

## ARTICLE

### **Orientalism as a form of Confession**

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**ABSTRACT:** In addition to being characterised as a ‘regime of truth’, Orientalist discourses also display the general properties of confessional discourses outlined in Foucault’s *Will to Knowledge*. The article argues that there is a similarity in the ‘effects of power’ made possible within these frameworks, particular regarding the legitimisation and application of discipline. Finally, the paper draws out a few implications for the analysis of power and resistance in confessional economies of power. The perspective this paper provides an insight into the internal structure of Orientalist discourse; connects this structure with Orientalism’s ‘effects of power’; affords purchase on both Orientalism’s organisational and ontogenetic properties; helps explain the persistence of Orientalism – both overt and covert – despite three decades of post-Orientalist scholarship. In this sense, a confessional perspective on Orientalism affords a broad view of the contemporary politics of truth in which Orientalism plays such as an important part. Finally, a confessional perspective affords purchase on the nature of power, the formation of subjectivities, and the possibilities of resistance within Orientalist discursive contexts, which Said’s own analysis is often said to lack.

**Keywords:** Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Orientalism, Confession, Power, Resistance, Regime of Truth

### **Introduction<sup>†</sup>**

The debate on the differences between the work of Edward Said and Michel Foucault has obscured at least one area, in which convergence appears both possible and productive, namely the parallels between the properties of the discursive structures of Orientalism in Said and of Confession in Foucault and, by way of these, the similarities between their respective effects of power.<sup>1</sup> These features offer a starting point for an alternative framing of Said’s critique of occidentocentric discourse on the Arab-Islamic ‘East’.

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<sup>1</sup> Nichols’ otherwise excellent analysis of the function of the rubric ‘Foucault’ in the genealogy of postcolonial studies and theory omits confession from Foucault’s forgone legacy in these fields. Robert Nichols, “Post-

This article argues, first, that Orientalist discourse, especially in its characterisation as a 'veridic discourse', can be approached as a 'regime of truth'. Secondly, that the subject positions, which characterise Orientalist discourse, display the same properties as those found in confessional discourse as outlined in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*. Thirdly, the article considers the mechanisms through which a similarity in the 'effects of power' of these two frameworks is made possible. In particular, it considers the way disciplinary interventions are framed in order to generate a productive failure, which provides the root mechanism through which confessional – and thus Orientalist – discourses are capable of (re)producing their specific subject positions and relations of power. In brief, rather than remaining at the descriptive level of illustrating the disciplinary operation of organisational hierarchies (ethical, political, analytical and taxonomical) which Said's analysis of Orientalist discourse limits itself to, a confessional perspective on Orientalism affords purchase on Orientalist discourses' ontogenetic properties – the ways in which such discourses are involved not simply in managing but in (re)producing the 'Orient'.

Finally, the article draws out certain implications for the analysis of power and resistance in confessional dispositives. In particular, a confessional perspective affords insights into elements, which Said's own analysis is sometimes said to lack,<sup>2</sup> such as the configuration of power relations, the formation of subjectivities, and the possibilities of resistance within Orientalist contexts.

In developing a confessional perspective on Orientalism this article seeks to contribute to the rediscovery of Foucault in postcolonial theory<sup>3</sup> by problematising the oversimplification of Foucault's approach to discourse, of which postcolonial theory is sometimes guilty. In particular, this contribution helps draw on the clearly productive dimension of power in Foucault and on his understanding of the sophisticated network of forces, subjectivities, materialities, ethics and (ambiguous) relations, which are involved in constantly (re)producing both 'power' and 'resistance'.<sup>4</sup>

### **Beyond Said and Foucault**

The analysis presented here explicitly avoids engaging in exegetic attempts to ground claims made in the authority of one or the other writer. After all, both scholars famously cautioned against those moments in which truth or authority are presented as objective, natural, or otherwise 'authoritative'. However, these disagreements are too important to ignore entirely, both in themselves, and because a brief analysis suggests that the authors' politics – Said's in

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colonial Studies and the Discourse of Foucault: Survey of a Field of Problematization," *Foucault Studies*, 9 (2010), 111-144.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990); Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992); cf. William Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (London: Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Nichols, *Postcolonial Studies and the Discourse of Foucault*.

<sup>4</sup> Nichols (*ibid.*), reprising Scott, calls for a rediscovery of Foucault in postcolonial theory in this sense. That this possibility is available ought to be obvious particularly in Foucault's work from *Discipline and Punish* onwards. In addition, as Scott points out, this perspective helps ask important questions about the genesis and configuration of postcolonial studies itself.

particular – provide as important a key for understanding these differences as do the analytical arguments themselves.

Said claims his disenchantment with Foucault was both analytical and political. Analytically, Said objected to what he called Foucault's descent into 'textualism', an obsession with power, and a structuralism which left no room for agency, and thus for resistance and change. This analytical 'nihilism' had clear political implications, which for Said reduced Foucault to a 'scribe of domination'. These analytical and political levels are closely linked.

### *Analytical Differences*

The convergence between Said and Foucault is extensively covered, particularly in relation to Said's most famous text, *Orientalism*. However, partly because Foucault never responded to Said's attacks, the latter ended up setting the tone for the debate over both this convergence and claims about differences between the two. The resulting analysis of Foucault's influence on Said focuses on the latter's claim to adapting only Foucault's idea of 'discourse' from *Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*, as well as concepts such as archaeology, genealogy, and the archive.<sup>5</sup>

Said's objections to Foucault's thought are essentially threefold. First, that Foucault fixates on text to the detriment of the material level of politics, thereby neutralising the political potential of (literary) criticism: 'the most recent apostles of European revolutionary textuality – Derrida and Foucault –' have ended up leading scholarship 'into a labyrinth of "textuality"'.<sup>6</sup> Second, that in his 'textuality', Foucault culpably ignores 'the imperial context of his own theories, and from this point of view [...] seems actually to represent an irresistible colonizing movement.'<sup>7</sup> Third, Said claims that Foucault ultimately remained a structuralist, since 'every-

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1991), 3. The awkwardness of Said's representation of Foucault's influence is well-established: In *White Mythologies*, Young, for example, criticizes Said for his providing a representation of Foucault's approach to discourse which is decidedly 'un-Foucaultian', even for an early text like *Archaeology of Knowledge*, which Said points to as the main influence on his own work, and as Nichols reminds us, even Aijaz Ahmad, no fan of either scholar, pointed out as much. This genealogy, however, is questionable: the texts Said cites (for a summary, see note 33 in Ruben Chuaqui "Notes on Edward Said's view of Michel Foucault," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, (2005); available at <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Notes+on+Edward+Said's+view+of+Michel+Foucault.-a0135888170>), the lecture "On Governmentality" (February 1<sup>st</sup>) in Foucault's 1978 *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures at the Collège de France which Said attended (see Edward Said, "Deconstructing the System," *New York Times*, 17 December 2000; available at <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/12/17/reviews/001217.17saidlt.html>), and the work Foucault had published by the time the two met in 1979 are all far richer, and it is difficult not to hear echoes of this Foucault in Said's *Orientalism*.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 3. Diagnosing the ills of contemporary literary criticism, Said finds that "our critical ethos is formed by a pernicious analytic of blind demarcation by which, for example, imagination is separated from thought, culture from power, history from form, texts from everything that is hors texte, and so forth." Said, *WTC*, 169. "What puzzles me is not only how someone as remarkably brilliant as Foucault could have arrived at so impoverished and masochistically informed a vision of sound and silence, but also how so many readers in Europe and the United States have routinely accepted it as anything more than an intensely private, deeply eccentric, and insular version of history." Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 523.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), 278.

thing is an aspect of the process of the carceral society,<sup>8</sup> a 'conception [which] has drawn a circle around itself, constituting a unique territory in which Foucault has imprisoned himself and others with him.'<sup>9</sup> Thus, rather than resisting power, Foucault became 'the scribe of domination.'<sup>10</sup> For himself, Said claimed to have moved beyond the idea that society could be reduced to 'just the smooth working out of a massive system of domination,'<sup>11</sup> and on to a humanism which allows for the possibility of (successful) resistance.<sup>12</sup>

### *Political Difficulties*

These analytical limitations appear to be directly linked to Said's political differences with Foucault. Essentially, Said accused Foucault of being unwilling – and ultimately unable – to translate 'insurrectionary scholarship' into political activism. Focusing on deconstruction of the (linguistic) machinery of power alone had, in Said's estimation, lead to a kind of moral nihilism neutralising the intellectual's political potential in critiquing power. Said attacked Foucault, claiming he took 'a curiously passive and sterile view not so much of the uses of power, but of how and why power is gained, used, and held onto.'<sup>13</sup> This perspective on power is why Said claims Foucault became 'uninterested in any direct political involvement of any sort,'<sup>14</sup> with the result that the question of a theory of power 'has captivated not only Foucault himself but many of his readers', with the effect of justifying 'political quietism with sophisticated intellectualism.'<sup>15</sup>

These arguments have been thoroughly contested elsewhere,<sup>16</sup> and it is not this article's remit to revisit them. But Said's reading remains odd, not least because these two authors had so much in common, particularly in relation to their analyses of the politics of truth and authority. It has been argued that Said's position might be rooted in a lack of familiarity with Foucault's work, particularly after *Discipline and Punish*, but this seems rather unlikely.<sup>17</sup> Particularly because it assumes that Said refused to read Foucault's later material, and that he

<sup>8</sup> Said, *WTC*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Said, *WTC*, 245.

<sup>10</sup> Said, *WTC*, 138.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, *Interviews with Edward Said*, ed. Amritjit Singh and Bruce G. Johnson (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2004), 101.

<sup>12</sup> "[U]nlike Michel Foucault [...] I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of text constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism." Said, *Orientalism*, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Said, *WTC*, 221.

<sup>14</sup> Said, *PPC*, 77.

<sup>15</sup> Said, *WTC*, 245. Chomsky makes a similar but more cautious claim. However, as is well-known, Foucault always resisted formulating a *theory* of power (and therefore a specific archetype of a society to come), but rather focused on providing tools for an *analytic* of power, arguing that 'theories' were inextricably involved in the (re)production of particular forms of political order. E.g. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998), 82-83; Michel Foucault, "Interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino", in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1984), 63.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Paul A. Bové, "Intellectuals at War: Michel Foucault and the Analytics of Power," *SubStance*, 11.4 (1982/83): 36-55. For the *functions* such representations of Foucault have in the development of postcolonial theory, see also Nichols, *Postcolonial Studies and the Discourse of Foucault*.

<sup>17</sup> See note 5.

ignored Foucault's well-known political activism and commentary, which he clearly did not (witness his criticism of Foucault's controversial articles on the Iranian Revolution).

Despite Foucault's refusal to engage his critics in 'diatribes,'<sup>18</sup> one can infer he may not have been too impressed with Said's claims based on a response given to a question about his alleged nihilism and determinism, in which Foucault said he was 'astounded to learn that people could have seen the affirmation of an inescapable determinism in my historical studies,' whereas he had always aimed to emphasise the contingency of social structures – and therefore also of power relations.<sup>19</sup> He specifically included under this rubric the relationship between theory and practice, and the 'intellectual's' role in relation to these.<sup>20</sup>

On this basis, it is perhaps precisely at the political level that the key to purported intellectual differences between Said and Foucault might be found. Said's primary political disagreement with Foucault – which can be located before his analytical distancing – was, at least in Said's eyes, over Palestine. Said identifies the origin of his disenchantment with a seminar on the Arab world organised in the spring of 1979 by Sartre and de Beauvoir, but which was held at Foucault's apartment. As a result of this encounter, Said comes to perceive Foucault as 'strongly pro-Israel'.<sup>21</sup> Said's impression relies, in his own explanation, on Deleuze's account of a disagreement between him and Foucault over Palestine. Based on this disagreement – the substance of which Said does not mention – Said infers Foucault was pro-Israeli, and that this was the reason for his refusal to discuss Palestine either with Said or at the meeting.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere however, Said himself is tentative about claiming Foucault was pro-Israeli.<sup>23</sup> Said's recollection is probably best considered a description of how he accounts for the perceived difference between him and Foucault, rather than a reliable source on Foucault's own position.

The implications of Foucault's analysis of truth certainly appear *politically* – rather than analytically – problematic for Said. Said chose to defend the Palestinian cause by accusing Zionists of peddling falsehoods about Palestinian identity. This engages Zionist narratives on a terrain that assumes there is such a thing as a natural, objective 'truth', that this truth is demonstrable, and that in this case the truth is 'Palestinians', usurped by Zionists. The strong implication of Foucault's analysis of the arbitrary nature of (claims to) 'truth' and its ontological relation to power, however, is that there are no objective truths, just as there is no natural, uncontested, or timeless identity – whether personal or collective. Identity claims are always and necessarily and artificial dispositives that remain coherent only insofar as the external and

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<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, "Interview de Michel Foucault," in *Dits et écrits vol. I-II* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), vol. II, 1512. See also Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze "Intellectuals and Power," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 205-217.

<sup>21</sup> Said reported becoming disenchanted with the couple because they "knew nothing about the Arab world and were both fantastically pro-Israel" (Said, *Interviews*, 75).

<sup>22</sup> As Racevkis notes, Foucault's views on Israel were far from one-sided. In a 1982 interview, for example, he condemned the massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila, which the IDF were responsible for allowing. Foucault, *Dits et écrits 2*, 1168.

<sup>23</sup> For Said's account of the meeting, see Edward Said, "Diary," *London Review of Books*, 22.11 (2000): 1 June, 42-43; available at <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v22/n11/edward-said/diary>.

internal forces, which originally established them – and therefore, ultimately, the strategic logic for their existence – continue to remain in place.<sup>24</sup> Said, however, in addition to emphasising the unequal terrain, upon which Palestinian and Zionist narratives met, always contested Zionist narratives on the terrain of objective, factual accuracy as fabrications: to follow Foucault in fully accepting the ultimately arbitrary nature of identity could have been politically problematic.<sup>25</sup> It is impossible to say whether this is a fair representation of the reasons for Said's rocky relation to Foucault: all that is certain is that the distance he attempts to put between him and Foucault analytically appears to dovetail the grounds upon which Said attacks Foucault politically.

This political tension might be detected in another context that has generated a debate on Said's own work, namely the (lack of) internal consistency of his analysis. While Said defended it as entirely intended,<sup>26</sup> it is striking that this ambiguity pertains precisely to the question of ontology. The most important aspect of this inconsistency both analytically and politically is that Said oscillates between two stances on the issue of the constructedness of representations and therefore of identities. At times, he berates those, like Foucault, who follow through the implications of this position to the logical conclusion that there is no ontologically fixed fundamental truth about the social. In other moments, however, he accepts the idea that discourses – *per se*, not specific discourses – are 'artificial' in the sense of not being grounded in an objectively demonstrable and singular 'truth'. In particular, the idea of an ontological mutability of the social is present in one of his most famous analyses of Orientalism. Here he claims that such artificial representations 'manage – and even *produce* – the Orient.'<sup>27</sup> It is not simply that Said alternates 'between the idea that true representation is theoretically possible and the opposite position that all representation is necessarily misrepresentation,'<sup>28</sup> but that there seems to be an unresolved, but analytically and politically crucial tension over the relationship between representation and ontology at the heart of Said's analysis. It is precisely in relation to this tension that a different reading of Foucault could have been useful, although it would have involved Said jettisoning the idea that truth could be grounded objectively once and for all.

These points of tension between Said and Foucault are ultimately articulated around the key issues, which occupied much of both authors' attention: the nature of and relationship between subjectivity, power, and resistance; the (re)production of identities, 'truth', and more

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<sup>24</sup> E.g. Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194-228; and Gilles Deleuze, "What is a Dispositif?", in *Two Regimes of Madness*, ed. Gilles Deleuze and David Lapoujade, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 338-348.

<sup>25</sup> For a sustained analysis of the politics of Said's and Foucault's positions, see Bové, *Intellectuals at War*.

<sup>26</sup> Said claims he "designed [*Orientalism's* theoretical inconsistency] that way" (Said, *Criticism*, 137) to challenge "the sovereignty of the systematic method" (1978a: 673) and to develop a notion of non-coercive knowledge "which was deliberately anti-Foucault" (Said, *Criticism*, 137) again suggests a problematic understanding of Foucault's approach to ontology, truth, and to the relation between theory, agency and power. Edward Said, "Edward Said," in *Criticism in Society*, ed. Imre Salusinszky (New York, London: Methuen, 1987), 123-48.

<sup>27</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3. Emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Polity, 2000), 29.

generally power; and the contemporary politics of claims to truth. Focusing on these concerns and re-reading both authors' work in light of the other, may afford greater purchase on the politics of Orientalism and its persistence. This contribution will therefore concentrate on points of convergence, which might emerge from their respective texts.

### **Orientalism as a Regime of Truth**

Any attempt to draw on Said and Foucault simultaneously must confront the ontological differences evidenced in the debate above. This paper sets aside Said's objections, not just because these are also problems internal to Said's own work, but because there is nothing in post-structuralism generally or in Foucault's work in particular, which necessarily confines it to 'textuality', both because any deployment of the material is linked to semiosis of some kind, and because Foucault's analysis of knowledge production and its effects of power explicitly indicates the importance of material processes. With this proviso, and going beyond Said's own well-known acknowledgement of his debt to Foucault concerning concepts like discourse, it is possible to approach Said's analysis of Orientalism from the standpoint of Foucault's work on dispositive, on the relation between truth, knowledge, and power, on the regime of truth, and in particular the way these are configured in confessional power relations. From this perspective, there are striking parallels between Said's writing on Orientalism and Foucault's.

A famous interview on the relationship between truth and power epitomise the paradigm Foucault offers for analysing their interrelation. Said's definitions of Orientalism clearly echo the formulations put forward by Foucault. Firstly, Foucault points out the status of truth and the political implications of claims to truth, emphasising the role of claims to truth as lynchpins of a complex network of power relations:

Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. [...] [B]y truth I do not mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted', but rather 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true' [...] it's a matter not of a battle 'on behalf' of truth, but of a battle around the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays. [...] 'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with the systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which induces and extends it. A 'regime' of truth.<sup>29</sup>

This 1977 interview<sup>30</sup> pre-dates both *Orientalism* and Said's meeting with Foucault in 1979. In any case, the question of the politics of truth claims is central to Foucault, at least since *Birth of*

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<sup>29</sup> Foucault, Reader, 74.

<sup>30</sup> The interview first appeared in *Microfisica del Potere* (1977), and shortened in "Vérité et pouvoir", *L'Arc*, 70 (1977): 16-26.

*the Clinic*,<sup>31</sup> and can be traced not just to Nietzsche's influence, but also to authors such as Canguilhem, Bachelard, or Blanchot. So it ought not to have been a surprise to Said in the late 1970s.

Not long after the publication of the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, in the introduction to his best-known book, Said gave four famous definitions of Orientalism:

the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient [...] by making statements about it, authorizing views on it [...] teaching it, settling it, ruling over it<sup>32</sup>;

a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'<sup>33</sup>;

a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience,<sup>34</sup>

particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient [because it is] a *veridic discourse* about the Orient.<sup>35</sup>

Here, Said, like Foucault, suggests Orientalism's power as a discourse is rooted in its ability to present itself not as one possible truth among many, but as *the* truth about the Orient. This claim to speaking *the* truth, to veridiction, is central both in Said's argument that Orientalism is 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,'<sup>36</sup> and in Foucault's statement that any claim to truth 'is linked in a circular relation with the systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which induces and extends it.'<sup>37</sup>

Reading these statements side by side suggests obvious possibilities for convergence between these perspectives. Indeed, appending 'about the Orient' to each recurrence of 'truth' in Foucault's definition, provides a strikingly familiar image of Orientalism.<sup>38</sup> Analytically, this convergence is possible on at least three planes: in their analysis of the politics of truth-telling, in truth-claims' entanglements with power, and in the way such claims engender political implications. In both cases, discourses on truth are 'veridic' in the sense that they supply 'rules according to which the true and the false are separated'. For both authors, the claim to truth-telling is produced and made plausible through identifiable structures – Said calls these

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<sup>31</sup> Originally published in 1963, and in 1973 for the English translation. Arguably, the question of the politics of truth claims is central at least since *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

<sup>32</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 6; emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Foucault, *Reader*, 74.

<sup>38</sup> It also pre-figures later analyses of Neo-Orientalism. For an early but sadly neglected analysis of Neo-Orientalism – a social scientific 'reincarnation' of classical Orientalism – see Yahya Sadowski, "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate," in *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*, ed. Joel Beinin and Joe Stork, (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 33-50.

'corporate institution', Foucault labels them 'systems of power' – and produces 'effects of power' by 'authorizing views', 'inducing and extending' these effects of power, enabling this form of power to teach, settle, rule, etc. and ultimately establish the conditions for its own (re)production. In both cases, discourses of truth have political functions and effects because they present themselves as precisely *the* truth, not one among several possible standpoints, nor a historically contingent, immanent truth. The contexts in which these 'veridic' discourses emerge, the forms they take, and the effects they have, suggest that Said's Orientalism, as much as Foucault's 'regimes of truth', are 'linked in a circular relation' with power.

A second parallel between Said's definition of Orientalism and Foucault's regimes of truth can be identified in the material underpinnings of truth-telling/-claiming discourses. Said calls Orientalism a 'corporate institution' promoting a 'style of thought'. Foucault emphasises that claims to truth are always internal to a particular political economy. Said never acknowledged Foucault's work on this count<sup>39</sup>, but the relationship between power, knowledge, and truth Foucault envisages is strikingly similar to Said's own analysis. Foucault's analysis presents the discursive realm of a regime of truth as inextricable from a political economy – in the sense of an *oikonomia*, a disposition of forces appropriate to achieving an end – that is both discursive and material:

In societies like ours, the 'political economy' of truth is characterized by five important traits. 'Truth' is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information [...]); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation.<sup>40</sup>

As noted above, Said famously defines Orientalism as the 'the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient [...] by making statements about it, authorizing views on it [...] teaching it, settling it, ruling over it.'<sup>41</sup> This description already explicitly focuses on what Foucault would have called a regime of truth's 'effects of power': Orientalism puts the West – or rather, the authoritative subject position in Orientalist discourse – in the condition of 'dominating, restructuring, and having authority' over the Orient.<sup>42</sup> This already contains a hint of the macro-structural level at which Orientalism (also) operates, and of the ontogenesis it involves, but Said then explicitly claims that Orientalism as a discourse has the power to 'manage – and *even produce* – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively.'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bovè, *Intellectuals at War*.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, *Reader*, 73.

<sup>41</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3; emphasis added. Elsewhere in *Orientalism*, Said writes "'the Orient' is itself a constituted entity, and the notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically 'different' inhabitants

It has to be emphasised that Said stressed both his proximity to and distance from Foucault's 'regime of truth'. In *Beginnings*, for example, Said writes that Orientalism is "a new habit of thought, a *set of rules* for knowledge to dominate truth, *to make truth as an issue secondary* to the successful ordering and wielding of huge masses of actual present knowledge" (291; emphasis added). Here, the analysis explicitly appeals to an underpinning 'objective' truth 'to be discovered and accepted', clearly presenting a significant difference with Foucault. However, the emphasis on the 'set of rules' and their ability to mask the truth precisely by making a plausible and widely accepted claim to veridiction – however 'false' it might be – clearly echoes Foucault's analysis, as do passages cited earlier, in which Said indicates that the 'Orient' is actively (ontologically) produced by the veridic discourses of these corporate institutions. Said's formulations of Orientalism as a 'veridic discourse' are, at the very least, strongly suggestive of a 'Foucaultian' regime of truth and its political economy, whether or not Said acknowledged it.

### **Orientalism's Confessional Structure**

The question of what kind of regime of truth Orientalism is can be approached through Foucault's analysis of Confession. In Foucault, a confessional discourse<sup>44</sup> entails core elements recognisable in Orientalist discourse. First of these is a canon of normality (in confession, sinlessness as the 'normal' state). This norm provides the goal to which individuals must aspire (an emancipatory project), which certain subject positions – if not individuals or specific communities – have attained. Second, a force can be identified, which leads some – in some cases, all – subjects to deviate from that norm. Third, confessional discursive configurations identify two subject positions: the Confessor, ascribed authority over the norm and its attainment, and the Sinner, whose (impossible) task it is to achieve emancipation. Fourth, a framework is provided, which is at least nominally capable of redeeming sinners and achieving emancipation. These elements produce 'effects of power', beginning with the hierarchical relation of authority between Sinner and Confessor, the disciplinary consequences of accepting or resisting this framework, and perhaps most importantly for present purposes the way 'knowledge' is produced.

Confessional relations of power therefore rely first and foremost on establishing a canon of 'normality' and deviance/pathology. This occurs through the characterisation of possible subject positions within the discourse, which Foucault calls 'specification of individuals': while the Confessor is gatekeeper of the state of grace (the norm, towards which emancipation is directed), confessional discourse marks subjects occupying the Sinner position with the impulse to deviate from the canon. This impulse necessarily undermines the discourse's avowed emancipatory purpose. Thus, while confessional discourse provides subjects with an emancipatory project they are enjoined upon to attain, the Sinner also bears such intrinsic characteristics ('original sin') that this endeavour is always and necessarily frustrated.

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who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture or racial essence proper to that geographical space is equally a highly debatable idea." Said, *Orientalism*, 322.

<sup>44</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998), 17-21, 59-73.

Contemporary Orientalist discourses display precisely such characteristics. Orientalism constructs two subject positions: the Western Self, presented as the epitome of the canon to which the Other must aspire (egalitarian, rational, secular, progressive, dynamic, etc.), the Arab/Islamic Other as not accidentally, but inherently deviant (by nature authoritarian, irrational, religious, backward, static, etc.).<sup>45</sup> Mirroring the confessional articulation of sin as pathological deviance, this essentialism marks out Arab/Islamic alterity as inherently dangerously deviant. Moreover, if for Foucault the causality of deviance is diffuse, latent, polymorphous, and inextinguishable, describing the pathology buried deep in the Sinner's nature as 'obscure,' 'elusive by nature (*il est de sa nature d'échapper*); its energy and its mechanisms escaped observation (*se dérobent*)' such that 'its causal power was partly clandestine,'<sup>46</sup> one is readily reminded of Said's analysis arguing that Orientalist discourse attributes precisely these characteristics to the Arab/Islamic Other.

### Effects of Power

Corroborating the validity of the analogy between confession and Orientalism are several otherwise well-known 'effects of power', which can be shown to flow from the 'confessional' articulation of Orientalist discourse's Occident-Orient relation.

#### *Producing Truth and Subjectivity*

Of particular interest is the similarity in the way knowledge and truth about subjectivities, their goals and relations are defined and produced. Here, Orientalism is clearly reminiscent of what Foucault calls the 'method of interpretation'. The net effect of these similarities is that, in the way it produces 'truth', Orientalism, like Confession, disenfranchises the (deviant) Other from authoring the truth of its own condition. The assumption of pathology built into the Sinner/Arab-Islamic Other subject position, continuously works to silence the Other, regardless of its actions by placing the latter in a position in which – from within Orientalist Confessional discourses, i.e. on these discourses' own terms – it is unable to authorize a different account of itself without laying itself open to 'corrective' discipline (or at least the attempt to exercise it) or to the requirement to assimilate itself to the Confessor subject position. For example, articulations reconciling democracy and Islam, or different visions of modernity, etc. – such as might be attempted by, say, Turkey's AK Party, Tunisia's Nahda Party, and others – may be attempted, but are at best regarded with suspicion (witness the disciplinary interventions against, say, Algeria's FIS in 1992/93 or Hamas after its electoral victory in 2006, or indeed Muslim immigrants in Europe or the USA after '9/11'). It is in this sense that, from within an Orientalist/Confessional discourse, the Other(s) cannot 'speak'.<sup>47</sup> The role of the Oriental

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<sup>45</sup> There are of course various versions of this argument, from those focusing on Arab culture (e.g. Raphael Patai) to the role of Islam (e.g. Elie Kedourie), both in 'humanist' terms, such as those Said analyses, or in 'sublimated' social scientific terms (see Sadowski, *New Orientalism*).

<sup>46</sup> Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, 66; emphasis added. The original French renders the crucial property that sin deceives the sinning Other (*se dérobent*) as much as the Confessor, reinforcing the Confessor's right to deliberate on the truth of the Sinner's acts and avowals.

<sup>47</sup> It is the epistemic 'closure' of confessional discourses that is the reason why 'the Subaltern cannot speak' from within Orientalist dispositives. If, as clear from Foucault's *Confessions of the Flesh* and Deleuze's *What is*

Other, as of the Sinner, is primarily to confess its deviations – ‘sins’ which are of course known in advance – to the Occidental Self, whose task it is to then adjudicate on the Other’s nature. As Foucault observes: ‘[t]ruth did not reside solely in the [confessing] subject [...] It was constituted in two stages: present but incomplete, blind to itself, in the one who spoke; it could only reach completion in the one who assimilated and recorded it [...]. [T]he revelation of confession had to be coupled with the decipherment of what it said.’<sup>48</sup> This decipherment could only be carried out by a subject in the Confessor’s position: in the particular case of Orientalism, this is obviously the position of (‘Western’) emancipation.

In this process, not only is truth being produced by a particular subject position, but there are two ‘truths’ which are being produced simultaneously and symbiotically: the Other must ‘speak the truth (but since it is the secret and is oblivious to its own nature, *we reserve for ourselves the function of telling the truth of its truth*, revealed and deciphered at last) *and we demand that it tell us [...] that truth about ourselves which we [the “emancipated” Self] think we already possess* in our immediate consciousness.’<sup>49</sup> Confessional discursive structures, in other words, have a *double* ontogenetic function, and it is in this sense that Orientalism, like Confession, is a ‘style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over’ *both* the Self and the Other, a discourse which must ‘manage – and even produce’<sup>50</sup> them both simultaneously, a ‘corporate institution’ which produces a whole range of inextricably linked subjectivities ‘by making statements about them, authorizing views on them, settling them, and ruling over them.’<sup>51</sup>

The diagnostic framework, which operates as a machinery of truth production translates into prognostic frameworks for the Other. Indeed, Orientalist discourse shapes subjectivities in a way readily recognisable from a confessional standpoint: in both cases, the Other undergoes a range of interventions seeking to refashion its selfhood. Liberal interventionism today probably best exemplifies the attempt by a Normal Self to produce a subjectivity for the Other in its own image. Diverse though they are, these interventions seek to reform target populations by ‘providing a positive example, through the promotion of market democracy via trade, aid, cultural and political exchange – or the withdrawal of these [...] – right up to coercive intervention and statebuilding.’<sup>52</sup> Examples of these interventions can be readily found in recent debates over the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) but also in debates over development or democratization. Indeed, Western governments’ democracy-promotion programmes – those very programmes the failure of which was so starkly highlighted by the Ar-

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*an apparatus?*, representation always involves multiplicity, and if any dispositive’s configuration is necessarily immanent to a balance of internal and external forces, then any dispositive must be subvertible: the subaltern can ‘speak’ only by disarticulating the hegemonic regime of truth within which it is marginalized.

<sup>48</sup> Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, 66-67.

<sup>49</sup> Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, 69, emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Beate Jahn, “The Tragedy of Liberal Diplomacy: Democratization, Intervention, Statebuilding (Part I),” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 1.1 (2007): 87-106, 92.

ab Uprisings – display precisely such characteristics both before and after the Uprisings.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the Uprisings provide a reminder of how quickly and effectively such mechanisms operate. Despite defying scholars and policy-makers, exploding Orientalist myths and challenging the West's own hegemonic narratives about the superiority of liberal democracy, attempts to 'Orientalise' the uprisings soon emerged, for example by crediting Gene Sharp – American theorist of non-violent change, whose work was used by Freedom House to train groups that Egyptian protesters had contact with – with providing the intellectual trigger which made the Uprisings possible, or similarly depriving protesters of agency by crediting social media with sparking the Uprisings.<sup>54</sup>

The paradoxical outcome of failures by development or democratization programmes to achieve the Other's 'emancipation' is that instead of a critical re-examination – which would amount to challenging not just the narrative about the Arab/Islamic Other, but also about the Western Self – these failures result in an imperative to '*change the target culture right up to the reconstruction of every individual in society.*'<sup>55</sup> This apparent paradox can be explained by the confessional dynamic Foucault emphasises: the role of the 'method of interpretation' is not to produce 'truth' about either the Self or the Other, but to produce as true claims that will enable confessional power relations to reproduce, the truth the Self already possesses.

### *The Productivity of Failure*

The attempt to refashion the Other's identity is of course necessarily destined to fail. But, as for Confession, Orientalism's productivity can also be found in the specific way these frameworks *fail*. Far from being epiphenomenal, failure is integral to confessional frameworks' (re)production, and can be shown to have precisely this function in Orientalist discourses.

Like confession, Orientalist discourses explicitly claim the remit of 'telling the truth' about their respective domains, not least in the name of this truth being vital to their avowed emancipatory objective. This characteristic can be discerned in the articulation of classical Orientalism within several contemporary discourses, such as Civilization or Modernization. However, since alterity is defined as essentially, inherently deviant, this goal is necessarily undermined. So long as the underpinnings of such discursive frameworks remain unchanged, the superposition of emancipatory and essentialist dimensions within these discourses' creates a truth, which ultimately entraps the Other, condemning it to never fully achieving the emancipatory task it is set. If the 'Arab Mind' is by its nature incapable of enlightened rational thought or if 'Islam is incompatible with democracy' in itself, then no matter how far an individual or a society might 'progress', these efforts are inevitably superficial mimicry: they are inevitably destined to fail, and must be viewed and acted upon as such.

Such failure, however, is clearly not an unintended consequence, by-product, or flaw in a confessional discursive structure's economy of power. On the contrary, this (re)presentation

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<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of the EU's response, see Andrea Teti, "The EU's First Response to the 'Arab Spring': A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity", *Mediterranean Politics*, 17.3 (2012), 266-284.

<sup>54</sup> Rabab El-Mahdi "Orientalising the Egyptian Uprisings," *Jadaliyya*, 11 April 2011; available at <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1214/orientalising-the-egyptian-uprising>; last accessed 30/01/2012.

<sup>55</sup> Jahn, *Liberal Diplomacy*, 93, emphasis added.

of the Oriental Other's nature as inherently deviant is a crucial element of this dispositive's operation. The most important part of this operation is to dissimulate the confessional structure's own causality. Indeed, from the standpoint of the Normal Self in a confessional framework, failures to achieve emancipatory goals in contemporary Orientalist discourses (e.g. Modernization, democratization, etc.), from 'minimalist' interventions by cultural example or financial enticement, all the way to 'maximalist' statebuilding, 'liberal intervention' or 'regime change', 'must be put down [...] to shortcomings in other areas,' exempting either the Western Self or the framework itself from any responsibility.<sup>56</sup> By facilitating failure, the dissimulated, dangerous and inescapable essence ascribed to the Other within confessional frameworks permits this shifting responsibility for failure away from the framework itself, and onto that deviant Other.<sup>57</sup> This operation can be understood along at least two axes: discipline and ontogenesis.

### *Failure and Discipline*

In its disciplinary implications, two effects of Orientalism's confessional configuration can be discerned. Firstly, the latent nature of Orientalist Islam's causality requires *constant, endless, and ubiquitous* surveillance.<sup>58</sup> As with the sinfulness of sexuality in confession, the 'passional impulses' built into the very nature of the Oriental Other might manifest themselves at any time and in any place: society and its political agents must be constantly monitored for even the slightest hint that such dangers might manifest. However, as a source of not simply contingent but of pathological deviation, Arab/Islamic alterity thus becomes a 'police' matter, 'not something one simply judged, [but] a thing one administered, [...] regulated for the good of all'.<sup>59</sup> The risk posed by Islam's latent causality, thus transforms the specification of the (Western) Norm into a 'grid' – provided by Orientalism's classical motifs described above – identifying possible kinds of deviation and the sites at which these might manifest. As a result, the supposedly neutral and objective taxonomy of a machinery the purpose of which is to observe the Other 'transubstantiates' into what Foucault called 'lines of penetration', established all around the Arab/Islamic Other's body (politic), i.e. ultimately into a framework for surveillance. While the avowed aim of this surveillance is to prevent and neutralize deviation and more generally to bring about the 'reformation' of the deviant Other, this can never, of course, be fully achieved given the nature of alterity as pathological by assumption. This combination

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<sup>56</sup> Jahn, *Liberal Diplomacy*, 93.

<sup>57</sup> These cyclical dynamics require foundational constructions of pathological alterity to remain unchanged. Of course, these constructions are themselves subject to change: the deployment of the idea of a 'Turkish model' in public and 'expert' commentary after the Arab Uprisings of 2010-12, for example, has begun desedimenting the notion of Islam as fundamentally incompatible with modernity/democracy etc. – although whether it will challenge the confessional operation viz. the Middle East of discourses on democracy remains an open question. See Andrea Teti "The Globalization of Democracy and the Location of the Middle East in the Contemporary Global Order" ed. Stephan Stetter, *The Middle East and Globalization* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> This is precisely one of the functions to which data-gathering exercises such as those routinely performed in assessments of (and by) 'civil society' can be turned.

<sup>59</sup> Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, 24.

of an avowedly emancipatory/reformatory aim and a latent, polymorphous and deviant causality transforms any Orientalist discourse into a carceral space, the fundamental function of which is to govern the Other by framing its purpose as emancipation on this confessional discourse's own terms, and by disciplining its (inevitable) failures. This carceral dynamic, of course, is defined not by its attempt to induce penitence and *reformation*, but in its deployment of that attempt to sustain a relation of power.

Secondly, Orientalism's confessional configuration functions as a key legitimising device for the application of discipline, whether or not the Other 'accepts' the terms of this rigged 'game'. If it 'admits' an 'original sin', which by definition it can never transcend, the Other implicitly accepts the authority of the Western/Normal Self's (in the undoubtedly Occidentocentric way Orientalist discourse articulates it), at the very least in the sense of accepting the basic characterisation and purpose of its politics (essentially pathological ontological features and an imperative towards 'emancipation'). It also provides grounds for disciplinary interventions articulated as consequences of deviations. However, from within that discursive structure, rejecting the confessional framing can in itself be constructed as a manifestation of deviation, thereby legitimising disciplinary interventions, again from within. Indeed, from a Foucaultian point of view, the qualitative discrimination between normal and pathological, Self and Other, is central to the legitimization of disciplinary interventions. As Foucault argues: 'there where one finds a society of normalisation, there where one finds a power which is [...] in the first instance [...] a bio-power [...] racism is indispensable as a condition in order to be able to put someone to death'.<sup>60</sup> Here, 'racism' is often read literally, but is perhaps best read metaphorically as the pathology of utter alterity: confessional discourses legitimise the application of discipline against the Other by recourse to that Other's essential(ly threatening) alterity. This clearly mirrors Said's analysis. Said identifies one of Orientalism's central functions precisely as the authorisation of views making it possible to rule over the 'Orient', i.e. the population targeted by this discourse as a threat. Just like the ontological character of sexuality presents a permanent existential threat to the purity and eternal life of the soul, the Arab/Islamic Other is a representation not simply of contingent, immanent difference with Western Selfhood, but of ontological irreconcilability. Both sex and Otherness need first to be framed as expressions of the pathological in order to legitimise disciplinary interventions against them, which are presented as corrective and/or protective practices. Paraphrasing Said: authorizing statements about the Other based on its special place in the Western Self's imagination also makes it possible to rule over it.<sup>61</sup>

### *Confessional Ontogenesis*

Equally important operations can be discerned at an ontological level. Veridic discourses are not simply involved in legitimising disciplinary actions: in both Said's and Foucault's cases, they are intimately involved in a 'circular relation' (re)producing those very subject positions at an ontological level. This ontogenetic function is inextricable from the way the path to emancipation is structurally precluded for these discourses' Others. As has been suggested

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<sup>60</sup> Michel Foucault *Il faut défendre la société*, (Paris: Gallimard Seuil, 1977), 228. My translation.

<sup>61</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1-2.

above, one of the key ways, in which the configuration of these discourses and their attendant effects of power are (re)produced is precisely through the failure of its designated Others to succeed in the emancipatory tasks set for them (to remain free from sin, 'civilise', 'modernise', 'democratise', etc.). Failure and the imperative toward emancipation are inextricable components of the discourses' productivity.

This analysis also permits a re-evaluation of disciplinary action. The function of the application of discipline is only superficially to eliminate the source of deviance. Just as for Orientalism in Said, the continued existence of such a radical – and radically dangerous – Other has a precise function in the (re)production of this confessional dispositive. While on a first reading, disciplinary intervention is aimed at eliminating the threat to the body politic which comes from such pathology: on another more fundamental level, its existence, alterity, and danger are inextricable from the process by which the 'normal' Self can establish (and defend) its selfhood. Ultimately, the function absolved by the application of discipline and the 'constant and ubiquitous surveillance' is in fact the exact opposite of its avowed role, it is to incite the production of pathological deviation, without which the reproduction of the confessional dispositive would be undermined. Foucault implies as much when he points out that, having assumed the existence of pathological forces at work, confessional discourse essentially moves from taxonomy of alterity, into a framework for surveillance, and ultimately into a 'machinery of incitement' of the very pathological alterity it avowedly seeks to eliminate or at least check. Analogously, Orientalism's imperialist impulse is not simply subservient to a gratuitous desire to colonise, but as Said himself noted elsewhere, is woven closely into the processes whereby Western cultures formulate and discipline their own identities. These are precisely the implications of Said's emphasis on 'the Orient's special place in European Western experience.'<sup>62</sup>

#### *Orientalism's Origins and Cartographies*

Any interrogation of the 'confessional' economy of Orientalist discourses and subjectivities, particularly its functions, must raise questions about their origins. The preface to the French edition of *Madness and Civilization*, read from the standpoint of his analysis of Confession, seems to prefigure Said's concerns, as well as, perhaps, Grosrichard's detour through these narratives to reflect upon the ideas of 'Western Selfhood(s)', their construction, and their evolving political functions.

In the universality of Western Reason [*ratio*], there is a split [*partage*] which is the Orient: the Orient thought of as origin, dreamt of as the vertiginous point from which are born nostalgias and promises of a return, the Orient offered to the West's colonizing reason yet indefinitely inaccessible, because it remains [*demeure*] forever the limit: night of the beginning in which the West formed itself but in which it drew a dividing line [*ligne de partage*], the Orient is everything for it that it is not, notwithstanding which it still must seek its own original [*primitive*] truth in it.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1*, 189-190. My translation.

Insofar as the governmentality of these narratives of the Orient is inextricably linked, to paraphrase Said, to the generation of authority and rule over the 'Occident' as much as the 'Orient', Foucault's passage above may provide an insight into one of the more deeply-rooted reasons for the persistence of Orientalism in (still Western-dominated and Anglo-centric) public and academic discourse, as a 'constitutive outside' which is the subject of such intense scrutiny ultimately precisely because (the properties of) that 'outside' also represents crucial components of its own Selfhood.

But the construction of this particular pathology also helps account for another ontogenetic characteristic of Orientalist discourses, namely the problematic nature of the 'cartography' of subjectivities in Said's analysis. Said is aware of the arbitrary nature of Orientalist narratives in relation to both the terms of the cartography – structured around the Orient/Occident axis – they identify, and he is therefore aware of the elision of internal diversity this taxonomy permits within each of these sites. However, Saidian Orientalism as a framework, insofar as it is concerned more with critiquing the operation of a 'Western' othering, nonetheless 'saves' this geographical axis. Specifically, it only partially problematises internal differences within each geographical site. This lays Said's analysis open to the (otherwise often abused) charge of 'Occidentalism'. Conscious of trying to avoid such totalising effects, as well as what he perceived as Foucault's structuralism and cultural essentialism, Said attempted to draw on Vico, Williams, and Gramsci. A properly Confessional standpoint, however, can help emphasise the arbitrary nature of claims to 'selfhood', and identify the competing alternatives silenced by any such claim, destabilizing Orientalist discourses from within their claims to Selfhood, rather than simply focusing on their claims about Otherness and their political operation. By focusing on non-geographical cartographies, a confessional perspective also highlights the operation of Orientalist discourses *within* the (geographical) boundaries of the putative Self, as well as on its Other(s).

### **Power and Resistance**

Approaching Orientalism as a confessional dispositive also affords purchase on the role of, possibilities for, and obstacles to resistance against Orientalism itself.

Resistance is a central concern in both Said and Foucault. Said, for example, claims he is not arguing 'that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient, but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity "the Orient" is in question.'<sup>64</sup> This standpoint aims to both avoid structuralism and determinism, and to conceive resistance as always possible and as always having the potential to subvert existing power relations. This conception is easily accommodated in Foucault, for whom, since 'power relations are mobile relations, that is, they may become modified, they are not given once and for all,'<sup>65</sup> then 'in relations of power, there is necessarily a possibility of resistance, because if there were no possibility of resistance—of a violent resistance, of flight, of ruse, of strategies that invert the situa-

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<sup>64</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Foucault, *Dits et écrits* 4, 720.

tion—, there would be no power relations at all.’<sup>66</sup> In fact, the confessional model of power allows a refinement of the role of resistance in Orientalism, beyond the straightforward opposition of Orientalist and anti-Orientalist narratives, clarifying two distinctions that remain somewhat ad hoc in Said.

First, a confessional perspective helps conceptualise how and why certain kinds of ‘resistance’ may reinforce the particular power configuration within which they take place, by producing precisely the kind of ‘pathological alterity’ required (e.g. radicalisation of rhetoric and/or practice by Islamist groups bolstered rather than undermined the US right). This production is precisely the effect of a confessional dispositive’s operation as a ‘machinery of incitement’. For Orientalism, the ‘grid of observation’ built around the motifs of Western Selfhood and transposed into the categories and analytical taxonomies of Orientalism and its subsequent instantiations – Civilisation, Modernisation, Democratization, etc. – also becomes a grid through which the subject position of the Western Self can police its Oriental Other to detect any potentially dangerous ‘deviance’. This grid legitimises disciplinary interventions in order to ‘inoculate’ both Oriental and Western bodies politic against pathological deviance, but, acting as a ‘machinery of incitement’, also simultaneously and symbiotically continuously (re)generates that deviance. An Orientalist discursive configuration produces the very alterity, which Normal Selfhood finds threatening and aims to eliminate, and in legitimising disciplinary interventions against this alterity, it both attempts to eliminate that alterity and facilitates the reproduction of forces, which may disrupt dominant or hegemonic relations. Note that this is also true of a second category of subjectivities produced by confessional dispositives, which resist the (application of the) framework itself.

Second, a confessional perspective helps show that the replacement of particular subjects or agents in a power relation does not in itself guarantee a change in the *nature* of power relations unless it also involves a shift in the characterisation of subject positions, i.e. of the configuration of the dispositive itself (this was the intriguing possibility raised by the use of the trope ‘the Turkish model’ by Western policy-makers in the wake of the Arab Uprisings). Said accused Foucault of underplaying the very possibility of resistance. This seems exaggerated not just in terms of Foucault’s personal political history, but also analytically. Aside from his focus on the fluidity of power and the possibility of resistance noted above, his famous debate with Chomsky suggests that Foucault’s was more a caution about the real differences between proposed alternatives.<sup>67</sup> Foucault was concerned with the question of resistance at least as far back as his 1967 analysis of ‘heterotopias’,<sup>68</sup> spaces in which other power relations

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<sup>66</sup> Foucault, *Dits et écrits* 4, 720. For an overview of the debate concerning Said’s misappropriation of Foucault, see Ashcroft and Ahluwalia *Edward Said*, Young, *White Mythologies*; Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*; and Ahmad, *In Theory*.

<sup>67</sup> The debate is reproduced in Rajchman, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate*, and available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kawGakdNoT0>.

<sup>68</sup> Foucault’s lecture *Of Other Spaces* was given in Tunisia in 1967, but not authorised for publication until the spring of 1984: <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>; for the original French, see: <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.fr.html>. Elsewhere, Foucault berates political and legal theory precisely because for all its critiques of monarchy and absolutism, it has not yet ‘cut off the king’s head.’ Foucault, *Interview*, 63.

are possible, and which for him were always not only possible, but existing. Heterotopias are spaces of resistance, or more precisely spaces where alternatives to power configurations which are hegemonic in broader socio-political spaces are possible. In itself, the existence of these alternatives makes it possible to challenge that hegemony. Foucault therefore poses the problem of resistance and alternatives to power by offering a lens through which to interrogate resistance, without foreclosing its possibility. A confessional perspective suggests caution about the *intrinsic* merits of any resistance, but also allows one to ask whether a particular form resistance has the potential to effect change by subverting the economy of power within which it occurs. In this sense, the confessional organisation of power provides a 'structural' criterion through which the success of any change can be measured. A confessional perspective therefore allows an examination of the transformative potential of any particular form/instance of resistance, distinguishing between those whose nature and/or intensity radically change the configuration of existing power relations, and those which reinforce or re-organise existing patterns, irrespective of their location within the form of power in question.

Finally, it is worth noting that Said emphasises the ontogenetic interconnection between 'West' and 'East' in Orientalism primarily in one direction: Arab/Islamic alterity is functional to and structured by its relation to the West (its function is to 'come to terms/deal with' the Orient<sup>69</sup>), and in this sense it is always dependent on – and secondary to – narratives of Western identity. But Foucault's confessional dispositive helps understand a more general ontogenesis, in which both (sets of) discourses are simultaneously produced and symbiotic. Foucault argues that 'the dissemination and reinforcement of heterogeneous sexualities [is] linked together with the help of the central element of confession,<sup>70</sup> and emphasises that this link is not simply a 'weak hypothesis' that diverse sexualities pre-exist a disciplinary grid later imposed upon them redefining them as 'deviant' behaviours to be 'normalised', but a 'strong hypothesis' that the full range of these sexualities are produced by and through the avowedly observational framework itself.

Thus, a Confessional perspective on Orientalism furnishes not only an analytic of resistance, but also helps understand the processes through which it 'manages and even produces' the Orient, not least 'imaginatively'. If Orientalism as a discourse displays confessional properties, and if it can be shown to operate as a machinery of incitement, resistance is far from impossible: it is inevitable. Whether this kind of resistance reinforces or destabilizes the configuration of power depends both on the kind of force a particular form of resistance represents and also on whether the intensity of that force is sufficient to destabilise the dispositive it is originally produced within.

This standpoint therefore offers a more coherent reading not just of Orientalism *per se*, but also of the interplay between 'Western' and 'Eastern' discourses, both between 'West' and 'Middle East', and in the complexities of political debates within post-colonial Arab states – e.g. in relation to nationalism, (neo- and cultural) imperialism, religion, democracy, Islam, and alternative modernities.

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<sup>69</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, 61.

## Conclusions

Beyond the genuine analytical tensions and the personal or political differences (perceived or otherwise) between Said's work and Foucault's, Foucault's analysis of the politics of truth and particularly his analysis of confession provide a useful perspective on Said's *Orientalism*. The parallels between their respective analyses truth-producing, 'veridic' dispositives are hard to miss. As this article has suggested, both discourses display properties outlined in Foucault's analysis of confession in the first volume of *History of Sexuality*. For example, both involve the organisation of subjectivities around two opposed subject positions: the first is a 'Normal' selfhood, while the second is an inherently 'Deviant' alterity. Both Foucaultian Confession and Saidian Orientalism also provide a pathway for the Other to eliminate its 'deviance' and achieve the emancipatory task it is set. And in both cases, the terms in which those subject positions are defined tend to undermine that very emancipatory trajectory.

Building on those parallels, this article has sketched some areas in which a confessional reinterpretation of Saidian Orientalism might be useful. The article has shown how this reinterpretation provides an insight into the internal structure of Orientalist discourses, problematizing the imagined geographies of Saidian Orientalism. Viewing Orientalism as a confessional dispositive also helps connect its discursive structure with its 'effects of power', providing a coherent explanation for the legitimisation and application of discipline in Orientalist discourse.

Moreover, a 'confessional' perspective sheds light on Orientalism's organisational and ontogenetic properties, and provides a framework for understanding the economy of organisation behind the formation of subjectivities and the possibilities of resistance in Orientalist contexts. In particular, a confessional perspective provides a handle on the productivity of failures to emancipate, specifically the way in which failures by both the 'normal self' and by the 'deviant other' help reproduce rather than undermine Orientalism's confessional properties, and thus Orientalist relations of power. In so doing, a confessional perspective goes beyond Said's descriptive approach and provides a purchase on the forces within Orientalism that support its (re)production. Finally, a confessional approach has been shown to help understand not just the particular way power relations are configured in Orientalist dispositives, but the way in which dominant forces and resistance are articulated within those dispositives.

In brief, a confessional reinterpretation of Orientalism provides an alternative framing of Said's critique of occidentocentric discourse which both addresses key limitations of that framework, and allows for its expansion. In this sense, a confessional perspective on Orientalism affords a broad view of the contemporary politics of truth in which Orientalism plays such as an important part.

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