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Reconceiving the Intellectual's Role: A Critical Analysis of
***Beginnings* by Edward Said**

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Dedication

We wish to express our deep sense of thanks to our parents and siblings for their unconditional support and encouragement. We also dedicate this work to our friends who stand by us whenever we need them. Finally, our dedication goes to all those who supported and helped us, whether with words or actions.

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In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

All praise to Allah, who gave us strength and patience to accomplish this work.

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Abstract

This study investigates Edward Said's redefinition of the intellectual's role through his theory of beginnings in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), analyzing how his critique of static origins in favor of contingent, dynamic beginnings reshapes intellectual agency. Employing textual hermeneutics and conceptual analysis, the research examines Said's dialogues with Foucault, Derrida, and Vico, situating his work within poststructuralist and postcolonial debates to assess whether his secular critique reconciles structuralist thought with the ethical demands of cultural criticism. The findings reveal that Said's framework reconfigures the intellectual as both critical outsider and politically engaged scholar, using contingency and secular critique to dismantle hegemony while centering marginalized voices. The study concludes that *Beginnings* remains vital to contemporary cultural criticism, offering a model for intellectuals to navigate power and representation crises by bridging theory and praxis ultimately reframing intellectual responsibility as a self-reflexive, ethical struggle against systemic oppression.

Keywords: Beginnings, Contingency Origin, Human agency, Secular criticism, Intellectual's role.

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

Edward Said's *Beginnings* has had a profound effect on contemporary debates about the intellectual's role in contemporary society. We discover in the writings of Paul Bové, Abdirahman Hussein, and Lecia Rosenthal the ways Said's refiguring of intellectual agency, critique, and responsibility continues to animate critical discussion across the disciplines.

To begin with, Paul Bové in his book, *Intellectuals in power: a genealogy of critical humanism* positions *Beginnings* as a foundational text that rethinks agency through the lens of discourse analysis and genealogical critique (1968). By situating Said alongside thinkers like Foucault and Vico, Bové illuminates how *Beginnings* rejects passive conceptions of “origins” in favor of deliberate, transformative acts of “beginning.” His analysis reveals the intellectual’s dual role: both composer of new narratives and dismantler of entrenched power structures. For Bové, Said’s insistence on contingency becomes a radical stance—one that resists authoritarianism while demanding the intellectual’s constant self-interrogation.

In addition, in his study, *Edward Said: criticism and society*, Abdirahman Hussein approaches *Beginnings* as the theoretical cornerstone of Said’s later critiques of Orientalism and imperialism (2002). Blending Said’s insights with structuralist and poststructuralist theory, Hussein argues that *Beginnings* reconceives the intellectual as a “secular critic” who exposes the mythologies underpinning systemic oppression. Where deterministic theories

of history erase human agency, Hussein shows how Said's emphasis on intentional beginnings empowers intellectuals to challenge hegemonic narratives. This framework, Hussein contends, not only equips scholars to deconstruct oppressive systems but also animates the emancipatory praxis that defined Said's postcolonial engagements.

Lastly, Lecia Rosenthal offers in her book, *Mourning modernism: literature, catastrophe, and the politics of consolation*, a theological-philosophical reading that traces how Beginnings redefines intellectual responsibility through secular criticism (2011). Focusing on Said's dialogue with Vico and Auerbach, Rosenthal demonstrates his rejection of theological certainty in favor of historical contingency and human agency. Her work contrasts Said's "worldly" intellectual—a figure who intervenes in political crises—with T.S. Eliot's transcendent idealism, underscoring Said's call for vigilance against dogma and solidarity with marginalized communities. For Rosenthal, Beginnings emerges as both an ethical imperative and a methodological guide, urging critics to transform their practice into a site of engaged, self-reflexive struggle.

Together, these scholars reveal Beginnings as a living text—one that compels intellectuals to confront power, embrace contingency, and reimagine critique as an act of worldly commitment. From Bové's dialectical agency to Hussein's anti-hegemonic critique and Rosenthal's ethical secularism, Said's work remains an indispensable provocation, challenging us to rethink the very limits of intellectual practice

2. Statement of the Problem

An effort is made to explore Edward Said's re-conception of the role of the intellectual, as articulated in his theory of "beginnings," challenging prior paradigms that assume fixed "origins" and the extent his secular critique reconcile its structuralist/poststructuralist preconceptions with the ethical challenges associated with historical injustices and material constraints in contemporary cultural criticism.

3. Research Aim

This study investigates Edward Said's theoretical frameworks, particularly his seminal distinction between dynamic, human-centered "beginnings" and static, mythologized "origins." Situating Said's thought within structuralist and poststructuralist paradigms. It is sought to analyze and evaluate his challenge to the conventional intellectual authority through close readings of literary case studies

4. Research Questions

1. How does Edward Said's distinction between "beginnings" and "origins" in *Beginnings* redefine the intellectual's role in cultural and historical critique?
2. What does Said's concept of the intellectual as a "beginner" reveal about the relationship between marginality and critical agency?
3. How does *Beginnings* lay the groundwork for Said's later works in framing the intellectual's responsibility to challenge power?

5. Significance of the Study

Edward Said's book "*Beginnings*" had a significant impact on changing the view of the intellectuals' role as a responsible to confront power structures and advocate for marginalized communities. It helps scholars and activists with conceptual tools to navigate crises of representation and power in global discourse.

6. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology combining textual hermeneutics and conceptual analysis to interrogate Edward Said's theoretical frameworks in *Beginnings*, treating his ideas as evolving structures that transform "original truths" through situational engagement rather than conforming to prescriptive dogmas.

Through historical analysis, it locates Said's work within poststructuralist and postcolonial debates by examining his critical dialogues with Foucault, Derrida, and Barthes, while descriptive analysis systematically maps his key concepts of exile, marginality, and textual critique.

Employing thematic coding to identify discursive patterns (agency, power structures) and comparative textual analysis of Said's readings of Proust and Conrad, the study demonstrates how his literary interpretations shape his reconceptualization of the intellectual as both critical outsider and politically engaged scholar.

7. Structure of the Study

This research is structured in two consecutive chapters to systematically investigate Edward Said's intellectual project. The first chapter, "Theoretical Foundations of Said's Intellectualism," is a critical analysis of Beginnings' conceptual underpinnings, especially Said's pioneering distinction between active "beginnings" and passive "origins." Drawing on poststructuralist texts from Foucault and Derrida, this chapter critically appropriates mainstream intellectual paradigms as it develops Said's competing intellectual vision as an exilic intellectual operating from spaces of productive marginality.

The second chapter, "Literature, History, and the Intellectual's Role in Cultural Discourse," puts these theoretical arguments to use in close readings of Conrad and Proust's works. This critical chapter shows how Said's approach enables interrogating colonial power structures and dominant historical accounts. Placing the intellectual as critical reader and cultural interlocutor, the chapter discusses the ongoing value of Said's model and undertakes a thorough critique of the same within new critical theory. Its two-section approach ensures intensive scrutiny from theorizations to applied readings in books.

CHAPTER ONE:

Theoretical Foundations of Said's Intellectualism

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Introduction

Through this chapter, a key idea in Edward Said's critique of Eurocentric knowledge production is being addressed: the contrast between "beginnings" and "origins." According to Said, beginnings are intentional, secular acts influenced by three main elements and they are human agency, historical context, and power dynamics. At the same time, he rejects negative, deterministic "origins" linked to teleology or metaphysics. In his philosophy, Said emphasizes that intellectual inquiry must examine the socio-political embeddedness of ideas, as it is portrayed in *Orientalism*, where colonial discourse shapes the "Orient" as a constant source of legitimacy for domination, drawing on post-mastery theories such as Foucault and Nietzsche. The chapter then addresses Said's idea of intellectuals as merely "amateurs" and "exiles," reinforcing a secular critique that undermines local beliefs and excludes important theoretical commentaries.

1.1 The Concept of “Beginning”

This "beginning" differs from origin in its supposed philosophy by Edward Said. Beginnings, as Said claims in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1985) Origination is a passive, mythical, or divine source whose beginnings belong to the active, human-made acts of intellectual inquiry. That is, the person's intention to have a conversation or thought line starts with such intention and free will when defining knowledge production-from Said's perspective. To him, the already spoken of beginnings are entirely secular; they don't refer to any divine or metaphysical force, but are rather the result of human endeavors-from historical context, power relations, and personal subjectivity.

Deeply influenced by the poststructuralist thought, Said's philosophy of *beginnings* closely relates to the concept, particularly of Michel Foucault, that discourse serves as a system of representation structuring knowledge (Foucault, 1972). Therefore, he criticizes the belief that the West intellectual tradition leaves no passive inheritance and that such authority is an act of

beginning and making. Beginnings, he says, will be always in a particular socio-political context; thereby carrying in themselves all messages of "worldliness" in the texts and ideas (Said, 1983). It is this same perspective that is later critiqued in *Orientalism* where he dismantles the Euro-centered "beginnings" of colonial discourses.

1.1.1 Agency and Intentionality in Beginnings

As Edward Said states, authority as well as its exercise is bound up with the act of beginning. In Said's philosophy, beginnings are "methodological necessities," while he rejects seeing them as passive inheritances (Said, 1975) therefore, he urges that the intellectual must assume an active and critical stance toward tradition. Unlike origins, which are often framed as unchanging foundations of one kind or another, such as myths of purity found in religion or nationalism, beginnings denote something always in the making, always subject to question. This idea is manifest in Said's own practice of literary criticism. When critics interpret a text, they are not looking to recover some fixed "original" meaning, but are creating new analytical frameworks that must be seen in relation to their own historical, cultural, and ideological positions (Said, 1983). So he develops this notion in the wider context of "secular criticism," which privileges human inquiry over transcendent or universalist claims (Said, 1983).

1.1.2 Beginnings as Contingent and Worldly Acts

The poststructuralist debate—especially with Michel Foucault's explanatory theory of discourse as a representation system shaped in light of power-relations—has considerable implications for Edward Said's concept of "beginnings" (Foucault 1972). Said, however, diverges sharply from Foucault when he emphasizes the active role of intellectuals in forming and contesting discursive structures. For Said, beginnings are "worldly" acts—that is, embedded and responsive into the concrete realities of politics, history, and power. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said

shows how European scholars defined the Orient as a conceptual beginning in order to cast non-Western societies as passive objects upon whom colonialists could impose their dominion (Said 1978). By bringing to light the artificiality of such beginnings, Said reveals profoundly intertwined imperial power with the production of knowledge. He also calls for counter-discourses from intellectuals for the demolition of dominant discourses.

1.1.3 Contrasting “Beginning” and “Origin”

After taking a Nietzschean critique of teleological narratives, one finds Edward Said gradually becoming suspicious of "origin" and finally rejecting it. In an example of this argument from Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887/1996), which provoked the search for origins to become a reductive pursuit of static essences, Said points out that such origins eliminate the historical complexities constituting ideas: "As in the late Romantic period, the idea was frequently formed in scholarship that a national identity would have as its "origin" a primordialisticorganicistic fact. Instead, Said sees identities as produced in iterative "beginnings" then formed in shifting power-dispositional discourses" (Said, 1993). This is indeed a critique of the Orientalism, wherein he uncovers how the West conceived of the "Orient" as an immutable, exoticized other.

1.2 The Concept of Origin

While Said is skeptical of the concept "origin," he believes in "beginnings." According to him, origins are associated with teleology, essentialism, and an idealized Romantic being authentic. Under this view, Said has derived from Nietzsche's genealogical method in refutation of the search for origins as reductive, reducing the complexity of the historical processes (Nietzsche, 1887/1996). For example, in *Orientalism* (1978), he shows how the Western scholars constructed

the "Orient" as a mythical origin to legitimize their colonial domination and thus confused cultural representation with political power (Said, 1978).

The critique of origin figures centrally within Said's larger project of dismantling hegemonic narratives. He urges intellectuals to set aside such fixed constructs as "East" and "West" by framing interrogations of how beginnings are made. Rather, a contrapuntal reading of history is the best way forward: one that foregrounds the relationship of multiple perspectives and overlapping experiences (Said, 1993). This highlights one of Theodor Adorno's concept of negative dialectics, which magnifies non-totalizing critiques (Adorno, 1973).

Said differs from theorists such as Derrida and Foucault by maintaining a dedication to humanistic agency, even as he draws on poststructuralist critiques of origin. Derrida's deconstruction eliminates the concept of solid beginnings, whereas Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) reduces origins to discursive forms (Derrida, J.1967). Despite recognising that beginnings can be created, Said maintains that it is the ethical duty of the intellectual to influence history. His simultaneous commitment to Enlightenment humanism and poststructuralist critique—a synthesis that permits his politically engaged scholarship—is reflected in this tension.

1.3 Implications for the Intellectual's Role

Said's redefinition of the concept of origin and beginning entails profound consequences for the intellectual. In *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), he contends that intellectuals must adopt the posture of "exile" and "amateurism," to mitigate complicity with institutional or political orthodoxies (Said, 1994), thereby proceeding from a conviction that intellectuals have an ethical responsibility to interrogate the origins of dominant discourses and reveal their limitations. In Said's view, the intellectual must "speak truth to power," not solely in the opposition, but also in the

amplification of marginalized voices in order to illuminate the constructedness of what has been accepted as the dominant narratives (Said, 1994). This vision allies itself closely with that of the "organic intellectual" espoused by Antonio Gramsci, who contests hegemonic systems through engaged, critical praxis (Gramsci, 1971/1999). However, Said goes further in delineating a secular criticism as humanistic inquiry that resists nationalistic or dogmatic constraints, fostering instead an engagement with ideas that is critical and worldly (Said, 1983).

1.3.1 The Intellectual as “Exile” and “Amateur”

Said enters an elaborate discussion of the conditional metaphorical and literal meanings of the term "exile" in defining the intellectual's position in society. From this vantage point, it is possible to conceive of the term "exile" in the sense described by Adorno, which makes invocation of this term seem reasonable. To Adorno, nonconformist or non-identity thinking takes special credence in the capacity of resistance; therefore, exile here may serve as a metaphor for a seeming critical distance from prevailing ideologies that seem to possess the authority of being hegemonic (Adorno, 1966/1973). Contrarily, Said's own identity and experience as a Palestinian in being in the diaspora endow much more literal meaning unto this metaphor, that is, that geographical or intellectual dislocation constitutes a moral vantage point that is not constrained or subsumed within the territorial confines of a nationalist or parochial loyalties (Said, 1994). Said's position as an outsider in Western scholarship afforded him the opportunity to mount his famous indictment of Orientalism and to deconstruct the Eurocentric representation of the Middle East (Said, 1978). Alongside this, he defends "amateurism," a form of intellectual engagement that looks askance at professional or institutional discipline, concerning itself instead with the ethical intervention in public concerns (Said, 1994). It resonates with Gramsci's notion of the "organic intellectual," who stands with subaltern groups to challenge hegemonic structures (Gramsci, 1971/1999). By

intertwining exile and amateurism, Said envisions an intellectual as an agent of "counter-memory," undermining canonical historic narratives and providing a space for silenced voices.

1.3.2 Secular Criticism and Worldliness

The intellectual, once again, finds expression in Said's argument of "secular criticism." In *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), Said states that by "secular criticism" one means the reception of the "worldliness" of texts rather than their transcendent, religious, or nationalistic frameworks and how that text is embedded within material histories, power structures, and lived human experiences (Said, 1983). The one form of criticism, in Said's view, demands a "contrapuntal" methodology in which cultural productions are examined alongside the displacing history of colonization and resistance (Said, 1993). A case in point is his reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), where he shows the imperial roots behind English domesticity and the derived prosperity through connection to Caribbean plantations (Said, 1993). This highlights the burden laid upon the ethical intellectual who is to discover the "silences" in the canon and the intertwining of these silences with resultant systems of oppression. Although it promises reparative humanism rather than dismembering nihilism, Said's approach accords with Gayatri Spivak's "epistemic violence" that dismantles subaltern voices from producing knowledge in a colonial discourse (Spivak, 1988).

1.4. Theoretical Influences on Said's Intellectualism

Said's rationalism of critical agency is shaped by a combination of interdisciplinary influences in his intellectualism: Giambattista Vico: From Vico's *New Science* (1725), Said believes of the idea that history is a human creation rather than a divine one. "Humanist Historicism" proves his rejection to metaphysical origins (Said, 1975).

Michel Foucault: Even though Said approves Foucault's critique of discursive power, he rejects his ideas on how intellectuals can "begin" new discourses, (Said, 1975).

Theodor Adorno: Said's opposition to ideological closure is clearly portrayed in Adorno's idea of non-identity, which is the unwillingness to minimize contradictions to synthetic unity (Said, 1983).

Antonio Gramsci: Said's portrayal of the intellectual as a partisan truth-teller is molded by Gramsci's "organic intellectual". Through his theory, he stands with marginalized communities (Said, 1994).

The outcome of these influences working together is apparent in Said's call for intellectuals to embrace "amateurism"—a deliberate rejection of specialization in favor of interdisciplinary, politically engaged critique (Said, 1994).

1.4.1 The Role of History in Shaping Beginnings

As Said argues, history does not serve just as a stage for intellectual inquiry; it becomes an active and formative power in the very conditions of critical thought. "Beginnings," in his view, are neither originary nor perceived as such but are contingent, human-made constructs created from power dynamics as opposed to origin, which for him indicates passive, metaphysical emergence. As Said describes in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), origins are supernatural or mythic, whereas beginnings are intentional and secular acts of intellectual labor. This makes it clear to him that historical narratives are political embedded in the politics of

representation rather than neutral or objective; the very core of that idea is in Said's critique in *Orientalism* (1978), which exposes how European scholars constructed the "Orient" as an ahistorical, a temporal idea to justify domination over colonies. Thus Said historicizes Orientalist

discourse, revealing how it was instrumentalized by the imperials with the results of erasing agency outside the West and asserting the colonizer as the sole arbiter of truth. Such his approach is with Michel Foucault's (1972) theory that language and discourse are systems of power and determine who can speak and what can be said and under what conditions.

However, Said extends this critique to the work of the intellectual in a moral sense towards unearthing discursive architecture and recovering silenced histories (Said, 1993). His appeal to historical understanding as a "worldly" process molded by material realities and human agency can also be seen from the perspective of Antonio Gramsci (1971) as a view which develops cultural hegemony. In this regard, history shall be seen as a field of contestation where the dominant ideals have to contend with subaltern voices. With such an audience of beginnings as the contest, Said would empower intellectuals to evoke possible historical transformations beyond resignation.

1.4.1.1 Beginnings as Historical Acts

For him, "beginnings" are directly linked to history and therefore differ from "origins." Beginnings are defined as specific endeavors contingent and human-made and arising out of some historical context; whereas "origins" imply some fixed, transcendental point of departure, such as divine creation or racial essentialism. Lastly, for Said, the beginning is "intentional" and "methodological": now the responsibility to engage with socio-political realities of time is the intellectual's (Said, 1975). For instance, enlightenment's reason appears as the common "first setting" for modern science; this was not an objective shift in intellectual attribution but was tied heavily to European colonialism and the rise of industrial capitalism (Said, 1993). By historicizing these so-called origins, Said shows that knowledge systems are necessarily tied to power structures, thus challenging assumptions of objective neutrality in intellectual traditions.

1.4.1.2 The Dialectic of Continuity and Rupture

In *Beginnings*, which Said writes, theory traverses the dialectical tension between continuity and rupture in history in such a way that new beginnings seem to persist with historical residues. Thus, for example, Foucault, in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* published in 1972, presents an idea of epistemic breaks such that radically different discourses occur. For example, postcolonial nations, which started with anti-colonialism, often move towards Eurocentric frameworks, such as nation-states' models, indicating that colonial history still carries some residue (Said, 1993).

This is somehow the same dialectic with Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno, 1966/1973), which negates any possibility of synthesis but insists on the critical awareness of historical contradiction. An illustration provided by Said is the case of Palestine, since in that struggle, the Nakba (1948) represents a rupture - the violent displacing of Palestinians - and a contested point of origin in Zionist historiography, which frames as a "return" to the ancestral land (Said, 1979). Through his philosophy, Said calls for an interrogation of the "fiction of pure discontinuity" at all levels of society to deconstruct such narratives and exhibit the politicizing acts of historical interpretation that beginnings represent (Said, 1975)

1.4.2 The Connection Between Literary Structure and Intellectual Critique

Said's intellectualism makes a strong case for the inseparability of literary form from political critique, a vital point of differentiation in his thought. He posits that literary works and "contrapuntal texts" such as poetry, novels, and other cultural artifacts expose the intertwined histories of colonizer and colonized, not just as works of aesthetic value (Said, 1993). For example, in his analysis of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Said argues that colonial exploitation in Antigua was paramount to the English estates' domestic comfort.

In so doing, by contrasting the proclaimed narrative of the novel with its ignored colonial hinterland, Said reveals the way literature is implicated in normalizing imperial power. Such methodology speaks to Said's larger commitment to what he calls "secular criticism," wherein the ideology and form of textuality are to be considered. Using Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1953) as his foundation, Said argued that through close reading, the particularities of the literary devices may be seen to encode and subvert dominant ideologies, through the use of devices such as irony, fragmentation, or narrative perspective. For instance, using *Heart of Darkness*, Said's observation on the ambiguity resident in Conrad's text reveals tensions within colonial racism while also sustaining it, which in sum demonstrates the capacity of a literary work to contest its own assumptions (Said, 1993).

What is more, Said's method dovetails with the notion of the "political unconscious" developed by Jameson (1981), which states that it is the innovations of the literary works that attend to the historical tensions. Although it is a perspective that Said shares, he emphasizes moral responsibility of the critic to a greater extent than on just structural analysis. He goes on to claim that in order to "speak truth to power", intellectuals must eradicate the aesthetic distance that hides the actual effects of literature (Said, 1994). His consideration of Palestinian narratives, in which he demonstrates how fragmented, nonlinear storytelling concerns with the attempt by Zionist historiography to erase Palestinian identity, provides a gripping illustration of this moral imperative (Said, 1979).

1.4.3 The Importance of Textual Analysis in Intellectual Practice

In Beginnings: Intention and Method (1975), Edward Said accentuates textual analysis as a priority in forming critical knowledge small enough to include an elaborate discussion of the intellectual's role. For Said, reading and analyzing texts becomes not a matter of academia but

becomes politic and ethical necessity for intellectuals. This section will study through Said-theories, particularly concerned with other general approaches of critical theory, postcolonial theory, and hermeneutics-the relevance of textual analysis in intellectual activities.

1.4.3.1 Textual Analysis as a Mode of Critical Engagement

Said's critique of Orientalism (1978) changed the texts' understanding more than mere artifacts. Texts are embedded in a system of power and dominance, by which Said has come clear in his discussion in *Beginnings* that the beginning is a site of contestation in which meaning is not only produced but also deconstructed (Said, 1975). In this conjunction, it also resonates with Michel Foucault's (1972) concept of discourse, which rather refers to how power and knowledge are constructed through language and institutional practices.

Said believes that textual analysis enables scholars to uncover concealed ideologies, argue against majoritarian tales, and present counter-histories. He called for "secular criticism"-an interpretative approach that does not cling to dogmatism but is genuinely open to change and takes into account material conditions of text formation (Said, 1983.). This view is also near Raymond Williams' cultural materialism (1977), which as a standard considers the contribution of social and historical influences on literature as well as culture

1.4.3.2 The Hermeneutics of Suspicion and Intellectual Responsibility

This is said to be also derived from Paul Ricoeur's (1970) "hermeneutics of suspicion," which contests surface meanings in order to unravel deeper structures of power. For Said, intellectuals will particularly have to assume this critical attitude toward dismantling hegemonic discourses, particularly those that reinforce colonial and imperial ideologies.

By exploring the issues around the "Orient" as a Western category and drawing out the consequences of this process in terms of Said's promotion of "reading imperialism with your books," he clarifies the subtle ways in which academic and literary texts interpolate imperialist ideologies (Said, 1978). By closely performing textual analysis, an intellectual thus fulfills an obligation to resist or critique power, aligning much with the call of Fanon (1961) for a radical rewriting of history and culture as a decolonizing means.

1.4.3.4 Textual Analysis and the Public Role of the Intellectual

Said envisages textual analysis beyond the confines of academia as a means by which intellectuals engage in public discourse. Critics, in his thinking, should reveal how literature shapes popular consciousness and meet public discourse. According to this definition, the intellectual "questioning patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial, or gender privilege" has been closely aligned with Anton.

1.4.4 Structuralist and Post-structuralist Influences: Foucault, Derrida, and Barthes on Said's Thought

Said's intellectual formation bore the marks of the authorial intentions of many structuralism and post-structuralism theorists, notably Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes. These became instruments to allow Said to interrogate power-knowledge relations, deconstruct dominant epistemological frameworks, and critique Eurocentric discourses. But Said's ambivalence and criticism here were ultimately selective; he insisted on retaining the politically committed and humanistic role of the intellectual. In this section, Said's appropriation, adaptation, and critique of these traditions are investigated in the light of his general idea of intellectual responsibility.

Some of Foucault's first ideas on discourse, power, and formation of knowledge emerged as a basis for Said's critique of Orientalism. Foucault showed how the creation of knowledge is implicated in the power structures of institutions in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975) (Foucault, 1972/2013). Foucault's notion of discourse also influenced Said in his identification of a discursive field which regulates what can be said, by whom, and under what circumstances (Said, 1978).

Nevertheless Said resisted the more disinterested accounts devised by Foucault that verged on reductionism in their explorations of power's subtlety. As much as Foucault increasingly focused on diversifying maps of power for hybrid subjects resisting their authorship, Said argued that free will and ethical responsibility are key traits to being an Intellectual. In *Beginnings* (1975), Said illustrates the tension by invoking Foucault's discourse analysis while asserting humanistic assumptions of causal agency and authorial intervention, which tend to dissolve in post-structuralist thought (Bové, 1986).

Derrida's deconstruction, particularly his critique of logocentrism in *Of Grammatology* (1967), shaped Said's exploration of binary oppositions in Western thought (Derrida, 1976). Said refers to Derrida's notion of *différance* in *Beginnings* to underscore meanings as always in the process of being deconstructed and deferred within a text. This undermining of meaning, however, seemed to elude Said.

Derrida would often release language from its referential and material consequences, while Said would argue for just that materiality and consequence, often violent, as regards colonial discourses (Said, 1983). The Saidian view of "beginnings" holds that such interpretations are consciously willed, historically situated acts of meaning-making which are "secular, humanly

produced and constantly reexamined" (Said, 1975), thus latching on to Derrida with an implicit counterargument against his undermining of origin and intent.

Roland Barthes's 1967 essay *The Death of the Author* famously questioned the established conception of authorship by placing emphasis on the reader as the site of meaning-making (Barthes, 1977). On the other hand, Said became preoccupied by Barthes's rejection of authorial depersonalization.

1.5 Critique of Traditional Intellectual Paradigms

1.5.1 Challenging Academic Traditions

This is the original foundational work in the critique of epistemological assumptions underlying academic authority and knowledge production, and in suggesting some radical reformulation of the intellectual's role. The section criticalizes Said's challenge to the long-established academic traditions, including institutionalized knowledge, disciplinary boundaries, and the intellectual's responsibility to engage the world beyond academia. Drawing from Said's theoretical framework and secondary scholarship, this study shows how his works confront the traditional epistemologies as well as champion a more dynamic, politically engaged model of intellectualism.

A pertinent theme in *Beginnings* is that Said in these essays-alleges that fixed boundaries of disciplines impose artificial barriers on inquiry, putting methodological orthodoxy over creative and critical thought. He calls this "the tyranny of the discipline" (Said, 1975): established fields will dictate what counts as legitimate knowledge. This applies that way to Michel Foucault's (1972) observation of discursive formations, which put uptight limits on these academic disciplines through institutional restraints on what can be said, by whom, and in what contexts.

Interdisciplinary scholarship advocated by Said-politics combining theory and philosophy with literary criticism-directly defies these constricted paradigms. Such multi-disciplinarily was shown by Said to be an intellectual practice questioning very complex power structures that would be overlooked by single discipline approaches. Yet today, such critique remains currently significant because contemporary academia is still operating through disciplinary silos. Gilroy (2010) has observed that neoliberal reforms in education further entrench these borders by commodifying knowledge and discouraging critical cross-disciplinary engagement. The contemporary context thus under which Said's critique is thrown highlights its everlasting relevance and critical potential.

Said has even extended his critique toward the entire way that academic institutions reproduce hierarchies of knowledge as well as intellectual authority. For example, he once stated that academic institutions usually act as gatekeepers which elevate certain epistemologies, particularly the Eurocentric points of view, over and above denying many others (Said, 1975). Such an argument had full amplification in *Orientalism* (1978), in which Said also ventured to uncover the "scientific" claims made by the Western academia in order "objectively" construct and uphold "truths" about colonized discourses.

Perhaps the most radical aspect of Said's intellectual project is his insistence that scholars must transcend the confines of academia and actively engage in public discourse. For him, the intellectual is "secular, oppositional, and committed," rejecting the notion of the detached, apolitical scholar outright (Said, 1994). This fits well with Antonio Gramsci's (1971) vision of organic intellectuals, those who are bound by social realities and engage in ideological struggles.

In this dissertation, I contrast Said's vision of intellectual responsibility with traditional academic norms that inhibit political engagement where possible. Said's argument acquires a sense

of urgency when mounted in the present context alongside examples of contemporary academics standing for social justice and opposing authoritarian regimes. In this context, Noam Chomsky famously stated that the intellectual's responsibility is not only to interpret the world but to change it (Chomsky, 1967). This is a position Said wholly endorses. Thus the work of Said provides a vital framework for reconfiguring the relationship between scholarship, activism, and public life.

1.5.2 Exile and Marginality

A crucial part of Edward Said's more extensive critique of authority, power, and cultural hegemony is his conception of the intellectual as a figure of exile and marginality. In *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), Said examines how the literal-as well as metaphorical-form of exile shapes the ability of the intellectual to challenge pluralistic systems of thought and authority. This section studies the implications of Said's theory of exile and marginality for intellectual practice in a way that makes it permanently relevant for critical scholarship.

For Said, exile is not just a geographical dislocation; it is also an epistemological position that allows the intellectual to refuse assimilation into the ideologies that dominate any culture, institution, or nation. "Exile," he argues, "creates a kind of liminal space from which the intellectual can maintain a critical distance, not bound to institutional loyalties or nationalist agendas" (Said, 1975). This view resonates well with Theodor Adorno's (1951) notion of the "emigrant intellectual" whose uprootedness creates in him a distinct angle of vision from which to criticize social and cultural norms.

Further expanding the conceptual arrangement, Said brings in the idea of exile as a state of one opposed to the status quo; where critique is an ethical demand more than academic exercise

(Said, 1994). The intellectual in exile is therefore determined by their estrangement from the centers of power to recognize and be able to contest systems of domination.

So close is the notion of exile to Said's revaluation of marginality-as deficit and marginalization to conquer, as generative space for critical resistance. Borrowed from Antonio Gramsci's (1971) distinction between traditional and organic intellectual, Said captured the marginal intellectual as one who works outside the major institutions and so retains the capacity for radical critique (Said, 1983). In such formulation, marginality becomes conscious positioning, refusal to co-opt hegemonic discourses or disciplinary orthodoxies.

Said's very own positionality as a Palestinian-American intellectual very much informed this conviction, placing him literally and metaphorically on the margins of Western academia (Said, 2000). From that position, he argued that marginality compels the intellectual in speaking truth to power where even alienation professionally or personally results.

Said denounces intellectual involvement within the framework of nationalist and institutional networks by advocating instead for exile and remoteness. He warns against the dangers of such "professionalism," since it entangles academics within hierarchies and shuts down criticism (Said, 1994). Instead, he advocates for "amateurism"-the intellectual act of engaged moral commitment rather than institutional reward (Said, 1994). This position resonates with Michel Foucault's (1977) concept of "specific intellectual," who grounds critique in local struggles in order to thwart universalizing discourses.

1.5.3 The Intellectual as an Outsider

Said's conceptualization of the intellectual as an outsider lies at the heart of his greater project of critique concerning authority, power, and institutionalized knowledge. Said privileges

consideration of intellectuals who must constantly be in a liminal situation: not quite too familiar with ruling frameworks or fully detached from them, which is largely what he considered in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975). In this section, I scrutinize the theorization behind Said's vision of the outsider intellectual and its consequences and relevance in the contemporary context.

Outsider intellectualism is grounded firmly in Said's conception in postcolonial theory, continental philosophy, and his own entry as a Palestinian scholar into the institutions of Western academia and culture. Citing Michel Foucault's (1977) theories of discourse and power, Said argues that intellectuals must resist incorporation into institutional and ideological structures. The outsider intellectual thus operates on the margins of the prevailing epistemologies and contests hegemonic narratives while being wary of fixed identities and totalizing frameworks (Said, 1994).

This position would reflect Antonio Gramsci's (1971) distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals. Traditional intellectuals, primarily profiled as servants of some kind to the ruling social order, contrast starkly with the organic intellectuals, who emerge out of the existence of oppressed groups able to express counter-hegemony. Said, in an extended sense, mentions the need for an intellectual to constantly develop from both a literal and metaphorical exile to engage critically. This rupture, Said (2000) sardonically states, "exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place"—a rupture that gifts a view from a unique stance of critique.

Said has always critiqued outsider intellectualism, which remains avowedly resistant to institutionalization. He warns about the ability of academics to negotiate away their critical autonomy for a position of authority as an "expert" serving the interests of state or corporation (Said, 1994). Rather Said prefers amateurism, an intellectual stance that gives preference to ethical commitment as against professional specialization (Said, 1996). This echoes Pierre Bourdieu's

(1984) critique of academic fields as sites of symbolic power, which means the institutional conventions of the field often delimit the production and circulation of knowledge.

Moreover, Said's outsider intellectualism opposes the myth of objectivity in scholarship. In agreement with Adorno's (1973) negative dialectics, Said claims that intellectuals must therefore critique en permanence, opposing external systems of domination and their own complicity in these systems. This ethical necessitation, which Said further elaborates in *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), calls for an unending interrogation of the intellectual's positionality and a commitment to dissent.

But given today's climate of acute political polarization and rampant commodification of higher education, Said's call for intellectual independence is still highly relevant. Critical autonomy finds a new urgency within a neoliberal university landscape where the market rules research agendas and endows institutional conformity (Giroux, 2014). And in a globalized world marked by displacement, diaspora, and transnational solidarity, an outsider intellectual is still an important voice challenging dominant narratives and advocating for the cause of lesser-known communities (Spivak, 1988).

However, Said's paradigm has faced some resistance. Others, such as Sara Ahmed (1999), have challenged Said's romanticization of exile, which overlooks the material precariousness and mental strain for displaced intellectuals. Terry Eagleton (2003) even argues that the ideal of the outsider intellectual may well be that it becomes an elite privilege afforded only to the relatively secure with institutional backing and cultural capital. Nonetheless, Said's model could be deemed an essential theoretical resource for any rethinking of the intellectual as a force countering oppression and rethinking authority

Conclusion

Edward Said's *Beginnings* redefines the intellectual's role by dismantling rigid notions of origin and emphasizing historical contingency, textual critique, and structuralist-poststructuralist thought. His rejection of fixed origins in favor of dynamic "beginnings" liberates intellectual practice from deterministic traditions, positioning the critic as an active, oppositional figure. By engaging with Foucault, Derrida, and Barthes, Said constructs a framework where exile, marginality, and interdisciplinary critique become central to intellectual resistance. Ultimately, *Beginnings* challenges institutional dogmas, advocating for an intellectual who embraces ambiguity, intervenes in discourse, and reimagines knowledge as an ongoing, contested process. Said's work thus remains a vital call for critical engagement in an era of ideological conformity.

CHAPTER TWO:

Literature, History, and the Intellectual's Role in Cultural Discourse

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Introduction

Edward Said's scholarly contributions have greatly influenced modern concepts of literature, history, and the role of the intellectual in cultural criticism. In order to explore the relationship between culture and power, this chapter discusses Said's interdisciplinary approach, which gathers literary analysis with historical context. Said's methodology enables intellectuals to function as critical interpreters of cultural narratives, focusing on his foundational works such as *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Furthermore, it illustrates how Said's theory permits a sophisticated critique of imperialism and cultural hegemony through case studies of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, as well as an examination of historical interpretation and the role of the intellectual as a critical reader of culture.

2.1 Said's Use of Literary and Historical Analysis

According to Said his approach is based on the belief that history and literature are inseparable, he claims that texts are acting as both makers and products of their socio-historical contexts. Said's approach, "texts are worldly, they are events to some extent, still a part of the social world even when they seem to deny it". (Said, 1983). Said insists on criticizing the Western obsession with mythologized "origins" in *Beginnings* (1985), emphasizing instead secular, purposeful "beginnings"—acts of narrative agency that demonstrate how authors place themselves in relation to or in opposition to prevailing historical trajectories (pp. 29–32). Edward Said's multidisciplinary approach is based on literary and historical study and his conviction that texts are neither only reflections of their times and not independent aesthetic objects. Rather, he suggests that literature and history are intertwined in a dialectical relationship in which writings both influence and are influenced by the ideologies, power dynamics, and material circumstances of their respective times. As demonstrated by the way colonial texts create "origins" to justify

dominance, this supports *Beginnings'* contention that narrative is a "beginning intention," a purposeful act of power that challenges or upholds preexisting knowledge frameworks (Said, 1975, p. 49). Said's methodology opposes the idea of "pure" literary interpretation by arguing that all writings must be interpreted as "worldly" artefacts immersed in sociopolitical circumstances. It draws inspiration from poststructuralist philosophy, and anticolonial critique and Marxist history, (Said, 1983). Conrad had a conflicted depiction of imperialism, which both reproduces and criticizes colonial ideology, reflects Said's view that the writer as a "beginner" occupies a contested place, both bound by and able to subvert historical forces (Said, 1975, p. 81). His interpretations are grounded in this viewpoint of Proust and Conrad, whose writings he places within the larger currents of European empire and cultural identity. *Beginnings* rethinks literary analysis as a means of political involvement by framing criticism as a "beginning" act that challenges the passive acceptance of canonical narratives and instead examines how texts establish, maintain, or upend power structures (Said, 1975, p. 373).

2.1.1 Case Study 1: Marcel Proust's in Search of Lost Time

Although *in Search of Lost Time*, Proust's modernist epic, is widely praised for its contemplative examination of desire and memory. However, Said have another point of view, which places the book in the context of France's colonial expansion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, claiming that Proust's concern with decay and time suggest to the waning of European imperial power (Said, 1993). Said wrote and criticizes the Western propensity to mythologise cultural "origins" in *Beginnings* (1975), describing stories such as Proust's as secular "beginnings"—purposeful acts of storytelling that addresses the author's engagement with historical crises (pp. 29–32). For example, the narrator's sentimental memories of Combray are not

only personal but they also reflect an extended cultural fear of France's transformation from a traditional, rural civilization to an industrialized, colonial power.

Here *Beginnings* explains Proust's approach: his fractured narrative form serves as a "beginning" that upends linear historiography, reflecting the confusion of a country clinging to imperial grandeur in the face of its material collapse (Said, 1975, p. 81).

Said suggests attention to the book's "contrapuntal" structure, which combines France's exploitation of Algeria and Indochina with the protagonist's disjointed recollections of bourgeois ambitions and aristocratic salons. Assimilation and exclusion resulted tensions in a society struggling with racial and national identity that appeared, for example, by the Jewish art collector Charles Swann (Said, 1993, p. 321).

Said asserts Swann's dual identity as a "beginner" navigating colonial modernity by drawing on *Beginnings*. His cultural hybridity challenges France's illusion of homogeneity while continuing to support its imperial structures (1975, p. 164). Said shows how literature mediates historical consciousness even in cases where imperialism is not overtly thermalized by associating Proust's storytelling tactics to France's colonial endeavors

This approach has been further developed by critics like Emily Apter (1999), who suggest that Proust's fractured temporality reflects the "disjointed" experience of colonial modernity, where conventional and globalized identities clash (p. 87). This interpretation supports *Beginnings'* argues that modernist aesthetics are not neutral but rather "beginnings" that mediate the conflicts of their time, discovering the ways in which cultural creation either upholds or challenges dominance structures (Said, 1975, p. 373). This encourages Said's larger claim that the geopolitical conflicts of their era are inextricably related to modernist aesthetics.

2.1.2 Case Study 2: Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has long been a hot topic especially in discussions that related to literature's culpability in colonialism. despite the fact that Said acknowledges Conrad's criticism of Belgian crimes in the Congo, he believes that the novella ultimately continues the imperialist ideology of dehumanization. According to Said's perspective, Marlow's mission into the "dark" continent converts Africa to a metaphysical emptiness—a "place of negation" where European identity is simultaneously validated and undermined (Said, 1993, p. 24). Africa's transformation into a blank slate came through Conrad's story, which is a purposeful beginning, removing its historical complexity to suit imperialist discourse. Said connects this operation to the Western authority to define "origins" as static and absolute (pp.29-32). This is where Said's *Beginnings* (1975) sharpens the critique. The Congolese people are portrayed as ghostly beings who lack agency and historical identity, reflecting what Chinua Achebe famously referred to as Conrad's "racism" (1977) (p. 783).

Said's criticism goes beyond textual study to examine how the novella was received in the past. He suggest that Western academics frequently overlook the radicalized violence that underlies the story whereas applauding Conrad's "universal" themes (such as existential dread) (Said, 1993). This supports *Beginnings'* believe that critique needs to question how texts start or "begin" systems of meaning that normalise power rather than embracing the illusion of "pure" aesthetics (Said, 1975). Said argues that this selective reading is an example of how literary criticism itself may be used as a tool for cultural dominant.

Said's interpretation, however, has been contested by academics such as Benita Parry (1983), who claims that Conrad's irony reveals the hypocrisy of imperialist discourse (p. 42). Said responds by referencing the framework of *Beginnings*: even satirical stories such as Conrad's are

imprisoned within Eurocentric "beginnings," since they assume the colonizer's epistemic power to determine reality (1975, p. 81). He sheds the light on the idea that even self-critical Western narratives often fall short of transcending the epistemic frameworks of colonialism, emphasizing that irony alone does not exonerate the text of its Eurocentrism (Said, 1993, p. 30). Said assumes that critics must follow how books like *Heart of Darkness* establish and maintain colonial worldviews through contrapuntal reading which is a technique based on *Beginnings*' request to expose the "intentionality" behind narrative acts (1975, p.17).

2.1.3 Historical Interpretation

Said affirms that texts must be dealt with "contrapuntally," contrasting dominant narratives with marginalized voices, and his historical method goes beyond simple contextualisation (Said, 1993, p. 66). For instance, the silences in Conrad's portrayal become apparent while reading *Heart of Darkness* in the context of African resistance activities. This approach both reflects and challenges power systems, drawing inspiration from Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony. Said reveals the dialectic between political dominance and creative creativity by placing texts within their historical matrices. Further criticizing the Western obsession on "origins," Said claims in *Beginnings* (1975) that narratives are influenced by deliberate, secular "beginnings" that represent the author's agency in the context of colonial hierarchies (pp. 29–32). Moreover, in his investigation of Verdi's opera *Aida* (1871), Said argues that it reflects Europe's Orientalist interest in Egypt at the height of African imperial rivalry (Said, 1993, pp. 133–159). The way that cultural creations aestheticise and sanitise colonial domination is revealed through Said by placing *Aida* into the framework of Egypt's forced modernization under British influence. By presenting opera as a narrative "beginning" that validates imperial authority in contrast to native Egyptian counter-narratives repressed by colonial modernity, *Beginnings*

enhances his analysis in this case (Said, 1975, p. 164). According to his contrapuntal approach, Said urges that the writer's position as a critical "beginner" who challenges inherited traditions, calling on academics to deconstruct Eurocentric teleologies ingrained in classic works (*Beginnings**, p. 49). Rereading Austen's *Mansfield Park*, for example, using this perspective reveals how the "beginning" of the book normalises plantation economies and silences the slave labour that supports its bourgeois society (Said, 1993, pp. 84–97). According to *Beginnings* (1975, p. 373), literary criticism in the end is an act of recovering agency that turns passive acceptance of history into an active investigation of the ways in which narratives uphold or challenge dominance.

2.2 The Intellectual as a Critical Reader of Culture

Edward Said from his perspective, an intellectual is a politically active critic who deconstructs cultural narratives to show power structures. According to him, he presents the intellectual as a "exilic" character who acts outside of institutional complacency to question ideas, rejecting neutrality (Said, 1994, p. 44). Said criticises the Western fixation on mythologised, fixed "origins" in *Beginnings* (1975) and instead advocates for secular "beginnings"—purposeful acts of narrative agency that show how authors and critics place themselves inside or against power structures (pp. 29–32). Secular critique, which places texts in their historical contexts and appears the illusion of apolitical art, is essential to this function (Said, 1983). Said's study of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, for instance, manifests how the novel's picturesque English setting is maintained by colonial exploitation in Antigua, exposing literature's complicity in empire (Said, 1993). In this instance, *Beginnings* intensifies the criticism: Austen's story serves as a "beginning" that legitimises colonialism by portraying slavery as an unseen "origin" as opposed to an active, disputed process of dominance (Said, 1975, p. 81).

Contrapuntal reading, which contrasts dominant and marginalised voices to undermine Eurocentric laws, is at the essence of this critique. Said draws attention to the cultural inconsistencies of imperialism through integrating anti-colonial writings with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Said, 1993). Conrad's ambiguous writing upholds and challenges imperial ideology, revealing the author's intertwined agency, this approach is consistent with *Beginnings'* idea of the writer as a critical “beginner” who upends inherited traditions (Said, 1975, p. 100). The ethical responsibility of the intellectual is to expose oppressive regimes in order to oppose "cultural hegemony" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). The ethical responsibility of the intellectual is to uncover oppressive regimes in order to oppose "cultural hegemony" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). Said, based on Foucault, demands that texts be examined for their social significance and presents them as objects of power (Foucault, 1972). According to Said, this investigation is consistent with *Beginnings'* assertion that criticism is a radical "beginning" in and of itself—a refusal to acknowledge established narratives as final and a dedication to rethinking their political stakes (1975, p. 373).

According to Frantz Fanon's integration of psychoanalysis and revolution, intellectuals must engage in public discourse, which connects between theory and activism. This critical practice transcends academia (Said, 1993). However, Spivak (1988) cautions against intellectuals using subaltern voices, and Bhabha (1994) challenges Said's binary conception of power (pp. 271, 25). However, Said maintains that self-examination and international cooperation might lessen these dangers, promoting a "cosmopolitan humanism" to fight inequality and nationalism (Said, 2004).

"Beginnings" affirms that all stories have disputed "beginnings," and the intellectual must have responsibility to reveal their manufactured authority and reclaim storytelling as a means of achieving justice (Said, 1975).

2.2.1 Textual Interpretation as Engagement

From Edward Said's perspective, interpreting texts is a political and ethical act that challenges existing power structures and goes beyond scholarly research. He rejects the idea of "disinterested" reading in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), contending that texts are inextricably related to the material circumstances of their creation and reception (p. 4). In *Beginnings* (1975), Said warns this position through criticising the Western obsession with mythologised "origins" and promoting secular "beginnings", which critical and intentional acts of narrative initiation that expose how authors place themselves either within or against imperial hierarchies (pp.29-32). This method, known as secular critique, requires critics to uncover the ways in which literature justifies oppressive structures such as colonialism. Said's interpretation of *Mansfield Park* (1814), for example, reveals Austen's reticence regarding slavery and depicts her pastoral England as complicit in the exploitation of the Caribbean (Said, 1993). Edward Said's *Beginnings* expands on the analysis here: By normalising colonial exploitation and concealing the savagery of empire behind the facade of bourgeois domesticity, Austen's novel serves as a "beginning", a narrative technique Said links to the Eurocentric authority to define historical "origins" (1975, p. 81). This type of criticism supports Foucault's (1972) theory that language is a weapon of dominance and calls on scholars to consider how texts support hegemony (p. 49). As seen by his coupling of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) with C.L.R. James' anti-colonial histories, Said's contrapuntal reading further politicises interpretation by contrasting colonial narratives with marginalised voices (Said, 1993). Similar to how Conrad's contradictory narration, this approach mirrors *Beginnings*' insistence that writers behave as critical "beginners" who upend inherited traditions (Said, 1975). This approach with destroying its Eurocentric canons turns interpretation into support for the downtrodden. However, Spivak (1988) cautions that even critical

readers run the risk of reproducing epistemic violence by appropriating subaltern voices (p. 271). In response, Said encourages self-reflection, depending on that interpreters have to be aware of their positionality while highlighting narratives that have been ignored.

According to Said, textual engagement connects theory and practice. As demonstrated through Fanon's integration of psychoanalysis and revolution, it pushes intellectuals to oppose academic insularity (Said, 1993). Edward Said believes that the radical premise of *Beginnings* shapes the basis of this practices : criticism is a "beginning" act in and of itself, a rejection of the legitimacy of conventional narratives and a declaration of fresh, liberating possibilities (Said, 1975). Said redefines interpretation as a moral obligation and a way to upend cultural complacency and imagine emancipatory futures through redefining critique as activism. *Beginnings* emphasizes that all stories are contested acts of authority; to read them in a different way is to regain the ability to start over and destroy the myths that uphold dominance (Said, 1975).

2.2.2 Challenging Dominant Discourses

In the text *Beginnings* (1975), Edward Said recasts the intellectual's role as one of disruption by force-hoods in hegemonic accounts, arguing that scholars must come to actively contest institutionalized systems of knowledge that perpetuate inequities. Aided in this analysis by Foucault (1972), Said interrogates discourse as power and further shows how dominant epistemologies—be they colonial, imperial, or nationalist—vilify dissent, while imposing moral obligation on the intellectual to question authoritative knowledge claims by way of his innovative notion of "beginnings." Such an intervention, then, provides theoretical credence: without mythologized origins, it substitutes critical and secular points of departure, thus providing both a methodological base for the counter-hegemonic critique, as well as the primary undergirding for

postcolonial studies and cultural studies, which necessarily span analytically rigorous work and political engagement.

2.2.2.1 The Intellectual as a Disruptive Force

Said's criticism of powerful discourses derives immensely from Foucault's original proposition that knowledge is fundamentally entangled with power relations. It follows that Said argues intellectuals must interrogate such systems, expose their underlying ideological bases, and challenge their claims to legitimacy. This has a likeness with the idea of the "organic intellectual" that Gramsci (1971) draws on—an organic intellectual from subaltern groups to challenge hegemonic ideas; Said, however, extends it through his concept of "secular criticism" (1983). This method is unrepentantly resistant to devotion to any one theoretical orthodoxy, demanding rather rigour in historical and material contextualization. Secular criticism holds to what, for Said, was paramount—a vital connection between critique and the lived life experiences it seeks to illuminate—by rooting intellectual work in concrete things instead of in abstract systems.

2.2.2.2 Postcolonial Implications and Critiques

Said's intervention is crucially relevant to postcolonial studies, almost entirely concerned with the loss of non-Western epistemologies and languages in the historical record of Western academia. He was the predecessor to scholars like Spivak (1988), who exposed how systematically colonial ideologies silenced subaltern voices. Thus Said fundamentally recasted postcolonial theory by inspiring the future generations of scholars to Deconstruct Eurocentric historiographies by challenging the dominant narratives and calling for the repossession of marginalized knowledge. Yet, this paradigm has not been free of criticism. For Robert Young (2001), though sympathetic with decolonization projects, Said's paradigm contains a contradiction: it turns to theorists such as Foucault and Gramsci from within the West, which replicates, he says, the

Eurocentrism it seeks to dismantle. This critiques, however, raise important deliberations on whether Said's approach can entirely be detached from the Western traditions of epistemology it criticizes-the tension propelling many more debates in postcolonial studies. However, Said's notion of the intellectual as an engaged critic rather than a neutral observer must remain central to current cultural and political debate. His assertion of entrenching knowledge production in historical materialism and resisting institutionalized oppression fuels contemporary demands for epistemic justice, ensuring that his work lives on in hands across academic, political, and social spheres.

2.2.3 The Intellectual's Responsibility

The notion of intellectual responsibility forms the core of Edward Said's critique of political and cultural discourse. It is in this sense that the argument forms the basis of the ethical obligation of an intellectual: to speak truth to power (Said, 1994) irrespective of personal and professional consequences. Substantially relying on and creating pivotal reference to Julian Benda's *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927), Said further emphasizes the moral responsibility of the scholar to redeem this co-optation by state or corporate interests. His framework advocates what he metaphorically terms an "exilic" position - a state of "perpetual opposition" achieved through deliberate detachment from institutional allegiances (Said, 1994). This radical conception completely redefines intellectual work as oppositional since it privileges critical independence, rendering institutional security and ideological conformity less important.

2.2.3.1 The Ethical Imperative of Opposition

Said's critique of institutional complicity builds a theoretical underpinning for his notion of the intellectual as an antagonist. He insists that real intellectual work must resist all forms of institutional seduction-whether through academic prestige or state patronage-in order to retain its critical independence. This view extends Foucault's (1980) analysis that examined a dialectic

between power and knowledge with a direct imperative caution against ideological co-optation. Importantly, Said is not content with defensive resistance; he also requires that intellectuals engage actively in toppling the hegemonic narratives that uphold systemic injustices. He thereby envisions the scholar as transformed from passive observer to active dissident and charged with the task of exposing and resisting structures of oppression.

2.2.3.2 Public Engagement as a Moral Duty

According to Said (1993), intellectual resistance extends beyond the domain of theoretical critique into the realm of actual public discourse, where scholars ought to engage in challenging hegemonic narratives and amplifying marginalized perspectives. This is in keeping with Chomsky's position (Chomsky 1967) on the role of intellectuals as truth-tellers exposing state and corporate propaganda; yet Said's contribution is not restricted to opposing the dominant powers but, instead, foregrounds cultural analysis, most importantly in *Orientalism* (1978), an exhaustive deconstruction of Western representations of the East. His career provided a prime instance of this model: as an advocate for Palestinian rights, Said showed how intellectuals could negotiate between the worlds of academic rigor and political engagement, denouncing oppressive structures while proposing liberatory alternatives (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001). The synthesis of scholarship and activism remains Said's most enduring contribution to the contemporary intellectual practice.

2.2.3.3 Critiques and Practical Challenges

Said's image of what it means to be engaged as an intellectual was, on one side, profoundly ethical and efficacious; on the other side, it has invited scrutiny for its applicability in contemporary academia. Richard Posner, for example, notes that in 2001 with the increasing professionalization of intellectual labor working through tightly dependent institutions, money strings, and careerist rewards, Said's model of radical dissent was becoming less and less workable.

Giroux (2014) adds heft to the argument by identifying similar features in the neoliberal university--where outcomes that can be quantified and research that has exchange value actively dissuade scholars from taking an oppositional stance, for example in Giroux's case, in danger to their professionalism. And complicating the situation further is the postcolonial critic Spivak, who writes of "a very serious question about the universalization of the role of the intellectual" in that the penalties to scholars at the margins are often disproportionate to what those at the center of their profession face whenever they take on structures of power. This brings to light a crisscrossing blind spot in Said's framework that calls for more nuanced discussion on how desynchronized positions of vulnerability and privilege shape opportunities for intellectual resistance.

2.3 Reconceiving the Intellectual's Role in Society

Said's reconception of the intellectual's role, focusing on its contemporary relevance, the fusion of scholarship and activism, and the limitations of his framework.

2.3.1 Contemporary Relevance of Said's Intellectual Model

In this age of neoliberalism and the digital disinformation that infects scholarship, Edward Said's critique of institutional complicity and insistence on intellectual autonomy remain relevant (Giroux, 2014). Not only does the very dependence of universities on industry-funded research further complicate cooptation of scholars, it also raises serious alarm bells for academic freedom as the institution develops ties with various under-represented interests. Today, it gets even more difficult for an intellectual. Not only should they keep up critical engagement with new state-sponsored censorship (Couldry & Mejias, 2019), but they have to navigate algorithmic biases as well.

For Said, "transnational solidarity" strikes a chord with current movements such as Palestinian liberation activism and Black Lives Matter, where instead of just striking a balance in the context of scholarship and activism by scholar-activists, the last such line sketched up by Major would perfectly suffice in capturing what Said meant. Robin D.G. Kelley (2017) and Noura Erakat (2019) are examples of such figures bridging historical research with contemporary struggles against racial and colonial violence. Such work demonstrates how Said's framework still inspires intellectuals to struggle against oppressive systems, all the while dealing with the complications of 21st-century knowledge-making (Mbembe, 2016).

2.3.2 Intellectual Activism: Merging Scholarship and Political Engagement

Said fundamentally readjusts the conception of intellectual labour, presenting it as an inherently oppositional act, which completely contradicts the idea of scholarly neutrality in the sense of detachment. His framework valorizes the likes of Frantz Fanon and Noam Chomsky, figures whose work exemplifies a necessary synthesis of theoretical precision and political commitment (Said 1994). This paradigm has influenced and continues to influence the next generation of scholar-activists, including Cornel West and Angela Davis, who, in their direct involvement with liberation movements, testify to Said's idea of the publicly engaged intellectual (Davis 2016; West 2017).

The enduring power of Said's model is especially visible, however, when academics in highly repressive contexts face life-threatening consequences for dissenting. Within Turkey and Hong Kong, scholars continue to risk state persecution by actively condemning their authoritarian regimes, providing a contemporary instance of Said's injunction to speak truth to power (Cheung 2020; Söyler 2021). But this activist engagement introduces unresolved epistemological tensions

regarding the possibility (or desirability) of maintaining scholarly objectivity while engaged in political struggle: a theoretical concern that Said raises, but never ultimately reconciles.

2.3.3 Limitations of Said's Intellectual Framework

Edward Said's work is still perceived as fundamental, yet it is said to be blind in some respects. The rose-tinted view of the intellectual "exile" fails to account for the capacity of the institution to bring about change. As Bourdieu (1989) remarks, it is not necessary to be an outsider to effect a difference; rather, the better reformers are probably insiders who are able to work through their academic and political systems.

Then Said elevates moral courage and individual dissent. Here Butler (2002) counters that systemic obstacles—more funding cuts, professional blacklisting against dissent—making this choice decidedly less simple. They go on to say: The very structures of institutional power can discipline dissenters well before they utter a word.

The irony is most biting, in what Aijaz Ahmad (1992) calls an implicit critique, in that Said's very own apparatuses are deeply indebted to European thinkers such as Vico and Foucault, which in effect uphold the Western-centric prejudices challenged by Said. A tension that subsequent scholars Gayatri Spivak (1999) and Walter D. Mignolo (2011) have attempted to grapple with from the standpoint of Indigeneity and Global South viewpoints that Said was often concerned to negate.

2.4 Findings and Results: The Intellectual's Role in Contemporary Cultural Discourse

2.4.1 Dominant Epistemologies

He critiques 18th-century philologists such as Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan; Said indicates that those endowed with "scientific" objectivity often hide their imperialist agenda behind deceptive pleats. This legacy, then, speaks to the duty of contemporary intellectuals to remain

vigilant in confronting neoliberal and nationalist discourses that continue to muffle dissident voices, highlighting the enduring presence of power masquerading as neutral expertise in contemporary policy, media, and academic arenas.

2.4.2 The Paradox of Representation

Edward Said captures the delicate tightrope of the modern intellectual - we are really to voice the oppressed, not convert lived experience into a political slogan. Consider his own life: though his Palestinian roots deeply shaped his activism, he stayed steadfastly opposed to narrow nationalisms, insisting instead on universal dignity for all people. The balancing act of honoring specific struggles while keeping in sight our shared humanity is perhaps one of his most urgent lessons for today's thinkers popular in navigating identity politics.

2.4.3 Resisting Institutional Co-optation

Said raised the voice about intellectuals becoming "highly specialized professionals" whose interests serve institutional rather than public good. The definition of "amateurism" by which he spoke-bridging ones' knowledge in disciplines transcending academic silos-makes much more sense today. In this current place, where neoliberal universities lean on marketable skills rather than critical thinking, where both the "cancel culture" and reactionary politics enforce the ideological purity of arguments, maintaining the intellectual autonomy entails conscious resistance as a whole. The true intellectual, for Said, has to maneuver through these pressures while staying committed to uncomfortable truths. Said sounded the alarm about intellectuals becoming "specialists in a highly professional sense" who serve institutional agendas rather than public good. His ideal of "amateurism", that is, bridging one's knowledge into disciplines transcending academic silos, is one that makes more sense today. In this current place, where neoliberal universities rely on marketable skills rather than critical thinking and where both "cancel culture" and reactionary

politics enforce ideological purity, maintaining intellectual autonomy requires conscious resistance across the board. The true intellectual, for Said, has to navigate these pressures while staying committed to uncomfortable truths.

2.4.4 Cultural Humility and Intersectionality

Although such writing long predated such terms' enshrinement in the academic discourse, Said's work models what we now call cultural humility-an ongoing practice of examining one's own blind spots. His analysis of how race, class, and colonial power intersect foreshadowed today's intersectional frameworks. Critiquing the Western canon while being steeped in it, then de romanticizing Palestinian identity, were all examples of the kind of nuanced self-consciousness that culturally humble scholarship tends to embody.

For example, Proust and Conrad redefine intellectuals in Said's *Beginnings* as society's critical conscience, those who interrogate dominant narratives. His 20th-century framework would, of course, need to be adapted for the new forms of censorship and polarization in the digital age, but his basic insight remains invaluable: Real intellectual work is not about neutral observation but about ethical engagement with power in all its manifestations. The limitations of said model do not undermine its power but invite us to expand that spirit to new battles.

Conclusion

Through literary and historical analysis, as demonstrated by Proust and Conrad, Edward Said's *Beginnings* reinterprets the function of the intellectual by highlighting critical engagement with culture. Said portrays the thinker as an active contributor to society change by opposing prevailing discourses and promoting intellectual responsibility. Despite its influence, his concept has limitations when it comes to modern use. However, it is still essential for rethinking the agency

of the intellectual in cultural discourse, calling for ongoing critical engagement in a changing environment.

General Conclusion

In order to examine Edward Said's theoretical frameworks in *Beginnings*, this study uses a qualitative methodology that combines textual hermeneutics and conceptual analysis. It treats Said's ideas as dynamic structures that change "original truths" through situational engagement rather than adhering to prescriptive dogmas.

This research asked about three questions. The first asked about Edward's distinction between "beginnings" and "origins" in *Beginning*, which redefined the role of the intellectual in cultural and historical criticism. The second examined what the concept of intellectual said as a "beginner" revealed about the relationship between marginality and critical agency. The latter explored how the beginning launched the foundations for Said's later work to frame the intellectual's responsibility to challenge power.

The study concluded the following results. By rejecting static, mythologized origins which frequently support prevailing ideologies like colonialism, Edward Said's difference between beginnings and origins radically reshaped the function of the intellectual. Said contended in *Beginnings* that "beginnings" are disputed, man-made interventions that reflect historical and political circumstances, whereas "origins" suggested set, authoritative facts.

By exposing the ways in which narratives generate power, this paradigm reinterpreted the intellectual as a critical "beginner" who rejects traditional "origins." As an illustration of how literature can mediate historical crises, Said's examination of Proust shows how *In Search of Lost Time* subverted linear historiography to reflect France's imperial fall (Said, 1993). Intellectuals expose the ideological foundations of cultural narratives by emphasizing "beginnings," turning critique into a political act.

Furthermore, Said's "beginner" personifies the paradoxical force of marginality: the intellectual acquires the capacity to question dominant narratives by holding a "exilic" position outside institutional orthodoxies., "Beginners" like Conrad or Proust both reproduce and undermine prevailing discourses as they navigate their delicate positions within colonial modernity. For instance, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* demonstrates how marginality (such as Conrad's Polish exile) may create critical tension even while it complicitly supports imperialist dehumanization. Similar to this, Said's focus on "contrapuntal readin.

Additionally, *Beginnings* framed critique as a radical act of narrative intervention, laying the epistemological groundwork for Said's subsequent writings. The book's emphasis on secular "beginnings" as opposed to mythologized "origins" foreshadows Said's exposé of how Western knowledge creation justifies dominance in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. *Beginnings'* criticism of literary "worldliness" for example developed into *Orientalism's* analysis of academic collusion with imperialism. Similar to this, Said's model of the intellectual in *Representations of the Intellectual*, in which he promotes Thus, *Beginnings* seeds Said's lifelong project: redefining intellectual work as ethical opposition to power.

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الملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة معيرة إدوارد سعيد لتحديد دور المثقف من خلال نظريته عن "البدايات" في كتابه "البدايات": القصد والمنهج (1975)، إذ تحلل الدراسة كيف يعيد نقده للأصول الثابتة لصالح البدايات الدينامية المشروطة لتشكيل الفاعلية الفطرية. تطلق الرسالة باستخدام التأويل النصي والتحليل المفاهيمي، فالدراسة تبحث في حوارات سعيد مع فوكو ودريدا وفيكو، موضحة عمله في سياق النقاشات ما بعد البنوية وما بعد الاستعمارية لتقييم ما إذا كان نقده العلماني يوفق بين الفكر البنيوي والمتطلبات الأخلاقية للنقد الثقافي. تُبين النتائج على أن منهج سعيد الفكري يصور المثقف بكونه ناقداً خارجياً من جهة، وباحثاً سياسياً من أخرى، مستخدماً الطارئية والنقد العلماني لتفكيك الهيمنة مع إعطاء اليد العليا للمهمشين. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن كتاب "البدايات" يظل حياً للنقد الثقافي المعاصر، فيقدم نموذجاً للمثقفين لمواجهة أزمت السلطة والتمثيل عبر الجمع بين النظرية والممارسة، مما يعيد في النهاية صياغة المسؤولية الفكرية كصراع أخلاقي ذاتي ضد القمع المنهجي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأصل الطارئ، البدايات، دور المثقف، الفاعلية الإنسانية، النقد العلماني.