

Introduction

Ideas were like the tides of the sea or the phases of the moon; they came into being, rose, and grew in their proper time, and then ebbed, darkened, and vanished when the great wheel turned. They were temporary dwellings, like tents, and a tent was their proper home.

—Salman Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence*¹

All social life is essentially *practical*. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

—Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*²

Consider the following snapshots from the history of Germany's interaction with the Middle East:

- Crusaders in the early thirteenth century arrive in the Holy Land surprised to find acculturated European Christians speaking Arabic better than they speak any European tongue.
- In the seventeenth century, as one side effect of Germany's prolonged conflict with the Ottoman Empire, coffee comes to Europe, sobering up the beer-drinking population (on average, Germans drank between one and five liters of beer per day!); perhaps, without this fundamental change German societies would not have been able to industrialize, a process that required alert workers to operate machines.³
- In the eighteenth century, even as German states engage in bitter military battles with the Ottoman Empire, their rulers adopt Turkish games, introduce Turkish architectural styles, and enjoy Turkish music.
- During World War I Wilhelmine Germany peddles the idea of a Holy War against the British, French, and Russians to Islamic governments across the Middle East and Asia, and in the post–World War II era,

these initiatives are mirrored in the anti-imperialist foreign policy pursued by East Germany, which works closely at this time with Socialist Arab countries.

- In the last half century the economic, social, political, and cultural histories of Germany and Turkey are so closely bound up with one another that Germany not only adds three million individuals of Turkish origin to its population, but also imports the whole range of Turkey's internal challenges and opportunities.

How do these five snapshots illustrating the social, economic, and political dimensions of German–Middle Eastern relations compare to the image of the Middle East as it emerges, for example, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's medieval epic *Parzival*, Daniel Casper von Lohenstein's seventeenth-century tragedy *Ibrahim Bassa*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's eighteenth-century play *Nathan der Weise*, Else Lasker-Schüler's early-twentieth-century narrative *Der Prinz von Theben*, and Feridun Zaimoğlu's recent novel *Leyla*? By asking this question, *German Literature on the Middle East* proposes a refined methodology to evaluate the multiple semiotic layers contained in works of literature and other cultural representations and emphasizes the necessity of considering the wide web of political, economic, and social *practices* when engaging in the interpretative process. In this regard this study asks, what is the place of the literary in light of recent debates over the significance of *practice theory* for scholars in the humanities and social sciences? How can we, as literary scholars, make good use of the models that have been developed in response to the discontent with the determinism of the linguistic turn?⁴

Over the last decade, this frustration with the determinism of the linguistic turn has been articulated in various disciplines and has produced a rich scholarship emphasizing the importance of agency, subjectivity, affect, the body, performance, historical change, and experience. The main charge is that the determinism inherent to the notion of the linguistic construction of the world does not take into account bodily and material practices. The support for practice theory comes from different disciplines: scholars such as the anthropologist Sherry Ortner, the historian William Sewell, and the sociologist Andreas Reckwitz, among others, convincingly show that considering practices significantly enhances our understanding of how human beings operate, create meaning and, through their actions, affect semiotic orders. Sherry Ortner's notion of the "loosely structured actor," for example, illuminates spaces for agency and subjectivity outside of the restrictive conventions of discourse and *habitus*.⁵ William Sewell has taken on the question of practice from a different

angle and argues that notions of “culture as a system of symbols and meanings” and notions of “culture as practice” are not incompatible.⁶ Sewell states that “to engage in cultural practice means to utilize existing cultural symbols to accomplish some end. . . . It [culture] is . . . the semiotic dimension of human social practice in general.”⁷ Sewell, however, argues that “culture has a semiotic structuring principle that is different from the political, economic, or geographical structuring principles that also inform practice” and thereby makes a distinction to which I do not subscribe.⁸ *German Literature on the Middle East* extends Sewell’s definition of culture to include all forms of human practice. In this regard, the model of practice theory as outlined by Andreas Reckwitz seems most suited to anchor the approach I pursue in my study. Reckwitz defines practice theory as one of four types of cultural theory, the other three being mentalism, textualism, and intersubjectivism. The four cultural theories have in common that they explain and understand “actions by reconstructing the symbolic structures of knowledge which enable and constrain the agents to interpret the world according to certain forms, and to behave in corresponding ways.”⁹ Practice theory retains the relevance of the semiotic approach to culture, but shifts away from a Saussurean understanding of language to one informed by, among others, the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein who emphasized the importance of practice for establishing meaning.¹⁰

In explaining the merits of practice theory, Reckwitz draws on the work of, among others, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, the late Michel Foucault, Harold Garfinkel, Judith Butler, Bruno Latour, Charles Taylor, and Theodore Schatzki. Reckwitz emphasizes the importance of the body, the agent/individual, routinization, and the material for cultural analysis, and argues that “practice theory ‘decentres’ mind, texts, and conversation.”¹¹ In this view “discourse and language lose their omnipotent status. Discursive practices are one type of practices among others.”¹² This understanding of discourses is related to an increased recourse to the body and materiality: “A discursive practice also contains bodily patterns, routinized mental activities—forms of understanding, know-how (here including grammar and pragmatic rules of use), and motivation—and above all, objects (from sounds to computers) that are linked to each other.”¹³ Consequently, practice theory “shifts bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine to the centre of its vocabulary.”¹⁴

Literary scholars, including many in the field of postcolonial studies, have been hesitant to absorb these discussions and remain largely committed to what Reckwitz calls “textualism.” Perhaps this is understandable in light of the currency literature and language disciplines gained as a result of the linguistic turn. In particular, the centrality of the concept of “discourse” and the pre-

sumed ability of texts to influence political, social, and economic action gave literary studies an increased relevance. Following the publication of Edward Said's study *Orientalism* in 1978, the central claim uniting literary studies associated with postcolonial theory has been a belief that literary and other cultural representations not only reflect but also significantly contribute to engendering oppressive structures, such as imperialism. Connected to this understanding of the role played by literary and other textual discourses is the idea that debunking the ideological dimensions of culture can lead to political and social change. As Teun A. van Dijk states in his introduction to the five-volume *Discourse Studies*, "It has become widely accepted that discourse is profoundly embedded in society and culture, and hence, closely related also to all forms of power, power abuse, and social inequality."¹⁵ The goal of critical discourse studies has therefore become to reveal the oppressive structures of cultural discourses and to raise awareness of the power dynamics inherent in the multifaceted manifestations of language.

Yet the focus on the analysis of discourses undertaken by scholars located in literature and culture departments has not gone without critique. As Achille Mbembe points out, "On the pretext of avoiding single-factor explanations of domination, these disciplines have reduced the complex phenomena of the state and power to 'discourses' and 'representations,' forgetting that discourses and representations have materiality."¹⁶ Scholars studying textual and other cultural representations indeed often neglect to explore the specific relationship of these textual discourses to social, political, and economic processes, and to materiality. As a result, a form of idealism—in this case a belief in the power of ideas and beliefs to structure political, economic, and social action—has emerged, primarily in U.S. humanities-based disciplines. Clearly, this turn to the realm of ideas is also connected to the decline of materialist approaches to understanding society, a decline that became more widespread after the fall of Communism in the 1980s and the dramatic transformations of global capitalism that followed. William Sewell links the paradigm shifts in history and other disciplines to the "fundamental transformations of the social forms of world capitalism."¹⁷ While some academic groups, such as the South Asian Subaltern Studies Collective and scholars identified with Latin American subaltern studies, have long insisted that we pay attention to material conditions and practices, the paradigm that became dominant, particularly in U.S. literature and culture departments, has largely omitted these factors.¹⁸

This rise of idealism in academia is partly rooted in a selective and incoherent reception of aspects of the work of Michel Foucault and other cultural theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, and in a related spe-

cific use of the concept of “discourse.”¹⁹ In the case of Foucault, the incoherence results partially from the fact that Foucault refined his understanding of the idea of discourse over time, although it can be argued that he consistently encouraged the careful exploration of the relationship of textual discourses to social, economic, and political practices in their historical specificity. Initially, Foucault’s work is premised on a distinction between the realm of discourse and areas outside of the discursive realm. At the end of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (*L’Archéologie du Savoir*; 1969) Foucault states, “Discourse is not life: its time is not your time; in it, you will not be reconciled to death; you may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don’t imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he.”²⁰

In his subsequent works, especially *Discipline and Punish* (*Surveiller et punir*; 1975) and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (*Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 1, *La volonté de savoir*; 1976), Foucault increasingly explores “the role of nondiscursive practices.”²¹ He expands on the notion of discourse by exploring its connectivity to power and knowledge, which entails a more careful understanding of the relationship between discourses and the economic, social, and political spheres. Throughout his work Foucault’s case studies, however imperfect they may be, identify specific historical moments, consider economic conditions, and strive to arrive at an understanding of the complexity of how power works through the interplay of institutions, discursive structures, and political, social, and economic processes. Foucault makes a distinction between discursive and nondiscursive contexts, such as “institutions, social relations, economic and political conjuncture.”²² *The History of Sexuality*, for example, reflects the understanding of the complex relationship between discourses and practices that led to Foucault’s rejection of the “repressive hypothesis.” Foucault’s later work, especially *The Care of the Self* (*Histoire de la sexualité*, vol. 3, *Le souci de soi*, 1984), turns to the role of human agency and subjectivity, but this dimension of his work, and Foucault’s development in general, is often not considered in analyses that draw on his work.

As a result, and despite the fact that Foucault asks us to pay attention to the tension between textual discourses and nondiscursive practices, the notion of discourse has led to widely different uses of the concept across the disciplines. Sara Mills writes that “Foucault has often been interpreted as saying that there is no non-discursive realm, that everything is constructed and apprehended through discourse.” She argues that “Foucault is not denying that there are physical objects in the world and he is not suggesting that there is nothing but discourse, but what he is stating is that we can only think about and expe-

rience material objects and the world as a whole through discourse and the structures it imposes on our thinking.”²³ Nevertheless, one understanding of especially Foucault’s “middle period” writings has led scholars to extend the concept of discourse to include a wide array of practices *beyond* the realm of the linguistic. David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis write:

We take *discourse* or *discourses* to refer to systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects. . . . Discourse theorists . . . affirm the discursive character of all social practices and objects, and reject the idea that ideological practices simply constitute one area or “region” of social relations. Thus, for instance, the distinctions between political, economic and ideological practices are pragmatic and analytical, and strictly internal to the category of discourse.²⁴

The expanded definition of discourse proposed by Howarth and Stavrakakis may be interpreted as formulating a semiotic approach to understanding society, but it collapses systems of symbols and meaning and various practices, which, in my view, proves to be an impediment to, rather than a vehicle for, furthering cultural analysis. Here their concept of discourse becomes inclusive and deterministic to the degree that it seems to encompass everything; indeed, the expanded definition of the concept renders it practically meaningless. Alternately, scholars who study primarily literary and other textual discourses often believe in an inherent correspondence between the trajectory of textual discourses and social, economic, and political practices. Generally, the specific historical and geopolitical context relevant to a work of fiction, for example, is assumed to be known. Edward Said, for instance, calls Orientalism “an imperialist tradition” but does not provide his readers with evidence about the workings of imperialism; the reader is expected to know just how European political and economic intervention into, for example, nineteenth-century Egypt took place.²⁵ Assuming Europe’s essential “positional superiority” over the Middle East resulted in another conjecture, namely, the supposed concurrence of textual discourses and social, political, and economic practices.²⁶ These assumptions have led to an omission of key factors that are relevant to understanding, for example, the colonization of nineteenth-century Egypt, such as various actions of the Ottoman Empire, international debt politics, the modernization plans of the local elites, and the specific infrastructure and raw material situation of the country.²⁷

The dilemma inherent to this approach has been acknowledged by critics for quite a while.²⁸ In fact, Edward Said himself refined his approach in *Cul-*

ture and Imperialism and numerous essays.²⁹ He went even further when, in 1997, he distanced himself from the field of postcolonial studies because of its disregard of the persistence of political and economic forms of oppression.³⁰ Of course, in order to do justice to the development of the field, we have to take the historical moment of *Orientalism* into account. In 1978 Said was making a provocative statement when he distinguished between “pure and political knowledge”: “I believe it needs to be made clear about cultural discourse and exchange within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is not ‘truth’ but representations.”³¹ In this regard we need to recognize the obstacles Said and other scholars, such as those identified with New Historicism, were facing when they began to expand the notion of textuality and to explore the active role of literature in shaping historical processes. Thus, not only literature and philosophical treatises but also texts such as legal documents, advertisements, and political policy statements, particularly in their interrelatedness, became objects of interpretive study. Extending the semiotic analysis of the textual to include visual representations and other forms of cultural expression, such as music and dance, was a logical next step. These scholars succeeded in raising consciousness about the role of textual discursivity and broadening our understanding of the role of cultural representations, but they neglected to explore the complex and often conflicting relationships between the wide range of social, economic, and political practices on the one hand and textual and other cultural representations on the other hand.

It is at this juncture that *German Literature on the Middle East* makes its intervention. Juxtaposing literary and related textual practices to social, political, and economic practices and materiality does not indicate a desire for a naive realism. Rather, all practices and their engagement of material objects call for interpretation. This approach was already established by Max Weber in the early 1900s, notably in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, which proposed categories useful to the interpretation of social and economic action.³² Economic, social, and political practices thus emerge as meaningful and in need of interpretation, just as do literary texts (textual practices) and other cultural representations to which they may or may not be related. The occurrence of a death or a journey undertaken to sell goods may only be known to us through a textual document, but the text is not the death or the journey, and we may understand the action and the discursive statement about the action separately, all the while attempting to acknowledge self-reflexively the discursive boundedness of our own perception of the world. As Theo van Leeuwen writes, “It is important to stress the difference between social practices and representations of social practices. It seems obvious, yet the differ-

ence is often glossed over.”³³ Acknowledging these distinctions is paramount to practice theory. Reckwitz and other scholars, including cognitive scientists, show convincingly that our perception of the world is determined not only by discourse, but also by the body, affect, and material conditions.³⁴ Already in 1972 Pierre Bourdieu warned of the pitfalls inherent in “reduc[ing] all social relations to communicative relations and, more precisely, to decoding operations.”³⁵

Linguists, of course, have also contributed to refining our understanding of the role of language. As John J. Gumperz and Stephen C. Levinson state, “The kind of contextual information that is actually needed [for the understanding of an utterance] turns out to be deeply embedded in practices of speaking, the local conduct of social life, and the social distribution of shared understandings.”³⁶ Clifford Geertz addresses this necessity of considering contextual information when he points out that “code does not determine conduct.”³⁷ In a similar vein, scholars in various disciplines have questioned the dominance of text-centered analyses for quite some time. In the field of religious studies, for example, Thomas P. Kasulis has argued against disconnecting the study of beliefs from the study of practices.³⁸ In addition, scholars have insisted on the significance of the material world for the development of human consciousness. From the field of cultural studies, Brian Rotman’s work shows that understanding the material world’s impact on human thought is vital. He writes that “human beings are ‘natural born cyborgs’; the ‘human’ has from the beginning of the species been a three-way hybrid, a bio-cultural-technological amalgam: the ‘human mind’—its subjectivities, affects, agency, and forms of consciousness—having been put into form by a succession of physical and cognitive technologies at its disposal.”³⁹ While some studies, such as Tom Lutz’s *American Nervousness 1903: An Anecdotal History* (1991) and Daniel T. Reff’s *Plagues, Priests, Demons: Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New* (2005), have presented innovative models of analysis by drawing on knowledge from different disciplines to sketch the relationship of textual discursivity to political, scientific, and economic practices and materiality, these types of analysis seem to have received limited reception by literary scholars.⁴⁰

The concern regarding the lack of a broader knowledge base to evaluate literary texts motivated Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to suggest invigorating the field of comparative literature by “consider[ing] the resources of Area Studies.”⁴¹ Similar concerns have arisen also in the broader fields of cultural studies and cultural history. In *A Crooked Line*, his account of the last forty years of theoretical and methodological debates in the field of history, Geoff

Eley rightly concludes that “between social history and cultural history, there is really no need to choose.”⁴² Gabrielle Spiegel says in her commentary on Eley’s study that “the book takes a stand among current demands to recuperate the material, in effect, the social, as part and parcel of a belief in the reality and socially significant presence of the past, both in the past and in the present.”⁴³ In fact, with practice theory we are urged to understand the social as located in cultural practices, as it attempts to avoid the trap of linguistic determinism and textualism by opening the field to consider a wider universe of practices in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of cultural processes. Practice theory thus promises new avenues for understanding literary texts.

German Literature on the Middle East brings the debates over the relevance of practices to the study of literature. My case study in this regard is the German literary discourse on the Middle East. Before I turn to the study’s outline, it is worthwhile to take stock of how scholars in German studies have responded to Said’s *Orientalism*, which remains the point of reference for studies conducted in a wide range of fields. Scholars have both worked within the parameters of Said’s paradigm and also expanded and challenged it. As my study draws heavily on the works of these scholars, I will only give a brief overview at this point, categorizing the work that has been done in order to highlight specific accomplishments.⁴⁴ Contributions were made primarily in the following areas:

- I. Most directly linked to the publication of *Orientalism* are studies on German Orientalist scholarship. In *Orientalism*, Said leveled the charge that the discipline in general is politically corrupt and contributed to establishing imperial and colonial rule in the Middle East. Focusing mostly on French and British scholars, he exempted German Orientalists from the assumed complicity with the imperial project.⁴⁵ Several German Arabists and Islamists, such as Tilman Nagel, joined the discussion by defending their disciplines; earlier scholars, such as Rudi Paret, had taken the same stance already in the 1960s, when these charges were first made.⁴⁶ Robert Irwin’s study, though not exclusively focused on the German tradition, also belongs in the “defensive” camp.⁴⁷ For other scholars, such as Holger Preissler, Gernot Rotter, and Ludmila Hanisch, Said’s theses inspired investigations of the history of the discipline, without necessarily probing its ideological and political dimensions.⁴⁸

Clearly in dialogue with Said, however, are analyses by Suzanne Marchand, Ursula Wokoeck, Sabine Mangold, Tuska Benes, Alexan-

der Haridi, and Ekkehard Ellinger.⁴⁹ Kai Hafez explored the development of scholarship on the Middle East under the ideological constraints academics faced in the GDR.⁵⁰ In addition, recent studies that investigate the role of German Orientalists and other scholars in Turkey (Arnold Reisman, Kader Konuk),⁵¹ show that institutional constraints, material conditions, domestic and international political developments, and a wide range of ideologies (including racism, Christianity, nationalism, civilizationism, communism, and modernizationism on the one end, and universalism and multiculturalism on the other end) structured the work of German Orientalists. While it is possible that the knowledge they produced was appropriated for political and economic purposes at any time, the actual direct involvement of academics in imperial and nation-state politics began, in some cases, toward the end of the nineteenth century. It is noteworthy that Arab-language scholarship tends to absolve German Orientalists and German-language writers from the accusations associated with the Orientalism paradigm and rather celebrates German scholarship and the German literary tradition ('Awni 'Abd al-Ra'uf and Iman al-Sa'id Jalal; Adnan Rashid).⁵²

2. A second group of studies focused primarily on literature and its relation to colonialism and imperialism, especially in the aftermath of Said's publications and the emergence of the field of postcolonial studies. Some scholars, such as Andrea Fuchs-Sumiyoshi, attempted to refute Said; others used his framework to illustrate the connections between literary works and the colonial and imperial contexts (W. Daniel Wilson, Nina Berman, Reika Ebert).⁵³ Andrea Polaschegg's more recent study engages with Said but leaves his theoretical and methodological framework behind. While the study succeeds in assessing an extensive archive of relevant sources, it consists, as the author herself states, mostly of "prolegomena for a history of German Orientalism."⁵⁴ Mirjam Weber's study on Orientalism in Goethe's and Heine's poetry emphasizes that the creative engagement with the Orient neither only reproduces nor mirrors existing images, but results in innovation.⁵⁵ Some scholars picked up the cue from the Orientalism debate but focused on domestic issues, such as nationalism and gender relations (Todd Kontje, Robert C. Holub, Cornelia Kleinlogel).⁵⁶ A number of analyses by, for example, Arlene Teraoka, Leslie Adelson, Nazire Akbulut, Ishrak Kamaluddin, Azade Seyhan, Uta Aifan, Manar Omar, Tom Cheesman, and B. Venkat Mani draw, in one way or another, on the Orientalism paradigm to understand domestic and

transnational power relations, as they emerge in literary texts composed by post–World War II minority and majority authors.⁵⁷ Even though Mounir Fendri’s 1980 study on Heinrich Heine does not take recourse to Said’s paradigm it illustrates that Heine engaged Orientalist topics to define his position in Germany, an aspect also present in the work of Else Lasker-Schüler and other German-Jewish writers and intellectuals (Donna K. Heizer, Nina Berman, Noah Isenberg).⁵⁸ Several anthologies and special issues devoted to literary and cultural images of the Middle East include contributions that fall into the various approaches outlined here.⁵⁹ In toto, scholarship in this area has attempted to demonstrate (1), that a connection does indeed exist between German literary texts and actual power relations between Germany/Europe and the Middle East, or between majority Germans and minority groups of Middle Eastern descent; and (2), that literary representations signify primarily in their domestic dimension.

3. Related to the second group are analyses that explore German nonliterary representations of the Middle East, especially in the visual arts, film, travel literature, and other nonfiction texts (e.g., Marie Elisabeth Pape, Deniz Göktürk, Almut Höfert, Eugene Sensening-Dabbous, Susan R. Boettcher). Some of these studies refer to the *Orientalism* debate directly, others engage with it indirectly by highlighting the political dimension of cultural representations.⁶⁰
4. A fourth group of studies investigates the nature and implications of the media’s image of the Middle East. These studies, including analyses by Sonja Schultheiß-Heinz, Astrid Hub, Samir Aly, and Kai Hafez, by definition illustrate the close relationship between the coverage of actual events and German ideologies.⁶¹
5. Historians and political scientists, directly and indirectly, contributed to the *Orientalism* debate by focusing on German and Habsburg imperialism, various dimensions of domestic and foreign policies of the Ottoman Empire and other Middle Eastern states, and post–World War II developments. Among the substantive list of studies are works by Francis R. Nicosia, Jonathan S. McMurray, Jennifer Jenkins, Gottfried Hagen, Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, Thomas L. Hughes, Tilman Lüdke, Malte Fuhrmann, Margaret L. Anderson, ‘Abd al-Ra’uf Sinnu, Paula Sutter Fichtner, and Carole Fink.⁶² In addition, studies by historians and social scientists of the Middle East, such as Taner Akçam, Marc David Baer, Mustafa Aksakal, and M. Şükrü Hanioglu, are particularly relevant in this regard.⁶³

6. Several studies and anthologies focused on German attitudes toward Islam (e.g., Abdoldjavad Falaturi, Detlef Thofern, Werner Ruf, Susan L. Boettcher, Silvia Horsch, Nina Berman, Iman Attia). Here, the results reveal perhaps the most consistent picture, namely, that ignorance about Islam structured German views of the Middle East negatively from the Middle Ages to the present.⁶⁴
7. Finally, studies addressing the relationship between German Jews and Orientalism highlighted dimensions that are often ignored in the *Orientalism* debate, in spite of the fact that Said identified antisemitism as “the secret sharer” of Orientalism.⁶⁵ Susannah Heschel and Jonathan Hess assessed the political significance of writings by Jewish Orientalist scholars not only for the development of German Orientalist sciences, but also with regard to the position of the Jewish minority in Germany more broadly.⁶⁶ A recent anthology illuminates the significance of Jewish scholarship for critical Koranic studies.⁶⁷ The works of Reisman and Konuk on the emigration of German intellectuals to Turkey, which comprised a large number of Jewish scholars, also belong to this group of studies.

As this brief overview demonstrates, German scholarship made a unique contribution to the *Orientalism* debate by working within Said’s model, but also by expanding and transcending it. Scholars explored territories ignored or not addressed in the 1978 publication, including the interaction between the Ottoman Empire and German-speaking countries, the tremendous impact of Christianity on scholarship as well as imperial developments, the active roles played by German Jews in German–Middle Eastern matters, various domestic dimensions of literary and cultural representations, and the ties between German Orientalist scholars and the imperial German state. When considered collectively, these contributions by scholars from different disciplines also shed light on the relationship between various social, economic, and political practices and material aspects on the one hand, and textual and other representational practices on the other hand. That is, this body of scholarship allows us to modify the Orientalism paradigm by considering the relationship between these different kinds of practices that are shaped by a broad range of ideas and textual discourses but that also emerge from factors such as epidemics, war, specific technologies, commodities, and institutions.

My study thus draws on and adds to this body of scholarship through an evaluation of the *longue durée* of German Orientalism and by providing a

comparative dimension, which yields a number of original insights. My study shows that literary and related nonfiction texts on the Middle East may but do not *necessarily* tell us much about causality, about the *origin and course* of social, political, and economic events. Discriminating between textual discourses and nontextual practices is essential to my approach. The assessment of the tension between discourse and practice remains bound to the realm of the textual, as practice is accessible to us only through textual representation. But texts documenting practices and material reality (such as information regarding the number of pilgrims, trade statistics, legal treatises and their execution, data on intermarriage, and immigration data) need to be juxtaposed with autobiographical accounts of pilgrimages, eyewitness reports on military confrontations, and fictional accounts related to historical events. Of course, data about practices and material reality may be unreliable, even fabricated, and need to be interpreted. Our grasp of complexity is dependent on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of our data, and on our ability to interpret it.

Building on the rich scholarship of the past two decades, my study outlines the complex web of factors relevant to understanding Germany's relationship to the Middle East. This complexity of modes of identification and ideologies that inform literary and other textual representations (such as religion, local belonging, class, gender, ethnicity, and age), understood in combination with political, economic, and social factors, troubles the presumed semiotic unit expressed by the Orientalism paradigm. As stated earlier, I do not intend to promote a naive realism by juxtaposing literary representations to "reality." Rather, I argue for putting into dialogue cultural, social, political, and economic data, all of which need to be interpreted. This extended study of German literary discourses on the Middle East, seen in their relationship to other cultural representations and a wide range of social, political, and economic practices, allows me to identify several key aspects of German-Middle Eastern relations:

Shared History. Rather than presenting a history of divisions, my study highlights a history of contact and exchange between Europe and the Middle East/North Africa. Interestingly, this shared history comes to the fore most clearly when we consider practices such as pilgrimage, conversion, trade, intermarriage, migrations, and war. Even war entails interaction beyond the hostilities. Examples include prisoner taking and exchange, collaboration (as Ian Almond has shown in *Two Faiths, One Banner*), and the establishment of new boundaries through territorial annexations that lead to new shared living spaces.⁶⁸ The literary imagination and other areas of cultural production (e.g., architecture, music, painting) may or may not reflect these practices of interac-

tion and exchange. In this regard, *German Literature on the Middle East* contributes to the growing number of scholarly works that emphasize aspects of “coexistence” and “contact” in their analyses of European–Middle Eastern history.⁶⁹

Much of this shared history is preserved in literary texts, but the lack of knowledge about the history of contact impedes a more nuanced comprehension of the literary material. The nobility of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s imaginary knight Feirefiz (his speckled body a metaphor for his mixed European-African parentage) tells us that Europeans clearly knew about the achievements and grandeur of Arab chivalric culture. Yet, the accepted usage of the term *noble heathen* downplays this awareness and relegates the figure to the realm of pure imagination. In fact, however, the noble heathen corresponds to facets of reality just as much as does the image of the brutal Turkish warrior of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Intra-European Rivalries. Related to this aspect of circulating cultural material is the fact that European political and economic relations with the Middle East were significantly and perhaps decisively determined by intra-European strife and competition, rather than by actual interactions with Middle Eastern states. Hence, it was Frederick II’s struggle with the pope that spurred his refusal to participate in an early thirteenth-century crusade. Likewise, the French alliance with the Ottomans in 1535 was carried out in defiance of their German competitors; Venice constantly shifted alliances to secure its interests; and Ottoman/Turkish alliances with German powers continue to impact intra-European strife to this day. Seen in light of these events and power constellations, the idea of a seemingly monolithic Europe is untenable.

Heterogeneity of Discourse and Interests of Social Groups. The study of literary discourses in their larger historical context shows that individual literary texts and sometimes entire textual genres correspond to the interests of specific social groups. With the constant waxing and waning of politically powerful groups, literary and cultural discourses prove to encompass the entire range of special interests; rarely do we find coherence with regard to the sum of the textual material or with regard to the actions of possible actors at any one time. Thus, whether a discourse becomes hegemonic depends on specific and ever-shifting power constellations. In this regard, my study confirms findings of George Steinmetz’s intriguing study, *The Devil’s Handwriting*, about the relationship between precolonial ethnography and colonial native policy.⁷⁰

Oppressive Hypothesis. Analogous to Foucault’s critique of what he termed the “repressive hypothesis,” the long-term interdisciplinary study of German discourses on the Middle East reveals that the presence of oppressive

discourses does not necessarily indicate oppressive action—and that the opposite is also true: the absence of oppressive discourses and the presence of discourses of tolerance and acceptance does not necessarily translate into emancipatory practices. This aspect has mostly to do with the fact that political power often acts in ways that do not correspond with dominant opinion. Frederick II's arrangement with Sultan al-Kamil, *Turcomania* in Saxony at a time of still intense conflict with the Ottomans, and the supposed tolerance of contemporary liberal Germans who meanwhile deny Muslim residents of Germany their basic civil rights all exemplify this point.

The next points relate more specifically to the status of literature:

Translation, Archive, and Politics. Much of the material that makes up the German literary discourse on the Middle East came into German culture via translation from other European languages. The plots of many medieval epics, such as the *Rolandslied* and *Parzival*, were adopted and adapted by German writers via translation from the French language, just like much of the material for Baroque plays and novels, Enlightenment narratives, and nineteenth-century poetry came into German from other languages. Although German translators and rewriters often changed the material in decisive ways, many times they did not substantively alter the basic messages of the source text. In spite of this broadly shared literary archive, however, the political and economic relationships of individual European societies to the Middle East were distinct. This simple insight fundamentally challenges Said's claim regarding the inter-relatedness of cultural discourses and political-economic developments.

Most of my analysis focuses on German cultural material, but the connections established here highlight just how crucial the field of translation studies is to investigations of national, transnational, and intercultural discourses. How can we make a claim about a distinctly "national" imaginary when much of the literary and cultural material in Europe is shared? I envision subsequent studies that will complete the unfulfilled promises of this study by shedding light on aspects that I am unable to pursue here in depth. Comparative studies of German and French sources in any of the periods studied here, for example, will allow us to arrive at a better understanding of how material that is circulated in translation corresponds to particular national imaginations and practices. These comparative studies would effectively, in Ute Frevert's words, "Europeanize" German, French, and other histories.⁷¹ Conceived even more broadly, comparative studies will enable us to develop a global consciousness. As Emily Apter suggests, "A new comparative literature, with the revalued labor of the translator placed center stage, expands centripetally toward a genuinely planetary criticism."⁷²

Large gaps exist in European studies because of the predominant focus on English, French, Spanish, Italian, and German material, and so here, too, is an area that deserves scholarly attention. I was unable to read sources that exist, for example, in Croatian, Hungarian, and Polish, yet repeatedly stumbled across material that had first been published in these and other languages but that has not been factored into the writing of European histories. Spivak's plea for paying attention to the relevance of "the languages of the Southern Hemisphere" easily applies to the minor languages of Europe as well.⁷³

Memory. Another aspect that emerges in my study is the importance of understanding cultural and collective memory, especially as it develops over centuries. How is it possible, for example, that imagery that was largely dormant since the early modern period reemerged so readily in the late twentieth century? The archive of German images about the Middle East is best understood as a palimpsest, in which cultural and literary periods form in layers, with subsequent periods having access to the imagery of earlier periods. From the Middle Ages to our contemporary period German culture harbored imagery that corresponded to major belief systems of respective time periods. Religion, culture, universal humanism, civilization, nation, race, and modernity informed the ideological content of the imagery. Images conceived in earlier periods later reappeared, taking on new meanings but also drawing on their established potential as signifiers. The persistence of a specific archive of images—from religious enemy to noble heathen, from debauched, violent, and hypersexed Arab to wise and amiable Oriental—resonates with Jan Assmann's ideas regarding cultural memory. He writes that cultural memory "exists not only in us and in others who remember, but also in things, such as texts, images, and practices. . . . [Cultural memory is] that tradition in us, those texts, images, and rites, all of which ossified through a process lasting generations, centuries, even millennia, and which shape our consciousness of time and history, our view of ourselves and the world."⁷⁴ The archive of German Oriental imagery, largely "ossified" in the sense of Assmann's definition, remains accessible over time. The quality of the images' durability can be explained by the fact that they are displaced from their original historical context, with their anachronistic quality creating tensions. But this archive is not "just there"; rather, it functions as a repertory, allowing for variation in the process of re-playing images. This process corresponds to Maurice Halbwachs's ideas regarding "collective memory":

We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of

our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had.⁷⁵

What Halbwachs suggests here for the process of individual and collective remembering may be extended to cultural remembrance. Germany's cultural memory of its greater than thousand-year history with the Middle East has resulted in a vast repertory of images, partially ossified in Assmann's sense, and perpetually reproducible and changeable, as Halbwachs suggests. The conclusion will return to this question by considering insights from cognitive neuroscience.

Images of the Self. Interpreting the meaning of Oriental imagery reveals that the Orient is a place of images of the self—the idealized self, utopian self, problematic self—as much as, in Said's view, it is “one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.”⁷⁶ The imagery may present the self in disguise, but it is clearly the self. Wolfram von Eschenbach's Feirefiz is the ideal knight and Sultan Saladin the ideal ruler, just like Ibrahim Bassa is the despot under attack by Enlightenment thought and Hofmannsthal's son of a merchant the decadent *fin de siècle* aesthete. Consequently, Oriental imagery also needs to be understood as a vehicle that can be used to express the changing issues of German societies in particular historical moments.

Occidentalism and Orientalism of the East. Another aspect that deserves fuller attention in future works is the Occidentalism of the East. Middle Eastern culture produced its own discourse on the West, from the historians of the Crusades to the intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This discourse continues to function in much the same way that the European discourse on the Middle East and Islam operates. And just as the European discourse on the Middle East means different things depending on the actual power relations that exist at a given point in time, the Middle Eastern discourse cannot be fully understood without considering these same power relations.⁷⁷ In addition, and this may be surprising, much of the European imagery of the Orient that is most closely associated with the Orientalism paradigm—images of violence and sexuality, of luxury and asceticism—has roots in the Middle East's very own Orientalism: the stories of Sinbad the Sailor's journeys to unknown exotic places or the Islamic prejudice against polytheistic and nonurban cultures, among other topoi, emerge as a repository for European fantasies about the East. Other stories have been shared for centuries, such as the legends around Alexander the Great and various religious traditions. In more than

one way imagination and social contact are linked in the common history of Europe and the Middle East.

A few remarks about key terms are in order. *Germany* is a shifting signifier, referring to a range of empires and states over a thousand-year period. The focus on “Germany” is legitimated through a textual archive that exists in the German language, beginning here with Middle High German texts from the middle of the eleventh century. This archive of literary texts and other writings in the German language was written and read by people who often valued their regional or religious identity more than belonging to an empire or nation-state, and often would not have self-identified as “Germans.” Because a German nation-state came into being for the first time only in 1871, for most of the period being investigated here, “Germany” existed in the form of the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg Empire. This study pays little attention to Switzerland as a political entity but includes writings by Swiss authors when relevant.

Just like *Germany* is more of a heuristic device than a stable signifier, the term *Middle East* does not refer to a clearly identifiable territory or political constellation. The Middle East, as referred to in this study, includes what is today known as the MENA region, the areas of the Middle East and North Africa. For the period under discussion this includes some but not all of the territories of the ‘Abbasid Empire and the Ottoman Empire (and later the Republic of Turkey, whose geopolitical belonging has been contested for quite some time). The Middle East, in the Western understanding of the term, includes areas inhabited by Arabic-, Persian-, Turkish-, and Hebrew-speaking peoples and by peoples speaking lesser-known languages, such as Armenian. Various European countries employ different terms to refer to the regions, and they do not correspond: the Middle East, as understood in this study, includes areas described by the German terms *Naher Osten* and *Nordafrika*. In the more recent period, and clearly in response to colonial and postcolonial history, *Middle East* (al-Sharq al-Awsat) has become a term used also for self-identification by the people of the region. Also, Ottoman society was multiethnic and multireligious; neither the term *Muslim* nor *Turkish* appropriately describes it. In the following discussion I use the words *Turk* and *Turkish* whenever they are employed in the sources I discuss, but also alternate with *Ottoman*. The status of the term *Istanbul* is also complex; I use *Constantinople* for the period before 1453, and *Istanbul* afterward, even though the former term and many others were used simultaneously until 1930.⁷⁸

The individual chapters of this book concentrate on five periods that differ greatly in length, and also differ greatly in terms of distinctive ideological,

social, economic, and political factors. Chapter 1 covers the years from 1000 to 1350. Even before the Crusades began, tens of thousands of pilgrims traveled to Palestine each year, and because of their literal interpretation of the Bible, the area's eschatological significance was a tangible reality for medieval Germans. German emperors considered themselves rulers of the Holy Land, not only as Christians, but also as successors to the Roman Empire. During the course of the Crusades, however, German political leaders were increasingly more interested in contemporaneous expansion into eastern European territories, or, like Frederick II, they participated in the Crusades reluctantly and largely for political reasons. Literary texts from the period include examples of explicit propaganda literature and texts that articulate a critique of the Crusades. The reality of intercultural encounters is articulated in epics and poems, German and Arabic travel accounts, and the writings of Arab historians.

Chapter 2 addresses events that took place from about 1350 to 1683, the Second Siege of Vienna. Beginning in the fourteenth century, the Ottoman Empire advanced steadily north- and northwestward into Europe, laying siege to Vienna in 1529 and 1683. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 coincided with the invention of the printing press, and some of the earliest printed materials articulate fears of the invading army. As a result of the encounter with the Ottoman Turks, and in contrast to the primarily religious discourse of the Middle Ages, German representations of the Ottomans (plays, broadsheets, songs, and newspapers reporting events from the battlefield) increasingly included images of cultural difference. The fact that during this period the Ottoman Empire posed an actual threat explains the general absence of positive images in German depictions of the Ottomans; interestingly, many Turkish sources about the conflict echo the German portrayals of military conflict and violence experienced by the civilian population. Concurrently, a deep interest in Ottoman culture, reports about conversions, and developing economic relations coexisted alongside the negative view of the enemy.

Events that occurred between 1683 and 1792, the beginning of the French occupation of Germany, are at the center of chapter 3. The Second Siege of Vienna marks the beginning of the Ottoman Empire's slow but steady loss of control over its European territories. In conjunction with the universalism and humanism of the Enlightenment and the call for social change in Europe, multiple challenges to established power structures (including the Christian church) affected German images of the Turks. The *Turquerie*, or *Turcomania*—an interest in Turkish food, clothing, carpets, and other products—that had first begun in France, reached Prussia and Austria in the late 1760s. The popularity of Middle Eastern sources (*One Thousand and One Nights*, among

others) reflects a growing interest in the region, which enabled the founding of Orientalist disciplines. By the end of the eighteenth century new types of “enlightened” Turkish and Arab Muslim characters appeared in German plays, operas, and other writings. This new climate facilitated the beginning of Prussian-Ottoman (and later German-Turkish) cooperation, which was paralleled by shifts in French and British relations with the Middle East, among others.

Chapter 4 reviews the events from the end of the eighteenth century to 1945. Although German states did not emerge as colonial powers in North Africa and the Middle East, Habsburgs and Prussians were active in the areas of infrastructure development, banking, and military advising (and even military intervention in a few instances). Economic, military, and political developments were paralleled by an expanded interest in the Middle East by Orientalist scholars, painters, writers, and, later, filmmakers. German Jews were concurrently identified as the internal Oriental other. Writings that conveyed a programmatically positive image of the Orient (e.g., anthroposophy and cultural Zionism) departed from articulations inspired by a sense of German racial superiority, modernization, and progress. This particular tradition of positive identification with the Middle East/Orient—from Wolfram to Goethe, Buber, Steiner, and Hesse—appears to have no equivalent in French or British culture. By considering the actions and writings of Middle Eastern intellectuals and elites, I acknowledge their critical stance toward European domination of the Middle East but also the existence of a dialogue on modernization.

Chapter 5 discusses the period from the end of World War II until 1989. Throughout the postwar era, East and West Germany, Austria, and Switzerland entertained strong economic and political relations with Israel and other Middle Eastern countries. Noteworthy are the distinct political relations that East and West Germany developed with Middle Eastern states and the history of immigration. The GDR established close alliances with Socialist Arab countries, whereas the FRG emerged as a partner to Israel. These interstate relations significantly shaped institutions, media, and cultural representations. The large-scale labor migration changed West Germany in particular; curiously, this important development is largely invisible in highbrow literature produced by writers without immigrant backgrounds. Beliefs established in earlier periods, however, continued to persist. Alongside this mainstream neglect toward the transforming society, literary and other cultural works by authors and artists with immigrant roots altered the cultural landscape in innovative ways.

The concluding pages revisit key findings of the study with regard to the importance of actual intercultural contact; the interdependency of cultural, political, and economic factors; and the role that literary discourses and cultural

concepts play in these processes. The concluding section also considers research in cognitive neuroscience that sheds light on patterns relevant to understanding the circulation of cultural memory across time and space. The section ends with an analysis of Zaki Al-Maboren's artwork *Kaaba—Das eckige Haus*, which is interpreted here as a sophisticated commentary on intercultural coexistence.

What my study seeks to accomplish, from the perspective of a literary scholar, is to provide a model for more careful contextualization of literary and other textual discourses. The approach I advocate here raises the question of interdisciplinary competence: To acquire expertise even within one discipline is a challenge, and any steps outside the familiar parameters of disciplinary training may convey an air of transgression. We feel vulnerable when we leave familiar turf, and we are. The potential charge of dilettantism prevents most scholars from exploring the space beyond disciplinary boundaries. But upon leaving familiar territory, we begin to see the limits of disciplinary work. It is with an awareness of the potential and actual weaknesses of this attempt to cover a thousand years of intercultural history that I invite my readers to consider the relationship between Germany and the Middle East in new ways. The role played by textual discursivity in specific historical moments and geopolitical situations does not follow a predictable pattern. This aspect comes to the fore most clearly by way of a long-term and cross-cultural analysis that considers the connections between textual discourses, various practices, and materiality.

The fourteenth-century scholar Ibn Khaldun begins his study of world history by detailing what it takes to write history.

The (writing of history) requires numerous sources and much varied knowledge. It also requires a good speculative mind and thoroughness, which lead the historian to the truth and keep him from slips and errors. If he trusts historical information in its plain transmitted form and has no clear knowledge of the principles resulting from custom, the fundamental facts of politics, the nature of civilization, or the conditions governing human social organization, and if, furthermore, he does not evaluate remote or ancient material through comparison with near or contemporary material, he often cannot avoid stumbling and slipping and deviating from the path of truth.⁷⁹

As contemporary scholars, we stay away from claiming to write the "truth," feeling more comfortable with Clifford Geertz's notion of "guesses" and "better guesses": "Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses,

not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape. . . . Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete.⁷⁸⁰ In this spirit I present my (at this point) best guesses at understanding the significance of literary discourses within the context of the long history of Germany's social, political, economic, and material relations to the Middle East.

CHAPTER I

Pilgrims, Crusaders, Knights, and Settlers (1000–1350)

During the Middle Ages, Europe's relationship to the Middle East was structured fundamentally by the Christian worldview, according to which the Holy Land figured prominently. Geopolitical belonging was clearly not as relevant as religious group identity, and in this regard we need to understand the term *Europe* as a heuristic device that allows us to talk about developments that occurred in a specific geographical space during the Middle Ages and the early modern period. The pivotal importance of religious belonging inspired pilgrimages to Jerusalem from the fourth century onward, and it provided the ideological impetus for the Crusades. Most of Europe, including Germany, shared this preoccupation with the Holy Land, yet different European societies were connected to the Middle East in distinct ways. The Muslim presence in Spain and Sicily; the geographical proximity of southern European states to Muslim territories; the central role played by, for example, merchants from Genoa and Venice in the long-distance trade; and the competition between various European powers are among the many aspects that constitute the complex web of relations between European and Middle Eastern societies. Instances of cross-cultural and interfaith collaboration—in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East—defied the notion of a strict division between Europe and the Middle East, between Christianity and Islam.

The German view of the Middle East needs to be seen in the context of this web of inner-European and cross-Mediterranean connections. Germany's contact with the Middle East, exemplified first and foremost in its political, economic, and cultural relationship to the Holy Land, was expressed in both religious and secular writings. Because the period predates the arrival of print media, we know very little about the ways in which the issue was debated in popular culture, and only have access to texts composed by a tiny fraction of educated individuals. Whereas most of the religious writings were composed