THESIS

RE-VISITING ORIENTALISM:

ON THE PROBLEM OF SPEAKING FOR THE ORIENT

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ABSTRACT

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It was the advice of one of my professors that when I found a thesis topic that would sustain my interest that I be able to summarize it in one sentence. Here it is: *Orientalism involves instances of speaking for others, and, therefore, Orientalism is primarily a problem of ethics*. Or, in another formulation: *Orientalism, not as the problem of representing the Orient, but as the problem of speaking for the Orient.* In the pages that follow, I will offer a re-reading of Orientalism, one that is aimed at both a positive exegesis of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and a critical engagement with the text.

In the first chapter, I distill *Orientalism* and some of the common criticisms leveled against the book. This requires delving into Michel Foucault and specifically examining how Said appropriates Foucault's discourse theory. My main argument here will be that discourse theory is by its nature perspectival, and, thus, Said does not fail to correctly appropriate Foucault. Given the perspectival nature of discourse theory there are numerous perspectives from which to analyze the discourse of Orientalism. Thus, my suggestion by the end of this chapter is to make the turn away from a *representational* reading of Orientalism towards an *ethical* reading. In Chapter Two, I chart out this ethical reading by highlighting the problem of Orientalism as one of *speaking for* the Orient rather than *representing* the Orient. Using Linda Martin Alcoff's essay, *The Problem of Speaking for Others*, I highlight how discourse theory in general and

Orientalism in particular involve instances of speaking for others. In Chapter Three, then, I offer

solutions to the vexed problem of speaking for others.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

"In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Kind."

DEDICATION

To my late cousins, Oday Muhammad Baradan and Abu Khair Baradan,

who taught me how to serve humanity

…and to the Syrian people whose perseverance continues to show me that no situation is

hopeless.

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTALISM AND ITS CRITICS

"A question often discussed in philosophical hermeneutics is whether it is possible to understand an author better than he understood himself; that is, precisely what, in fact, understanding him means."

--Jarava Lal Mehta, *Problems of Understanding*

§ 1.1 Introduction

Consider the following true examples that reveal the ubiquitous practice of speaking for others:

I.   At a recent dinner, I was introduced by one of my friends to a group of academics. One of the fellows, upon finding out that I was an academic as well, inquired as to what in particular I studied. My friend, who had introduced me, interjected on my behalf and said, "Saad studies philosophy; it's his passion." I gave him a disgruntled look and then proceeded, in private, to explain to him that I could speak for myself about my profession and line of work.

II.   In 2005, President George W. Bush, in his White House address concerning the first "democratic" election in Iraq, told the nation, "Today the people of Iraq have spoken to the world" and that they, Iraqis, "have shown their commitment to democracy." Bush would go on to laud the invasion, despite the bloody years ahead, which would throw into question the very idea of "success" or "democracy" in Iraq.

III. After a 2010 Ted Talk, Sheryl Sandberg, speaking as a voice for mothers in the work place, faced extensive criticism for speaking on behalf of a demographic that many women argued she had little knowledge of. For many women, taking work advice from Sandberg, who earned a salary of $30 million in 2011, was like taking fashion from Gwyneth Paltrow, whose fashion website suggests that a $471 dress is budget-conscious. Sandberg's working world and the world of the average working woman were just too far apart for the former to speak for and on behalf of the latter.

As variable as the contexts of these situations are, they all represent some of the current practices

and discussions concerning the practice of speaking for others. In her essay "The Problem of

Speaking for Others," Linda Martin Alcoff notes how speaking for others has come under increasing criticism and that in some circles the discursive practice is being rejected.[1] From feminist theory to anthropology, there is a growing recognition that the practice of speaking for others is problematic. This recognition, as Alcoff says, comes from two sources:

1. First, there is a growing recognition that where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says, and thus that one cannot assume an ability to transcend one's location. In other words, a speaker's location (which I take to refer to their *social* location, or social identity) has an *epistemically* significant impact on that speaker's claims and can serve either to authorize or disauthorize one's speech.[2]

2. The second source involves a recognition that, not only is (social) location epistemically salient, but certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous.[3]

Recognizing these two problems leads one to ask, when, if ever, is it valid to speak for others? Is it ever valid to speak for others who are unlike me or who are less privileged than I? Alcoff spends the majority of her essay trying to get clearer about the problem of speaking for others and analyzes various solutions to the problem and the aforementioned questions. Her suggestion by the end of the essay is not to follow a set of algorithmic rules by which we can always and absolutely determine whether it is appropriate to speak for others, but to develop a set of critical practices that keep one mindful of actual and possible cases of speaking for others.[4] But before delving systematically into the problem of speaking for others in Chapters Two and Three, the

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[1] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique*, No. 20 (Winter, 1991-1992): 6.

[2] *Ibid*, 6-7.

[3] *Ibid*, 7.

[4] These suggested practices are as follows: "1) The impetus to speak must be carefully analyzed and, in many cases (certainly for academics!), fought against; 2) We must also interrogate the bearing of our location and context on what it is we are saying, and this should be an explicit part of every serious discursive practice we engage in; 3) Speaking should always carry with it an accountability and responsibility for what one says; 4) In order to evaluate attempts to speak for others in particular instances, we need to analyze the probable or actual effects of the words on the discursive and material context. One cannot simply look at the location of the speaker or her credentials to speak, nor can one look merely at the propositional content of the speech; one must also look at where the speech goes and what it does there." *Ibid*, (24-26).

question arises as to what significance the problem of speaking for others has for *Orientalism*.
This thesis is an attempt to offer a different reading of the problems of *Orientalism*, and Alcoff's
essay is the primary inspiration behind that reading.

To begin, there is a well-rehearsed criticism of *Orientalism* which suggests that in as much as
Edward Said successfully demonstrated in that book the tendencies of Western scholarship to
attribute a set of natural or social characteristics as defining of all members of groups belonging
to the Orient, Said is, himself, equally guilty of these "essentializing" tendencies with respect to
Western knowledge and scholarship.[5] In other words, Orientalism, as James Clifford puts it, has
the tendency to *dichotomize* the human continuum into we-they contrasts that describe the
resultant "other" as possessing a set of necessary and universal essences.[6] While Clifford
acknowledges that Said was right to identify a discourse that dichotomizes and essentializes in its
portrayal of others, Said's oppositional critique of the discourse of Orientalism runs the risk of
falling into the analogous procedure of *Occidentalism*, i.e., the tendency to essentialize Western
knowledge and scholarship.[7]

The dichotomy that emerges out of *Orientalism* is that between what is called the "Orient"
and the "Occident." Clifford describes how this dichotomy is the result of two aspects of
Orientalist discourse. First, Clifford acknowledges a set of stereotypes made about the Orient
that Said succeeded in identifying and discrediting: the eternal and unchanging East, the sexually
insatiable Arab, the "feminine" exotic, the teeming marketplace, corrupt despotism, and mystical

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[5] This criticism is raised most explicitly in James Clifford's "On Orientalism," *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, (Harvard University Press, 1988), 255-276; but is also discussed in the critiques by Aijaz Ahmad (1992), Sara Mills (1993), Dag Hallvard Nestby (2013), Dennis Porter (1983), and Robert Young (1990).

[6] Clifford, "On Orientalism," 258.

[7] *Ibid*, 259.

religiosity are just a few stereotypes made about the East or Orient.[8] Secondly, though, Said, in

describing stereotypes made about the Orient, claims that the West studied the East in particular

manner and tone: the dominant and authoritative West, the sexually curious explorer, the

tendency to speak down and disparagingly of the East, and the tendency to speak xenophobically

of the East are just a few of the ways that Said claims the West approached the East. For

Clifford, and other critics, these become a set of stereotypes about Western scholarship regarding

the East.[9] By the end of *Orientalism*, then, we are left with two sets of stereotypes that, as

Clifford says, "function to suppress an authentic 'human' reality"[10] and that ultimately become a

set of *essences*. For Said, the essences attributed to the Orient describe what it means, for

example, *to be* an oriental, or to practice Islam; conversely, for Clifford, the essences attributed

to Western scholars and their scholarship by Said disclose what it means *to be* a student of the

Orient, or to be involved in writing and speaking about the Orient.[11] Clifford questions whether

alternatives exist to this dichotomizing and essentializing process:

> Can one ultimately escape procedures of dichotomizing, restructuring, and textualizing in
> the making of interpretative statements about the foreign cultures and traditions? If so,
> how? Said frankly admits that alternatives to orientalism are not his subject. He merely
> attacks the discourse from a variety of positions, and as a result his own standpoint is not
> sharply defined or logically grounded.[12]

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[8] *Ibid*, 258.

[9] See, for instance, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit's *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York, 2005) and Akeel Bilgrami's subsequent critique, "Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment." *Critical Inquiry 32* (Spring 2006): 381-441.

[10] *Ibid*, 258.

[11] *Ibid*, 258.

[12] *Ibid*, 261.

That Said fails to offer alternatives to the discourse of Orientalism is a common criticism leveled

against the book.[13] But Clifford's complaint, at this point, seems to be that Said's methodology

for critiquing Orientalism is hypocritical, since it makes recourse to essentializations that the

critique is trying to highlight and eliminate as problematic in Western scholarship.

   In the first place, Said's work intended to reveal how the Occident came to systematically

represent the Orient in ways that he claimed were disparaging, inaccurate, and fanciful.[14] This

was, for Said, the very problem of Orientalism: As a discourse, it (Orientalism) represents the

Orient in a theatrical fashion through representations that have very little to do with the reality of

the Orient. As Said says:

> The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole
> East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger
> whole from which they emanate. . . . .In the depths of this Oriental stage stands a
> prodigious cultural repertoire whose individual items evoke a fabulously rich world: the
> Sphinx, Cleopatra, Eden, Troy, Sodom and Gomorrah, Astarte, Isis and Osiris, Sheba,
> Babylon, the Genii, the Magi, Nineveh, Prester John, Mahomet, and dozens more;
> settings, in some cases names only, half-imagined, half-known; monsters, devils, heroes;
> terrors, pleasures, desires.[15]

These representations come to symbolize the fundamental themes, artifacts, and stories that are

at the disposal of the Orientalist and that repeat themselves in various styles and approaches to

the study of the Orient. The only difference between Ernest Renan's *Philological Laboratory* and

Antoine de Sacy's *Rational Anthropology*, for example, Said argues, is that the former

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[13] The question of whether there can be an alternative is answered negatively by some Colonial Studies
interlocutors, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who, in her "French Feminism in an International Frame,"
argues that "there can be no retrieval of the Subaltern or colonized voice because the subject is only constituted
through positions that have been permitted: 'After the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project' it
cannot be a question of producing texts that simply answer back from a nativist position.' For Spivak, then, there
can be no such alternative history for the Subaltern any more than, for Said, there can be an alternative to
Orientalism." Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[14] The issue regarding Said's vacillation on the metaphysics of representation will be dealt with in Chapter Two.

[15] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage House: A Division of Random House, 1994), 63.

approaches the Orient philologically and the latter anthropologically, but the end result is the

same: they offer only representations of Oriental language, culture, and living that are the

product of the given intellectual cultures of their times and that perpetuate Orientalist

structures.[16] But Said is only able to paint these representations of Western scholarship with such

broad strokes via, what Clifford calls, a "hybrid perspective."[17]

   Clifford questions this hybrid perspective by criticizing Said's appropriation of Michel

Foucault. Clifford says:

> This methodological (not empirical) point is important for anyone involved in the kind of
> task Said is attempting. One cannot combine within the same analytic totality both
> personal statements and discursive statements, even though they maybe lexically identical.
> Said's experiment seems to show that when analysis of authors and traditions is intermixed
> with the analysis of discursive formations, the effect is mutual weakening.[18]

Specifically, since Said departs from Foucault with regard to the role of the author in discourse

theory, Clifford accuses Said of cobbling the discourse of Orientalism from various kinds of

utterances. That is, Said views Orientalism as part authorial, part traditional (groupings of

authors), and part discursive formations. As Clifford puts it:

> What is important theoretically is not that Foucault's author counts for very little but rather
> that a "discursive formation" – as opposed to ideas, citations, influences, references,
> conventions, and the like – is not produced by authorial subjects or even by a group of
> authors arranged as a "tradition."[19]

Foucault, thus, disallows the former two kinds of utterances from having any place in discourse

theory. He is critical of the role of the author and tradition, not in the obvious sense of an

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[16] *Ibid*, 130.

[17] Clifford, "On Orientalism," 269.

[18] *Ibid*, 269.

[19] *Ibid*, 269.

individual or individuals who produce or pronounce a text, "but in the sense of a principle of grouping of discourses, conceived as the unit and origin of their meanings, as the focus on their coherence."[20] In other words, the attribution of "authorship" and "tradition" are used as principles of organization to give a group of diverse texts a single meaning or unity. We then begin, for example, to draw relations between the works of a specific author, between "early" and "mature" works, between works that may be less logo-centric and more literary, between political and a-political works, and so on. The point is that by attributing the personality of a single author to a given group of texts we impose a cohesion onto those texts that may be nothing more than mere fiction. Thus, Foucault prefers to use the term "author-function" instead of focusing in on the real author, because it is the "author" functioning as an organizing principle that interests him most.[21] As such, discourse theory, as Clifford indicates, is always unfair to authors:

> It [discourse theory] is not interested in what they have to say or feel as subjects but is concerned merely with statements as related to other statements in a field. Escaping an impression of unfairness and reductionism in this kind of analysis is a matter of methodological rigor and stylistic tact. Foucault, at least, does not appear unfair to authors because he seldom appeals to any individual intentionality or subjectivity. "Hybrid perspectives" such as Said's have considerably more difficulty escaping reductionism.[22]

Unlike Said, Foucault believes that the "author-function" or "tradition-function" count for very little in trying to understand a body of texts. And placed in the larger corpus of Foucauldian thought, Foucault's denial of the author *qua* author is an extension of his denial of the "subject."

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[20] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Routledge Kenan and Paul, 1992), 58.

[21] Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (New York: Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2003), 60.

[22] Clifford, "On Orientalism," 270-271.

Both moves are intended to shift the focus from the author or subject as the center of analysis to the *discursive forces that generate that author or subject.*

Consequently, then, Foucault holds that a discourse is made up of statements or discursive formations, which is to say that statements in a discourse are generated by a set of rules and processes that operate largely below the level of consciousness of individual subjects. It is these unconscious rules and processes that determine the boundaries of thought in any given discourse.[23] What is important about this isolation of "statements" as the functional unit of discourse is that, since Said departs from Foucault regarding the nature of the units of discourse, this departure is, according to Clifford, essentially what makes Said's own discourse of Orientalism *totalizing*, i.e., generalizing over a variable set of spaces (Great Britain, France, Germany, the U.S., and more) and a variable set of times (from Homer's *Iliad* through most of the Enlightenment). As Clifford says about Said's theory:

> The field of Orientalism is genealogically distributed in two ways: synchronically (constituting in a unified system all Western textual versions of the Orient) and diachronically (plotting a single lineage of statements about the East, running from Aeschylus to Renan to modern political sociology and "area studies."[24]

Because Said stitches together the discourse of Orientalism from various types of utterances, many of which Foucault disallows, Clifford's complaint is that the discourse of Orientalism suffers from a lumping approach, which is neither loyal to Foucault's methodology nor systematic in gathering and grouping the utterances that speak to, for, and about the Orient:

> Indeed Said's methodological catholicity repeatedly blurs his analysis. If he is advancing *anthropological* arguments, Orientalism appears as the cultural quest for order. When he adopts the stance of *literary critic*, it emerges as the process of writing, textualizing, and interpreting. As an *intellectual historian* Said portrays Orientalism as a specific series of

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[23] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 62.

[24] Clifford, "On Orientalism," 266.

influences and schools of thought. For the *psychohistorian* Orientalist discourse becomes a representative series of personal-historical experiences. For the *Marxist critic* of ideology and culture it is the expression of definite political and economic power interests. Orientalism is also at times conflated with *Western positivism*, with general definitions of the primitive, with evolutionism, with racism. One could continue the list. Said's discourse analysis does not itself escape the all-inclusive "Occidentalism" he specifically rejects as an alternative to Orientalism [italics for emphasis].[25]

It is essentially this totalizing maneuver, which is methodologically hypocritical and weak according to Clifford, that implicates Said, whether he intended to or not, in creating representations of Western scholarship that are equally disparaging, inaccurate, and fanciful.

So, in distilling the problematic quality of how Western scholarship represented the East, Clifford argues that Said commits the same mistake through his representations of Western scholarship on the East. Whether critics view Said's essentializations of Western knowledge as more of an intentional act of "writing back" against the West or as a consequence of Said's botched attempt at appropriating Foucault's discourse theory, the point remains that *Orientalism* has the double effect of leaving many readers bewildered as to how the dichotomization between "Orient" and "Occident" may be overcome, and also of raising important questions concerning cross-cultural dialogue. As Clifford phrases it:

> Though Said's work frequently relapses into the essentializing modes it attacks and is ambivalently enmeshed in the totalizing habits of Western humanism, it still succeeds in questioning a number of important anthropological categories, most important, perhaps, the concept of culture. . . . .if all essentializing modes of thought must be held in suspense, then we should attempt to think of cultures not as organically unified or traditionally continuous but rather as negotiated, present processes.[26]

If *Orientalism* has taught us one lesson, it is that dichotomizations and essentializations do more to impede cross-cultural dialogue than foster it. As attested to by the vast critical literature that

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[25] *Ibid*, 271.

[26] *Ibid*, 271-273.

has been in continual struggle with the bifurcated thinking that *Orientalism* created, if one wants to change cross-cultural dialogue for the better, then it is an emancipation from the problems of Orientalism that is needed. It would seem that a renewal of vision is needed in order to ask whether the framing of the problems of Orientalism is redundant.[27] This thesis aims to affirm that view by offering a way of re-framing or re-thinking the problems of Orientalism.

In particular, this thesis intends to make the move away from a reading of *Orientalism* as the general problem of representing Others – whether those representations are manufactured by philosophers, linguists, poets, travel writers, foreign policy experts, etc. – towards *Orientalism* as the specific problem of speaking for Others. That is, instead of viewing Said's criticism about the discourse of Orientalism as a complaint against *representations* of the Orient, we can view his criticism as a complaint against the ubiquitous practice of *speaking for* the Orient. The distinction is subtle, but, I would like to think, fruitful. Here, it is helpful to turn to Alcoff's essay. She remarks:

> Although clearly, then, the issue of speaking for others is connected to the issue of representation generally, the former I see as a very specific subset of the latter. I am skeptical that general accounts of representation are adequate to the complexity and specificity of the problem of speaking for others.[28]

Seen in this fashion, the problems of Orientalism no longer concern the general "crisis of representation" but a specific mode of representation, i.e., speaking for others.[29] And although

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[27] In "On Orientalism," Clifford asks whether discourses, which aim to explain how distinct groups of humanity imagine, describe, and comprehend each other, are ultimately condemned to redundancy, the prisoners of their own authoritative images and linguistic protocols (260).

[28] Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," 10.

[29] The phrase "crisis of representation" was coined by George Marcus and Michael Fischer and describes the skepticism towards the human sciences' ability to adequately capture or describe social reality. Specifically, the crisis stems from the uncontroversial observation that all interpretive accounts are to some degree distorting, and, thus, never able to completely or directly capture lived human experience. See "A Crisis of Representation in the Human Sciences" in George Marcus and Michael Fischer's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press): 7-16.

Alcoff does not explicitly address the ethical dimension that the problem of speaking for others discloses, the questions she raises are clearly normative. They concern when and how it is appropriate for academics, intellectuals, and really anyone in a position of power to speak for and on behalf of others. The goals of this thesis are to demonstrate how these professional ethical questions concerning the practice of speaking for others have been behind the scenes in *Orientalism* and encapsulate Said's fundamental complaint against the discourse of Orientalism. Only then will the problems of Orientalism become more tractable. Without further ado, then, let us begin by distilling Said's understanding of Orientalist discursive practice.

§ 1.2 Orientalism According to Edward Said

Orientalism reveals a man engaged in what J. L. Mehta calls the "to-and-fro movement" of self-understanding[30], of which Mehta says:

> This to-and-fro movement between myself and the other, between my present and the heritage of my past, is also part of what is known as 'the circle of understanding,' which leads to a deepening and widening of my own self-awareness through this corrective circularity of understanding.[31]

Mehta's language and metaphor are useful here, as throughout the pages of *Orientalism*, Said vacillates and negotiates between his past, the *Orient*, and his present, the *Occident*, leading to an eventual irony, because upon having completed the "the circle of understanding" in *Orientalism* one does not feel a deepening and widening of one's own self-awareness of these places, their persons, cultures, traditions, etc., but rather, as the general criticism goes, the production of these places in terms of we-they contrasts. This unfortunate consequence is ultimately tied to the

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[30] This is a process that, in Said's final work, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, he treats explicitly and of which Akeel Bilgrami speaks eloquently in the foreword: "Said's answer is that when criticism at our universities is not parochial, when it studies the traditions and concepts of other cultures, it opens itself up to resources by which it may become self-criticism, resources not present while the focus is cozy and insular. The 'Other,' therefore, is the source and resource for a better, more critical understanding of the 'Self'." Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), xi-xii.

[31] J. L. Mehta, "Problems of Understanding." *Philosophy East and West* 39, No. 1. (January 1989): 4.

immense scope Said gives to the discourse of Orientalism, since as we saw in the introduction, the synthesis of Orientalist discourse from various kinds of utterances creates a discourse that is neither rigorous nor loyal to Foucault. It is in the very first pages of *Orientalism* that Said distills this titanic discourse.

There are three distinct, though, Said believes, interdependent, theses regarding what Orientalism as a discourse *is*.[32] Each thesis informs a specific reading of Orientalism. First, there is this:

> The most readily accepted designation for Orientalism is an academic one, and indeed the label still serves in a number of academic institutions. Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism.[33]

Very broadly, Said's thesis, here, suggests that Orientalism is an *academic* division characterized by the *location* of the material it studies regardless of how that material is intellectually approached. Said delimits the "Orient" for his purposes to North Africa, the Middle East, and Islam, designating this area of study as the Near Orient.[34] And insofar as this thesis condemns a great group of academics to the practice of Orientalism, the *academic* thesis of Orientalism, as I shall be calling it, is quite general. Quickly, though, Said offers a second, even broader, thesis:

> Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists,

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[32] Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

[33] *Ibid*, 2.

[34] *Ibid*, 17. I follow Said's lead here in that by using the word "Orient" I am referring to North Africa and the Middle East; but I differ from Said in two important respects. First, the only Islam the word "Orient" should signify is the Islam specific to those regions and not, for example, the Islam of Indonesia or India. Second, the "Orient" should not only signify the geographical space taken up by North Africa and the Middle East, but also the people of those areas regardless of where they may live, i.e., in Europe, North America, South America, etc. I do think, however, that the problem of speaking for the Near Orient extends itself to the problem of speaking for the Orient in general.

and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on.[35]

Although this definition includes those academics implicated in Said's first thesis, it clearly transcends the academy by suggesting that Orientalism is a type of psychology, or theoretical starting point, from which a binary ontology is constructed. The binary consequence of this *psychological* thesis of Orientalism is probably the most devastating for Said's enterprise, since, as briefly discussed above, the divide between "Orient" and "Occident" is quite often the starting point for reductive criticisms of *Orientalism*. Finally, then, there is Said's third thesis:

> Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institutions for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.[36]

This may be the most pragmatic and *corporate* definition of Orientalism Said gives us, thus bringing the level of generalization of Orientalism as a discourse to its zenith. In the brief stretch of two pages, then, Said has implicated everyone from academics, government officials, reporters, and anyone who has thought about, spoken for, or written about the Orient to a sinister practice where generalizations about Oriental people, their customs, cultures, practices, etc., are made, systemized, and disseminated as "knowledge."[37] As alluded to above, the problem Said now encounters is one of scope and substance, since it is generally held that the discourse of

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[35] *Ibid*, 2-3.

[36] *Ibid*, 3.

[37] Equally problematic, this final definition stands in contradiction to Said's remarks that place the origins of Orientalism in an Athenian, specifically Homerian, setting. As Aijaz Ahmad says: "One does not really know whether 'Orientalist Discourse' begins in the post-Enlightenment period or at the dawn of European civilization, whether in the period of the Battle of Plassey or in the days of the Battle of Troy." Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, (London: Verso, 1992), 181.

Orientalism is unlike any discourse Foucault had in mind.[38] To put it another way, Said's appropriation of Foucault's discourse theory violates some of the basic tenets of how Foucault would explain a discourse, like Orientalism, is constructed and maintained, both in and of itself and in relation to other discourses. To get a grip on how this appropriation, or lack thereof, plays out in *Orientalism*, it is first necessary to distill Foucault's notion of a discourse, or what he also calls "discursive formations."

§ 1.3 Foucault's Discourse Theory

Informally, Foucault's discourse theory first arises in his *The Order of Things*.[39] Later, in an attempt to understand and label what he was doing therein, Foucault offers a formal treatment of discourse theory in his *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, which towards the end of his career, he elaborates with an essay entitled "The Order of Discourse."[40] The latter works are both concerned with how systems of thought, or what Foucault calls a "discourse," are formed and regulated. And of the two, "The Order of Discourse" is Foucault's final statement concerning discourse theory. As such, it is this latter lecture that will serve as the primary source for my distillation of Foucault's discourse theory.

In "The Order of Discourse," Foucault begins by stating the central hypothesis that will occupy his lecture:

> That in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its power and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.[41]

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[38] See footnote 5.

[39] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books; Reissue edition, March 29th, 1994).

[40] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

[41] Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, 52.

From this hypothesis, Foucault spends the rest of his lecture elaborating a set of procedures that

constrain discourse and lead to its production.[42] One may wonder why Foucault insists on

defining a set of procedures that *constrain* discourse instead of defining discourse itself. That is,

what does an unconstrained discourse look like? For Foucault, all discourse is constrained

insofar as each discourse has various procedures or rules that work to shape, limit, and circulate

the statements within that discourse. Foucault divides the procedures that constrain discourse

into two sets: external procedures of exclusion and internal procedures of exclusion. The

procedures are by no means meant to be an exhaustive list, as Foucault says: "There are, of

course, many other procedures for controlling and delimiting discourse."[43] The procedures

Foucault identifies, then, are the strategies that he has found most ubiquitous in his studies.

<u>1.3.1 Foucault's Mechanisms of Exclusion Exterior to Discourse</u>

Foucault identifies three mechanisms of exclusion exterior to discourse: *forbidden speech*, the

cleavage between *reason* and *madness,* and *the will to truth*. This first set of mechanisms are

 said to put power and desire at stake.[44] As Foucault says:

> "There is nothing surprising about that, since, as psychoanalysis has shown, discourse is
> not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire – it is also the object of desire; and since,
> as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or
> systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse
> is the power which is to be seized."[45]

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[42] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 57.

[43] Foucault, *The Order of Discourse,* 56.

[44] *Ibid*, 56.

[45] *Ibid*, 52-53.

In other words, discourse is an object of desire because through discourse a power is obtained that facilitates the production and circulation of a set of statements. To be in control of a particular discourse is to be in control of a particular system of thinking or thought. For example, in the past decade, the "war on terror" is a discourse that has organized and disseminated statements about what a terrorist *is* and what *should* be done about terrorism. The discourse is not only struggled over by certain institutions, such as nation-states and the media, but by the very people the discourse is about. Communities that are said to be the breeding grounds for terrorism, whether domestically or internationally, struggle to have the statements that link their community to terrorism revised or eliminated. But since there is an imbalance in power relations between certain states/institutions and the groups of people that the "war on terror" discourse is about, statements about what a terrorist *is* will always disfavor those communities.[46] Thus, while there are many books and articles on the terrorism perpetrated by Arabs and Muslims, there are far fewer books on state terrorism, or White terrorism, or Black terrorism. For Foucault, then, discourse is nothing less than a power that satisfies *a* desire for what should be disseminated as knowledge. As such, there are various ways to constrain and produce discourse, or knowledge.

The first, forbidden speech, is the general recognition, as Foucault says, that:

> "We know quite well that we do not have the right to say everything, that we cannot speak of just anything in any circumstances whatever, and that not everyone has the right to speak of anything whatever."[47]

Such exclusion is achieved in a number of ways. First, there is the "taboo on the object of speech,"[48] which occurs, for example, in a topic like sexuality, where sexuality is either seldom

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[46] Mills, *Michel Foucault,* 69.

[47] *Ibid*, 52.

or never discussed because it violates certain cultural or social norms. Second, there is "the ritual of circumstances of speech"[49] that include the various ceremonies and formalities that surround, for example, a president's inauguration speech or a religious sermon. Third, there is the "privileged or exclusive right of the speaking subject"[50] that allow, for instance, a biologist to speak on matters concerning biology, since they are the most qualified, while disallowing others. As such, these strategies work to exclude not only certain topical matters, but also certain people from speaking in certain discourses.

Foucault next identifies the cleavage between *reason* and *madness* as a second mechanism of exclusion.[51] He says:

> "Since the depths of the Middle Ages, the madman has been the one whose discourse cannot have the same currency as others. His words may be considered null and void, having neither truth nor importance, worthless as evidence in law, inadmissible in the authentication of deeds or contracts, incapable even of bringing about the trans-substantiation of bread into body at Mass."[52]

Simultaneously, though, Foucault recognizes that while the discourse of madness that the madman espouses lacks importance and veracity, the madman is not completely powerless in his discourse:

> "On the other hand, strange powers not held by any other may be attributed to the madman's speech; the power of uttering a hidden truth, of telling the future, of seeing in all naivety what the others' wisdom cannot perceive."[53]

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[48] *Ibid*, 52.

[49] *Ibid*, 52.

[50] *Ibid*, 52.

[51] Foucault's most critical work that deals with this cleavage is *Madness and Civilization* (1972).

[52] Foucault, *The Order of Discourse,* 53.

[53] *Ibid*, 53.

One can survey a variety of discourses to see how variable this bifurcation between reason and madness has been. In theology, for example, prophets were often considered madmen by certain segments of their communities, while the kings or rulers the prophets reproached were considered reasonable. In philosophy, certain philosophers, such as Socrates, were persecuted as madmen.[54] Similarly, in science, there was Galileo, whose scientific genius was labeled as madness by the Catholic Church. The fact that this cleavage should occupy so many diverse discourses leads Foucault to suggest that, despite advancements in psychic health, which attempts to recognize and decode the madman's speech, thus making it seem as if reason and madness were on a par, the cleavage, through different networks and institutions, is always working differently. For Foucault, there is always a desire for such a division, as the power it yields is too pervasive.

Lastly, Foucault comes to the third exclusionary mechanism, namely, the *will to truth*. Foucault realizes that it is:

> "Perhaps risky to consider the opposition between true and false as a third system of exclusion, along with those just mentioned. How could one reasonably compare the constraint of truth with divisions like those, which are arbitrary to start with or which at least are organized around historical contingencies; which are not only modifiable but in perpetual displacement; which are supported by a whole system of institutions which impose them and renew them, and which act in a constraining and sometimes violent ways?"[55]

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[54] See, for instance, Soren Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* where the case is made that Socrates' speech is, in many instances, to the laymen, an instance of a madman speaking: "The irony of Socrates makes use, and that precisely when he wishes to bring out the infinite, makes use, among other things, of a form of speech which sounds in the first instance like the speech of a madman." Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941): 77.

[55] Foucault, *The Order of Discourse,* 54.

Nevertheless, though, Foucault thinks that when we consider that the will to truth has spanned so many centuries, its pervasiveness cannot be ignored:

> "But when we view things on a different scale, when we ask the question of what this will to truth has been and constantly is, across our discourses, this will to truth which has crossed so many centuries in our history; what is, in its very general form, the type of division which governs our will to know, then what we see taking shape is perhaps something like a system of exclusion, a historical, modifiable, and institutionally constraining system."[56]

Seen as an exclusionary mechanism, the will to truth constrains discourse through a number of ways. First, it may seek to naturalize the objects of a given discourse. This makes the objects observable, measurable, quantifiable, classifiable, i.e., "true" in the sense that the objects exist. Second, the will to truth seeks to rationalize discourse such that the theories a discourse espouses are justifiable. This makes beliefs about the objects of a particular discourse more readily acceptable or believable. Third, the will to truth is supported materially by a whole range of practices and institutions: universities, government departments, publishing houses, scientific bodies, and so on.[57] All of these institutions work to exclude statements they consider false and keep in circulation statements they consider true.[58] Given the immense materiality of the will to truth, Foucault suggests that of the three exclusionary mechanisms he has elaborated, he has spent the most time on the will to truth because it is towards this will that the other two exclusionary mechanisms have been drifting:

> "The third system increasingly attempts to assimilate the others, both in order to modify them and to provide them with a foundation. The first two are becoming constantly fragile and more uncertain, to the extent that they are now invaded by the will to truth, which for its part constantly grows stronger, deeper, and more implacable."[59]

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[56] *Ibid*, 54.

[57] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 58.

[58] *Ibid*, 58.

[59] Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, 56.

This "invasion" of the will to truth, as Foucault puts it, can be observed through the 19th and 20th century desire for disciplines that study society, culture, and literature, to become more scientific, i.e., to become socially scientific. Yet despite this dominance, Foucault notes that the will to truth is the least spoken about and unfolds itself as its own truth:

> "And yet we speak of the will to truth no doubt least of all. It is as if, for us, the will to truth and its vicissitudes were masked by truth itself in its necessary unfolding. The reason is perhaps this: although since the Greeks 'true' discourse is no longer the discourse that answers to the demands of desire, or the discourse which exercises power, what is at stake in the will to truth, in the will to utter this 'true' discourse, if not desire and power?"[60]

In other words, the dogmatic adherence and perpetuation of the will to truth is ubiquitous because of the desire and power at stake involved in the utterance of the "true" discourse. That a discourse can claim to be grounded on what is "true," or objective or justifiable or verifiable, lends it a leverage of power that other discourses that lack veracity do not have. A discourse that is "true" can be used to push particular economic, medical, or judicial practices; hence Foucault's long list of works that analyze how particular practices arise and continue to perpetuate themselves.

1.3.2 Mechanisms of Exclusion Interior to Discourse

Foucault then identifies a second set of exclusion mechanisms: *commentary*, the *author*, *disciplinary boundaries*, and the *rarefication of the speaking subject*. He says:

> "I believe we can isolate another group: internal procedures, since discourses themselves exercise their own control; procedures which function rather as principles of classification, of ordering, of distribution, as if this time another dimension of discourse had to be mastered: that of events and chance."[61]

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[60] *Ibid*, 56.

[61] *Ibid*, 56.

The first of these internal procedures, commentary, signifies those instances of writing about another's statements. As Foucault says:

> There is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced; and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech acts which take them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again.[62]

The general assumption is that a text is commented on because of its quality, because it is more interesting or of more value than others; Foucault, however, challenges this by suggesting that it is a question of difference in the way the text is analyzed.[63] There are a plurality of commentaries for any given text, each of which may pick out some general or particular detail and whose commentary may spark a radically different understanding of a text people had thought they once understood. This thesis, for example, is intended to be such commentary. Paradoxically, though, Foucault suggests that commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said.[64] That is, commentary has a binary function of keeping those ideas that are "true" in circulation through the repetition of them, but commentary also functions as a means for refining and expressing those ideas in original ways, or for a new context. In the first sense, commentary is dogmatic, and in the second, it is critical.

The "author" is the second exclusionary mechanism interior to discourse. And having, in the introduction, significantly discussed how Said's methodology differs from Foucault in regards to

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[62] *Ibid*, 56-57.

[63] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 59.

[64] Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, 58.

the author, I will not reiterate those points except to say that while Foucault views the "author" as a category imposed onto discursive statements, Said thinks, at least for Orientalist discursive practice, that the author is an intrinsic and necessary feature of Orientalist discourse.

Disciplinary boundaries, then, are the third exclusionary mechanism interior to discourse, of which Foucault says, "[It is] a principle which is itself relative and mobile; which permits construction, but within narrow confines."[65] Disciplinary boundaries concern the limits we place on subject areas.[66] For example, if we work within psychology, we will approach a particular type of subject matter with a particular set of methodological and theoretical tools. If we attempt to analyze that same subject matter, but now from the realm of history or sociology, then we will approach that subject matter with different tools and delimit it in other certain ways. Disciplines work as a limit on discourse, because they prescribe what can be counted as possible knowledge within a particular subject area.[67] Furthermore, the methodological and theoretical tools generate a body of propositions that the particular discipline considers factual and by which new propositions can be produced, but again, only within tightly defined limits. Foucault contrasts the principle of the discipline to that of the author:

> "It is opposed to the principle of the author because a discipline is defined by a domain of objects, a set of methods, a corpus of propositions considered to be true, a play of rules or definitions, of techniques and instruments: all of this constitutes a sort of anonymous system at the disposal of anyone who wants to or is able to use it, without their meaning or validity being linked to the one who happened to be their inventor."[68]

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[65] *Ibid*, 59.

[66] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 60.

[67] *Ibid,* 60.

[68] Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, 59.

To put it another way, because a discipline is defined by a set of methods, objects, and propositions, this delimitation facilitates an anonymous system that most anyone can use without their interjections and contributions being linked to their personality or individuality. Disciplines are less concerned with the personality of their contributors than the contributions themselves. Furthermore, the principle of discipline is also opposed to that of the commentary, as Foucault says:

> "In a discipline, unlike commentary, what is supposed at the outset is not a meaning which has to be rediscovered, nor an identity which has to be repeated, but the requisites for the construction of new statements. For there to be a discipline, there must be the possibility of formulating new propositions, ad infinitum."[69]

In a discipline, there is always the possibility of generating new statements infinitely while in the works of commentary the "new" statements are merely a repetition of a meaning or identity that is omnipresent in the texts. Whereas the commentary-principle limits the chance-element in discourse by the play of a meaning that is repetitive and the same, the author-principle limits the discursive chances that something new might by said by the play of a meaning that is tied to an individual and self.[70]

The fourth and final mechanism of inclusion interior to discourse is what Foucault calls "The rarefication of the speaking subject." By "rarefication" Foucault means the limitations placed on who can speak authoritatively; that is, some discourses are open to all and some have very limited access.[71] He says:

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[69] *Ibid*, 59.

[70] *Ibid*, 59.

[71] *Ibid*, 61.

> "None shall enter the order of discourse if he does not satisfy certain requirements or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so. To be more precise: not all the regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some of them are largely forbidden (they are differentiated and differentiating), while others seem to be almost open to all winds and put at the disposal of every speaking subject, without prior restrictions."[72]

Whereas the previous mechanisms of exclusion concerned either a mastering of their powers or their chance appearances, the rarefication of the speaking subject is about determining who can speak. For Foucault, who can speak is determined by rituals, which function on many levels. First, rituals define the qualification which must be possessed by individuals who speak; second, rituals defines the gestures, behavior, circumstances, and the whole set of signs which must accompany discourse; third, and finally, rituals fix the supposed or imposed efficacy of the words, their effect on those to whom they are addressed, and the limits of their constraining value.[73] For example, at the General Assembly of the United Nations, there are a set of rituals that determine who can speak. No representative of the assembly may speak unless they obtain permission from the President of the assembly; the President calls upon speakers in the order they signal their desire to speak.[74] Furthermore, the General Assembly may limit the time allotted to each speaker and the number of times each representative may speak on any question. If a representative wishes to adjourn or close a debate or discussion, then other representatives are given the opportunity to oppose the move.[75] These, and other procedures, work to fix the

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[72] *Ibid*, 61-62.

[73] *Ibid*, 62.

[74] "General Assembly of the United Nations," accessed February 15th, 2015, http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/ropga/plenary.shtml.

[75] *Ibid*, accessed February 15th, 2015.

efficacy of speech at the United Nations. The rituals ensure that only specific persons are allowed to speak, for a specific amount of time, and on specific issues.

§ 1.4 Orientalism and The Mechanisms of Exclusion

The purpose of the lengthy discussion concerning Foucault's mechanisms of exclusion is three-fold. First, I want to demonstrate that, for Foucault, the mechanisms are not a set of intrinsic conditions necessary for the analyses of discourse. Rather, the mechanisms are a set of extrinsic conditions that, when any one mechanism is present, facilitate analyses of discourse. Second, by designating the mechanisms as extrinsic conditions, this will allow me to push back on criticisms that take issue with Said's appropriation of Foucault's discourse theory. That is, Foucault does not think that each and every mechanism will necessarily shape every discourse. Some mechanisms may be more or less pervasive in specific discourses or not even present at all. Third, then, this will allow me to demonstrate in Chapter Two how one mechanism in particular is most pervasive in Orientalist discourse, and, consequently, to show how the problem of speaking for others is the central problematic that the discourse of Orientalism faces.

Towards the end of the "The Order of Discourse," Foucault proposes how future analyses might approach discourse. He states:

> "A first group of analyses might deal with what I have designated as functions of exclusion. I formerly studied one of them, in respect of one determinate period: the divide between madness and reason in the classical epoch. Later, I might try to analyse a system of prohibition of language, the one concerning sexuality from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century."[76]

The phrase "I formerly studied one of them" is telling for the argument I now want to make. What it suggests is that, for Foucault, the mechanisms of exclusion can be studied in isolation. In particular, the former study Foucault is referring to is his *History of Madness*, which delineates

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[76] Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, 70.

how the divide between reason and madness – an exclusion mechanism – shaped the discourse(s)

concerning psychological health through the Middle Ages and early Enlightenment period. It is

not the case that Foucault isolated this particular mechanism because he found it most

interesting, but rather, that he isolated it, because, for the particular discourse he was examining,

it was the most pervasive. By pervasive, I mean it had the most to do with how the statements in

that discourse were formed and circulated. Foucault does not exclude the possibility that other

mechanisms may have played some role, and future analyses might highlight this. But in

studying the arrangement and transformation of psychological statements throughout this

specific epoch, Foucault found that the bifurcation between reason and madness had an

overwhelming influence on the regulation and circulation of statements pertaining to

psychological health.

That Foucault leaves open the possibility that other mechanisms of exclusion may have

shaped the very same discourse suggests that discourse analysis is perspectival. As Foucault

says:

> "In any event, one thing at least has to be emphasized: discourse analysis understood
> like this does not reveal the universality of a meaning, but brings to light the action of
> imposed scarcity, with a fundamental power of affirmation."[77]

That is, the goal of discourse analysis is never to offer a final or more correct analysis of given

body of statements. Rather, it is to see how certain mechanisms shape and form the statements of

a particular discourse. A body of statements, if analyzed through the lens of forbidden speech,

may yield a different analysis, than when analyzed through the lens of commentary, and so on.

Each mechanism, if present, offers a new way or perspective from which to understand a given

body of statements. Furthermore, in the same way that the mechanisms of exclusion may overlap

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[77] *Ibid*, 73.

in any one discourse, discourses may overlap, such that the study of one discourse may require

the study of other discourses. What this reveals, according to Foucault, is that the mechanisms of

exclusion function differently according to the discourse in question. Here, quoting Foucault at

length is worthwhile:

> "Earlier on I mentioned one possible study, that of the taboos which affect the discourse of sexuality. It would be difficult, and in any case abstract, to carry out this study without analyzing at the same time the sets of discourses – literary, religious or ethical, biological or medical, juridical too – where sexuality is discussed, and where it is named, described, metaphorised, explained, judged. We are very far from having constituted a unitary and regular discourse of sexuality; perhaps we never will, and perhaps it is not in this direction that we are going. No matter. The taboos do not have the same form and do not function the same way in literary discourse and in medical discourse, in that of psychiatry or in that of the direction of conscience. Conversely, these different discursive regularities do not have the same way of reinforcing, evading, or displacing the taboos. So the study can be done only according to pluralities of series in which there are taboos at work which are at least partly different in each."[78]

This passage is revealing, for it suggests that, although the contents of various discourses and the

mechanisms of exclusion that are operative in those discourses may be similar, it is possible for

the statements produced in each discourse to function differently. Sticking with Foucault's

example of the discourse of sexuality, we can see how the exclusion mechanism of the "taboo"

or "forbidden speech" will operate differently in religious discourses that deal with sexuality

than they do in medical discourses that deal with sexuality.

What may be taboo in a religious discourse that deals with sexuality are certain sexual

practices, such as sexual intercourse before marriage, sodomy, or adultery. It is not the case that

these practices are not explicitly discussed, since they must at the very least be mentioned as

vices or acts to be avoided. But beyond that, a religious discourse, once it has made clear that

these sexual practices are sinful, may seek not to discuss these acts often for fear that too much

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[78] *Ibid*, 72.

discussion will lead to the perversion of its community. The function, then, of the mechanism of forbidden speech in a religious discourse that deals with sexuality is clearly normative, since the taboo works to encourage and prevent certain sexual practices. The religious discourse has as its end the moral and spiritual purity of its followers through the regulation of sexuality. Conversely, a medical discourse that deals with sexuality, and that works to forbid certain statements concerning sexuality from being circulated, may do so for normative reasons that do not pertain to character and morality. For example, if a government seeks to reduce the population of its country, like China did in the 1980s, it may implement a policy that limits the number of children that a couple may have. Statements that may be forbidden, then, would include statements that portray larger families in a positive fashion, statements that encourage couples to have more than one child, etc. The medical discourse here would have as its end not the moral or spiritual purity of its citizens, although this might be part of it, but rather the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of the country. While both the religious and medical discourses concerning sexuality may employ the taboo to encourage or discourage certain sexual practices, they do so for different ends. Thus, the taboo functions differently in each discourse.

The point, then, of these passages is to stress the extrinsic quality of the mechanisms of exclusion as they relate to discourse. That is, each and every mechanism of exclusion will not be present in a particular discourse, and, even if they are, not to the same degree. There is nothing intrinsic to discourses themselves which suggests that one and only one set of mechanisms will shape discursive statements. While a historical survey of different discourses might yield, as Foucault suggests, mechanisms of exclusion that are more ubiquitous, this does not prevent future and other discourses from having different mechanisms of exclusion. Furthermore, if a theoretician is to employ Foucault's discourse theory, then there is nothing preventing him or her

from analyzing discourses according to the mechanisms they find prevalent in their respective discourse.

Bringing it back to Said and Orientalism, then, the criticisms that critics have leveled against Said's appropriation of Foucault's discourse theory are questionable. In particular, they fail to recognize that Said's analysis of the discourse of Orientalism will not be the same in every respect to the discourses that Foucault analyzed. That is, the discourse of Orientalism may contain mechanisms of exclusion that are not present or are not as prevalent in the discourses as, for example, in those that Foucault studied, such as that of madness or sexuality.

The most common of such criticisms is found in the work of Robert Young.[79] In his *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, Young criticizes Said on the grounds of the age-old philosophical conundrum of the relation of the particular to the universal, and thus of free will to necessity.[80] As we saw in the introduction, the deepest criticism leveled against Said for how he "fails" to appropriate Foucault's discourse theory is Said's re-introduction of the author as a repository of analysis. Whereas Foucault decenters the author or subject from discourse, Said insists that, in his analysis of Orientalist discourse, he has found the author to be determinative. Said is unwavering in this regard:

> "Yet unlike Michel Foucault, to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism. 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."[81]

The supposed consequence of Said's positioning here is that by clinging to the author he

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[79] Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[80] *Ibid*, 134.

[81] Said, *Orientalism*, 23.

introduces agency, or the particular, into a discursive field where, for Foucault, all that is allowed in discursive analysis are the mechanisms of exclusion, or the universal. As Young puts it:

> "Said's revision of Foucault simply takes us back to the problem with which we had begun. So, in the most traditional, indeed theological, manner, Said wants to hang on to the individual as agent and instigator while retaining a certain notion of system and historical determination. He must do the latter in order to argue for the existence of such a thing as 'Orientalism' at all, but on the other hand he must retain a notion of individual agency in order to retain the possibility of his own ability to criticize and change it. It seems that, once again, he must have it both ways."[82]

The worry, for Said, is that by clinging to the author, Said ends up centering his analysis of Orientalist discourse on the knowledge derived from the experience of that subject instead of the conditions that allowed for the emergence of that subject. In the former case, the subject's experience constitutes knowledge, while in the latter, the conditions, i.e., the exclusion mechanisms, constitute knowledge. Foucault is squarely in this latter camp. But there are two caveats that begin to push back on the criticism that has at issue Said's departure from Foucault in regards to the author.

First, Foucault's discourse theory, and, for that matter, his work in general, is not intended to provide theorists with a totalizing theory that can explain everything. As Foucault says in the foreword of *The Order of Things*:

> "This foreword should perhaps be headed 'Directions for Use'. Not because I feel that the reader cannot be trusted – he is, of course, free to make what he will of the book he has been kind enough to read. What right have I, then, to suggest that it should be used in one way rather than another?"[83]

This, and along with the fact that Foucault was an iconoclast, refusing to be limited to the position of his last text, has prompted many feminists to approach Foucault's work as a 'tool-

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[82] Young, *White Mythologies*, 134.

[83] Foucault, *The Order of Things*,

box,' as a fragmented theory which is descriptive of changing contexts, and therefore subject itself to change and re-evaluation.[84] The claim, then, that Said, or any theorist for that matter, could misappropriate Foucault weakens, since there are not a set of tenets such appropriation must follow. The break that Said makes from Foucault regarding the author, which is viewed by Young, and others like Aijaz Ahmad and Dennis Porter, as violating some fundamental feature of discourse theory, becomes less significant.

Second, to accuse Said of illegitimately holding onto some notion of subjectivity in discourse theory while claiming that Foucault completely expunges the subject is odd given the fact that, for Foucault, the mechanisms of exclusion interior to discourse are intended to distinguish the speaking subject. That is, these procedures are all concerned with classifying, distributing, and ordering discourse, and their function is ultimately to distinguish between those who are authorized to speak and those who are not – those discourses which are authorized and those which are not.[85] This suggests that Foucault does not completely abandon the subject in discursive analysis. The mechanisms of exclusion interior to discourse are deeply involved in determining the who, what, how, and where of speech; they provide the material conditions for speaking. Thus, while commentators have wanted to emphasize Said's departure from Foucault's methodology, few, if any, have attempted to highlight how it is that Said's methodology is in line with Foucault. In what ways is what Said calls the discourse of Orientalism akin to discourses Foucault examined? Apart from Said's departure from Foucault's analysis of the fictional nature of the author, is the other of Foucault's mechanisms of exclusion present in Said's analysis? If

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[84] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991)

[85] Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 58-59.

so, what are they and how are they present? It is with these questions in mind that the next

chapter begins.

CHAPTER TWO

ORIENTALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF SPEAKING FOR OTHERS

"The only possible opening for a statement of this kind is that I detest writing. The process itself epitomizes the European concept of "legitimate" thinking; what is written has an importance that is denied the spoken. My culture, the Lakota culture, has an oral tradition, so I ordinarily reject writing. It is one of the white world's ways of destroying the cultures of non-European peoples, the imposing of an abstraction over the spoken relationship of a people."

--Russell Means, *For America to Live Europe Must Die*

§ 2.1 Introduction

The first chapter intended to distill Orientalism according to Said and how the literature has come to view, criticize, and discuss the discourse. This chapter intends to discuss Orientalism "anew" by building upon the interpretation of Foucault's discourse theory introduced in the latter part of Chapter One and through the work of Alcoff.[86] It was argued, via a close reading of Foucault's "The Order of Discourse," that the discourse analysis is by its very nature perspectival. That is, the same discourse can be analyzed through various mechanisms of exclusion, each mechanism revealing something unique about the how the knowledge in that particular discourse is constituted and circulated.

In Chapter Two, I will build on this interpretation of discourse theory by suggesting that the discourse of Orientalism needs to be analyzed through one mechanism of exclusion in particular,

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[86] There is nothing wholly new about the interpretation of the problem of Orientalism I am putting forth. Thus, the quotes serve to signify the rebirth of a neglected aspect of Orientalist discourse. It is an aspect that Said emphasized in *Orientalism*, but also elsewhere, such as in his *Culture and Imperialism*: "Without significant exception the universalizing discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world. There is incorporation; there is inclusion, there is direct rule; there is coercion. But there is only infrequently an acknowledgment that the colonized people should be heard from, their ideas known." (50)

i.e., the rarefication of the speaking subject, which is most involved in determining who can and cannot speak in the discourse of Orientalism. Said was, himself, quite concerned with the speaking biases involved in Orientalism. Throughout the pages of *Orientalism*, there is a recurrent theme of a silencing of the Orient, of not allowing the Orient to speak about its own history, culture, language, and life experiences. If the discourse of Orientalism is problematic for Said, it is not because the representations made of the Oriental fail to capture Oriental reality, but because the Orient is never given a voice of its own. Said, in his "Representing the Colonized," goes so far as to say that the dialogue between Western anthropology and colonized people has been non-reciprocal, thus leading Said to support the need for the West to do less talking and more listening. Yet despite Said's explicit desire for Western scholarship to, at the very least, examine the speaking biases involved in the discourse of Orientalism, the critical literature has glossed over this problem. This is where and why the interjection of Alcoff's formulation of the problem of speaking for others is necessary, for, through it, an old problem can be given new life.

§ 2.2 On The Problem of Speaking For Others

The discursive practice of speaking for others is so ubiquitous that its problematic nature might be taken for granted. The examples offered at the opening of this thesis were meant to demonstrate just that. While, in the first example, the speaking for was instantiated in an informal setting – one friend speaking for and on behalf of another friend – the other two examples occurred in a formal setting – one at a ceremony and the other on television. It seems that in our personal, social, and political lives we do not have to look far for instances of speaking for others. And it seems there is both a gut reaction and public backlash when either a

given "I" or "We" is spoken for illegitimately. There is a strong current in feminist literature that affirms these repulsions by suggesting that the practice of speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate.[87] The source of this recognition comes from two observations.

First, there is a growing recognition that where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says. Second, aside from the meaning of what we say being susceptible to discursive shifts, certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous in ways that lead to or perpetuate oppression. While the first observation suggests that location is *epistemically* salient, the second observation seeks to "dis-authorize" certain locations of speaking. Combined, both these observations reveal that who is speaking to whom turns out to be as important for meaning and truth as what is said; in fact what is said turns out to change according to who is speaking and who is listening.[88] Alcoff treats these observations in a formal manner, but before distilling her argument, it is worth noting the influence that Foucault had on her formulation of the problem of speaking for others.

Following Foucault, Alcoff uses the term "rituals of speaking" to identify the discursive practices of speaking or writing that involve not only the text or utterance but their position within a social space including the persons involved in, acting upon, and/or affected by the words.[89] That is to say, much like Foucault uses the rarefication of the speaking subject to designate the rituals that are particular to speech in a specific discourse, Alcoff isolates two

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[87] Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," 6.

[88] *Ibid*, 12.

[89] *Ibid*, 12.

elements of these rituals that she finds most effective: 1) the positionality or location[90] of the speaker and 2) the discursive context.[91]

By location, Alcoff means the social location one occupies constituted by such things as wealth, gender, culture, religion, etc. Social location is often tied to a social identity, and, thus, the two can be understood synonymously. My social identity as a teacher qualifies the location from where I speak in certain ways. It may make the utterances I utter carry more authority and less skepticism, since I am perceived as educated and trained in pedagogical practice. As one would imagine, social identity is neither singular nor fixed, since each person occupies a diverse and changing social space through the course of their life. Thus, what is important in analyzing the location from where one speaks is their *current* and *specific* social location relative to any discourse. On top of that, though, our social location is embedded in a discursive context.

By discursive context, Alcoff is referring to the connections and relations of involvement between the utterance/text and the other utterances/texts as well as the material practices in the relevant environment.[92] For example, a contemporary metaphysician giving a lecture on causality would most likely be aware of the relevant literature on the topic, both historically and currently, and would take into account what has been said or written on it. She should consider the target audience (the people to whom she is speaking) and the wider discourse (to which she is

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[90] It is worth noting that, for Said, location was central to his rethinking of many of the texts he analyzed. His analysis of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* offers us a glimpse of this emphasis: "After Lukacs and Proust, we have become so accustomed to thinking of the novel's plot and structure as constituted mainly by temporality that we have overlooked the function of space, geography, and location. . . Like many other novels, *Mansfield Park* is very precisely about a series of both small and large dislocations and relocations in space that occur before, at the end of the novel, Fanny Price, the niece, becomes the spiritual mistress of Mansfield Park. And that place itself is located by Austen at the center of an arc of interests and concerns spanning the hemisphere, two major seas, and four continents." Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage, 1993: 84.

[91] Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," 12.

[92] *Ibid*, 12.

contributing). Some of the material conditions that would obtain in such a context would include

the rituals surrounding her instance of speaking and writing, such as presenting her lecture at a

conference within an allotted time, the process of submitting and having her lecture accepted, the

editing and revisions, etc. Alcoff adds that the discursive context should not be confused with an

environment spatially adjacent to the particular discursive event. That is, Alcoff is not referring

to the space surrounding a particular instance of speech, but the broader social and intellectual

space that speaking or writing aims to address. With this Foucauldian background in mind, then,

we can now examine a formal treatment of the problem of speaking for others.

There are two premises that Alcoff unpacks in order to advance our understanding of the

issues involved:

> *Premise 1*: The "rituals of speaking" (as defined above) in which an utterance is located always bears on meaning and truth such that there is no possibility of rendering positionality, location, or context irrelevant to content.

> *Premise 2*: Certain contexts and locations are allied with structures of oppression, and certain others are allied with resistance to oppression. Therefore, all are not politically equal, and, given that politics is connected to truth, all are not epistemically equal.[93]

The most controversial of the premises is the first premise, since it asks those of us entrenched in

the Western canon of philosophy to rethink the relationship between speaking, meaning, and

truth. What the first premise entails is that the rituals of speaking – location and discursive

context – bear on and are constitutive of meaning, the meaning of the words spoken as well as

the meaning of the event.[94] What this requires, as Alcoff says, is:

> A shift of the ontology of meaning from its location in a text or utterance to a wider space that includes the text or utterance, but that also includes the discursive context.

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[93] *Ibid*, 14-15.

[94] *Ibid*, 12.

And an important implication of this claim is that meaning must be understood as plural and shifting, since a single text can engender diverse meanings given diverse contexts.[95]

The mutability of interpretation, and, hence, meaning, may be conceded by some, since it is easy to envision many examples where what is emphasized, noticed, and how a particular utterance or text is understood is affected by the location of both the speaker and hearer.[96] When, for instance, a veiled woman speaks, the presumption is usually against her both for her femininity and the religious/cultural garment that she wears, which for many signifies oppression; when a Caucasian man speaks he is usually taken seriously. When, again, a dictum or adage is uttered by a person of color, say, "Respect the visions and dreams of your brother and sisters," it is often considered laughable and glossed over, but when a European utters the same or similar adage it is often considered philosophical wisdom.[97] Thus, Acloff stresses that the rituals of speaking affect whether a claim is taken as true, well-reasoned, compelling, or considered a significant idea.[98] But while critics may concede that the mutability of interpretation is inevitable, some may maintain that truth is a different matter altogether.

Alcoff thinks it is right to maintain that the establishment of location's effect on meaning and even on whether something is taken as true within a particular discursive context does not entail that the "actual" truth of the claim is contingent upon its context.[99] She argues, however, that this objection presupposes a particular relationship between the truth of a statement and the world,

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[95] *Ibid*, 12.

[96] *Ibid*, 13.

[97] Felix Cohen, "Americanizing the White Man," in *The Legal Conscience* (Yale University Press: New York, 1960), 315.

[98] Alcoff, *The Problem of Speaking For Others*, 13.

[99] *Ibid*, 13.

one where truth is independent of interpretation, and, hence, also speakers or listeners. Whether truth is independent of interpretation or not brings us to the long debate in the history of Western philosophy over the meaning of truth. There have been *correspondence*, *idealist*, *pragmatist*, *coherentist*, and *consensual* theories of truth, but the most dominant view has been the first, correspondence, which maintains that truth represents a relationship of correspondence between a proposition and an extra-discursive reality.[100] The problem with a correspondence theory of truth, though, is that, as Kant and Hegel argued, it leads to skepticism, since it makes truth by definition inaccessible, because the human frame of reference is not expungable. Alcoff's solution to this quibble rests on the indexical "bears" in the first premise.

By suggesting that the rituals of speaking bear on the meaning and truth of what is spoken or written, Alcoff is indicating that there is a variable amount of influence on meaning and truth short of determination or fixation.[101] In other words, to say that the rituals *bear* on meaning and truth is not the same as to say that they *determine* meaning and truth. A speaker's social location, according to Alcoff, should not be viewed in a one-dimensional or static manner. Since social location is inexorably linked to social identity, and since the latter is multiple and with varying degrees of mobility, it follows that a speaker's social location is the same. Thus, where one speaks or writes from is not a fixed essence, and to the extent that there is an uneasy, undetermined, and contested relationship between location on the one hand and meaning and truth on the other, the evaluation of meaning and truth cannot be reduced to the identification of

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[100] *Ibid*, 14.

[101] *Ibid*, 15.

a speaker's location.[102] What Alcoff is ultimately arguing for is the *relevance* of location against any singular power of locational *determination*.

If location is epistemically relevant, then, as premise two suggests, certain locations will be epistemically relevant in structures that perpetuate and resist oppression. Alcoff emphasizes how the phrase "politics is connected to truth" follows necessarily from premise one. This is because the rituals of speaking are politically constituted. Who is speaking, who is spoken of or for, and who listens are the result, as well as an act, of political struggle.[103] The discursive context is essentially a political arena. And this was Foucault's point in distilling the mechanisms of exclusion, to see how the mechanisms influenced the politics of what is spoken or written. So whereas the first premise seeks to establish the relevance of location to the epistemic status of what is said, the second premise seeks to dis-authorize certain locations on grounds that are simultaneously epistemic and political.[104] Combined, the premises suggest that a speaker is not in full control over the meaning and truth of what they speak or write. The rituals of speaking will be partly determinative of what is said, and while speakers may strive to understand the context of what they say, they will never fully know everything about the context of their speech, especially given the digitalized revolution of speaking and writing where what is said and written is disseminated into a globalized, online village. But Alcoff stresses that a loss of control does not mean that speaker cannot be responsible for what he/she chooses to speak or write. A *partial* loss of control does not entail a *complete* loss of accountability.[105]

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[102] *Ibid*, 17.

[103] *Ibid*, 15.

[104] *Ibid*, 15.

[105]*Ibid*, 16.

Having explicated the problem of speaking for others, I will now further specify and distinguish the act of *speaking for* others from the act of *representing* others.

§ 2.3 Speaking For Others vs. Representing Others

In Chapter One, I claimed that distinguishing the act of speaking for others from representing others could be achieved by moving away from a representational reading of Orientalism towards an ethical reading. In order to do that, I need to further specify how speaking for others is different than representing others. Although I agree with Alcoff's sentiment that the "crisis of representation" cannot adequately capture the problem of speaking for others, she does not delve too deeply into the relationship between speaking for and representation. Thus, I will now consider an argument as to why speaking for is an act distinguishable from representing, since doing so will further legitimize the reading that I am putting forward. But first a caveat.

There is a conflation that arises when discussing the problem of speaking for others. There is the practice of speaking *for* others and the practice of speaking *about* others. At the beginning of her essay, Alcoff intentionally conflates these two practices because she believes there is an ambiguity in these two phrases. When I speak for others, I, more often than not, will end up conferring some information about the people I am speaking for. Similarly, when I speak about others, or simply try to describe their situation or some aspect of it, I may also speak for them. Thus, Alcoff maintains that if the practice of speaking for others is problematic, then so too is the practice of speaking about others, because it is often difficult to distinguish the two.[106] My remarks, then, like Alcoff's, will aim to focus on the practice of speaking for others, although I do not think it will be possible to completely disentangle speaking for from speaking about.

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[106] *Ibid*, 9.

In the practice of speaking for others, Alcoff says that the speaker is engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situation, and, in fact, *who they are*.[107] It is not the case that a speaker or writer discovers the true selves of those he or she is speaking or writing about and then merely represents those selves in some mirroring fashion. All acts of representation are acts of mediation or interpretation. And this goes for speaking for myself. For when I speak for myself, although I may intend to present others with a mirror image of who I see myself to be, that is, my goals, ideals, beliefs, etc., there is an interpretation that takes place such that, if I am honest, I can never completely capture and communicate my true self. What I provide to others is a mere representation of myself. The point, then, is that in all instances of speaking for, whether for myself or for others, a kind of representation occurs. Yet Alcoff believes that the act of speaking for is a specific subset of the edifice of representation in general. Why is that so, and how is it the case?

Alcoff begins to examine the relationship between speaking for others and representing others when she distinguishes a type of representation: political representation, as in, for example, electoral politics.[108] Elected politicians and officials are authorized to speak for others by virtue of their election. Ideally, these representatives represent the needs, desires, and aspirations of their constituency, and, in the political sphere, they speak and advocate for the fulfillment of their constituency's projects. Alcoff wonders if political representation can provide a model solution to the problem of speaking for others. She answers both yes and no.[109] Yes, because political representation is easily expanded to other, less formal situations where authorization is

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[107] *Ibid*, 9.

[108] *Ibid*, 10.

[109] *Ibid*, 10.

given to speak for others. These include end-of-life choices, where the spouse or family member is given permission to speak for their dying loved one or when a defendant hires and authorizes a lawyer to speak on his or her behalf. But Alcoff also answers, no, because authorization does not alleviate all of the problems in speaking for others. One is still interpreting the other's situation and wishes (unless, of course, they are given a written text to read from), and so one is still creating for them a self in the presence of others.[110] Furthermore, the power to confer such authorization is rarely present in most instances where one is being spoken for. That is, political representation represents a small part of the instances of speaking for others. This is certainly the case in the discourse of Orientalism that I am examining, as well as in analogous discourses such as imperialism, colonialism, and patriarchy. For in Orientalist discourse, the speakers, from academics, colonial generals, essayists, philosophers, and more, are rarely, if ever, given the authorization to speak for and on behalf of the Orient. That authorization is taken for granted, often on the grounds of superiority of intellect, culture, and civilization in general. But the point of highlighting political representation for Alcoff is that it *cannot* be used as a model solution to all instances of speaking for others, though it may prove instructive when trying to formulate responses.[111]

At this point, I want to fill in the gap of how speaking for others is a subset, or mode, of representing others, and, thus, a more specific problem than is representing others. Why should we read the problem of Orientalist discourse as the specific problem of *speaking for* the Orient rather than the general problem of *representing* the Orient? Is there really a difference? If so, what is it? Said and his critics make entering into this talking point easy.

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[110] *Ibid*, 10.

[111] *Ibid*, 11.

In *Orientalism*, Said seems to vacillate between two notions of representation. During a short stretch of passages – two pages to be exact – Said distinguishes between representations in a Foucauldian sense and representations in a realist sense.[112] The realism about representations surfaces when Said says this:

> "As this book has tried to demonstrate, Islam has been fundamentally misrepresented in the West."[113]

The implication of this passage is that although Islam (and the Orient) have been misrepresented by and through Western scholarship, it could be the case that alternative discourses could "truly" or more "accurately" represent the Orient. In other words, Said's remarks, here, suggest that not all representations are involved in a distortion of facts, or mediation. There may be a way of producing representations of the Orient that better capture the *reality* of what Oriental history, culture, and life is about. However, this passage is quickly qualified with a different, Foucauldian notion of representation:

> "My whole point about this whole system [of Orientalism] 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 usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting."[114]

Here, Said affirms Alcoff and Foucault's point that all representations are involved, to some degree, in a distortion of facts. This distortion is not always due to some malicious intention on the part of the representer, but rather, because all representations, whether through literature, art, philosophy, etc., involve the contaminating effects of human mediation or interpretation. To represent others is ultimately to impose onto others some element that is not of their own

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[112] Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, 185-186.

[113] Said, *Orientalism*, 272.

[114] *Ibid*, 273.

making, but that of their interpreters. Furthermore, the quest to capture the "essential" reality that

representations aim to discover is misguided because there is no essence to be had. Aijaz Ahmad,

in his *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, then, accuses Said of wanting it both ways, since

he invokes Foucault to dismiss the Orientalist attempt to represent the Orient as fictitious, but as

a committed humanist he, throughout *Orientalism*, searches for a discourse or procedure that

would facilitate true representations of other cultures, peoples, and places.[115] At issue, ultimately,

is whether there can be a true representation of anything.

The criticism raised by Ahmad concerns the metaphysics of representation, specifically

whether representations are truth apt or not. But what I want to argue now is that the focus on the

metaphysical aspect of representations distorts why representations are problematic. Regardless

of whether representations can represent a true reality or whether they are always distorting,

what is problematic about representations is the dominating relationship they create between the

representer and the represented. My first example of speaking for others at the beginning of this

thesis demonstrates this point. Let us revisit it.

> The original formulation was this:
>
> > At a recent dinner, I was introduced by one of my friends to a group of academics. One of the fellows, upon finding out that I was an academic, as well, inquired as to what in particular I studied. My friend, who had introduced me, interjected on my behalf and said, "Saad studies philosophy; it's his passion." I gave him a disgruntled look and then proceeded, in private, to explain to him that I could speak for myself about my profession and line of work.

A reformulation into a philosophical thought experiment might look like this:

> Layla and Louise are at a dinner party to celebrate their colleague's successful defense. Louise introduces Layla to her friend Laurice. Laurice asks Layla what she studies. But before Layla can respond, Louise interjects by saying: "Layla studies philosophy; it's one of her passions in life." Layla gives Louise a disgruntled look and brings Louise to

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[115] Ahmad, *In Theory*, 193.

the side, where Layla explains to Louise that she can speak for herself, her interests and passions.

What is revealing about this thought experiment is that, although Louise represents to Laurice a true state of affairs about Layla, i.e., that Layla studies philosophy and it is her passion, the fact that Louise communicates something true about Layla does not eliminate Louise's speech as problematic. It is a true representation of Layla that she studies philosophy, but the *way* that truth is communicated is problematic. It is problematic because Layla was silenced. Her voice was dominated by another speaker to the point that it never surfaced, although it could have. Thus, the personal autonomy of Layla was thwarted. Had Louise communicated a false state of affairs about Layla, say, that she studies sociology instead of philosophy, then the communication would be problematic twice, once because Layla's personal autonomy had been thwarted, and twice because a false state of affairs, or misrepresentation, had been communicated on Layla's behalf. Thus, what both representations have in common, whether it is a representation in some true, unmediated sense or a misrepresentation in the sense of a distortion of facts, is the elimination and silencing of others as capable, speaking subjects.

So, while the criticism of Said's vacillating regarding the metaphysics of representation is valid, the criticism overemphasizes what is at issue for Said. What is at issue in not whether the representations of Orientalist discourse are truth apt, because even if they are, the creation of representations that reflect a true state of affairs – assuming such a representation is possible – does not eliminate the illegitimate dynamic whereby one person or group speaks for and on behalf of another person or group. That is to say, highlighting the truth aptness of representations, while important, does not disclose the particularly immoral quality that many, if not all, representations in Orientalist discourse seem to constitute. For Said, what is at issue, then, is not metaphysics, i.e., whether representations track and map onto some extra-discursive

reality, but ethics. Specifically, it is a shift of focus from the general question regarding the truth-content of representations to the specific question regarding the relationship of domination whereby others are spoken for and silenced. Thus, in what follows, I shall focus on speaking for the Orient as a particularly pernicious and ubiquitous mode of representing the Orient.

§ 2.4 The Problem of Speaking for Others in Orientalism

In section 1.1, we identified three distinct, yet overlapping, theses regarding what the discourse of Orientalism consists of: an *academic*, *psychological*, and *corporate* thesis. It is fair to say that, whether for academics, colonial administrators, or travel writers of the Orient, instances of speaking for others occur at all levels of Orientalist discourse. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I will focus on and isolate Said's academic thesis of Orientalism. I will do so for a few reasons.

First, it is from the academy that I am speaking, and, therefore, it is the academic, material requisites of speaking for others that I am most familiar with. Second, while modes of the psychological thesis still exist – I have in mind, here, the clash of civilization thesis put forth most notably by Samuel Huntington – such positions have been deemed intellectually immature and ineffective.[116] They tend to perpetuate the West-East dualism this thesis has been trying to undermine and move beyond. Third, while it can be argued that imperialism has never ceased, but only taken on new methods and forms, the corporate thesis that covers instances of speaking for others in such institutions as the military-industrial complex, think-tanks, government bodies, NGO's, etc., is well beyond the scope of this thesis. This is not to suggest that there are not similarities across the different discourses of Orientalism, but rather, to acknowledge that each

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[116] See, for instance, Akeel Bilgrami's "The Clash within Civilizations," where he argues that Huntington's thesis runs the risk of being as absolutist as the "absolutists," specifically religious and Islamic, that Huntington criticizes (92). Akeel Bilgrami, "The Clash within Civilizations," *Daedalus*, Vol. 132, No. 3 (Summer, 2003): 88-93.

discourse may lend itself to speaking for others in unique ways. Thus, in what follows, I shall use "Orientalist discourse" to refer to its academic manifestation.

According to Said's academic thesis, then, anyone who is involved in writing about, teaching, or researching the Orient is implicated in Orientalist discursive practice. This implies that irrespective of methodology – whether a scholar is approaching the Orient philosophically, sociologically, or anthropologically – the fact that that scholarship is about the Orient is enough for it to be likely implicated in a whole set of generalizations and essentializations about the Orient. Now, this is a fairly strong accusation Said is making of the academy. To say that all academic research and pedagogy about the Orient is bound to the tenets of Orientalist discourse as explicated in Chapter One is to say that academic work as a whole about the Orient is more involved in the perpetuation of fictitious images, stories, and lessons rather than the distillation and dissemination of "knowledge" about the Orient. How legitimate is Said's claim here?

If we construe Said's claim as a complaint against the content of Orientalist discourse, then it will be difficult to accept it as anything more than an extravagant and overreaching criticism, because there does, in fact, exist scholarship about the Orient that does not obey the tenets of Orientalist discourse.[117] Even though Said does a thorough job of showing how, in the work of some academics and theorists, Orientalist tendencies are salient, Said acknowledges his own inability to analyze all scholarship on the Orient:

> "Yet my discussion of that domination and systematic interest does not do justice to (a) the most important contributions to Orientalism of Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain, and Portugal…"[118]

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[117] See, for instance, feminist scholarship on the Orient, specifically, Sara Mills' *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (Routledge: London, 1991).

[118] Said, *Orientalism*, 17.

At most, Said touches on a dozen or so specialists from Britain, France, and the U.S. It is fair to say, then, that Said has left a vast array of Orientalist scholarship unanalyzed, including scholarship in the areas on which he restricted his focus on. However, there is another way to understand Said's claim, and that is to understand the claim not as a criticism of the entire content, but as a criticism of the varied positionalities, or social locations, assumed by Orientalist discourse. That is, Orientalism assumes specific, particularly dominating, spatial and social relationships in the material it studies. Said calls this:

> "[A] *positional* superiority, which Orientalism depends on for its strategy and which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him or her the upper hand."[119]

These positionalities are constituted by what Alcoff calls the rituals of speaking, or what Foucault calls the rarefication of the speaking subject. And it is by examining the relationship between the rituals of Orientalist discourse and the positionalities of domination that we can better understand why Said finds the discourse, in its totality, so problematic.

In Alcoff's argument, premise one and two, if we remember, are as follows:

Premise 1: The "rituals of speaking" in which an utterance is located, always bears on meaning and truth such that there is no possibility of rendering positionality, location, or context irrelevant to content.

Premise 2: Certain contexts and locations are allied with structures of oppression, and certain others are allied with resistance to oppression. Therefore, all are not politically equal, and, given that politics is connected to truth, all are not epistemically equal.[120]

So what we want to understand is the relationship between the two premises. Specifically, how is it that the rituals of speaking in Orientalist discourse, which bear on meaning and truth, come to either ally with or perpetuate structures of oppression? How does the social location of an

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[119] *Ibid*, 7.

[120] *Ibid*, 14-15.

academic or scholar affect the meaning and truth of their speaking or writing? And how does this affect, often unintentionally, the perpetuation of structures of oppression? What I want to argue now is that the practice of speaking for others undermines, in particularly pernicious and specific ways, the personal and moral autonomy of the person or persons being spoken for, and it is this breach of autonomy that makes the practice of speaking for others problematic. Orientalism just happens to represent an especially pernicious instance of this problem.

First, like Alcoff, Said stresses, if not the same, then very similar rituals of speaking not only in *Orientalism*, but in *Culture and Imperialism*, as well. The primary rituals concern the speaker's social location and positionality. Earlier and above, I deferred distinguishing the two. At this point it is important to show how they are different.

A person's social location manifests itself through the social identities that person may take on through the course of her or his life. That includes, but is not limited to, things such as race, gender, nationality, religion, sexual preference, class, etc. While some of these identities, like race, gender, or nationality, are determined for us, others are not. I, for instance, have not chosen to be Arab by blood nor American by culture, but I have chosen to be Muslim by faith. To the degree that some of our social identities are determined for us, then, there is a degree to which we cannot help how certain aspects of our social identity influence the meaning and truth of what we say. If, for example, I were to speak today to my students about the current strife and conflict in Syria, then the fact that I am Syrian and my students know this might lead my students to view my analysis of the situation as more truthful than the analysis presented by CNN or Fox News. This is not to suggest, however, that I may be absolved from what I say when I speak; on the contrary, speakers should strive to understand how their determined social identities affect what they say in specific contexts. This understanding, though, will always be partial, since it is

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impossible to know the entirety of the context in which I speak. What is essential is that our social identities, partly determined and partly chosen, create a social space from where we can speak. Within these social locations, then, we can choose a particular position to speak from. That is to say, a positionality just is the place we choose to speak from given the unique and specific social locations afforded to us. A positionality *is an intentionally assumed space*. And this, I think, is what is key for Said. While no speaker can choose to completely absolve themselves from the social locations they occupy, every speaker should aim to navigate those social locations ethically. There are certain positionalities that we should and should not assume given the background of our social identities. What is problematic in Orientalist discourse, then, is that many of the positionalities assumed by scholars of the Orient thwart the personal and moral autonomy of the persons spoken for.

There have been two particularly dominant and opposing notions of autonomy, namely *autonomy as autarkeia* (or self-sufficiency) and *autonomy as self-rule*.[121] The first has its formulation in the work of Aristotle. For Aristotle, self-sufficiency consists in choosing what one will pursue without the pressure of need or utility being a relevant determinant of choice.[122] A person is autonomous insofar as she or he pursues ends not determined by some external purpose or perceived lack in what is needed to flourish; autonomy as *autarkeia*, or self-sufficiency, then, is independence from external influences (such as need or utility).[123] As one could imagine, autonomy as *autarkeia* is a rigorous criterion for autonomy, since the complete independence from external influences seems unrealistic and impractical. In our ordinary lives we seem

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[121] Thomas May, "The Concept of Autonomy," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (April, 1994): 134

[122] *Ibid*, 135.

[123] *Ibid*, 135.

dependent on some external influences, such as governments, family, police, etc., yet we still think of ourselves as autonomous persons. More specifically, self-sufficiency as a measure for autonomy is too rigorous in a couple of ways.

First, self-sufficiency lends itself to a rather austere existence.[124] To act in a self-sufficient manner seems to go against what we take to be part of a full, rich, and robust life.[125] We ordinarily act on the basis of such contingent, external purposes, such as fulfilling the wish of a child, friend, or spouse, or keeping a promise. To act so as to fulfill the wish of my spouse would be to act so as not to meet the requirement of self-sufficiency, because the determination of my action would stem from the contingent and external wish of my spouse. Yet we still think that acting in such a fashion is part of living a rich life and that we are still, to a certain degree, autonomous. Second, though, and more problematic, there appears to be an incompatibility between self-sufficiency and types of authority.[126] If an action is determined by an external and contingent authority, then it is not self-sufficient. But in our everyday life we navigate a diverse world of authority. Traffic laws establish their authority over us by determining how we can drive. Doctors establish their authority over us by determining what ails us or whether we are sick. Teachers establish their authority over us by determining what we should learn and how. We do not ordinarily consider these kinds of authority as obstructing our autonomy; on the contrary, they help expand our autonomy, since the traffic laws help us to drive more safely and efficiently, the doctor helps us get well or remain healthy, and the teacher helps us to obtain the skills or credentials necessary for employment or understanding. Thus, the rigor of autonomy as

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[124] *Ibid*, 139.

[125] Ibid, 139.

[126] *Ibid*, 139.

autarkeia seems too great. A suitable notion of autonomy should allow the incorporation of certain external and contingent influences in a person's actions rather than requiring the impractical detachment from them.[127] This is why I shall focus on autonomy as self-rule.

"Autonomy" is derived from the Greek words *autos* and *nomos* meaning, literally, "self-rule."[128] As such, autonomy as self-rule has its antecedents in the Greeks, particularly in Aristotle's' *Politics*, and in the work of Kant. The view of autonomy as self-rule requires that the person play a significant role in formulating the content of her behavior or action.[129] Autonomy does not require the impractical detachment from external influences; rather, it requires that the person actively assess these influences rather than simply react to them.[130] External influences lack causal power. What they do provide is information according to which the person may act. The central characteristic, then, of autonomy as self-rule is *active assessment*. To say that a person has autonomy is to say that she does not simply react to her environment and other influences but actively shapes her behavior in the context of them. It is this active assessment that lends identity to the behavior as a particular person's action. In other words, we may say a person is autonomous insofar as they are ruled by active assessment and not external influences, although the latter will inevitably fabricate the context against which active assessment is directed. Contexts, however, are not all equal. Some contexts threaten the ability of a person to self-rule, both personally and morally, and it is this of which the discourse of Orientalism is guilty.

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[127] *Ibid*, 139.

[128] *Ibid*, 139.

[129] *Ibid*, 141.

[130] *Ibid*, 141.

It is clear that if, in Orientalist discourse, the Orient is spoken for in instances where it is perfectly capable of speaking for itself, then this involves a breach of "personal" autonomy. For to speak for oneself constitutes a basic feature of being personally autonomous. Person or persons who are capable of speaking for themselves, about their culture, history, psychology, traditions, etc., should be allowed to do so on the grounds that they are in the *best position* to do so. The assumptions here are two-fold. First, we ordinarily think that a person is him or herself the most reliable and authentic source for conveying states of affairs that relate to themselves. Second, that to convey those states of affairs, or speak for oneself, is part of what it means to self-rule oneself.

The authenticity we attach to self-knowledge is part of our everyday fabric. The doctor does not interview the patient's family or friends but rather the patient herself to understand her symptoms or what ails her. When a person is victimized the authorities are keen on having the personal account of the victim, using it as a measure of other accounts, such as the accounts provided by witnesses or the victimizer. This is not to say that self-knowledge is always reliable but that it is afforded a certain weight to the degree that we, at the very least, prefer that the person in question disclose that knowledge over remaining silent. Furthermore, to speak for oneself is part of what it means to self-rule oneself because of how necessary it is to be capable of doing so. From job interviews, education, and various public and social interactions, speaking for oneself is necessary for being able to navigate many of these settings. Granted, certain customs and cultures may relegate and restrict speaking for oneself, but the necessity of self-ruling oneself by speaking for oneself remains relevant because of its practicality. In addition, and this is where the discourse of Orientalism becomes especially relevant, there have occurred a slew of injustices when the personal autonomy of others has been intentionally thwarted. Some

of these injustices have occurred on massive and systematic scales. For example, certain economic development policies towards the "Third World" have, in some cases, made the suffering they sought to alleviate worse, because the voices of indigenous populations were either not taken seriously enough or thwarted.[131] The same can be said for Women, Blacks, and people of color whose voices have historically been silenced or eliminated on the grounds that what they had to say was irrelevant and not in the interest of the dominant group. But while the observation that speaking for others undermines personal autonomy may be obvious, what is less obvious is how speaking for others undermines the moral autonomy of the person or persons being spoken for.

If personal autonomy as self-rule entails active assessment in the personal life of the subject, then moral autonomy as self-rule entails active assessment of the moral life of the subject. That is to say, instead of being merely influenced by external moral laws, whether religiously or secularly based, and accepting these laws blindly, the morally autonomous person actively assesses the moral law to the point that they determine that this or that moral law is worth living by. To self-rule one's life morally is to live by the moral law one has chosen. As with personal autonomy, then, there will be contexts that thwart the moral autonomy of the person or persons in question. Just as Orientalist discursive practice sometimes thwarts the personal autonomy of a person or persons in the Orient by speaking for them, Orientalism thwarts the moral autonomy of the person or persons being spoken for by creating a xenophobic social and intellectual space that those spoken for must deal with and respond to.

When an Orientalist, for example, creates a set of essentializations about the Orient, say, that they are a mystical people or that violence is an inherent part of their culture, then not only are

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[131] See, for example, William Easterley's *The White Man's Burden: Why The West's Efforts To Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill And So Little Good* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006).

those persons silenced as capable speaking subjects, but they are now defined in certain respects. These essentializations are not innocuous, as they create a social and intellectual framework, i.e., the discourse of Orientalism, in which the Orient is involuntarily a part of and against which it must respond. For the Orient to rebuke any of these essentializations is for it to speak in a space that has already been defined without its input. If people of the Orient are to speak within it, then they are limited and defined by the tenets of that discourse. If they are to ignore the discourse, then the discourse completely defines them. Speaking for the Orient thus becomes a stifling apparatus whereby those who are spoken for are trapped in a social and intellectual space that is not neutral but rather positive and violent towards *who they are*, *what they stand for*, and *how they live*. This positive interference occurs at more than just a personal level, since the questions of who one *is* and *how* one conducts one's life inevitably include moral questions and choices. Regardless, then, of how much active assessment the subject being spoken for exercises, he or she is bound by a context, i.e., Orientalism, that makes difficult the questions about identity, existence, and meaning. That is not to say that this context is wholly determinate of the people spoken for, i.e., that Orientalism disallows the Orient any notion of autonomy, but that the discourse does more than just merely provide information that the Orient must actively assess. The information it provides is particularly interfering in the existential sphere that every human must face. And it is on this account of interference that the discourse of Orientalism is morally problematic.

So, in closing, the discourse of Orientalism contains many instances of speaking for others. While it would be ambitious to say that all those instances are problematic, it is safe to say that many of them are indeed so because of the dominating positionalities assumed. Furthermore, many of the Orientalists that Said analyzes fail to acknowledge their social location and

consequent positioning when they speak for others and how this influences what they say and

those they are speaking about. This is due, in part, as Alcoff says, from a desire for mastery and

control:

> "I would stress that the practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for
> mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about
> another's situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and
> praise."

In seeking to be masters over other, less privileged, persons, the Orientalist speaks for others

without any regard for how his or her assumed positionalities affect the meaning and truth of

their speaking and writing. On one level, the Orientalist undermines the personal autonomy of

those spoken for. And on another level, the Orientalist undermines the moral autonomy of those

spoken for.

CHAPTER THREE

OBJECTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

§ 3.1 Introduction

To this point I have argued that the problem of Orientalist discourse lies not in the general

problem of representing the Orient but in the specific problem of speaking for the Orient. In

doing so, I have critiqued the discourse of Orientalism on ethical grounds. Specifically, I have

argued that in speaking for the Orient, the personal and moral autonomy of those spoken for is

thwarted. This is so because, on a personal level, capable, speaking subjects are silenced, and, on

a moral level, there occurs a positive interference in the existential sphere of those who are

spoken for. Like Said, who laid the foundations for the first ethical critique of Orientalism, there

will be those who object to this interjection of ethics into discourse theory. Thus, in this closing

chapter, I would like to address a couple of the strongest objections that could be levelled against

my interpretation and argument. The first concerns Said's humanism and Foucault's anti-

humanism. The second concerns whether and how the problem of speaking for the Orient avoids

the dualistic metaphysics that the problem of representing the Orient creates, and, thus, lends

itself to more tangible solutions to the discourse of Orientalism. After dealing with these

objections, then, I will highlight certain strategies for the problem of speaking for others.

§ 3.2 Said's Humanism and Foucault's anti-Humanism

Discourse theory is generally construed as a strictly descriptive enterprise. That is to say that, in

describing how certain bodies of knowledge are produced and regulated, discourse theory is not

concerned with critiquing these bodies of knowledge if that means prescribing norms for the

production and regulation of knowledge. Part of this has to do with the fact that, for Foucault, at least, discursive formations are largely the product of unconscious rules. These rules are unconscious because they become so ingrained in the production of certain discourses that they are taken for granted or assumed as foundational. The discourse theorist's job is to highlight these rules, or what Foucault calls the mechanisms of exclusion, to better understand how discourse is produced, regulated, and disseminated. In doing so, the discourse theorist seeks to make conscious what was once unconscious. But when this occurs, the inevitable question arises as to whether the theorist who is now conscious about specific rules of regulation and production must do anything to critique or question those rules if they seem morally problematic. The intuitive answer is yes. If, for example, there exists a discourse that disseminates propositions that are overly discriminatory and xenophobic towards a specific population, then it would seem necessary to call into question the mechanisms of exclusion which facilitate such a discourse. For not all "knowledge" is equal. Some "knowledge" does violence to others. And once this is understood, it seems necessary to formulate a critique that, at the very least, questions the moral consequences of such discourses.

The apparent discord, then, that exists between Said and Foucault is whether such critique is possible. For Foucault, as well as other anti-humanist thinkers such as Levi Strauss and Roland Barthes, systems of thinking and perceiving transcend the power of individual subjects within those systems, and, therefore, the only choice of subjects is either to *use* or be *used* by those systems.[132] In other words, the sovereignty of the subject is non-existent in discourse theory. The subject is more the product of discourse than discourse is the product of the subject. This, as Said

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[132] Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 9.

says, flatly contradicts the core of humanist thought.[133] For the humanism that Said espouses holds that people all over the world are moved by ideals of justice, equality, liberty, etc. and that it is humans moved by such ideals that make history. As Said says, change is human history, and human history is made by human action.[134] So while Said holds that the subject is embedded in systems of thinking and perceiving, but this embededness does not completely determine the subject, Foucault thinks the contrary, i.e., that the subject is determined by discourse and thus lacks the capacity to change it. The right answer, I want to argue, lies somewhere in the middle.

It is the case that discourse *partly* determines the subject and that the subject can *partly* affect change. Said and Foucault seem to be on extreme ends of this debate, and I believe that empirical observation can strike a happy medium between the two. For example, consider the "war on terror" discourse first highlighted in Chapter One. Foucault would be right to say that this discourse played an influential role in determining the actions of certain subjects after the tragic events of September 11th, 2001. On one side of the discourse, people of perceived Arab and/or Islamic background were determined by this discourse in the sense that became acutely aware of how threatening they now appeared in the public sphere. Arabs and Muslims were always part of the fabric of life in America, but now they especially stood out due to the association between their race/religion and terrorism. To blend in, some individuals began shedding their cultural signifiers. Some men named Muhammad shortened their name to "Mo." Some women who had been wearing hijab or traditional religious veil began to unveil out of fear of being discriminated against or harassed. Muslims who regularly frequented the Mosque became more conscious about who they talked to or what they said inside Mosques because of suspected spying and entrapment by government agencies. All these changes in the life of Arab and/or Muslim

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[133] *Ibid*, 10.

[134] *Ibid*, 10.

subjects demonstrate the ability of the war on terror discourse to determine their lives. On the other side of the discourse, Americans became more aware of people who looked or actually were Arab and/or Muslim in their communities. Suddenly, a man of brown complexion with a long beard and wearing traditional Islamic dress stood out as suspicious or threatening. The same can be said for a veiled woman. The war on terror discourse was effective in determining the attitudes, and in some cases where discrimination or harassment occurred, the actions of certain Americans towards a specific minority population. So, again, Foucault is correct to highlight the ability of discourses to determine the subject.

However, this determination does not completely prevent the subject from acting towards change. For within the past 14 years since the war on terror discourse came to fruition, there have been changes to alter or eliminate the discourse completely. For instance, in February of 2015, President Obama explained to media reporters why he no longer used the term "Radical Islam" in describing Muslim groups who committed terrorism.[135] The essential reason was to discredit any religious authority these groups may perceive themselves to have. The leaders of these groups are not religious leaders but terrorists. Furthermore, the biases that the media have generally had towards Arabs and/or Muslims has slowly but surely been challenged. The rush to label as terrorism any act of violence committed by Muslims has been questioned on many fronts. And it is in this questioning manner that Arab and/or Muslim subjects have challenged the war on terror discourse. They have sought to change or eliminate a discourse that has determined their lives in ways that are intrusive and unwelcome. Thus, the determining power of discourse, while extensive, is not overly determinative in the sense that the subject cannot either change or

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[135] Jennifer Bendery, "Obama Explains Why He Doesn't Use the Term 'Radical Islam' For Islamic State, Al Qaeda," Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/18/obama-islamic-state-terrorists_n_6708610.html (accessed April 25, 2015).

eliminate those determinations. The subject and discourse remain entangled in a web of determination and counter-determination.

§ 3.3 Overcoming the Dichotomizing Logic of Orientalism

It has been argued throughout this thesis that framing the problem of Orientalism as the problem of speaking for the Orient rather than the problem of representing the Orient would avoid the reductive and binary thinking that has been a persistent criticism of the book. The goal has been to move beyond the Occident/Orient dualism that the discourse of Orientalism creates by essentializing the Orient and Western scholarship on "the Orient." My argument has attempted to shift the area of emphasis on the problematic aspect of Orientalist discourse from the content of the discourse, i.e., the comprehensive system of concepts and techniques that classifies the Orient as inferior, to the specific locational and positional strategies the discourse assumes.[136] That is to say, the reason so much ink has been spilled on the dichotomizing logic of Orientalism is because what has been assumed as most problematic about the discourse are the representations *qua* representations. These representations, whether the creation of travel writers, philosophers, philologists, politicians, etc. often contain essentializations that are xenophobic and demonizing of the Orient. Now, while these representations are problematic on account of their sinister quality, and, thus, Said was correct to discredit them as mere fictions, what is more problematic is the fact that the represented are never given a voice of their own. The content of the representations remains problematic, but it is the deeper issue of silencing and speaking for the Orient that ultimately needs to be questioned. For even if the representations represented true states of affairs about the Orient, there would remain the problem of the Orient never being given a voice of its own. Ultimately, then, it is not the essentializations, which lead to the binary

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[136] Dag Hallvard Nestby, *The Great Dialogue: Overcoming the Dichotomising Logic of Orientalism* (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, November 2013): 7.

between the Occident and the Orient, that should be considered most problematic, but the specific ways in which the Orient is spoken for through these essentializations. Once this is recognized – that *Orientalism* is ultimately a problem of *speaking for* the Orient more than it is a problem of *representing* the Orient – then not only can the dichotomizing logic of the book be set to one side, but, more importantly, more specific solutions to the discourse of Orientalism can be discussed and theorized.

§ 3.4 Strategies for Dealing with The Problem of Speaking for Others

In this final section, I do not aim to provide an absolute solution to the problem of speaking for others in the discourse of Orientalism nor outside of it. Like Alcoff, I am skeptical that there could be a set of criteria or rules by which we could always determine when it is and is not appropriate to speak for others. The complexity of our social contexts coupled with our inability to completely account for or track what our speaking and writing does to others leads me to believe that the best we can aim for are certain self-critical practices that keep our *desire* and *ability* to speak for others in check. Alcoff does a good job of articulating some of these practices, which I shall further explicate and situate in the discourse of Orientalism. But first a caveat. It is obvious that not all cases of speaking for others are problematic. There exist situations in which speaking for others advances, aids, or relieves the situation of those spoken for. Usually these situations involve some person or persons who are, for whatever reason, incapable of speaking for themselves. This incapacity may arise from a desperate situation, such as a natural disaster or the breakout of war, where the immediacy of the situation requires that informed others outside of the situation communicate the plight of those in the disaster. This incapacity may also arise from more intentional and structural situations. For example, when certain persons are economically, socially, or militarily oppressed it may, again, be necessary to

speak for others to alleviate or advance their situation. But what makes the discourse of

Orientalism problematic is the fact that in the many instances where the Orient is spoken for, the

Orient is more than capable of speaking for itself. The goal of self-critical practices, then, is to

curtail and reduce these illegitimate instances of speaking for others. Alcoff distills four self-

critical practices, two of which deal with the *desire* aspect of speaking for others and the other

two that deal with the *capability* itself.

    "The impetus to speak must be carefully analyzed and, in many cases, fought against!"[137]

The desire to speak for others is born out of a desire for mastery and knowledge over others. For

being a master over others is to be in some kind of control over others. In the academic context,

this control manifests itself through the types of images, narratives, and stories that are told about

those who are spoken for. The Orientalist is able to control the imaginative narrative about the

Orient, which binds the Orient to a narrative that it must engage, counter, or reject. This first

critical practice has us fight against this desire for mastery. That is to say, if our immediate desire

is to speak for others, then this immediate desire must be, at the very least, questioned and

analyzed. It is not enough to justify a desire for speaking for others with phrases such as "It's my

gut feeling" or "I have an intuition that I should." For as this thesis has shown, too many

instances of speaking for others undermine the personal and moral autonomy of those spoken

for. Therefore, the desire to speak for others should be fought against in the sense that whenever

we have this desire we should suspend immediately acting on this desire until further self-

interrogation occurs.

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[137] Alcoff, *The Problem of Speaking for Others*, 24.

Furthermore, while disciplining the desire to speak for others by requiring a self-critical interrogatory practice is a good first step, I would add that we should aim to cultivate other desires that are more beneficial and less harmful in our interaction with others. I have in mind, mainly, the cultivation of thr practice of listening to others. In an academic context, where we are often speaking from a position of immense privilege and power, our desire to listen to others should trump our desire to speak for others. For listening to others first will undoubtedly aid our interrogatory practice. By listening to others we can see if our desire to speak for others is legitimate because the knowledge provided through that listening will further inform us about those others. If, for example, I were to speak for Syrian refugees in Lebanon so as to encourage a lecture hall to donate food, but I had not yet consulted those refugees, then I might be largely ignorant of their actual needs. By listening to them, then, I could revise my speaking for them so as to better represent their needs. Listen first, speak second, is a good general rule. But this is just the first self-critical practice. The second builds further into the interrogatory process.

"We must also interrogate the bearing of our location and context on what it is we are saying, and this should be an explicit part of every serious discursive practice we engage in."[138]

If questioning our desire to speak for others leads us to interrogate this desire, then what must be part of this interrogation is an analysis of the social location from which we are speaking and the context in which we are speaking. Specifically, we must ask what are the social locations we occupy (that of class, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, etc.) and how do these locations bear on our speaking or writing. Moreover, how might the specific context in which I am speaking bear on the meaning and truth of what I say. This is not to say that social location and context

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[138] Alcoff, *The Problem of Speaking for Others*, 25.

always bear negatively on our speaking or writing. In fact, there may be cases where location and

context have a positive influence on our speaking and writing. What matters most, though, is

only that this analysis is carried out before we speak for others.

For the Orientalist, being explicit about this analysis would mean being honest with herself,

her audience, and those she is speaking for. There should be no qualms if our social location and

context disallow certain research avenues or projects. For what this means is that the particular

instance of speaking or writing has the potential of being discursively dangerous in the sense that

it would lead to or perpetuate oppression. This consequence is to be distinguished from the

undermining of the personal and moral autonomy of those spoken for. That is to say, most cases

of speaking for others undermine the personal and moral autonomy of those spoken for (and this

may be construed as oppressive), but, on top of this, some instances of speaking for others lead

to economic, social, and/or political oppression. And this is where the next step of our

interrogatory practice continues.

"In order to evaluate attempts to speak for others in particular instances, we need to analyze the

probable or actual effects of the words on the discursive and material context. One cannot simply

look at the location of the speaker or her credentials to speak, nor can one look merely at the

propositional content of the speech; one must also look at where the speech goes and what it

does there."[139]

So not only should the speaker analyze the social location and context of their speaking, but also

what our speaking does to others. Too often our analysis centers on the content of our speaking

without paying attention to the material consequences of our speaking. But since all speaking has

material consequences, a complete analysis of our speaking must include a scrutiny of the

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[139] Alcoff, *The Problem of Speaking for Others*, 26.

content as well as the probable or actual material consequences. These consequences include, but are not limited to, questions concerning *where* our speech goes, *how* our speech is received by others, and *what* it does to others. If our speaking leads to the actual consequence X, and X happens to be or lead to oppression, then there will be precedence for us to abandon such speaking in the future. Actual material consequences will obviously be easier to track than probable material consequences, which will most likely be more difficult to anticipate. Nevertheless, this analysis should be carried out, and combined with an analysis of our social location and context, it can ensure that out speaking does less harm and more good to others.

Consider, for example, my second example of speaking for others in Chapter One. It read as follows:

> In 2005, President George W. Bush, in his White House address concerning the first "democratic" election in Iraq, told the nation "Today the people of Iraq have spoken to the world" and that they, Iraqis, "have shown their commitment to democracy." Bush would go on to laud the invasion, despite the bloody years ahead, which would throw into question the very idea of "success" or "democracy" in Iraq.

Here, we have the President of a particularly wealthy and strong nation speaking for the constituency of Iraq. The claim is made that they, Iraqis, have shown a commitment to democracy, i.e., democratic ideals in the formation and regulation of a nation state. Some of the salient features of the speaker's social location include his *racial identity*, i.e., white or Caucasian, his *political identity*, i.e., conservative, his *national identity*, i.e., North American, and his *occupational identity*, i.e., President of the United States of America. I would also add that in this specific instance and for this specific speaker, there is a *historical identity* that is especially relevant here. The fact that George W. Bush is the son of George H. W. Bush and that the latter also has a history with the people of Iraq lends itself to a historical identity of military

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domination, imperialism, and war mongering. Combined, these social identities all bear on the truth and meaning of what the President says.

It is difficult for Iraqis to take the President's speech as anything more than vacuous rhetoric given the amalgamation of social locations from which he speaks. Failing to analyze the President's social location and context works to discredit the truthfulness of his claims. Instead of viewing the President's claims as a true representation of the wants and needs of the Iraqi people, Iraqis and commentators can too easily question or dismiss these claims as nothing more than a thin veneer for imperial interests and domination. So, simultaneously, the President has undermined the personal autonomy of the Iraqis by disallowing them the ability to speak for themselves. He has also undermined the moral autonomy of the people of Iraq by creating a discourse that they must now engage, counter, or reject. These material consequences should be enough to deter speaking for others. For by not giving Iraqis a voice of their own and by a creating a discourse that defines them in certain respects, the speaker fails to see how and what his speaking does to others.

"Speaking should always carry with it an accountability and responsibility for what one says."[140]

In Chapter Two there was expressed a concern that if social location and context have the power to affect the truth and meaning of our speaking or writing, then there is a degree to which we cannot be held accountable for our speaking or writing. Given our inability to know everything about how our speaking will be received and what it will do to others, it would seem that there is a loss of control over what we say. There will simply be unaccounted for meanings and interpretations, and, so, there is a sense in which we are only partially in control of our speaking. But I believe this concern can be remedied by the aforementioned self-interrogatory process.

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[140] Alcoff, *The Problem of Speaking for Others*, 25.

To listen first and then inquire into how social location and context might affect the meaning and truth of what we say and what probable or actual material consequences might follow is to not take our ability to speak for others for granted. It is to understand that with this privilege comes an immense responsibility, one that some Orientalists have taken too lightly. Speaking for others is not a right, but a privilege. And given its long history of being abused, speaking for others now requires an interrogatory process to ensure that future instances will not turn out to be like many of those of the past.

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