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# Said and the Religious Other

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Whether observed in French *laïcité*, Kemalist Turkey, Kantian political theory, Western Christian theology, or North Indian classical music, the presence of modern secularity has been demonstrably complex (Asad 2003; Bakhle 2008; Blumenberg 1985; Connolly 1999; Navaro-Yashin 2002). My purpose in this essay is to further examine the intricacies of the modern secular, specifically its relation with what it deems "religious." My focus will be Edward Said, whose paradigmatic engagement in secular, critical, and comparative inquiry makes his work an ideal place to investigate the modern apparition of the secular. It is widely acknowledged that *Orientalism* (1979) led to a profound transformation of entire fields of inquiry in the humanities and social sciences, and even the creation of new ones.[1] Said's work as a practice of criticism has been instrumental in addressing the affinities between forms of knowledge and domination, especially in their colonial variety. However, studies of his writings have only recently begun to address the topic of modern secularism in his work, which will be at the center of this paper (e.g., Mufti 2004; Hart 2000; Anidjar 2006; Apter 2004; Robbins 1994; Gourgouris 2004).

I believe that to understand Said's secularity we must look beyond his sentimental appraisals of religion, which have evoked both sympathy and resentment, and much debate, among various writers. Further, we cannot understand his secularity if we take his use of such adjectives as "religious" and "secular" literally. What matters about these adjectives, and the qualities

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[1] Noting its immense impact on anthropology, for example, Nicholas Dirks states: "*Orientalism* was not just an important intervention, it was one of the most critical books for reconceptualization of anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century" (2004: 42).



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he makes them stand for, are the ways in which Said's figurative deployment of them is predicated on a secularist imagination.

I will identify in his works the enactments of a partisan secular self and argue that they illuminate modern secularity. Specifically, I will demonstrate how the secular is made an *authoritative presence* in Said's practice of criticism. The sensibilities that inhabit his practice elucidate how the secular secures its modern presence through dependency on and denial of what it designates as "the religious." I must stress that I am not interested here in Said's writings per se, but rather in how they provide a useful instance for a comparative investigation of the complex and contradictory workings of the secular in a humanist intellectual tradition in the West.

I will concentrate on Said's espousal of "secular criticism" as he elaborated this notion in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983) and famously employed it to analyze the coalescence of politics and knowledge in his iconic *Orientalism* (1979). My essay will follow Said's enactment of a secular authority in these texts, showing how he distinguishes this kind of authority from "the religious" in establishing a sense of "the real," a sense of self, other, place, and criticism, with particular attention to the significance of "history." Said's writings also offer an occasion to consider not only how the secular is distinguished from the religious, but also how the former is dependent upon the latter. After considering this dependency through examples from modern Arabic poetry, I conclude by suggesting that "Secularism" could be a sequel to *Orientalism*, probing the relation between dominant and dominated selves much as Said did in that monumental work.

## ENACTMENTS OF A SECULAR AUTHORITY

In Said's work the notion of "secular criticism" evolved into a critical-ethical creed, undoubtedly facilitating his ascent to renown as a public intellectual in the modern, secular, Western academy.[2] Through a secular persuasion, Said tells us that the intellectual resists removing ideas from the world of politics and history, whether in "traditional" or "modern" societies. A secular attitude, which Said never assumes to be peculiar to a secular societal order, helps ideas defy their professional destiny, which would cloister them in sterile, specialized, academic vocabularies, impervious to domination and oppressive human conditions. To think, read, and write in a secular way, according to Said, is to sustain and nourish receptivity to the circumstances of writing and speaking in

[2] I speak of "the secular," as Talal Asad (2003) recommends, in order to sustain the distinction between it and two related concepts: secularism and secularization. Following Asad, I take the secular as an ontological-epistemic formation, secularism as a political doctrine about the separation between religion and politics, secularization as simultaneously a historical process and a sociological thesis. For a lucid and compact sociological review of these concepts, see José Casanova (1994), and for a detailed account of the Christian history of the notion of secularization, as a category that emerged originally from "theology of division," see Hans Blumenberg (1985).

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the world as they leave traces in the acquiescent or dissenting relations that texts seek to establish with domination. Indeed, the secular for Said becomes a way of saying critical, since criticism "is, in short, always situated; it is skeptical, *secular*, reflectively open to its failings" (1983: 26, my emphasis).

This articulation of the secular is telling. Said writes against specialization in intellectual labor, specifically in inattentive literary theory and practice occupied with textuality, method, and system (1979: 25). However, in a certain sense, he seems to forsake the secular while advocating it. Precisely by invoking the secular to find, as it were, the political context in literary texts, Said deviates from the force that famously or infamously has been associated with secularization—the force of differentiating societal spheres, a quality central to the canonical Weberian interpretation of secularization (Casanova 1994). This differentiating tendency is not identical to the specialization of knowledge that existed in the pre-modern era. In the name of secularization, the compartmentalizing force par excellence, Said expresses his "refusal for specialization," as W. J. T. Mitchell (2005: 104) would put it, by calling on literary theory to avoid specialization as an oblivious field of scholarship. For Said, to remain secular means to be always receptive to truths of power, culture, and history, affirming "connections between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies, and events" (1983: 5). Thus, for Said, who contests the "triumph of the ethic of professionalism," the secular offers a worldly, as opposed to "otherworldly," presence to criticism (ibid.: 4).[3]

This formulation of "secular criticism" makes two points obvious. First, the secular can be articulated as an advocacy for merging spheres, for their openness to each other (e.g., literary criticism and culture), which is incongruent with the proclivity of the secular to compartmentalize spheres, to transform them into independent realms. In what I consider a non-secular moment, Said's preamble to his argument in *Orientalism* collapses the distinction between "pure" and "political" knowledge. "The general liberal consensus," he writes, "that 'true' knowledge is fundamentally non-political . . . obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced" (1979: 10). To secularize thus does not always mean to specialize, as Weberian accounts usually maintain (Blumenberg 1985; Swatos and Christiano 1999; Connolly 1999).

Second, what is unmistakable about Said's secularity is that it affirms itself by negating and denigrating its other. It exists in this world while its other does not; the latter's "quasi-religious quietism," Said contends, sends the critics to "another world" (1983: 25). The secular, it would seem, inhabits the "real" and its other the "unreal." This is because, as Said announces: "The secular

[3] At the opening of *Orientalism*, Said notes, "the general liberal consensus that 'true' knowledge is fundamentally non-political . . . obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced" (1979: 10).

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intellectual works to show the absence of divine originality and, on the other side, the complex presence of historical actuality. The conversion of the absence of religion into the presence of actuality is secular interpretation" (1989b: 168).[4] The differentiation Said conducts should already point to a basic perceptual or sensorial achievement of the secular in its modern apparition: its having made one reality, one sense of time, one mode of being, legitimate, affirmable, and realizable.

To fault Said's work for the foible of inconsistency would be neither fair nor appropriate.[5] For, as Said tirelessly sought to remind us, knowledge, scholarly or otherwise, is *critically* assessed by its clear, constant, and thorough attentiveness to contingencies of surrounding conditions and not by a callous adherence to logical formalities. More relevant is what Said's invocation of secularism entails. My sense is that it reminds us of the complexity of the secular, as a formation out of whose modernity the political doctrine of secularism and the historical process of secularization have risen. The secular, I contend, is not simply about the separation of spheres, for as I have just shown, Said has invoked it to advocate their merging. Said's invocation reminds us that "the secular" lodges itself in senses of time, of the real, of the self and its other.

The secular in Said also operates as an authority, enabling a particular architecture of the self, positioned in a distinct set of relations to time and place. I propose that the secular self which Said enacts largely stands in opposition to its other, which it designates as "the religious," in a way similar to the opposition between the Orientalist self and the Oriental other, which Said dissects within Orientalist discourse.[6] It follows, then, that for Said the secular self, while embattled, is paradoxically able to define and designate what its other lacks. Thus, an assured, secular self constitutes itself by negating and denigrating the religious, something which Said admits, as in his aforesaid comment on the task of the secular intellectual: he designates the secular as a kind of presence and decries the religious as a kind of absence.

It is odd to speak about the working of a hegemonic order, which I take modern secularity to be in this instance, in the work of an intellectual who dedicated his life's labor to opposing all forms of hegemony. It is at least as odd to reflect on the hegemonic standing of secularism in the work of Said, for whom

[4] Indeed, this particular writing about the secular by Said is one of my sources for writing about the relation of the secular to the religious as one between presence and absence.

[5] Anidjar (2006), along with Hart (2000) and Mitchell (2005), has recognized Said's hostility to religion. While Anidjar attributes it to "his special whim or initiative, a fit of personal inconsistency, or creative idiosyncrasy" (2006: 58), I propose that it is more consistent with modern secularist politics than Anidjar allows.

[6] Similarly, but for different purposes, Hart argued that Said's religious-secular distinction "resembles, if not mimes, the East-West distinction" within Orientalist discourse. Concerned with expanding and fortifying what he calls "radical critique," Hart proposed dissolving "invidious distinctions" such as the secular-religious and refusal to take "religion" as a universal premise or object of such critique (2000: 86).

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"a secular attitude" is the capacity to make critical, that is, oppositional inquiry possible (1983: 290). We can often observe secularism's authoritative presence in Said's academic as well as his political work.[7] In fact his writing invites such an analysis if we tentatively assume that *analysis*, as a cerebral engagement, is all that the multifarious secular condition requires.[8] Said's oppositional criticism lends itself to a critique of secularism to the extent that it is a kind of authority crucial to the perceptions that profoundly animate his texts, and to their transmission and canonical distribution in academe and its secular disciplines.[9] I therefore read the secular in Said's work mindful of his understanding of authority as manifest in *Orientalism* more than thirty years ago: "There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analyzed" (1979: 19–20).

This sense of the authority of the secular is also found in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. This work offers us but one instance of the authoritative presence of the secular as, first, an intellectual sensibility guiding Said's project and, he would say, any other that aspires to criticism and, second, a secular self-understanding attainable through a series of negations of its other, namely, the religious. Said opens the book by introducing his notion of "secular criticism" and concludes it by elaborating on his sense of an opposite concept: "religious criticism." To Said, the secularity of criticism means its alertness, again, in theory and practice, to "the world of events," to circumstances of speaking and writing. While he admits the possibility of varieties of criticism, the proper (if not the only possible) mode of genuine criticism seems to be secular: "It is not practicing criticism either to validate the status quo or to join up with a priestly caste of acolytes and dogmatic metaphysicians" (1983: 5). Criticism obtains its proper name and comportment from secular, not religious attitudes.[10] So what attributes does Said allocate to each?

[7] By taking Said's notion of "secular criticism" as the locus of my inquiry into his secularity, my essay does not include an examination of his involvement in the resolutely secular movement of Palestinian nationalism, nor do I discuss his relation as an Episcopalian Arab to the ongoing debate on secularism in the Arab-Muslim world.

[8] Analyzing secularism should require that we examine more than just what it does to thinking, such as what it does to sensing and perceiving, but I cannot elaborate that point in this study.

[9] Similarly, Timothy Brennan notes that Vico gave Said a "decidedly secular authority" (2004: 34).

[10] While Said, as is well known, employed Foucault's notion of discourse to launch his critique of Orientalism, he does not seem to work with the notion of criticism that Foucault, in certain places, espouses. In fact, a certain tension seems to inhabit Foucault's notion of critique, from which Said's is spared. For example, in his essay "What Is Enlightenment?" Foucault attached neither "religious" nor "secular" qualities to criticism, as when he stated: "Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits" (1984: 45). Yet, in his essay "What Is Critique?" Foucault locates the arrival of the "critical attitude" as a post-Reformation event, that is, an event that

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Against the worldly, critical, skeptical, and historical approaches of secular criticism (all adjectives that he uses), Said pits the otherworldly, dogmatic, mystical, mythical, and metaphysical orientations of religious criticism. The latter harbor beliefs that are protective, not dissenting.[11] For Said, religious criticism is an agent of closure, shutting off human investigation in deference to authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the otherworldly. "A secular attitude," by contrast, "enables a sense of history and human production, along with a healthy dose of skepticism about the various official idols venerated by culture and by the system" (1983: 290). Said is anguished by the eroding secularity of literary criticism, which he bemoans as bringing the "return of religion." He finds in this "return" a corrosive appeal to magic, obscurity, and theology, impoverished skepticism, protective belief, and an absence of critical activity and consciousness that besieges literary theory and practice (1983: 292).

What stands out in Said's stance is not erroneous or even superficial thinking about the religious and the secular, but rather the moves he deems necessary to making a secular self and marking its other. The articulation of such a self-other relation compels consideration of the presence of the secular as a self that is continually constituted through negating and denigrating its other, marking an absence. Said's understanding of culture should have reminded him of the secularist trappings in his advocacy of the secular as the proper name and comportment of a critical sensibility.[12] For ironically this is precisely what he

occurred during the sixteenth-century proliferation of what he calls the "art of voluntary insubordination" within modern Western culture (1997: 32). At any rate, both Said and Foucault seem in these formulations to locate the object of critique as an externality of the self, and in so doing they take subjugation as inhering in oppression.

[11] The Qur'anic narration of no less than the Abrahamic founding of monotheism emerges precisely as a series of dissents. In his dissenting monotheism, Abraham, as the story goes, had to confront the polytheism of his father, of his clan, and of the Babylonian monarch Nimrod. To question further the inherent distance Said seems to presume as existing between "dissent" and "religious protective beliefs," one may also consider how acts of criticism are conceived or practiced even when steeped in religious theology. Such is the work, for example, of al-Ghazali within the Islamic tradition. In a way reminiscent of the Augustinian confessions, the self as a kind of authority is what constitute the target of dissent. Thus in al-Ghazali's *Alchemy of Happiness*, dissenting belief is not merely directed at an authority external to the self, at a non-self. The self, or rather the soul (*nafs*), is what is observed, explored, questioned, resisted, and also cared for: insisting on the necessity of observing its inner and outer "movements and stillness," al-Ghazali writes: "Awakening occurs to whomever is diligent in *jihad* (striving) exercise and is rid of the reach of desire and anger, vice and malfeasance" (1973: 125).

[12] One instance of this trapping occurs in Said's discussion of anthropology, in which he establishes a relation of identity between the secular and the worldly: "'Worldliness' is a notion that I have often found useful . . . the idea of being in the secular world, as opposed to being 'otherworldly'" (1989a: 212). Contrast this equation of the secular with worldly that Said affects with the refusal of such an equation manifest in Hanna Arendt's notion of "world alienation": "Whatever the word 'secular' is meant to signify in its current usage, historically it cannot be possibly equated with worldliness; modern man at any rate did not gain this world when he lost the other world, and he did not gain life either, he was thrust back upon it . . . " (in Blumenberg 1985: 9).

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warned against when he noted "that culture achieves its hegemony . . . based on a constantly practiced differentiation of itself from what it believes to be not itself. And this differentiation is frequently performed by setting the valorized culture over the Other" (1983: 12). Said differentiated secular from religious criticism precisely along those lines of demarcation by which the secular secures its image of a triumphant self. The secular is the sign of worldliness (and criticism); the religious is the sign of otherworldliness (and acquiescence). Thus his insights on authority ended with his blindness to how the secular has unfolded in the modern era as a hegemonic authority, one whose *affiliations* with his texts he could not acknowledge. To the last days of his life, Said continued to deracinate the secular as an other to the theological because it is, along with democracy and openness, one of the three core features of humanism (2004b: 22).

In order to pit secular against religious varieties of criticism, Said had to *believe in an essence* of religion (which is about the supernatural) whenever he relegated it to the status of an absence (1989b: 168), and by extension he also had to revere "historical time" (and its attendant humanism) as the sovereign temporality. "The core of humanism," he argued, "is the secular notion that the historical world is made by men and women and not by God" (2004b: 11). He further had to *dispossess* the non-secular, which he exiled to the "otherworld" when he spoke of "religious criticism" (1983: 25). Said, who otherwise writes piercingly about the poignancy and power of foreignness, ultimately affirmed the secular, announcing the frailty and finitude of theology, which, as Walter Benjamin noted in his first thesis on history, "is wizened and has to keep out of sight" (1968: 253). Thus, Said, whose Palestinian and Islamic *filiations* undermined his admissibility as a citizen of the late twentieth century, was perhaps compensating through his secular *affiliation* inside a global secular order.

I do not want to imply that Said's criticism harbors inherently dismissive views of actions and formations that acquire a religious character. Some interpreters of Said's legacy have found such a conclusion improbable. For instance, Bruce Robbins holds that Said appropriates the concept of religion only as an "insignia" against nationalism (1994: 6–7), Emily Apter maintains that Said remained intellectually curious about "cultures of belief" (2004: 53), and Aamir Mufti brands Said's "critical secularism" as a "critical practice of unbelief" (2004: 35). Aside from the fact that these positions unnecessarily presume religion to be about belief, they overlook that Said never seemed to bother with identifying a distinction between a critical and a putatively complacent secularism. And this is because, for Said, "Criticism in short is always . . . secular" (1983: 26). So while Said does not claim to have taken religion as his ultimate target of dismissal, he invokes religion along with its derivatives to confer a name and substance on whatever or whomever he opposes (e.g., the "priestly acolytes and dogmatic metaphysicians").

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We need to allow for a certain complexity in Said's relation to religion, even if he did not write and speak about it. This is the complexity that Mitchell sensed when he pointed out that Said transcended in practice what he thought about religion theoretically (2005: 104), or that Apter noted when she wrote that Said's secularism negotiated between competing "sacred tongues" (2004). For Said does not appear to have always grasped the incompleteness of his animosity. Consider, for example, his rebuttal of Michael Waltzer, when Said acknowledged that he held a "principled antireligious position" (in Hart 2000: 197). Yet his *Covering Islam* is an attempt to repudiate imperial, distorting knowledge of Islam, and it should alert us to how "unprincipled"—by which I strictly mean, variegated—this antireligious stance must have been.[13] No sensitive reading of Said can dismiss what I call the "residue" of a charitable impulse he sustained toward religion insofar as it might generate contestatory forms of politics, those fundamental to the aspirations and identities of cultures facing oppressive powers, especially outside dominant Western Christendom.[14] This is why I suggest that understanding Said's secularism should reach beyond the question of whether and to what extent he wrote disapprovingly and simplistically about religion.

I consider "simplicity" and "complexity" inadequate to describe the effects of authority on thinking. What marks Said's writing about religion under the authority of secular reason is not only a matter of cerebral activities ("simple" or "complex" reasoning), but rather, I propose, complacent ethics. Notwithstanding his critical sensibility, Said writes complacently about religion insofar as he affirms the power of the secular.[15] For instance, he identifies the religious as the inherent target of resistance (1983: 12), as the "quasi-religious authority" being troubled by worldly and critical consciousness of secular criticism (ibid.: 15–16), or as "quasi-religious quietism" that sends the critics to "another world" (ibid.: 25).

It is ironic that an intellectual who has taught us much about exile and foreignness, and who has passionately written about powers exerted on and exuded by the making of texts, about the struggles to chronicle obliterated

[13] In *Covering Islam*, Said holds that by examining the uses and abuses of Islam in the West he finds it "doctrinally as blameless in this regard as any other of the great universal religions" (1981: xvi).

[14] Joseph Massad asserts, "While respectful of religion as a personal relationship to the metaphysical, Said was a committed secularist when it came to intellectual life" (2004: 7). This assertion on Massad's part illustrates that a more adequate investigation of Said's secularity asks not simply whether Said respected or derided religion, but what were the various textual moves Said used to render religion as an other, invested in a metaphysics from which the secular is presumably spared.

[15] My assumption here differs from Apter (2004: 41) and Mitchell (2005: 107), who saw in Said's commitment to secularism a commitment to a feeble and vulnerable cause. To hold that secularism is an historic form of dominance, however contingently so, does not preclude another assumption, that it is a dominance that has become decreasingly able to hold its ground, or as Connolly put it: "The historical *modus vivendi* called secularism is coming apart at the seams" (1999: 19).

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absences and contest dominant presences in the world, nonetheless seems to have missed the same points regarding modern secularity. But like all the great works he studied, and like his own great work, Said was not above the conditions he describes. Would Said's *Orientalism* have attained the kind of credibility and authority it now enjoys in the post-Christian West, specifically in circles of critical (read, secular) theory, had he spoken affirmatively about that Western scar known as religion?

It would therefore be useful to look beyond questions of whether Said is dismissive and intolerant of the place of religion and religious practice in cultural life (Mitchell 2005; Anidjar 2006; Hart 2000) or benignly resentful and indifferent (Apter 2004; Mufti 2004; Robbins 1994). To understand his secular subjectivity, we must discern different ways in which Said takes religion as his other, something that Anidjar (2006) and especially Hart (2000) have studied. We need to distinguish Said's extra-literary appraisal of religion as a human cultural phenomenon from his semiotic invocation of it in the contrast he draws between secular and religious criticism. This opposition, as already mentioned, enabled him to consider the religious as the *sign* of a degenerate intellectual condition and the secular as a potential deliverer from it. In this particular semiotic assignment of "religion," we can examine the hegemonic working of the secular in Said as a modern intellectual of the humanist tradition.

## SAID AND THE TIME OF THE MODERN SECULAR

In historicism, historical time, and knowing history, Said saw indispensable tools for liberation from degraded knowledge and politics. I focus on his valuation of these tools, specifically his enthusiasm for historicism, to illustrate how the secular acquires self-recognition by fashioning a sense of space and, as Said's secular partisanship demonstrates, a sense of time.

Consider for example, how the word "otherworldly" operates in Said's partisanship for the secular to consign its other, the religious, to absence. Describing the rise of "religious criticism" as having the effects of a religious discourse, he notes how the latter operates as an "agent of closure, shutting off human investigation, criticism, and effort in deference to the authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the other-worldly" (1983: 290).

We thus see how the secular creates a spatial identity—this world and the other world—pointing to the territorial limits it draws around itself, and to the ramparts necessary for its self-recognition. It banishes its other as outside "the real" and outside nature, as though the secular alone inhabits "the real" and the natural. Another way to understand this affirmation of self is by considering all the sensorial work done by the secular so as to make only one world, one reality, one notion of history, and one sense of time and place (by which I mean worldliness) admissible in human cognition. For as Said relentlessly affirms: "Knowing is making, Vico said, and what human beings can

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know is only what they have made, that is, the historical, social, and secular world" (1983: 291).

The secular, then, is what renders history, historical time, or temporality legitimate and legitimately recognizable. That history and historical awareness seem to be the exclusive feat of secular thinking follows of course a humanist tradition of positing "man" and "history" as sovereign agents, marking the "exit" that Kant found historically necessary to maturity.[16] What is significant here is how Said's reverence for historicism amounts to his taking history to be a synonym of time.[17] It follows that what is ahistorical is also presumably outside time and outside knowing. His secularity appears to be above the soil of metaphysics and alone in the seas of historical time.

Said's embrace of history helps remind us that the secular works not only on securing a certain spatiality (in relation to the religious as that which stands outside the world), but it works also on temporality, that is, a sense of time. To Said, secularizing amounts to historicizing, and historicizing to temporalizing. To be "ahistorical" is to be outside time or to lack consciousness of it, a condition which encompasses the unreal, religious, mystical, mythical, and metaphysical. I wonder, if Said had affiliated his notions of history with Nietzsche's *Uses and Abuses of History*, for example, as opposed to the secular sediments of Vico's authority in *New Science*, or Auerbach's *Mimesis*, would he have discovered the ways in which history has become one of the "official idols venerated by culture and by the system" (1983: 290) that he implores us to contest?

I suspect that Said's enthusiasm for history would have been curbed by an affiliation with Nietzsche, who was anti-Christian and non-secularist in his distinct way but also a kindred spirit in his effort to disclose the intimacy that binds truth and justice.[18] In their similar battles, Said and Nietzsche fight for the wholeness of living and knowing, against the quarantining of facts away from values, thinking away from acting, and yet they arrive at opposite views on history. This is why Nietzsche, not Said, is capable of appreciating

[16] There is not the space here to elaborate on how Said's views emanating from the humanist tradition are a product of a series of complex omissions in the modern era, by which a multiplicity of times were banished by the arrival of a secularly experienced and expressed time.

[17] This point derives from the work of Reinhart Koselleck, who argued about the "flood of temporalization" in the modern experience and expression of "history" (1985: 26). Koselleck, focusing on the changing meanings of "history," suggests that "it now stands in and for itself" and is made to produce "truths" that "by virtue of their temporalization, became superior truths . . . demanding that the whole of history be read in terms of temporal structures" (ibid.: 256).

[18] This point about the non-secularity of Nietzsche emerges from William Connolly's work. Connolly contends that Nietzsche cannot be easily described as secularist when he exposes "those delicate tactics by which secularists first purport to leave religious/metaphysical perspectives in the closet at home and then quietly draw upon a subset of them to elevate themselves into pillars of public authority." Moreover, Nietzsche stands for Connolly as someone who "in his gratitude for existence . . . confounds the dour division between the enchanted world of medieval Christianity and the disenchanted world of secular modernism" (1999: 15).

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the so-called "unhistorical." "The unhistorical and historical," Nietzsche writes, "are necessary in equal measure for the health of individuals, of a people and of a culture" (1983: 63). For Said, modern historical knowledge opens the door to life and action; for Nietzsche, it locks it. Nietzsche sees in the modern rise of historical science a malady; Said sees the "new science" as an antidote to joining "the priestly caste of acolytes and dogmatic metaphysicians" (1983: 5). To those fatigued by "history," Nietzsche and later Foucault administer their well-known "genealogy."[19] For Nietzsche, history is a way to "religion" (and to art among other things as well). For Said, history is the healthy distance from religion, as he argued in his last work: "The core of humanism is the secular notion that the historical world is made by men and women, and not by God" (2004b: 11). Said's valuation of "the unhistorical" is one way to understand why he, who otherwise employs Foucault's notion of discourse, would be unable to find any use for his notion of genealogy in the critique of Orientalism. It is worth remembering Foucault's remarks: "It [genealogy] must seek them [events] in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history … it is necessary to master history so as to turn it to its genealogical uses" (1977: 139–60).[20] This agenda, I propose, is helpful in explaining why Foucault's notion of discourse was of greater service to Said than genealogy was.

It is crucial to understand how Said's and Nietzsche's opposing views on history are related to their views on religion. I do not offer Nietzsche's notion of history as either paradigmatic or prognostic. Rather, I suggest that Said could very well have suffered from the "consuming fever" that Nietzsche sees as a mark of our age: over-consumption of history. Against this "consuming fever" and "hypertrophied virtue" (1983: 59), Nietzsche diagnoses the rise of history as a "sovereign science" (ibid.: 66). He recommends the anti-historical and suprahistorical as antidotes whereby "anti-historical" is the force of forgetting and "suprahistorical" is the force of eternity: "Science … sees these two [as] hostile forces; for science considers the only right and true way regarding things, that is to say, the only scientific way, as being that which sees everywhere things that have been, things historical, and nowhere things that are, things that are eternal; it likewise lives in a profound antagonism towards the eternalizing powers of art and religion for it hates forgetting, which is the death of knowledge" (ibid.: 120).

If Said had adopted Nietzsche's irreverence toward history, his enthusiasm, if not reverence, for secularism might have been tempered. Yet it remains

[19] I do not wish to imply that Foucault (1977) is against history as such. Rather, he distinguishes between the "effective history" available to the genealogist and what he considers the metaphysical history of the theologian and modern rationalist.

[20] To say that Said could not find any direct use for Foucault's notion of genealogy does not mean that Said did not perform or at least espouse tasks that have genealogical effects (*a la* Nietzsche and Foucault).

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probable that Said's enthusiasm was ultimately for the cause of humanism, not secularism. He seems to have avoided the term secular and its derivatives toward the end of his life, specifically in works that were published shortly before and after his death. I am referring to the title of a foreword he wrote for the 2003 republication of *Mimesis*, in which he described Auerbach not as secular, but as earthly (staying closer to the German *irdischen*). In fact, Said pointed out that "secular" is "less concrete" and offers only a partial rendition of *irdischen* (2004a: 13).[21] For the last book he authored, he chose democratic, not secular, as the key qualifier in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004b).

I suggest that the veneration Said sustained—and Nietzsche did not—for this cultural idol known as history prevented him from questioning the invidious distinction between the secular and the religious. He saw the former as worldly and the latter as otherworldly; one, he believed, "enables a sense of history" (1983: 290) while the other "transposes the academic critic of literature … into another world altogether" (ibid.: 25). More importantly, Said's views on history offer a preliminary understanding of the secular as having to do fundamentally and specifically with our sense of time and "the real."[22]

Johannes Fabian's critique of anthropology offers the discipline an alternative to Said's espousal of historicism, which affirms a certain time and denies another (actually many others[23]). Fabian admits sharing a common occupation with Said and Foucault.[24] Like them, he is interested in the crisis

[21] Said's greater investment in humanism, when contrasted with secularism, is evident already in his early works, as in his translation of Erich Auerbach's "Philology and Weltliteratur." Said prefaces this translation by presenting Goethe's original notion of "world literature" as "a visionary concept, for it transcends national literatures without, at the same time, destroying their individualities … a concert among all the literature produced by man about man" (Said and Said 1969: 1).

[22] Talal Asad emphasizes that one of secularism's requirements is to transcend a plurality of times that people live, imagine, use, and respond to, even within modernity, toward "the homogenous time of capital." In the modern condition of secular nation-states, he observes, "Secular history's linear temporality has become the privileged measure of all times. The re-reading of the scriptures through the grid of myth has not only separated the sacred from the secular, it has helped constitute the secular as the epistemological domain in which history exists as history" (2003: 43).

[23] The others being unilinear time, cyclical time, time of return, eternity, actual present and deferred present, ongoing past, and futures past. In describing the emergence of history as a single, universal subject, Koselleck formulates a notion of simultaneity as being an intrinsic quality in the very structure of time. As part of looking at the modern semantics of the concept of revolution, he notes that before the Enlightenment and the French Revolution gave the concept (revolution) its modern, modish, stylish semantics, revolution indicated a "consciousness of return," as indicated by the prefix "re." For example, Hobbes wrote about the English Revolution of 1666: "I have seen in this revolution a circular motion." Koselleck adds that by the late eighteenth century, revolution no longer "indicated a return to given conditions or possibilities but has since 1789 led forward into an unknown future" (1985: 42–46).

[24] Said, in turn, seems to have read and even admired Fabian's argument in *Time and the Other*, noting that "Fabian's serious effort to redirect anthropologists' attention back to discrepancies in time, power, and development between the ethnographer and his/her constituted object is all the more remarkable" (1985: 5).

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besetting modern European knowledge. Like Foucault, but unlike Said, Fabian attends to the obliterations that were necessary for the arrival of our contemporary notion of time. He contends that evolutionary discourse was one of the ways in which anthropology constituted its object, a cultural other, and that the "starting point for any attempt to understand evolutionary temporalizing will be the achieved secularization of Time" (1983: 11). For Fabian, the arrival of a modern, legitimate sense of history is not a triumphant accomplishment of rationality, as it may seem in Said's embrace of the *New Science*, that is, history. Rather, it is a story of eliminations necessary to the success of Western colonial domination. Fabian argues that modern anthropology has been able to create its object and project a distance from it precisely through resorting to a universalizing notion of secularized and naturalized time.[25] "It takes imagination and courage," Fabian contends, "to picture what would happen to the West (and to anthropology) if its temporal fortress were suddenly invaded by the Time of its Other" (1983: 35). My point here is that Fabian's recognition of the contemporaneous multiplicity of times is predicated on his taking secularization as a process that banishes other notions of time. Said could not recognize this banishment because he assumed the secular and did not take the kind of distance from its modern epistemic-ontological presence that Fabian did. However, it does not follow that Said's acceptance of the secular was unfaltering.

## DENIAL AND DEPENDENCY

The incompleteness of the secular's grip on Said's thought takes several forms and appears in numerous places. For example, he comes closest to a genealogist's ethics, and hence is at odds with secular rationalist notions of a coherent subject, when he lauds Freud's elaboration on human identity in *Moses and Monotheism*.[26] Freud, writing toward the end of his life, confronted his own secularity, from which he had once decried religion as an illusion. According to Said, identity "cannot be thought or worked through itself alone; it cannot constitute or even imagine itself without that radical originary break or flaw which will not be repressed, because Moses was Egyptian, and therefore always outside the identity inside which so many have stood" (2003: 54). Compare this position with Foucault's remarks on identity and genealogy:

[25] On the contribution of secularized Time to the creation of anthropological discourse about the cultural other, Fabian held that the "temporal discourse of anthropology as it was decisively formed under the paradigm of evolutionism rested on a conception of Time that was not only secularized and naturalized, but also thoroughly spatialized. Ever since . . . anthropology's efforts to construct relations with its Other by means of temporal devices implied affirmations of difference as distance" (1983: 16).

[26] In his conclusions on "Religious Criticism," Said contends that "a purely secular view of reality is no guarantee" against "irrationalism or radical simplification" (1983: 291).

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"The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation" (1977: 162).

Thus Said's genealogical proclivities, and hence his deviation from basic tenets of modern secularity, are patently manifest in his refusal to work with the distinction between pure and political knowledge (1979: 9–15). It is important to recall how Foucault criticized the position of the modern historian who is "divided against himself; forced to silence his preference and overcome his distaste, to blur his own perspective and replace it with the fiction of universal geometry; to mimic death in order to enter the kingdom of the dead" (1977: 158). From the suggestion that Said here acts as a carrier of a genealogical and, in a sense, non-secular ethics, one can propose two things: first, that modern secularism, as an instance of authoritative tradition, cannot be assumed always to attain a complete hold on subjects who claim or are made to claim allegiance to it; and second, as I suggested earlier, that secularism should not be always understood as a force producing the differentiation of spheres (e.g., "pure" and "political" knowledge). If Said weds in a non-secular way the search for truth and justice, he has, in a typical secular fashion, taken that search to be viable only outside an identity he designates as "religious."[27]

Since Said commends Freud's model of human identity in *Moses and Monotheism*, a model that discovers sources for the self outside the self (collective and personal), he would likely agree with the idea that the more the self denies its other the more it depends on it and, specifically, the more the secular denies the religious the more it comes to depend on it. Said is alert to how Orientalist drawings of the geopolitical, cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, and scientific borders of the West hinged on the denial of Oriental presence in their making, as when he argues, "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (1979: 3), as a "cultural contestant" and source of Europe's "civilizations and languages" (ibid.: 1). Indeed the complex reliance or dependency of the secular on the religious is precisely what prompted Mitchell (2005) to call Said's work "secular divination." In practicing secular divination, Mitchell suggests, Said relies on Vico's theology, on a religious sensibility, which Said and those committed to his notion of secular criticism have not sufficiently acknowledged.

Said treats this quandary of the secular as a problem besetting those who suffer a deficiency in secularity. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, he aims to distance himself from distressing trends he identifies in the field of literary criticism. A secular attitude allows Said to stand against what he considers the "return of the religious," which leads to the proliferation of

[27] Arabic, a language that Said studied only in adulthood, happens to allocate similar phonemes to "truth" and "justice": *haq* denoting justice and right; if the definite article "*al*" is added before it, it could refer to one of God's names. The derivative *haqiqah* means truth.

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"precious jargon" and "formidable complexities" (1983: 4) among the "religiously inclined critics" (ibid.: 292) he finds partly responsible for the thinning of secularity in recent criticism. He identifies this trend as "a religious shift" resulting in "an increase in the number of fixed special languages," many of them "impenetrable, deliberately obscure, willfully illogical" (ibid.: 292). Said regards criticism as a "truly secular enterprise," cognizant of its affiliation to the political world and not acquiescent with it because secular criticism "deals with local and worldly situations" (ibid.: 26).

In the substance he imputes to "the return of religion," Said treads the same path as have other thinkers, maverick and mundane, who adopted the European Enlightenment's critique of religion as their guiding staff, declared as the other of theology, that category from which religion once emanated. My sense is that Said's critique (to the extent that it is also an enactment of a secular self-understanding) of "religiously inclined critics" preoccupied with method, system, and textuality, deserved as it may be, makes his attributing religiosity to them seem dubious. Especially so when the following questions are considered: Are these critics really religious? Might they be, in a certain sense, secular precisely when they shelter their anxieties in argot? What constitutes the religiosity or secularity of their mode of criticism?

We have several reasons to question and think through Said's depiction of this shift as putatively religious. After all, it is not religion, but secularism that is celebrated by its advocates (and rejected by its detractors) for its proclivity for differentiation of spheres (e.g., separation of church and state). It is also an ideology of the secular nation-state, whose bureaucracies work to ensure that the languages of therapy, politics, science, religion, finance, or aesthetics do not coalesce into a unified whole but rather stay as autonomous realms of fragmented human action.

Moreover, to take the mere evocation of religious-mythical reference as evidence of a tarnished or absent secularity, as Said does, is to flatten a *multiplicity of intentions* into a *single instance of naming*. Evoking religion in the title or subject of a book does not make the evoker any more affiliated with religion than does a book on capitalism affiliate its author to a capitalist persuasion. For example, someone like Max Weber cannot be more of a capitalist or Perry Miller more of a Puritan than any of Said's referenced authors can be more religious when they invoke "religion" as "the result of exhaustion, consolation, disappointment: its forms in both the theory and practice of criticism are varieties of unthinkability, undecidability, and paradox together with a remarkable consistency of appeals to magic, divine ordinance, or sacred texts .... When you see influential critics publishing major books with titles like *The Genesis of Secrecy ... Kabbalah and Criticism ... Deconstruction and Theology*, you know you are in the presence of a significant trend" (1983: 290–92).

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Said calls that trend "religious criticism" operating as though it were a "religious discourse" (ibid.: 290). Had Said taken a critical, that is, oppositional, distance from secularism, I think he would have generated questions about the ways in which such resort to argot, such increasing evocation of religious-mythical signs, is distinctly secular.[28] Had Said been attentive to the secular affiliations, zones, and intentions of his own texts, all proposed by him as targets of critical inquiry, he might have discovered that the secular itself is no less worthy a subject of critical inquiry, if only for having evolved and become at a certain point in Western and global history a kind of authority.[29] Said could then have elaborated on how secular assumptions become natural, cogent, and congenial whether they are made inside or outside academe. He might have elaborated on the ways in which the secular often arrives at a self-understanding by ignoring in itself things it detects and exaggerates in its other: annihilation of criticism, absence of history, or impoverished worldliness. He also would have been able to examine the seeming withdrawal of criticism from the "world of events" as no more religious than an act enmeshed in the secular politics of a modern literary, academic field. He could have asked what the rise of "formidable complexities" and "precious jargon" might have to do, not with a "return of religion," but with a predicament created by the secular itself in its modern career.

At least that is what I began to ask when I compared Said's observations on literary criticism in the West with my own observations on poetic composition during my ethnographic work among contemporary Arab poets. My aim was to examine the political significance of the rising stature of prose in their work. I observed that as traditional versified forms were losing their standing among Arab poets, more and more of them—whether living in Berlin, Cairo, or Ramallah—titled, infused, interpreted, and described their poetic texts in ways that would distress Said. Signs from the ancient mythologies of the Middle East and the monotheistic scriptures have proliferated in modern poetry, and yet secular poets deploy these signs in ways that would be impossible for "traditional" poets. So, for example, "secular" poets reference pagan gods and goddesses, such as the Canaanite goddess Anat, more often than traditional poets do.

Said might lament that Arab poets are as "otherworldly" as the literary critics he chides in the West. Poets who otherwise want to quarantine religion in the

[28] In fact "oppositional" might be considered Said's preferred emphatic, as when he says, "Were I to use one word consistently along with secularism (not as a modification but as an emphatic), it would be oppositional" (1983: 29).

[29] My position is that one should not conflate secularity to mean authority, let alone the authority always external to theology, because histories of "the secular," I submit, are more extensive than its appearance as a dominant political doctrine—secularism—inside and outside of Western modern societies. For a useful source on the complicated conceptual history of the secular, see Blumenberg, who considers "secularization" an "indefinite term" (1985: 23).

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zone of personal *beliefs*, outside of art and certainly outside of politics, as partisans of secularist politics typically invoke the religious in their verse in a way similar to the literary critics Said discredits. Consider the following examples from poetic works by Syrian-Lebanese Adonis, the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish, and a third from a conversation I had with the Egyptian prose poet, Helmi Salim.

> Adonis: The blood of gods is still warm on my clothes. The cry of a seagull ascends from the midst of my papers. Let me carry my words and go . . . .[30]

> Mahmoud Darwish: The hymn broke and prose spread in prayers.[31]

> Helmi Salim: Why should poetry be easy? It is one of the duties of poetry to change the sign into an allusion. My idea is that language in poetry carries back meanings, secondary, assumed meanings, not primary, blatant meanings. Poetry doesn't communicate information, it alludes, it does not report. But the difficulty in poetry is not because of the holiness of the text, it is because we lack mediators and because the language of poetry is allusive and not reporting . . . . Why should the content of economics, sociology need explaining but not poetry? This is not to say that poetry is sacred or priestly.[32]

Adonis is the mythical name that Ahmad 'Ali Said took at the age of nineteen as part of his rebellion against the public presence of a religious authority, Islam, in Syrian and other Arab societies. So vehement is his objection to religious political authority in these societies that a *New York Times* reporter called him "an outspoken champion of secular democracy and a ferocious critic of organized religion." This newspaper report invoked the authority of none other than Edward Said, who was quoted as seeing in Adonis "today's most daring and provocative Arab poet."[33] Although criticism of religion has not been as pivotal to Darwish's career, he, like Adonis and other contemporary Arab poets, increasingly refers to poems as a kind of prayer—a secular prayer. Darwish, who composes in free verse, complains above about the dominance of prose over verse, and its proliferation in versified texts. My point is that one is less likely to hear "traditional," or "conservative," or "non-secular" poets speak of their poems as prayers, whether versified or prosaic, in the way secularist poets do. Indeed, the semantic of the concept of poetry itself has shifted in such a way that poets who otherwise want to remove "transcendence" from public life and politics fill their texts with its signals; those who generally abstain from praying tend to write about it ("signifying" it) in their texts. In this way, contemporary Arabic poetry is veering not only toward prose, but also toward the difficult and the obscure, replete with opaque religious-mythical references.

[30] *Songs of Mehyar the Damascene* (Adonis 1971).
[31] *Mural* (Darwish 1999).
[32] Personal Conversation, Cairo, Jan. 2002.
[33] Shatz, *New York Times*, 13 July, 2002: n.p.

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One result has been that while contemporary Arab poets speak in a language of daily life, even in demotic Arabic, far removed from the elevated classical Arabic, they are nonetheless distinctly difficult to read. This is not because they resurrect unfamiliar words from the hidden treasures of ancient Arabic; the individual words are not difficult, at least not semantically, but the semantic and logical relations they weave between words often are obscure. Helmi Salim above defends this common approach in contemporary Arabic poetry, especially among prose poets. He wants to shed any sacredness that may grip language and texts; he wants to speak a daily Arabic that is distant from Qur'anic authority, yet paradoxically, Salim finds it necessary to have his poetry mediated to the masses. Again, it requires mediation not because it contains rare and obsolete words, but because what binds these words is opaque in a distinctly modern and indeed secular way.

In thinking about this obscurity, whether in Arab poetry or Western literary criticism, I find it useful to remain alert to the secular as a legitimizing formation, and to its relation with the religious other. The secular in this poetic shift displaces the religious and at once depends on it—the secular compensates for, substitutes for, and appropriates the language of its other. To what extent are the particular predicaments facing secular poets endemically secular? Should we expect to encounter them wherever we see the secular striving for an authoritative presence?

Recent inquiries into "the secular" register its complex relation with the religious. Examples of the articulation of this quandary, wherein "the secular" both denies and depends on the religious, occur in North Indian music's secular pedagogy that relies also on religious rituals (Bakhle 2008: 259), in political theory's disavowal of metaphysics while it re-institutes a new version of it (Connolly 1999: 32), in French government policy working in a theological fashion to secure its secular identity (Asad 2006: 40), and in the relation of "scientific" social theory to a theology it seeks to replace (Milbank 1993: 3). The point is that whether the secular lodges itself in poetic techniques, intellectual sensibilities, philosophical postulates, social theory, or state ideologies, we see it acquiring its identity and securing its presence through a relation to the other that it has come to name and depend on in the modern era as "the religious."

## CONCLUSIONS: ORIENTALISM'S SECULAR BEGINNINGS

*Orientalism*, the book, identified and even fomented a crisis in representation. "To represent someone or even something," Said writes, "has now become an endeavor as complex as an asymptote" (1989a: 206), and earlier, in *Orientalism*, he suggests, "The real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything" (1979: 272).[34] By way of concluding, I propose that the

[34] In anthropology, this suggestion was made over a decade ago by George Marcus and Michael Fischer in their *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1996).

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time has come to continue the exercise initiated in Said's *Orientalism* and to push further questions about the genesis of representational discourse in the West. With the advent of societies, theologies, and philosophies that have been described, adequately or not, as "post-secular" (e.g., Habermas 2002; Milbank 1993), we must now investigate how "the secular," in its ascent to power, became both a means of representing a modern self and its other (called "the religious") and a mode of knowing that engenders its own transcendence without being, in itself, a transcendent realm. It comes with its peculiar metaphysics, rationalities, certainties, anxieties, presences, and absences. These aspects of the secular should be the subject of comparative inquiry, whether the things compared are societies or theories about them.

As we extend the exercise Said initiated in *Orientalism*, we must learn from its weaknesses and strengths. We must ask not only how the modern West misunderstood and dominated the cultural other it located outside its geopolitical spaces, but also how it dominates the others it keeps under the surface within its immanent borders. Perhaps then we can arrive at a reading of Orientalism, the discourse, that sees it not only as a distortion of others, but also as an episode of disorientation or forgetfulness about one's own beginnings. It would then be possible to ask: Could the secular as a modern hegemonic formation be investigated as something close to what Said sees in the discourse of Orientalism, "a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts" (1979: 12)?

My suggestion that Said's *Orientalism* includes an invitation, perhaps unwitting, to a sequel that deserves the title of "Secularism" derives in part from Said's own argument about Orientalism.[35] He seems aware, even if not always explicitly so, that Orientalism's very beginnings reside in secularism. For example, at certain moments in his argument he identifies the secular in general terms (terms that do not invoke the secular) and stops with the appellation, "post-Enlightenment period" (1979: 3), or with "cultural energy that needed to create the Orient," or with "a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture" (ibid.: 12), all of them serving Said as sites for locating and thus comprehending Orientalism's history. Incidentally, these moments of evoking (and silencing) the secular as a category testify, I believe, to the secular's hold on Said's pronouncements; it is a general source out of which they emerge.

However, there are moments in the argument about Orientalism when Said is not silent about the secular making of that discourse. In such moments, for example, he timidly states, "modern Orientalism derives from *secularizing*

[35] Anidjar (2006) reaches a similar conclusion when he proposes that in writing *Orientalism*, and in waging his battle against religious authority, Said forgot the lesson of Orientalism, that it is secularism. He suggests therefore that Said's work, specifically *Orientalism*, be read as a critique of Christianity and therefore also as a critique of its secular remaking of religion.

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*elements* in eighteenth-century European culture" (1979: 120). A few pages later, he notes that Orientalism can be understood as "a set of structures inherited from the past, *secularized*, redisposed, and reformed by such disciplines as philology, which in turn were naturalized, modernized, and *laicized* substitutes for (or versions of) Christian supernaturalism" (ibid.: 122, my emphasis). In yet another place, Said notes that what Foucault identifies as the discovery of language was "a *secular event* that displaced a religious conception of how God delivered language to man in Eden" (ibid.: 135, my emphasis). Whether Said conceives of the secular as events, structures, elements, or processes, two things are clear: that the secular is the formation subsumed within the powerful discourse he identified as Orientalism (not the other way around), and that secularism has been—and this is an important point—at least one of Orientalism's beginnings. That secularism was a beginning for Orientalism in the West is demonstrated when Said describes Orientalism as a discourse that "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (ibid.: 12); it is not, in other words, a product of the world of "religious" Orientals.

The possessive pronoun "our" is precisely what opens up questions about how secularism, in its complicated Western varieties, might be productively investigated as one of Orientalism's beginnings. It would be helpful to remember Said's insights on the significance of beginnings for critical and comparative inquiry. "[T]here is no such thing" Said claims, "as a merely given, or simply available, starting point: beginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to enable what follows from them" (ibid.: 16). Another insight Said translates from Gramsci: "The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is … as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces … therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory" (ibid.: 25). Thus, our critical and comparative inquiry is to find out how secularism is one such process (and presence) whose traces are deposited both in Said's work and in what made the arrival of Orientalism possible in the first place.

*Orientalism* helped us understand the beginning of a European culture that "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (ibid.: 3). An additional exercise that builds on *Orientalism*'s exploration of how power and knowledge, how self and other, coalesce might enable us to be less assuming about the present we live in. To put it another way, we should rephrase Said's goal, and attempt to understand how *a secular* European culture gains its strength and identity by setting itself off against "the religious" as a sort of surrogate and even, until recently, underground self.

Through the "non-dominative and non-essentialist type of learning" (1995: 337) Said wanted his book to yield, we can relocate the discourse of Orientalism as an episode in a larger narrative of modern Western history, not simply one of distorting cultural others, but of confused, anxious, forgotten, and

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dominating identities, which find themselves living the schism between faith and reason, belief and science, and criticism and tradition. These and other ingrained polarities were necessary for securing the migration of the secular outside theology and its ascendancy as a particular and powerful history of the West. Secularism, in its modern apparition, like Orientalism, may then appear to be an authority necessary for producing Western imaginative, scientific, ideological, political, and military truths. Yet the secular in its modern and global career does not govern only the conditions of war or truce between the West and those outside it, strictly speaking, but it also is what is made invisible, absent, unreal, and irrelevant to its dominant modes of thinking and being inside its mutating existence.

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