

THE VIOLENCES OF KNOWLEDGE: EDWARD SAID, SOCIOLOGY, AND POST-ORIENTALIST REFLEXIVITY

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ABSTRACT

As a fountainhead of postcolonial scholarship, Edward Said has profoundly impacted multiple disciplines. This chapter makes a case for why sociologists should (re)read Edward Said, paying specific attention to his warning about the inevitably violent interactions between knowledge and power in historic and current imperial contexts. Drawing on Said and other postcolonial theorists, we propose a threefold typology of potential violence associated with the production of knowledge: (1) the violence of essentialization, (2) epistemic violence, and (3) the violence of apprehension. While postcolonial theory and sociological and anthropological writing on reflexivity have highlighted the former two dangers, we urge social scientists to also remain wary of the last. We examine the formation of structures of authoritative knowledge during the French Empire in North Africa, the British Empire in India, and the American interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan during the “Global War on Terror,” paying close attention to how synchronic instances of apprehension (more or less accurate perception or recognition of the “other”) and essentialization interact in the production of diachronic

Postcolonial Sociology

Political Power and Social Theory, Volume 24, 231–262

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ISSN: 0198-8719/doi:10.1108/S0198-8719(2013)0000024015

essentialist and epistemic violence. We conclude by calling for a post-orientalist form of reflexivity, namely that sociologists, whether they engage as public intellectuals or not, remain sensitive to the fact that the production and consumption of sociological knowledge within a still palpable imperial framework makes all three violences possible, or even likely.

“Perhaps the most important task of all would be to undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to Orientalism, to ask how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective. But then one would have to rethink the whole complex problem of knowledge and power” ([Said, 1994 \[1979\]](#), p. 23).

WHY SOCIOLOGISTS SHOULD (RE)READ EDWARD SAID

Few books have impacted as many fields as dramatically as Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, first published in 1978. Commenting on the book’s effect on the secular study of Islam, Richard C. Martin wrote that “A single book changed the meta-discourse on what we were doing and what we should be doing” ([2010](#), p. 903). Anthropologist Nicholas B. Dirks agreed, calling *Orientalism* “one of the most critical books for the reconceptualization of anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century” ([2004](#), p. 23). The book also changed how scholars discuss an area no longer called “the Orient” ([Martin, 2010](#), p. 903) helping scholars of other regions break out of a Eurocentric perspective and solidifying the postcolonial theory Said “is said to have created” ([Brennan, 2000](#), p. 583; see also [Gandhi, 1998](#), p. 25). Perhaps due to Said’s own disciplinary location, much postcolonial theory has come from and dramatically affected the academic study of literature in the United States, though Said hoped an emphasis on theory would not overshadow a commitment to humanism, a theme to which he repeatedly returned in his later years ([Said, 2000](#)). Weathering prominent political criticism from Marxists ([Ahmad, 1992](#); [Nigam, 1999](#); [O’Hanlon & Washbrook, 1992](#)) and neoconservatives ([Lockman, 2004](#)) alongside rebuttals by anthropologists ([Lewis, 1998](#); [Richardson, 1990](#); [Varisco, 2004](#)) Middle East Studies scholars ([Irwin, 2006](#); [Lewis, 1982](#)), and other area specialists ([Rice, 2000](#)), the book continues to have a significant impact across multiple disciplines.

But, its influence is barely felt in sociology departments. With some exceptions (Bhambra, 2007; McLennan, 2003; Salvatore, 1996; Steinmetz, 2007; Turner, 1974, 1978), sociologists have paid much less attention to *Orientalism* than fellow academics in humanities, areas studies, and anthropology. We see four primary reasons why sociology – both as a discipline and in its specific work with “foreign” cultures – could profit from a deeper interrogation of Edward Said’s oeuvre. First, Said warns sociologists about the inevitably violent interactions between knowledge and power. Second, like many culturally sophisticated sociologists (e.g., Adams, 2005; Gorski, 2003; Steinmetz, 2007), Said recognizes the value of poststructuralist critiques without giving up hope for representational claims. Third, Said provides a powerful example of reflexive, public scholarship that draws from poststructuralist critiques; and fourth, we believe that, via Said, such a reflexive, public sociology could provide a valuable partner to post-colonial theory itself, which often makes use of sociological data, methods, and theory.

In the following discussion, we first revisit Said to develop a threefold typology of potential violences – essentialist, epistemic, and apprehensive – involved in the production of knowledge. We then turn to empirical cases of social scientific research conducted within the framework of French, British, and American empire to analyze the processes through which these violences of knowing interact over time to produce authoritative structures of knowledge such as the orientalist episteme targeted by Said. Having engaged and extended Said’s warnings about the imbrication of knowledge and power, we conclude by proposing a post-orientalist reflexivity that is (1) acutely aware of the potential dangers of producing knowledge within a particular field of power and (2) strives to preserve a relative degree of autonomy while producing knowledge about “others” of great interest to policy makers.

THE VIOLENCES OF KNOWLEDGE

One of Said’s primary contributions is his insistence on, and exegesis of, the fundamental relationship between knowledge and power, specifically the imbrication of knowledge with empire. Even “the estimable and admirable works of art and learning” Said analyzes in *Culture and Imperialism* are at the same time connected “with the imperial process of which they were manifestly and unconsciously a part” (1993, p. xiv). If this is so for novelists like Dickens and Austen, then it is certainly even truer for those, including

social scientists, who explicitly study “the Orient” or any other peoples who can be controlled. Said’s *Orientalism* was intended as a direct rebuke to “the general liberal consensus that ‘true’ knowledge is fundamentally non-political (and conversely, that overt political knowledge is not ‘true’ knowledge) [which] obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced” (Said, 1994 [1978], p. 10). Therefore, to be “a European or an American” who studies the Orient “means and meant being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interest in the Orient” (*ibid.*, p. 11).

Said’s use of the word power draws, at different moments, from Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony and Foucault’s understanding of power as rooted within discourse. Both Gramsci and Foucault ably demonstrate how power is essentially about *violence*, particularly if violence is understood as the coercion of body and mind. Much of Said’s and other postcolonial theorists’ attention has focused on the latter, what Bourdieu refers to as “symbolic violence which is not aware of what it is” (1991 [1982], pp. 51–52). Said’s work exposes the essentialist and epistemic levels of symbolic violence involved in the production of knowledge in an imperial relation between observer and observed. These are necessarily related to a civilizing project often carried out explicitly within educational settings that marked “the Englands, Frances, Germanys, Hollands as distant repositories of the Word” (Said, 1993, p. 223) which contained objective truth not only about the whole world but about the colonized’s own selves. Said quotes Fanon: “for the native, objectivity is always directed against him.” (*ibid.*, p. 258). This Nietzschean take on truth was even more fully developed in *Orientalism*, in which Said writes that “Orientalism was...a system of truths...in Nietzsche’s sense of the word... My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness” (Said, 1994 [1978], p. 204).

Gayatri Spivak coined the term “epistemic violence” to refer to the power-knowledge configuration expressed in Orientalism, stating the “clearest possible example of [it] is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity” (Spivak, 1998, pp. 280–281). Her specific example of this is “a narrative of codification” via “the legitimization of the polymorphous structure of legal performance, ‘internally’ noncoherent and open at both ends, through a binary vision” (*ibid.*, p. 280). Spivak shows how “the British study of Indian history and languages led to the

stabilization and codification of Hindu law" (*ibid.*, p. 282) which, alongside the British establishment of an intermediary class of English-educated natives, allowed "an explanation and narrative of reality [to be] established as the normative one" (*ibid.*, p. 281). Spivak then uses the concept to show how the subaltern – looking at the specific case of women who self-immolated on their husbands' funeral pyres – "cannot speak" (*ibid.*, p. 308). They cannot speak not because of their obvious absence from the academic elite writing about them (though that is certainly relevant) but because their means of speaking and understanding the world has been irrevocably changed by those in power. Even resistance to *suttee* (which Spivak points out does not actually mean bride-burning, though it has come to) is inescapably marked by colonialism and a desired return to a "tradition" which only came to exist as a result of colonial knowledge. "The case of *suttee* as exemplum of the woman-in-imperialism would challenge and deconstruct the opposition between subject (law) and object-of-knowledge (repression) and mark the place of 'disappearance' with something other than silence and nonexistence, a violent aporia between subject and object status" (*ibid.*, p. 306).

While a lot of the attention in the postcolonial canon has been focused on the essentialist and epistemic violences associated with the production of knowledge, it bears emphasizing that much of the violence involved in the colonial encounter was (and is) more than "symbolic"; colonial violence was by no means all in their heads. Said himself repeatedly insisted that knowledge produced about the "other" was then used to subjugate and control the material bodies and lands of colonized peoples. The use of knowledge to enact physical – and not just psychological – violence is a lacuna that can be too easily ignored by emphasizing the long-term processes of epistemic violence. Conceptualizing and categorizing the social reality of the "other" involves a complex nexus of symbolic and material realities.

We distill, from Said's and other postcolonial theorists' warnings, three overlapping forms of violence at risk in producing knowledge in an imperial field of power. It is important to note that each of these violences comes from forms of knowledge which might or might not be violent in and of themselves, but which *all* hold the potential for enabling acts of violence.

1. The first of these, which we are calling *the violence of essentialization*, involves a misrecognition in which essentialized, ahistorical categories and labels are used to classify the other and then to potentially enact physical and psychological violence upon them. Such essentialization is

central to Said's argument in *Orientalism*, which primarily focuses on the interrelated representational violence within the Western "cultural archive" that builds off and reinforces misrecognition, "seeing the essentialized orientality of the Orient" (Said, 1994 [1978], p. 255).

2. The second, and related, danger is what Spivak refers to as "*epistemic violence*" (1998, pp. 282–283) referring to a process in which Western forms of knowing, including social scientific concepts and categories, preclude or destroy local forms of knowledge. The "voice" of the subaltern is silenced a priori because its means of speaking has been replaced.
3. We would add a third type of violence, rarely focused on within postcolonial theory: *the violence of apprehension*. This applies to research that avoids the dangers of binarism or generalization intrinsic to essentializing and epistemic violences. We warn that even more or less accurate apprehension (or a laying hold of knowledge) of the "other" through careful and nuanced research retains a potential violence. It can still be used directly and indirectly to consolidate power and to enact physical and symbolic violence on the "other."

TIME AND THE VIOLENCES OF KNOWLEDGE

A critical distinction among the three violences of knowledge is their temporal dimension. The epistemic violence expressed in a structure of authoritative knowledge described by Fanon, Spivak, Said, Bourdieu, and others necessarily involves a diachronic process, with categories, classifications, and identities becoming naturalized and internalized over time. The violence of essentialization, in contrast, can happen synchronically at a single instance; it also works diachronically, where a series of repeated essentializations lead to persistent stereotypes. Apprehension also usually happens synchronically, with more or less accurate knowledge of the other gained in discreet increments. Once it is added to the authoritative knowledge structure, however, it inevitably contributes over the *long durée* to epistemic violence.

The essentialist violence described by Said necessarily relies on a diachronic evolution of forms of knowledge about the Oriental other, but can also entail synchronic instances of violence in which essentialized categories and typologies inform decision and policy-making in real ways leading to concrete acts of violence. Said's overarching structure of

authoritative knowledge – what Foucault would call an episteme and what Said is calling Orientalism – is a force with causal power, and one of its results is a longstanding, diachronic pattern of epistemic violence, violence which is created by and creates synchronic moments of essentialization. This essentialization is necessarily violent because of the violent nature of misrecognition itself (Fanon, 2004 [1963]) and contributes to a pattern of epistemic violence that is inseparable from longstanding structures of oppression. In conjunction, the violence of essentialization and epistemic violence affect both the observer and the observed, the dominator and the dominated, and in the still too real context of empire, the colonizer and the colonized (King, 1990; Nandy, 2010).

Said and other postcolonial scholars have been rightly concerned about what we are calling the structure of authoritative knowledge, but have less explicitly theorized the process by which the orientalist episteme is produced. By attending to the interaction of the three violences of knowledge over time, it is possible to more accurately account for the possibilities and dangers of knowledge about the “other.” Where do the essentializations and binary categories that form Orientalism’s building blocks come from? We contend postcolonial critiques of epistemic and essentializing violence have under-theorized the symbolic and very real physical risks of what we have labeled the violence of apprehension. While essentialist forms of knowledge might have been outright lies, it seems possible that some are based upon what were at least initially more or less accurate descriptions of at least *some* members of the community being represented. When we talk about the more or less accurate knowledge involved in the violence of apprehension, we do not mean a positivist, pre-interpretive perception of the “way things really are” so much as a careful, nuanced approximation of heterogeneous social life derived from rigorous field or archival work. More or less accurate does mean access to “truth”; it just means better than the sorts of false binaries one could make up from one’s armchair.

This more optimistic epistemology is fundamental to the postcolonial critique: essentializations are problematic because they are *not true* (even if this assumption has often gone somewhat unacknowledged as it risks reeking of positivism). Spivak defends herself from such a charge in her article, arguing that her intention “is not to describe ‘the way things really were’” (1998, p. 281) even though it seems she is doing exactly that, or, at the very least, describing how certain historical narratives were the way things *really weren’t*, which might be the best a deconstructionist can do. Said is less apologetic about righting the historical record, and he devotes

the latter two books of the “Orientalism trilogy” – *The Question of Palestine* (1979) and *Covering Islam* (1981) to showing how wildly wrong Western media and intellectuals have been about Palestine, the Middle East, and Islam.

In later writings, Said acknowledges that an Orientalist critique based on a straightforward power motive, for example, that Europe wants to dominate the Orient and produces whatever forms of knowledge necessary to achieve that goal, is simply too simple. He acknowledges that “Even the mammoth engagements in our own time over such essentializations as ‘Islam,’ the ‘West,’ the ‘Orient,’ ‘Japan,’ or ‘Europe’ admit to particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference, and those require careful analysis and research” (Said, 1993, p. 52). Said does not deny that Orientalist research could produce “a fair amount of exact positive knowledge about the Orient” (Said, 1994 [1978], p. 52). The problem was not that all of the knowledge was wrong. The problem was what “accurate” knowledge was used to accomplish synchronically and what it fed into diachronically. In discreet moments, more or less accurate knowledge will be used by those in power as a tool to more effectively implement violent action. When fed into larger, diachronic structures, this violence of apprehension almost inevitably results in epistemic violence and the violence of essentialization. Our warning about the violence of apprehension does not presume a positivist representation of social life. Interpretation is obviously necessary. However, certain interpretations are clearly stronger than others, and that strength is adjudicated by gathering more or less accurate data to support interpretive claims (Reed, 2011).

We are particularly interested in how small synchronic moments of data gathering help empires to consolidate epistemic power and solidify certain interpretations. The perfect example of this sort of data gathering is what Foucault documents in his work, particularly *Discipline and Punish* (1995 [1977]) and *A History of Sexuality* ((1990 [1976])). The focus on small measurements of prisoners’ and confessors’ daily lives is exactly the sort of “accurate” knowledge that is then fed into larger epistemes, contributing to both the violence of essentialization and epistemic violence. In a similar way, social scientists might gather knowledge about Muslim women in an Egyptian religious movement (Mahmood, 2005), African-American students in an urban high school (Fordham, 1996), or the relationship between AIDS activists and medical research (Epstein, 2006): in each of these cases, there is a marshaling of evidence to make a certain interpretive argument, and both the synchronic moments in themselves and the larger arguments they compose can be used by the state or other large institutions to further

consolidate power and even inflict physical violence. This risk of the violence of apprehension is not confined to the production of social scientific knowledge within historic empires; it remains a threat in today's implicit and explicit imperial power configurations.

SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND EMPIRE

In his later book, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said lays out a strategy for responding to the structure of authoritative knowledge and the essentializing and epistemic violences he identified in *Orientalism*. Using a metaphor from Western classical music, Said proposes a contrapuntal rereading of the Western cultural archive, a comparative approach displaying a “simultaneous awareness both of metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts” (1993, p. 51). Rather than a purely deconstructive exercise or a “decolonization” of the cultural archive, Said’s goal is to trace both imperial processes and resistances to arrive at a point that “alternative or new narratives emerge, and they become institutionalized or discursively stable entities” (*ibid.*). In this rereading of canonical texts, it is possible to explore identities, or, for our purposes “categories,” not as “essentializations...but as contrapuntal ensembles” (*ibid.*, p. 52).

Though this type of post-orientalist project has made inroads in other disciplines, a contrapuntal rereading of the sociological and social scientific archive has only been attempted by a few scholars. One example, though not necessarily inspired by Said, is Connell’s (1997) interrogation of how the mid-20th century construction of a metropolitan-centric canon of “classical theory” in American sociology invented a foundational narrative that concealed the much broader context of imperial expansion and colonization that informed the early development of the discipline in the 19th and early 20th centuries for both European and American sociology and reinforced a disciplinary specialization on the metropolitan problems of industrialization, secularization, democratization, and urbanization. In the past decade, other scholars have begun to put empire and colonialism back on the sociological radar (Adams, 2005; Barkey, 2008; Charrad, 2001; Go, 2008; Goh, 2007; Mawani, 2009; Steinmetz, 2007). However, as Kemple and Mawani (2009, p. 239) observe, “this literature has had limited influence on (re)shaping the discipline’s boundaries and in revealing how its ontological moorings, categories, and modes of analysis have been fundamentally structured by imperial pursuits and formed within cultures of colonialism.”

The nascent project, represented in this special journal issue, of exploring and revealing sociology's "imperial unconscious" (Go, 2011) and "imperial shadows" (Kemple & Mawani, 2009) is very much in-line with the Saidian contrapuntal method, reading the Western sociological canon with an ear for counter-themes, resistances, and silences connected to the rise of the discipline within the historical milieu of expanding empire. Within the framework of the three violences outlined above, this approach is concerned with exposing a process of diachronic epistemic violence in the construction and professionalization of a theoretical tradition whose employment of universalistic categories of knowledge is unaware of the historical factors, often connected to an imperial context, which gave rise to this structure of authoritative knowledge. These attempts at a critical postcolonial disciplinary reflection represent a much-delayed (when compared to sister disciplines such as anthropology and history) sociological response to the orientalist critique.

To "provincialize sociology" (Burawoy, 2005a, p. 20) by clearly exposing forms of epistemic violence embedded in the discipline, an important first step is to sociologically analyze how the three violences of knowledge interacted (and continue) to interact over time in the context of empire to produce a structure of authoritative knowledge. From the early 19th century, sociological approaches served as a "handmaiden" for European imperial powers engaged in the process of conquering and ruling alien indigenous populations. Beginning from the Scientific Expedition that accompanied Napoleon's campaign to Egypt (1798–1801), the evolution of the social sciences, in France and in other metropolitan centers, was imbricated with imperial expansion, and implicitly and explicitly complicit in the violences of apprehension, of essentialization, and, over time, epistemic violence (El Shakry, 2007; Mitchell, 1988; Said, 1994 [1978]). Though strategically and politically a failure, Napoleon's escapade in Egypt bore long-term fruit in the publication, begun in 1802, of the encyclopedic 23 volume *Déscription de l'Egypte*, which showcased the work of the 167 scholars, scientists, engineers, and artists attached to the French expeditionary corps who had completed an inventory of Egypt's antiquities, flora, fauna, agriculture, and irrigation systems and conducted ethnographic and geographical surveys. In addition to laying the foundation for Egyptology, the expedition set a precedent for a comprehensive scientific survey that was repeated in Algeria three decades later with the *Exploration scientifique de l'Algérie* (1844–1867).

It was in Algeria that French colonial sociology (the distinction of anthropology as a separate discipline occurred much later) came into

full-flower, as a cadre of military officers profoundly influenced by Saint-Simonian social theory at the *Ecole Polytechnique* were assigned to the country in the wake of the conquest which began in 1830. In 1844, Governor General Bugeaud, engaged in the brutal total pacification of Algerian territory and elimination of “Abd al-Qader’s” interior emirate, appointed Eugène Daumas as the head of the Direction of Arab Affairs. Under Daumas, an administrative system, the Arab Bureaus, was put in place in which elite native affairs officers had wide latitude, as Abi-Mershed has demonstrated, in implementing Saint-Simonian notions about social order which they clearly intended to eventually use back in the metropole: “From the very start of their colonial venture in the 1830s, the Saint-Simonians’ alternative modernity in Algeria – with its particular modes for rationalizing and regulating colonial society, its specific understandings of evolution and change, of culture, race, and gender – was meant to reverse the flow of historical development and progress and to radiate from Algiers as a model for Paris to heed” (2010, p. 8).

In their efforts to know their subject populations in order to better rule them, many of the Arab Bureau officers and their institutional descendants in the French military later in Algeria and in Morocco, produced high-quality studies of local society, customs, and religion (Burke, 2008). Gellner describes French sociological and ethnographic work as “a kind of reconnaissance in depth, and it was the handmaiden of government” (1976, p. 139). The production of knowledge needed by the French to pacify and administer North Africa entailed the construction of a substantial institutional infrastructure dedicated to linguistic, ethnographic, sociological, and historical studies including the *Ecole d’Algiers* and the *Institut des Hautes Etudes Marocain* in Rabat (Burke, 2007). The colonial sociological gaze, first in Algeria and later in Morocco, was directed at rural Islam (particularly the Sufi networks that had mobilized such intense resistance against military conquest), tribal structure, Islam, Berber society, and the relationship between tribes and the central government (Burke, 2008; Montagne, 1930). These efforts produced a vast sociological and ethnographic archive accessed both in the empire and the metropole, including Durkheim’s use of work done in Algeria’s Kabyle region in the 1880s to support his theorization of mechanical solidarity.

The French case, in which a substantive sociological project of studying the “other” was carried out in North Africa over more than a century, provides valuable insight into how the types of violence outlined above interact and evolve in the process of imperial conquest and subsequent colonial administration. In his study of similar questions related to the

German Empire, Steinmetz (2007) emphasizes a causal arrow pointing from precolonial ethnographic (mis)representations (our violence of essentialization) about different indigenous populations toward variations in native policy implemented by different colonial states. However, the evidence from the French case (which came to the colonial game much earlier and, in Algeria, had a much less well-developed orientalist ethnographic archive *prior* to constructing the colonial state) reveals a much more complex interaction between the production of knowledge about indigenous groups and the exercise of power over them. Though undoubtedly French colonial officers and more professionally trained academics who engaged in sociological and ethnographic research in North Africa were influenced by some orientalized preconceptions, in many respects they remained remarkably open to new data, particularly because of the stakes in having more or less accurate knowledge in the midst of military campaigns. In fact, Burke makes an important observation that it seems the first generation of colonial sociology typically did the best work: “The further one gets from the blood and thunder of military conquest, so it seems, the less relevant and less reliable the ethnography” (2008, p. 160).

It seems the more important and common causal chain flows from what we have described as the violence of apprehension toward the violence of essentialization. This reading remains sensitive to synchronic instances of gathering more or less accurate data to their diachronic evolution, due to the influence of political considerations, toward essentialist and epistemic violence. The crystallization of what Burke (1973, 2008) calls the “Moroccan Vulgate” in the first decades of French rule in the sultanate illuminates this process. Though France had been on the ground in Algeria since 1830, Morocco, next-door to the west, remained uncolonized through the end of the 19th century due to a balance of diplomatic interests related to Britain’s strategic concern with the Straits of Gibraltar and the route to India. It also remained relatively unknown to Europe (outside of coastal enclaves in which European merchants and diplomatic agents conducted business), and in 1900, France began to send in scientific missions to study Moroccan society, politics, and culture, laying the groundwork for a future intervention. Based out of Tangier, researchers carried out extensive surveys in the north and central Morocco, gathering information on tribal structure, the Moroccan government (*makhzan*), religious practice, agriculture, and economic information, “ready to renounce the convenient pieties of the colonial vulgate for a much more open, complex, and nuanced portrait of Moroccan society” (Burke, 2008, p. 167). Following the 1904 Entente Cordiale, however, in which France and Britain recognized their respective

interests in Egypt and Morocco, France had a vested political interest in an eventual protectorate form of colonial association with the Moroccan government, which had the effect of incentivizing a particular reading of Moroccan society and politics, namely that the Moroccan state had historically been unable to effectively project power over a dissident interior and that the French therefore needed to “partner” in pacifying the country and developing its governing apparatus and economy.

Influenced by a particular set of imperial political considerations, this “vulgate” simplistically reduced the complexities of the Moroccan context (more or less accurately reflected in earlier research) into a set of interrelated binaries based upon a fundamental political division between the “land of government” and the “land of dissidence” – over which was laid ethnic (Arab vs. Berber), geographic (plains/coasts vs. mountains and cities vs. countryside), and religious (Muslim vs. more secular) divisions that grossly distorted the state’s sociological vision. Thus, a sensitivity to hybridity and local knowledge expressed in earlier work was dumbed down into an essentializing shorthand which could be used by the colonial state to “see” North African society (Scott, 1998). In sum, the contingencies of imperial interests, dictated by a particular set of diplomatic considerations, impacted the subsequent construction of sociological knowledge about Morocco and crystallized a particular set of interpretations, embodying what we have labeled as the “violence of essentialization” and a type of “epistemic violence.”

Dirks (2001) describes a similar interplay between the violences of apprehension and essentialization in his study of the rise of an “ethnographic state” in British India after the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny/Great Rebellion. In explaining the shift from a historiographical mode to an ethnographic mode, Dirks explains that the colonial state’s fundamental concern after 1857 was determining who is loyal, which necessitated an increasingly comprehensive knowledge of Indian society in order to further British interests in order and the maintenance of rule. The logical end point of the positivist enterprise was the Ethnographic Survey carried out in conjunction with the census of 1901 under the direction of H. H. Risley. Dirks writes, “The last half of the nineteenth century witnessed the development of a new kind of curiosity about and knowledge of the Indian social world, exhibited first in the manuals and gazetteers that began to encode official local knowledge, then in the materials that developed around the census, which led to Risley’s great ambition for an ethnographic survey of all of India” (Dirks, 2001, p. 41). This type of imperial empiricist sociology of India attempting to refine caste categories only succeeded in

uncovering further layers of overlap and complexity, but, because the colonial state needed this type of knowledge to make Indian society “legible” (Scott, 1998), it simply encouraged more of an empiricist response that over time resulted in an increasingly codified and standardized ethnological knowledge. The epistemic violence that results from the colonial state’s need to translate sociological knowledge into policy or law forms the context for Spivak’s (1998) argument in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

Another related dimension in which the synchronic process of a violence of apprehension is fused with the violence of essentialization occurs in the attempts by the colonial state to ascertain, encode, and reproduce an authentic native traditional sphere. The process of military conquest clearly necessitates the synchronic acquisition of reliably “accurate” knowledge about local conditions, but colonial states, in many instances, continued to expend tremendous efforts amassing data on local culture, religion, gender relations, handicrafts, law, customs, etc. after pacification has been completed. The overall purpose of this project is to maintain a separate native category, or multiple native categories defined according to criteria of cultural authenticity, perpetuating what Chatterjee (1993) calls the “fundamental rule of colonial difference.” In this respect, it is likely the production of knowledge about local culture, society, or religion was often not totally inaccurate. The violence of apprehension occurs because this knowledge was then used to produce markers of native identity, the purpose of which was to reinforce a hierarchy between European colonizer and native colonized. And, over time, this violence of apprehension, which became translated into colonial policy to maintain static categories of native identity, led to the violence of essentialization and epistemic violence.

The complex interaction between the three violences of knowledge is applicable not only for historic cases of empire, but is also, as Said insists throughout his corpus, highly relevant to our contemporary context. By considering the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of the construction of knowledge about Islam, Muslim societies, and a geographical construction like the “Middle East” within the American academy over recent decades, it becomes clear that an imperial context continues to intertwine epistemic violence and the violences of apprehension and essentialization. Though it resonated across multiple disciplines, Said’s direct criticism in *Orientalism* was aimed squarely at the field of Middle East Studies that developed in the United States during the Cold War. As with other area studies fields, Middle East Studies fused the humanities and social sciences in order to produce knowledge about a highly strategic non-Western region. Said’s critique

radically impacted the field, engendering both a hostile reaction from the old guard most clearly expressed in the long-standing feud between Said and Bernard Lewis and a hugely sympathetic introspection that led to a broad paradigm shift (Lockman, 2004). Three decades after *Orientalism*, Middle East studies remain polarized on multiple layers, perhaps most fundamentally by the Israel–Palestine conflict and most recently by the increasingly palpable neo-imperial context for the study of the Islamic world in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks with the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq and launching of the “Global War on Terrorism” by the United States government.

In the context of the terror threat and concrete imperial projections of American power in the so-called “Greater Middle East” (stretching from Morocco to Afghanistan), there has been an intensification of debates about the relationship between the funding and consumption of research about the region. To a large extent, most of the research carried out in U.S. universities about the Middle East, like other non-Western regions of the world, has been federally funded through Title VI of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958, which along with the Fulbright-Hays program, were created to develop experts on the nonaligned bloc, expertise which was deemed essential for national security during the Cold War. In 1965, Title VI was incorporated in the Higher Education Act with a shift in emphasis from national security to the value of international studies in higher education (Department of Education, 2011). After the 9/11 attacks, Congress passed the first significant increases in funding for these programs since the 1960s. In June 2003, a congressional subcommittee held hearings on “International Programs in Higher Education and Questions of Bias” where Stanley Kurtz, a columnist for the *National Review*, criticized Title VI-funded area studies centers for being dominated by a postcolonial “ruling intellectual paradigm” founded by Edward Said, the core premise of which was “that it is immoral for a scholar to put his knowledge of foreign languages and cultures at the service of American power” (Kurtz, 2003). Along with fellow critics of university-based Middle East studies Daniel Pipes and Martin Kramer (2001), Kurtz questioned how much “bang for the buck” the U.S. government receives from its investment in the production of knowledge about the region. Soon thereafter, a bill, H.R. 3077, was passed by the House that would have created an “International Education Advisory Board” to advise Congress “on Title VI programs in relation to national needs with respect to homeland security, international education, international affairs, and foreign language training” (Govtrack, 2003). Though the bill did not reach the floor in the Senate, it represents an

unresolved tension over federal funding of area studies research which oscillates between (1) the explicit goals of national security and direct feedback into the defense, intelligence, and homeland security components of the state and (2) the indirect benefits of fostering an increased knowledge and understanding of the world within the broader American public via the higher education system.

Beyond renewed Congressional interest in the outcomes of the funding it appropriates for area studies research (which is now threatened by budgetary spending cuts), there have also been direct efforts by the Department of Defense (DoD) to acquire social science research, with a specific interest in the Middle East and the broader Islamic World. In 2008, then Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, announced a new program targeting \$70 million of DoD money at the social sciences, “The Minerva Initiative,” aptly named after the Greek goddess of wisdom and war. The Minerva Initiative’s stated purpose is “By drawing upon the knowledge, ideas, and creativity of the nation’s universities, the Department [of Defense] aims to foster a new generation of engaged scholarship in the social sciences that seeks to meet the challenges of the 21st century” ([United States Department of Defense, 2011](#)). In a speech to the Association of American Universities, Gates, a former President of Texas A&M University, outlined likely areas the initiative would support which included Chinese Military and Technology Studies, an Iraqi and Terrorist Perspectives Project (in which primary sources captured by the U.S. military would be made available to scholars), and Religious and Ideological Studies, which he explained could focus on “the conflict against jihadist extremism” and the “overall ideological climate within the world of Islam” that would develop “the intellectual foundation on which we base a national strategy in coming years and decades.” A fourth area, the New Disciplines Project, is intended to engage additional disciplines including history, anthropology, sociology, and evolutionary psychology ([United States Department of Defense, 2008](#)). The goal here is clearly to construct what would amount to an even more explicit and streamlined military–academic complex.

The swing toward harnessing the social scientific production of knowledge more efficiently toward military and strategic purposes has, of course, not gone uncriticized, with vociferous opposition against the H.R. 3077 bill and the Minerva Initiative from academics concerned about intellectual freedom, selection bias, and a further militarization of the university system (“AAA Calls for Alternate Management of Minerva”; Beinin, 2004; Lockman, 2004). The American Anthropological Association and the

independent Network for Concerned Anthropologists (NCA) added vociferous criticism about the U.S. Army's development of a Human Terrain System (HTS) in which anthropologists and other social scientists are embedded in combat units engaged in counter-insurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to provide "empirical sociocultural research and analysis to fill a large operational decision-making support gap" (U.S. Army, 2011). In 2009, the Network for Concerned Anthropologists published a *Counter Counterinsurgency Manual* (Network of Concerned Anthropologists, 2009) exposing the ethical and intellectual conflicts surrounding the Pentagon's use of Human Terrain Teams, which would be directly involved in the violences of apprehension and essentialization we have described. They also, as the title indicates, took aim at the military's structure of authoritative knowledge signified by the 2006 U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Manual (Sewall, Nagl, Petraeus, & Amos, 2007), which was written by a team under General David Petraeus' direction to synthesize lessons learned since the 2003 Iraq invasion and lay out a new doctrine of COIN operations for the U.S. military. In tandem with pointing out the inaccuracies, plagiarisms, and misconceptions that riddle the manual, the fundamental concern of the authors of the *Counter Counterinsurgency Manual* is the concrete link between epistemic and physical violence that the military's desire to coopt anthropological, sociological, historical, economic, and political knowledge to improve the HUMINT, human intelligence, supposedly needed to successfully wage counterinsurgency operations. A similar organization, the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars (founded in the 1970s), has recently focused energies on resisting the renewed militarization and securitization of knowledge about the continent with the growth of the U.S. military's AFRICOM and the spread of the Global War on Terror.

Even for social scientists not directly tied to any of these official initiatives, the Departments of State, Education, Defense, and the intelligence agencies remain interested in all things Islamic. One's work, however free of the essentialist and epistemic violences described above, still retains a potential to feed into these diachronic processes or to synchronically inform decisions regarding the exercise and extension of imperial power. Perhaps the most poignant example concerns scholarship about the relationship between Islam and politics. Since 9/11, under both Bush and Obama, the U.S. government has been actively interested, obviously, in combating "bad Muslims" but also in encouraging "good Muslims" (Mamdani, 2004). Thus, as opposed to the violence of essentialization, which would treat the category of Islam and Muslim society simplistically,

the U.S. government has an expressed interest in a careful discernment of a gradation from dangerous, “radical” streams to the safer, “moderate” groups. This policy imperative necessitates more or less accurate knowledge, an accurate apprehension of the heterogeneous nature of various Muslims societies and political contexts, which avoids claims to avoid simple binaries (e.g., Muslims are bad, non-Muslims are good) even as it inadvertently creates new ones (e.g., these Muslims are bad, but those Muslims are good). As result, even the most self-consciously nonessentialist work on Islamic social movements and parties (e.g., Schwedler, 2006; Wiktorowicz, 2001), the compatibility of Islam and democracy (e.g., Bayat, 2007; Esposito & Voll, 1996), or women and Islam (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1998; Badran, 2009) are of interest in the formulation of U.S. policy. For example, Saba Mahmood laments the fact that United States power is linked to creating the “right” kind of Muslims (2006) yet, ironically, her landmark book *Politics of Piety* (2005), which deconstructs stereotypes about Muslim women’s responses to the Islamic Revival in Egypt could easily be used by government authorities to simply recalibrate their checklist of what constitutes good and bad Muslims and further consolidate their power.

The post 9/11 engagement in the Global War on Terror and the construction of pseudo-colonial states in Iraq and Afghanistan thus bears a close resemblance to the 19th and 20th century French and British imperial examples described above in which the extension and operation of imperial power requires the production or acquisition of social scientific knowledge about populations that need to be controlled or managed. As with these earlier European cases, as Said emphasized, the American neo-empire is also largely focused on Muslim societies from North Africa to South Asia, and knowledge produced directly by the state or accessed from other sources, including academia, about the region is at a premium. In both the historical and contemporary cases we have presented, this knowledge can be produced synchronically – tribal mapping in Afghanistan by an embedded anthropologist – and diachronically – the crystallization of COIN doctrine in the U.S. military – to impose one or more of the three violences – apprehension, essentialization, and/or epistemic – in both nonphysical and physical ways. Given the inherent risk that even accurate apprehension of the other can be instrumentalized to enact physical violence or deformed into a type of essentialization in the process of being incorporated into an epistemic structure used to guide state policy, what then should we do as sociologists?

TOWARD A REFLEXIVE POST-ORIENTALIST SOCIOLOGY

One way out of this conundrum, a path advocated by Said, is to claim that culture has a “relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms” (1993, p. xii) and “is 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...” (1993, p. xiii). Culture here does not simply refer to “aesthetic forms” but to “all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation” that “included...both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history” (1994, p. xii). It might appear a bit jarring to see Said advocating a position of cultural optimism in light of the at-times Nietzschean pessimism seen in *Orientalism*. Yet even in *Orientalism* – as is clear in this chapter’s epigraph – Said was open to the possibility of relatively autonomous knowledge. Within the book one sees a constructive tension between Foucault, who argues that the authoritative power structure is unavoidable, and Gramsci, who is more optimistic about the possible uses of positive knowledge. Gramsci, and Said’s reading of him, is not naive: there is no denying that hegemony exists or that power-structures control what is said and what is thought. Said acknowledges that the notions of culture he outlines are problematic because they can become linked to a xenophobic parochialism (itself sometimes linked to “religious and nationalist fundamentalism”) and to “thinking of [culture] as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world” (1994, p. xiii). In Foucault’s model, culture of any sort is fed into a sausage factory of power-knowledge, allowing an ever-deeper consolidation of power. In Said and Gramsci’s model, the sausage factory still exists, and culture can contribute to it, but it doesn’t have to. Relative autonomy is possible, but how can a social scientist try to achieve it?

The closest discipline to sociology to wrestle with this dilemma has been cultural anthropology, which, since the late 1950s, has struggled to reconcile itself with its past relationship to colonial power and the subsequent postcolonial and New Left critiques of the discipline, of which Said’s was one of the most salient. James Clifford, argued that “recent trends” in anthropology – including the discussions generated by Said’s *Orientalism* – “have cast radical doubt on the procedures by which alien human groups can be represented... These studies suggest that while ethnographic writing

cannot entirely escape the reductionist use of dichotomies and essences, it can at least struggle self-consciously to avoid portraying abstract, a-historical ‘others’” (1983, p. 119). He goes on that “neither the experience nor the interpretive activity of the scientific researcher can be considered innocent” (1983, p. 133) and that ethnography must be understood as “constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects” rather than one person writing about an “other” (1983, p. 133).

So what is to be done? Is positive knowledge still possible? Clifford writes that “paradigms of experience and interpretation are yielding to paradigms of discourse, of dialogue and polyphony” (1983, p. 133), paradigms which would be celebrated in the landmark book he co-edited with George E. Marcus, *Writing Cultures* (p. 133). Marcus would later ruminate that despite the body-blows anthropology had received, it had not given up entirely on “cultural translation, which is what ethnography is” (1998, p. 186). Even Talal Asad, the anthropologist who preceded Said in pointing out the imbrication of anthropology with empire and whose later work is famous for Foucault-inspired genealogies and a “conceptual, antihumanist, and antiprogressivist approach” (Scott, 2006, p. 139), is nonetheless amenable to histories which “track the movement forward from past to present of some idea or institution or practice” (Scott, 2006, p. 138) and to ethnography itself, which Asad believed could still be fixed:

I believe that it is a mistake to view social anthropology in the colonial era as primarily an aid to colonial administration, or as the simple reflection of a colonial ideology. I say this not because I subscribe to the anthropological establishment’s comfortable view of itself, but because bourgeois consciousness, of which social anthropology is merely one fragment, has always contained within itself profound contradictions and ambiguities – and therefore the potential for transcending itself. For these contradictions to be adequately apprehended it is essential to turn to the historical power relationship between the West and the Third World and to examine the ways in which it has been dialectically linked to the practical conditions, the working assumptions, and the intellectual product of all disciplines representing the European understanding of non-European humanity. (Asad, 1973, pp. 18–19)

Relative autonomy is possible for anthropologists. But they have to be careful, and that care is provided by reflexivity. While anthropologists have a somewhat different project than sociologists, we take seriously the need to be reflexive and the reminder that such reflexivity must (1) be aware of the location of the researcher and the complicated ways his or her knowledge might be used and (2) be humble regarding the importance of accuracy and

representativeness in her knowledge and the possibility of it later being disproven.

What is interesting about these critiques of ethnographic method is that, despite their acknowledged debt to Edward Said's work in developing a reflexive anthropology, this reflexivity is generally about the dangers of enacting the violence of essentialization and contributing to epistemic violence. These are obviously valid concerns, but, again, we worry that such an exclusive focus ignores the possibility of what we are calling the violence of apprehension. Such a lacuna is perhaps the result of these critiques' historical position: written from the early 1970s to the mid to late 1990s, this disciplinary self-critique of ethnography occurred between two major moments of explicit United States' imperialism, which might explain why there was less concern about the ability of those in power to use more or less accurate academic knowledge to better consolidate power. More recently, anthropologists have become much more explicitly aware of the potential dangers of the violence of apprehension, as evidenced in the discussion above about AAA's, and other anthropologist networks, concern and criticism of attempts to harness anthropological methods and knowledge to aid in counterinsurgency and military-led state building. For the methodological mainstream, however, the violence of essentialization and epistemic violence remain the biggest worries for the discipline.

A similar blind spot affects the reflexive turn within sociology. Perhaps more than any other sociological theorist, Bourdieu, who began his career teaching at the University of Algiers in the late 1950s in the midst of the Franco-Algerian war and conducted field work in Kabylia, is aware of and provides sophisticated frameworks for the study of the relationship between knowledge and power which is such a concern for Edward Said and other postcolonial theorists. Said criticized Bourdieu for failing to explicitly address the relationship between empire and knowledge. In a noteworthy address to the American Anthropology Association, Said complains: "Is it farfetched to draw an analogy between Camus and Bourdieu in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, perhaps the most influential theoretical text in anthropology today, which makes no mention of colonialism, Algeria, and so on, even though he writes about Algeria elsewhere? It is the exclusion of Algeria from Bourdieu's theorizing and ethnographic reflection that is noteworthy" (1989, p. 223). While Said was empirically wrong in this statement (*Outline* contains multiple passages and scores of footnotes referencing Algeria), it is true that Bourdieu's meta-theorization of the relationship between knowledge and power developed largely after he had returned to France – his taxonomy of forms of capital, analysis of symbolic

violence, and later theorization of the state's "monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 1999; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 112) – remain bounded by a metropolitan horizon.

Within the typology of violences we have outlined, Bourdieu's call for a reflexive sociology is predominantly focused on the potential for essentialization and epistemic violence. But, this concern is less about the object of study and more about how these biases might corrupt the production of objective knowledge. The explicit goal of practicing a thorough "epistemic reflexivity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) emphasized in his earlier work is a more rigorous scientification of the sociological project. As Marcus observes, "Self-reflexivity is for Bourdieu a renewed and more powerful form of the old project of the sociology of knowledge, but this time fully integrated as a dimension of sociological method" (1998, p. 195). Bourdieu is predominantly worried about getting sociological apprehension right.

To be fair to Bourdieu, though, it is important to recognize how he *indirectly* did incorporate the question of empire, particularly in his later, more transparently reflexive period. Writing about his early fieldwork in Algeria, Bourdieu explained that a guilty conscience about being a "participant observer in this appalling war" his response was to "do something as a scientist." Referring to the political context of the Algerian war in the late 1950s, he states: "In a historical situation in which at every moment, in every political statement, every discussion, every petition, the whole reality was at stake, it was absolutely necessary to be at the heart of events so as to form one's opinion, however dangerous it might have been – and dangerous it was" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 33, quoted from Kocyba, Schwibs, & Honneth, 1986, p. 39). Bourdieu was acutely aware of the ethical dilemmas of his position in a brutal anti-colonial war as an academic sociologist funded by the French state. His response, much more fully developed in his later theorization of reflexivity, was to produce more accurate, more objective knowledge of Algerian society (and of French colonial society). He later mentions that his ethnographic work in Algeria had sensitized him to the "'epistemocentrism' associated with the scholarly viewpoint," but his resulting concern focused on "the presuppositions and prejudices associated with the local and localized point of view of someone who constructs the space of points of view" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 254). Bourdieu's fixation with "epistemic reflexivity," the origins of which he traced back to his ethnographic field work in Kabylia, features the sort of accountability we are calling for, but it only partially covers the types of violence associated with the production of knowledge within an imperial topography of power. Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is highly sensitive to

the violence of essentialization and deeper structures of epistemic violence but, for him, these are a concern predominantly as problems of knowledge. His reflexive approach is intended to ensure the production of more objective and accurate sociological knowledge, but, in doing so, still leaves the door open for the violence of apprehension.

Michael Burawoy's famous call for a reflexive sociology runs into similar problems, as it focuses primarily on the values, goals, and audiences of sociological work than the potential for violence which we raise in this chapter. In his many writings about public sociology, he repeatedly insists the central questions sociologists must ask themselves is for whom and for what are they doing sociology (Burawoy, 2005a, p. 12), determining which values drive their work "by engaging in what Weber called value discussion, leading to what I will refer to as reflexive knowledge" (2004, p. 1606). He does ask if sociologists should "be concerned explicitly with the goals for which our research may be mobilized" (2004, p. 1606) and, in some of his writing about policy sociology, refers to its tendency to "legitimate solutions that have already been reached" (2005a, p. 9). Yet the vast majority of Burawoy's writing about public sociology have focused on "sociology's affiliation with civil society, that is public sociology, represent[ing] the interests of humanity – interests in keeping at bay both state despotism and market tyranny" (2005a, p. 24). Burawoy's reflexivity, in other words, is about the need to do good, rather than the need to avoid violence. Burawoy does obliquely acknowledge the kinds of violence that concern us here with his insistence that sociologists "provincialize" United States sociology (2005a, p. 22), but this refers to epistemic violence and the violence of essentialization and still misses the violence of apprehension.

This is not to denigrate Burawoy's call, which is similar to the later work of Pierre Bourdieu and the reflective humanism of Edward Said. We find all three personally inspiring and an appropriate model for sociological work. We recognize, however, that not all sociologists find public sociology so attractive or intellectually tenable (Hadas, 2007; Holmwood, 2007). While Burawoy says his questions are "for whom and for what" sociological knowledge is produced, he actually appears to be asking for whom and *toward* what, for example, what are the values that drive the end-goals of our research? For the purposes of this chapter, we can afford to be relatively agnostic about this values-question, as our most pressing concerns are about the "for what" which Burawoy often elides, for example, the real possibility of our knowledge making any of the three forms of violence possible. In other words, whether or not sociologists choose to take a stand against the

war in Iraq or Afghanistan as sociologists or even simply as citizens, whether or not they intend their work to end or justify the wars, their research on Iraq or Afghanistan will be used by those in power.

While we have been emphasizing the implications of scholarship on the Middle East and Islam, it is important to remember that a sensitivity to how sociological knowledge will be used is vital for all fields within the discipline. Work on inner-city populations, on crime and the justice system, on migrant labor, on religious minorities, on “right wing terrorism” – to name only a few – are just as likely to be used by those in power. As we have discussed regarding the French and American imperial contexts, states or major corporations want “operationalizable” knowledge that can be used to implement policy. The well-known dictum that “policy people only read one paragraph” might be an unfair characterization of officials’ intellectual ambitions, but it demonstrates well the basic problem that subtle, nuanced, more or less accurate knowledge will inevitably be rendered blunt and essentialized to create government and corporate policies and strategies.

As the recent turn in anthropology has ably demonstrated, all representation is potentially violent: even the most careful ethnographer misses something in writing her field notes, and then misses even more when she turns those field notes into articles and books. While there can be certain strategies – among them various kinds of reflexivity – to acknowledge what is missing, these strategies are simply impossible to implement on a broad scale. Social scientists who study any marginalized groups within any society should be particularly sensitive to how the knowledge they produce – however sensitively collected and presented – is used by those in power, yet social scientists should also recognize that any data they produce – no matter how arcane the information gathered, no matter how protected the population studied – might well be used to consolidate power. We would propose that, in addition to worrying about whether or not our work as social scientists “makes a difference,” we should worry about the sort of difference our work makes.

CONCLUSION: WHY EDWARD SAID MATTERS

There appear to be two strategies to deal with these worries about our knowledge’s potential implications for violence: the first is to avoid the problem by not producing positive knowledge and the second is to ensure that our knowledge is used the way we want it to, that is, as nonviolently as possible. Said does not ignore the stakes involved here, warning that

“reading and writing texts are never neutral activities: there are interests, power, passions, pleasures entailed no matter how aesthetic or entertaining the work” (1993, p. 318). These stakes are particularly dire when writing about others, as Said describes how anthropologists must resolve “the almost insuperable contradiction between a political actuality based on force, and a scientific and humane desire to understand the Other hermeneutically and sympathetically in modes not influenced by force” (1993, p. 56). The problem, as we have been insisting throughout this chapter, is not only one of force occluding “accurate” knowledge whether diachronically or synchronically but also force using sensitively acquired more or less accurate knowledge for its own ends.

In an address to American anthropologists, Said warns that United States foreign policy is ‘heavily dependent on cultural discourse, on the knowledge industry, on the production and dissemination of texts and textuality, in short, not on ‘culture’ as a general anthropological realm, which is routinely discussed and analyzed in studies of cultural poetics and textualization, but quite specifically on our culture’ (1989, p. 215). More importantly, he asks anthropologists about “intellectual dissemination, the exfoliation of scholarly or monographic disciplinary work from the relatively private domain of the researcher and his or her guild circle to the domain of policy making, policy enactment, and – no less important – the recirculation of rigorous ethnographic representations as public media images that reinforce policy” (1989, p. 218). As we have mentioned above, such ethnographic representations run the risk of possible violence because they can lead to essentialized understandings of the “other” or can produce an “epistemic violence” which undercuts local categories and knowledge. Yet these representations also have the potential for violence even if they are more or less accurate; Said gives the example of James Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak*, “a brilliant empirical as well as theoretical account of everyday resistances to hegemony [which] undercuts the very resistance [Scott] admires and respects by in a sense revealing the secrets of its strength” (1989, p. 220). The culture and knowledge social scientists create can and often will be used by those in power. What are we to do?

Said’s answer to this question at the end of his address to anthropologists is a bit unsatisfying, providing a vague insistence on seeing “Others not as ontologically given but as historically constituted” (1989, p. 225) which does not really resolve the possibilities for the three forms of violence we have outlined here. In the same address, however, Said provides a caveat “that the imperial system that covers an immense network of patron and client states, as well as an intelligence and policy-making apparatus that is both

wealthy and powerful beyond precedent, does not cover everything in American society” (1989, p. 215). It is this possibility for standing outside of power that provides hope for Said and those who follow him, a possibility made tenable by his ultimately aligning with the Gramscian rather than the Foucauldian side of *Orientalism*. In an interview, he said that while writing the book, he “was already aware of the problems of Foucault’s determinism...where everything is always assimilated and acculturated...The notion of a kind of non-coercive knowledge, which I come to at the end of the book, was deliberately anti-Foucault” (Said & Viswanathan, 2001, p. 80). In a much-cited collection of essays, Said laments that “what one misses in Foucault is something resembling Gramsci’s analyses of hegemony, historical blocks, ensembles of relationships done from the perspective of an engaged political worker for whom the fascinated description of exercised power is never a substitute for trying to change power relationships within society” (Said, 1983, p. 222).

This description of Gramsci could just as easily describe Said, and it is in Gramsci that Said finds a balance between Matthew Arnold’s positive view of culture and Foucault’s suspicion of culture’s relationship to power:

...as Gramsci is everywhere careful to note, cultural activity is neither uniform nor mindlessly homogenous. The real depth in the strength of the modern Western State is the strength and depth of its culture, and culture’s strength in its variety, its heterogeneous plurality... [Gramsci] loses sight neither of the great central facts of power, and how they flow through a whole network of agencies operating by rational consent, nor of the detail – diffuse, quotidian, unsystematic, thick – from which inevitably power draws its sustenance... Well before Foucault, Gramsci had grasped the idea that culture serves authority, and ultimately the national State, not because it represses and coerces but because it is affirmative, positive, and persuasive. (Said, 1983, p. 171)

It is because of Gramsci’s inspiration that Said is able to urge his fellow critics “to see culture as a historical force possessing its own configurations, ones that intertwine with those in the socioeconomic sphere and that finally bear on the State as a State” (1983, p. 171). Said was concerned because such an engagement is not happening, however, at least not in Said’s field of comparative literature. Instead, an “ethic of professionalism” (1983, p. 4) has emerged, obsessing over small technical problems and rendering impossible the “autonomously functioning intellectual” (1996 [1994], p. 67) who “ought to be an amateur” (1996 [1994], p. 82). Such an amateur that is, someone unafraid to engage “even the most technical and professionalized activity” despite a lack of proper specialization is necessary because these debates are important for all citizens and not only specialists

(1996 [1994], p. 82). Like Buraway's comments on sociology, Said laments that his discipline – which was once at the forefront of debates about society – has now more or less excused itself, the better to make time and space for highly technical debates (Said, 1982). Unlike Buraway, Said does not support a scholarly division of labor: he would like all scholars to be public scholars.

However, one of the problems we find with “amateur intellectuals” is that they are not able to provide the sort of correction and accountability that specialization provides. While we share Said's wariness about guilds of scholars wholly removed from the world, we would point to the reflexivity of Marcus, Bourdieu, and Buraway as providing examples of scholarship which is publicly focused but also adept at the latest theoretical and methodological innovations within a field of study and amenable to correction of its empirical content and theoretical approach. This type of reflexivity would enhance Said's larger goals. For example, in *Orientalism* and elsewhere, Said makes distinctly *sociological* causal arguments about institutions, discourses, and culture and, throughout his oeuvre, he cites sociologists and anthropologists approvingly. Yet the relative weakness of Said's causal arguments was one of the major criticisms of *Orientalism*, and better sociology would have made for a better book. Steinmetz's *The Devil's Handwriting* (2007), is, among other things, just such a correction and addition to the sociological arguments implicit in *Orientalism*. If post-colonial theorists are going to make causal arguments about culture and institutions, they might as well learn from sociologists how to make sociological claims. As McLennan argues, a major “overlap” between postcolonial theory and sociology is “the continuing necessity of ‘sociology’ in the generic, if not necessarily disciplinary, sense: an elementary and plausible sociology of current trends and developments, and some kind of articulation of ‘the logic of the social’” (2003, p. 83).

In the other direction, sociologists ought to learn from postcolonial theorists how to be more careful and reflective about the relationship between the knowledge they create and the powers they (often unwittingly) support or repress. While openness to correction and an awareness of how our location affects what we produce are both vital forms of reflexivity of which Said was well aware, we have been stressing another kind that Said also insisted upon. Scholars must be aware of what their knowledge does, and they must find a place from which to produce and then observe that knowledge in relative autonomy from those in power. If, as Said claims, there is such a thing as a relative autonomy of culture, and if culture can stand up against the State and not only add to its power, then there is some

possibility for more or less accurate knowledge that does not immediately contribute to the three violences we describe here.

We do not want to equivocate: the odds are that knowledge produced about high-interest groups will be used by government powers. Yet there is also the possibility that our knowledge might change minds and improve policy in a way that does not consolidate state power but rather works within civil society to lessen suffering, increase freedom, and makes lives more meaningful. To do so requires no small amount of Gramscian hope in the face of overwhelming odds, but it also requires a commitment by intellectuals – and for our purposes, sociologists – to pay attention to what their knowledge does and where their knowledge goes. In his address to anthropologists, Said says that, while writing *Orientalism*, “I did not feel that I could give myself over to the view that an Archimedean point existed outside the contexts I was describing, or that it might be possible to devise and deploy an inclusive interpretive methodology that could hang free of the precisely concrete historical circumstances out of which Orientalism derived and from which it drew sustenance” (1989, p. 211). Relative autonomy is not total autonomy, and we sociologists are responsible for what we create.

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