EDWARD SAID AND ANTHROPOLOGY

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Since the publication of Orientalism in 1978, it has been virtually impossible to study the colonial world without explicit or implicit reference to Edward Said’s charge that the sources, basic categories, and assumptions of anthropologists, historians of the colonial world, and area studies experts (among others) have been shaped by colonial rule. This article charts Said’s influence on anthropology, tracing both anthropology’s engagement with colonialism and the frequently ambivalent (and sometimes defensive) responses within the field to Said’s critique. The article also considers the larger terrain of Said’s engagement with the field, from his concern about its “literary” turn of the 1980s to his call for U.S. anthropology explicitly to confront the imperial conditions not only of its epistemological inheritance but also of its present position. Though Said’s direct writings on the discipline have been limited, the article concludes that anthropology has not only learned a great deal from Said’s critique, but has become one of the most important sites for the productive elaboration and exploration of his ideas.

DESPITE, OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF, the enormous impact Edward Said has had on the discipline of anthropology, he was not always welcomed as a friendly critic. For some anthropologists, he became synonymous with the charge that the discipline would forever be tainted by its colonial origins. Said was hardly the first to call attention to anthropology’s colonial origins—and continuing entailments—but there was something about the challenge he held out that made many anthropologists uncomfortable, defensive, and reactive. Thus, when Edward Said was invited to the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) as an anthropological interlocutor in November of 1987, his critical reflections about the implications of U.S. imperialism for the discipline, the persistence of colonial forms of knowledge, and the need for explicit political engagement, were not well received. According to one anthropological observer, “Respondents angrily and vigorously pointed out the vast radical literatures and personal political histories that contradicted Said’s vision…”1 This

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was not the hero's welcome that one might have expected given the critical importance of Orientalism for the anthropological project.

**THE SCOPE OF THE ORIENTALISM CRITIQUE**

When Edward Said published his pathbreaking *Orientalism* in 1978, he articulated the most compelling polemical critique of the implication of scholarly discourses in colonial ideas and legacies that had been made to date. After this work, it has seemed impossible to engage in the study of the colonial world without either explicit or implicit reference to his charge that both our sources and our basic categories and assumptions (as anthropologists, historians of the colonial world, area studies experts, etc.) have been shaped by colonial rule. Said made the case that the Orient, qua Orient, was constituted as an effect of the collaboration of power and knowledge in the West, a collaboration most significantly made possible by the colonial era. When Said used the term Orientalism, he meant it in a number of interdependent senses. These included the general tendency of thought, found throughout the colonial establishment, in which the Orient was made to be Europe's other, a land of exotic beings and exploitable riches that was there primarily to service the economy and imagination of the West. Orientalism also refers to a much more sophisticated body of scholarship, embodied in such practices as philology, archaeology, history, and anthropology, all glorifying the classical civilizations of the East (at the same time they glorify even more the scholarly endeavors of the West that made possible their recuperation and study), but suggesting that all history since the classical age had been characterized by decline, degradation, and decadence. Orientalism, whether in the guise of colonial cultures of belief, or of more specialized subcultures of scholarship, shared fundamental premises about the East that served to denigrate the present, deny history, and repress any sensibility regarding contemporary political, social, or cultural autonomy and potential in the colonized world. The result has been the relentless Orientalization of the Orient, the constant reiteration of tropes conferring inferiority and subordination on the East.

The importance of Said's critique was hardly lost on anthropologists, who were already well aware of the colonial context for much early anthropological knowledge, not to mention the extent to which much anthropological work continued to privilege ideas of exoticism, otherness, and the primitive. And yet, when Said was invited to the 1987 AAA meetings, there was clear ambivalence about the implications and scope of the Orientalism critique. On that particular occasion, the panelists were certainly not unconcerned about questions of colonialism and imperialism, but their responses suggest a residual resistance to the kind of totalizing epistemological critique made by Said, even as some respondents were concerned about Said's own distance from Marxist critiques of imperialism within the discipline. If Said's position was seen as too heavily weighted by epistemological and political rather than economic or material concerns, at least one irony was that some of his strongest
comments concerned the ways in which the political crises of anthropological practice and knowledge had been shifted into literary and philosophical domains. Said, the professor of English and comparative literature, had been especially distressed to see historical and political issues treated as questions of reading and writing. In fact, the 1980s were a decade in which the political engagements of the Vietnam era had given way to concerns in literary theory and narrative method. And Said was correct, if rhetorically mischievous, to observe that, “few of the scholars who have contributed to such collections as Writing Culture or Anthropology as Cultural Critique—to mention two highly visible recent books—have explicitly called for an end to anthropology as, for example, a number of literary scholars have indeed recommended for the concept of literature.” In capturing the extent to which the crisis of representation had become a dominant strain in recent anthropological writing—both of the books he named had been published in 1986—Said was especially well positioned to complain about the literary turn. He observed that, “few of the anthropologists who are read outside anthropology make a secret of the fact that they wish that anthropology, and anthropological texts, might be more literary or literary theoretical in style and awareness, or that anthropologists should spend more time thinking of textuality and less of matrilineal descent, or that issues relating to cultural poetics take a more central role in their research than, say, issues of tribal organization, agricultural economics, and primitive classification.” Said must have been horrified to realize that the greatest impact of Orientalism on many anthropologists was to encourage more attention to the poetics of colonialism than to the politics of anthropology.

What concerned the panelists at the AAA meetings of 1987, however, was not the critique of literary theory as much as the relationship of colonialism to anthropology, both in terms of its disciplinary constitution and the further relationship between colonialism and capitalism. In making the charge that “the recent work of Marxist, anti-imperialist, and meta-anthropological scholars . . . nevertheless reveals a genuine malaise about the sociopolitical status of anthropology as a whole,” Said asked why it was, for instance, that the author of one “remarkable book” that provided a model for a new kind of critical “historical anthropology” seeming to go well beyond the limits of disciplinary reflection, had felt impelled to make an impassioned call for the importance of anthropology as a discipline. How could it be that at a time of evident “paradigm exhaustion,” the ultimate refrain seemed to come down to concern about the survival of anthropology? Said also noted that the original and important work of anthropologists such as Marshall Sahlins and Eric Wolf lacked critical self-reflection (and, by implication, significant critical engagement with the colonial sources for much of their historical work) even while they ignored the contemporaneous politics of representation (“Who speaks? For what and to whom?”). Anthropologists might retreat into textuality, or they might practice varieties of Marxist political economy, but in both cases they seemed to evade the historical and political reasons that made the postcolonial field increasingly inhospitable for older forms of ethnographic fieldwork.
And in their protestation of the importance of their guild, they simultaneously seemed to betray anxieties that Said intuited had to do with the foundational politics of anthropology itself. Whether Said meant to overstate the case or not, the responses of his fellow panelists made it clear that he had diagnosed something important, and that anthropology, for all of its contemporary merits in the panoply of American social science, still had difficulty engaging the genealogical burden of its colonial origins. In this essay, I will reflect both on Said’s impact on, and his legacy for, anthropology, but I will do so in the larger context of recalling the depth and persistence of the disciplinary anxiety that emerged around Orientalism.

**Orientalism and Anthropology**

Orientalism, in fact, did not pay a great deal of attention to the history of anthropology. The historical polemic Said mounted there was directed primarily against the structural and largely discursive collaborations between the academic traditions of textual, philological, and civilizational study on the one hand and the formal political and institutional mechanisms of colonial rule on the other. Anthropology was mentioned either as part of area studies or as one of the social scientific disciplines, along with history and political science, that were critical to postwar academic delineations of the areas of the world that had earlier been left either to textual scholars or colonial administrators. True, he criticized the reductive culturalism of the anthropology of thinkers as different as Claude Levi-Strauss and A. L. Kroeber—in its uses by influential Orientalist scholars such as Gustav von Grunebaum—but Clifford Geertz was one of the few scholars to emerge from Said’s polemic with honorable mention. Said praised Geertz’s scholarship as an example of work that moved beyond the field of Orientalism “defined either canonically, imperially, or geographically.” As he went on to note, “the anthropology of Clifford Geertz... is discrete and concrete enough to be animated by the specific societies and problems he studies and not by the rituals, preconceptions, and doctrines of Orientalism.” When, in his subsequent essay, “Orientalism Reconsidered,” he was sharply critical of Geertz’s “standard disciplinary rationalizations and self-congratulatory clichés about hermeneutic circles,” he was not recanting his earlier comments so much as giving vent to his more troubling sense that anthropologists were repeating the political delusions of philosophical and literary theories and preoccupations that emphasized meaning and interpretation over the clamorous demands of politics and history. And he took care to use this concern as a backdrop for his own praise of Johannes Fabian’s book, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Constitutes its Object*. Said used his criticism of hermeneutic circles to regard “Fabian’s serious effort to re-direct anthropologists’ attention back to the discrepancies in time, power and development between the ethnographer and his/her constituted object [as] all the more remarkable.”

Despite the negligible place of anthropology in his writings prior to the AAA meetings in 1987, Said did not have to comment directly or extensively on the
discipline for the connection to be made between the central concerns of his book and the historical as well as theoretical entailments of anthropology both in colonial history and in Orientalism as a field (and tradition) of scholarship. Besides, Said's critique of area studies had struck close to home, since anthropology had played a significant role in the development and elaboration of many of the central activities of area studies both as a general field of study and as a discrete institutional activity located in university area institutes or centers. Indeed, it has been widely understood that postwar anthropology expanded in large part because of political and academic recognition of its critical role in the study of the postcolonial “Orient.” Said, of course, was hardly the first critic either to suggest the need for political and historical interrogation of the discipline, or to link it to Orientalism, but, as noted above, he struck a nerve. It was not uncommon for anthropological reviewers to accept the importance of Said's criticisms, but then to counter with the charge both that he essentialized Orientalism as much as the latter had essentialized the Orient, and that he left no role for the actuality of the Orient either to emerge in any account or speak back. Thus, in various reviews and commentaries, Said was counterattacked for the very sins with which he had charged the imperial West and the traditions of Orientalist scholarship.12 For his critics, Said was at once a Nietzschean postmodernist and a political polemicist, in either case characterized by excess, contradiction, and ruthless disregard for the facts. But that these charges have been steadily made during the twenty-five years since the publication of the book reveals something more fundamental: Orientalism was not just an important intervention, it was one of the most critical books for the reconceptualization of anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century.

ANTHROPOLOGY BEFORE Orientalism

If Said's central arguments had been anticipated by others, including perhaps most critically Anwar Abdel-Malik,13 one of several of his most important anthropological anticipations can be found in the volume Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter, edited by Talal Asad and published in 1973.14 Asad, who assembled the volume on the basis of a conference he convened at the University of Hull in 1972, began his introduction by noting that the subject of colonialism, and in particular its relations with anthropology, had been largely ignored in British social anthropology. Reacting to the anthropological insistence on the discipline's origins in the “ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment,” Asad wrote that, “anthropology is also rooted in an unequal power encounter between the West and Third World which goes back to the emergence of bourgeois Europe; an encounter in which colonialism is merely one historical moment. It is this encounter that gives the West access to cultural and historical information about the societies it has progressively dominated, and
thus not only generates a certain kind of universal understanding, but also re-enforces the inequalities in capacity between the European and the non-European worlds.\textsuperscript{15} Here was the germ of a sweeping critique, made more insistent by his subsequent observation that although anthropologists legit-mately lay claim to the “sympathetic recording of indigenous forms of life that would otherwise be lost to posterity… they have also contributed, sometimes indirectly, towards maintaining the structure of power represented by the colonial system.”\textsuperscript{16} And in his own essay, Asad took this argument further, specifically proposing the complementary relationship of Orientalist scholarship and anthropological writing. As he noted, “For the orientalist’s construct, by focusing on a particular image of the Islamic tradition, and the anthropologist’s, by focusing on a particular image of the Africanist tradition, both helped to justify colonial domination at particular moments in the power encounter between the West and the Third World… by refusing to discuss the way in which bourgeois Europe had imposed its power and its own conception of the just political order on African and Islamic peoples, both disciplines were basically reassuring to the colonial ruling classes.”\textsuperscript{17}

Despite the care with which Asad made his argument, his central point was frequently interpreted as the charge that anthropologists had been the handmaiden of colonial rule; interventions by anthropologists as various as Del Hymes and Robert Scholte were understood to echo the same charge. Anthropologists who took the charge seriously—British social anthropologists in particular—defended themselves by providing personal and institutional histories that were meant to invite retraction, or at least absolution. Significantly, Asad had not in fact suggested direct and intentional collaboration, nor had he been primarily interested in establishing blame. His critique of colonialism was predicated on a larger analysis of “the dialectic of world power.” In his view, “it is a mistake to view social anthropology in the colonial era as primarily an aid to colonial administration, or as the simple reflection of colonial ideology. I say this not because I subscribe to the anthropological establishment’s comfortable view of itself, but because bourgeois consciousness, of which social anthropology is merely one fragment, has always contained within itself profound contradictions and ambiguities—and therefore the potentialities for transcending itself.”\textsuperscript{18} In any case, Asad’s primary concern had to do with the effects of colonialism on anthropological knowledge: “That such contributions were not in the final reckoning crucial for the vast empire which received knowledge and provided patronage does not mean that it was not critical for the small discipline which offered knowledge and received that patronage.” Characteristically, this more subtle point received little direct attention until much later.\textsuperscript{19} Besides, Asad did not move to a more constructivist epistemologi-cal critique because, in this particular volume at least, he did not grant the kind of power to knowledge that someone like Edward Said—following Foucault as well as Nietzsche—insisted upon.

Asad’s charge that anthropologists had reified colonial images of colonized societies was nevertheless severe and well ahead of its time. One exception
in this regard was the anthropological historian Bernard Cohn, who had been writing searing essays from the late 1950s about the political entailments of what he called a colonial sociology of knowledge as well as its more contemporary reproduction in the work of postcolonial anthropologists. In his early historical essays, Cohn had demonstrated in multiple ways how revenue and tenurial arrangements, legal codes and institutions, and other expressions of what we now call “colonial governmentality” were fundamental to the colonial conquest and rule of India by Britain. He further demonstrated that many of these colonial understandings and policies had become conventionalized and naturalized as fundamental truths about India across the full temporality of its civilizational past. In an early anticipation of some of Said’s arguments about the character of colonial knowledge as a discursive formation, Cohn wrote in 1968 that, “The orientalists and the missionaries were polar opposites in their assessment of Indian culture and society but were in accord as to what the central principles and institutions of the society were. They agreed that it was a society in which religious ideas and practices underlay all social structure; they agreed in the primacy of the Brahman as the maintainer of the sacred tradition, through his control of the knowledge of the sacred texts. There was little attempt on the part of either to fit the facts of political organization, land tenure, the actual functioning of the legal system or the commercial structure into their picture of the society derived from the texts.” Cohn further demonstrated the productive nature of these (mis)understandings. In the case of caste, for example, he proposed that the colonial decennial census of India, in the hands of administrator scholars such as H. H. Risley, not only canonized an idea of India as fundamentally a land of caste, but also made caste a much more important institution for the development of local social movements and political mobilization. Cohn went on to write important essays on a wide variety of issues relating to colonial forms of knowledge, from the generative significance of early colonial grammars to the symbolic economies imposed in spectacular state functions meant to represent British authority and its hegemony over Indian elites. Cohn understood that colonial forms of knowledge had been crucial to the establishment and legitimation of colonial rule, and that these same forms of knowledge not only survived in contemporary academic contexts, but also produced a variety of cultural effects in postcolonial settings. In particular, Cohn was sharply critical of the ways in which the categories of “tradition” and “modernity” continued to bear the traces of colonial rule. His abiding sense of the need for anthropology to become thoroughly historicized was in large part the fruit of his recognition that anthropology in India had been significantly shaped by the colonial encounter.

**History and Anthropology**

If Cohn’s influence on historians of colonialism has been deep, especially for work done on the British colonial history in India, it is not without significance that other anthropologists became much better known for their advocacy of history. For example, Cohn’s colleague in Chicago, Marshall Sahlins, embraced...
history in a series of books that grew out of his work on Hawaii and Polynesia, but he did so in a way that not only kept structuralism as a guiding framework and culture as a key idea, but also neglected the role of colonialism except as a distorting effect of capitalism on the proper understanding of “natives” and “others.” For Sahlins, history was primarily about the reproduction of structure, while change was the conjunctural result of cultural encounters that transform basic structure through a logic driven by the culture of capitalism. In the founding myth of his own historical anthropology, Sahlins narrated the story of how Captain Cook unwittingly sailed into the mythological topos of the Hawaiian god Lono, only to find himself the all too material victim of ritual sacrifice in an event that led to imperial retribution and ultimately the colonization of the island. Sahlins's seminal analysis of this historical moment was taken by many anthropologists as a signal revision of anthropology's traditional aversion to temporality and history, but the subsequent critique by Gananath Obeyesekere, however provisional its own historical conclusions, made clear that all was not well in historical anthropology-land. Although the debate at one level was a rehearsal of the debate between culture and practical reason, and at another a vitriolic exchange about “native” vs. “anthropological” knowledge, it was perhaps more fundamentally about the relationship between colonial power and colonial knowledge—the very terms that had become so seemingly inescapable after the publication of Orientalism.

Obeyesekere argued that Sahlins read historical sources literally, and that despite his mastery of the archival materials, he did not read colonial texts “contrapuntally” in relation to the systematic interests—both material and ideological—of colonial power. Moreover, Obeyesekere charged Sahlins with buying into a general Western myth of the European man as “god” in the eyes of “natives.” The more general implication of this critique, of course, is that contemporary anthropological understandings of culture—however critical and revised they might be—reproduce older colonial notions that have circulated as stereotypes about the cultures of colonized peoples. Obeyesekere used his own work in and personal knowledge of Sri Lanka to predicate his suspicion, occasioning the most aggressive of Sahlins’s polemical retorts. But the more important point was his questioning of Sahlins's fundamental lack of skepticism about the accounts of explorers, traders, missionaries, and colonial administrators. Indeed, as Said had made clear, the historical archive was itself a sediment of the history of colonial institutions, ideas, and investments. And if this archive was in part the result of the legitimizing project of colonialism, it could not be used unproblematically to certify postcolonial anthropological projects of cultural analysis. Sahlins, who quipped in a recent essay that anthropology would be better off left un-Said, has been singularly allergic to the notion that anthropology has been significantly affected by its colonial past and averse in particular to the charge that the epistemological terrain of anthropology should be interrogated in relation to colonial forms of knowledge.

Sahlins's reaction to the influence of Said is curiously similar to the reactions of other anthropologists who share neither Sahlins's structuralism nor his commitment to the constitutive idea of culture. It is not beside the point that
Said wrote Orientalism at least in part as a literary scholar informed by the theoretical insights of Foucault and even Derrida, though he made clear his deep indebtedness to Gramsci and saw himself in a serious genealogical relationship with Vico (as does Sahlins). Orientalism is in some ways profoundly Foucaultian, and it is important to remember that Foucault was still a very new and undigested force in anthropology when Orientalism was published in 1978. Paul Rabinow had by then begun writing on Foucault, but the implications of Foucault’s critical histories of the disciplines, his complex sense of discourse, and his insistence on the inextricably productive relationship between knowledge and power were still little reflected in the published record of disciplinary thought. In an essay published in the same year as Orientalism, Said had written a brilliant commentary on the reading strategies of Derrida and Foucault, showing their similarities and differences, evaluating their approaches to the study of texts, and ultimately showing why Foucault was much more useful for his project than Derrida.29 Said’s principal concern with Foucault was his lack of any theory of historical change, and his failure to build a Gramscian understanding of hegemony into his model of discourse. At the same time, Foucault’s work had opened up new ways to conceptualize the systematic character of writing that embodied different trajectories, histories, and intentions, even while participating significantly in, and being determined by, the colonial project. As Said wrote in Orientalism itself, “I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault’s notion of a discourse, as described by him in The Archaeology of Knowledge and in Discipline and Punish, to identify Orientalism. My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly 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 period.”30 At the same time, however, Said could not dispense with his own commitment to the significance and consequence of individual action, whether in politics or in writing. Thus, though he deployed Foucault’s notion of discourse, he simultaneously asserted his belief in the “determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism.”31 In the end, his historicist understanding of texts was perhaps most significant; the point for Said was that, “The unity of the large ensemble of texts I analyze is due in part to the fact that they frequently refer to each other: Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors.”32 In short, discourse for Said was neither theoretical fancy nor a simple shorthand for taking a few examples as the whole, but an historical phenomenon of staggering actuality.

**REPRESENTATION AND THE CULTURAL PROJECT**

One of the criticisms levied against Said is that he invites oppositional strategies of representation for the brute realities of Oriental life, but seems to ignore the task of finding more adequate ways to give accounts of, and for, the Orient.
And he critiques representation only to say that representation itself can never aspire to the conditions of truth; if all representation is doomed, why bother?

The charge concerns Said's extraordinary reflections about the life and work of Louis Massignon, whom he greatly admired. Said praised Massignon for having "reconstructed and defended Islam against Europe on the one hand and against its own orthodoxy on the other. This intervention—for it was that—into the Orient as animator and champion symbolized his own acceptance of the Orient's difference, as well as his efforts to change it into what he wanted." Said is curiously forgiving of Massignon's almost heroic "will to knowledge over the Orient." And he defends him against the charge by some Muslim scholars that he "misrepresented Islam as an 'average' or 'common' Muslim might adhere to the faith," in short as one who engaged the "object" of scholarship as a vital and living tradition in which the political stakes were well removed from the usual perspectives of the colonizing agent or gaze. Most curious of all, Said's defense of Massignon occasions his own rumination on the ultimate impossibility of representation: "the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer... we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is eo ipso implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth,' which is itself a representation." These reflections lead Said to comment more generally about the theoretical frame of his general argument. "My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence—in which I do not for a moment believe—but that it operates as representations do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting. In other words, representations have purposes, they are effective much of the time, they accomplish one or many tasks." He then explains that the relationship between individual will or intention and institutional structure or effect is complex and fraught, and that the ideal of pure knowledge is as impossible as the will to knowledge is forever crippled by the contingencies of political power and appropriation. For Said, however, this acknowledgement robs individuals neither of their responsibility nor their significance, and he is insistent that he means neither to "dehumanize Massignon... nor [to] reduce him to being subject to vulgar determinism."

Of Said's early reviewers, James Clifford was perhaps the most perceptive and sympathetic, recognizing as he did the power of Said's reading of Massignon. In his careful essay, Clifford traced Said's ambivalences—about representation and truth, structure and agency, society and the individual, post-structuralism and humanism, among others—and appreciated the moments of textual strain for what they revealed. He worked through his recognition that Said's humanism is as insistent as his historicist insistence on the discursive character and political implication of French and British Orientalist scholarship. And although he averred that Said's "methodological catholicity" works to blur his analysis, he dismissed neither the power of the argument(s) nor their...
importance for anthropology. At the same time, Clifford was uncomfortable with what seemed to be left of the anthropological idea of culture. In the face of Said's attack on oppositional distinctions, Clifford felt the need to assert that, “There is no need to discard theoretically all conceptions of ‘cultural’ difference, especially once this is seen as not simply received from tradition, language, or environment but also as made in new political-cultural conditions of global relationship . . . however the culture concept is finally transcended, it should, I think, be replaced by some set of relations that preserves the concept’s differential and relativist functions and that avoids the positing of cosmopolitan essences and human common denominators.”

Clifford’s own ambivalence about the culture concept, or at least his critical sense of its emergence in the professional genres of anthropological writing and its manifold misuses, has been forcefully argued in other influential essays. But here we see his residual commitment to the concept itself, both in its articulation of difference, and in its demand for a relativist worldview. Significantly, Clifford departed from Said in his concern both about the totalizing implications of the Orientalism critique, and about the problematic universalism of Said’s humanism.

It is as clear from a reading of Clifford’s review as it is from rereading the relevant texts that Said had in some ways gone well beyond the earlier critiques of Asad, Cohn, and other anthropological critics of the role of colonialism in their discipline. This was in part because Said came from outside the discipline, and in part because Said, in raising the crisis of representation to a new level, attributed productive capacity to knowledge itself. For the same reasons, however, many of those who considered themselves Said’s fellow travelers in terms of their respective political critiques of American foreign policy reacted, sometimes with marked antipathy, against Said’s privileging of epistemology. Micaela di Leonardo, for example, has argued that the problem with Said is his anti-Marxism and his consequent failure to appreciate the larger issues of capitalism, relations of production, and class. Di Leonardo accuses Said of “willful blindness” about the “veritable global flood of Marxist work on imperialism,” objecting in particular to his failure to appreciate the power of Eric Wolf’s work. But Di Leonardo has no brief for the culture concept, especially as it has been refashioned in the work of someone like Clifford. She notes that Clifford’s “lyrical yet hagridden definition” of the ethnographic encounter “misses both informants’ and ethnographers’ institutional connections, up to the level of differing citizenships and differential power (by class, race, gender) as citizens.” So, in the end, Said is too poststructuralist for di Leonardo, too humanist for Clifford, and, for many anthropologists, too concerned about the epistemological legacies of colonialism for anthropology as a discipline.

**Toward a Postcolonial Anthropology**

Despite the explosion of critical work on colonialism, colonial knowledge, and the politics of anthropology during the 1980s and 1990s, the debate about
Said has continued; his influence has been as enduring as it has been troubling. He has been taken to task by many critics, anthropologists and others, for the internal inconsistencies of his text. On the one hand he is clearly a secular humanist, on the other hand he is indebted to Foucaultian poststructuralism and hailed, as was Foucault, by the siren of Nietzschean critique. He is an eloquent critic of the essentializing tendencies of Orientalist discourse, but seen as essentializing not just that discourse itself, but both the Orient and the Occident. He is sympathetic with the aspirations and intentions of some Orientalists, but ultimately he consigns them to the tyranny of their historical moment. He suggests that Orientalist discourse has worked to “orientalize the Orient,” but he nowhere suggests how this could have occurred.

Indeed, a perusal of anthropological journals reveals that right up until his death, Said was generating critiques, responses, and reflections on the capacity of the anthropological enterprise to survive Orientalism. In August 1990, Anthropology Today published a critical essay on Said by Michael Richardson, entitled: “Enough Said,” where the author asserted that Said’s idealism and hyper-textualism distracted him from appreciating the manifest importance of responsible engagement with the reality of the Orient. Tellingly, Richardson quoted approvingly the novelist Simon Leys’s comment that “Orientalism could obviously have been written by no one but a Palestinian scholar with a huge chip on his shoulder and a very dim understanding of the European academic tradition.” Nicholas Thomas took Richardson to task in the same journal both for misreading Said’s critique and for failing to accept the extent to which the discipline of anthropology was founded on the primacy of ideas of exoticism, otherness, and intransitive distance between the subject and object of knowledge. Characteristically, Thomas took for granted the need to take seriously Said’s call for a different kind of critical anthropology “that is concerned with the formation of anthropological knowledge in the context of colonial histories and contemporary imperialism.” Thomas was less interested in trying to apply Said’s critique literally to anthropology than he was to think with it, for example, by calling into question the way much humanist and self-critical anthropology (where the culture concept continued to be the animating spirit behind social description) typically subordinated the “lives, cultures, and societies [of the people described] to the purposes of metropolitan rhetoric: the interests of healthy skepticism or relativistic cultural criticism at home thus make the other admissible primarily as a corrective to some aspect of ‘our’ thought.” And in an essay published a few months later in Cultural Anthropology, Thomas produced one of the most trenchant and forceful critiques of the continuing significance of notions of cultural difference, exoticism, alterity, and ideas of otherness. Writing against ethnography, Thomas sharply demonstrated both the unacceptable politics of much pervasive rhetoric about the distinctive mission of anthropology, and the extent to
which Said’s challenge was indeed being taken up by historical anthropologists
and others who were beginning to make cognate empirical demonstrations of
the need for a radically new theoretical armature for the discipline.45

Increasingly, Said’s name has been associated with the general field of post-
colonial studies, and ironically it has often been assumed that he was merely
calling for the establishment of a form of identity politics in which only the
“self” could represent the “self.”47 However, while Said welcomed (even as
he helped to inspire) the huge shifts in the American academy that worked as
much as any theoretical critique to alter the terms of “self” and “other” that had
predicated so much of the anthropological enterprise, he was no champion of
the identity politics that often accompanied it. Indeed, Said was aghast when
identity politics were used in his name to reduce historical, political, theoreti-
cal, and epistemological questions to simple assertions of ontology. Paradoxical
for some critics, perhaps, but it was precisely Said’s humanism that made him
suspicious of the rising chorus of identity claims in the academy. And it was pre-
cisely his enduring critical sensibility that made him learn from writers such
as Conrad, and react against “native” successors to Conrad such as Naipaul.
Indeed, Said often invoked Adorno’s great line that one had to be steeped in
a tradition to hate it properly, and he always preferred to “hate” the classics
rather than find alternatives that failed to bring him aesthetic pleasure.

**CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM: BEYOND ORIENTALISM?**

Much to Said’s own personal chagrin, Orientalism was such a monumental
work that it overshadowed much of his later academic writing, in particular
his Culture and Imperialism, published in 1993.48 This sprawling book was
at once a sequel to Orientalism and a different project altogether. Said always
bristled when others claimed to go beyond Orientalism—implying that he
had not. In Culture and Imperialism, Said wrote about various expressions
of resistance to imperialism, and he demonstrated the force of Fanon’s famous
phrase, “Europe is literally the product of the third world.” On the one hand, he
dealt with myriad colonized and postcolonial writers who had “written back,”
complicating, resisting, transforming, and hybridizing the force of Orientalism’s
discursive hegemony. Of course, he did this at the same time that he delineated
what any resistance is up against, offering once again his critical assessment of
America’s position in the world, with particular reference to the then recent
Gulf War and the rise of a newly uncontested—because of the fall of the Soviet
Union—“new world order.” Viewing this domination as clearly imperial in its
extent and ambition, he was as cogent and insightful as ever about the way
American imperial forms were established and legitimated with often unprece-
dented military, political, as well as economic aspiration. On the other hand,
he developed an extraordinary argument that called attention to the centrality
of empire in the formation of “Europe.” Using readings of Austen, Thackeray,
and Dickens, among others, Said demonstrated that empire was as much the
enabling condition for the rise of the British novel as it was for the rise of the
British state and its economy. With his characteristic turn of phrase, he wrote that, “without empire, I would go so far as saying, there is no European novel as we know it.”49 But this was not just a polemical phrase, for he showed that the conventional story of Britain/Europe's autonomous cultural development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not only inextricably connected to imperial wealth and possession, but that its general invisibility resulted from the extent to which empire was taken for granted in the writings and cultural expressions of that time and place.

If in Orientalism Said had argued that the Orient had been literally produced as a cultural as well as political object or essence, he argued in Culture and Imperialism that the Occident—otherwise put, the Metropole—had only managed to produce itself through the instrumentalities of imperial history. The implication here was that the Occident had to make the Orient “other” and render it so different as to make its contribution to modernity and European culture somehow unthinkable. In these terms, the two books were two sides of the same coin, both sustained efforts to unthink the curious effect of imperialism—to make imperialism simultaneously natural and benign, acceptable and invisible. The argument was seen by many as the final assault on the literary canon—even dead white women like Jane Austen were imperialists—and Said was regularly accused of reading empire everywhere (a charge he happily acknowledged, though he saw this as a consequence of world history rather than personal prejudice). And yet those who actually read the book were forced to realize that Said was deeply invested in the great works of art that made up the canon. While he was one of the great advocates of expanding comparative literature to the point where it became global rather than merely European, he was also a passionate and sensitive reader of the traditional texts; perhaps in some circles this made his interventions all the more dangerous and difficult.

Outside of literary studies, Said’s proposals in Culture and Imperialism seemed somewhat less revolutionary, as a number of scholars in history and anthropology had begun to demonstrate different ways in which the colonial world constituted a “laboratory of modernity.” These scholars were arguing that the colonial encounter was made up of a set of histories that produced not only many of the commodities so critical to the modern world, but also fundamental ideas of citizenship, political rights, culture, race, sexuality, health, urban planning, and state discipline.50 Curiously, it was perhaps easier for anthropologists to write empire back into the Metropole than it was for most scholars of literature or history, for whom Europe’s cultural and political achievements are still seen as essentially sui generis, and the idea of Europe continues to be sacrosanct.

Nevertheless, some of Said’s early proposals continue to provoke anxiety within the discipline of anthropology, something I am sure would please him. And yet, the impact of Said’s work can be seen throughout the contemporary anthropological world, in particular in the United States academy, where anthropology is becoming increasingly internationalized, especially in its graduate
student body. Anthropologists—only a few of whom are named in this essay—have contributed important insights to our understanding of the cultural, political, social, and economic effects and legacies of colonial history. Indeed, colonialism is accepted as a major subject of anthropological inquiry, even as it is widely recognized that colonial forms of knowledge continue to bedevil even the most postcolonial debate on questions relating to cultural difference, moral relativism, identity, or, for that matter, the significance of globalization. Not all of this can be credited to the influence of Edward Said and *Orientalism*, of course. But there is no doubt that Said made a monumentally important and productive—if often also troubling—difference on the field, and for that alone, anthropology, in my hybrid view at least, is forever in his debt.52

NOTES

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 209.
6. Ibid., 212.
8. Ibid., p. 326.
11. Ibid., p. 5.
12. See, just as one of many such examples, Michael Richardson, "Enough Said: Reflections on Orientalism," *Anthropology Today* 6, no. 4 (August 1990), pp. 16–19.
15. Ibid., 16.
16. Ibid., 17.
17. Ibid., 118. ("Two European Images of Non-European Rule").
18. Ibid., 17.
21. Ibid., 146 ("Notes on the History of Indian Society and Culture").
22. "India was seen as a collection of castes; the particular picture was different in any given time and place, but India was a sum of its parts and the parts were castes." Ibid., 147.
23. Ibid, 224–54 ("The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia").
24. It was in large part because of the influence of Bernard Cohn, my teacher at the University of Chicago, that I first read Orientalism with a sense of recognition, primed to reimagine the larger story of the disciplines—and of Orientalist scholarship and the area studies establishment—through Said's much more forceful and sweeping argument. Said was always far more engaged in public political debate than Cohn, even as his style of academic intervention was both more impassioned and more theoretically attuned. But it was Cohn who made it clear to me that the story Said was telling about Orientalism, colonialism, and Middle Eastern Studies was both a far more general story, and one with major implications for the disciplines of history and anthropology as well as literary and textual studies.
27. The term, of course, is Said’s, but it applies to Obeyesekere’s own polemical project in taking on Sahlins in this case.
30. Said, Orientalism, p. 3.
31. Ibid., 23.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 272.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 273.
37. Ibid., 274.
39. Ibid., pp. 274–75.
44. Ibid.
46. See, for example, Sarkar, “Orientalism Revisited,” and Ahmad, In Theory.
47. In 1999, to give a rather more complex example of how this issue has been considered, Vassos Argyrou published an essay entitled, “Sameness and the Ethnological Will to Meaning” in Current Anthropology, in which he took Said’s critique as a starting point, but then argued that the ethnological effort to find “sameness” invariably invoked difference instead, reproducing an inherent commitment to typological and analytic differentiation that in some ways only became an apparent contradiction when viewed as a “native” (who must distrust both sameness and difference as aspirations when engaged in ethnological work at home). In effect, Argyrou argued that representation was less an epistemological than an ontological crisis, brought into focus when one of the “others” confront a variety of still pervasive but unspoken assumptions about the relationship between identity and anthropological knowledge. I suspect that Said would have granted the force of the argument, but questioned its ultimate premises.
49. Ibid., 69.
50. Bernard Cohn observed some years ago that “the process of state building in Great Britain, seen as a cultural project, was closely linked with its emergence as an imperial power.” Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 3. Cohn noted that many of the projects of state building in both countries, concerning documentation, legitimation, and classification, “often reflected theories, experiences, and practices worked out originally in India and then applied in Great Britain.” (Ibid., 4) Many others have done important work on metropolitan effects of colonial history, e.g., Ann Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Paul Rabinow,

51. I was trained as an historian of South Asia at the University of Chicago in the 1970s, but I was trained, as mentioned in an earlier note, by Bernard Cohn, who, though he had been hired a decade earlier to head the South Asia history program, was himself an anthropologist by early training and primary professional experience. It was Cohn who introduced me to the idea that social and cultural history could learn from anthropology, both as a way of reimagining the historical archive itself and as a theoretical repertoire from which to draw. An early champion of interdisciplinarity, he was also known to quip that he didn’t care what your discipline was, as long as you were ashamed of it, and he was sharply critical of his own discipline for continuing to inscribe colonial assumptions and categories of thought in the way it approached broad questions around relations between West and East.

52. On a personal note, my own relationship to anthropology has been deeply connected to Edward Said, even as it was originally mediated by Bernard Cohn, who also died this last autumn (exactly two months to the day after Edward). When I was given the opportunity to play a significant role in the rebuilding of America’s oldest department of anthropology, after an academic career spent primarily in departments of history, I did so both with the blessing of the anthropologist who had been my graduate adviser and with the active encouragement and support of my new colleague, Edward Said. Both Cohn and Said provided the inspiration not just for maintaining a critical relationship to the disciplines, but for reimagining how they might be fashioned in a newly global, if also resurgently imperial world. In paying tribute to the memory and importance of Edward Said in relation to his influence on and importance in the world of anthropology, I must therefore pay homage to two important teachers and colleagues: and I do so with a sense of immense privilege, as well as now deep loss.