



FORUM: Postkoloniale Arbeiten / Postcolonial Studies

**German Romantics Imagining India:  
Friedrich Schlegel in Paris and Roots of Ethnic Nationalism  
in Europe<sup>1</sup>**

Michael Dusche (Berlin)

*I. Friedrich Schlegel in Paris*

In 1802, Friedrich Schlegel relocated to Paris to learn Sanskrit so as to be able to access the wealth of Sanskrit manuscripts in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (Pille, 2007: 22). His teacher was the Scottish naval officer Alexander Hamilton who was at the time a prisoner in France. As several scholars have pointed out, Schlegel seems to have lived a secluded life in Paris. Apparently he could not integrate into French society. “What he thought of the city outside the library,” writes Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, “drove him to the Indian study no less than the manuscripts, the preoccupation with old art, his social seclusion from French people, his growing Catholicism, we can see the correlation between his reluctance to become involved with modern Paris and his interest in ancient India – and,” as he adds, his “lack of interest in modern India” (2007: 725). Disgusted with the newly wealthy of the time of the Directorate, writes Marc-René Pille (2007: 22), and confronted with the insecurities of life in a mega-city of the early modern age – the “capital of the universe” as he calls it in his *Journey to France (Reise nach Frankreich* KFS VII 56-79), a text published in the same year, he seems to have experienced a cultural shock of sorts. “Schlegel complained that he could find in Paris ‘no fantasy, no art, no love, no religion’. He attributes this not to the national character of the French but to

---

<sup>1</sup> A previous version of this paper was presented on 1 March 2011 at the workshop "Expanding Horizons of History" at Manonmaniam Sundaranar University in Tirunelveli, India. I am grateful to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) under EU-India Study Centres Programme who sponsored my trip to India as Short Term Expert. On 5 April 2011 the present version of the paper was presented at the International Symposium of the Orient-Occident Research Group at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, Austria. Great thanks to the organisers for inviting me and to the participants for their valuable comments.

the degeneration of Europe as a whole, which he thought was worse in Paris than in German lands (Tzoref-Ashkenasi, 2007: 725). Remembering his travels through a largely agrarian Germany, coming to Paris, Schlegel abhors modern city life with its industry and commerce. He is taken a nostalgia for a time of “joyous living and high morality” when people stayed “in castles upon hilltops” (KFSA VII 56-79).<sup>2</sup> Thus he writes: “Since men have gathered in the valleys and around the great roads, greedy for alien ways and alien money, the heights and castles stand deserted” (ibid.). It is worth noting here the allusion to the “alien ways” of capitalist, urban modernity and the romanticisation of the agrarian world of the Middle Ages. “In April 1804, just before he left Paris for Cologne, Schlegel wrote to his brother about his growing unhappiness in Paris, which he explained as his hostility to Napoleon and sympathy for Catholicism. In April 1808 Schlegel converted to Catholicism together with his wife Dorothea and a few months later he left Cologne for Vienna. The turn to Catholicism and conservatism affected Schlegel’s treatment of India in two ways. First, he no longer sought spiritual inspiration in India. Rather he tried to find evidence for the truth of Christianity in Indian mythology. Second, Schlegel pointed to a direct connection between India and the Germanic part of Europe” (Tzoref-Ashkenasi, 2007: 727).

Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn<sup>3</sup> writes that Friedrich Schlegel harboured hopes of a better knowledge of ancient India, which is directly linked to his search for a counter model to modern, i.e. French society, which he perceived as decayed and fragmented. In Schlegel’s analysis, the Occident was on the wrong track since Greek antiquity. The Greek philosophers, according to Schlegel, attempted to understand the world in the mode of reflection and thereby fragmented it through the very categories of thought. In modern times, this led to the dictatorship of reason and to the idolatry of science and progress. It led to a lapse of faith, religious schism and, eventually, to the torments of the French Revolution. Only the Orient, in Schlegel’s view, was still capable of an holistic understanding of the world. In the mode of religion, the Orient was still in touch with original unity or, in the words of German idealism, with the Absolute. It is thus from the Orient, which he identifies with India, that Schlegel would like to derive the Occident’s remedy. Through the study of

---

2 Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations from German/French to English are mine.

3 The following is a paraphrase of Rabault-Feuerhahn, 2008: 66-78.

ancient Indic civilisation, Schlegel hopes to recover the lost key to primordial unity. He postulates the kinship of Sanskrit and Farsi with the European languages Latin, Greek and German. The oldest surviving language, Sanskrit, is postulated the progenitor of all other Indo-European languages. For Schlegel, the reference to Sanskrit also had a religious dimension. Since he conceived of the history of humanity as a continuous decline, Sanskrit was for Schlegel the language closest to the language of primeval revelation.

Faced with the dominant Graeco-Roman genealogy of Western civilisation and with the French who saw themselves as its epitome, Schlegel was not the first to search the Orient for alternative genealogies. One early precursor seems to have been Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In his posthumously (1717) published *Tentative Thoughts Concerning the Use and Improvement of the German Language* (*Unvorgreifliche Gedancken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der Teutschen Sprache*), Leibniz expressed his concern at the fact that since the Thirty Years War, the German language was in a dismal state and risked being swamped by French. He called for concerted action to take stock of German and other European languages, since he felt that with the loss of vernacular words, the corresponding things and the knowledge thereof would also be lost (Hutton, 1995: xiii). Leibniz already suggests what the Romantics later emphasised, that the German language is supposedly more ancient than Greek and putatively stands at the heart of the European languages as testified by old church liturgies, by the rights and laws concerning the nobility, and by old place names and the like (ibid. xiv). Almost a hundred years before Schlegel, Leibniz speculated that older variants of German once dominated much of Asia and Europe (Benes, 2004: 118).

Tuska Benes highlights Leibniz' linguistic initiative as the starting point for the academic study of 'peoples' or 'nations' (presumably still in the pre-political sense). According to her, this initiative directly influenced the Orientalist and historian August Ludwig Schlözer and led to a *Völkerkunde* (ethnology) that was no longer based on Biblical accounts but on a comparative study of language as an empirical tool. Leibniz had already suggested that one "infer from uniformities in language and descent ... that nations share in the same customs and fate" (Benes, 2004: 118). Later, the pietist theologian Johann Georg Hamann took this lead to suggest, contrary to Biblical ethnology, that not only the people of Israel but all peoples had

equal claim to spiritual truth. In his view, “poetry was the mother tongue of the human race” (ibid. 119) and since Oriental languages were the most poetic and spiritually symbolic, they promised to bring him closer to the divine truth. As Benes informs us (ibid. 120), Hamann passed his mystic regard for ancient Eastern languages to the early Romantics who then embarked on their quest for “rejuvenating the spiritual life of a disenchanting present” (ibid.).

Later, Hamann’s disciple Johann Gottfried Herder added the speculation that “National tongues ... expressed the soul or spirit of those who spoke them” (ibid.). Consequently he demanded a study of “national sign systems” as an attempt at “deciphering the human soul out of languages” (ibid.). In his *Treaty on the Origin of Language* (*Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* of 1772), Herder asserts that “language did not mirror a pre-existing metaphysical or empirical reality. Rather, it was the historical product of particular human communities” (ibid.). He located the “act of linguistic signification in the soul of the *Volk*” (ibid.), suggesting that individual national tongues actually expressed the character of a specific people. Herder diverged from the predominant enlightenment conception of language as a mere tool of communication in that for him, “language had no external referent other than the subjectivity of speakers; it represented the mode of consciousness through which particular linguistic communities experienced the world and gave voice to their inner life” (ibid.). Herder considered “each national tongue to be a living organism with its own ... internal laws of change” (ibid.; Thiesse, 2001: 34ff.).

In contrast to Herder, for whom all civilisations had equal value, Schlegel placed the ancient Indian civilisation above all others. This served him quite contemporary purposes. By demonstrating that human civilisation had its roots in ancient India, Schlegel parochialised Europe and its claim to civilisation inheriting from Greek and Roman antiquity. Thereby he could evade the classicist mood of his time, in the light of which France outshone the rest of Europe (Thiesse, 2001: 23ff.). By demonstrating that the ‘barbarians’ of Roman times actually hailed from ancient India, he assigned them a place among the civilised nations. For Schlegel, the Germanic tribes-people weren’t ‘barbarians’ at all but a free people whom the Romans had tried to subjugate. Not enough that they were equally civilised, they had access to a heritage even more ancient than that of Greece and Rome. Since, in Schlegel’s view, the French laid claim to the heritage of European antiquity, a claim to an even older

heritage by the Germans would free them from French tutelage and pave the way for German ascendancy. For Schlegel, and for other contemporary romantics, the claim to German cultural supremacy was founded in the greater authenticity of German culture. They saw German in unbroken continuity with Sanskrit, whereas French, the language that the Germanic Franks had adopted when settling down within the boundaries of the Roman empire, was seen as a bastard language between Romance, Celtic and Germanic dialects. From Schlegel's point of view, the French would appear as 'phony' Germans who had betrayed their Germanic heritage and thereby forfeited any legitimate claim to the most ancient civilisation of India.

One can see here already the seed to an Identity Politics that uses the debasement of the Other to raise the esteem and the coherence of the Self. The Other for the Germans has varied over time. The *Turk*, the *French*, the *Jew*, or the *Muslim* were prominent Others at different times. As soon as the Romantics became politicised in the wake of the anti-Napoleonic wars, they adopted anti-French sentiments. When in 1808 Fichte delivered his *Addresses to the German Nation*, the debasement of the French was part and parcel of the valorisation of the German Self.

The move towards nationalism by German Romantics like Friedrich Schlegel risked losing the politically emancipatory element of 18<sup>th</sup> century liberal republicanism, which was still present in the writings of Kant and Herder. Individual liberty was sacrificed for the sake of collective liberation and the individual person lost autonomy to become a member of a collective body politic. After 1800 the tendency increased among the Romantics to think in the direction of the collective. The newly awakened interest in myth and religion answered the needs of newly disoriented people for inclusion and belonging. Passive organic growth replaced active political deliberation, the organic community replaced political society (Safranski, 2007: 174). The ideal community of romanticism promised to unite everyone organically, so that everyone would be part of the whole without conflict or friction (Kohn, 1950: 445).

From the above, it is apparent that Schlegel was not interested in India for the sake of better knowledge. He used the India of his imagination as a screen upon which he could project his own discomforts with modernity and his resentment against the French. In 1808, Schlegel offered the fruits of his Sanskrit studies in a book titled *Ueber die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier (On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians)*. In this book he propagates an alliance of the Orient and the North against

the Occident, which he identifies with the West and the South of Europe (Oesterle, 1989: 10, quoting a letter to Tieck from 1802). Little of this seems to have had any lasting effect, except his Sanskrit to German direct translations from the Râmâyana and the Bhagavadgîtâ, the first of its kind in Germany (Pille, 2007: 26). The first part of the book contains Schlegel's genealogy of Indo-European languages, in which he follows William Jones, except that Jones twenty-two years earlier had not claimed Sanskrit to be the language from which all others derived. As we know today, Jones was right in assuming that all Indo-European languages have a common progenitor, probably spoken by Central Asian nomads who filtered into Iran, South Asia and Europe, but none is directly derived from the other. The second part of the book deals with Indian Philosophy while the third part suggests how the study of Indian literature might benefit the study of history in general (Tzoref-Ashkenazi, 2006: 714).

## *II. The Status of Schlegel's Orientalism*

In the past decade, a number of studies have appeared that inquire into the status of Schlegel's Orientalism. In the remainder of this paper, I shall review this literature to discuss what exactly Friedrich Schlegel was doing with his 'positive Orientalism', or, as it has been suggested, with his 'internal colonialism' or 'reverse Orientalism'. It will be confirmed that the main target of the discourse of German Romantic proto-nationalism was France. It was however embedded in the larger European Orientalist discourse. This section explores the status of the Romantics' engagement with India in relation to this larger discourse. Since this engagement did not involve an adoption of the reverse Indian perspective on Europe but was a means for German Romantics to focus on themselves for a better understanding and coherence of their own German 'Self', I propose to call Schlegel's attitude 'inverse Orientalism'.

As Jürgen Lütt (1998) has observed, the European discourse about what is called 'the Orient', besides attempting to reveal something about the Asian or African countries it purports to deal with, reveals the attitudes of those who lead the discourse toward general phenomena of history and modernity. Lütt distinguishes two fundamental perspectives towards history and modernity that emerge in the Oriental discourse in general and in the European discourse on India in particular. He calls these attitudes (1) the *Romantic attitude*, and (2) the *utilitarian attitude*. The first is marked by a generally pessimistic view of modern historical developments. The

Romantic attitude tends to see history as a process of decline and degeneration whereas the utilitarian attitude is marked by a generally optimistic view of modernity. In the utilitarian perspective, history appears as a process of development from the imperfect towards the more perfect.

Generally, Lütt goes on to point out, German Orientalists have tended towards the Romantic perspective whereas British Orientalists have been more inclined towards the utilitarian perspective (Lütt, 1998: 60). With respect to India, German Indologists leaned towards a positive, romanticising conception of India whereas British Indologists have been inclined towards highlighting India's social and cultural problems and its need to be governed, modernised and developed. The difference in attitude between German and British Indologists is partly due to the fact that the German Romantics had less direct access to the subcontinent, whereas British Indology from the beginning was embedded in the enterprise of the colonialists.<sup>4</sup> Thus, whereas British Orientalists were involved in the Empire's attempts at modernising British India and were thus confronted with contemporary issues such as the burning of widows, widow remarriage and the codification of Hindu and Muslim law, German Indologists were less concerned by such practical issues.<sup>5</sup> Their main concern was with European civilisation, European modernity, and the place of German culture, and Germany as an emerging country, in a modern European setting. In their perspective, European civilisation was on the decline due to the ruptures caused by the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution, which resulted in religious disunity and the political fragmentation of Europe, and they used India as a place-holder for everything Europe was not in their view: India was *ancient* whereas Europe was *modern*; India was *one* whereas Europe was *many* and India preserved, in the eyes of the Romantics, some elements of the original divine revelation that Europe was about to lose. All this resulted in Germany's 'positive Orientalism', as it was called by Ronald Inden (2000). One of the material indications of this positive attitude toward India is the fact that in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, twenty-two university chairs of Indology were established in Germany whereas in Britain, in the centre of its colonial Empire, only three such chairs existed (Kulke,

---

4 Here a differentiation is needed between Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August-Wilhelm, whose engagement with India was more sustained and less guided by the historical circumstances around 1800. Thanks to Anil Bhatti for this indication.

5 Although Friedrich Schlegel seems to have been aware of the practise of 'sati' (1799: 16).

2010). According to Sheldon Pollock, “both the investment and the production of pre-1945 Germany in Indological research surpassed that of the rest of Europe and America combined” (Tzoref-Ashkenazi, 2007: 718; Pollock 1993: 82).

Of course even in Germany the scholarly engagement with India was not independent of what was going on in other European countries. German, as well as British and French Orientalism was heir to a long-standing tradition of imagining India starting in Greek and Roman antiquity. At least since Alexander’s campaign into the Subcontinent, images of India survived in a literary genre called “Alexander novel” (Lütt, 1998: 60). For lack of empirical knowledge, India for most Greeks and Romans was a land of fancy and a source of all sorts of wonders and luxuries. The Christian Middle Ages inherited these imaginings and added the myth of a Christian empire with the priestly king John at its helm. This was the shared European heritage. Germans, French and British, however, differed in what they made of it, as Garth Fowden points out. While in Germany the clerical establishment was still very much “in a position to make trouble for scholars who undermined God’s Word ... French Orientalism was agnostic and anthropological in tone, while the Dutch and English were more interested in secular and modern subjects” (Fowden, 2011: 210f.).

In modern Europe, the academic engagement with Sanskrit texts began with Sir William Jones who in 1784 founded the Asiatick Society of Bengal in Kolkata (Calcutta). In the same year, Charles Wilkins published the English translation of the Bhagavadgītā. When Johann Gottfried Herder read this in the late 1780s, he already had an interpretive position ready for it on the basis of the inherited images of the Greeks, the Romans and the Middle Ages. In these images, India figures as the ‘cradle of humanity.’ In an archaic expression of its ‘mind’ it combines poetry, philosophy and religion in a synthetic whole (Herling 2010: 68). This is the foundation upon which the German Romantics build their imaginings of India. In 1789, Jones translates Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* into English. Only two years later, in 1791, Georg Forster’s German translation from the English appears and is read by the young Romantics Novalis, August Wilhelm Schlegel and his younger brother Friedrich Schlegel.

Meanwhile, James Mill, who is influenced and supported by the Utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, writes *The History of British India* (1817). In contrast to Jones, Mill depicts India as backward and plagued by superstition, Brahmanism and social oppression.



In 1819 Mill becomes an employee and leading officer of the British East India Company and exerts an eminent influence on the policy of the Company for the following 17 years. It is figures like him that best match the image of the Orientalist drawn by Edward Said in his criticism of Orientalism (1978). In *personae* like James Mill the criticised nexus between knowledge and power becomes most obvious. According to Said, Orientalism as an academic discipline is geared toward producing the necessary knowledge and legitimation for colonialists to rule countries like India. Depicting India as backward justified British colonialisation just as expert knowledge of its society and laws facilitates colonial rule. This nexus was of course not there in the German case but colonial Orientalism exerted its influence even in Germany. Notably Hegel and Marx are influenced by the utilitarian Image of India as a stagnant society, capable only of the 'Asiatic mode of production' which does not allow it to effectively participate in the emerging global capitalist economy.

To a certain extent, Said exempts German Orientalism from his allegation of actively seeking knowledge of the Other for the sole purpose of power over the Other. As he claimed, Germany did not have a "protracted sustained *national*<sup>6</sup> interest in the Orient" and thus no Orientalism of a politically motivated sort. (Said, 1978: 19). According to Said, German Orientalism was interested in the professional study of texts rather than in the exercise of colonial power (Jenkins, 2004: 97), but it had "in common with Anglo-French and later American Orientalism ... a kind of intellectual *authority* over the Orient," says Said (1978: 19).

This rather positive depiction of German Orientalism by Edward Said has been qualified recently by a number of authors, firstly in view of German entanglements with the Ottomans (Boettcher, 2004; Hagen, 2004), and, secondly, with respect to the involvement of German Orientalists in the attempts of the Russian Tsar to map his newly acquired Central Asian empire (Benes, 2004). Historically, Jenifer Jenkins summarises, German Orientalism draws on two separate sources: "first the presence of Islam in the Holy Land and along the long border between the Ottoman and Holy Roman (later Hapsburg) Empires; and second, the 'Oriental Renaissance' ... [i.e. the] European interest in the ancient worlds and cultures of India ... spurred by the work of Anquetil-Duperron and Sir William Jones and brought to Germany by the

---

6 Unless otherwise mentioned, italics in quoted passages are as in the original.

philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder and the Indologist Friedrich Schlegel” (Jenkins, 2004: 98).

The latter, as we have already seen, fuelled a search for Germany’s ancient national past. When looked upon superficially, constituent elements of Said’s Orientalism seem to be present in German Orientalism: (1) an academic tradition of “teach[ing], writ[ing] about, or research[ing] the Orient” (Said, 1978: 2), and (2) “a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most often) ‘the Occident’” (ibid.). However the thrust of German Orientalism largely diverges from the Anglo-French variety, especially in the third constitutive element of Said’s definition. While, for the colonial powers, Orientalism represented “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (ibid. 3), for the Germans, Orientalism functioned as a construct for their own national audiences. At the time of the Turkish wars this means “to define the contours of the history and politics of the evangelical, confessional, and religious world in later Reformation Germany” (Boettcher, 2004: 102). During the anti-Napoleonic wars, this means modelling the incipient German nation state on an oriental antiquity that was more ancient and hence more true to Biblical conceptions of human origin than even Greek and Roman antiquity.<sup>7</sup> Thus while German Orientalism facilitated Russian colonial expansion into the East, as Tuska Benes (2004) argues, and got entangled in Hapsburg and Prussian (later German) collaborations with the Ottoman Empire, as Nina Berman (2004: 141ff.) and Gottfried Hagen (2004) have shown, it’s own national interest did not lie in dominating the East but in giving credence and coherence to a conception of a German nation that, once politically unified, would merit a position greater or equal to other major European powers.

Criticism of Said’s dealings with German Orientalism, however, extends not only to the applicability of his critique to the German case. It also extends to Said’s very notion of Orientalism. This criticism too must be taken into account when talking about German Orientalism. Bradley Herling, for example, criticises Said for conceiving the pan-European Orientalist discourse as monolithic and “anonymously

---

<sup>7</sup> Tuska Benes points to the fact that even “[t]he invention of historical grammar – which was the most dramatic achievement of early German language scholars [like the Grimm brothers] – responded ... to precedents within comparative philology. German language study tailored itself more closely to the methods and concerns of Orientalists than to the techniques of classical scholars” (Benes, 2008: 118f.).

designed to control and patrol [the Orient, and especially] India with its intellectual practices” (Herling, 2010: 72), which would leave little chance for German intellectuals to escape its ethnocentrism. The conception of an anonymously designed discourse, of course, has its ideological perils. By leaving the western Orientalist no chance of doing it right, Herling argues, Said creates a hermetic position also for the Oriental subject, which is inescapably one of victim-hood. This may relieve the ‘victim’ of responsibility but also then of agency (Bilgrami, 1992: 836). It saves, one may add, the colonial or post-colonial subject the toils of engaging with the possible axiological content of Orientalist knowledge production. It diverts from the possibility of, and the need for, transparency in inter-culturally agreed criteria for truth and analysis, inter-culturally agreed standards of progress, and conditions that necessitate reform, transparent standards of legitimacy for power and governance, etc. Transcultural discourse requires a self-critical hermeneutic consciousness on both sides of the imagined divide. Only then could something like an “emergent reason” (Arkoun, 2006: 33) or a global “internal universalism” (Dusche, 2005: 121) ensue.

Said’s book has triggered a worldwide debate among Orientalists in general and Indologists in particular. It has also influenced academic developments in other such as literary criticism and postcolonial studies. After more than three decades of debate, many scholars agree that Said’s critique of Orientalism, while generally productive in bringing about the critical consciousness that it has, is also riddled with problems. First the use of the category ‘Orientalism’ has been critiqued for being as broad and essentialising as that of ‘the Orient’ which it purports to deconstruct. It neither sufficiently differentiates between different epochs of scholarly engagement with the Orient, nor differentiates between Orientalist scholars, politicians, travellers, poets or adventurers, who all, in their own ways, contributed to European imaginings of the Orient (Lütt et al. 1998: 564). It also, in the words of Bradley Herling, “has a tendency to leave aside differences between disparate national, local, and individual efforts at cross-cultural understanding. It denies flatly that actual advances and progress occurred, despite considerable evidence to the contrary” (Herling, 2010: 73). Thus Herling concludes that “it seems sensible to remain open to the possibility that some Orientalist efforts escaped such interests and contributed to cross-cultural understanding” (ibid.). We have to beware not to “see the Indian Other as silent and

passive in the face of an overwhelming, all-powerful European discourse” (ibid.). One may add that anti-Orientalism can be a dangerous tool in the hands of postcolonial nationalists, too. It can be misused to immunise postcolonial elites against critique from within. Anti-Orientalist discourse risks abetting anti-imperialist elites who tend to be prone to identity based structures of political dominance as undemocratic as those of the European masters they ventured to overcome.

In critically reviewing the recent literature on Friedrich Schlegel, I will now try to apply Said’s critique of Orientalism and the critique of Said’s critique to his case in order to arrive at my own assessment. According to Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, early German Orientalists like Friedrich Schlegel shared with their British counterparts “the feeling of superiority over contemporary Indians” (ibid.: 716). However, Tzoref-Ashkenazi does not mention the evidence for his claim. It seems questionable whether intellectuals like Schlegel should have had any feelings towards contemporary Indians at all, since they had never encountered one and were not at all concerned with modern India. Schlegel propagated what he called an ‘Oriental Renaissance’, which according to him would have reversed the Italian Renaissance, which had entailed critical humanist engagement with the Bible that led to the Reformation and the break up of the Medieval world of Latin Christianity into Catholics and Protestants. Schlegel dreamed of re-uniting Europe under the aegis of the Catholic Church. By the time the book appeared, he had just converted to Catholicism together with his erstwhile Jewish wife Dorothea. Tzoref-Ashkenazi, however, rightly points out that Friedrich Schlegel used India for “the construction of national identity and national vision” (ibid.: 718).<sup>8</sup> It is true that “German Indology had an obvious colonial context in that it was born out of British colonial scholarship, from which it received not only information and texts but also its analytical concepts. The emphasis on sacred texts and on reconstructing a primordial India lost in time ... They originated from both the Christian framework within which Indian religions were perceived, and from the contribution of Indian informants, usually Brahmins” (ibid. 718). But Schlegel used these texts and analytical concepts for quite different purposes than British or French Orientalists. One has to thus concur with Tzoref-Ashkenazi when he writes that “Schlegel’s view should be examined in the context of early German nationalism” (ibid. 732). And Schlegel was quite aware of the political

---

8 Cf. Jenkins (2004).

implications of his views, which Robert Cowan (2008: 323) does not acknowledge, when he characterises Schlegel's nationalism as a "spiritual problem". After all, Schlegel joined the service of Metternich as a writer of Austrian propaganda and as a member of the Austrian delegation to the Diet of Frankfurt and the Congress of Vienna. Between 1802 and 1808, Schlegel turned from a republican literary critic to a nationalistic, conservative, Catholic public intellectual.

The notion of Schlegel's Orientalism as a form of "internal colonialism", so termed by Sheldon Pollack and reiterated by Cowen (2008: 334) and Nicolas Germana (2010: 81), also does not seem convincing. In what sense should the notion of colonising or being colonised enter the discourse of the German Romantic? Schlegel, as others before him, like Kant and Herder, was aware that colonialism took place but to him this was something happening elsewhere, not in Europe. Mind you, we are still two hundred years from realising that colonialism leads to 'imperial encounters' and 'entangled histories'. In what sense should Schlegel have "identified with the oriental victims of western imperialism", as Germana and others suggest (ibid. 81, 83), when he was so little interested in modern India and his Indian contemporaries? Rather than speaking of "Schlegel's efforts to define Germany as the oriental Other of Europe," as Germana suggests (ibid. 90), one should speak of *Schlegel attempting to define Germany as the true oriental 'Self' of Europe*. I would like to propose the term 'inverse Orientalism' to describe this.

To a large degree, Friedrich Schlegel's 'positive' Orientalism merely consisted in a 'transvaluation of values' regarding the staple categories of British Orientalism. Thus 'caste', an indicator of backwardness in British Orientalism, is transvalued by Schlegel into a positive sign of political organisation. Schlegel believed that the Medieval hierarchy of estates (Christian clergy, warring noblemen, trading townsfolk and toiling farmers) was a reflection of its origins in the Indian caste system (with Brahmin priests, warring Kshatriyas, trading Vaishyas and toiling Shudras as their equivalents).

### *III. Friedrich Schlegel in Paris. Mutual Perceptions of Germans and French*

Understanding and analysing German and French perceptions of each other in Paris at the time may be more fruitful than interrogating the status of Schlegel's

Orientalism.<sup>9</sup> One wonders how Friedrich Schlegel's French contemporaries perceived him and his fellow Romantics, and how their perceptions and projections in turn influenced him and his perceptions of France and what it stood for. Here Harro Zimmermann's (2009) biography of Friedrich Schlegel offers some valuable insights.

In Germany, prior to Friedrich and Dorothea's relocation to Paris, Friedrich Schlegel had faced one defeat after another. His literary journal *Athäneum* had flopped. His novel *Lucinde* had earned him the reputation of a corrupter of morals. As a consequence he was prohibited from entering the city of Göttingen (Zimmermann, 2009: 167). His circle of friends in Jena was fast dissolving (ibid. 167f.). He was accused by his friends of living beyond his means and incurring huge debts (ibid. 170). Hegel accused him of not living up to what was expected of him as a university lecturer (ibid. 174) and Clemens von Brentano calls him *Herr Friedrich mit der leeren Tasche* (lord of the empty pocket, ibid. 175) as he is not even able to meet the expenses of his doctoral dissertation through his lectures. Wilhelm von Humboldt calls him a *Luftgebilde von Menschen* (figment of air, ibid. 177) Financial strains had increased when Dorothea and Friedrich had moved to Dresden. There they had to pay the *Judenzoll* (municipal tax collected specifically from the Jews) for Dorothea, the daughter of Moses Mendelssohn. At that time she had still not been legally divorced from her husband Simon Veit. Neither had she converted to Christianity (ibid. 176). A last chance is offered by Goethe who helps Friedrich to stage his drama *Alacros* in Weimar, where Friedrich is not generally welcome. The drama flops and thus Friedrich and Dorothea pack up and travel to Paris via the Wartburg, Frankfurt am Main, the Alsace and Metz (ibid. 177). They reach Paris at the end of July 1802 and find a flat at 19, rue de Clichy in the Montmartre area (ibid. 180).

A hint as to how Friedrich Schlegel perceived his new social environment is offered by Henri Chélin (1981): "Schlegel is discomforted by the arrogant irritability of some French, especially Napoleon, vis-à-vis the exquisite productions of the German spirit. Could it be the case that a feeling of powerlessness drives him into the increasing distance to everything that breathes French spirit?" (quoted in Zimmermann, 2009:

---

9 In 1810 Germaine de Staël published her *De l'Allemagne* where she praised the cultural impulses coming from Germany. Through her praise of Herder and other German luminaries she determined the image of Germany in France for the following sixty years. Such praise could not have been so welcome if the anti-French propaganda of the German Romantics and their nationalistic successors would have left much of a trace in France.

180). *Lucinde*, Friedrich Schlegel's novel published a few years earlier gives no indication of any anti-French sentiments. On the contrary, instead of praising the Nordic and Germanic over the French, as he later would, Schlegel denounces "Nordic bad habits" (nordische Unart; 1799: 32) and the "jarring dissonances of our Nordic mother-tongue" (ibid. 18). The French he associates with love and gallantry (ibid. 38; 74).

One wonders, therefore, what might have caused Schlegel's discomfort with Paris and the French? Was it a reaction to how Germans were perceived by the French? The literature and the published sources give little indication. Günter Oesterle points out that reports of the German diplomat Carl Gustav Brinkmann, Rahel Varnhagen and Heinrich von Kleist had cautioned Friedrich and Dorothea against the French (1989: 3). Zimmermann points to the apparent alienation of the 7000 strong German community in post-directorial Paris and the (2009: 184). He cites the memoirs of Sulpiz Boisserée: "the uncertainty and violent suspense in which the population was kept during these times dampened all conditions ... foreigners slowly disappeared, theatre visits and strolls through the city became less frequent ... everyone retired into his own circle of friends" (ibid. 185).

In any case, Friedrich and Dorothea didn't move to Paris out of enthusiasm for France but for financial reasons and also because Paris allowed them to live their unusual alliance undisturbedly. They may have felt, as Dorothea writes, that they will "always remain strangers there" (ibid. 188). However does this explain the violent contempt, almost hate, for everything French, that light up in their writings? Schlegel calls the French "monkeys" and Dorothea calls them "stupid" and "pedantic" (ibid.). "They have so little sense of originality and taste," Dorothea writes in her diary, "that they ignore the prettiest woman if she is not à la mode ... The zoo here is very nice," she concedes, "especially the elephant ... it is indisputably the creature that least belongs here besides me" (ibid. 4). And Schlegel writes: "the character of the French only consists of negations; no imagination, no art, no love, no religion – i.e. quite zero in all directions." (ibid.). For Schlegel the French are "Maschinenmenschen" (robots) "devoid of all love", "slave-like" and "almost out of their mind" (ibid.). They are "envious", "child-like" and display a tendency for "self-aggrandisement" (ibid. 8). They are "intentional" and "self-involved" (ibid. 9).

Schlegel's contempt of French culture and people leads to an increased valorisation of everything German. To Schlegel, Paris is "truly the place where one grows fond of German literature" (Oesterle, 1989: 2, quoting an early letter of Schlegel's from Paris). Schlegel calls French scholars blinkered specialists and claims that Germans alone have an idea of "Studium im Ganzen" (a holistic approach, *ibid.* 8). While the French dislike everything foreign, Germans love everything strange as an "inborn instinct" (*ibid.*). While it is the national character of the French to be exclusively preoccupied with themselves, it is the prerogative of Germans to discover and familiarise themselves with other nations (*ibid.*). Thus in contrast to Germans, the French have "absolutely no concept of universality" (*ibid.* 9). For Harro Zimmermann, "the journalistic purpose of [Schlegel's journal] *Europa* [which he published during his Paris years] ... consisted in fending against German feelings of mediocrity vis-à-vis French culture and in promoting the programmatic idea that it was Germany's destiny to save the continent from its degeneration under French leadership" (2009: 193f.). In his judgement, "Friedrich Schlegel splits off the German Romantic movement from the mainstream of European developments in the arts, before long, only the 'self' can assert a claim for the 'universal'" (*ibid.* 194).

Oesterle reminds us, however, that Friedrich Schlegel was not yet thinking in simple nationalistic terms during his Paris years: "I should not look upon this thoroughness in egotism as a national trait" writes Schlegel in his journal *Europa*. "It only marks the position that it [the French nation] occupies in the general depravity of our age. Even the already mentioned lack of imagination, which is never natural but always the consequence of a forceful or contingent muzzling, can only be attributed to the age, and not to the nation in its original character" (*ibid.* 5). The French nation for Friedrich Schlegel only displays most clearly the general symptoms of the age, which he calls a "confused" and "middling age". In the time of a Manichaean "struggle between the principles of good and bad" Paris, the "modern capital of the world", becomes the "new Sodom" (*ibid.* 6).

To understand the newness of the idea of nationalism at the time, we have to remind ourselves that around 1800 the link between nation and politics did not yet suggest itself. At that time, the Schlegel brothers were still thinking along the lines of an amalgamation of the French and the German nation, a "European patriotism" as they called it (Zimmermann, 2009: 181), to create a politically united Europe. Such dreams



are not to be confounded with any peace-loving cosmopolitanism, as Günter Oesterle (1989) has argued convincingly, for Friedrich Schlegel had already begun to harbour a growing aversion against “a nation that promised to become ever more blunt and brutish” (Zimmermann, 2009: 181). He therefore dropped the idea of a synthetic Franco-German nation in favour of a Nordic nation ruling supreme over all of Europe. For Schlegel, the future Europe should revolve around Germany – Europe’s actual core – and not France. Instead he dreamed of himself being “*the* writer, poet and historian of the nation,” which he imagined to be a “united German and Nordic Empire” to which “all other European countries and nations” should stand in a “relation of (feudal) dependency” (Oesterle, 1989: 10, who quotes a note by Friedrich Schlegel from 1803). This “blueprint ... of nationalism with anti-French and anti-Modern direction of impact” (ibid.) combines the idea of political sovereignty with an ethnically exclusive conception of the nation. It thus marks the inception of the idea of ethnic nationalism in Europe (Dusche, 2010). This nationalism is generated in a spirit of cultural defensiveness and German chauvinism. It uses references to India, Asia and the Orient only to underline its own legitimacy through India’s revered antiquity.

Oesterle has correctly called this ideological turn a “counter revolution” and Schlegel himself testified to it. “In France,” writes Schlegel in his *Philosophische Lehrjahre* (philosophical apprenticeship), “the revolution is merely extinguished, in Germany it has prompted, if not accelerated, a true counter revolution” (1989: 5).

### References

- Arkoun, Mohammed (2006). *Islam. To Reform or to Subvert?* London: Saqi.
- Benes, Tuska (2004). Comparative Linguistics as Ethnology: In Search of Indo-Germans in Central Asia, 1770-1830. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24(2), pp. 117-132.
- (2008). *In Babel’s Shadow. Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Berman, Nina (2004). Thoughts on Zionism in the Context of German-Middle Eastern Relations. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24(2), pp. 133-144.
- Bilgrami, Akeel (1992). What Is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity. In: *Critical Inquiry* 18(4), pp. 821-842.

- Brunschwig, Henri (1947): *La crise de l'état prussien à la fin du XVIIIe siècle et la genèse de la mentalité romantique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Boettcher, Susan Renee (2004). German Orientalism in the Age of Confessional Consolidation: Jacob Andreae's *Thirteen Sermons of the Turk*, 1568. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24(2), pp. 101-115.
- Chélin, Henri (1981). Friedrich Schlegels "Europa". Frankfurt am Main: Lang.
- Cluet, Marc (2004): *La fascination de l'Inde en Allemagne: 1800-1933*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Cowan, Robert B. (2008): Fear of Infinity: Friedrich Schlegel's Indictment of Indian Philosophy in 'Über die Sprache und die Weisheit der Indier'. In: *The German Quarterly* 81(3), pp. 322-338.
- (2008a): New Models for Indo-German Scholarship within the Critical Reappraisal of Orientalism. In: *The Comparatist* 34(3), pp. 47-62.
- Dusche, Michael (2005). Multiculturalism, Communitarianism and Liberal Pluralism". In: Malik, Jamal & Reifeld, Helmut (eds.). *Religious Pluralism in South Asia and Europe*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 120-144.
- (2010): Origins of Ethnic Nationalism in Germany and Repercussions in India. In: *Economic and Political Weekly* 45(22), pp. 37-46.
- (2010a): Ethnischer Nationalismus. Eine kritische Betrachtung. In: Mazumdar, Shaswati et al. (eds.) *German Studies in India*. Munich: Iudicium, pp. 50-67.
- (2010b): Die Geburt des Nationalismus aus dem Geist der Romantik. In: *Akten des XII. Internationalen Germanistenkongress Warschau* (forthcoming).
- Fowden, Garth (2011): Review of Marchand (2009) and Wokoeck (2009). In: *English Historical Review* 126(518), pp. 209-212.
- Germana, Nicholas A. (2010): Self-Othering in German Orientalism. The Case of Friedrich Schlegel. In: *The Comparatist* 34(3), pp. 80-94.
- Hagen, Gottfried (2004). German Heralds of Holy War: Orientalists and Applied Oriental Studies. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24(2), pp. 145-162.
- Herling, Bradley L. (2010): 'Either a Hermeneutical Consciousness or a Critical Consciousness.' Renegotiating Theories of the Germany-India Encounter. In: *The Comparatist* 34(3), pp. 63-79.
- Hoeveler, Diane Long & Cass, Jeffrey (eds.) (2006). *Interrogating Orientalism: Contextual Approaches and Pedagogical Practices*. Columbus: Ohio State University.

- Hutton, Chris (ed.) (1995). *History of Linguistics* (8 Volumes). London: Routledge / Thoemmes: (Vol. 1) Introduction.
- Inden, Ronald (2000). *Imagining India*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jenkins, Jenifer (2004): German Orientalism, Introduction. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24(2), pp. 97-100.
- KFSA *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* Vol. I-XXXV. Edited by Behler, Ernst et al. (1958-1980). Paderborn: Schöningh.
- Knopper, Françoise & Mondot, Jean (2008). *L'Allemagne face au modèle français de 1789 à 1815*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail.
- Kohn, Hans (1950). Romanticism and the Rise of German Nationalism. In: *The Review of Politics* 12(4): 443-472.
- Kulke, Hermann (2010). Lecture at the occasion of the award of the Padma Shri on 7 April 2010 at the India International Centre in New Delhi (personal attendance).
- Leibniz, Gottfried (1717). Unvorgreifliche Gedancken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der Teutschen Sprache. In: Hutton, Chris (ed.) (1995). *History of Linguistics*. London: Routledge: Vol. 1; German edition by Pörksen, Uwe (1983<sup>2</sup>). Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Lütt, Jürgen (1998): 'Heile Welt' oder Rückständigkeit? Deutschland, Indien und das deutsche Indienbild. Das Romantische und das utilitaristische Indienbild Europas. In: *Der Bürger im Staat* 48(1), pp. 60-64.
- Lütt, Jürgen et al. (1998). Die Orientalismus-Debatte im Vergleich: Verlauf, Kritik, Schwerpunkte im indischen und arabischen Kontext. In: Kaelble, Hartmut & Schriewer, Jürgen (eds.). *Gesellschaften im Vergleich. Forschungen aus Sozial- und Geschichtswissenschaften*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, pp. 511-567.
- Marchand, Suzanne L. (2009). *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire. Religion, Race and Scholarship*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mukherjee, Aditya (2011). Empire: How Colonial India Made Modern Britain. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* XLV(50), pp. 73-82.
- Oesterle, Günter (1989). Friedrich Schlegel in Paris oder die romantische Gegenrevolution. In: Fink, Gonthier-Louis (ed.): *Les Romantiques allemands et la Révolution française – die deutsche Romantik und die französische Revolution*. Strasbourg: Université des Sciences Humaines, pp. 163-179. Republished 08/10/2005 at [www.goethezeitportal.de](http://www.goethezeitportal.de) (accessed 11/04/2011).

- Pille, Réne-Marc (2007): Von der Seine zum Ganges. Paris als Geburtsstätte des Indienbilds von Friedrich Schlegel. In: VALENTIN, J.-M. (ed.) Akten des XI. Internationalen Germanistenkongress Paris 2005, Band 9. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, pp. 21-26.
- Pollock, Sheldon (1993): Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj. In: Breckenridge, Carol A. & van der Veer, Peter (eds.). *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rabault-Feuerhahn, Pascale (2008): *L'archive des origines. Sanskrit, philologie, anthropologie dans l'Allemagne du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Cerf.
- Safranski, Rüdiger (2007). *Romantik. Eine deutsche Affäre*. Munich: Hanser.
- Said, Edward W. (1978): *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Schlegel, Friedrich (1799). Lucinde. Ed. Naumann, Ursula (1985). *Friedrich Schlegel. Lucinde. Ein Roman. Mit Friedrich Schleiermachers Vertrauten Briefen über Friedrich Schlegels Lucinde*. München: Goldmann.
- Thiesse, Anne-Marie (2001): La création de identités nationaux. Europe XVIIIe siècle, Paris: Seuil.
- Tzoref-Ashkenazi, Chen (2006): India and the Identity of Europe: The Case of Friedrich Schlegel. In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67(4), pp. 713-734.
- Wokoeck, Ursula (2009): *German Orientalism: The Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800 to 1945*. London: Routledge.
- Zimmermann, Harro (2009): *Friedrich Schlegel oder die Sehnsucht nach Deutschland*. Paderborn: Schöningh.

Dr. Michael Dusche, Berlin  
 Email: [mdusche@gmx.de](mailto:mdusche@gmx.de)  
 Homepage: [www.dusche.de](http://www.dusche.de)