Journal of Contemporary Thought

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2007 (SUMMER)
PUBLISHED BY
FORUM ON CONTEMPORARY THEORY, BARODA
IN COLLABORATION WITH
INTERNATIONAL LINCOLN CENTER,
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY, SHREVEPORT, USA
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
NIRMAN FOUNDATION, USA

We hope you have gone through the articles published in the winter 2006 issue of the Journal devoted to the topic "Actually Existing Colonialisms," edited by Gaurav Desai from Tulane University, New Orleans, USA, and have appreciated their relevance to the debate academics all over the world are engaged with on the question of American involvement in the affairs of other countries. The editor and the authors of the articles have voiced their concern at the spread of new colonialism across the world in various forms. Thus the postcolonial debates are getting charged with new meanings in the changing contexts of world politics. We hope you too will reflect critically on this situation and let us have your responses to the topic so that we publish them later in our Journal. We are happy that this issue has carried John Oliver Perry's response to the issues raised in the special number of the Journal and Gaurav Desai's answer to that response. We would encourage such critical exchanges in the pages of the Journal.

This issue has included some papers presented at the ninth international conference held in Udaipur in December 2006. Since the conference theme was on Indian knowledge-systems we thought that by publishing a few articles on this theme here we would be able to move into areas of critical praxis from high theory. So a transition has been made here from our earlier preoccupation with theory to our present concern with praxis, although it is not always possible to separate the one from the other. Moreover, Theory *qua* theory does not seem to have much relevance to our time now; in order to become useful as knowledge it must engage with the experiential reality of our every-day life by closing the gap between academic knowledge and worldliness of ideas. The Forum's events will try to reflect this change in perspective. We have identified three broad areas for our future concern. They are: (i) Democracy and Human Rights; (ii) Gender and Cultural Studies; and (iii) Nature of Violence. Our workshops, courses, conferences, and publications will try to address issues related to these areas directly or indirectly. The support accorded by the Ford Foundation through the renewal of the grant for three more years will help us in a major way to carry on our activities for the benefit of scholars across disciplines throughout South Asia.

Editors

Journal of Contemporary Thought, 25 (Summer 2007)

WILLIAM P. FRANKE

The Ethical Posture of Post-Colonial Discourse in Said and in Gandhi

What are the ethical premises of a postcolonial literary criticism and theory? The fundamental problem of ethics is how to relate to and respect other persons. There is thus an ethical problem at the source of purportedly postcolonial criticism, that of how to speak of the other, not to mention *to* the other or *for* the other. And then we must turn it around and ask: Can the subaltern speak? But perhaps that is not for us to say. If we feel compelled to ask the question, at least we should have the sensitivity and restraint not to answer it, since then the subaltern really will have been preempted and not have been given a chance to speak for him or herself. But how can we comport ourselves in such a way that he or she might be free to do so? How can the subaltern be *given a chance* to speak? And then to further refocus not on answering for someone else, but on interrogating ourselves, we should concentrate rather on the question, Can *we hear* the subaltern speak?

Edward Said has been incomparably important for establishing post-colonial criticism as a discourse. And the ethical thrust of this critical discourse can hardly be conceived without reference to the penetrating analyses and piercing disclosures of his works. Yet ethically I believe Said's discourse is problematic. In order to free the powerful ethical message of this type of criticism from an ethically inappropriate posture, I wish to isolate what I see as the shortcomings of Said's approach and rhetoric—at least in the particularly influential form they took in his landmark book, *Orientalism*. Said's mission is too important to be compromised by a polemical form of address. A hyperbolic style was undoubtedly necessary and was in fact fabulously effective in its time, yet it risks becoming something of a liability as time moves on. For an ethical perspective that can foster a postcolonial discourse of a radically different, yet truly revolutionary kind I propose to reconsider the vision of Mahatma Gandhi.

I. On Reading Said: Do We Need to be Shamed into Changing?

The writings of Edward Said have become enormously influential in

literary criticism and are widely recognized as spearheading what has emerged increasingly in the last two decades as "post-colonial criticism." They propose a criticism founded on insight into the "worldliness" of texts. This is a criticism that is attentive to and inspired, in the first instance, by politics and by the political significance of culture. Insight into literature must (this approach emphasizes) be founded on awareness of the political and social contexts in and from which writing emerges, and in particular on awareness of the relations between different groups within society. More specifically, Said concentrates on relations of domination and submission or resistance between colonizers and colonized. His perspective is world-geographical and world-historical, and his main theme, from *Orientalism* (1978) through *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), is that of empire in all its phases and facets. According to this perspective, the politics of empire have for centuries produced and directed the principle developments of global history. Imperialist politics, therefore, represent a hermeneutic key to world literature as it arises out of and reflects back upon global political and social history.

Having read with keen interest, immense pleasure, and considerable profit the arguments advocated by Said, I am moved to respond, nevertheless, critically. The pugnacious nature of those arguments is apt to generate motives for resistance and to provoke critical reaction and contestation. By their categorically assertive nature and yet highly invidious content, by their implicit claim to clearly reveal a normative and almost universally suppressed truth, these arguments tend to call forth and demand either total submission or stiff resistance. It is ironic, given their targeting of exactly the sort of aggressive strategies of domination which characterize imperialist culture, that Said's arguments, by their antagonistic tone and embattled attitude, tend to produce this sort of dichotomy between submission and rebellion as the only alternatives. Said's declared intent is to promote critical reflection on the topics he discusses, but that is precisely what the manner of his discussion in *Orientalism* in particular is apt to subvert, at least at first, until the antagonisms aroused can be given a chance to subside.

In his discussion of his method in the Introduction, Said avows the difficulty of avoiding "too dogmatic a generality" and at the same time "too positivistic a localized focus." He fears "difficulties that might force one, in the first instance, into writing a coarse polemic on so unacceptably general a level of description as not to be worth the effort" (p. 8). What I

am objecting to is only this polemical strain in the book, which is still there despite such disclaimers: this ideologically charged vision is offered, and is in any case received by many, as the book's revelation. The fact that it is interwoven with other more moderate, controlled, self-critical strands serves it as camouflage. Said ingeniously shows himself to be conscious of this "engaged," political, militant aspect of his rhetoric, so that he can say that he does not mean for the book to come across this way. Still, that is exactly how it works in crucial moments that for many become key to the meaning of the whole.[1] Indeed, no book works quite completely as a simple unity, yet this highly charged, ideological register is apt to elevate itself above the others and drown out all qualifications in a lower register of fair and judicious, reasonable and balanced judgment.

Of course, the strategy involved in even its most provocative arguments cannot be fully evaluated on the basis of this book alone, which the subsequent *oeuvre* in many ways qualifies. As Gauri Viswanathan notes in her introduction to an edition of his interviews, "The interviews Said gave over the past three decades boldly announce that neither his own books and essays nor those written about him have the last word" (p. xi). Nevertheless, I write principally as a reader of *Orientalism*. Although this is far from a complete reading of Said, it focuses on what is likely to be many, if not most, readers' initial (and perhaps only) experience of Said's work. The impact of this book in its time was sensational, and the after-effects are still playing themselves out today. So the limitations of its message and methods should also be clearly grasped now from our greater historical distance.

My purpose here is not in the least to minimize the ills and catastrophic human tragedy connected with colonialism. Rather, it is to point to the structures of tragedy in human history that determine these evils well beyond any Manichean polarities of good and evil and beyond any mythic narratives of hounding out the real culprits and delivering them up for ritual punishment. My immediate purpose is to expose ways in which Said's arguments are deeply implicated in precisely what they oppose—the imperialistic gesture of aiming to dominate and subdue others by assigning them a single, fixed significance. I do not for a minute think that this invalidates or even infirms those arguments. It aims only to strip them of an illusory aura of having an undialectical sort of truth value, of being the real truth finally brought out into the open over against all preceding culture in the orientalizing West, which has

purportedly been unmasked as simply lies because guilty of complicity in colonialism. Again, Said himself anticipates the charge he provokes and warns, "One ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away" (p. 6). Yet, in decisive ways at many junctures, that is exactly what *is* insinuated. What is unquestionably persuasive in Said's analysis of "the knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse" is that the power of a paradigm is startlingly revealed by piecing together its disparate elements and expressions. But this too is nothing other than what Orientalists, good ones, as well as other analysts of societies, do.[2] Such analyses tend to produce unified, monolithic significances that they pin to the living, changing, self-contradictory objects of their analysis. My contention is that Said's critical discourse has done just that concerning the West, and grandly.

Said's revisionist narrative of world history is in many ways just as "orientalizing" as are the imperialist versions of this history. It is their reversal—somewhat as in a mirror image. As Said recounts it, there is one universal sense of history in every instance across the planet: imperialist exploitation of non-Western peoples, in the service of which orientalizing misrepresentation is deployed. Said is critically sophisticated enough to explicitly deny that this can be his intention. But it tends inexorably to be the drift of his analyses, which he himself acknowledges are inextricably "political." Said's supposedly critical interpretations are steered by ideology and employ exactly the same sort of propagandistic means that they expose and deplore. His very attempt to represent "the West" and its history in its fundamental motivations inevitably "orientalizes" this region and history by attributing it one, constant significance.

In the first chapter of *Orientalism*, Said investigates first the relation to the East as essentially one of *knowing* it, and as such this is also automatically a power relationship. In the second section of the chapter, he describes how the East is imagined in the culture of Orientalism, how it is thus defamiliarized and made unreal. The third section examines the "project" whereby the West makes connection with the East in order to control it, as it did with the Suez canal in 1869 (until 1956). This is the logical—and practical—conclusion of the Orientalist idea. It exalts a "true, classical Orient that could be used to judge and rule the modern Orient" (p. 72). The fourth section discusses how "crisis" occurs because

the intellectual construction of Orientalism meets with resistance from the actual Orient after World War I. This results in a growing rift between East and West.

It is, of course, true of anything and anybody that being represented means being put in a passive role of being manipulated by something or someone alien and external. Likewise Said's own representations put Orientalism in a passive role; they generalize about it and flatten it out. It is given a single sense, one which condemns a whole amorphous, incoherent, inconsistent corpus. Here is a very average sort of statement about Orientalism "in general" in Said's discourse, following up Isaiah Berlin's remarks about its "anti-empirical" attitude:

> And so, indeed, is the Orientalist attitude in general. It shares with magic and with mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are *because* they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter (p. 70).

Said's discourse, despite all its detailed differentiation and analysis, creates this monolith "Orientalism": it is valuable and fascinating for showing lines of coherence between radically different types of Orientalist discourse. But he does still attempt to assign it a single significance as a whole. This is exactly what he condemns Orientalism for having done to the Orient. For him, everything written and represented about the East aims at dominating it. This is to some extent true of representations of anything: knowledge is inevitably in some sense an effort to master and control. And rational discourse invariably tends to homogenize what it is about and to turn it into a system. Certainly Said has attempted to dominate and even undo Orientalism by representing and analyzing it in his book of that title.

Forms of Western representation, not least in the arena of philosophical discourse, have also gone to great lengths to countervail these inherent propensities of rational discourse. In a spirit of criticism, reactive counter-discourses develop a certain capacity to negate themselves and to attempt to open towards the Other rather than subjugate it. This same self-critical movement is what makes Said's own critical discourse possible. It is a negation of Western orientalizing representation. It can be persuasive because critical discourse as practiced in the West and in Europe has valorized what it cannot itself attain and control. There is precisely in

Western, at least in avant-garde critical discourse, an acute appreciation, arguably even an overestimation of and fascination with otherness. The Other is recognized as what cannot be comprehended or said.

Said emphasizes only the West's domination of the East, not because this is all there is in discourses about the East, but for political reasons of his own. That is all he wants to see because he thinks there is an imbalance in history that ought somehow to be redressed. This is understandable as part of the struggle for power. It may even be necessary and serve by some compensatory logic in the struggle for justice. He resorts to a strategy of using shame rather than directly opposing power with power. But this does involve Said in presenting his discourse as factual—in the rhetorical trappings of telling it the way it really is—and thereby occulting the way in which the facts he divulges are also shaped as the products of his analysis itself. And this is at bottom a self-misrepresentation and mystification of the same sort as he accuses Orientalism of resorting to when he charges, "Orientalism is involved in worldly, historical circumstances which it has tried to conceal behind an often pompous scientism and appeals to rationalism" (p. 10).

We must, then, be a little suspicious of Said's assuming a posture of scholarly detachment: "What interests me most as a scholar is not the gross political verity but the detail . . . ." (p. 10). He knows he cannot assert that there is a single, simple truth to this story and that he is telling it. Yet under the guise of a negative rhetoric and saying that this is *not* what really interests him—"not the gross political verity"—he has nevertheless given his reader to conceive of a macroscopic Verity: he does not even say what it is, but we know exactly what he means, and also that it is for him "gross" not only in a literal sense of magnitude but also in a strongly judgmental, pejorative sense that is indirectly, even subliminally insinuated.

Said writes of Orientalism in his original introduction, "nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot to hold down the 'Oriental' world" (p. 12). Yet the arguments of the book are not disciplined by such general acknowledgments. They argue rather for incriminating a whole civilization or group of civilizations as imperialist and therefore guilty of the most heinous crimes of systematically and mercilessly oppressing whole peoples out of wholly selfish, exploitative and inhuman motives, while mendaciously masquerading as something wholly benign. This accusation is written into the whole texture of Said's

representations and generally speaks up shrilly at a crucial point in every specific discussion. Empire, as synonymous with oppression, constitutes without exception the "worldly, historical circumstances" that Orientalism has tried to conceal. Imperial domination is "the big dominating fact" that governs every detail of everyday life and its representations (p. 11). And that imperial fact, we are led to believe, has the same essential meaning always and everywhere: oppression, nothing else, however various its forms and manifestations.

Said's analyses have polemical bite to them, and this is crucial to motivate certain kinds of change. But they do not present the whole truth objectively. Indeed how could they on Said's own stated premises, including the premise that all knowledge, however academic or impartial, is "political"? Thus they themselves call for critique and counter-argument. I would like to think that Said would recognize this sort of response as an indication of the success, at least rhetorically if not politically, of his writing. It shows that he has been heard, even if not completely believed and embraced. To the extent his arguments attempt to enlist adherence to a cause through purportedly coercive logic, they are themselves complicit in the sort of regime they decry and seek to depose.

Said's case against empire, I submit, is based on an *essentializing* identification of a system and indeed a whole civilization with certain agents, or simply with "the West." But the system is not one and the same, self-identical, no matter from where and by whom it is viewed, and it is not the simple result of these agents' will, as if by divine fiat. Certainly we can agree that these agents are objects of history too, and this means that they too are *re*acting even before they are acting in order to impose their will, which will is in fact many, oftentimes contradictory wills. That some of them sometimes possess certain decisive privileges and powers is not to be gainsaid. But neither are the ambiguities of these "advantages." That Westerners living within the "empires" of Britain, France, and the United States are interested and self-interested is surely true. But it is no less true of others living elsewhere. As the object of *Said's* discourse, colonizing countries and their diverse motivations and contradictory actions are flattened out into a single history of oppression. Though he differentiates between Orientalisms, he writes as if he holds the key to interpreting the real character and motives of them all.

Although Said treats Orientalism in its varied historical transformations,

the effect of his argument is to dehistoricize specific instances of Orientalist expression in order to make them models of a fixed will to domination that is quite generally attributed to the West. It is the same story in every specific case. A general scenario emerges as the truth that history reveals. In this way, Said reifies Orientalism into a power bloc, as opposed to opening a dialogue with the voices he is interested in analyzing and evaluating. One voice of Orientalism in one of its most colonialist and imperialist incarnations is that of Rudyard Kipling. Kipling is, of course, famous for his sometimes imperious pronouncements like:

> Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet
> Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat.

Kipling, or more precisely his poem, can be used handily to exemplify the "geographical separation of peoples and cultures" that is alleged to be at the heart of Orientalism (p. 351). But this position adopted by certain individuals at a certain historical point in certain respects cannot be used to define their essence. This flattens out the historicity of the other side, makes "them" serve as an object and a target. Kipling's poem continues:

> But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth
> When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!

However, this part of the deconstructing and de-essentializing of oppositional logic in the forging of a humanism something like what Said himself envisages is not permitted Kipling; it exceeds the role assigned him as imperialist.

Said's condemnations are justified not by the truth of disinterested scholarly analysis but by his own interest in breaking down the prestige and impugning the credibility of a presumably malicious institution and thereby influencing political opinion in a certain direction. However, he disguises the way the institution in question is the construction of his own adversarial discourse. Said is very conscious of the way a presumed reality of the Orient is constructed by literary means, and he exposes this brilliantly. He is less reflective or transparent, at least so far as this book is concerned, about the rhetorical constructedness of his own anti-imperialist discourse.

Said's tone and rhetoric are at times abusive and sarcastic, inadvertently imitating his target at its worst, for example, where he writes of

Orientalism's "failures, its lamentable jargon, its scarcely concealed racism, its paper-thin intellectual apparatus" (p. 322). Moreover, Said's discourse itself indulges in broad generalizations, for example, where it begins a sentence about "the Western consumer" with "always":

> Always there lurks the assumption that although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the world resources. Why? Because he, unlike the Oriental, is a true human being. No better instance exists today of what Anwar Abdel Malek calls 'the hegemonism of possessing minorities' and anthropocentrism allied with Europocentrism: a white middle-class Westerner believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition 'it' is not quite as human as 'we' are. There is no purer example than this of dehumanized thought. (p. 108)

Now the horrible thing is that there is some truth to this stereotype. It may even serve a purpose to shove it crudely into view in this way. Still, we should not take this as more than a caricature. It has all too much validity at that level. My point is how similar Said's description is to the methods of representation against which he is protesting. Granted, his account is historically differentiated and nuanced, but that only makes it all the richer as caricature, since one overarching sense still controls the meaning of every detail of the representation.

The great 19th century Orientalists themselves knew and sometimes acknowledged or hinted that their portraits were a little inaccurate or caricatural, but they maintained that this was necessary and justified for practical purposes and for teaching how to manage these otherwise ungovernable masses. Orientalist representations too can be very detailed and differentiated and are so increasingly as knowledge of any given region or people grows. The problem is that these differences are presented only as variations on a theme and become the way of confirming a general rule, and this is to treat those who are represented as unfree and as fixed by their significance *for us* and in our interpretation. But this is eminently the case too with Said's interpretation of Orientalism.

Said complains that the Orient is debased by being made an object of study and turned into a text, but his own anti-imperialist discourse is also based almost entirely on texts. Furthermore, just the indignant tone of Said's treatment tends to augment the difficulty of opening up complex histories to analysis of their paradoxes. This tone is not

addressed to a party assumed, or at least allowed to be possibly, in good faith, a presupposition necessary to genuine dialogue. It objectifies and targets a discourse, and to the extent that it acknowledges the discourse as being someone's discourse, it tars that author and agent as in bad faith and an oppressor.

It is difficult to judge the other as morally wrong without arrogating the position of being morally right to oneself. Perhaps the best we can do is to resist with passive resistance à la Gandhi. Emmanuel Levinas would insist that the other *qua* other is always right. I am unconditionally obligated to the Other and responsible to the Other, even to the point of being responsible for the other's persecution of me! I am hostage to the Other. This gives a hint of how truly radical are the ethical challenges facing us in the future as we try to accept and get along with one another on a shrinking planet.

The basic problem with *Orientalism* is its lack of respect for others, the ones it orientalizes. Said's book shows massive lack of respect for Orientalists and for whole blocs of humanity, like "Europeans" and "Westerners." He is judgmental about them and their motives—schematized as being always domination and exploitation—rather than appealing to them as free agents to condemn injustices and even the injustice of colonialism itself, not just against but also with Westerners, by standards they recognize and have done as much as anyone else—and perhaps even more—to forge and promulgate. Said is at pains in his Afterword for the 1994 republication of *Orientalism* to deny that the work is anti-Western: "It is beknighted to say that Orientalism is a conspiracy or to suggest that 'the West' is evil" (p. 345). The Orientalism he attacks turns out to be merely an abstraction, though he still does want to identify a vast body of scholarship under that rubric and condemn it wholesale. He admits that it was a "partisan book" but at the same time presents himself as seeking conciliation, "to challenge the notion that difference implies hostility, a frozen reified set of opposed essences, and a whole adversarial knowledge built out of those things. What I called for in *Orientalism* was a new way of conceiving the separations and conflicts that had stimulated generations of hostility, war, and imperial control" (p. 350).

Yet Said polarizes and localizes blame, as if he had isolated the guilty party (Europe, especially England and France through most of the modern period, America in post-World War II era). The implicit

assumption is that without these offenders things would have been r right. But no one should know better than Said himself how illusor that assumption is. For there is always domination in society. It tak different forms. What would history have been without these imperi powers and presences? What other forms of domination would ha filled the vacuum? Are we comparing the real world to a utopian ideal complete freedom for all such as has never been remotely realized by a society in ancient or modern history? This is not to justify imperialis but only to demand a realistic, *worldly* analysis of what can be expecte to replace it so that we can judge it compared to real alternatives and relation to the real problems of human society with which it and eve other system of government has had to try to cope.

What, moreover, are the liabilities of isolating the element of dominatic from all the other aspects, including the cooperative, of the coloni enterprise? Making exploitative domination *the* key to interpretation history distorts perhaps as much as do imperialist ideologies themselve Said is right that this relation of domination and the injustices and abus it generates can never be justified or excused. But he himself typical takes a one-sided view. The position of domination can be as unfr and helpless as that of subjection; it goes both ways. We cannot but l suspicious of one-sided moralizing judgments.

Of course, from the point of view of a colonized people or individu the feeling of oppression is likely to be one-sided but no less true. Th however, is a perspective from within the fray and mayhem of history a not a critically objective view. It expresses the experience of the victi This experience may be totally authentic, but it is not the whole story. must be respected, but it needs also to be supplemented and confronte with other viewpoints, in order to avoid simply shifting the burde of being the scapegoat on to another party, as opposed to achieving balanced perspective envisioning reciprocal compromise in a situatic of conflicting interests. Otherwise victimization becomes a blindin generalizing hermeneutic. It can and should work to counterpoi triumphant colonialism, but it itself needs to be counterpointed, or el it falsifies like every other generalizing lens.

In effect, Said proposes the victimization of the colonized as t hermeneutic key to history. Victimization becomes the master narrativ And Said presents it with the authority of fact, for all his awareness of tl liabilities that this entails: "Yet if we eliminate from the start any notic

that 'big' facts like imperial domination can be applied mechanically and deterministically to such complex matters as culture and ideas, then we will begin to approach an interesting kind of study" (p. 12). Said eloquently rejects generalizing arguments. He puts us on our guard against the tendency of discourse to treat its objects as stable by defining them. This is exactly what he objects to in Orientalist discourse: "Orientalism assumed an unchanging Orient, absolutely different (the reasons change from epoch to epoch) from the West" (p. 96). Yet, paradoxically, his own argument, for all its specific detail, is powerfully generalizing: it always comes round to the same simple, inevitable conclusion about the absolute evil perpetrated by agents of empire. This is the frame that enables so much more complex and polyvalent analyses all to hang together. Their overall meaning is clear and powerfully general, though the details on their own would defy pat answers to questions of causation and blame. This sort of layered structure is not illegitimate, but it does contradict the repudiation of generalization that Said theoretically espouses.

Besides, a generalized attack on generalization is much too general. Generalities are wrong and offensive when the subject under discussion is an individual human being. In an individual case, respect for a person's uniqueness is the first imperative. But we do not discuss only individuals. Even if we hold, at the metaphysical level, that only individuals exist (a position called Nominalism), still we must talk, and talk a lot, about the formal structures that organize individuals into a world. Although these forms and structures are not ultimate realities, they are the basis for any relative coherence in our experience and action, and we must discuss them in general terms. In fact, all language is general: words are significant because they can be reiterated again and again, with something of the same meaning, in different concrete instances. This is epistemologically inescapable.

Western culture is totalizing not because "it" believes in generalizations any more than Said does. Western cultural masterpieces have intervened effectively and ingeniously upon their own historical situations. Western theory has developed probably the highest degree of critical consciousness of the historical contingency of interpretation. Said too generalizes in order to argue against the monolith of Orientalism—which his own interpretation actually constitutes as a totality. This may be justified as necessary to counter a hegemonic universalistic discourse, but generalization can be justified similarly by strategic motives for

canonical authors too. We cannot go on attributing complacent, self-congratulatory assumptions of universality indiscriminately to any traditional or canonical voice within Western literature. It is much more often just the opposite: those authors who are profoundly disturbed and disturbing have tended to be held up as "great."

Said's analyses and critiques at their deepest level are not really about Orientalism specifically but apply to all disciplinary knowledge and even to representation in general. Said's book is a detailed demonstration of how pervasive prejudice is in the discourse of Orientalism. But this is hardly the case only, or perhaps even to an exceptional, excessive degree, in discourse about the Orient. Said's argument essentializes a tendency of all discourses about other people or places or systems and suggests that the tendency to derogatory generalization and prejudice is peculiarly Western and Orientalist.

It is the very nature of representation to be self-enclosed, theatrical, narcissistic, self-referential. Representation *per se* is "orientalizing": it is an appropriation and falsifying familiarization of the other. Representing even strangeness inevitably domesticates it, projecting ineluctably one's own perceptions and preoccupations onto it. Knowledge necessarily treats its object *qua* object as non-active—non-autonomous and non-sovereign. Said's argument has not so much a geographical as an epistemological purport. And this tends to undercut its force as a complaint about the abuses in any specific region or on the part of specific political powers, since it is exactly the same story anywhere else, indeed everywhere else.

Said's discourse is historically circumstanced and rich in detail, so much so that we are apt to forget that it is an argument about the general structures of distortion inherent to any representation of other cultures. In the overall context of Said's indictments, these observations read as accusations leveled specifically against Orientalism. We receive the impression that it alone is guilty of gravely mendacious misrepresentation rather than simply exemplifying the structural distortions of representation as such. Said lets the general epistemological drift towards objectifying whatever discourse is about be confounded with his historical theses concerning specific regions and agents of discourse—"the West"—so that we no longer perceive the difference and are persuaded to blame one guilty party for the fact that representation is distortion and that the world is not just. In this regard, Said's style of argument may well

represent more the self-loathing of a sophisticated, reflective, powerful culture than the voice of the oppressed.

In reading Said the question raised for me is, Do we need to be shamed into changing? Indeed we have needed and need to change in the directions history and Said have insistently indicated. Decolonization became historically necessary and was only just. But does this justify blaming "the West" for the wrongs of a whole period of human history? It is in any case bound to engender a reflex reaction of pride and self-defensiveness determined to justify itself even by force where necessary. The best way to redress wrongs of race, class, and country is to begin respecting others rather than blaming the nation or geographical region or gender to which they belong.

I have loved reading Said's work for its breathtakingly rich and comprehensive history and geography: it presents a vast sweep of events in an overarching coherent and meaningful synthesis. In this, however, Said represents eminently the very virtues of generalizing conceptualization and persuasively unifying, synthetic narrative that he decries. The argument, in its very polemical provocation, contradicts the critique that it incessantly levels against jaundiced characterization. I am even morally disposed to see it all Said's way, yet his argument, I must admit, is nevertheless pugnacious and biased. This does not invalidate the argument but puts it on a level with the ideology that it opposes and exposes.

These remarks have been a reaction to a book and indicate how it may work contrary to the author's own purpose, as expressed in subsequent statements, of avoiding the sort of invidious representation that induces to the myth of a "conflict of cultures." This is a menace to which Said in recent years wished to alert us; he found that he had a paramount mission in helping us to avert such a false "inevitability." I have wished to show ways that this type of mediating and peace-keeping mission must entail correction of his earlier approach and a critical reflection on its ethical stance.

II. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, or Change Begins at Home

What Said writes about colonialism can be placed in perspective by juxtaposition to a very different interpretation of ostensibly the same historical phenomenon by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi is aiming at a different type of truth altogether, but this difference will help check the

inevitable imperialistic tendencies of Said's account to usurp the name of truth for itself alone. While one can follow and sympathize with Said's line of interpretation, it insinuates that it is the only true account of the matters it discusses. And that needs to be challenged. Gandhi's diametrically opposed vision will be invoked here, even if only briefly, to suggest an alternative vision that would merit being pursued at greater length. The irony is that by not attempting to defend the colonized as victim, Gandhi gives the colonized their own voice. Where Said is still viewing the problem of colonialism essentially from the point of view of the colonizer and simply reversing the bias, Gandhi truly takes up the viewpoint of the colonized.

Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, that is, *Home Rule*, articulates and embodies a tremendous realization of Indian freedom. The author wills to be Indian, to be what he is, and is then *ipso facto* already free and self-ruling. The presence of foreign nationals and institutions within the geographical compass of India becomes a merely external contingency. Freedom begins from oneself and one's own people, and then others, whatever they do, can be handled in a manner expressing one's own intrinsic freedom. One is free vis-à-vis all others, including those who take themselves to be one's rulers, if one is acting from inner, spiritual freedom. Gandhi believes that this is the best and indeed the only method for achieving juridical and social freedom as well. A people like the British, who are not first inwardly free, are much further away than Indians are from ever becoming truly free. On this basis, Gandhi avoids becoming resentful of the power of the British, whether it is exercised in their land or his. For this kind of power—that of attempting to lord it over others instead of mastering oneself—is rather a kind of impotence and self-enslavement and a falling prey to fear.

Gandhi's revolution in thought is concentrated in his thinking about "passive resistance," which he also calls "love-force" or "soul-force," or better yet, *satyagraha*, that is, "firmness in adhering to truth" (*Hind Swaraj*, c. xvi). This form of resistance is unconditional: it withdraws entirely from relation with the aggressor that it is resisting. This is the direct realization of the absolute, inalienable power of the inner self to rule itself. In order to do so, it must renounce the external world and all force used to make the world conform to the self's wishes. To this extent, passive resistance is based on the postulate of an inner, essential self, and this may be seen in a postmodern age as its weakness. However, while

no such self can be individuated and made present as any positive sort of existence, nevertheless, it can be a principle effectively determining action based on it as a moral postulate and ideal: it is real in proportion to the faith and commitment of those who act upon it. It is not a matter of concepts; it cannot be adequately conceptualized, but must rather be enacted. Only thus can it escape from the inevitable dilemmas of conceptualization, which is always compromised by the struggle for defining others and for gaining power over them.

This force coming from within, as if from nowhere, is necessary in order *not* to respond to aggression or exploitation simply from within the dynamic of retaliation and the dialectic of reciprocal violence. By passive resistance one is passive, absolutely passive, with respect to the oppressions befalling one from without. By completely withdrawing from all relation to the oppressor, including all will to retaliate, one is no longer ruled by this unjust government that lacks the consent of the governed. One is no longer induced by the aggression of the other to take up in consequence a symmetrically correlative position as combative and at war. One may be abused in one's outward being, but not ruled in one's true or inner being. In this inner sphere of self-determination, one is free to will oneself free. This is in fact the nature of human freedom as a genuine source of novelty. Here the self is the spontaneous origin of itself. This sort of freedom is not simply given in the nature of things, but human beings can believe in this freedom of self-rule and thereby actually realize and experience it.

Passive resistance is infinite and unlimited resistance that resists even being drawn into a violent relation of push-and-shove with oppression because it is absolute in its resistance to oppression and therefore to violence. It refuses to be provoked by oppression into abandoning itself and its own intrinsic peace, refuses to be contaminated by the mentality of war and oppression that threatens and endeavors to intimidate it from without. In this sense, it is not just passive but rather proactive. This is a passivity that is not the opposite of any activity, not a reaction, but an absolute, positive, creative, productive, originary force of peace. Like passivity in Levinas, it is prior to any agency of ego and its conditions of possibility. For Gandhi it comes from the Self rather than from the Other, but really, by complete self-abnegation and detachment, it is altogether outside the dialectic of self and other. It recognizes such invidious dichotomies as illusory and thereby escapes the prison of the self that

construes itself through opposition to others.

To blame the colonialists and to want to take away from them what they took or in any case acquired is to credit and accept their version of history as the triumph of their will. Gandhi rather reads victory and domination as a defeat for the colonizers own freedom, worsted by their greed and arrogance. It is for him stronger and also truer to pity them than to blame them. Blaming colonizers is predicated on acceptance of their interpretation of their own values as superior, followed by lamenting that they have the power they do, rather than seeing their position of domination as in itself already a perversion and an enslavement. Only when the colonized have already accepted the values and standards of the colonizers do the acts of the latter appear as successful and as working to their advantage as aggressors. Only then can the colonized be moved to imitate the colonizers actions in the attempt to reverse the subjugation and regain the advantage for themselves.

Gandhi shows that the tragedy and crime of colonization is not the imposition by force of superior might, but rather the weakness of the old civilization in accommodating itself to the invader and accepting the apparently stronger order of the colonizer as dominant and thereby relinquishing their own inalienable command and sovereignty over themselves. Indians became subject to English rule because of a failure of their own self-rule. "The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them" (p. 39). Gandhi therefore enjoins his fellow Indians to "cease to blame the English. They rather deserve our sympathy. They are a shrewd nation and I, therefore, believe that they will cast off the evil" (p. 38).

Gandhi's teaching on Home Rule as self-mastery is every bit as true now as it was when he first articulated it in 1908. He is saying "be free" here and now. If home rule does not start at home, within each individual Indian and each individual anywhere, no one will ever be free. For Gandhi, "Parliaments are really emblems of slavery" (p. 38). They mean delegating oneself, relying on someone else to exercise one's freedom, rather than becoming and remaining free in and for oneself.

III. Conclusion: Critical Consciousness, Non-Retaliation, and Escape from the Syndrome of Revenge

More often than not, those who are most desirous to possess certain

types of power are the ones who protest most vociferously against its exercise by others. It is often the suppressed desire for imperialistic sorts of power that animates the fight on the part of those who aggressively rebel against it. Someone else's having such power is intolerable most of all to those who covet it for themselves. Said's text and very method of writing and arguing is an inverted mimetic image of imperial control and enforcement of its own code of values as coercively valid. It is not wrong for Said to express his protest; surely quite the opposite. But it should not be mistaken for a true or balanced account. It is a counter-discourse, embroiled in the struggle for power with the discourse of Orientalism with which it vies and which it even, to a significant degree, creates. It is to this extent a discourse of reaction and even resentment. What it is outraged against is not injustice *per se*. It is unilaterally against those it perceives as perpetrators of injustice because it identifies with those being violated and humiliated. But by resenting and reacting against the perpetrators, it stays within the structure of violence, aiming to reverse its direction, rather than renouncing it altogether.

To see history in exclusively conflictual and exploitationist terms, such as it is presented by Said's story of imperialism, is to make it necessarily antagonistic, rancorous, and rivalrous. These are not facts neutrally signified but are themselves also generated by the signifying forms we choose and the systems of interpretation we construct. This is where subsequent postcolonial theory has introduced vital correctives. Gayatri Spivak's *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) is much more acutely self-critical of any position it assumes, sensitive to the epistemological infirmities of its own enterprise. Spivak is against representational realism itself, the dominant mode, after all, of narrative representations of history including Said's. Such a discursive mode *per se* belongs to hegemonic, ideological discourse. It presumes to be telling the true story. Spivak does not attempt to reverse violence by interpretations antithetical to imperialism and claiming for themselves access to "concrete reality," but to diffuse the power of just such appeals.

Even more clearly pointing in directions leading beyond the closure of the cycle of reciprocal violence, in thought if not in act, Homi Bhabha emphasizes how the differences of politics are not given prior to discourse but are always in part generated by the signifying process itself. Culture is itself the production of differences which are produced in the moment of being enunciated. Representation tends to negate the struggle that

produces it, presenting what it represents as facts, whereas meaning is always produced first by difference and is never simply mimetic and transparent to reality. This tendency of discourse to reify what it represents as pre-existing any saying needs constantly to be guarded against. These critical-epistemological perspectives expose the highly ideological character of a discourse such as Said's.

What I am objecting to in Said is that he argues against the evil of colonialism by placing the blame for it on others, on a guilty West. By identifying with the not-self-proclaimed but confined-to-a-stereotype victims of colonialism, he inadvertently perpetuates their powerlessness and strips them of their in principle inalienable freedom. By denouncing the West, with which he does not identify, even though he also belongs to this region, he lends it power as the perpetrator to be denounced. But this effort to subject to shame and guilt the other that one fabricates is the sort of gesture that founds colonialism. It asserts power, in this case moral power, over another and to that extent claims a right to dominate that other. Gandhi offers an alternative that does not attempt to judge or to coerce the other in any way but rather to gain control over oneself. This is a far more morally legitimate way of influencing others. It is impossible to force others to be good. We can only influence them in this direction by becoming good ourselves. The attempt to exert force over others is the quintessence of colonialism, and Said's discourse is still at one level a reflex action belonging to this vicious colonial dynamic. By contrast, Gandhi points the way to freedom. Free from this syndrome of striving to command and thereby overcome the other felt as oppressor, we are invited to redirect our energies towards overcoming ourselves. At least this battle with ourselves needs to be engaged in even before determining which, if any, others really are our enemies and how to fight them. That is how oppression ceases actually and immediately within one's own sphere of action, if not globally, whereas the other way, that of violent reaction rather than passive resistance tends inevitably to perpetuate violence and oppression.

Notes

1. Although the readers I have in mind are mainly not professional scholars, these tendencies are well documented in numerous recent publications celebrating Said, particularly in the wake of his decease in 2003. There is, of course, a vast corpus of criticism both attacking and defending Said and his project. I attempt to make my points concerning the ethics of postcolonial

discourse without becoming entangled in the intrigue of these detractions and promotions.

2. For some good work of Orientalists that is left out of account by Said, see Goldziher and Snouck on Islamic colonialism, and Arberry and Hourani on French and British imperial colonialism.

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Journal of Contemporary Thought, 25 (Summer 2007)

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Talking across Time: Postcolonial Challenges to Language, History, and Difference

> "...there is a paradox at the heart of the historian's practice: the reality to which the historian's interpretation is produced by that interpretation, yet the legitimacy of the interpretation is said to rest on its faithfulness to a reality that lies outside, or exists prior to, interpretation. History functions through an inextricable connection between reality and interpretation as separate and separable entities. The historian's inevitable dilemma consists in the need simultaneously to avow interpretation and to disavow the productive role interpretation plays in the construction of knowledge. This dilemma is not a new discovery, neither the product of the ravings of radical relativists nor the by-product of some nihilistic 'deconstuctionism'; it inheres in the practice of history itself." (Scott 2001: 86)

Where do our present discourses about most commonplace issues in applied linguistics come from? What have been the various articulations (Hall 1996) and assemblages in the past and how does probing some of their (semi)sealed boundaries allow us to cast analytic attention on the interpretive operations of the discipline, to the various ways in which it achieves its authority, its *reality effect* (Barthes 1986: 131)? Why is it important that Applied Linguistics attempt to come to terms with its present by reaching back into the 'past,' and what do we begin to uncover when we cross-question our current interpretations of key debates in the field? As Joan Scott above points out, all historical endeavours are interpretations and all interpretations should always remain open to disavowal. Implicit in her statements is the idea that stepping into "history," "the past" (singularities which we must contest) is like stepping into quicksand—there is really no "firm base" from which to proceed, only an assemblage of images, documents, speeches, figures, relatives, artifacts, recordings, and photographs that have entered our consciousness and that we have to sift through as we attempt to make sense of our present. These fragments, on which we impose a coherence and linearity, emerge in prescribed forms in most every aspect of the ELT domain of applied linguistics (including language attitudes, world Englishes, pedagogic practices, language policies, pedagogic tools) and get articulated and