Ashcroft, Bill and Pal Ahluwalia. “Culture as Imperialism.” Edward Said. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008. Pp. 82-114. Print.

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CULTURE AS IMPERIALISM

The English poet William Blake (1757–1827) once wrote that ‘the foundation of empire is art and science. Remove them or degrade them, and the empire is no more. Empire follows art and not *vice versa,* as Englishmen suppose’ (in Said 1994b: 65). The role of culture in keeping imperialism intact cannot be overestimated, because it is through culture that the assumption of the ‘divine right’ of imperial powers to rule is vigorously and authoritatively supported. Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* begins from this premise, that the institutional, political and economic operations of imperialism are nothing without the power of the culture that maintains them. What, for instance, enabled the British in India to rule a society of hundreds of millions with no more than 100,000 people? What is it about that presence that induced identification and sometimes admiration in Indian elites despite the history of expropriation and exploitation that characterised the Raj? Edward Said’s argument is that it is culture (despite its sometimes overweening assumptions) that provides this kind of moral power, which achieves a kind of ‘ideological pacification’ (ibid.: 67).

The struggle for domination, as Foucault shows, can be both systematic and hidden. There is an unceasing interaction between classes, nations, power centres and regions seeking to dominate and displace one another, but what makes the struggle more than a

random tooth-and-claw battle is that a struggle of values is involved (Said 1976: 36). What distinguishes the modern European empires from the Roman or the Spanish or the Arab, according to Said, is that they are systematic enterprises, constantly reinvested. They do not move into a country, loot it and leave. What keeps them there is not simple greed, but massively reinforced notions of the civilising mission. This is the notion that imperial nations have not only the right but the obligation to rule those nations 'lost in barbarism'. Like English philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–73), who stated that the British were in India 'because India requires us, that these are territories and peoples who beseech domination from us and that … without the English India would fall into ruin' (Said 1994b: 66), imperialists operated with a compelling sense of their right and obligation to rule. Much of this sense was present in and supported by European culture, which itself came to be conceived, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, as synonymous with 'the best that has been thought and said' (1865: 15).

Joseph Conrad is fascinating in this respect, for although he was an anti-imperialist, his belief that imperialism was inevitable made him complicit with its totalising assumptions. Conrad's Africans come out of a tradition of Africanism (that is, a way of 'knowing' Africa that is very similar in its processes to Orientalism) rather than any 'real' experience, and it is the almost sinister primitiveness of these Africans (even though, or perhaps *because,* it is at the same time the primitiveness of humanity itself) that justifies the mission of imperialism. What redeems the imperial process, according to Conrad, 'is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea' (Said 1993a: 81). If we are saved from the ruin of short-term conquest, says Said, then the idea of redemption takes this one step further. For the imperialist is redeemed by the self-justifying practice of imperialism's idea of mission and reveres this idea, even though it was constructed in the first place in order to achieve dominance over the colonised (ibid.: 82). Conrad captures two very different but intimately related aspects of imperialism: the idea that the power and opportunity to take over territory, *of itself*, gives you the right to dominance; and the practice that obscures this idea by developing 'a justificatory regime of self-aggrandizing, self-originating authority interposed between the victim of imperialism and its perpetrator' (ibid.: 82).

It is the profound and ubiquitous power of this self-aggrandising authority that maintains the belief that a particular society has access to those civilised and civilising values from which the world could benefit. Particularly interesting is the fact that within the metropoles themselves, imperial ideology and rhetoric remained unchallenged by socially reformist movements, such as the liberal movement, working-class movements or the feminist movement. 'They were all imperialist by and large' (Said 1994b: 67). Said's point is that imperial culture was built upon assumptions so deep that they never entered into discussions of social reform and justice. Some of this might have come, as it does today, from ignorance or lack of interest, but, by and large, by the late nineteenth century, Europe had erected an edifice of culture so hugely confident, authoritative and self-congratulatory that its imperial assumptions, its centralising of European life and its complicity in the civilising mission simply could not be questioned.

Two themes dominate *Culture and Imperialism*. The first is an analysis of the 'general worldwide pattern of imperial culture' that develops to both justify and reinforce the establishment and exploitation of empire; the second is the counterbalance to this, 'the historical experience of resistance against empire' (Said 1993a: xii). Metropolitan Europeans have been often alarmed at the apparently sudden emergence of newly empowered voices demanding that their narratives be heard. But such voices have been there for a long time.

> [To] ignore or otherwise discount the overlapping experience of Westerners and Orientals, the interdependence of cultural terrains in which colonizer and colonized co-existed and battled each other through projections as well as rival geographies, narratives, and histories, is to miss what is essential about the world in the past century.
>
> (ibid.: xxii–xxiii)

Here, we see that the various modes of engagement with imperial power are active and continuous from the moment of colonisation. It is the overlapping of the imperial culture and the contestatory discourse of resistance that characterises Said's examination of both the operation of imperialism within European culture and the operation of resistance in colonised societies. Indeed, far from having no theory of resistance, as some have claimed, this interaction is central to his theory of resistance.

One thing that always fascinated and troubled Said is the ease with which the aesthetic productions of high culture can proceed with very little regard to the violence and injustices of the political institutions of the society within which they are conceived. The ideas about inferior races ('niggers') or colonial expansion held by writers such as historian, essayist and critic Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), art and architecture critic John Ruskin (1819–1900), or even novelists Charles Dickens (1812–70) and William Thackeray (1811–63) are relegated 'to a very different department from that of culture, culture being the elevated area of activity in which they "truly" belong and in which they did their really important work' (ibid.: xiv). All cultural production has a deep investment in the political character of its society, because this is what drives and energises it. But this relationship is often invisible, and that is what makes ideology so effective. In an early interview, Said observed that 'culture is not made exclusively or even principally by heroes or radicals all the time, but by great anonymous movements whose function is to keep things going, keep things in being' (Said 1976: 34). The conservative and anonymous nature of cultural formations explains something of the uncontested and very complicated relationship between culture and political ideology. In time, 'culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates "us" from "them", almost always with some degree of xenophobia' (Said 1993a: xiii). Sadly, though perhaps not unexpectedly, it becomes a function of traditional intellectuals unwittingly to legitimate dominant cultural and political ideologies focused on the nation or the empire. This is precisely the way Orientalists and Orientalist discourse work to consolidate the imperial dominance of Europe.

Culture is both a function of and a *source* of identity, and this explains the return to some form of cultural traditionalism in post-colonial societies, often in the form of religious or national fundamentalism. Imperial culture can be the most powerful agent of imperial hegemony (see p. 41) in the colonised world. As discussed, Gauri Viswanathan's (1987) well-known thesis of the invention of the discipline of English literature study to 'civilise' India is a good example of this. Alternatively, culture also becomes one of the most powerful agents of resistance in post-colonial societies. The continuing problem with such resistance is that a decolonising culture, by becoming monist in its rhetoric, often identifying strongly with religious or

national fundamentalism, may tend to take over the hegemonic function of imperial culture.

By 'culture' Said means:

> all those practices, like the arts of description, communication and representation, which have relative autonomy from the economic, social and political realms, and which often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure (Said 1993a: xii);
>
> a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s (ibid: xiii).

Said's view of culture here appears to be somewhat different from Raymond Williams's definition of culture as 'a whole way of life' (1958). For it is difficult to see how a community's culture can be separated from its economic, social and political practices, all of which help constitute its way of understanding and constructing its world. However, it is clear that the objects of study of the human sciences are cultural ideas and systems, in which they share very little with, say, the natural sciences.

Said's conception of culture sometimes seems contradictory because his own preferences seem inexorably and paradoxically drawn towards the 'high' culture of the literary and artistic canon. But high culture is possibly most deserving of attention, for its deep links to political ideology are invariably obscured by its assertion of transcendence and its appeal to a 'universal' humanity. *Culture and Imperialism* 'deuniversalises' imperial culture by revealing its quite specific social provenance. Ultimately, this is the efficacy of Said's assertion of culture as imperialism, because, in its presentation, its critical traditions and the rhetoric surrounding it, 'Culture' has been habitually presented as existing in a realm beyond politics.

Said refers to Raymond Williams, whom he regards as a great critic but one who demonstrates a limitation, in his feeling that English literature is mainly about England. This is associated with the idea that works of literature are autonomous, but Said's concept of the text's worldliness allows him to show that literature itself makes constant references to itself as participating in Europe's overseas expansion, creating what Williams calls 'structures of feeling' that 'support, elaborate and consolidate the practice of empire' (Said 1993a: 14). 'Neither

culture nor imperialism is inert, and so the connections between them as historical experiences are dynamic and complex' (ibid.: 15).

In its most general sense, imperialism refers to the formation of an empire, and as such has been an aspect of all periods of history in which one nation has extended its domination over one or several neighbouring nations. Said's definition of imperialism, however, is one that specifically invokes the active effects of culture. Imperialism for him is 'the practice, theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory' (ibid.: 8), a process distinct from colonialism, which is 'the implanting of settlements on a distant territory'. Empire is the relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. Imperialism distinguishes itself from empire, because while the establishment of empires by the active colonisation of territories has ended, imperialism 'lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices' (ibid.: 8). Its very investment in culture makes imperialism a force that exists far beyond a geographical empire, corresponding in contemporary times to what Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72), the first President of Ghana, called 'neocolonialism' (1965).

Although Said is keen to discover how the idea and the practice of imperialism gained the consistency and density of continuous enterprise, he does not have a systematic theory of imperialism, nor does he problematise it in any extended way, since he draws upon and engages the work of traditional scholars. Rather, his aim is to expose the link between culture and imperialism, to reveal culture as imperialism. For there is more to imperialism than colonialism. Imperial discourse demonstrates a constantly circulating assumption that native peoples should be subjugated and that the *imperium* had an almost metaphysical right to do so (Said 1993a: 10). This implies a dense relationship between imperial aims and general national culture that, in imperial centres such as Britain, is concealed by the tenacious and widespread rhetoric about the universality of culture.

THE NOVEL AND EMPIRE

Passages like the one in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in which Marlow reflects on the 'idea' behind imperialism as somehow 'redeeming it'

are not lifted out of the novel 'like a message out of a bottle', claims Said. Conrad's argument 'is inscribed right in the very form of narrative as he inherited it and as he practised it' (Said 1993a: 82). The novel is of crucial importance to Said's analysis of imperial culture because, in his view, without empire 'there is no European novel as we know it' and, if we study the impulses giving rise to it, 'we shall see the far from accidental convergence between the patterns of narrative authority constitutive of the novel on the one hand, and, on the other, a complex ideological configuration underlying the tendency to imperialism' (ibid.: 82). It is not that the novel – or the culture in the broad sense – 'caused' imperialism, but that the novel – as a cultural artefact of bourgeois society – and imperialism are unthinkable without each other (ibid.: 84). Furthermore, this link was peculiarly Anglocentric, for, while France had more highly developed intellectual institutions, the rise and dominance of the English novel during the nineteenth century were virtually undisputed. Thus, the durable and continually reinforced power of British imperialism was elaborated and articulated in the novel in a way not found elsewhere (ibid.: 87). The continuity of British imperial policy throughout the nineteenth century is accompanied actively by the novel's depiction of Britain as an imperial centre. The novel's function, furthermore, is not to ask questions about this idea, but to 'keep the empire more or less in place' (ibid.: 88).

Borrowing from Williams's notion of a culture's 'structure of feeling', Said calls this a 'structure of attitude and reference' that builds up gradually in concert with the novel. There are at least four interpretative consequences of this. First, there is an unusual organic continuity between earlier narratives not overtly concerned with empire and those later ones which write explicitly about it (ibid.: 89). Second, novels participate in, contribute to and help to reinforce perceptions and attitudes about England and the world. Along with an assumption of the centrality and sometimes universality of English values and attitudes goes an unwavering view of overseas territories (ibid.: 89). Third, all English novelists of the mid-nineteenth century accepted a globalised view of the vast overseas reach of British power. Novelists aligned the holding of power and privilege abroad with the holding of comparable power at home (ibid.: 90). Fourth, this structure connecting novels to one another has no

existence outside the novels themselves. It is not a policy or a meta-discourse elaborated in any formal way, but a structure of attitude and reference that finds concrete reference in particular novels themselves (ibid.: 91). Thus, the consolidation of authority is made to appear both normative and sovereign, self-validating in the course of the narrative (ibid.: 92). Although novels do not cause people to go out and colonise, they rarely stand in the way of the accelerating imperial process. This operation of the novels without any recourse to a meta-narrative of empire is an excellent demonstration of the worldliness of the texts and their affiliations to a range of social and cultural realities. For this worldliness, this locatedness of the novels, is *itself* the demonstration of the pervasiveness of imperialism.

CONTRAPUNTAL READING

Because the underlying 'structure of attitude and reference' examined by Said has no existence outside the novels themselves, they must be read in a particular way to illuminate this structure. Consequently, Said's most innovative contribution to identifying the nature of the dense relationship between European culture and the imperial enterprise is his formulation of a mode of reading that he calls 'contrapuntal'. This method is particularly relevant to reading novels, since the novel had a unique relationship with the imperial process, but contrapuntal reading is not limited to novels.

Contrapuntal reading is a form of 'reading back' from the perspective of the colonised, to show how the submerged but crucial presence of the empire emerges in canonical texts. As we begin to read, not univocally but *contrapuntally,* with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history and of those other subjected and concealed histories against which the dominant discourse acts (Said 1993a: 59), we obtain a very different sense of what is going on in the text.

We read a text contrapuntally, for example, 'when we read it with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England' (ibid.: 78). Contrapuntality emerges out of the tension and complexity of Said's own identity, that text of self that he is continually writing, because it

involves a continual dialogue between the different and sometimes apparently contradictory dimensions of his own worldliness.

The idea for contrapuntal reading came from Said's admiration for the Canadian virtuoso pianist Glenn Gould, a person who 'exemplified contrapuntal performance' (Robbins *et al*. 1994: 21) in his ability to elaborate intricately a particular musical theme. What Said particularly admired in Gould was the element of invention, 'the finding of a theme and developing it contrapuntally so that all of its possibilities are articulated, expressed and elaborated' (Said 2006: 128). Similarly, contrapuntal reading is a technique of theme and variation by which a counterpoint is established between the imperial narrative and the post-colonial perspective, a 'counter-narrative' that keeps penetrating beneath the surface of individual texts to elaborate the ubiquitous presence of imperialism in canonical culture. As Said points out:

> In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work.
>
> (1993a: 59–60)

Contrapuntal reading takes both (or all) dimensions of this polyphony into account, rather than the dominant one, in order to discover what a univocal reading might conceal about the political worldliness of the canonical text.

Such a reading aims particularly to reveal the pervasive constitutive power of imperialism to those texts, since the empire 'functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction' (ibid.: 75). It is the process of making that code visible that becomes the business of a contrapuntal reading, which reads the texts of the canon 'as a polyphonic accompaniment to the expansion of Europe' (ibid.: 71). Approaching the constitutive nature of imperialism polyphonically in this way involves taking into account the perspectives of both imperialism and anti-imperial resistance. This avoids a 'rhetoric of blame' by revealing the intertwined and overlapping histories of metropolitan and formerly colonised societies (ibid.: 19). Once we discern the 'massively knotted

and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences – of women, of Westerners, of Blacks, of national states and cultures' (ibid.: 36) – we can avoid the reductive and essentialising division of categories of social life, and consequently avoid the rhetoric of blame that emerges from such reductiveness. Cultural experience and cultural forms are 'radically, quintessentially hybrid' claims Said (ibid.: 68), and although it has been the practice in Western philosophy to isolate the aesthetic and cultural realms from the worldly domain, 'it is now time to join them' (ibid.: 68). Thus, the worldliness of the text manifests itself in a dense network of affiliations within and between cultures and societies.

A contrapuntal perspective can make connections between quite discrepant experiences, such as 'coronation rituals in England and the Indian durbars of the late nineteenth century' (ibid.: 36). A particularly good example of the value of a contrapuntal perspective is the contradictory place of Kipling's picture of India in *Kim* in the development of the English novel, on the one hand, and the development of Indian independence, on the other. 'Either the novel or the political movement represented or interpreted without the other misses the crucial discrepancy between the two given to them by the actual experience of empire' (ibid.: 36). So contrapuntal reading does not simply exist as a form of refutation or contestation, but as a way of showing the dense interrelationship of imperial and colonial societies.

Said's contrapuntal reading of major works has often been misunderstood as a blanket dismissal of all canonical literature as imperialist. But it is crucial to see that his reading of these works comes out of a considerable admiration for them. 'Contrapuntal' reading must take the works themselves seriously to have any effect. In *Freud and the Non-European* (Said 2003a), he takes a moment to rebut criticisms that he rejects such writers out of hand.

> On the contrary, I am always trying to understand figures from the past whom I admire, even as I point out how bound they were by the perspectives of their own cultural moment … My approach tries to see them in their context as accurately as possible, but then … I see them contrapuntally, that is, as figures whose writing travels across temporal, cultural and ideological boundaries in unforeseen ways.
>
> (ibid.: 23–4)

GEOGRAPHY

Said's own sense of the contrapuntal process was that it is a way of 'rethinking geography' (Robbins *et al*. 1994: 21) and he regards the emphasis on geography in *Culture and Imperialism* and in *Orientalism* as extremely important (ibid.: 21). Indeed, the concern with geography becomes insistent throughout his work, not only because of his own dislocation and exile, but because the obscuring of those local realities that are crucial to the formation and the grounding of any text is a prominent feature of the universalising processes of imperial dominance. *Orientalism* raised the importance of 'imaginative geographies and their representation' (Said 1978a: 49). To have a discipline of learned study such as Orientalism based on some geographical field says much about Orientalist discourse itself, and much more about how the world is divided geographically in the imperial imagination.

Rather than just another way of reading the text, contrapuntal reading uncovers the geographical reality of imperialism and its profound material effects upon a large proportion of the globe. Said suggested in an interview in 1994, somewhat hopefully perhaps, that the historical Western (and particularly US) blindness to geography might be changing, that a 'kind of paradigm shift is occurring; we are perhaps now acceding to a new, invigorated sense of looking at the struggle over geography in interesting and imaginative ways' (Robbins *et al*. 1994: 21). Certainly, in post-colonial discourses, the local place, culture and community are becoming ever more insistent. But also, work such as Amiel Alcalai's *Arabs and Jews: Rethinking Levantine Culture,* Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* and Bernard Smith's *Imagining the Pacific* represent a way of conceiving human history not just in geographical terms, but in terms of the *struggle* over geography (ibid.: 21). The struggle over the constitution of place has been a major feature of cultural relationships within imperialism since Mercator's invention of the projection atlas.

Something of the urgency of geographical veracity can be found in an interview Said gave as early as 1976. In this interview, he stresses, as he so often does, the paradoxical 'worldliness' of his own critical position, in that he comes from 'a part of the world whose modern history is largely intelligible as the result of colonialism, and whose present travail cannot be detached from the operations of imperialism' (Said 1976: 36). Colonialism and imperialism are not abstractions for

Said; 'they are specific experiences and forms of life that have an almost unbearable concreteness' (ibid.: 36). This is a concreteness heavily invested in local geography and the struggle over its representation, a local reality that remains paradoxical in Said's work since he has been exiled from it for most of his life.

Most cultural historians and literary scholars, Said believes, have failed to note the geographical notation, the theoretical mapping and charting of territory, in Western fiction, historical writing and philosophical discourse. This notation is particularly pertinent to the assertion of cultural dominance.

> There is first the authority of the European observer – traveller, merchant, scholar, historian, novelist. Then there is the hierarchy of spaces by which the metropolitan centre and, gradually, the metropolitan economy are seen as dependent upon an overseas system of territorial control, economic exploitation, and a socio-cultural vision; without these stability and prosperity at 'home' … would not be possible.
>
> (Said 1993a: 69)

This reliance upon the colonised territories cannot be over-emphasised. Underlying social and cultural 'spaces' are 'territories, lands, geographical domains, the actual geographical underpinnings' of the imperial contest, for geographical possession of land is what empire is all about. 'Imperialism and the culture associated with it affirm both the primacy of geography and an ideology about control of territory' (ibid.: 93).

In all the instances of the appearance of the empire in cultural products such as novels, 'the facts of empire are associated with sustained possession, with far-flung and sometimes unknown spaces, with eccentric or unacceptable human beings, with fortune-enhancing or fantasized activities like emigration, money-making, and sexual adventure' (ibid.: 75). The perspective of the inhabitants of those far-flung places, indeed, the people themselves, only exist (when they are not actively debased as 'primitives' or 'cannibals') as shadowy absences at the edges of the European consciousness. Contrapuntal reading acts to give those absences a presence.

AUSTEN'S *MANSFIELD PARK*

Said's best-known example of a contrapuntal analysis is his reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park,* in which Sir Thomas Bertram's absence

from Mansfield Park, tending to his Antiguan plantations, leads to a process of genteel but worrying dissolution among the young people left in the inadequate care of Lady Bertram and Mrs Norris. A gradual sense of freedom and lawlessness is about to result in the performance of a play called *Lovers' Vows* when Sir Thomas returns and methodically puts things to rights, like 'Crusoe setting things in order', or 'an early Protestant eliminating all traces of frivolous behaviour' (Said 1993a: 104). The contrapuntal reading is one that brings the reality of Antigua to the fore in this process. Sir Thomas, we assume, does exactly the same thing on his Antiguan plantations, methodically and purposefully maintaining control over his colonial domain with an unimpeachable sense of his own authority:

> More clearly than anywhere else in her fiction, Austen here synchronizes domestic with international authority, making it plain that the values associated with such higher things as ordination, law, and propriety must be grounded firmly in actual rule over and possession of territory. She sees that to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate in close, not to say inevitable association with it. What assures the domestic tranquillity and attractive harmony of one is the productivity and regulated discipline of the other.
>
> (ibid.: 104)

Mansfield Park itself exists as both metaphor and metonymy of the colonial domain of Sir Thomas, without whose overseas properties the ordered life of the Park could not function.

Fanny Price, the poor niece, the orphaned child, displays an integrity of character favourable to Sir Thomas, and gradually acquires a status superior to her more fortunate relatives. But when she is forced to return to her home in Portsmouth, we find another, even more subtle connection with empire. Her return is a rediscovery of the limitation, the confinement, the meanness of situation and spirit that poverty entails. The message is an imperial one: 'To earn the right to Mansfield Park you must first leave home as a kind of transported commodity … but then you have the promise of future wealth' (ibid.: 106). Fanny's movement is a smaller-scale version of the larger colonial movements of Sir Thomas, whose estate she inherits.

However, in reading the novel, there is a corresponding movement to the one that searches out the relevance of references to colonial

holdings. Whereas the references to Antigua uncover hidden aspects of the dependency of British wealth upon overseas holdings, there is also, says Said, a need to try to understand why Austen gave Antigua such importance. Britain and, to a lesser degree, France both wanted to make their empires long-term, profitable, ongoing concerns, and they competed in this enterprise. Thus British colonial possessions in Jane Austen's time were a crucial setting for Anglo-French competition as both empires struggled for dominance in the sugar industry (ibid.: 107).

Austen's Antigua is not just a way of marking the outer limits of Mansfield Park's domestic improvements or an allusion to the 'mercantile venturesomeness of acquiring overseas dominions as a source for local fortune'. It is a way of signifying 'contests of ideas, struggles with Napoleonic France, awareness of seismic economic and social change during a revolutionary period in world history' (ibid.: 112). Further, Antigua holds a precise place in Austen's moral geography, because the Bertrams could not have been possible without the slave trade, sugar and the colonial planter class.

The consequence of a contrapuntal reading is that the novel cannot simply be restored to the canon of 'great literary masterpieces'. Such a reading, although it is one among many, changes for ever the way in which the novel can be read. *Mansfield Park* 'steadily, if unobtrusively, opens up a broad expanse of domestic imperialist culture without which Britain's subsequent acquisition of territory would not have been possible' (ibid.: 114). But the structure of attitude and reference that supports the novel cannot be accessed without reading the novel itself carefully. Doing this,

> we can sense how ideas about dependent races and territories were held both by foreign office executives, colonial bureaucrats, and military strategists and by intelligent novel-readers educating themselves in the fine points of moral evaluation, literary balance, and stylistic finish.
>
> (ibid.: 114)

THE CULTURAL INTEGRITY OF EMPIRE

While a contrapuntal reading allows us to see the operation of imperialism in particular texts, it also opens up the almost total relation between cultural and political practices in global imperialism.

One fascinating aspect of the subject is 'how culture participated in imperialism yet was somehow excused from its role' (Said 1993a: 128). Imperialism itself only became an actively espoused doctrine after the 1880s, yet the exponents and propagandists of empire during this time deploy a language 'whose imagery of growth, fertility, and expansion, whose ideological structure of property and identity, whose ideological discrimination between "us" and "them" had already matured elsewhere – in fiction, political science, racial theory, travel writing' (ibid.: 128). So, by the time of the rise of the overt doctrine of imperialism, even the most questionable and hysterical assertions of dominance are announced as virtually universally agreed truths. These assumptions have percolated up by this time through the culture itself.

When a cultural form or discourse aspired to wholeness or totality, when it assumed its own universality, this was usually because its cultural assumptions were backed by a quite explicit demonstration of political power. Such specific material links between culture and power are outlined by V.G. Kiernan in an analysis of Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King,* which lists the staggering range of British overseas campaigns, all of them resulting in the consolidation or acquisition of territorial gain, to which Tennyson was 'sometimes witness, sometimes connected' (ibid.: 127). Victorian writers were witnesses to an unprecedented display of British power during this time, so it was 'logical and easy to identify themselves in one way or another with this power' (ibid.: 127) since they already identified with Britain domestically. When the theme of imperialism is stated baldly by someone like Carlyle, 'it gathers to it by affiliation a vast number of assenting, yet at the same time more interesting, cultural versions, each with its own inflections, pleasures, formal characteristics' (ibid.: 128). This network of affiliations becomes the repository of a range of implicit assumptions about Britain and British power that tends to separate culture from an explicit identification with imperialism.

Said makes a systematic list of the various fields in which imperial power is taken for granted in a way which consequently determines the nature of the observations and beliefs prevalent in various discourses:

1 a link between geography and ontology (see p. 56) as the ontological distinction between the West and the rest of the world becomes taken for granted;

2 a disciplinary consolidation of race thinking comes about;
3 historical research comes to accept the active domination of the world by the West as a canonical branch of study;
4 the domination of the West becomes an active influence woven into the structures of popular culture, fiction, and the rhetoric of history, philosophy and geography, and has a material impact on the environments of colonised countries, on the administration and architecture of colonial cities and the emergence of new imperial elites, cultures and subcultures;
5 a very active creative dimension to imperial control saw Orientalist, Africanist and Americanist discourses weaving in and out of historical writing, painting, fiction and popular culture.

VERDI'S *AIDA*

Despite the deep connections between the novel and British imperialism, the structure of attitude and reference which permeates cultural activity, and hence provides the implicit justification for imperialism, can be found in a great variety of European cultural forms. A contrapuntal reading interferes with those 'apparently stable and impermeable categories founded on genre, periodization, nationality or style' (Said 1993a: 134): categories which presume that Western culture is entirely independent of other cultures and of 'the worldly pursuits of power, authority, privilege and dominance' (ibid.: 134). Wherever we look in European culture of the nineteenth century, we find a particularly dense web of affiliations with the imperial process.

Verdi's opera *Aida* (first performed Decemver 1871) is virtually synonymous with 'grand opera'. Enormously popular and widely known, being performed, for instance, more times than any other opera by the New York Metropolitan Opera, *Aida* raises complex questions about 'what connects it to its historical and cultural moment in the West' (ibid.: 135). Like well-known novels, the opera appears to dwell in the rarefied realm of great art, the nature of its subject matter rarely being questioned by its audiences. But *Aida*'s peculiarities, 'its subject matter and setting, its monumental grandeur, its strangely affecting visual and musical effects, its overdeveloped music and constricted domestic situation, its eccentric place in Verdi's career' (ibid.: 137), require, according to Said, a contrapuntal reading that can come to terms with its radical

hybridity and its location in both the history of culture and the experience of overseas domination. 'As a highly specialised form of aesthetic memory, *Aida* embodies, as it was intended to do, the authority of Europe's version of Egypt at a moment in its nineteenth-century history' (ibid.: 151). A contrapuntal appreciation reveals its 'structure of reference and attitude', 'a web of affiliations, connections, decisions, and collaborations, which can be read as leaving a set of ghostly notations in the opera's visual and musical text' (ibid.: 151).

Its story, for instance – of the Egyptian hero of a successful campaign against an Ethiopian force who is impugned as a traitor, sentenced to death and dies of asphyxiation – recalls the rivalry of imperial powers in the Middle East. Although suspicious of Egyptian ruler Khedive Ismail's designs on Ethiopia, the British encouraged his moves in East Africa as a way of blocking French and Italian ambitions in Somalia and Ethiopia. From a French point of view, *Aida* dramatised the dangers of a successful Egyptian policy of force in Ethiopia.

Furthermore, Ismail's modernising pretensions resulted in the splitting of Cairo into a medieval 'native city' without amenities, and a colonial city that attempted to emulate the great European cities. The opera house itself was built on the divide between these two cities, and *Aida*'s Egyptian identity was part of the new city's European façade, with no congruence at all between it and Cairo. *Aida,* commissioned for the opening of the opera house, was a luxury purchased by credit for a tiny clientele, mostly European, whose entertainment was incidental to their real purpose, which was to supply credit to Ismail's development plans. The opera recalls, therefore, 'a precise historical moment and a specifically dated aesthetic form, an imperial spectacle designed to alienate and impress an almost exclusively European audience' (ibid.: 156). This is far from its place in the European repertoire today, yet 'the empire remains, in inflection, and traces, to be read, seen and heard' (ibid.: 157).

It is, of course, very easy to forget the unpleasant aspects of what goes on 'out there' if one belongs to the powerful culture. This, indeed, is a subtle aspect of the complicity of European culture in the imperial process. Its ideology of universality, its assumptions of European centrality and value make it peculiarly amenable to obscuring that imperial politics of power from which it draws sustenance. *Aida* is a particularly good example of the way in which European cultural forms divest themselves of any apparent connection to the

world of their creation, as they assume the myths of transcendence that attach to the works of classical Western art.

KIPLING'S *KIM*

The usefulness of contrapuntal reading lies in its ability to reveal a text's reliance on, and endorsement of, the political structures and institutions of imperialism through clues that might otherwise go undetected. In Rudyard Kipling's *Kim,* however, such a reading must operate in a slightly different way, because the presence of empire is so manifest and overt. Yet contrapuntality does provide two fundamental insights. First, that Kipling is writing not simply from the authoritative viewpoint of a White man in a colony but from the perspective of 'a massive colonial system whose economy, functioning and history had acquired the status of a virtual fact of nature' (Said 1993a: 162). Second, *Kim* was written at a specific time in history, a time when the relationship between Britain and India was changing. A contrapuntal reading, then, plunges deep into the colonial context of the novel, not simply to contextualise it, but to show how specific operations of its themes and structure emanate from and reflect those specific historical conditions. 'We are naturally entitled to read *Kim* as a novel belonging to the world's greatest literature', says Said, yet 'by the same token, we must not unilaterally abrogate the connections *in it*' (ibid.: 175).

One example of such a connection is the overwhelming maleness of the novel, which may seem an unsurprising feature of a book written at the turn of the twentieth century, but which in *Kim* is indicative of the specific importance to empire of male metaphors of sport and competition. The dominant metaphor of this kind in *Kim* is the 'Great Game' of the imperial mission, the game of British intelligence in India. To be 'eternally pestered by women', says Kim, is 'to be hindered in playing the Great Game, which is best played by men alone' (ibid.: 165). The links between the operations of the Secret Service and this sporting metaphor are especially pertinent to the role of the empire in India but also concur with the aims of Kipling's contemporary, Baden Powell, whose 'scheme of imperial authority culminating in the great Boy Scout structure "fortifying the wall of empire"' (ibid.: 166) is a particular example of the importance to empire of images of manly sporting endeavour.

Another contrapuntal insight is that for Kipling there was no conflict between his empathy for India and Indians and his belief in the rightness and efficacy of British rule. Whereas Edmund Wilson suggests that the reader might expect that Kim will sooner or later come to see that he is 'delivering into bondage to the British invaders those whom he has always considered his own people' (ibid.: 175), Said retorts that any such conflict might seem unresolved in the novel because there simply is no conflict, because for him it was India's best destiny to be ruled by England. 'There were no appreciable deterrents to the imperialist world view Kipling held, any more than there were deterrents for imperialism for Conrad' (ibid.: 176).

Thus, his fiction demonstrates 'contrapuntal' ironies despite the presence of obvious imperial themes. For instance, the 'Indian Mutiny' was a catastrophe that cemented the division between the British administration and the Indian populace for ever. For an Indian not to have felt a deep repugnance for the British reprisals would have been very uncommon, yet Kipling has an old veteran telling Kim and his companion that 'a madness ate into the army' that 'chose to kill the Sahib's wives and children. Then came the Sahibs from over the sea and called them to most strict account' (ibid.: 178). Clearly, this extreme British view of the mutiny takes leave of the world of history and enters 'the world of imperialist polemic, in which the native is naturally a delinquent, the white a stern but moral judge and parent' (ibid.: 178). Not only does Kipling fail to show us two worlds in conflict, 'he has studiously given us only one, and eliminated any chance of conflict appearing altogether' (ibid.: 179). A similar case occurs when Kipling has the widow of Kula make the comment, when a District Superintendent of Police trots by, that 'These be the sort to oversee justice. They know the land and the customs of the land' (ibid.: 179), which is Kipling's way of 'demonstrating that natives accept colonial rule so long as it is the right kind. Historically this has always been how European imperialism made itself palatable to itself' (ibid.: 180).

Therefore, suggests Said, if we read *Kim* in the ways it has normally been read, as a boy's adventure or a rich and lovingly detailed panorama of Indian life, we are simply not reading the novel that Kipling actually wrote (ibid.: 180). The method by which British rule erected the myth of its own permanence was to create these fantasies of approval, as mirror reflections of its own belief in the civilising

mission. As Francis Hutchins says, 'An India of the imagination was created which contained no elements of either social change or political menace' (cited in Said 1993a: 180). This is not to say, of course, that Kipling consciously fabricated a propagandist view of India. Rather, his own deep belief in the value of British rule, and the imperialist dominance of narrative, conspired to create this India of the imagination for the European and Indian alike. An extension of this contradictory attitude can be found in the profound Oriental stereotyping of Indians, for just as Kipling could not imagine 'an India in historical flux *out* of British control, he could not imagine Indians who could be effective and serious in what he and others of the time considered exclusively Western pursuits' (ibid.: 185).

But, at the same time, the energy and optimism of the novel set it apart from European writing of the period, which tended to dwell on the 'debasement of contemporary life, the extinction of all dreams of passion, success, and exotic adventure' (ibid.: 192). On the contrary, *Kim* shows how the expatriate European, from whom nothing is held back, can enjoy a life of 'lush complexity' in India, and the absence of hindrances to this enjoyment is due to its imperialist vision (ibid.: 192). Similarly, the novel's luxurious and spatial expansiveness contrasts markedly with the 'tight, relentlessly unforgiving temporal structure of the European novels contemporary with it'. In *Kim,* time never seems to be the enemy for the White man because the geography itself seems to be so open and available to freedom of movement (ibid.: 193).

All the ambivalences and contradictions of the novel emerge from its unquestioning acceptance of the efficacy of British rule. *Kim* is neither a simple imperialist apologetic nor a naively blind though lavishly decorated panorama of India. It is the realisation of

> [a] great and cumulative process, which in the closing years of the nineteenth century is reaching its last major moment before Indian independence: on the one hand, surveillance and control over India; on the other, love for and fascinated attention to its every detail.
>
> (ibid.: 195)

Thus, the novel is not a political tract, but an engagement with an India that Kipling loved but could not have. This is the book's central meaning, for *Kim* is 'a great document of its aesthetic moment', a milestone along the way to Indian independence (ibid.: 196).

CAMUS'S *L'ÉTRANGER*

Albert Camus is a writer whose work has been co-opted so completely into the canon of contemporary European literature that the facts of France's colonisation of Algeria, facts that can be read contrapuntally in the novels, remain significant by their absence in his writings. His work is habitually read as if Algeria didn't exist, or as if the location didn't matter. But to read *L'Étranger,* for instance, as a comment on France under Nazi occupation is to incorporate much of the novel's own concealment of the facts of locale and geography. Although European criticism is likely

> to believe that Camus represents the tragically immobilised French consciousness of the *European* crisis near one of its great watersheds … insofar as his work clearly alludes to Algeria, Camus's general concern is the actual state of Franco-Algerian affairs, not their history.
>
> (Said 1993a: 211)

Yet the Algerian locale seems incidental to the pressing moral issues the novels seem to canvas, and his novels are still read 'as parables of the human condition' (ibid.: 212). The fact that Meursault kills an Arab, or that Arabs die in *La Peste* – indeed, the fact that Arabs exist, even as unnamed presences in the novels – appears to be incidental.

But it is this very elision that suggests what a contrapuntal reading can reveal: that the novels give ample detail about that process of French imperial conquest that began in 1830 and continued during Camus's life, ultimately projecting into the composition of the texts themselves (ibid.: 212). His writing is 'an element in France's methodically constructed political geography of Algeria' (ibid.: 212). Just when the British were leaving India, we find Camus demonstrating an 'extraordinarily belated' colonial sensibility, continuing to enact an imperialism that was long past its heyday.

The correspondence between how Camus incorporates both the Arab population and the overwhelmingly French infrastructure into his novels, and the ways in which schoolbooks account for French colonialism is arresting. The novels and short stories, in a sense, narrate the result of a victory won over a pacified, decimated Muslim population. By 'confirming and consolidating French priority, Camus neither disputes nor dissents from the campaign for sovereignty waged

against Algerian Muslims for over a hundred years' (ibid.: 219). Hence, his writings 'very precisely distil the traditions, idioms, and discursive strategies of France's appropriation of Algeria' (ibid.: 223). Ultimately, Camus's narratives 'have a negative vitality, in which the tragic human seriousness of the colonial effort achieves its last great clarification before ruin overtakes it. They express a waste and sadness we have still not completely understood or recovered from' (ibid.: 224).

MAPPING A THEORY OF RESISTANCE

Said's attention to the presence of the politics of imperialism within the literature and music of the imperial powers often confused critics into accusing him of inordinate attention to Western culture, and a corresponding lack of attention to those of the colonised societies. This ignores Said's often reiterated claim that in *Orientalism,* for instance, he was interested precisely in the operation of the dominant culture. *Culture and Imperialism* does redress, however, the absence of those cultures of resistance to imperialism that spread throughout the various European empires. But the crucial feature of a contrapuntal reading is that it reveals the overlapping and intersection of imperialism and its resistance. This is the value of contrapuntality, because it enables the critic to detect the constant counterpoint of power and resistance operating within the colonised world.

In the 'Afterword' to the 1995 edition of *Orientalism,* Said made the revealing statement that most of his work has been attacked for 'its "residual" humanism, its theoretical inconsistencies, its insufficient, perhaps even sentimental treatment of agency', adding 'I am glad that it has!' He makes no apologies for the fact that *Orientalism* is 'a partisan book, not a theoretical machine' (Said 1995a: 340). These reflections, nearly twenty years after the publication of *Orientalism*, are an important entry to an understanding of his strategy for resistance, and a key to the second major theme of *Culture and Imperialism* – the historical experience of resistance against empire. As Said notes, he has borne the brunt of an attack that suggests that his work has not lived up to the promise of offering resistance primarily because of the manner in which he conceives agency.

A central problem with ideas of resistance is the overly simplistic conflation of resistance with oppositionality. This assumes that in the fraught and vigorous engagement between imperial discourse and the

consciousness of the colonised, the only avenue of resistance is rejection. But post-colonial analysis has revealed (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989) that such opposition, far from achieving a successful rejection of the dominant culture, locks the political consciousness of the colonised subject into a binary relationship from which actual resistance is difficult to mobilise. The forms of resistance that have been most successful have been those that have identified a wide audience, that have taken hold of the dominant discourse and transformed it in ways that establish cultural difference within the discursive territory of the imperialist. An example of this occurs, for instance, when writers appropriate the colonialist language and literary forms, enter the domain of 'literature' and construct a different cultural reality within it. This is the form of resistance that interests Edward Said, because this is the form that arguably has been the most effective in cultural terms. Contrapuntality identifies the constant overlap and interchange, the continual counterpoint and contestation that occur within the actual domain of cultural resistance.

It is this form of resistance that is deeply inflected with Said's notion of secularism. As he uses it, secularism is opposed not only to the tendency of professional critics towards 'theological' specialisation, but to the almost theological doctrines of nationalism itself. In an interview with Jennifer Wicke and Michael Sprinker, Said sets 'the ideal of secular interpretation and secular work' against 'submerged feelings of identity, of tribal solidarity', of community that is 'geographically and homogeneously defined. The dense fabric of secular life,' says Said, is what 'can't be herded under the rubric of national identity or can't be made entirely to respond to this phony idea of a paranoid frontier separating "us" from "them" – which is a repetition of the old sort of orientalist model' (Sprinker 1992: 233). The politics of secular interpretation suggest a way of avoiding what Fanon called the 'pitfalls of national consciousness' (1964). One of these pitfalls is that 'rhetoric of blame' that Said sees as undermining the potential for social change (1986d).

While not made explicit in his earlier work, resistance becomes a central theme in *Culture and Imperialism*. Said argues that a dialectical relationship very quickly characterised the engagement of colonial subjects with the empire. Indeed, resistance against empire was ever pervasive within the domain of imperialism, since the coming of the White man brought forth some sort of resistance everywhere in the

non-European world (Said 1993a: xii). The fact that he did not discuss this response to Western dominance in *Orientalism* meant that he ran the risk of negating the active resistance of the colonised. Imperial power was never pitted 'against a supine or inert non-Western native; there was always some form of active resistance and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out' (ibid.: xii). Said's claim here could well be read as an exemplar of Foucault's formulation that 'where there is power there is resistance'. And yet it is here that he wishes to part company with Foucault. For Said, this is the playfulness of Foucault, the lack of political commitment. For if power oppresses and controls and manipulates,

> then everything that resists it is not morally equal to power, is not neutrally and simply a weapon against that power. Resistance cannot equally be an adversarial alternative to power and a dependent function of it, except in some metaphysical, ultimately trivial sense.
>
> (Said 1983: 246)

Said's strategy for resistance encapsulates a twofold process, which can be likened to the two phases of decolonisation he discusses in *Culture and Imperialism*. The first is the recovery of 'geographical territory', while the second is the 'changing of cultural territory' (1993a: 252). Hence, primary resistance that involves 'fighting against outside intrusion' is succeeded by secondary resistance that entails ideological or cultural reconstitution. Resistance then becomes a process 'in the rediscovery and repatriation of what had been suppressed in the natives' past by the processes of imperialism' (ibid.: 253). The significance and emphases of the prefix 're-' here are 'the partial tragedy of resistance, that it must to a certain degree work to recover forms already established or at least influenced or infiltrated by the culture of empire' (ibid.: 253).

This culture of resistance is explored by Said in terms of the capacity of the colonised to 'write back' to empire, a process that reconstructs the relationship between the self and the other, and which he sees operating through a rewriting or 'writing back' to canonical texts such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He juxtaposes *Heart of Darkness,* Conrad's story of a journey upriver to the dark heart of the African jungle, with Ng′gi wa Thiongo's *The River Between* and Sudanese novelist Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the*

North, novels which both rewrite the Conrad classic from the point of view of the colonised. These writers 'bear their past within them' in various ways: 'as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially revised visions of the past tending towards a post-colonial future', but, most powerfully, as 'urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance' (Said 1993a: 256).

Such canonical rewritings locate the interrelated strategies of rereading and rewriting in the process of cultural resistance, and they are effective interventions because they cannot be dismissed or silenced (as a simple rejection might be dismissed). Crucially, they are 'not only an integral part of a political movement, but, in many ways the movement's successfully guiding imagination', because they demonstrate an 'intellectual and figurative energy reseeing and rethinking the terrain common to whites and nonwhites' (ibid.: 256). Discussing the rethinking of *The Tempest,* Said notes how post-colonial analyses read and rewrite the play from the point of view of the monster Caliban, whom Prospero enslaves, and asks, 'How does a culture seeking to become independent of imperialism imagine its own past?' (ibid. : 258).

He sees three alternatives to the problem. The first is to become a willing servant of imperialism, a 'native informant'. The second is to be aware and accept the past without allowing it to prevent future developments. The third is what leads to nativism and arises out of shedding the colonial self in search of the essential pre-colonial self (ibid.: 258). While Said celebrates an anti-imperialist nationalism that emerges out of such a configuration in which the self identifies with a subject people, he reiterates Fanon's warning, that 'nationalist consciousness can very easily lead to a frozen rigidity' with the potential to degenerate into 'chauvinism and xenophobia' (ibid.: 258). In order to avoid this, it is best to have some sort of amalgamation of the three alternatives, so that Caliban sees his 'own history as an aspect of the history of all subjugated men and women, and comprehends the complex truth of his own social and historical situation' (ibid.: 258).

This writing back, as Said notes, is the project of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. However, what is critical in this writing back is the breaking down of barriers that exist between different cultures. This conscious

effort to 'enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories', is a powerful transformative movement of resistance that he terms 'the *voyage in*' (Said 1993a: 261). The third topic is a movement away from separatist nationalism towards human community and human liberation.

The interrelationship of these three topics becomes clear when viewed as a progressive formulation. The restoration of community seeks to assert a cultural resistance and in this process give strength to imperialism's 'other'. Such a reading of history draws upon this strength to break down the binary division of self and other. This culminates in the move towards human liberation by bringing the self and the other together. This formulation is consistent with Said's assertions of the prevalence of cultural hybridity and multiple identities, and the need to accept their reality. This subtle movement beyond simple binary opposition 'refuses the short-term blandishments of separatist and triumphalist slogans in favour of the larger, more generous human realities of community among cultures, peoples, and societies' (ibid.: 262). This community, for Said, is the real human liberation portended by the resistance to imperialism (ibid.: 262). This is not an outright rejection of nationalism because, in the tradition of C.L.R. James (1901–89), Frantz Fanon (1925–61) and revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral (1924–73), 'nationalist resistance to imperialism was always critical of itself' (ibid.: 264). What Said rejects is the manner in which such nationalism develops into nativism, as in the case of négritude.

Négritude was the celebration of Blackness, of being Black, of specifically African culture and African values that sought to reify a pre-colonial African past. This need to resurrect an African culture founded on the claimed glories of the past is one rejected by Fanon. 'The historical necessity,' he wrote, 'in which the men of African culture find themselves to racialise their claims and to speak more of African culture than of national culture will tend to lead them up a blind alley' (Fanon 1964: 172). Fanon's revulsion was a result of his concern that, by racialising the problematic of cultural oppression, the possibilities of true liberation were diminished because of the focus on the past. This concern is shared by Wole Soyinka, whose critique of négritude points out how the African in such a construction is always secondary to the European. The celebration of Blackness for Soyinka

in these terms is just as revolting as loathing the African. The problem with négritude is that it is 'trapped inside itself, a basically defensive role, even though its accents were strident, its syntax hyperbolic and its strategy aggressive' (Said 1993a: 277). As Soyinka points out, négritude stayed within the Eurocentric intellectual formulation of Africa's difference, thus paradoxically trapping the representation of African reality in those binary terms (ibid.: 277).

Like Fanon and Soyinka, Said is concerned with the problem of continued racialisation. It is this concern that drives him to reject négritude. In *Culture and Imperialism,* he describes négritude as a nativist phenomenon, linking it with other anti-colonial stances, such as that of Yeats in the Irish context. He argues that, in terms of the division between ruler and ruled, it 'reinforces the distinction even while reevaluating the weaker or subservient partner' (ibid.: 275). To opt for some 'metaphysics of essence like *négritude,* Irishness, Islam or Catholicism is to abandon history for essentialisations that have the power to turn human beings against each other' (ibid.: 276). Like so many issues, for Said, this is a matter of worldliness because 'such essentialisations are an abandonment of the secular world', which lead to either a sort of millenarianism in mass-based movements, or a degeneration into 'small-scale private craziness, or into an unthinking acceptance of stereotypes, myths, animosities, and traditions encouraged by imperialism' (ibid.: 276). It is significant that Said sees such nativist essentialisations as an abandonment of history, because although history itself is a powerfully constitutive Eurocentric construction, its very power makes it an important discourse to be rethought and reconstructed in strategies of post-colonial resistance.

For Said, it was imperative to transcend the simplistic formulations of racial or national essence while recognising their role in the early stages of identity formation. This can be achieved by 'discovering a world *not* constructed out of warring essences' (ibid.: 277). In addition, such transcendence is possible if one recognises that people have multiple identities that allow them to think beyond their local identities. There are, Said insists, alternatives to nativism where, although 'imperialism courses on … opportunities for liberation are open'. Significantly, Said refers to Fanon in defining liberation as 'a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness' (ibid.: 278).

Said, however, engages with Fanon within a new trend that seeks to locate him as a global theorist who can be understood by problematising

his identity. African American critic Henry Louis Gates has criticised what he calls 'critical Fanonism', which sees Fanon as an emblem of almost any kind of political resistance, and this comes from

> [the] convergence of the problematic of colonialism with that of subject-formation. As a psychoanalyst of culture, as a champion of the wretched of the earth, he is an almost irresistible figure for a criticism that sees itself as both oppositional and postmodern.
>
> (Gates 1991: 458)

In such a reading of Fanon, Said points out that Fanon's work was aimed at forcing the metropole to rethink its history in light of the decolonisation process. He argues:

> I do not think that the anti-imperialist challenge represented by Fanon and Césaire or others like them has by any means been met: neither have we taken them seriously as models or representations of human effort in the contemporary world. In fact Fanon and Césaire … jab directly at the question of identity and of identitarian thought, that secret sharer of present anthropological reflection on 'otherness' and 'difference'. What Fanon and Césaire required of their own partisans, even during the heat of struggle, was to abandon fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition. Become different, they said, in order that your fate as colonized peoples can be different.
>
> (Said 1989a: 224–5)

The focus, then, is not on a racialised notion of culture but on a decolonised culture in which race is no longer a key element: a decolonised culture in which consciousness and conscious activity will be liberated. It was a project Fanon discussed in *The Wretched of the Earth* in terms of the creation of a national culture. For Fanon, a new national culture has to be formed and the old ideology of domination dispersed. For Said, an alternative non-coercive knowledge that counters the dominant narrative becomes essential. It is this need for a counter-narrative that motivates Said and that is the main intellectual issue raised by *Orientalism*. 'Can one divide human reality?' he asks, as indeed it appears to be so often divided 'into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?' This strategy of 'surviving the consequences humanly'

becomes a key aspect of his view of human liberation, which for him means avoiding the almost inevitable division of humanity into 'us' (Westerners) and 'them' (Orientals) (Said 1978a: 45).

Said's 'voyage in' begins by searching for possible sites of resistance. Despite the pervasiveness and hegemonic nature of dominant discourse, there is capacity to resist because 'no matter how apparently complete the dominance of an ideology or social system, there are always going to be parts of the social experience that it does not cover and control' (Said 1993a: 289). Under a Foucauldian formulation of power (which he in part endorses), such capacity to resist is problematic. Yet the ability to resist, to recreate oneself as a post-colonial, anti-imperialist subject, is central for Said, and this recreation of the self needs to be contextualised in terms of Fanon's influence upon him. For it is the construction of identity that constitutes freedom, because human beings are what they make of themselves, even if they are subjects of repressive discourses. As Fanon says, 'It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world' (1986: 231).

Mustapha Marrouchi has pointed out that 'logic and the logic of identity are founded, for Said, on the opposition of inside and outside which inaugurates all binary opposition' (Marrouchi 1991: 70). Said objects to the homology between pairings such as us/them, or inside/out. And yet, at the same time, he faces the problem that identity is constituted through a process of othering. All cultures and societies construct identity 'out of a dialectic of self and other, the subject "I" who is native, authentic, at home, and the object "it" or "you", who is foreign, perhaps threatening, different, out there' (Said 1986a: 40). Identity is crucial to Said because the identity of a people determines the manner in which they organise knowledge. All humans view their differences as matters of interpretation. The assumption, for instance, that 'there was a characteristic French or British attitude in the nineteenth century' is to suggest 'that there was a characteristic French or British way of dealing with reality' (Said 1979: 143). For Said, the workings of identity issues are clearly at the heart of his project. To him, identity is not static. Rather, it is something that 'each age and society re-creates … over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions' (Said 1995a: 332). Hence the notion that any culture

could be explained within terms of itself without any reference to the outside is anathema to him. He rejects the notion that insiders have a privileged position from which to address these questions (Said 1985: 15).

It is Said's particular insight into, and formulation of, identity that demonstrate how it is that, despite the discourse of Orientalism, intellectuals from the colonies are able to 'write back' through various strategies of appropriation (Ashcroft *et al*. 1989). The 'voyage in' for these intellectuals is a process of 'dealing frontally with the metropolitan culture, using the techniques, discourses, weapons of scholarship and criticism once reserved exclusively for the European'. Their appropriations achieve originality and creativity by transforming 'the very terrain of the disciplines' (Said 1993a: 293). By operating inside the discourse of Orientalism, these intellectuals negate the Orientalist constructions which have been ascribed to them. It is through this process of negation that they are able to become selves as opposed to the identity of mere others that they inherit. This is precisely the voyage in that Fanon made when he wrote about the experience of colonisation from a French perspective, from 'within a French space hitherto inviolable and now invaded and re-examined critically by a dissenting native' (Said 1993a: 295). For Said, this entails reading texts from the metropolitan centre and from the peripheries *contrapuntally*: 'The question is a matter of knowing how to read … and not detaching this from the issue of knowing what to read. Texts are not finished objects' (ibid.: 312).

This important assertion, that texts are not finished objects, reflects the influence of Giambattista Vico on Said, in particular the conception that texts are a result of a historical and dynamic process; that texts have contexts. For Said, this rests on '*what is* and *what can be made to be* in Vico's work' (1976: 821, emphasis in original). What is important about a text, then, is not only what is there but what can be put there. The voyage in allows for the development of texts that break down the tyranny of the dominant discourse. But to be able to do this is to recognise the relationship between the dominator and the dominated. This is essential because 'the great imperial experience of the past two hundred years is global and universal; it has implicated every corner of the globe, the colonizer and the colonized together' (Said 1993a: 313).

Said's emphasis on the impact of the colonial experience on both the colonised and the colonisers has important ramifications for his

strategy of resistance. It is here that he borrows directly from Fanon's discussion of the 'pitfalls of nationalist consciousness'. And it is here that Said's reading of Fanon is crucial. He cites Fanon so often, he remarks, because Fanon expresses more decisively than anyone 'the immense cultural shift from the terrain of nationalist independence to the theoretical domain of liberation' (ibid.: 323–4). For Fanon, it is important not only to recreate national identity and consciousness in the process of de-colonisation but also to go beyond and create a social consciousness at the moment of liberation. Social consciousness becomes all the more important because, without it, de-colonisation merely becomes the replacement of one form of domination by another.

In *Culture and Imperialism,* Said speculates that Fanon has been influenced by Marxist critic Georg Lukács through reading his *History and Class Consciousness*. This conjecture allows Said to read violence in Fanon as 'the synthesis that overcomes the reification of white man as subject, Black man as object' (ibid.: 326). Violence for Fanon, Said argues, is the 'cleansing force' that allows for 'epistemological revolution', which is like a Lukácsian act of mental will that overcomes the fragmentation and reification of the self and the other. The need for such violence arises when the native decides that 'colonisation must end'. For Fanon:

> The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity … The settler's work is to make dreams of liberty impossible for the native. The native's work is to imagine all possible methods for destroying the settler. On the logical plane, the Manicheanism of the settler produces a Manicheanism of the natives, to the theory of the 'absolute evil of the native' the theory of the 'absolute evil of the settler' replies.
>
> (cited in Said 1993a: 327)

This quote has two important implications for Said's hypothesis of Lukács' influence on Fanon. First, there is the reification of the subject and the object. Second, violence is an act of mental will that overcomes this reification. Said argues that Fanon's is not a simplistic nationalism that arises out of the cleansing force of violence. Rather, Fanon recognises that 'orthodox nationalism followed along the same track hewn out by imperialism, which while it appeared to be

conceding authority to the nationalist bourgeoisie was really extending its hegemony'. This allows Said to argue that, in Fanon, the emphasis on armed struggle is tactical and that he wanted 'somehow to bind the European as well as the native together in a new non-adversarial community of awareness and anti-imperialism' (Said 1993a: 330–1).

This Lukácsian influence can be identified also within Said. For him, the act of will that overcomes this reification is the 'writing back' to cultural imperialism. Through this process, a new system of 'mobile relationships must replace the hierarchies inherited from imperialism' (ibid.: 330). Thus, the essence of liberation and emancipation is a consciousness and recognition of a universal self, which is a unification of the self and the other. Such a conclusion is possible because Said views Fanon as not merely a theoretician of resistance and decolonisation but also one of liberation.

Some critics have argued that, despite greater attention to resistance in *Culture and Imperialism,* Said fails to provide a strategy for resistance because 'he is more interested in the useful but untheorized work of someone like Barbara Harlow, whose Resistance Literature he praises' (Childs and Williams 1997: 111). Such a dismissal of Said's theory of resistance fails to take into account both the nature of a resistance divorced from the 'rhetoric of blame' and the pervasive way in which Said sees it operating in post-colonial society. Although Said adopts certain aspects of the Foucauldian paradigm, he rejects its totalising effect. He demands space from which to resist. It is his juxtaposition of Fanon and Foucault that is particularly instructive. For Said, Fanon's work is significant because

> [it] programmatically seeks to treat colonial and metropolitan societies together, as discrepant but related entities, while Foucault's work moves further and further away from serious consideration of social wholes, focusing instead upon the individual as dissolved in an ineluctably advancing 'microphysics of power' that is hopeless to resist.
>
> (Said 1993a: 335–6)

A Saidian strategy of resistance is the ability to make the 'voyage in', to write back to imperialism. This is possible because of the potential for humans to negate their experiences, to imagine another world, a better world in which the colonisers and the colonised work towards liberation.

SUMMARY

In Said's view, we cannot really understand the power and pervasiveness of imperialism until we understand the importance of culture. Culture is the power which changes a colonised people's view of the world without the coloniser needing to resort to military control. The significance of imperialism appears subtly in the texts of imperial powers, a structure of attitude and reference to which these texts do not necessarily refer directly. When read 'contrapuntally', the reader responding to the texts from the point of view of the colonised, this structure of attitude and reference may be exposed to show that imperialism was a key condition for the very existence of British high culture. But just as important as the need to develop a way of reading high culture is the need for the colonised and formerly colonised to develop an effective response to imperialism. Said is adamant that rather than a 'politics of blame' which is ultimately backward-looking and self-defeating, post-colonial peoples may resist most effectively by engaging that dominant culture, by embarking on a 'voyage in', a powerful variety of hybrid cultural work which counters dominant culture without simply rejecting it.