity, whether "material" or "discursive," as determinative, indeed mutually constitutive. Figuring out how to actually do this naturally proved much more difficult than specifying it as a goal, and many of the issues raised by the linguistic turn remained contentious into the twenty-first century.35

In an afterword written for the 1995 reprinting of Orientalism, Edward Said assessed the impact of his book and some of the responses to it. He began by expressing regret that some readers, especially in Arab and Muslim countries, had used his book to argue that the entire West was the enemy of Islam and the Arabs, or that Islam was perfect. His rejection of essentializing, Said insisted, applied just as much to Islamic fundamentalist claims about "true Islam" as it did to the Western representation of "the Orient" that he had criticized in Orientalism.

He went on to discuss the reception of the book in the Arab world where, he felt, much of the criticism to which it was subjected constituted "an accurate reflection of how decades of loss, frustration and the absence of democracy have affected intellectual and cultural life in the Arab region." Said insisted that Orientalism had been an effort to break down barriers, to open up new ways of thinking that critically transcended boundaries between cultures and forms of knowledge, to develop "a new way of conceiving the separations and conflicts that had stimulated generations of hostility, war, and imperial control."

Said concluded his assessment on a rather optimistic note. While "the animosities and inequities still exist from which my interest in Orientalism as a cultural and political phenomenon began," he wrote, "there is now at least a general acceptance that these represent not an eternal order but a historical experience whose end, or at least partial abatement, may be at hand. Looking back at it from the distance afforded by fifteen eventful years and the availability of a massive new interpretative and scholarly enterprise to reduce the effects of imperialist shackles on thought and human relations, Orientalism at least had the merit of enlisting itself openly in the struggle, which continues of course in 'West' and 'East' together."

Writing from the vantage point of the early years of the twenty-first century, it is perhaps a bit more difficult to share Said's optimism. But he was certainly right to note the profound transformations which scholarship in the humanities had experienced in the last decades of the twentieth century, transformations to which Orientalism, along with Said's other work, made no small contribution. This is not to say that Orientalism is flawless or that none of the criticisms made of it have any validity. I tend to agree with the assessment made by Sadik al-'Azmi, and echoed