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ALMOST UNCONSCIOUS: Towards a History of Said's Notion of Latent Orientalism

ABSTRACT

This essay offers an exegetical analysis of Edward W. Said's notion of latent Orientalism as taken up by later scholars of Orientalism. It argues that Said's presentation of this notion was modest, piecemeal, and obscured by the manner in which he presented it and that later scholars have frequently sought to magnify latent Orientalism's significance, simplify its meaning, and still claim a Saidian pedigree for their efforts. It concludes that while some of these later scholars have taken the notion of latent Orientalism into new territory, later renditions of the notion have introduced their own complexities and issues usually without improving on the Saidian original. The essay gives particular attention to those scholars who misrepresent Saidian latent Orientalism as being "unconscious".

INTRODUCTION

Edward W. Said's book, *Orientalism* (1978), is the widely recognized foundational text for the contemporary study of the notion of Orientalism, set the stage for developments in the field since 1978, and continues to dominate it down to the present. Among the most influential concepts that Said proposes in it are the twin notions of "latent Orientalism" and "manifest Orientalism," which scholars have frequently taken to encompass the fundamental structure of Orientalism. They have been especially impressed with the notion of latent Orientalism, which appears to expose the deeper, inner heart of Western Orientalism's ideological war on the East. Indeed, later generations of scholars have developed a larger family of terms duplicating and expanding on Said's original notion, which terms include: "concealed," "covert," "disguised," "implied," "inherent" "intrinsic" "invisible," "tacit," "subconscious," and "veiled" Orientalisms. And they use these terms to describe a largely hidden, nebulous, and powerfully influential ideological wellspring of Orientalist prejudices and stereotypes that Orientalists of all stripes unwittingly but habitually draw on to imagine and construct Orientals as an "Other" that has an essential, fixed, and usually inferior nature or being. Scholars who use these terms sometimes cite Said but often don't. They sometimes put their words in his mouth in the process, but again often they don't.¹ This is to say that Said's original notion of latent Orientalism is an important "moment" in the history of the study of Orientalism. It is my purpose here to re-examine Said's presentation of the notion in *Orientalism* exegetically and then to look specifically at how other scholars have responded to his original understanding of it. The goal is to offer insights relevant to the history of the notion of Saidian latent Orientalism.

SAID

The significance of the notion of latent Orientalism to the subsequent study of Orientalism is not something readers are likely to anticipate from the text of *Orientalism* itself. From first sentence to last, it is 328 pages in length, and Said doesn't get to "latent Orientalism" until the introductory

¹ See the entries for "Hidden Orientalism," "Implicit Orientalism," and "Unconscious Orientalism" in the "Glossary of Orientalisms" on this website (<https://www.orientalismstudies.com/glossary>). And see, Herbert R. Swanson, "Faddish Orientalisms: A Study of Hidden Assumptions in the Study of Orientalism," 25 January 2021. At this website, *Orientalism Studies* (https://8634c329-b0ce-497d-b86b-09687c01ce75.filesusr.com/ugd/4cfa9b_a291baf86d4b4cc782141b53b84e3b9f.pdf).

section of the third chapter, which is entitled “Latent and Manifest Orientalism” (pages 201-225). He doesn’t introduce the term itself until page 206, which is almost exactly three-fifths of the way into the book. The last time he uses it is on page 224, only eighteen pages later. And that’s it. That’s all there is. The term appears nowhere else in *Orientalism* and, remarkably, it doesn’t seem to appear in any of Said’s other writings on Orientalism including in his lengthy reflections in the “Afterword to the 1995 printing” of *Orientalism* (Said, 1995). It is equally striking that he uses latent Orientalism’s twin term, “manifest Orientalism,” only twice in the entire text (other than in subject headings and in the index), both times on that same page 206 and in two successive sentences. Whatever Said’s reason for ignoring the term, it is functionally unnecessary as the whole of *Orientalism* is a study in the manifestations of Orientalism so that “Orientalism” means “manifest Orientalism”. Said, however, doesn’t acknowledge this usage, and it appears that he is introducing the reader to two new notions. It does not help, furthermore, that he is opaque in the way he goes about defining the notion of latent Orientalism itself. It appears from the text that he defines it only in the one sentence when, in fact, he introduces it in a series of passing allusions sprinkled across the text, which collectively offer a clearer definition of the notion than does the one-sentence (one-phrase, actually) definition. For this reason, it is best to start with the allusions and work back to the one-phrase definition, and that is my approach here.

Said begins the section on latent and manifest Orientalism by summarizing his arguments up to that point. He states that in Chapter One he painted with broad strokes the ways in which the West has long feared and belittled the Orient, imagining that there is a fundamental cognitive as well as geographical divide between East and West. In Chapter Two, he focused on the 18th and 19th centuries in order to portray the emergence of Orientalism as a force to be reckoned with in European thinking and history. It is at this point that we begin to encounter hints of what Said means by “latent Orientalism” even though he has not yet introduced the term. On page 202, thus, he describes Orientalism as being a “field associated with traditional learning,” and on page 203 he describes it as being a “wide field of meanings, associations, and connotations.” Moving on, Said refers to Orientalism as being a “system of truths,” (page 204), and then he calls it a “body of ideas, beliefs, clichés, for learning about the East” (page 205). While all of these passing descriptions refer to Orientalism and not latent Orientalism, what they tell us provisionally is that Orientalism is a mental phenomenon that is associated with learning, meanings, ideas, beliefs, clichés, truths, and knowledge. It is also a collective “thing” that can be described as a body, a system, or a field all of which, again, reside in the mind. Orientalism, in sum, is a mental phenomenon. It is, as such, what Orientalists *think* about the East.

This summation is confirmed by the one place prior to page 206 where Said goes into a little more detail about the mental nature of Orientalism. On page 203, he observes that European Orientalists developed “idioms” to describe the Orient, which idioms came to dominate their discourse regarding the East, and he then states, “Beneath the *idioms* there was a *layer of doctrine*, which was fashioned out of the experiences of many Europeans, all of them converging upon such essential aspects of the Orient as the Oriental character, Oriental despotism, Oriental sensuality, and the like.” (Page 203, *italics* added). “Idioms,” as figurative and imaginative uses of language, are once again mental phenomenon as are doctrines, making this a particularly clear allusion to the way in which Orientalism functions in the human mind as a body of thought (doctrines) that directs the Orientalist’s attention to what is taken to be the essence of the Orient. Of particular note is Said’s passing reference to a “layer of doctrine” that lies “beneath the idioms,” which anticipates the notion of a *latent* Orientalism that resides beneath Orientalism’s manifestations.

The conclusion that Orientalism resides in the human mind is something less than startling news however Said clothes it in the rhetoric of academia. That he also conceives of it as being a “field” or a “body” does not change this conclusion but does indicate that for Said Orientalism is organized and has an inner logic that binds it into a whole. Still, all in all, Orientalism resides in the mind, and even if this is hardly a stunning conclusion Said hints at its importance in his passing observation that Orientalism is a “positive doctrine about the Orient that exists at any one time in the West.” (Page 203, *italics* added). “Positive,” in this sense, means “real,” and serves to alert the reader that, while it might seem to be no big deal that Orientalism is an artifact of the mind, in fact it *is* a big deal. We’re

dealing with a potent reality here, not “just” somebody’s private opinions or passing thoughts. We will return to the notion of “positivity” below.

Once Said introduces the term “latent Orientalism” on page 206, he begins to make a series of passing allusions to it in the same way as he previously makes concerning Orientalism more generally. He notes, thus, that latent Orientalism is a single thing that is stable, durable, and remains “more or less” constant; and he describes the latent context of European Orientalist thinking as being composed of “theses” (page 206) and a “framework” for viewing and evaluating Orientals (page 207). He writes that latent Orientalism is a “group of ideas” useful to a male-dominated evaluation of the East (page 207), and he refers in passing to it as being “intellectual operations” useful to perceiving and judging the Orient (page 208). Said also describes it as being a “**common intellectual and methodological tradition**” shared by Orientalists (page 210). Latent Orientalism, in sum, is made up of *theses* and is a *framework, a group of ideas, intellectual operations, perceptions, and an intellectual tradition*. All of this only serves to reinforce our conclusion that for Said latent Orientalism resides in the human mind where it determines European Orientalist thinking about the East.

These passing, brief descriptions of latent Orientalism show that Said’s descriptions of manifest Orientalism after page 206 are, in fact, no different from those previous to that page, and they are somewhat puzzling in that there seems to be little about them that is hidden or concealed—i.e. “latent”. Thus, “theses” according to Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary are propositions that are either to be proven or asserted without proof.² Whatever else they are, they are by definition something more overt than covert. A “framework” is “a basic conceptional structure (as of ideas).” Something that is “intellectual,” be it perceptions or a tradition, requires the use of the intellect, which Merriam-Webster defines as the “power of knowing,” the “capacity for knowledge,” and the “capacity for rational or intelligent thought especially when highly developed.” None of this sounds “latent” at all. Said’s use of the word “perceptions” to describe latent Orientalism is still more puzzling: “perception,” according to Merriam-Webster involves observation, concepts, awareness, and comprehension. Perceptions, by definition, are manifest and not latent. Most puzzling of all, on page 221 he argues that European Orientalists historically built up a “cumulative vision” that shaped their understanding of the “quintessential Orient,” which essential understanding he styles as being “**the doctrinal—or doxological—manifestation of such an Orient.**” And he adds immediately that this manifestation “**is what I have been calling here latent Orientalism.**” That is, Said says that what he has been calling “latent Orientalism” is a doctrinal or doxological *manifestation* of the Orientalist understanding of the Orient, which is contradictory since something that is latent cannot be a manifestation.

A pattern is emerging. We have already seen that Said uses the same kind of language to talk about “Orientalism” and “latent Orientalism”. We have also seen that he almost never uses the term “manifest Orientalism” and habitually uses “Orientalism” instead as if it and “manifest Orientalism” mean the same thing. Now, we find him describing latent Orientalism in passing using terms that are associated with cognition, i.e. “conscious intellectual activity.” We can only conclude that Said does not maintain clear boundaries between what is latent, what is manifest, and what is “just” plain Orientalism and that he does not treat the latent-manifest binary as being a hard-and-fast one.

Another thing that is striking in Said’s statement regarding doxological manifestations is the use of the patently religious term “doxological”. This is not the first time in *Orientalism* that Said uses the word: early on, he wrestles with Orientalism’s relationship to European culture, arguing that it is not Asian realities that determine how European Orientalists view the Orient but, rather, it is the whole complex of the organization of European Orientalism itself including, “**...the field's shape and internal organization, its pioneers, patriarchal authorities, canonical texts, doxological ideas, exemplary figures, its followers, elaborators, and new authorities.**” (Page 22, *italics added*) The fact that several of these terms, including “patriarchal authorities,” “canonical texts,” and “followers,” as well as “doxological ideas” have a religious flavor to them suggests a connection between religious forms or

² Dictionary definitions through this essay are taken from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>) and were accessed in May-June 2021.

models and Orientalism. Further along, Said again turns to the notion of doxology as he examines the historical status of academic European Orientalists by describing how they saw themselves as resurrecting the Orient as well as imagining and creating its reality in their studies of the East. He writes, “In short, having transported the Orient into modernity, the Orientalist could celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God had once made the old.” The fruits of this secular creation are preserved for future generations by what he calls “a secular tradition of continuity,” which he describes as “a lay order of disciplined methodologists, whose brotherhood would be based, not on blood lineage, but upon a common discourse, a praxis, a library, a set of received ideas, in short, a doxology, common to everyone who entered the ranks.” (Page 121, *italics* added). This is not subtle. “Doxology” is an out-and-out theological term. Said thus writes as if Orientalism is the secular equivalent of an organized religion that celebrates not only the manifestations of Orientalism, including its “praxis” and “brotherhood,” but also its “set of received ideas” with a sense of praise that reminds him of the way the faithful praise God. It seems that one of Said’s operating models for Orientalism is Western Christianity with its (latent) doctrines as well as its (manifest) ecclesiastical structures and practices. It is both notable and understandable that Said would imagine latent Orientalism to be religious-like: notable, because it nails down his sense that latent Orientalism is an organized mental phenomenon; and understandable in that to his secularist way of thinking Christian dogmatics offers an excellent example of the power that invented belief systems can have over both the mind and behavior.

It is in this context that Said gives his one-sentence definition of both latent and manifest Orientalism on page 206, which reads, “The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity, which I shall call *latent* Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth, which I shall call *manifest* Orientalism.” (*italics* in the original). The sentence begins by establishing the fact that Said is not actually introducing something new to the reader. He is, rather, expanding on and clarifying a distinction that he has already been making, namely that Orientalism is both something that is expressed in a (manifest) body of knowledge and in an underlying (latent) set of ideas or doctrines. The distinction between latent and manifest Orientalism itself is thus implicit in the larger notion of Orientalism and is important for that reason, but it still is not important enough to have been introduced earlier, defined more precisely and at greater length, or treated as a fundamental insight.

According to Said, latent Orientalism is “a positivity”. Merriam-Webster’s definition for “positivity” is sparse, unhelpful, and redirects the reader to the definition for “positive”. That entry defines something that is “positive,” as Said uses the word here, as being something that: *first*, is formally laid down or prescribed, can be stated clearly, and which inspires confidence; *second*, is unconditional, incontestable, and unqualified; and, *third*, is real and indicates an active rather than passive state of being. Latent Orientalism is thus a phenomenon that has to be taken with seriousness as an authoritative, clear, and (supposedly) reliable set of ideas or doctrines concerning the essential nature of the East that cannot be challenged or limited in scope. This “positivity” is real, compels action, and cannot simply be held passively. Said presumably uses this term to command his readers’ attention, demanding that they take latent Orientalism seriously as a reality that is as real in its latency as manifest Orientalism is in its manifestations. He also uses it to assert the fact that latent Orientalism is a system of ideas or doctrines about the Orient that is “prescribed” rather than discovered, “unconditional” rather than conditioned on Asian realities, and “unqualified,” again, rather than being qualified by those realities. As a body of knowledge supposedly about the Orient, thus, it has nothing to do with Asia or Asians; and as an “active state of being,” it creates its body of knowledge instead of passively receiving it from elsewhere. With this one word, “positivity,” Said accomplishes two things: he asserts the real-world reality of latent Orientalism, and he dissociates it from Asia or anything else outside of itself.

Latent Orientalism, moreover, is positivity that is “almost unconscious”. According to Merriam-Webster, “unconscious” in the sense it is used here refers to a state of ignorance in which one is unaware of something, which means that European Orientalists had a set of ideas or doctrines that functioned as a framework for their thinking about the Orient, but of which they were *almost* unaware.

The “almost” is important and must be taken seriously. It prevents readers (or, at least, should prevent them) from treating “latent Orientalism” as if it has a clear, uncontested meaning that is sharply distinguished from “manifest Orientalism”. We have already seen the way in which Said several times alludes to latent Orientalism with descriptions that seem to be as overt as covert, and the “almost” here very much reflects that usage. It serves to warn the reader to take the idea that latent Orientalism is “unconscious” with more than a grain of salt. Indeed, it means that latent Orientalism is a conscious mental phenomenon since it is only “almost” unconscious, not actually unconscious.³ And, in fact, Said understands that individual European Orientalist scholars historically could be aware of their own supposedly latent Orientalist beliefs. He observes, for example, that Europeans invested a great deal in their system of knowledge making of it “**an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness**” (page 6, *italics added*), and later on, he observes that one of Orientalism’s initial traits was its “**newly found scientific self-consciousness based on the linguistic importance of the Orient to Europe.**” (Page 98, *italics added*). Said, however, is also aware of the fact that European Orientalists could be both conscious of some of their beliefs and unconscious of others. In his discussion of the language of Orientalism, for example, he describes it as being a “mythic language” that is necessarily systematic, and he argues that Orientalists cannot employ such language discursively “without first belonging—*in some cases unconsciously, but at any rate involuntarily—to the ideology and the institutions that guarantee its existence.*” (Page 321, *italics added*). This is reminiscent of the one-phrase definition of latent Orientalism in that this mythic language is both conscious and unconscious but certainly involuntary. At the very end of *Orientalism*, Said contends that the danger facing all Western academic Orientalists is that there is a set of “received ideas” that dominates the academic field of Orientalism and is handed down to each new generation of scholars. He calls this tradition of received ideas “the old ideological straightjacket” and argues that freeing oneself from it requires “methodological self-consciousness” (page 326). This “ideological straightjacket” composed of “received ideas” is another allusion to latent Orientalism, and Said’s comments here underscore the fact that Western Orientalists can be aware of their latent ideas and doctrines, and, indeed, they must be if they hope to be free of them. Said, in sum, understands that Orientalists are both aware and unaware of the fundamental nature and power of Orientalism as a way of thinking, and he carries this dynamic between awareness and ignorance over into the one-phrase definition of latent Orientalism because he knows that Orientalists are not uniformly and unremittingly unaware of their Orientalism. Some of them, at least, can even consciously free themselves from the straightjacket of their latent prejudices and stereotypes. The “almost” in “almost unconscious” preserves this conscious-unconscious/latent-manifest dynamic in Orientalist thinking, which is why it is important.

Said’s one-phrase definition of latent Orientalism, thus, defines it as being a powerful, self-contained set of ideas or doctrines (a “positivity”) that is largely hidden from view but not entirely so (“almost unconscious”). He completes the definition by writing in parentheses that it is also a “certainly untouchable” positivity. Merriam-Webster defines something that is “untouchable” in two ways that are relevant here: *first*, the untouchable is exempt from criticism or control; and, *second*, it lies beyond reach. Given Said’s understanding of Orientalism generally, both of these definitions apply: the body of Orientalist ideologies are not (usually) questioned because they are taken to be so obviously true to those who believe them as to preempt any doubts. And, precisely because they are latent, Orientalists for the most part are not really aware that they even exist so that they really are beyond reach. The wording here, however, feels a bit awkward particularly because Said puts the “untouchable” part of it in parentheses that seem unnecessary. We can’t be sure why he did so, but it is possible that he uses the parentheses to tone down the assertion of untouchability just a bit—to

³ The city of Omaha, Nebraska, in the United States is situated on the western bank of the Missouri River across from Council Bluffs, Iowa. Omaha is thus, *almost* in Iowa, which is only about 200 meters away. But, even if it was only 2 meters, Omaha is still *not in* Iowa. That is what “almost” means, which again is to say that according to Said latent Orientalism is a “conscious” cognitive function, not unconscious. Even allowing for the fact that we are dealing here with a mental rather than physical, geographical phenomenon, the meaning of almost does not change. Something that is “almost” something else is *not* that thing, however we slice and dice it.

leave some “wiggle room,” as it were, similarly (but even more obscurely) to the way he uses “almost” to tone down “unconscious”.

In sum, *Said defines latent Orientalism as being an all but hidden deeper mental layer of Orientalist ideas (doctrines) that function as a framework used by European Orientalists to think about the Orient and its peoples. These ideas are held by Orientalists to be real, consequential, and have their own inherent integrity, which means that in the ordinary course of things the community of Orientalists does not and all but cannot question or amend them.*

In light of all of the ink that has subsequently been invested in Said’s notion of latent Orientalism, his own presentation of the matter is modest, restrained, and ambivalent verging on opaque. All in all, it is interesting, useful, but not that much of a big deal—or so it would seem if one only reads Said and ignores what comes next. It is, however, to “all of the ink” that we turn now.

AFTER SAID

Nearly thirty years after the publication of *Orientalism*, Daniel Varisco (2007) took up Said’s notion of latent Orientalism, focusing on the definition on page 206 of *Orientalism*, and wrote, “Notice how this passage sidesteps a totalizing sense by qualifying ‘unconscious’ with ‘almost,’ ‘found’ with ‘almost exclusively,’ and ‘unanimity, stability, and durability’ with ‘more or less.’” He characterizes Said’s rhetorical style as, “*This trope of the adverbial caveat*,” which he “dangled like catnip before the reader” so that Said could “speak in round numbers, so to speak, rather than giving what might be called a statistical, and thus potentially falsifiable, sense to his argument.” The result is that “any exceptions pointed out by a critic are pre-mitigated. The caveats appear to flow from cautious scholarship, but the latent intent is that of a polemicist.” (Varisco, page 56, *italics added*). Varisco also observes that, “The latent can be elicited only by reading between the lines, but Said has a tendency to choose lines of such seemingly singular meaning that they override an alternative, even a nuanced, reading.” (Page 57). And he concludes, “Said’s rhetoric stresses what might best be called a metaphysic by metaphor: that which is hidden is described by acting the way it would have to act if it were manifest.” (Page 59).

Varisco’s reading of Said’s understanding of latent Orientalism is at once insightful and cynical, helpful and not so helpful at the same time. On the one hand, he calls attention to the fact that Said is rhetorically obscure, and he realizes that Said’s one-sentence definition stands within a larger context that invites readers to read between the lines. He also recognizes that Said was trying to avoid absolutes and that his notion of latent Orient is a metaphor, which has a quasi-religious (“metaphysical”) quality about it. And, perhaps most notably, Varisco also recognizes that the distinction between latent and manifest Orientalisms is not that clear in that what is manifest defines what is hidden. On the other hand, Varisco focuses narrowly on the Said’s one-phrase definition and cynically declines to read between the Saidian lines. That same cynicism (that Said is a “polemicist”) excuses him from having to do the hard work of exegeting the text, that is of trying to understand why Said chooses the words he uses and defines latent Orientalism in the ways he does. Most other scholars do not read Said as carefully as Varisco, while making his same mistakes: they fail to read between Said’s lines; they focus exclusively on the one-phrase definition; and they read their own meanings into Said’s words.

A key case in point is Danielle Sered’s (2017 [1996]) roughly thousand-word summary of Said’s views on Orientalism illustrated by the original 1978 cover of *Orientalism*. Her summary is particularly important because the Google Scholar search engine puts it at or near the top of its list of hits for “latent Orientalism” and, sometimes, quotes it as *the definition* for the term.⁴ After a brief introduction, Sered provides a list of five key terms from *Orientalism*, which includes three global notions: “the Orient,” “Orientalism,” and “the Oriental,” to which she adds “latent Orientalism” and “manifest Orientalism”. This summary exemplifies what many of Said’s successors have done with and to his notion of latent Orientalism. The first thing they have done is to magnify the significance of latent Orientalism by making it one of the key concepts for the study of Orientalism. Sered does this

⁴ This, according to multiple searches for “latent Orientalism” at the Google Scholar search engine in July 2021.

by placing her entry for latent Orientalism early in her summary and by giving it, along with manifest Orientalism, the status of being one of only five key terms for understanding Orientalism. The reader is left with the clear impression that both the binary schema of latent and manifest Orientalism and latent Orientalism itself are of central significance when, in fact, *Orientalism* contains a large number of other forms of Orientalism, some of which are equally worthy of note.⁵ The second thing that Said's successors do is to strip his definition of its nuances in order to transform it into something supposedly simpler and more concrete. Sered thus defines latent Orientalism as being, "the unconscious, **untouchable certainty about what the Orient is**," which entirely ignores Said's several allusive descriptions of latent Orientalism and, instead, focuses on the one-phrase definition described above. She redefines latent Orientalism as being a certainty that is unconscious and **untouchable**, words that come from Said but are not used the way he uses them. The third thing that later scholars have done is to put their words into Said's mouth. Sered here presents her version of latent Orientalism as if it is Said's, and while she does not make that claim in so many words her context, presentation, and the illustration leave the impression that she is summarizing Said rather than reinventing him.

Derek Bryce and Elizabeth Carnegie (2014) use this same three-pronged strategy in their brief restatement of Said, which reads, "Said (1978: 206) argues that two types of Orientalism exist: a *latent set of assumptions* taking the form of 'an almost unconscious (and certainly an **untouchable positivity**', and a *manifest set of stated views about the history, languages, religions etc. of the Orient*.' (Bryce & Carnegie, page 3, *italics added*). They too magnify latent Orientalism in their assertion that Said claims that "two types of Orientalism exist" as if these two are dominant. They too reformulate Said's definition, substituting the notion of "a latent set of assumptions" in place of his "positivity"; and they too begin by asserting that it is Said who "argues" their reformulation. This sort of thing happens repeatedly in the literature. Ronald L. Iverson (1995) entirely discards Said's own words and claims that Said states that latent Orientalism "**represents the constellation of underlying attitudes and assumptions about the Orient which have remained essentially constant and unchanging through the years.**" He upgrades Bryce and Carnegie's "set" of assumptions into being a more impressive sounding "constellation" of "attitudes and assumptions" and, once again, claims that it is Said speaking, not him.

In sum, scholars who take up Said's notion of latent Orientalism frequently use a three-prong strategy of magnifying, simplifying, and misattributing it. They usually entirely fail to engage with Said's more modest approach to the notion, all the while claiming or, at least, implying that they are summarizing Said's latent Orientalism. To be clear, the problem is not in and of itself that other scholars fail to adhere to a putative Saidian standard but, rather, that in these cases they wrongly claim his mantle.

A common tactic Said's successors employ in pursuit of this three-pronged strategy is to substitute other terms for "positivity" in his one-phrase definition. One of the more common substitutions, one we've already seen above in Bryce & Carnegie and in Iverson, is to substitute "assumptions" for "positivity". Bryce & Carnegie redefine latent Orientalism as a "set of assumptions" and Iverson calls it a "constellation of underlying attitudes and assumptions." On first glance, replacing "positivity" with "assumptions" seems like a good move that reflects one of Said's key arguments, namely that Western Orientalists assume things about the Orient that do not reflect Asian realities. There are, however, problems. For one thing, the notion of "assumptions" is no less complex than the notion of "positivity," particularly as a description of latent Orientalism. "Positivity," moreover, asserts the reality of latent Orientalism as being as real as the real-world manifestations of Orientalism. "Assumptions" as a description of latent Orientalism says nothing at all about the reality of the notion in and of itself and, in fact, takes a step away from a Saidian sense of reality because assumptions by

⁵ These include, alphabetically, the following Orientalisms that Said refers to in *Orientalism*: academic, artistic, bookish, classical, contemporary, dogmatic, early, historical, Islamic, learned, literary, male, modern, official, old, political, popular, present-day, professional, pure, recycled, Renaissance, Romantic, scholarly, scientific, social, theatrical, traditional, Western, and white Orientalisms, as well as American, Anglo-American, British, Dutch, European, French, German, Italian, and Swiss Orientalisms.

their very definition have a questionable, uncertain relationship to reality. Furthermore, when authors replace “positivity” with “assumptions,” they trivialize the concept of latent Orientalism by giving the impression that Saidian latent Orientalism is “just” about assumptions, something cut and dried that everyone understands. Nathaniel Knight (2000) apparently tries to address these defects by describing latent Orientalism as being “a rock-solid” set of assumptions as if adding “rock-solid” to “assumptions” makes them somehow more tangible, stronger, or more significant. One can only wonder, however, what precisely a “rock-solid” set of assumptions might be and whether or not it even makes any sense to think of *assumptions* in terms of hardness and solidity. Actually, Knight seems to be groping his way back towards Said’s “positivity,” which affirms the unquestionable reality and internal integrity of latent Orientalism.

Said’s own use of the idea of “assumptions” is instructive: to begin with, he recognizes that European Orientalists did make assumptions that reflected their Orientalist ideologies and prejudices, but when he refers to Orientalist “assumptions” he does so in a more nuanced way. For example, his description of the thought processes of 19th century British Orientalists such as T. E. Lawrence or Edward W. Lane, involves what Said calls, “**a set of reductive categories**” such as, for example, “Semites,” or “Muslims,” or even “the Orient” itself. He observes that, “**Since these categories are primarily schematic and efficient ones, and since it is more or less assumed** that no Oriental can know himself the way an Orientalist can, any vision of the Orient ultimately comes to rely for its coherence and force on the person, institution, or discourse whose property it is.” (*Orientalism*, page 239, *italics added*). Making assumptions is “more or less” part of the way in which these Orientalists think, and Said leaves it to us to ponder what it means to “more or less” assume something—a tentative-sounding phrase that echoes “almost unconscious”. Said also recognizes that Orientalist assumptions can change over time such as between the generation of the Dutch Orientalist C. Snouck Hurgronje (1857-1936) and that of the British H. A. R. Gibb (1895-1971) (page 257). If assumptions can change over time, it can be argued that they are not latent at all since a key characteristic of Saidian latent Orientalism is that it changes very little. Or again, Said refers to the “**very large number of assumptions and suppositions**” that make up an Orientalist understanding of Islamic civilization (page 261). Once again, there is no linkage between these assumptions and suppositions and latent Orientalism, and the fact that there are so many of them also suggests they are more of a manifestation of latent Orientalism than anything else.

Had these scholars consulted the text of *Orientalism* to see how Said himself uses the term “assumptions,” which they apparently did not, they would have found that it is no less nuanced and no less complex than his use of “positivity,” while lacking the all important sense of unquestioned reality and significance of Said’s term. In sum, redefining the notion of latent Orientalism as being a set of assumptions trivializes it, fails to simplify or clarify it, and instead introduces its own set of issues. Attributing such redefinitions to Said is incorrect, and sloppy scholarship. If scholars are going to claim Said as their source for replacing “positivity” with “assumptions,” they would do well to go back to Said and see if their replacement is faithful to his use of the term—something that is not hard to do when there are any number of PDF file versions of *Orientalism* on line available for exegetical word searches. Had they checked in with Said, in sum, they would have found the word “assumptions” as a one-word definition for Saidian latent Orientalism is more problematic than “positivity”.

One of the most significant and egregious instances of scholars reinventing Said’s latent Orientalism in his own name, is the dropping of “almost” from his one-phrase definition of latent Orientalism as a positivity that is “almost unconscious”. This deletion of Said’s “almost” is particularly notable because it has opened the door to considerable speculation that Said’s latent Orientalism has Freudian roots. Homi K. Bhabha and Meyda Yeğenoglu are two prominent scholars who have played a role in this transformation.

According to Bhabha (1994), Said’s analysis of colonial-era European discourses regarding “the Orient” shows them to be a form of radical realism used by European Orientalists to turn their stereotypes of the Orient into its supposed reality. Bhabha observes that Said, “**hints continually at a polarity or division at the very centre of Orientalism.**” This polarity is, “**on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery, practice; on the other, it is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements.**” (Bhabha, page 102). In this way, he prepares for his introduction of

Saidian latent and manifest Orientalisms by moving the latent-manifest binary to the center of Orientalism and by pre-defining latent Orientalism as being “the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements.” He goes on to assert that “**And, finally, this line of thinking is given a shape analogical to the dreamwork, when Said refers explicitly to a distinction between ‘an unconscious positivity’ which he terms *latent* Orientalism, and the stated knowledges and views about the Orient which he calls *manifest* Orientalism**” and that “**Said identifies the content of Orientalism as the unconscious repository of fantasy, imaginative writings and essential ideas.**” (Bhabha, page 102, *italics* in the original, **bold** added). And the deed is done: an “almost unconscious” positivity becomes a nakedly “unconscious” one. The “almost” vanishes without a trace or a comment.

In truth, one wonders why Bhabha insists on so closely linking his reinterpretation of latent Orientalism to Said. Sumit Chakrabarti (2012) credits him for relocating “**the Saidian concept of latent Orientalism**” from the political realm into the psychological, which allows “**a free-play of meanings which are not inevitably caught up in the discursive paradigms of colonial rule.**” This enables Bhabha to articulate new insights employing such concepts as “narcissism” and “aggressivity,” which take the whole notion of latent Orientalism in new, useful directions. The problem for us here is that he insists on a Saidian pedigree for his retooling of the notion.

When he drops the “almost” from “almost unconscious” in Said’s name, Bhabha makes two mistakes: *first*, he mistakenly represents Saidian latent Orientalism as being “explicitly” “an unconscious positivity.” This is not the case. Word searches reveal that nowhere in the text of *Orientalism* does the phrase “an unconscious positivity” without the “almost” appear even though Bhabha puts it in quotations marks. His claim, furthermore, that Said “explicitly” defines latent Orientalism as “an unconscious positivity” (sans “almost”) lacks credibility on the face of it, given the fact that Said tends to describe latent Orientalism with terms that blur the boundaries between what is manifest and what is latent, as we have seen above. Bhabha is also incorrect in his claim that Said “identifies” the content of Orientalism as being an “unconscious repository”. Word searches, again, show that he does not. Period. *Second*, having engaged in this misrepresentation of Said, Bhabha then transforms latent Orientalism in Said’s name into a Freudian-like analog of “dreamwork” that is “the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements” and an “unconscious repository of fantasy, imaginative writings and essential ideas.” To be fair, Bhabha doesn’t claim explicitly that Said borrowed from Freud, but he certainly leaves that strong impression especially in his use of the term “dreamwork,” as well as his list of nouns identifying latent Orientalism with dreams, etc. Said himself does not claim a connection between his use of the terms “latent” and “manifest” and Freud, and the supposition that there is a connection is just that: a supposition, one that has been made because Freud wrote about the latent and manifest content of dreams in his famous text, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899).

Other scholars have taken up this same re-imagination of the notion of latent Orientalism so that it is now frequently assumed and asserted that latent Orientalism is an unconscious phenomenon of Freudian dimensions. Robert Young (2012), for example, states that Said uses “Freudian theory” in his description of latent and manifest Orientalisms, and he cites Bhabha as a source for this claim. According to Young, it is this Saidian “paradigm” that Bhabha used to develop his own “**quasi-psychoanalytic reading of the interrelation of subjective and objective dynamics under colonialism.**” (Young, page 32). More recently and explicitly, Robert K. Beshara (2019) argues that when Said distinguishes between latent and manifest Orientalism he is repurposing Freud’s method of dream interpretation in which Freud distinguishes between the “manifest content” and “latent content” of dreams. Min Pun (2019) offers a helpful example of how persistent the discarding of the “almost” can become. He claims that, “**Said also employs Freud’s theory of dream in his book.**” And argues that, “**According to Said, there are latent Orientalism and manifest Orientalism. The latent Orientalism is the internal thinking of the western scholars about the East.**” He then observes that, “**Like [the] unconscious element of Freud, there is unconscious biasness about the easterners (orientals) in the western scholars’ (Orientalists’) mind and such biasness in their minds is expressed through their writings.**” He goes on to note that according to Freud dreams have both latent and manifest content in which “repressed desire” is latent and dreams are manifest. He concludes,

"Similarly, Said relates Freudian theory of dream in his theory of Orientalism. According to Said, there are latent Orientalism and manifest Orientalism. The latent Orientalism is the internal thinking of the western scholars about the East." (Pun, page 77, *italics* added). In fact, there is no evidence in *Orientalism* or other of Said's writings to suggest that he "employs" Freud's theory of dreams. He may have borrowed the terms from Freud, but there is no way of knowing if even that is the case. The way he uses them is not Freudian, nor does Said relate Freudian dream theory to his own understanding of Orientalism. Pun also substitutes "biasness" for Said's "positivity," which is not out of line with Said's own use of that word, but like the word "assumptions" biasness is a limp (and awkward sounding) substitution that lacks the force of "positivity". The central problem, once again, is that Said does not understand Orientalist biases to be "unconscious". He might have agreed that they are *almost* so, but this takes us back to the heart of the arguments given above concerning the significance of the Saidian "almost" in "almost unconscious".

And, in all of this, that troubling "almost" doesn't quite go away although all of these scholars never explain why they drop it. Bhabha himself acknowledges that Said only hints at the Freudian roots of latent Orientalism. Young (2007) notes that Bhabha called attention to the fact that Said treats both latent and manifest Orientalisms in only a brief and undeveloped way and differentiated between them "*in a significant but uncharacteristic invocation of psychoanalysis.*" (Young, 2007, page 4, *italics* added). In truth, Said did not invoke psychoanalysis in any clearly stated, overt way, and one has to read a great deal into his words to come to any other conclusion. Beshara (2021), meanwhile, takes note of the fact that even though Said clearly draws on Freudian dream theory, he "strangely" does not connect it to Freud and, indeed, seldom even mentions Freud in the text of *Orientalism*. Beshara concludes that Said "repressed" Freud in the text. There is nothing *in* the text that clearly supports such conclusions, which Beshara admits himself, but then goes on and makes them anyway. According to the advocates of an unconscious Orientalism themselves, in sum, Said only treats latent Orientalism in a brief way, an undeveloped way, and his (supposed) invocation of psychoanalysis was "uncharacteristic". He himself does not connect latent Orientalism to Freud and hardly mentions Freud at all. In spite of these acknowledgements that their conclusions are not supported in the text, scholars such as Young and Beshara still assert that Said's latent Orientalism is unconscious and Freudian—and once again Said's "almost" is nowhere to be seen and unaccounted for.

A second scholar who has played a role in reframing Said's notion of latent Orientalism as unconscious is Meyda Yeğenoğlu (1998) who offers her readers an interpretation of latent Orientalism from a feminist perspective. Early on in her book, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, she refers to Said and quotes his definition of latent Orientalism as being an "almost unconscious and (certainly untouchable) positivity" and writes, "*Thus latent Orientalism reflects the site of the unconscious*, where dreams, images, desires, fantasies and fears reside. Orientalism, then, simultaneously refers to the production of a systematic knowledge and to the site of the **unconscious**—desires and fantasies: it signifies how the 'Orient' is at once an object of *knowledge* and an object of *desire*." (Yeğenoğlu, page 23, *italics* in the original, **bold** added). This redefinition of Said is careful, intentional, and indicates that Yeğenoğlu has worked through Said both for what he himself argues and what he contributes to her own research. She carefully states that latent Orientalism "reflects the site of the unconscious," which does not, strictly speaking, contradict Said even though she drops the "almost" in his "almost unconscious". Still, she avoids claiming that it is located in the site of the unconscious—a fine distinction but supportable. In this quotation, she also advances her own arguments by describing this "site of the unconscious" as being the site of "dreams, images, desires, fantasies and fears." She notes that Said himself says that latent Orientalism is male dominated, which she sees as being significant to the way Western Orientalists imagine and construct the Orient including especially its women as the objects of their desires and fantasies. That being said, her words invite readers to associate latent Orientalism with the notion of the unconscious sans "almost," and it seems entirely likely that most of her readers most of the time will read her to be saying that latent Orientalism *is* unconscious.

If Yeğenoğlu's rewording of Said's latent Orientalism is problematic, then, so too is the way she treats the significance of his notion of latent Orientalism. She argues that, "*Latent Orientalism seems to have a fundamental significance in Said's overall analysis*" and observes, "However, in implying a

kind of sub-structural, disseminating, and authorizing knowledge, the distinction between the *latent* and *manifest* Orientalism seems to have wider implications than Said himself recognizes.” (Page 23, *italics* in the original). As we have seen, Said’s successors frequently magnify the significance of his notion of latent Orientalism where he did not, and Yeğenoğlu does exactly that in her claim that latent Orientalism “seems” to have a “fundamental significance” to Said’s line of reasoning in *Orientalism*. The clear suggestion is that it does have that level of importance. She also magnifies the significance of latent Orientalism in her claim that Said *implies* that latent Orientalism is a substructure of Orientalism, making both it and manifest Orientalisms into the two pillars of the structure of Orientalism. Said, yet again, makes no such claim, and I would argue that the modest way he presents the whole notion of latent Orientalism indicates that he did not think of the latent-manifest binary in structural terms. They represent the dynamic relationship between the deeply held sets of ideas and their actual historical expressions as Orientalism, not its structure.

Unfortunately, Yeğenoğlu also falls into the trap of reinventing latent Orientalism as a Freudian construct and attributing her reinvention to Said himself. She writes,

Although Said refers, in passing, to the concept of *latent* Orientalism as the realm where **unconscious desires, fantasies, and dreams about the Orient reside**, he never elaborates its nature nor the processes and mechanisms involved in its working. He does not engage in a discussion of its role in the constitution of the relationship between the Western subject and its Oriental other by subjecting this unconscious site to a more detailed psychoanalytic reading. (page 24, *italics* in the original, **bold** added)

Yeğenoğlu is wrong in her assertion that Said “in passing” refers to latent Orientalism “as the realm where unconscious desires, fantasies, and dreams about the Orient reside.” She is wrong because she drops the “almost” in Said’s “almost unconscious” without seemingly considering why he uses it. She is also wrong because Said does not even indirectly describe latent Orientalism as being unconscious “desires, fantasies, and dreams”. That is her language, not his and her insight not his.

Yeğenoğlu’s failure to retain the Saidian “almost” is an important development in the history of the notion of latent Orientalism because it reinforces the same failure by Bhabha. They are both widely respected scholars who are frequently cited. And that is the problem. They have helped to perpetuate a misinterpretation of Said that significantly changes the meaning of latent Orientalism while citing him as if they are being faithful to his original. Some sixteen years after Yeğenoğlu, Fehmi Turgut (2014) argued that, “**Said recognizes two types of orientalist outlook: latent orientalism and manifest orientalism.** Latent orientalism refers to the western mindset or the *collective unconscious* and can be conjectured as what the westerners keep in their minds as *unconscious perceptions* of the East (Said).” And he goes on to claim that, “**Said reshapes and reformulates the very nature of the concept of Orientalist discourse in that latent orientalism reveals what is hidden in the unconscious sphere of the Western mind as dreams, images, fantasies and fears leading to the production of systematic knowledge about the Orient (Yegenoglu).**” (Turgut, page 3, *italics* added). Latent Orientalism in Turgut is simply “unconscious perceptions,” and he cites both Said and Yeğenoğlu as the sources of this definition. He reinforces and expands on it by also asserting that latent Orientalism is a Freudian-like phenomenon involving unconscious dreams, etc., again citing Yeğenoğlu to prove his point. It is in this way that the meme that latent Orientalism is “unconscious” rather than “almost unconscious” has become widely accepted and repeated without malice aforethought. Although, for example, Sabry Hafez (2014) largely characterizes Said’s latent Orientalism accurately, he still describes the way in which “Orientals” themselves internalize the “latent form of Orientalism” as being done “unconsciously”. In and of itself, this is a minor flaw in an otherwise insightful exposition, which again is precisely the point: the simple equation of unconscious with latent Orientalism, direct or indirect, is widespread in the scholarly literature of Orientalism and shows up frequently as if it is common knowledge. Jeff Downter (2010), takes matters another step away from Said in Said’s name, writing, “**Subconscious Orientalism, or latent Orientalism, as used by Edward Said, is an amalgamation of willed, imaginative concepts, theory and practice of the East by Western society, to such an extent that the West makes assumptions and stereotypes the East unintentionally.**” Here, “unconscious” becomes “subconscious,” a debatable notion at best; and yet again Said is cited as the source of a usage that does not come from him.

Valerie Kennedy's (2000) perceptive summary of Said's latent Orientalism in her widely cited book, *Edward Said: A Critical Introduction*, is particularly instructive concerning the substitution of "unconscious" in place of Said's "almost unconscious". In her description of Said's latent Orientalism, she quotes directly the one-phrase definition with its "almost" intact, notes that Said does not define the notion as such, and then sums up his understanding of latent Orientalism by writing that it "seems to mean something like a collective and unconscious shared set of images and attitudes that does not change through time." (Page 24, *italics added*). Said's *almost* becomes Kennedy's *seems to mean something like*. This paraphrase itself appears to be close to Said and maybe is slightly less opaque, but just as Said does not explain his one-phrase definition of latent Orientalism so she too fails to explain what it means to "seem" to be "something like" an unconscious set of images and attitudes. Where Kennedy strays further afield is in her substitution here of "set of images and attitudes" for Said's "positivity" in his definition of Orientalism as an almost subconscious positivity. This substitution recalls the arguments I made just above concerning the replacement of positivity with "assumptions," and I would argue that Kennedy waters down Said's positivity in the same way—and misses entirely the point behind his using it. The end result, in any event, is that most of her readers most of the time will read right through (not even see) the opaqueness of her definition and come to the conclusion that Saidian latent is unconscious so that she too perpetuates the meme. Of course, one might equally accuse Said himself of causing the meme in the first place by throwing in the "almost" with no explanation, a point that I will return to below. That being the case, Kennedy's presentation still only serves to carry the meme itself forward while ignoring the way in which Said actually defines latent Orientalism in his allusive way.

The transformation of Said's tentative, limited definition of latent Orientalism as being "almost unconscious" into it's being "unconscious" is problematic at best for a number of reasons: *first*, it is wrong so long as Said is cited as the source for it. *Second*, those who drop the "almost" in "almost unconscious" generally fail to engage Said's approach and only manage to substitute their own issues and complexities for his. *Third*, as a rule those claiming that latent Orientalism is unconscious seem to be oblivious to the complex, contested nature of the concept of "the unconscious". John A. Bargh and Ezequiel Morsella (2008) begin their study of "the unconscious mind" by stating, "[Contemporary perspectives on the unconscious mind are remarkably varied.](#)" And they go on to review several different views, noting that the Freudian model has become more problematic over time, although still influential. Among many students and scholars of Orientalism, the notion that latent Orientalism is unconscious has become an unquestioned meme presented as if it is obvious when there is nothing obvious, let alone simple about the notion of "unconsciousness". *Finally*, transforming "almost unconscious" to just plain "unconscious," invites not a few scholars to claim a Freudian paternity for Said's notion of latent Orientalism as if it is obvious even though Said himself makes no such claim and shows almost no interest in Freud at all.

CIRCLING BACK

Said's notion of latent Orientalism, in sum, has become an important one, more important than Said intended it to be apparently. His insight that Orientalism is at once covert and overt is widely accepted by students and scholars of Orientalism and has been expanded upon in various ways. And while those ways cannot all be attributed to Said, his latent-manifest binary marks the beginning point for the insight and, thus, for the notion of latent Orientalism itself in all of its various guises.

It is a fascinating beginning because Said's approach to the notion makes it harder to come to grips with than it needs to be. Although he intended it to address specific issues in his arguments in *Orientalism*, he introduced it in a section with a blaring heading, "Latent and Manifest Orientalism," that over-communicated its actual significance. He then proceeded to define latent Orientalism with a series of allusions in the midst of which he embedded a one-sentence definition of the binary including a one-phrase definition of latent Orientalism. In the allusions, he modestly describes latent Orientalism to be a mental phenomenon, basically being a set of ideas or doctrines with which Orientalists think about Orientals. In the phrase, however, he defines it as being a "positivity," which term demands a careful parsing; and he flirts with the enticing thought that "latent" really means "unconscious" but then throws a wrench in the works by qualifying it with a disconcerting "almost": it is a positivity that is *almost* unconscious, which is also (parenthetically) "certainly untouchable".

He does all of this in just eighteen pages and then entirely drops the notion of latent Orientalism, never to mention it again in *Orientalism* or, apparently, anywhere else.

Said's presentation of latent Orientalism can only be called modest, tentative, and ambivalent. It stands in stark contrast to the full text of *Orientalism*, which argues a view of Orientalism that is clear, forceful, and verges on absolutist. Edward Said finds no good in Orientalism, and a common criticism of him is that he is one-sided and over-states his case. This contrast between his clear treatment of the notion of Orientalism generally but confusing presentation of latent Orientalism should be a red flag for others: be careful and circumspect in interpreting his concept of latent Orientalism and in citing it. His modest, tentative, and ambivalent approach, in fact, invites other scholars to take the insight, move on in their own new directions, and leave him to the side.

This does happen. James Dryden (2017), for example, describes what Said's latent Orientalism "refers to" rather than what it *is* and then avoids the usual misrepresentations of it. Ahmad Mohamed and his coauthors (2010) aptly draw on an analogy from computer programming to analyze the way in which Saidian latent Orientalism has been transmitted historically in a Malaysian educational setting. Other scholars move beyond the notion of "latent Orientalism" to use other approaches and terms that reflect the same insight. Marke Kivijärvi (2013) in her study of Finnish business practices in Chinese markets, for example, finds that those practices are "complemented" by a "**less obvious, politically precarious and partially hidden Orientalism discourse**" that informs Finnish managers' attitudes toward the Chinese, pervades the ways they develop their business strategies, and empowers them with a belief that they always know what is happening and have control. Kivijärvi draws on Norman Fairclough's work on "Critical Discourse Analysis" to describe the nature and impact of this "hidden Orientalism" and only notes in passing that the Finnish managers used an Orientalist vocabulary "**similar to that found in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978)**". Kivijärvi's "hidden Orientalism" is thus synonymous with Said's "latent Orientalism," but not taken from Said and only tangentially refers to him. Most notably, she acknowledges that it is only partially hidden. In a survey of Australian texts on Hinduism and Buddhism, Greg Bailey (1989) uses the term "disguised Orientalism" to describe a debate concerning those texts in which some writers seemed to exhibit "an implicit hermeneutic" that sees Asian religions as being "exotic" and as a possible means for Western religious renewal. Bailey warns of an implied, uncritical "essentialism" in attitudes toward Asian texts. In much the same spirit, Nathan E. Dickman (2019) raises the possibility that Western "posthumanist" students of religion may practice a "covert Orientalism" that relies on an "entrenched vocabulary". Rather than make accusations, however, he encourages students to consult "indigenous" Asian religious texts more fully and regularly as a preventive measure. Again, Said is nowhere to be seen and the Saidian-like notion of "covert Orientalism" is used with circumspection. These authors and others demonstrate the usefulness of Said's insight as a critical tool for reflection on a crucial aspect of Orientalism, its latency, apart from Said himself.

As we have seen, there has been, however, a long-standing tendency among many scholars to cling to Said's pioneering binary with mixed results at best. The most important issue, reflected repeatedly in the above commentary, is that these scholars habitually ignore the implications of his modest, tentative, and ambivalent presentation and, instead, try to make more of the notion of latent Orientalism than Said does himself. They fail to realize that his allusive definition of the notion is actually simple and hardly earth shaking. They fix their attention on his one-phrase definition and attempt to reengineer it into something less obscure. They ignore the importance of Said's use of the word "positivity." They entirely drop without comment his all-important "almost" in "almost unconscious," all the while ignoring how messy, difficult, contested, and unmanageable is the notion of "unconscious". They speculate that Said must have taken the concepts of "latent" and "manifest" from Freud and then turn their speculation into a meme: "latent Orientalism is unconscious." Full stop. None of this works very well in and of itself. The various reinterpretations of Saidian latent Orientalism usually end up creating as many problems as they solve, and those who have made creative contributions to the scholarly understanding of latent Orientalism have done so in spite of the missteps they make in their interpretations of Said.

Most egregiously and, in some ways, most puzzling, however is that these re-interpreters of Said frequently do these things in his name, usually either claiming outright or by implication that their

version of latent Orientalism comports with his. One can only speculate on the reasons for this desire to claim a Saidian pedigree when, in fact, it is not really necessary at all. The fundamental insight that Orientalism is at once covert and overt stands on its own merits, and claiming the pedigree doesn't strengthen it. Indeed, the baggage that comes with Said's rendition should encourage others to develop their own lines of reasoning and ways of using it without depending on his—except, perhaps, as a benchmark.

In sum, it is evident that Varisco is right: Saidian latent Orientalism has a metaphysical quality to it that is metaphorical. "Metaphysical," here, means simply "highly abstract or abstruse" (Merriam-Webster). When we refer to the latent nature of ideological Orientalism, thus, we engage in abstract and metaphorical thinking, which requires discipline, thoughtfulness, and circumspection. It is not wise, in particular, to trade in absolutes, especially a hard and fast dualistic distinction between "conscious" and "unconscious". That being said, it is also important to remember that whatever else it might be latent Orientalism *is* a positivity that is real and it has real-world consequences, which Said documents with a painful clarity in *Orientalism*. And this brings us back full circle to the man and his notion. He is where the history of "latent Orientalism" necessarily begins, of course, but what is less obvious is that it is the history of an idea that was initially offered in a modest, tentative, and enigmatic way and grew into a concept that has become much more significant but, in fact, no less tentative and in some ways still more enigmatic. Some scholars use it to deepen our understanding of ideological Orientalism while others only manage to confuse that understanding. It is, thus, both a foundational insight for the study of Orientalism and a superficial meme that too often takes that study to nowhere in particular.

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