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EDWARD SAID AND ANTONIO GRAMSCI IN COUNTERPOINT

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Edward Said's thought continues to shape analysis of the legacies of colonialism. Among the diverse inspirations for Said's "secular" and, later, "democratic criticism" is the work of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and subalternity, his reflections on the role of intellectuals in society, and his discussions of the spatial relationship between culture and power, inform Said's "contrapuntal" approach, which reads the cultural archive as a polyphony of "intertwined and overlapping histories". While Said's regard for Gramsci's writings is well known, the precise nature of this theoretical encounter has been less frequently illuminated. This essay investigates Said's sustained engagement with the ideas of Gramsci and their multi-faceted influence on his work. Reciprocally, it suggests that Said's problematic uncovers critical aspects of Gramsci's thought. It hypothesizes that Said's "troubling" contrapuntal reading of the multiple discrepant historical experiences of empire implies an integral approach understood such that it prefigures the recent season of Gramsci studies. The latter has been marked by a historical-philological method, which treats hegemony within Gramsci's thought as one pole in a hegemonic-subaltern axis and is attentive to the concerns of a "living

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philology" resonant with Said's unorthodox humanist affiliations. Working towards a reconstruction of the encounter between Said and Gramsci across texts, this essay gleans Said's entanglement with this inter-war Marxist thinker as it is diffused across his body of writings, decoding the relation of "critical consciousness" to Said's "contrapuntal" approach. It places Said's generative framework in conversation with Gramsci's conception of the "philosophy of praxis", cross-pollinating insights from recent Gramsci studies with scholarship addressing Said's unresolved, dramatic methodology. Conversely, it aims to clarify the discontinuities between Said's thought and Gramsci's, discussing underexplored turns in this "travelling theory" that contribute to non-eurocentric frameworks for addressing present "worldly" challenges facing postcolonial and critical thought.

Introduction

Hamid Dabashi (2020a) describes Edward Said's impact on his generation of intellectuals, recalling Said citing a passage from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* in *Orientalism* contending that "critical elaboration" must begin with an "inventory" of oneself.[1] Gramsci argues that initiating his critical project, the "philosophy of praxis", requires a "consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces" (Gramsci 1971, 324; Gramsci 1975, 1376; Q 11, §12; Said 1978a, 25–26). Said (1978a, 25) characterizes *Orientalism* partly in terms of this conception, as "an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals".[2] Gauri Viswanathan suggests that this passage contains "the most significant line in all of Said's works" (Said 2001, xv): "I have tried to maintain a critical consciousness, as well as employing those instruments of historical, humanistic, and cultural research of which my education has made me the fortunate beneficiary" (Said 1978a, 26). For Dabashi (2020b, 30), this starting-point was "constitutional to Said's critical character […] always morally inventive, politically contingent, socially spacious, globally intervening".

This anecdote indicates the significance of Gramsci's writings for Said, and their role in his intellectual and moral project. Said's regard for Gramsci's thought is well known. At the same time, the manifold and precise nature of Said's theoretical engagement with Gramsci has been less often illuminated.[3] Without wishing to produce a "one-sided, Gramscian Said" (Vandeviver 2019, 304), this essay contributes to an examination of this relationship. Timothy Brennan's (2021, 223) biography *Places of Mind*

1 My sincere thanks to the organizers of the LSE *Gramsci in the Middle East and North Africa* conference (May 2022), at which this essay was presented, and to the reviewers for their insightful comments.

2 The "inventory" passage appears in "Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims" (Said 1979, 73), in Said (2000a, xxx), and Said (2001, 170).

3 Exceptions include Baratta's (2007) treatment of Said's relation to Gramsci, particularly the

musical resonances of Said's "contrapuntal" approach with Gramscian thought. See also Bhattacharya (2012).

notes Said planned to publish a book, never realized, "dedicated entirely to Gramsci and Lukács". Said condensed the preparatory materials for this book into an (also unpublished) essay, "On Critical Consciousness: Gramsci and Lukács", intended as the "centrepiece of *The World, the Text, and the Critic*" (232). In this text, Said describes his engagement with Lukács and Gramsci both as a "significant philological task" and having "a crucial bearing on contemporary discussion" of critical thought (EWSP 78:10:II.4, 3).

Aside from his unpublished papers, we are left to glean Said's entanglement with these inter-war Marxist thinkers as it is diffused across his body of writings, and to decode the relation of their "critical consciousness" to his "contrapuntal" approach. Unfolding Said's (1983, 202) problematization of being *between* culture and system, in dialogue with past thinkers (Gramsci/Lukács) and his contemporaries (Foucault/Derrida/Deleuze), speaks to the enduring relevance of his enigmatic relation to the "problem of methodology" and theoretical models for "alternative" forms of knowledge (Young (1990) 2004, 168). While this study focuses on Said as reader of Gramsci, it does not seek to deny Said's diverse sources, including Adorno, Amin, Barthes, Chomsky, Fanon, Foucault, Gilbert and Gubar, Hobsbawm, James, Merleau-Ponty, Vico, Williams, and beyond.[4] Rather, it aims to clarify the affinities and discontinuities between Said's thought and Gramsci's, hoping to reveal underexplored turns in this "travelling theory" fruitful for developing non-eurocentric frameworks to address the specificity of present "worldly" challenges facing postcolonial and critical thought.

4 For example, Said relates that Williams's *The Country and the City* was "one of his primary models when writing *Orientalism*" (Brennan 2021, 194).

Co-activation, the mutual siege, and passive revolution

Discussion of Said's methodology has often foregrounded his relationship to Foucault. James Clifford's (1988, 264–265) reading of *Orientalism* frames Said's method predominantly as an extension of Foucault's discursive analysis "to include ways in which a cultural order is defined externally", thus enlarging it "into the area of cultural constructions of the exotic". Similarly, Paul Bové (1986, 27) finds it fruitful to analyse Said's thought by "commenting on his differences from Foucault".[5] Others discuss Said's approach in *Orientalism* as a combination of Foucauldian elements with additional methodological affiliations, sometimes regarding this as an eclectic strength (Robbins 1983), sometimes as a problematic ambivalence (Ahmad 1994). Thus, Aijaz Ahmad views Said as having fused Foucauldian anti-humanism with what he sees as the "conservative" tradition of high humanist philology, exemplified by Auerbach and Spitzer. For Ahmad, this forces Said into

5 Bruce Robbins considers the extent to which Said is a "Foucauldian critic," noting that "he produces a similar shock and sustains a similar discrepancy" (Robbins 1983, 75).

"mutual incompatible definitions of 'Orientalism' so as to deploy both these stances" (166).[6]

Another line of interpretation gives prominence to Gramsci as a "constant touchstone" for Said's development (Brennan 1992, 85; see also Brennan 2006). Abdirahman A. Hussein considers the hybridity of Said's methodological approach, balancing his use of Foucauldian discourse analysis with his Gramscian engagement. Hussein argues that readers frequently err by assuming *Orientalism* to offer a complete theoretical system – "an overarching, formulaic principle which can be examined totalistically, swallowed whole, and recycled formalistically", – from which Said's overall thought can be interpreted (Hussein 2004, 13–14). In a 1987 interview, Said states:

> *Orientalism* is theoretically inconsistent, and I designed it that way: I didn't want Foucault's method, or anybody's method, to override what I was trying to put forward. The notion of a kind of non-coercive knowledge, which I come to at the end of the book, was deliberately anti-Foucault. (Said 2001, 80)

Said's reluctance to provide a replicable formula resonates with the spirit of Gramsci's contention that the "experience upon which the philosophy of praxis is based cannot be schematized" (Gramsci 1971, 428; Gramsci 1975, 1428; Q 11, §25; cf. Gramsci 1975, 857; Q 7, §6; Gramsci (1992, 1996, 2007) 2011, PN3, 159).

Hussein and Brennan both suggest that the paucity of attention paid to Said's 1975 book *Beginnings* hampers efforts to understand Said's approach. Thus, Said (2001, 77) reflects in 1987 on the "ventriloquistic" aspect of *Beginnings*, which "he likened to the harmonic choruses of polyphony" (Brennan 2021, 304) – an intimation of the contrapuntal approach he was to articulate later in *Culture and Imperialism*. For Hussein, failing to grasp the way *Beginnings* "clears a theoretical space for all of Said's later writings" (Hussein 2004, 15) leads many readers to overemphasize the Foucauldian elements of *Orientalism*. By extension, these readers also misinterpret Said as inconsistent in his conception of discourse. Hussein seeks to render the internal dynamic of what, following R.P. Blackmur, Said calls a "technique of trouble". Thus, Hussein suggests Said's "methodology is manifestly dramatic, immanent, and open-ended" (2004, 4). It consists of a "co-activation" of two "moments": an "agonistic dialectic" and an "archaeology/genealogy" (27). The "dialectical" moment "reflects on the implications of an extreme double-bind, which [Said] sometimes calls an 'either/or' transaction" providing an awareness of the extremes of a crisis (4),[7] while the other, "archaeological/genealogical" moment "involves the excavation of mental, textual, and other cultural archives which have hitherto been considered sacrosanct or otherwise simply taken for granted" (7). For Hussein, these moments relate to different influences. The "agonistic dialectical" moment corresponds

On Foucault and Said, see Bhatnagar (1986) and Vandeviver (2019). For Said's various essays on Foucault, see Said (1972, 1974, 1978b, 2000a).

6 Ahmad (1994, 169) recognizes Gramsci's significance for Said, but reads this as a substantive "domestication". Said's contested relation to the formation of postcolonial theory will not be rehearsed here.

7 For Hussein (2004, 5), Said's "agonistic" dialectic is not one of "smooth, predictable, and straightforward" Hegelian sublation.

with both conservative (Conrad, Swift, Eliot) and radical (Lukács, Williams, Gramsci, Adorno) thinkers, whereas the "archaeological/genealogical" moment concerns Vico, Nietzsche, and Foucault. We might question whether Gramsci maps neatly onto the first moment and not also onto the second, via his engagement with Vico, Sorel, and the semantic field of "common sense" [*senso comune*], as the problem-space of "excavating the taken-for-granted".[8] However, Hussein's general characterization captures the restless critical energy in Said's work.

This essay enriches and is distinctive from the discussions above regarding Said's generative approach to method by clarifying his entanglement with Gramsci, enabling us to better evaluate whether Said's ideas are a product of "incompatible tributaries" (Hussein 2004, 1), or in fact energized by their dramatic co-activation.[9] Readers are unlikely to need convincing of the importance that Said (1983, 174) ascribes to the "essential concept" of hegemony. It plays a key theoretical role both in his articulation of Western imaginative geographies in *Orientalism* and, later, in Said's (1993, 109) analyses of the "quotidian processes of hegemony" in the "consolidated vision" of (French and British) imperialism. Less readily accepted, as seen above, is the co-activation of the Gramscian concept of hegemony alongside a Foucauldian discursive analysis of the "thick constellation of knowledge about the 'other'" (Morefield 2022, 138). By contrast, the term subaltern does not appear in Said's *Orientalism* (excepting its 1994 "Afterword"), occurring rather in Said's dialogue with Gayatri Spivak and figures from the Subaltern Studies group (for example, Said 1993, 251). Nevertheless, this essay contends that Said's contrapuntal reading in *Culture and Imperialism*, of the multiple discrepant historical experiences of empire, implies an integral approach to the relationship between hegemony and subalternity. Understood in this way, Said's implicit conception of subalternity is in tension with other readings and prefigures the recent season of Gramsci studies. The latter has been marked by a historical-philological method that treats hegemony and subalternity within Gramsci's thought as poles within a hegemonic-subaltern axis.[10] In different ways, the Subaltern Studies group, Spivak, and Said have all contributed to a growing attentiveness to subalternity in recent readings of Gramsci's thought (see Green 2011; Thomas 2018a).

Said's *Culture and Imperialism* analyses the spatial relationship between culture and power by distilling a "structure of attitude and reference" from works by Austen, Verdi, Kipling, Camus, and others, indicating the ways in which the strength and authority of imperialist hegemony are "activated and maintained in literature" (Said 1993, 62, 75, 95). The evolution of this "structure of attitude and reference" is a product not only of metropolitan initiative or imagination, but of the experience of anti-colonial resistance and opposition. Thus, the third chapter of *Culture and Imperialism* charts

8 See Jackson (2024c). Stuart Hall arguably explores Gramsci's lexicon of "common sense" more explicitly than Said (1983, 187), who develops the problematic in Foucauldian terms of the density/weightiness of discourse.

9 Said (2001, 80) notably describes Gramsci as a "mediator" in his incorporation of the positions of Chomsky and Foucault. On Chomsky's importance for Said, see Robbins (2022).

10 This approach, developed by Francioni (1984), informs Frosini (2003), Cospito (2016), Vacca (2021), among others.

"resistance cultures", the "emergence of opposition", and the challenges posed by independence and liberation. Said mobilizes what he calls "Gramsci's vivid metaphor" of "a mutual siege" to describe the impact that anti-imperialist movements have on the "edifice of Western empire" (195). In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci uses this metaphor to discuss the ways in which hegemonic and subaltern forces shape each other as agonistic poles in the struggle between hegemonies, particularly in its aspect of "war of position":

> In politics, in other words, the war of manoeuvre subsists so long as it is a question of winning positions which are not decisive, so that all the resources of the State's hegemony cannot be mobilised. But when, for one reason or another, these positions have lost their value and only the decisive positions are at stake, then one passes over to siege warfare; this is concentrated, difficult, and requires exceptional qualities of patience and inventiveness. In politics, the siege is a reciprocal one, despite all appearances, and the mere fact that the ruler has to muster all his resources demonstrates how seriously he takes his adversary. (Gramsci 1971, 239; Gramsci 1975, 802; Q 6, §138)[11]

While Said's "siege" focuses on imperial rule, his treatment entwines colonial and class relations (and those of gender and race) in its explanation of what makes the "subordinate subordinate" (Said 1993, 80).

Reciprocally, for Gramsci, the "struggle between hegemonies" entails a trenchant criticism of imperialism that is far from reducing the colonial relation to its class axis.[12] Thus, Gramsci's "spatial historicism" entails a critical approach to the terms "East" and "West", in which "his geographically nuanced analysis of social relations and political projects emerge[s] out of the same method that yield[s] his historically differentiated insights" (Kipfer 2013, 83). For Gramsci, one must acknowledge that these concepts "never cease to be 'objectively real' even though when analysed they turn out to be nothing more than a 'historical' or 'conventional construct'" (Gramsci 1975, 874; Q 7, §25; Gramsci (1992, 1996, 2007) 2011, PN3, 175).[13] Indeed, Gramsci ((1992, 1996, 2007) 2011, PN3, 176) comments that "the purely historical nature of the significance attached to these terms can be seen from the fact that the words 'East' and 'West' have now acquired a supernumerary meaning and even refer to relations between whole civilizations".[14] Gramsci is explicit about the central importance of understanding this relationship, without which, he says, "it would be impossible to understand historical materialism, its philosophical position vis-à-vis traditional materialism and idealism, and the importance and significance of superstructures" (176).

11 Gramsci's inspiration is a quote from Marx on the "Eastern Question. 14 September 1855".

12 Young (2012a) documents the utility of Gramsci's anti-imperialist commitment, his analyses of the "Southern Question", and his Sardinian upbringing, for the development of non-eurocentric conceptions of the world.

13 For the second version (designated C-text, see Gramsci 2011, PN1, xv) of this text, see Gramsci 1975, 1418–1420; Q 11, §20; Gramsci 1971, 446–448.

14 To my knowledge, Said does not comment on this

passage. Under the rubric of "the objectivity of the real", Gramsci deals with Hegelian and Marxian renderings of the rational and the real; see Jackson (2024a).

15 Gramsci foregrounds dramatic form in his account of Machiavelli and Sorel's notions of "myth" (Thomas 2018b; Gramsci 1975, 951; Q 8, §21; Gramsci 2011, PN3, 246–248).

16 Thomas (2018a, 865) recounts Gramsci's growing awareness of the significance of the subaltern social groups for his carceral project. See Gramsci (2021).

The dramatic "co-activation" animating Said's approach chimes with Gramsci's integral treatment.[15] Indeed, Gramsci's increasing focus on subalternity in the later phases of his *Prison Notebooks* suggests a parallel in the development of their thought.[16] The growing prominence of subalternity in the unfolding of Gramsci's carceral project may be seen as consonant with the increasingly substantive account of anti-colonial resistance that Said provides in *Culture and Imperialism* relative to *Orientalism*. Thus, in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (1993, xiv) appraises that "what I left out of *Orientalism* was that response to Western dominance which culminated in the great movement of decolonization across the Third World". Yet, *pace* Said himself and criticisms that *Orientalism*, due to its Foucauldian influence, restricts resistance to the "micro-political" (Ahmad 1994, 199–200), there are also intimations in Said's earlier texts of the reciprocal shaping of hegemonic and subaltern figures. While unruly subaltern energies are visible in *Orientalism* primarily through the reactions that they provoke in the evolution of imperialism's imaginative geographies, the logic of resistance, absorption, and transformation can be detected in Said's account of Orientalism's structures and re-structures. Thus, something akin to Gramsci's conception of "molecular transformation" and passive revolution (Marchi 2021) can be found in Said's (1978a, 73ff) account of the evolution of European schematizations of Islam, namely, Islam's role as a "lasting trauma" for Europe. Said's documentation of European attempts to gradually incorporate elements of the recalcitrant actuality of Islam, in increasingly detailed schema that never abandon the overall framework of neutralization and domination, resonates with molecular aspects of the (simultaneously top-down and bottom-up) processes of "revolution-restoration" analysed by Gramsci.

Gramsci derives this conception in part from nineteenth-century historian Edgar Quinet, setting himself the task to:

> Look up in Quinet the meaning and justification of the formula according to which revolution and restoration are equivalent in Italian history. … Is it possible to establish a similarity between this concept of Quinet's and [Vincenzo] Cuoco's concept of 'passive revolution'? One would say that both Quinet's 'revolution-restoration' and Cuoco's 'passive revolution' express the historical fact that popular initiative is missing from the development of Italian history. (Gramsci (1992, 1996, 2007) 2011, PN3, 252; Gramsci 1975, 957; Q 8, §25)

For Gramsci, this absence of popular initiative, e.g. during Italian unification, is coupled with the fact that "progress" occurs "as a reaction of the dominant classes to the sporadic and incoherent rebelliousness of the popular masses" (252, 957). For Said, Quinet's ((1832) 1857) importance stems from the definition he gave to the "Oriental Renaissance", a new awareness of the Orient,

in particular "a newly perceived relationship between the Orient and the West" (Said 1978a, 42), with Islam as its paradigmatic example (137), and of "the Orient as therapeutic for the West" (271). This moment marks the initiation of modern Orientalism (42), and an expansion of "the Orient" beyond its previous limited association with Islam/Semitic languages. While Said does not directly discuss the concept of passive revolution during any period of his work, as early as *Orientalism* he conveys a sense of the subterranean shifts that accumulate to produce reorganizations of hegemony that seek to disaggregate and deflect subaltern pressures.[17] Examining Conrad and the "often surprising [Vichian] dynamics of human history" in his Freud lecture, Said (2003) 2014, 25–26) describes history's transformation of "the most unyielding stasis into process".

In *On Late Style*, Said illuminates the "knitted-together" durability of the process of "passive revolution" (without using the term) at work in the Italian *Risorgimento*. Said (2006, 72) discusses the way in which Gramsci's 1926 essay "Some Aspects of the Southern Question" "prepared the ground" for Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard*. He suggests that Gramsci's analysis of the "vast social disintegration" of the Italian South, of "a society dominated as an inferior, frozen in a state of permanent binarism, by a stronger outside partner", is given summative expression in Tancredi's comment: "if we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change" (Said 2006, 73).[18] For Said, what separates Gramsci and Lampedusa is the latter's foreclosure of any Gramscian solution (an alliance of the exploited and oppressed) to the "Southern Question". Thus, Lampedusa is animated by a position that Said (2006, 74) summarizes with a one-sided version of Romain Rolland's saying: "pessimism of the intellect, pessimism of the will". Said's frequent allusion to Gramsci's use of Rolland's phrase is inflected intertextually through, on the one hand, Said's abiding concern with the pessimism of Conrad, and on the other, Emile Habiby's ((1974) 2010) Palestinian figure of the "pessoptimist".[19] Said (1994b, 142) specifies that he ascribes priority in this dictum to the intellect: "I say pessimism of the intellect first and then optimism of the will based on the pessimism of the intellect".[20] Reading the Said – Gramsci nexus across texts, as a form of "travelling theory" (Said 1983, 2000a), generates possibilities for exploring the entanglement through diverse aspects, of conservation and transformation in situations of "catastrophic balance", of disruption, dislocation and self-knowledge in subaltern struggles.

Said's relationship to subalternity across his works deserves further investigation. Gramsci's understanding of the condition of subalternity as a "non-presence of the present", and its relation to his innovative political sense of "catharsis", emerges in part from his analysis of the plural temporalities dramatized in Canto X of Dante's *Inferno* (see Bové 2011;

17 See Thomas (2009, 151) on defensive and offensive phases of passive revolution.

18 Said's (2006, 74) analysis of Prince Fabrizio, emblematic of "southern men of culture who stand out for their international achievements and enormous erudition but are unproductive so far as their own environments are concerned", invites comparison with "Southern" intellectual Benedetto Croce.

19 Noted recently by Hammad (2024, 51). See also Abu-Manneh (2016, Ch. 3).

20 The priority of intellect relates to Said's (1983, 28) notion: "Solidarity before criticism means the end of

criticism". See Said (2000a, 529; 2000b, 233).

21 Gramsci (1975, 516–530, Q 4, §§78–87; Gramsci 2011, PN2, 246–258; see Thomas 2009, 283–284, 294).

Rosengarten 1986).[21] Encased in fiery tombs, the Guelf Cavalcante, and his Ghibelline rival, Farinata, endure a *contrapasso* punishment of being denied knowledge of the present. For Thomas, Gramsci derives from Dante (and his own isolated condition of incarceration) an awareness of the present as a composite of different "times":

> Rather than being expressive of an essence equally present in all practices, the present for Gramsci is precisely an ensemble of those practices in their different temporalities, struggling to assert their primacy and thus to articulate the present as an achieved rather than originary unity. (Thomas 2009, 284)

Gramsci associates this fragmentation with the condition of subalternity. While Said, to my knowledge, does not comment on Gramsci's reading of Dante, he ascribes notable significance to Auerbach's "dazzling analysis" of the same Canto in *Mimesis* (Said 2004, 107). Moreover, this conception of subalternity and the problematic of contemporaneity resonates with Said's (2000a, 51–54) reading of Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* (1999). The titular characters, Palestinian refugees, suffer a "non-presence of the present". In Kanafani's usage, this scene is not simply a "novelistic device", but becomes "a provocation" (53). Said translates this theme into his own distinctive conceptuality:

> The main conflict in the book therefore turns about that contest in the present: impelled by exile and dislocation, the Palestinian must carve a path for himself in existence, which is by no means a 'given' or stable reality for him. (Said 2000a, 52)

For Said, as for Gramsci, what is derived from these literary works is a sense of the present not as "given", but "intelligible only as an *achievement*" (53). The significance of this "paradox of contemporaneity", brought to its apex in the case of the Palestinians and tied by Gramsci to the subalterns' "cathartic moment" that unsettles the "taken-for-granted", reverberates across the works of both thinkers.[22]

22 Hammad's (2024) reflections on the changing shape of the Palestinian struggle in relation to "recognition scenes" [*anagnorisis*] and narrative frames exceeded by the flows of history, could be considered in relation to these "cathartic" moments and the

Elaboration and the intellectuals

Surveying Said's mentions of Gramsci in his monographs, essay collections, and published interviews reveals that he appears nine and seventeen times respectively in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. Gramsci is invoked more often and is discussed more extensively in Said's collections of essays, 27 times in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, and 54 times in his *Reflections on Exile*. Said's references to Gramsci appear frequently in his political interventions, including his journalistic articles published in newspapers, such as *Al-Ahram Weekly*, *Al-Hayat*, the *Gulf Today* and *Al-*

threshold of Said's (1984) "permission to narrate".

Khaleej (Said 2000b, 130, 233, 340). They appear also in his analyses of Palestine from the 1970s through the 1990s (see Said 1979, 37, 59, 73, 113; Said 1994c, 314, 316). Said's engagement with "theory" begins with his study of musical theory (Brennan 2021, 14). Given that a musical vocabulary pervades both Gramsci's and Said's theoretical lexicon, from rhythm, polyphony, harmony, fugue, and discord, to the contrapuntal, it is unsurprising that Gramsci plays a role in Said's reflections on music (Said 1991, xx, 15, 70, 88).[23] The title of Said's *Musical Elaborations* has a Gramscian derivation, referring to "part of what Gramsci calls the elaboration of civil society" (Said 2001, 145). In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said explains the significance of this term:

23 Further study might integrate scholarship on Said and Gramsci's mobilization of musical language for their wider theoretical projects. On music's "transgressive" aspect, see Gourgouris (2016), and on music and the "scent of the earth", see Baratta (2007).

> By elaboration Gramsci means two seemingly contradictory but actually complementary things. First, to elaborate means to refine, to work out (*e-laborare*) some prior or more powerful idea, to perpetuate a world view. Second, to elaborate means something more qualitatively positive, the proposition that culture itself or thought or art is a highly complex and quasi-autonomous extension of political reality and, given the extraordinary importance attached by Gramsci to intellectuals, culture, and philosophy, it has a density, complexity, and historical-semantic value that is so strong as to make politics possible. (Said 1983, 170–171)

For Said, "elaboration" is no mere epiphenomenon, but a cultural activity of primary importance for the patterning and sustenance of the fabric of "civil society". It includes heterogeneous aspects, both "subordinating, fracturing" ones as well as those that produce and create. This contrapuntal plurality constitutes the "depth" and "strength" of culture (171), the awareness of which "distinguishes Gramsci from nearly every other important Marxist thinker of his period" (171).

Said appeals to the resources of Gramscian thought to remedy what he sees as the weaknesses of "contemporary 'Left' criticism", particularly bemoaning the absence of:

> a serious study of what authority is, either with reference to the way authority is carried historically and circumstantially from the State down into a society saturated with authority or with reference to the actual workings of culture, the role of intellectuals, institutions, and establishments. (Said 1983, 172)

Thus, Said is attentive to both centralized state-led and de-centred processes by which a society is "saturated with authority". He praises Gramsci, and implicitly criticizes other Marxists, by suggesting that he is "the first – and in my opinion the most acute – modern Marxist to make the intellectual

the central point of his socio-political analyses" (Said 1983, 82). As above, Said relates this to Gramsci's sense of culture:

> as belonging not to some free-floating ether or to some rigidly governed domain or iron determinism, but to some large intellectual endeavour – systems and currents of thought – connected in complex ways to doing things, to accomplishing certain things, to force, to social class and economic production, to diffusing ideas, values, and world pictures. (Said 1983, 170)

Said (1983, 174) links his own distinctive coinage of the term "affiliation" with this discussion of "kinds of cultural ensembles" and the "essential concept of *hegemony* guiding cultural and broadly intellectual activity, or elaboration, as a whole".

Said's (1994a) re-examination of the role of the intellectual in modern society in his *Reith Lectures* juxtaposes Said's Gramscian influence with his valorization of Julien Benda's concern for the principled individual intellectual's vocation. While Said's conception of intellectual work shares the organizational aspect of representation associated with Gramsci, "articulating worldviews and arguments" of social groups, Jeanne Morefield (2022, 143) points out that the (individual) exilic intellectual is also a hybrid, "both attached to and somewhat detached from, the political/cultural environment that shapes them". This appears to place Said at some remove from, at least functional readings of, Gramscian intellectuals as "social organizers" of different ideological positions. This distance is underlined by Said's foregrounding of the "unsettling" task of the exilic critic to ask embarrassing questions (144). Nevertheless, Said punctures any sense of the free-floating intellectual devoid of attachments, with a Gramscian analysis of their worldly connections.[24]

24 On trajectories of the intellectual in Said and Gramsci, see Jackson (2024b).

Said's tactical foregrounding of his position in US academia to gain a more effective voice in American cultural life, Brennan (2021, 135ff, 188ff) argues, is partially responsible for many interpreters overlooking the fact that Said also engaged deeply with, and felt himself a part of, Arab intellectual traditions influenced by the spirit of the *Nahda*, the nineteenth-century Arab "awakening". The sense of Said being "at home" in his "adopted culture" meant that his deep engagement with Arab intellectual culture "remained invisible for at least half his audience" (47). Said affiliated himself with figures developing the *Nahda*'s legacy, such as Albert Hourani, Abdallah Laroui, Constantin Zurayk, Clovis Maksoud, and Anouar Abdel-Malek.[25] Another reason for the invisibility of these connections is the unfamiliarity of many Western critics with this literature. Said (1994a, 314) argues that a "Gramscian vision" is important to the project of developing a critical language that can "assess and critique power in the Arab world", saying that "we must indigenously and

25 See Ghazoul (1992). For Said's use of Abdel-Malek (1963) in *Orientalism*, see Said (1978a, 96–97, 105,

imaginatively develop models of the sort, for example, that Laroui in North Africa was able to do, or Anwar Abdel-Malek, or Jabiri" (314).[26] While the present essay does not elaborate substantively on these connections in global socio-political theory, it would be productive to examine the intertwining of traditions, for example, the philological developments pioneered by Arabic scholarship and adopted by thinkers such as Vico, and their relevance for Said and Gramsci.[27]

Travelling theory and living philology

Asked in a 1987 interview about his relationship to Gramsci's thought, Said highlighted Gramsci's capacious interests, saying:

> The […] immense reading and writing he did, on his own, in prison: that's really one of the great adventures of human experience. But all of that was contained within a fairly disciplined commitment to the world in which he lived. […] That one could manage that is something that I've always tried to emulate. (Said 2001, 88)

Said valorizes the combination of precision and non-dogmatic exploration that Gramsci achieved in his writings, despite the restrictions of his circumstances.[28] At the same time, Said emphasizes Gramsci's intellectual and moral commitment. Said suggests that his engagement with figures such as Lukács and Gramsci responds in part to missed opportunities in the traditions of Arab Marxism. Thus, he contends that:

> There has been some presence of those Marxist currents that interest us in the West, the Marxism of early and middle Lukács, the Marxism of Gramsci […]. But by and large, the development of Western Marxism was not reflected in Arab Marxism. […] To the best of my ability to judge it, the development of a theoretical Marxism in the Arab world did not seem to meet adequately the challenges of imperialism, the formation of a nationalist elite, the failure of the nationalist revolution, religion, etc. – all the problems that we now face, including Zionism itself. (Said 2001, 159–160)

Given the creative experimentation with Gramscian ideas found in thinkers such as Samir Amin or Mahdi Amel (Safieddine 2021), we might question the judiciousness of these, albeit tentative, remarks. Nevertheless, they pose the question of whether Said locates resources in Gramsci that would contribute to addressing some of the challenges that he enumerates. If so, this might explain Said's later efforts through his journalistic writings to amplify the

108, 325, 327, 360, 361, 372). On Charles Malik as "negative lesson" for Said, see Walhout (2021). See also Laroui (1974).

26 While Said famously invokes pianist Glenn Gould as a model for the intellectual, his conception also parallels Mahmoud Darwish's (2019, 20ff) relation of the poet to the political, simultaneously solitary and responsible, personal and poetical *qua* crossing interiority and exteriority. Compare Said's (2023) practice as poet.

27 For example, Said's association of Arabic philology and Vico (Brennan 2021, 136–138), with Vichian "providence" in Gramsci's writings (Gramsci 1975, 504; Q 4, §56; Gramsci (1992, 1996, 2007) 2011, PN2, 232).

28 Hall (2021, 296) remarks similarly on Gramsci's development of "the insights of Marxist theory in the direction of new questions and conditions".

creative adaptation of Gramscian ideas in the region and among diasporic communities.

In 1993, Said recalls reading Gramsci's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* shortly after its 1971 publication. Said (2001, 170) found this collection "intriguing but unsatisfying", saying: "There were too many ellipses; there were too many difficulties in understanding, literally, what Gramsci was about. It took reading the Italian to see what he was actually getting at". Said then revisits his discussion of the Gramscian "inventory" in *Orientalism*. His discovery of a line in the Italian edition, missing in the translated *Selections*, clarifies an imperative to compile an inventory, giving the passage a Vichian sense that Said says was crucial to his project in *Orientalism*: "By you making an inventory […] you give it a kind of structure that allows you then to confront it, dismantle it" (Said 2001, 170). The sense of Said's initial hesitancy regarding Gramsci's position is reinforced by the fact he did not refer to Gramsci in a published book until *Orientalism*.[29] It is unclear whether Said may have read Gramsci prior to the *Selections*, yet we may profitably re-read Said's 1960s writings in light of this comparison, since they reciprocally illuminate underexplored aspects of Gramsci's thought. For example, we might compare the methodological importance of Conrad's letters for Said's *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), with the role that Gramsci's *Prison Letters* (1994) play in the interpretation of his *Notebooks*. Hussein (2004, 26) also points out themes in the Conrad study that persist throughout Said's career, summarizing them as:

> difficult self-definition […] ideas in general […]; the operations of the human mind in the circumstances of space and time; about intellectuals and responsibility; about the interconnections of the will to truth and the will to power. […] Eurocentric vision, European imperialism, and the *sensus communis* implied in these two related consolidations. (Hussein 2004, 26–27)

These share much with those developed by Gramsci in his *Notebooks*, suggesting that Said's thinking was receptive to Gramscian themes (to an extent absorbed through the influence of Williams) even before his close reading of Gramsci in the 1970s.[30] Moreover, Said's subsequent interest in *Beginnings* in the "ventriloquism of diverse voices" resembles Gramsci's theory of the composite formation of personality, with its emphasis on an unsettled *modus vivendi*, subaltern fragmentation, and coherence.[31] Gramsci's withdrawal from conventional theories of the subject to a theory of (individual and collective) personality, as an "active social relation of modification of the cultural environment" (Gramsci 1971, 350; Gramsci 1975, 1331; Q 10II, §44), offers resources for understanding self-formation and ("molecular") processes of transformation discussed above (Thomas 2009, 375). This relates to the exilic condition that Said (2000a, 186) describes as "an awareness of

29 Said (1976) mentions Gramsci briefly in an interview, but there are few prior references to Gramsci. By contrast, Lukács is discussed in Said (1968, 1972, etc.).

30 Many of the specific themes of interest to Said would only later be foregrounded in anglophone Gramsci studies, partly through his own influence.

31 See Thomas (2009, 370) on "*una persona coerente*".

simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal". The distinctive "double awareness" that Said finds in Conrad can be read against Gramsci's notion of contradictory consciousness (Gramsci 1971, 333–334; Gramsci 1975; Q 8, §169; Q 11, §12). Nevertheless, the fact that Said does not cite Gramsci in *Beginnings* (1975) may be regarded as a counterweight to the evidence above for Gramsci's constitutive methodological importance for Said.[32] At the same time, Said (2001, 214) himself stresses in later interviews that he was "one of the first in America to teach Gramsci", despite the difficulties of deriving a Gramscian position.

Brennan (2021, 261) points out that Said "repeatedly questioned, […] whether a Marxism devised in the West could ever be relevant outside it". Said (2000a, 436) elaborates in his discussions of "travelling theory" the problem of either the loss or the renewal of thought's transformative capacity when migrating between different times and situations. We might consider the ways in which Gramsci's "philosophy of praxis", which he refers to as a method of "living philology" (Gramsci 1971, 429; Gramsci 1975, 1430; Q 11, §25), resonates with Said's (1983, 2004) "secular" and, later, "democratic criticism", and his humanist affiliations. In his preface to Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Said (2004, 96) places an emphasis on reading that exilic text as "a book of countercurrents, ironies, and even contradictions that need to be taken into account". Thus, he characterizes Auerbach's philological approach as "disciplined yes, but not autocratic", whose charm emerges from "a sense of searching and discovery" (Said 2004, 97, 100). The same might be said of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, its contrapuntal method leaning primarily towards a "confrontational" interweaving of discrepant historical experiences, rather than their pacific reconciliation (see Brennan 2021, 306).

The recent season of Gramsci studies has likewise attempted to adopt the method and explore the substance of Gramsci's conception of a "living philology". This is arguably prefigured in Said's unorthodox humanist affiliations, in particular the disciplined subversiveness that he extracts from Auerbach and others to synthesize a troubling form of "democratic criticism". Gramsci conceives his own rejection of mechanical schematization, quoted above, as "extending the sphere of philology as traditionally understood" (Gramsci 1971, 428; Gramsci 1975, 1429; Q 11, §25).[33] Said's and Gramsci's respective relationships with (an enlarged conception of) philology deserve further examination.[34] For Young, Said's "late identification with philology" can be regarded as a "redemptive position", as an "act of contrition for the discipline that [in *Orientalism*] he had brought to its knees" (Young 2012b, 29). It is notable that Ernest Renan (1823–1892), Orientalist authority and historian of religion, is important both for Said's understanding of the role of the philologist in Orientalism and, in a different way, for Gramsci. The latter fundamentally reconfigures the matrix of Renan's notion of "intellectual and moral reform" (via Sorel

32 Since Hussein (2004, 97) argues that *Beginnings* "clears a theoretical space" from which Said's later projects are launched, it is significant if Gramsci's writings were not explicitly involved in this process.

33 Brennan (2021, 7) highlights this link when referring to Gramsci, in view of his incomplete university studies, as an "interrupted philologist".

34 For Italian-language scholarship, see Chambers

and Croce) to inform his own project (Gramsci 1971, 395; Gramsci 1975, 1860; Q 16, §9).[35] Said, like Gramsci, sought to articulate accounts capable of holding together the contradictory realities of human principles and behaviours, even or especially in their "progressive" liberal-imperialist form.

(2006), Baratta (2007), Pala (2012).

35 Said (2000a, 418) notes that "Renan's *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, which in the European context was for people like Arnold a progressive text […] for Césaire is a direct antecedent of Hitler and Rosenberg".

Worldliness and the philosophy of praxis

After *Orientalism*, Said engages explicitly with Gramscian ideas across almost all his works, with notable exceptions including his memoir *Out of Place* (Said 1999), and later musical writings (Said 2008; Said and Barenboim 2004). The themes he discusses in relation to Gramsci reveal the diversity of Gramscian concepts mobilized by Said across his corpus. These topics include civil and political society, consent and coercion, hegemony and hegemonic systems, the critical inventory, organic and traditional intellectuals, rulers and ruled, historical-cultural bloc(k)s and elaboration, the "Revolution against *Capital*", the relation between knowledge and power, muscular-nervous practice, intellectual vocation and the cosmopolitan, geography and temporality, spatial consciousness and the "Southern Question", Vico, Croce, Gobetti, the metaphor of a mutual siege, directive ideas, optimism and pessimism, religion and the secular "conquest of civil society", to name but a few (see Said 2001, 214–215).

Beyond these direct references by Said to Gramscian concepts, there are further Saidian themes that speak to the resonances between their thought. For example, we might compare Gramsci's well-known analysis of Americanism and Fordism and its relation to empiricism-pragmatism, with Said's description (in his review of Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon*) of the attitude of "how-to-ism" and the reliance on expertise in contemporary American society and literature. For Gramsci, Americanism raises questions about the historical significance of the absence of a Hegelian phase in the American conception of life (Gramsci 1975, 97, Q 1, §105; Gramsci (1992, 1996, 2007) 2011, PN1, 194). For Said, it informs a presentist prioritization of the "here-and-now" (Said 2000a, 231). While these shared concerns are somewhat speculative, tracing their contours can help to decode unexpected turns in Said's thought. Reciprocally, these subterranean connections suggest pathways that Said's thought opens for subsequent readers of Gramsci. In this respect, understanding Said as a reader of Gramsci is relevant to the recent attention given to themes of language, translation, and translatability and their importance for Gramsci's critical project.[36] Moreover, we have seen above how Said's metaphor of exile provides new perspective on the critical aspect of the Gramscian intellectual.

36 See Frosini (2010). Balibar (2016) reads Said's

languages of war and translation as interpenetrating political models. See also Apter (2005).

Said and Gramsci share an enduring concern to criticize the intellectualistic belief (for Gramsci associated with a mummified Enlightenment tradition) that phenomena (like Orientalism) are not simply a "collection of lies" that will "blow away" if the truth about them is revealed (see Said 1978a, 6).[37] Both expend considerable effort to explain the "knitted-together strength" and "redoubtable durability" of Orientalist discourse or taken-for-granted "common-sense" notions.[38] Thus, Gramsci assesses the ways in which "popular beliefs" attain a "granitic solidity" and a relative imperviousness to rationalist criticism (Gramsci 1975, 471; Q 4, §45; Gramsci (1992, 1996, 2007) 2011, PN2, 195). For Said, this entails acknowledging the "degree to which *representation* is part of reality, not just its rendering in words" (Brennan 2021, 181). Thus, Said (1978a, 6) emphasizes that Orientalism is more "a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient" than a "veridic discourse about the Orient". While Said may be associated with the criticism of "canonical" cultural works, and Gramsci, by contrast, with the textures of folklore, they both display a nuanced approach to the role of popular belief and its interactions with all forms of literature. Thus, despite the supposed anti-religious implications of "secular" criticism, Viswanathan (2012, 44) points to Said's awareness of the density of religion, its hybrid of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, suggesting, in certain circumstances, that "religion could be allied with critique". Cosimo Zene explains the religion – subalternity nexus in Gramsci, contending that "religion in its broadest sense – as the study of religions and as religious practice – becomes a key factor to perceive in depth the existential, historical situation of 'subaltern groups'" (Zene 2020, 118–119).

37 On the "mummification" of culture in Gramsci, see Jackson (2020).

38 Jackson (2024c). See also Said's associated ideas of the "density", "critical mass", "weightiness", and "energy" of ideas.

Diverse lines of enquiry are suggested by such a Said – Gramsci nexus, such as the relationship between intellectuals and *senso comune* in the contemporary analysis of inequalities.[39] Moreover, Said's central category of "worldliness" has a counterpart in Gramsci's notion of the "absolute worldliness and earthliness" of thought [*la mondanizzazione e terrestrità assoluta del pensiero*].[40] As Peter Thomas (2009, 363) explains, Gramsci's "philosophy of praxis" reinterprets theory "in realistic and historical terms", and thus, "theory itself is to be understood as a determinate activity alongside other activities with its own specific tasks to fulfil, a theoretical 'moment' that can be immanent to the social practices it seeks to comprehend because those practices are already immanent to it". For Said (2001, 195), this is related to a dialectic that is "not interested in mediating, transmuting, overcoming, and all those other Hegelian processes by which antinomies are somehow resolved", but a "worldliness" that works these processes out "as discrepant realities physically, on the ground, where territory is the place that you do it".

39 For example, Crehan (2016). Compare Said's notion of *sensus communis* in Eurocentric vision (Hussein 2004, 27) with Gramsci's *senso comune*.

40 Gramsci (1975, 1270, 1437; Q 10.II, §31i; Q 11, §27; Gramsci 1971, 465; Gramsci 1995, 384). See Bernstein (2020). On "worldliness", see Baratta (1999).

Conclusion

This essay has begun to trace Said's sustained engagement with the thought of Gramsci, and its multi-faceted influence on his work. It has considered the extent to which Said's contrapuntal method prefigures (and through its diffusion has influenced) the recent season of Gramsci studies, marked by a historical-philological approach, treating hegemony within Gramsci's thought as one pole within a (contrapuntal) hegemonic – subaltern axis. Many of the threads connecting Said and Gramsci discussed in this study suggest the possibility of cross-pollinating insights from the recent season of Gramsci studies with scholarship addressing Said's unresolved, dramatic methodology. The contrapuntal aspect of Said's thought arguably performs a de-mummifying role analogous to that of "translatability" in Gramsci's conception of historical transformation. In his 1968-69 essay on "The Palestinian Experience", Said (1994c, 4) describes "Palestinianism" in terms startlingly reminiscent of the de-mummification of culture, as moving from a "political living death" to "a revitalization of thought" (18).[41] Gramsci's ongoing renovation of the philosophy of praxis involves unpacking the metaphors that are necessary for the creation of a "living philology", which resonates with the apparent paradoxes of Said's anti-humanist humanism.[42]

Despite the importance that Said ascribes to Gramsci as a philosophical and moral influence, Said also believes that every intellectual must clear a space for their own project, in Darwish's (2019, 33) terms, we might say their "personal cadence". In a 1976 interview, Said recounts:

> One of the arguments I was trying to articulate in *Beginnings* is that each critic needs in some way to fashion for himself a point of departure that allows him to proceed concretely along a given course of work. (Said 2001, 22)

Brennan (1992, 86) notes that "Said rarely addresses himself to the Gramsci who liked to talk about a 'conformism from below'", explaining this difference in terms of "Said's great suspicion of organizational entanglements" (87). Whether channelling Adorno or Darwish (2019, 38), Said was attuned to the dangers of the "voice of the collective" suffocating the "particularity of individuals". Gramsci, as a founding figure of the Italian Communist Party, was, through his praxis, evidently oriented towards organization-building in a critical and extended sense (see Thomas 2023). For some commentators, significance should be ascribed to Said's anti-systemic impulses. Said's attentiveness to the "untidiness" of the historical moment inclined him towards a "Deleuzian idea of the nomadic" (Said 2001, 139).[43] This can be understood in Gramscian terms as related to an intellectual-*arditismo* (Jackson 2024b), shaped by conditions of reciprocal siege, in which the articulation of critical intellectuality

41 Abu-Manneh (2016, 1) notes the shift from "void" to "discontinuity" that represents a "cathartic" moment in the Palestinian liberation struggle.

42 Palestine as metaphor looms large in Said, as in Darwish (2019).

43 See Said's enthusiasm for Deleuze and

Guattari's metaphor of the "war-machine" (Jackson 2024b, 62), but also his reservations in Said (2001, 162).

with subaltern movements faces attenuated prospects. On the other hand, Aamir Mufti and others have located Said, in the vein of a "late" Bandung humanism, as belonging to the generation shaped by anti-colonial struggles that sought state power to transform their societies. In the context of Said's enthusiasm for the accomplishments of the *intifada*, as a popular classroom, the self-education of a people-nation, "an alternative, an emergent formation" (Said 2001, 135), we might also read Spivak's recollection of Said's statement that he would be the "first critic of the Palestinian state once it was established" (Spivak 2005, 522). One can see how what Robert Young (2012a) has called *Il Gramsci meridionale*, hailing from the repeatedly colonized Sardinian "South" of Italy, plays an important role in Said's development of a form of theory that could evade the pitfalls of Eurocentrism. Said's aspiration for a "critical consciousness" appears to situate Gramsci's "philosophy of praxis" as part of a counter-tradition of "criticism from below", developed by Marxism, but extending beyond it (Brennan 2021, 262).

Rather than undertake the "initiation ritual" of adopting a definitive position on Said or Gramsci (Young 2012b, 25), this essay seeks rather to explore without premature judgement the stakes of their theoretical and methodological encounter. The desired outcome is neither hagiography nor scholasticism, but the employment of each to read the other "against the grain", revealing the underexplored potentials of their thought, and to revisit Said's wager that "critical consciousness as a faculty located in society" can address the "impasse of more recent critics" (EWSP 78:10:II.4, 26). It is an attempt to "clear a space" for resources that relate to the understanding of contemporary popular movements, to their relationship to postcolonial and critical intellectuals, to the deep grounds of passivity that impede the progress and sustenance of those movements, and to the development of critical, oppositional cultures to advance and organize them. The wager involved is that this "travelling theory", in a generative rather than mummified sense, can contribute towards non-eurocentric frameworks that enable these movements to fulfil, as Said endorsed, "the process of what Raymond Williams has called the 'unlearning' of 'the inherent dominative mode'" (Said 1978a, 28).

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