

The Legacy of Edward Said: An Exchange between Rayyan Al-Shawaf and David Zarnett

Rayyan Al-Shawaf replies to David Zarnett

Democratiya 12 featured an article serving as a double-review of Ibn Warraq's *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* and Daniel Martin Varisco's *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*. The review was written by David Zarnett, whose unrelentingly positive treatment of Ibn Warraq's book leaves much to be desired. Equally disturbing, however, is Zarnett's use of the review as a springboard to hurl a litany of false accusations against Edward Said, and to engage in a weird and highly misinformed discussion of Zionism and the Palestinians – amongst other misadventures. As a result, before I address Ibn Warraq's problematic book, I have found it necessary to tackle Zarnett's misrepresentation of Edward Said's position on a number of issues, as well as his misconceptions regarding important political events and personalities. In fact, this section (Part I) of my article is a good deal longer than that dealing with Ibn Warraq's book, and is divided into several sub-sections. Part II deals with a few of the many deficiencies from which Ibn Warraq's book suffers.

PART I: Zarnett's Article

General Observations

Zarnett can be extraordinarily naïve. For example, drawing on Ibn Warraq's discussion of the British navy's mobilisation against slavery in the early 19th century, he innocently asserts that 'the final abolition of the slave trade was brought about by the military manoeuvres of the British Imperial Navy.' Officially, yes, but history tells another story. Marika Sherwood's recent *After Abolition: Britain and the Slave Trade Since 1807* demonstrates that despite its issuing of the Slave Trade Act in 1807 and the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, Britain continued to be involved in slavery until the 20th century.

Simplistic characterisations of complex phenomena are another problem. Zarnett believes that the Iranian revolution was 'heavily influenced by a political ideology rooted in a particular interpretation of Islam,' something he accuses Edward Said of ignoring. In fact, it is exceedingly tricky to speak of a distinct ideology behind the

Iranian revolution. What is absolutely certain, however, is that the revolution was not caused by a mass desire on the part of Iranians to implement Khomeini's version of Islam, but by a confluence of interests temporarily uniting ideologically disparate groups –from the wealthy Bazaar merchants to Shiite clerics, underground leftist political parties, pro-Khomeini Islamic activists, and nationalists – all of which opposed the Shah's dictatorial rule. Significantly, many members of the Shiite clergy who joined the revolution were not aligned with Khomeini. These clerics would later oppose his radical reinterpretation of Shiite Islam; together with clerics who initially backed Khomeini but later fell out of favour, they would suffer the terrifying consequences of dissent.

Nikki Keddie is arguably the world's foremost living Iran scholar and the author of several critically acclaimed works on Iran, including the classic *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretative History of Modern Iran*, later revised and expanded as *Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. Writing in 1982, Keddie explained that for a long time after the ideologically disparate revolutionaries came to power in February 1979, the direction of the new Iran remained unclear:

The period since the revolutionary victory of February 11, 1979 has sometimes been divided both by Iranians and Westerners into three 'revolutions.' The first, from victory till the taking of the American hostages on November 4, 1979, was characterized by a coalition government dominated by secular, or relatively secular, liberals, while at the same time an originally secret Revolutionary Council dominated by clericals, and Khomeini himself, often made the real decisions. This could be called 'dual government' or a period like that of Kerensky's government before the Bolshevik revolution. The second was a period of increased radicalization culminating in the dismissal of the first elected president, Bani Sadr, in June 1981, after he and the strong left Islamic movement, the Mojahedin-e Khalq, turned against a government more and more monopolized by the clerical radicals of the Islamic Republic Party and by Khomeini. The third revolution encompassed this final break with religious liberals and leftists, and has continued until now. [1]

A recently published book by one of America's finest Middle East journalists provides an excellent overview of the Iranian revolutionaries' internecine struggle. *The Washington Post's* Robin Wright (whose books on Iran include *The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran* and *In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade*) provides a succinct description of the Iranian revolutionaries'

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factional infighting in *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East*. She sketches how it took until October 1981 for Khomeini and his followers to bring the entire governing apparatus of Iran under their control. [2]

Zarnett's profound ignorance of the Iranian revolution and Iran itself is on fuller display elsewhere. [3]

Edward Said and the Deficiencies of his Political Analysis

Echoing Daniel Martin Varisco, Zarnett holds that Said should have paid more attention to Orientals themselves in *Orientalism*. This is a common refrain and not entirely without merit, even though the express purpose of Said's book is to explore Westerners' perceptions of the Orient and Orientals, not the latter's perceptions of themselves, the West or Westerners. Incomprehensibly, however, Zarnett proceeds to claim that Said ignored Orientals in his other writings, specifically when adopting political positions on contemporary phenomena. On this point, Zarnett makes several specific accusations.

He begins with the following claim: 'In his analysis of the Iranian Revolution, Said systematically failed to consider the ideas and political programme of the Ayatollah Khomeini.'

This statement is true, though it should not be taken to mean that Said refrained from criticising Khomeini, his ideology or any number of his individual decisions. Equally important, however, was Said's attempt to draw attention to a subject discussed above: the inner turbulence of the revolution. For a long time, it was uncertain what the new Iran would look like – a theocracy was far from inevitable. Nikki Keddie has written: 'The more modern groups came to think they could trust Khomeini to set up a modern liberal government, especially as this was the image of Khomeini that he put forth in 1978-79 under the influence of his young non-clerical Paris advisers.' [4] Indeed, Khomeini himself stated: 'Our intention is not that religious leaders should themselves administer the state.' [5]

Soon enough, there occurred a protracted and violent struggle – between Islamists loyal to Khomeini, liberals, communists and 'Islamic Marxists' of the Mojahedin-e Khalq variety, amongst others – from which the ruthless Khomeini and his followers emerged triumphant. Said lamented: '*Very little of this struggle was reported in the United States while it was taking place.*' [6] The fact that the Islamists eventually

triumphed meant that the earlier one-dimensional media coverage did not need to be rectified, and many journalists and pundits could adopt a self-congratulatory tone about their decision, from the outset, to focus on the Islamic component of the revolution.

Zarnett then addresses the subject of Kuwait and the Gulf War: 'During the Gulf War, [Said] made little mention of the plight of the Kuwaitis who were suffering under a brutal occupation as a result of Ba'athist imperialism.'

Though Zarnett is fully entitled to believe that Said should have written more about Kuwait's suffering under Iraqi occupation, he is incorrect in asserting that Said made 'little mention' of this issue. Said condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait repeatedly and unreservedly.

Said's earliest article on Iraq's occupation of Kuwait appears to have been written immediately following the invasion and was published in the *Christian Science Monitor* on 13 August 1990, eleven days after Iraqi forces entered Kuwait. The article begins, 'Saddam Hussein is an appalling dictator whose rule in Iraq has turned the place into a graveyard for democracy.' [7] A little later on, Said addresses Kuwait's suffering directly. 'The disappearance of a society due to invasion and annexation is grave and tragic. The scale of human sorrow that will attend Kuwait's demise is horrific: Lives will be permanently disrupted or lost, families separated, work and livelihoods ended.' [8]

Similar comments were made in subsequent articles written during and after the first Gulf War. In mid-2000, ten years after penning the article quoted above, Said wrote the following: 'Iraq is still paying Kuwait for the few months of its occupation in 1990 and 1991, and that restitution is as it should be.' [9]

How did Said himself respond to critics who claimed that he ignored or even supported Baathist Iraq's crimes? When such accusations were made because he opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Said wrote:

To my Kuwaiti critics, do I need to remind them that I publicly opposed Ba'ath Iraq during the only visit I made to Kuwait, in 1985, when in an open conversation with the then minister of education Hassan el-Ibrahim I accused him and his regime of aiding and abetting Arab fascism in their financial support of Saddam Hussein? I was told then that Kuwait was proud

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to have committed literally billions of dollars to Saddam's war against 'the Persians,' as they were then contemptuously called, and that it was a more important struggle than someone like me could comprehend. I remember clearly warning those Kuwaiti acolytes of Saddam Hussein about him and his ill will against Kuwait, but all to no avail. [10]

Zarnett becomes more categorical in his next assertion: '[Said] also failed to speak out for the human rights of the Iraqi Kurds who were victims of the most brutal Iraqi state aggression.'

This is quite simply untrue. Said openly condemned '[Saddam's] persecution of the Shias and Kurds.' [11] Here is a more extensive quote, taken from an article written in 1991:

The behavior of the Iraqi regime has been disgraceful: repressive at home, mischievously adventurous and violent abroad. Most recently in its illegal occupation and annexation of Kuwait, it brought destruction upon its people, first through American bombing and mass devastation, then through a merciless persecution of its own population, especially the Kurds, persecuted, betrayed, and in danger yet again of being abandoned. [12]

Note that in the above quote, Said not only refers to the Iraqi Baath regime's persecution of the Kurds (and its invasion of Kuwait), *but blames the regime itself for the American bombing of Iraq.*

Finally, Zarnett makes his most outrageous allegation: 'Said felt compelled to only speak of human rights abuses committed by America and Israel.'

This statement is blatantly false – if not merely because of the above examples in which Said condemns the Iraqi Baath regime. Incredibly, however, Zarnett seems to forget that he has just finished bashing *Orientalism*, which delves into abuses committed by European powers against colonised peoples, with very little discussion of the US and Israel.

Said wrote about abuses committed by a range of countries, groups and individuals. He often mentioned human rights abuses by undemocratic Arab states, [13] and referred in passing to phenomena such as apartheid South Africa; [14] Turkey's persecution of Armenians in 1915 [15] and Kurds today, [16] as well as its 1974

invasion of Cyprus; [17] the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan; [18] Bosnians suffering ethnic cleansing; [19] and Russia's violent suppression of successive rebellions in Chechnya – singling out Boris Yeltsin for blame in this last case. [20]

It is also important to note that Said, who never played down the horrors or significance of the Holocaust, consistently condemned Palestinian terrorism against Israelis. [21]

None of this is to deny that Said was overly suspicious of the United States, and that he stubbornly refused to entertain the possibility that American political influence and military might could be, and sometimes is, used to benefit oppressed peoples. There is also no question that Edward Said's *Weltanschauung* was Palestinocentric, and that when he wrote about victims he wrote mostly about Palestinians. Yet even here the US and Israel were hardly the only victimisers. Reading *The Question of Palestine* and *The Politics of Dispossession*, for example, reveals that whether it was Jordan's Black September crackdown in 1971, the massacres committed by the Christian Phalangists during the Lebanese civil war, official discrimination practised by the Lebanese state or Kuwait's post-liberation vengefulness, Said pulled no punches when Palestinians were wronged by fellow Arabs.

Of equal significance was Said's criticism of the Palestinian Authority – the Fatah-dominated outgrowth of the Palestine Liberation Organisation that came to administer the autonomous regions within Gaza and the West Bank following the Oslo agreement – and its president, Yasir Arafat (see, for example, almost every essay in *Peace and its Discontents*). Tony Judt addresses this issue in his foreword to *From Oslo to Iraq and the road map*, a book filled with such criticism:

Said was above all concerned with addressing and excoriating his fellow Arabs. It is the ruling Arab regimes, especially that of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, who come in for the strongest criticism here: for their cupidity, their corruption, their malevolence and incredulity. This may seem almost unfair – it is, after all, the United States that has effective power, and Israel that was and is wreaking havoc among Edward Said's fellow Palestinian – but Said seems to have felt it important to tell the truth to and about his *own* people, rather than risk indulging 'the fawning elasticity with regard to one's own side that has disfigured the history of intellectuals since time immemorial' (December 2000). [22]

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Said was so critical of the Palestinian Authority's lack of democracy and its human rights abuses (including arbitrary arrests and torture), as well as Arafat's autocracy, corruption, stupidity and lack of leadership skills – 'Arafat's model of rule is based entirely on coercion and personal gain' [23] – that the Palestinian leader banned Said's books from circulation in areas controlled by the PA.

In short, only by ignoring thousands upon thousands of words can one conclude that in his writings Said blamed only the US and Israel for human rights abuses. It is true that in many of the articles from which the above quotes are culled Said criticises the US and Israel heavily, *but to ignore his criticisms of others is fundamentally dishonest.*

The Origins of Edward Said's Political Views

Zarnett is not satisfied with making the above baseless accusations. He goes much further, claiming that 'Said's political positions on the real Orient stem directly from his arguments made in *Orientalism*.' Indeed, according to Zarnett, '*Orientalism* is the soil in which Said's political positions are rooted.' [24]

It is difficult to pinpoint the source of Edward's Said's political views. There is no reason to doubt Said's own account – as it appears, for example, in the introduction to *The Politics of Dispossession* or in chapter 11 of *Peace and its Discontents* – that he became politicised by the Six-Day war of 1967 and the Palestinian reawakening brought about by Arab defeat. (Indeed, a cursory glance at Said's oeuvre indicates that his political writings all came after 1967.) It was a decade after his first foray into political analysis that Said produced *Orientalism* (1978). Years of opposing Israel's oppression of the Palestinians and the United States' wholesale support of such oppression would lead him controversially to locate Israeli and American policies within a larger historical tradition of Western attitudes toward Arabs and Muslims.

The admittedly problematic enterprise that is *Orientalism*, then, should properly be viewed as having its origins in the author's sense of Palestinian victimisation and his political beliefs regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To claim, as Zarnett does, that Said's political positions on Israel and Palestine (amongst other issues pertaining to the 'real Orient') stemmed from his views on Orientalist scholarship is to get it backwards.

One wonders, also, what Zarnett would make of the fact that Said's political positions evolved with time. Long a supporter of a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (a position formally endorsed by the PLO in 1988), Said came to change his mind in the last decade of his life and – largely because of entrenched and growing illegal Jewish settlement in the West Bank – began advocating a binational state. This is most evident in the essays collected in *From Oslo to Iraq*, and receives mention in the foreword by Tony Judt.

The most sinister aspect of Zarnett's sophistry is the implication that Said's arguments regarding Israel/Palestine can be summarily dismissed. If Ibn Warraq is correct that Edward Said was a 'fraud' [25] whose *Orientalism* is a piece of 'inherent dishonesty, charlatanry and imposture,' [26] and if Zarnett can convince us that Said's arguments against Zionism and for a free and independent Palestine derive from the spurious reasoning employed in *Orientalism*, we might feel tempted to consign to oblivion arguably the most eloquent and persuasive defence of the Palestinian cause.

Unfortunately, Zarnett's logic is faulty in the extreme. Though the evidence points to the 1967 war and its effects – not to conclusions reached in *Orientalism* – as having played the primary role in stimulating Said's political consciousness and guiding his subsequent approach to the Palestinian cause, the point ultimately is moot; *Said's political arguments should be considered on their own merits, regardless of their origin*. Realising this helps one to understand that it is entirely possible to hold different views of Said's different writings. If one agrees with Said's arguments regarding the Palestinian question, one need not necessarily second the conclusions reached in *Orientalism*, even if one believes that the latter was in some sense an outgrowth of Said's approach to Israel/Palestine. And if a reader agrees with *Orientalism's* theses, it does not become incumbent upon him/her to support Said's views on Palestine, even if such views are improbably thought to have originated with *Orientalism*.

Zarnett cannot understand this elementary truth, and resents the fact that in Varisco's book '[i]t is implied that Said's political positions speak for themselves and thereby require no justification.' Indeed, Zarnett seems oblivious to the fact that such an implication conforms rather well to universal norms regarding academic debate. The justifications – or lack thereof – for Said's political positions on Israel/Palestine are to be found in the very arguments he employs when tackling such matters, meaning that any attempted refutation should begin and end with a

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dissection of these arguments. *The question of origin is purely of biographical interest, for it is the cogency of the argument that should carry the day.*

Zionism and the Palestinians

Zarnett's attempt to discredit Said's political views is set in motion at least in part by a bizarre tangent, itself worth examining. Zarnett manages to bring Mahmoud al-Zahhar of Hamas into a difference of opinion between Varisco and Said regarding the proper way to characterise the below statement by the late Golda Meir, former prime minister of Israel:

There were no such thing as Palestinians. When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state? It was either southern Syria before the First World War, and then it was a Palestine including Jordan. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.

Zarnett is unhappy that Varisco, who dismisses Said's charge that Meir's above statement is 'deeply Orientalist,' should instead describe it as '[d]eeply Zionist' and 'offensive to all but staunch partisans.' Zarnett proceeds to explain that:

[I]n opposing Said's essentialism on Orientalism, Varisco seems to adopt an essentialist understanding of Zionism. Ze'ev Jabotinsky, a staunch Zionist partisan among others, recognised in his 1923 essay *The Iron Wall* that there were two nations in Palestine. Conversely, *The Economist* recently published an article quoting Hamas Foreign Minister Mahmoud Zahhar (hardly a Zionist) who echoed (without attribution) the words of Meir: 'We [Palestinians] were never an independent state in history... We were part of an Arab state and an Islamic state.'

Had Zarnett looked a little more closely at al-Zahhar's statement, he would have noticed that it is neither the 'converse' of Jabotinsky's recognition that there were two nations in Palestine, nor quite an 'echo' of Meir's claim that there never existed a Palestinian people.

The significance of Jabotinsky's two-part essay 'The Iron Wall' was that it recognised that the Palestinians – despite their perceived backwardness – constituted a nation,

rather than some undifferentiated mass. [27] This was considered progressive for its day and set the stage for Jabotinsky's important claim that there were two nations in Palestine. Mahmoud al-Zahhar does not address this issue in his statement, let alone provide its converse by claiming that there is only one nation in historical Palestine.

Golda Meir denied that the Palestinians constituted a people (or nation) and pointed out the historical fact that they had never possessed a state of their own. In independently observing that the Palestinians never possessed a state of their own, Mahmoud al-Zahhar is not echoing the copyrighted words of Meir – with all that this would entail by way of attribution – but simply making a factual statement. Nowhere, however, does al-Zahhar second Meir's strictly ideological contention that the Palestinians do not constitute a people/nation. [28]

Returning to Zarnett's intention with the above argument, which is to demonstrate Zionism's diversity, one comes across a serious problem. Zarnett accuses Varisco of 'essentialising' Zionism and proceeds to cite Ze'ev Jabotinsky's perception of the Palestinians as being very different from Golda Meir's. This is technically true, but in practice it meant nothing.

Perhaps Zarnett is ignorant of everything Jabotinsky wrote from 1923, when the 'The Iron Wall' was first published, until his death in 1940. In 'The Iron Wall,' to which Zarnett refers, Jabotinsky acknowledged the presence of two nations in Palestine and even went so far as to express opposition to the idea of expelling the Palestinians. Over the next 17 years, he changed his mind about expulsion:

In a letter to one of his Revisionist colleagues in the United States dated November 1939, [Jabotinsky] wrote: 'There is no choice: the Arabs must make room for the Jews in Eretz Israel. If it was possible to transfer the Baltic peoples, it is also possible to move the Palestinian Arabs,' adding that Iraq and Saudi Arabia could absorb them. Jabotinsky also alluded in a number of articles to the Greco-Turkish 'transfer,' describing it as a brutal, coercive action imposed by the victorious Turks but which proved ultimately beneficial to the Greeks. [29]

Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether Jabotinsky was childishly naïve or cruelly cynical. Consider this statement: 'The world has become accustomed to the idea of mass migrations and has almost become fond of them.' More shocking is

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what follows: 'Hitler – as odious as he is to us – has given this idea a good name in the world.' [30]

Jabotinsky's views are even scarier when one realises that the envisaged Jewish state from which he wanted to remove the Palestinians was not simply British mandate Palestine, *but Transjordan as well*. Indeed, the demand to incorporate Transjordan (now Jordan) into a Jewish state largely free of Arabs was at the very core of Revisionist Zionism, of which Jabotinsky was the founding father. [31]

Had Jabotinsky lived until 1948, he would have seen his wish to transfer his Arab neighbours largely fulfilled – at least from British mandate Palestine. At any rate, what is important here is that for all their ideological differences, when it came to the expulsion of the Palestinians Golda Meir and Ze'ev Jabotinsky were two sides of the same coin. Meir maintained that the Palestinians did not constitute a nation; for this reason, they didn't count, and she had no problem with their expulsion. Jabotinsky maintained that the Palestinians were in fact a nation; nevertheless, he wanted to expel them. Given their shared political position on the issue of expulsion, is it conceivable that their ideological divergence should make any difference to a Palestinian expellee?

Not only is Zarnett off-base in attributing undue significance to the ideological divergence between Meir and Jabotinsky on the subject of Palestinian nationhood, but ultimately their shared political position is symptomatic of the manner in which Zionists of various ideological stripes coalesced around expulsion of the Palestinians. Historians such as Nur Masalha have shown that support for expulsion of the Palestinians among pre-1948 Zionists cut across all ideological divisions. [32] This is even apparent today in contemporary Zionists' evaluations of the expulsion.

For example, Israeli historian Benny Morris documented the Palestinians' flight in 1947-49, attributing it to Zionist attacks, Palestinian fears of such attacks, direct expulsion at the hands of Zionist forces, and Arab calls for the Palestinians to evacuate. [33] In retrospect, Morris regrets that the Zionists/early Israelis did not expel more Palestinians: 'If [Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion] had carried out a full expulsion – rather than a partial one – he would have stabilized the State of Israel for generations ... The non-completion of the transfer was a mistake.' [34]

Zeev Sternhell is an Israeli historian, liberal-left Zionist and Holocaust survivor whose views on a number of Palestinian-related issues, including the 2000 intifada,

differ greatly from those of Morris. Yet when it comes to the expulsion of the Palestinians, he is not quite so different; a shocked Edward Said wrote of how, during a conference in Paris, Sternhell 'insisted...that although it was morally wrong to expel Palestinians, it was necessary to do so.' [35]

PART II: Ibn Warraq

Ibn Warraq's *Defending the West*

Zarnett improbably manages all of the above in an article ostensibly dedicated to covering Ibn Warraq's *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* and Daniel Martin Varisco's *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*. There is, of course, plenty of discussion by Zarnett of these two books, and it is Ibn Warraq's *Defending the West* that is the focus of this section of my article. [36] In one sense, *Defending the West* is a work of synthesis that brings together the scholarship of several historians whose findings disprove Said's assertions. Yet this focused endeavour is framed by Ibn Warraq's much more ambitious ideological argument in defence of 'the West.' As such, *Defending the West* is markedly different from another recent book on the subject of *Orientalism*. Though somewhat meandering, Robert Irwin's *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* shows how and why Said was often wrong, but does not construct civilisational meta-narratives in the process. An earlier book, A.L. Macfie's *Orientalism* (not to be confused with his *Orientalism: A Reader*) provides a good overview of the debate between supporters and opponents of Said's theses.

As it happens, I reviewed *Defending the West* for the *San Antonio Express-News*; my review ran on 23 November 2007, shortly after the book's publication. Unfortunately, spatial constraints necessitated drastic cuts – the book-review sections of newspapers across the world are shrinking steadily – but the general points of my argument were retained. Although I am providing a link to my short review, [37] this article will itself include (brief) quotes from the review's beginning and end in order to give readers an idea of my overall views before I explore them in greater detail. First, however, I want to draw attention to two problematic aspects of Zarnett's review of Ibn Warraq's book.

Zarnett's propensity for linguistic infelicities notwithstanding, his choice of words at times seems to bespeak a frighteningly crude and simplistic historical outlook. This is even more troubling given his criticism of precisely such a trait. Addressing *Orientalism*, Zarnett writes of 'the binary-thinking that Said rhetorically opposed

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but intellectually promoted' and later '[t]he simplicity of Said's binary mode of thought.' Later still, he claims that Varisco falls short of his book's goal 'to attack binary modes of thought' of the kind represented by Said. Yet for a truly binary mode of thought, one need look no further than Zarnett's own outlook, as manifested in his preceding sentence: 'In fact, past *Orientalism* housed both progressive trends worthy of praise and regressive trends worthy of condemnation.' Elsewhere, Zarnett uses the term 'nuanced' to describe historical evaluations grounded in a regressive/progressive binary. [38]

The second issue is far more important. Zarnett offers no criticism whatsoever of Ibn Warraq's book (his criticisms of Varisco all tellingly pertain to the latter's points of agreement with Said), despite *Defending the West's* many deficiencies. Zarnett even attempts to pre-empt censure of Ibn Warraq by alerting us to what misguided or even malicious critics will inevitably say about his book: 'Warraq's views will be roundly dismissed as "neo-conservative" and as an apologia for imperialism.'

Having noted his obliviousness to lacunae marring *Defending the West*, there is nothing more for me to say about Zarnett. About Ibn Warraq, however, there is plenty, and the following will show that there are a good many problems with his book that Zarnett could have chosen to cite. To make this section of my article more manageable, I have decided to limit my discussion to the sloppiness of Ibn Warraq's scholarship, a problem that taints his largely successful case against Said's *Orientalism*. Though I describe Ibn Warraq's larger argument in defence of 'the West' and point out its flaws, I do not delve into this subject. There are also several important issues I do not discuss at all, including Ibn Warraq's take on Said's explication – mostly in *Culture and Imperialism* – of Austen and Kipling. I also do not address minor issues, such as Ibn Warraq's objectionable style. [39]

In my review for the *Express-News*, I briefly encapsulate the problem with Ibn Warraq's larger argument: [40]

Too often, Warraq's otherwise welcome praise of various Western scholars' and institutions' quest for knowledge becomes a shrill hosanna to 'the West' – conceived of as a distinct and timeless entity – as well as 'European man (who), by nature, strives to know.'

Indeed, viewing the West as a unified and cohesive whole animated by 'rationalism, universalism, and self-criticism,' which Warraq calls 'the tutelary

guiding lights of, or the three golden threads running through, Western civilization,' is this book's major weakness. Even when Europe was riven by ideological battles over scientific inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge itself, the author sees only reason and progress. [41]

I conclude the review with an acknowledgment of *Defending the West's* central achievement, while pointing to the fact that a) this achievement is attenuated somewhat by several deficiencies and b) the book's larger argument fails outright.

Despite several drawbacks, 'Defending the West' remains in its immediate focus a good and necessary corrective to Edward Said's 'Orientalism.' Yet in its broader attempt to conflate reason and 'the West' – instead of specific and often embattled Western philosophical currents – this book inevitably founders. [42]

Before attending to the purpose of this section of my article, let me expand a little on the above point. By inflating the importance of personal bias and colonial affiliation, Edward Said enabled the lazy to dismiss scholars without even glancing at their work; a spicy *ad hominem* attack would suffice. Ibn Warraq shows clearly that Said's generalisations about Orientalists are wild and fanciful, yet proceeds to make his own. For Said, Orientalists are a cabal, for Ibn Warraq, a gathering of saints; for both, Orientalists typify a distinctly Western conception of knowledge, *and often even the West itself*. [43] Much of the debate since 1978 has been whether Orientalists aggrandised the scope and import of their findings in a pseudo-scholarly attempt to portray the Orient as monolithic. How ironic, then, that both Edward Said and Ibn Warraq should – by examining certain Orientalists and their works – draw radically different but similarly overarching and simplistic conclusions about the Occident.

To return to the aforementioned 'drawbacks' of Ibn Warraq's largely successful rebuttal of Said: I shall address several specific weaknesses (but often also specific strengths) of Ibn Warraq's refutation of Said's *Orientalism*. The discussion of Said in the below refers to *Orientalism*, while that of Ibn Warraq to *Defending the West*. All page numbers in the body of the text are from *Defending the West*.

Ibn Warraq is absolutely right about the inexcusability of *Orientalism's* scant discussion of German Orientalists, and justly takes Said to task for largely ignoring scholars – German and other – who do not fit into his conception of Orientalism

as having gone hand-in-hand with imperialism. [44] Yet it is Ibn Warraq's section on India that is arguably the book's strongest suit. Though he does not reveal that Hindu-Muslim rivalry has traditionally played a role in Indian views of British rule (it was the anti-Hindu Muslim Mughals whom the British dislodged), he shows the palpable appreciation several Indian historians feel toward the cultural and scientific contributions made by specific British colonists/Orientalists to their country. Also on the topic of his native India, Ibn Warraq offers this brilliant observation – which might just as easily have been made of the current American enterprise in Iraq: 'Those historians or polemicists like Said who dwell on the iniquities of individuals – their venality, their greed, their arrogance, or even their racism – are missing the point. It is to the institutions inaugurated, installed, and made to function impersonally that we should pay attention.' (p. 230) Speaking of India, Ibn Warraq singles out elected parliamentary government, the rule of law and the Indian Civil Service as the most important institutions introduced by the British.

Commendably, Ibn Warraq urges readers to judge scholarship on its own merits, irrespective of extraneous considerations. 'It is worth pointing out that often the motives, desires, and prejudices of a scholar have no bearing upon the scientific worth of a scholar's contribution.' (p. 39) Yet instead of expounding on this critical point, itself underlain by a resolute faith in objective knowledge – the existence of which Said often seemed to reject – Ibn Warraq frequently denies that Orientalists harboured ulterior motives to begin with, or claims that any prejudice on their part was pro-Oriental. [45] This simplistic and ultimately inaccurate appraisal obscures the need to confront the more important issue of whether the findings of scholars with a known anti-Islam bias should be dismissed, and whether Orientalists with ties to a colonial administration should be considered scholars at all. Though Ibn Warraq rightly believes that a scholar need not like Islam in order to know it, and that an Orientalist in the employ of a colonial administration did not necessarily slant his work to suit an overall imperial endeavour, this crucial point merits more than a few remarks.

The point takes on additional importance when Ibn Warraq criticises Western universities today for accepting donations from Arab sources, *as though it were a given that professors subsequently put a pro-Arab or pro-Muslim spin on their lectures*. Yet even as he rails against the epidemic of Western universities being 'corrupted by Saudi and other Arab money,' (p. 69) he provides no examples of such corruption, and cites only one instance in which anything untoward happened; in 1986,

Newcastle University professor Denis MacEoin (Daniel Easterman) [46] lost his post, abolished when Saudi sponsors unhappy with the way he taught Islam withdrew their funding for the programme they had established.

In certain instances, Ibn Warraq may have misunderstood Said's arguments. For example, in chapter five he painstakingly demonstrates the importance of work done by Western archaeologists in the Orient. Yet Said did not deny that Orientalists played a seminal role in excavating the Near East and India's past. Rather, he (improbably) claimed that this was part of an elaborate endeavour by Orientalists to prove that, whereas Europe's glory was contemporary, the Orient's greatness lay in antiquity; consequently, it behoved Westerners to enlighten benighted Orientals by unearthing their glorious past for them. Said's failing was that he never confronted the thorny issue of why so many Orientals themselves expressed no interest in their own history, something for which he is justly chided by Ibn Warraq.

Although Ibn Warraq does well to provide an overview of Edward Said's Arab critics, he is wrong to claim that Arabs and Muslims inhabit 'cultures...immune to self-criticism.' (p. 246) A glance at any major Arabic-language newspaper – especially the editorials and opinion pages during a given week – will reveal articles decrying dictatorship, terrorism and Islamic extremism. [47]

A section of *Defending the West's* seventh chapter is concerned with Islamic anti-Semitism. Aside from being necessary, much of this section is informative, including the portion concerned with doctrinal anti-Semitism (as found in the Quran and Hadith) as well as that listing examples of religiously inspired anti-Semitic violence on the part of Muslims at various stages in history. While early Islamic history includes instances of such violence, Ibn Warraq fails to disclose an important fact concerning at least one aspect of his discussion. The earliest account of the massacre of male members of the Jewish Banu Qurayza tribe and the enslavement of women and children was written a century after the alleged atrocity, and has long been deemed unreliable. The 8th century Ibn Ishaq, who wrote a biography of Muhammad in which he refers to the Banu Qurayza, was considered a liar by contemporaries as well as later scholars. [48]

Ibn Warraq does a good job of parsing Said's pretentious and often jargon-filled writing for incoherent statements, and justly lambastes Said for misreading R.W. Southern and Raymond Schwab, two historians whose findings Said misconstrued

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as critical of Orientalist scholarship. He also ridicules Said's defamatory charge that, due to Orientalist misinformation, 'every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.' (p. 32) Yet Ibn Warraq indulges in some calumny of his own, alleging that *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is 'a forgery taken seriously by all Muslims.' (p. 251)

Ludicrously, Ibn Warraq charges that the adamantly secular Said intended to legitimise Islamic fundamentalism. Though he quotes historian R. Stephen Humphreys, who considers it 'ironic' (p. 49) that *Orientalism* emboldened Islamists, *Ibn Warraq believes this to have been Said's very purpose, the only irony being that Said himself was not Muslim.* Disturbingly, Ibn Warraq's and others' fanciful verbalisations of Said's 'true' views are not properly demarcated from statements made by Said himself, creating the potential for reader misunderstanding.

Consider the following statement, which occurs during a discussion of rampant conspiracy-mongering in the Arab world:

Edward Said fed into this mentality and reinforced a culture of self-pity: '[I]f only the wicked West and those Zionists would leave us alone, we would be great again as in the time of our forefathers as when one Muslim could fell ten infidels with one blow of the sword.' Needless to say, self-criticism under these circumstances takes great courage and is rather rare in the Middle East. (pp. 80-1)

Inexcusably, Ibn Warraq fails to indicate that he isn't quoting Said here; the quote beginning '[I]f only the wicked West' and ending 'with one blow of the sword' is *Ibn Warraq's own verbalisation of Arab and Muslim self-pity*, which he fancifully argues was shared and reinforced by Edward Said, despite the fact that Said never wrote about Muslims felling infidels. Every indication is that this is a direct quote from Said, with the first letter of the first word having been meticulously encased in brackets as though it had to be changed from lower-case to upper-case so as to better conform to the new context.

Here is a disturbingly similar example – down to the very words employed. Again, there is no indication that the hysterical cry around which quotation marks have been placed is Ibn Warraq's tendentious paraphrasing of Edward Said's argument, not a quote from the book:

[*Orientalism*] taught an entire generation of Arabs the art of self-pity – 'were it not for the wicked imperialists, racists and Zionists, we would be great once more' – encouraged the Islamic fundamentalist generation of the 1980s, bludgeoned into silence any criticism of Islam, and even stopped dead the research of eminent Islamologists who felt their findings might offend Muslim sensibilities and who dared not risk being labelled 'Orientalist.' (p. 18)

Elsewhere, Ibn Warraq begins a paragraph thus:

The most pernicious legacy of Said's *Orientalism* is its implicit support for religious fundamentalism, and on its insistence that 'all the ills [of the Arab world] emanate from Orientalism and have nothing to do with the socio-economic, political and ideological makeup of the Arab lands or with the cultural historical backwardness which stands behind it.' (p. 53)

Again, it is not Edward Said insisting that 'all the ills [of the Arab world] emanate from Orientalism' but *another writer imputing these views to Said*. This is not at all clear, though endnotes help us determine the source. In this case, Ibn Warraq is quoting Emmanuel Sivan's translation of Nadim al-Bitar's characterisation of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Twice-borrowed mischaracterisations do not generally make for good scholarship, but that doesn't seem to stop Ibn Warraq.

Finally, here is a cavil that – while very minor compared to the above issues – helps further illustrate Ibn Warraq's general sloppiness. In one instance wherein Ibn Warraq accuses Said of ignoring Orientalists who were sympathetic to Islam and Muslims, he cites W.S. Blunt, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Marmaduke Pickthall and E.G. Browne as examples of 'quite deliberate omissions' (p. 37) on the part of Said. In fact, except for Montagu, all of the above figures were cited – albeit in passing – by Said. Ibn Warraq's mistake here should be multiplied by two; even as he wrongly blames Said for omitting E.G. Browne (amongst others), he notes that Bernard Lewis criticises Said for referring to Browne (amongst others) *only in passing*. (p. 50)

Addendum

In my review, I observe the following regarding *Defending the West*: 'It's also a bit odd that the author, who often rebukes Western liberals for being overly deferential

to Islam, should laud those Orientalists who viewed Islam sympathetically.' [49] Indeed, he even holds aloft the inconsistent Ernest Renan as an example, though it was with Renan's assertion 'Muslims are the first victims of Islam' that Ibn Warraq opens his book *Why I am not a Muslim*. [50] Although Ibn Warraq's shifting and selective approach to history does not mean that his historical and literary observations are incorrect, it does shed light on his insincere method of argumentation. In this addendum, footnotes have been provided for all quotes from Ibn Warraq's *Why I am not a Muslim*, while quotes from his *Defending the West* continue to be placed in parentheses.

Included in the first chapter of Ibn Warraq's *Why I am not a Muslim* is a discussion of European writers from centuries past who held a positive view of Islam; a version of this section was later included in Part I of *Defending the West*. In adapting the section, however, Ibn Warraq changed both its tenor and purpose. In *Why I am not a Muslim*, Ibn Warraq sets out to demonstrate that several 17th and 18th century European writers who praised Islam's supposed tolerance did so in order to emphasise the intolerance of the Catholic Church or Christianity in general. [51] In *Defending the West*, Ibn Warraq retains this explanation for the Islamophilia of Pierre Jurieu, Pierre Bayle, Henri de Boulainvilliers, Voltaire and Gibbon. However, he omits one very important charge that he originally made against such writers; *they were roundly ignorant of Islam*.

Ibn Warraq had different priorities when writing the two books. In the relevant section of *Why I am not a Muslim*, his purpose is to discredit the pro-Islam writings of Europeans, and to show that the Muslim tolerance in which they believed is a 'myth.' In *Defending the West*, however, Ibn Warraq's purpose is to use the very writers he ridiculed as proof that Edward Said's charges of Orientalist bias are unfounded. As a result, Ibn Warraq removes his criticism of their ignorance and naivety. 'Pierre Bayle was much influenced by Jurieu and continued the myth of Islamic tolerance that persists to this day' [52] becomes 'Pierre Bayle was much influenced by Jurieu and continued to sing the praise of Islamic tolerance.' (p. 35) Apparently, Islamic tolerance is no longer a myth, or maybe the issue simply isn't important.

Whereas in *Why I am not a Muslim* Ibn Warraq repeatedly characterises Jurieu and Bayle's positive treatment of Islam as inaccurate, in *Defending the West* he does not characterise it at all. The following statements from *Why I am not a Muslim* are nowhere to be found in *Defending the West*:

For Jurieu and Bayle in the seventeenth century, Turk was synonymous with Muslim; thus, Turkish tolerance turned into Muslim tolerance in general. The two writers showed no knowledge whatsoever of Muslim atrocities ... [I]t was quite fraudulent of Jurieu and Bayle to talk of Muslim tolerance in general on the basis of their scanty knowledge of Islamic history, because the religious situation varied enormously from century to century, in country to country, from ruler to ruler. [53]

In both books, Ibn Warraq discusses Count Henri de Boulainvilliers, who wrote a biography of Muhammad that was published in 1730; in both books, he describes the biography as 'apologetic.' [54] (p. 35) Crucially, however, in *Why I am not a Muslim* Ibn Warraq goes to great lengths to demonstrate that this apologetic biography is essentially of no value: 'Boulainvilliers had no knowledge of Arabic and had to rely on secondary sources; thus his work is by no means a work of serious scholarship. On the contrary it contains many errors and "much embroidery."' [55] Naturally, this characterisation has not been reproduced in *Defending the West* – wherein de Boulainvilliers is paraded alongside others as an example of how several European writers viewed Islam positively – nor has criticism of de Boulainvilliers' work by noted scholars of Islam Arthur Jeffrey and Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje.

The same approach applies to Voltaire. In *Why I am not a Muslim*, Ibn Warraq writes that 'the superficial rationality of Islam' would appeal to a deist like Voltaire, and continues: 'To this was added other false beliefs such as Islam's absolute tolerance of other religions, in contrast to Christian intolerance.' [56] While the former quote is not included in *Defending the West*, the latter becomes: 'To this was added other beliefs, such as the absolute tolerance of other religions, in contrast to Christian intolerance.' (p. 36) *No longer is there any mention of the falsity of the belief that Islam is tolerant of other religions.* Also, by removing the reference to Islam, Ibn Warraq has inadvertently changed the meaning of the rest of the sentence. After all, 'Islam's absolute tolerance of other religions' is quite different from 'the absolute tolerance of other religions.'

Ibn Warraq's discussion of Gibbon in *Why I am not a Muslim* is very important, as he attributes to the 18th century British historian a tremendous influence on European views of Islam for centuries to come. According to Ibn Warraq, 'Gibbon was much influenced by Boulainvilliers in particular, but also by the eighteenth-century Weltanschauung with its myths and preoccupations.' [57] Ibn Warraq

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proceeds to quote Bernard Lewis's criticisms of Gibbon's entire approach to Islam, and then makes his own observations:

Gibbon's deistic view of Islam as a rational, priest-free religion, with Muhammad as a wise and tolerant lawgiver, enormously influenced the way all Europeans perceived their sister religion for years to come. Indeed, it established myths that are still accepted totally uncritically by scholars and laymen alike. [58]

The above – as well as Lewis's criticisms – was conspicuously removed from the version of this discussion that appears in *Defending the West*. Also absent from *Defending the West* is the following observation Ibn Warraq makes in *Why I am not a Muslim*: 'Both Voltaire and Gibbon subscribed to the myth of Muslim tolerance, which to them meant Turkish tolerance.' [59]

To sum up, virtually all descriptions and characterisations have been removed, so that *Defending the West* simply lists various European authors who viewed Islam positively, and who praised it in order to highlight Christian wrongs and Christianity's perceived shortcomings. While Ibn Warraq repeatedly castigates such authors in *Why I am not a Muslim* for their acceptance of 'myths' such as Muslim tolerance, none of this is to be found in *Defending the West*. The issue is significant because the scholarly merit of a corpus of pro-Islam writings hangs in the balance. After all, what use should we have for positive treatments of Islam if they are grounded in factual error? For Ibn Warraq, the answer is clear; he can use them against Edward Said.

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Notes

- [1] Keddie and Hooglund 1986, p. 11.
- [2] Wright 2008, pp. 287-91.
- [3] See Zarnett's 'Edward Said and the Iranian Revolution,' *Democratiya* 9 (Summer 2007). Zarnett's article considers it a given that the Iranian revolution (not just a component thereof) was inherently Khomeinist from the outset, and that a blinkered Edward Said refused to see this.
- [4] Keddie 2003. (This is an online posting of Keddie's paper 'Better than the past.' The paper was presented at UCLA in 2003 and summarises some of the points of her then-upcoming *Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*.)
- [5] Wright 2008, pp. 287-8. This is not to say that Khomeini was entirely consistent in his statements – which may have been a deliberate strategy. He also doubtless benefitted from the confusion surrounding the newfangled term 'Islamic Republic,' which he introduced. No such thing had ever existed, while Iranians were long accustomed to their country being associated in some manner or other with Shiite Islam. Although some Iran observers (including Robin Wright) believe that Khomeini did not initially seek to establish a theocracy, those of his statements to the effect that he did not want clerical rule may well have been a form of *taqiyya*, or dissimulation, which has a long history in Islamic – especially Shiite – tradition. Aided by the fact that few outside his circle of followers had read his work or heard his lectures about the ideal form of Islamic governance, Khomeini could have when necessary obscured a) his unwillingness to be a merely symbolic figurehead uniting an array of ideologically disparate factions and b) his true intention to install clerical rule, with himself at the country's helm.

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- [6] Said 1997, p. 100. (Emphasis Said's).
- [7] Said 1994, p. 278. What makes matters worse is that Zarnett is aware of this statement; he quotes it in his article 'Edward Said and Kosovo,' *Demokratiya* 11 (Winter 2007).
- [8] Said 1994, p. 278.
- [9] Said 2001, p. 353.
- [10] Said 2004, p. 256.
- [11] Said 2001, p. 210.
- [12] Said 1994, p. 157.
- [13] See, for example, Said 2001, p. 161.
- [14] Said 2001, pp. 63-9 and Said 1994, pp. 169-70.
- [15] Said 2001, p. 271.
- [16] Said 2001, p. 212.
- [17] Said 1994, p. 279.
- [18] Said 1994, p. 279.
- [19] Said 2001, p. 212.
- [20] Said 2001, p. 45.
- [21] See, for example, Said 2001, p. 191, in which he writes: 'Terror bombing is terrible, and cannot be condoned.' For an example of a condemnation of a specific terrorist attack, see Said 2001, p. 45.
- [22] Said 2004, p. xi.
- [23] Said 2001, p. 53.
- [24] In passing, Zarnett cites three examples of what he deems to be obvious instances of Said viewing contemporary political problems through the prism of arguments made in *Orientalism*. As I demonstrate above in a separate context, two such examples – Said's allegedly faulty analysis of the Iranian revolution and his alleged insensitivity to the suffering of Iraqi Kurds – are mischaracterisations and therefore fall flat in this or any other context. Zarnett's third example is Said's 'perception of the U.S.-led Oslo Peace Process as a reincarnation of European "peace treaties" to African chiefs.'

Zarnett does not bother to demonstrate how or why the analogy is false; instead, one is left with the impression that Said irrationally equated Israel's approach to the Palestinians with European colonial exploits in (19th century) Africa, one of the subjects discussed in *Orientalism*. In fact, Said made a number of different analogies to emphasise his point that the Palestinians were getting a bad deal with the Oslo Agreement. For example, in 'The Morning After,' which appears as the second chapter of *Peace and its Discontents*, he terms the Oslo Accords 'a Palestinian Versailles' (page 7). On several occasions, Said pointedly compared the projected Palestinian autonomous areas to the Bantustans established by South Africa (see, for example, the concluding chapter in *Peace and its Discontents*). The Bantustan phenomenon – along with the history of apartheid South Africa – is very different from the 'classic' European colonialism practised in Africa, and as such is not discussed in *Orientalism*. After all, whereas *Orientalism* is concerned largely with events which occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Bantustans were established by independent South Africa in the second half of the 20th century.

Even in the discussion from which Zarnett's example seems to have been taken – chapter 14 of *The End of the Peace Process* – in which Said sarcastically compares Arafat to an African 'chief' bought off by French or British colonists, a number of analogies are made. Said cites the relevance of the American Indian model as well as the Bantustan model for pacifying natives – both of which have little or nothing to do with *Orientalism* – in addition to 19th century British and French colonial tactics in Africa. In other words, Said did not view Israel's treatment of the Palestinians solely through the prism of the anti-colonial arguments – specifically concerning white rule in 19th century Africa – that he set forth in *Orientalism*.

[25] Ibn Warraq 2008, p. 247.

[26] Ibn Warraq 2008, p. 295.

[27] Both parts of Jabotinsky's essay can be found online here: <http://www.mideastweb.org/ironwall.htm> (Retrieved 15 May 2008).

[28] Though it is well to note Zarnett's mischaracterisation of al-Zahhar's statement, what is more important is the *absolute irrelevance of all the above statements*, despite Zarnett's indication to the contrary.

For example, that the region of Palestine was long a part of an Arab or Islamic state does not necessarily mean that there should not be an independent Palestine today, or that Israel should not exist. Meanwhile, attempting to demonstrate that Palestinians (or Jews, for that matter) are a nation is a strictly ideological endeavour and as such falls outside the realm of proof. No scientific or universally accepted barometer exists for measuring whether or not a group of people constitutes a nation; as a result, nationalist ideologues are free to make up their own rules. Yet at the end of the day, whether or not Palestinians or Jews are deemed a nation by the powers that be or by anyone else should not in any way impinge upon their rights. If Mahmoud al-Zahhar were to claim that the Palestinians are not a nation unto themselves, but rather part of a larger Arab or Muslim nation, that would not justify their expulsion at the hands of the Israelis in 1948. Human rights don't work that way.

[29] Masalha 1992, p. 29.

[30] Segev 2000, pp. 406-7.

[31] Transjordan was included in the original British mandate for Palestine, but later accorded a separate status. Revisionist Zionists, however, continued to view Transjordan as part of a projected Jewish state.

[32] See Masalha's *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of Transfer in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948.*, quoted above. (As always, there are exceptions, as with the tiny Brit Shalom group, many of whose members improbably considered themselves Zionist. Yet Brit Shalom's espousal of an Arab-Jewish binational state actually stood at variance with the objectives of most Zionists, who wanted an avowedly Jewish state with a clear Jewish majority. Naturally, this made expulsion of the Palestinians inevitable. For more on Brit Shalom, see Segev 2000, pp. 408-10.)

[33] Morris's famous scholarly treatment of the subject is *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*. The revised and updated version includes much additional information and is entitled *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*.

[34] Morris quoted in Shavit 2004.

[35] Said 2001, p. 275. (Sternhell's book on Israel is entitled *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism and the Making of the Jewish State.*)

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- [36] The Arabic 'Ibn' is the equivalent of the Scottish 'Mac'; it means 'son of'. For this reason, it is incorrect to detach 'Warraq' from 'Ibn'; when I refer to the author in this article, it is always as 'Ibn Warraq.' The author's pseudonymous name means 'Son of a Stationer.' Unfortunately, in my review of *Defending the West* for the San Antonio Express-News, 'Ibn' and 'Warraq' were detached at some point in the editing process.
- [37] See bibliography.
- [38] The reference is to Ibn Warraq's supposed defence of an approach to imperialism that judges its effects as either regressive or progressive.
- [39] For example, there is the vicious personal nature of several of Ibn Warraq's attacks on Said. Also, Ibn Warraq has the temerity to include as an appendix to the book his rejoinder to a letter to the editor of the Wall Street Journal, without including the letter itself! (Ibn Warraq published an article in the Wall Street Journal that was very critical of Edward Said. The paper ran a response to the article from one of its readers, followed by Ibn Warraq's rejoinder.)
- [40] The following four quotes are culled from the book's title, page 38, page 57 and page 57, respectively. In the second quote, the explanatory addition 'who' has been encased in parentheses instead of brackets in line with the house style of the San Antonio Express-News.
- [41] Al-Shawaf 2007.
- [42] Al-Shawaf 2007.
- [43] Consider Ibn Warraq 2008, p. 223 – one of many examples in this regard. After quoting British archaeologist Austen Layard, who recounts his experiences in Iraq, Ibn Warraq begins talk of 'the West and its attitude toward knowledge.'
- [44] Said attempted to justify his approach by (wrongly) claiming that British and French scholars pioneered the study of the Orient in a process inextricably linked to British and French colonial designs, and that German Orientalists simply elaborated upon their predecessors' work.
- [45] See, for example, pages 37 and 46-9, but especially 174-97 and 238-44, which are concerned with Orientalists complicit in colonialism – specifically in India. (Pages 43-5, on the other hand, show how Orientalism and imperialism were often entirely unrelated.)
- [46] Denis MacEoin sometimes writes under the pseudonym Daniel Easterman; this was the case with his book *New Jerusalems*, which recounts his experiences at Newcastle University.
- [47] Ibn Warraq has little direct knowledge of Arabic literary affairs, of which his information is second-hand. For example, because he is unfamiliar with the Arabic-language writings of Said's Arab critics, he must rely on Emmanuel Sivan's brief overview of the subject. When writing about reform-minded intellectuals – dead or living – in the Arab world (pp. 81-3), he relies on Barry Rubin, who in turn is obliged to rely on translations for all statements made in Arabic.
- [48] See, for example, W.N. Arafat's 'New Light on the Story of Banu Qurayza and the Jews of Medina,' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, (1976), pp. 100-107, available online at <http://www.haqq.com.au/~salam/misc/qurayza.html> (Retrieved 11 May 2008) and http://www.globalwebpost.com/farooqm/study_res/islam/qurayzah/arafat.html (Retrieved 11 May 2008)
- [49] Al-Shawaf 2007.
- [50] See Ibn Warraq 2003, back of first (non-numbered) page.
- [51] Ibn Warraq also discusses 19th and 20th century scholars such as Hamilton Gibb and Montgomery Watt, distinguishing them from their forebears by claiming that a) they were far more knowledgeable of Islam and b) their intention in praising Islam was to deflect the threat posed by secularism and secular ideas to all religions.

[52] Ibn Warraq 2003, p. 18.

[53] Ibn Warraq 2003, p. 18.

[54] Ibn Warraq 2003, p. 19.

[55] Ibn Warraq 2003, p. 19. (The 'much embroidery' quote used by Ibn Warraq is Holt's in *Historians of the Middle East*, edited by Bernard Lewis and P.M. Holt.)

[56] Ibn Warraq 2003, p. 20.

[57] Ibn Warraq 2003, p. 20.

[58] Ibn Warraq 2003, p. 21.

[59] Ibn Warraq 2003, p. 21.

A Rejoinder to Rayyan Al-Shawaf

David Zarnett

Although Rayyan Al-Shawaf puts a great deal of gusto into his response to my review of Ibn Warraq's and Daniel Martin Varisco's books on Edward Said, it is difficult to agree with many of his points even after they have been stripped of his often intemperate language. It is important to openly debate the strengths and weaknesses of Said's work and of works about Said, but Al-Shawaf's contribution to the debate suffers as he so often either loses sight of issues raised or misrepresents them, resulting in his arguing with a straw man. I would like to correct some of his errors.

Palestine, Zionism and Iran

In an opening remark, Al-Shawaf claims that I engage in a 'weird and highly misinformed' debate about Zionism and the Palestinians. The issue he is responding to is a brief criticism I make of Varisco's description of Golda Meir's sentiment, that the Palestinians did not constitute a people, as 'deeply Zionist.' Such a conclusion, I believe, is inconsistent with Varisco's relentless criticism of the essentialist method of analysis adopted by Edward Said. Arguing against Varisco's belief, I pointed out that Ze'ev Jabotinsky, a significant Zionist figure, accepted the existence of a Palestinian nation. Further, I noted that even anti-Zionists, like Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahhar, had made statements negating the historical existence of a unique Palestinian nation.

Al-Shawaf spends a considerable amount of time attempting to 'debunk' my argument only to then concede the validity of my criticism of Varisco. He then

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transforms the issue into one I did not raise – the issue of transfer or expulsion of Palestinians. He writes that 'Meir maintained that the Palestinians did not constitute a nation; for this reason, they didn't count, and she had no problem with their expulsion. Jabotinsky maintained that the Palestinians were in fact a nation; nevertheless, he wanted to expel them.' Since my point had nothing to do with 'transfer' in Zionist thought and everything to do with the idea of a Palestinian people in Zionist thought, my point remains correct. Al-Shawaf's digressions about 'transfer,' which is, to say the least, a much more difficult and complex issue than his statements suggest, are well beyond the scope of my book review or this response.

Other unjustified charges appear in Al-Shawaf's writing. Consider this example: '[Zarnett's] choice of words at times seems to bespeak a frighteningly crude and simplistic historical outlook.' What exactly did I say to evoke such a response? It is my statement that 'past Orientalism housed both progressive trends worthy of praise and regressive trends worthy of condemnation.' If such a statement evokes accusations of 'frightening crudity,' what adjective would properly be used to describe Said whose basic premise denied any nuance or complexity in Orientalist literature?

Al-Shawaf goes on to write of my 'profound ignorance' regarding the ideological influences of the Iranian Revolution. What justifies Al-Shawaf's hurling of such invective? According to Al-Shawaf my crime was to consider the Iranian Revolution as 'heavily influenced' by 'a political ideology rooted in a particular interpretation of Islam.' The central problem here is that in his rush to disagree, Al-Shawaf misconstrues 'heavily influenced' to mean 'was the only influence.' In spite of the presence of other influences it is simply contrary to historical fact to maintain that Khomeini's version of Islam did not heavily influence the Iranian Revolution both in its inception and culmination. Al-Shawaf's quote from Nikki Keddie proves this point. Keddie refers to three stages, a first to November 1979 when 'clericals and Khomeini himself, often made the real decisions,' a second to June 1981 which involved a 'government more and more monopolized by clerical radicals of the Islamic Republic Party and by Khomeini,' and a third which has continued until now and represents 'a final break with religious liberals and leftists.' Which period would Al-Shawaf say was not 'heavily influenced' by Khomeinism?

Said's position on the Iranian Revolution negated, or considerably downplayed, the influence of Islam, and ignored the ideology and political programme of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Al-Shawaf concedes this point, which of course was

my central one. But Al-Shawaf attempts to save Said's treatment of the Iranian Revolution from this defect by arguing that the important aspect of Said's writings on the revolution was his attempt to illustrate the diversity of opinion and ideology at work in revolutionary circles. This is an exaggeration of a minor aspect of Said's position since he rarely wrote about the ideological 'turbulence' within the revolutionary movement. Instead, he argued against the branding of the revolution as one inspired by a political interpretation of Islam and for this reason he ignored Khomeini. In an article that appeared in the *Columbia Journalism Review* in 1980, Said criticized the media for not considering the other important major figures of the revolution, such as Ali Shariati. Said asked: 'why did no reporter seem to avail himself of crucial material contained in the Summer 1979 issue of *Race and Class* – for example, the material on Ali Shariati, an Iranian friend of Algerian revolutionary Frantz Fanon, who with Khomeini was the major influence on the revolution?' But Said failed to do what he criticized others for not doing, as nowhere in his four articles on the revolution is there a discussion of the ideas of Khomeini, despite his clear admission, contrary to Al-Shawaf, that Khomeini was a major influence.

Al-Shawaf, in footnote three, explains Said's evasion on the grounds that at the time Said was writing the revolution was not inherently 'Khomeinist' and it was therefore somehow acceptable, or at least understandable, for him to ignore his importance. But this is hardly acceptable for someone presenting himself as having insights of value into Middle Eastern events. Al-Shawaf does not acknowledge that at the same time as Said was ignoring Khomeini other observers, such as William Quandt and Michael Walzer, were acknowledging the importance of, and analyzing the ideas of the Ayatollah. It is the work of these observers, and not of Said, that provided the more prescient analysis of the influences on the revolution.

Iraq, Kuwait and the Kurds

Al-Shawaf then takes issue with my argument about Said's failure to speak out for Iraqi Kurds and that he made 'little mention of the plight of the Kuwaitis who were suffering under a brutal occupation as a result of Ba'athist imperialism.' Much like his misunderstanding of 'heavily influenced,' he operates from the belief that 'little mention' is the equivalent of 'no mention,' and that any mention is equivalent of adequate mention.

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I do not wish to repeat my entire analysis of Said's position on these matters and the Gulf War. For those interested, they can read my article 'Edward Said and Kosovo' which appeared in the Winter 2007 edition of *Democratija*.

Al-Shawaf presents a few examples of Said speaking out against Saddam Hussein and for the rights of the Kuwaitis and Kurds, but he fails to see the key points that undermines his defense of Said's record on these issues. The first example comes from an article that appeared in August 1990 in the *Christian Science Monitor*. In footnote number seven, Al-Shawaf writes 'what makes matters worse is that Zarnett is aware of this statement' since I cite it in 'Edward Said and Kosovo.' This would only make matters worse (for me) if I was advancing the argument that Said made 'no mention' of Iraqi human rights abuses. Since Al-Shawaf is aware of my article he should also be aware of the question that I used to guide my discussion of Said's position on these issues: 'to assess [Said's] anti-war position and Said's interest in what he referred to as American imperialism and Iraqi fascism, a relevant question to ask is not if Said opposed Saddam Hussein and his fascist Ba'ath party but rather *to what extent*.'

Furthermore, in defense of Said's record on the Kurds, Al-Shawaf quotes from an article Said published in November 1991 in *The Open Magazine Pamphlet Series* (republished in *The Politics of Dispossession*). But if we look closely at that article, we see that Said does not mention what made Ba'athist treatment of the Kurds unique and especially troubling – that in 1988 they launched a campaign of chemical weapon attacks that, according to Human Rights Watch estimates, resulted in the death of at least 50,000 Iraqi Kurds and described as genocide. [1] In his article Said did not describe Iraqi treatment of the Kurds using this key word – genocide – despite the evidence available at the time which I refer to in 'Edward Said and Kosovo.' What Said did manage to do was praise Saddam's efforts in building a secular society and developing Iraq's education, health, housing and oil industry infrastructure. It was only in September 1992 that Said spoke of genocide against the Kurds, and even then his condemnation was by no means unconditional. As I noted in 'Edward Said and Kosovo,' Said's belated acknowledgement of this Iraqi crime was expressed only when he chose to do so and in a way to say something damning (accurately or inaccurately) about American foreign policy.

When assessing Said's writings on the Gulf War it is necessary to consider the entire body of his work (because Said wrote, and said, many things). Thus we can measure the relative significance of certain statements. It is also necessary to consider when

Said made these certain statements. From this approach, what becomes clear is that despite the occasions when he did speak out against Iraqi human rights abuses, these verbal humanitarian interventions amounted to a minor component of his analysis when measured against the volume of his statements against military interventions that many saw as aimed to stop or limit these human rights abuses. Further, when we consider the timing of Said's writing, we see that some of the examples Al-Shawaf points to come a full decade after the Gulf War, when they represent little more than after-the-fact moral grandstanding. The point is that Said did not consistently speak out against Iraqi crimes when it mattered the most – when those crimes were either taking place or when he was crafting his position against a war to stop them. Here is a short excerpt from 'Edward Said and Kosovo' explaining this point:

Much like his belated acknowledgment of Iraqi actions against the Kurds – an acknowledgment that if made earlier would have significantly weakened his anti-war position – it was months after the Gulf War was over that Said began to describe Saddam in terms not seen in his war-time writings. In a lecture given in September 1991, Iraq's justification for the invasion of Kuwait was described as 'spurious'; the invasion was 'an outrageous breach of international law' and was 'intolerable and unacceptable.' The actions of the Ba'athist regime were 'disgraceful.' They were 'repressive at home, mischievously adventurous and violent abroad.' In an interview in early 1992, he spoke of Saddam as a 'murderer,' a 'tyrant,' a 'fascist,' and a 'pig.' This language, however, did not bring with it a more considered and substantial critique of Saddam's regime. Moreover, it did not bring with it any reconsideration by Said of his opposition to the Gulf War – a war launched to reverse what Said was now saying was an intolerable and unacceptable act.

Only when one considers the extent, context and timing of Said's statements do the important questions, which Al-Shawaf misses, arise: Why was Said more vocal about the crimes of Iraq *after* the Gulf War? Why was it only in September 1992 when Said decided to finally utter the words 'Ba'ath genocide against the Kurds' when this atrocity occurred in 1988? Was Said's own anti-war position premised on ignoring certain truths? Did his commitment to oppose American foreign policy involve a failure to make substantive mention of other factors that would significantly complicate his anti-war stance? Were the same tactics used by Said when he opposed NATO's military intervention in Kosovo? My analysis of these questions is hardly undermined by Al-Shawaf ignoring them.

Orientalism and Politics

The relationship between the validity of Said's views in *Orientalism* and his political postures is the last issue I wish to address. Al-Shawaf and I disagree on the nature of this relationship. Al-Shawaf places the origins of Said's political views in his politicization after 1967. I argue that they stem from the findings expressed in *Orientalism* for it is this book that identifies Said's research methodology, analytical interests and worldview, and was written before Said's important political writings. Al-Shawaf disagrees as he writes that '[y]ears of opposing Israel's oppression of the Palestinians and United States' wholesale support of such oppression would lead him controversially to locate Israeli and American policies within a larger historical tradition of Western attitudes toward Arabs and Muslims.' Al-Shawaf's approach is to insulate Said's political views from the defects of *Orientalism*. I do not think this can be done.

What irks Al-Shawaf is the following criticism I made of Varisco:

Early in his book, Varisco writes that 'I happen to agree with most of Said's political positions on the real Orient.'] The reader is neither told what these positions are nor the reasons why Varisco agrees with them. It is implied that Said's political positions speak for themselves and thereby require no justification. In making this statement it seems lost on Varisco that Said's political positions on the real Orient stem directly from his arguments made in *Orientalism*. How else are we to try to explain Said's perception of the Iranian Revolution as everything but heavily influenced by a political ideology rooted in a particular interpretation of Islam, or his reluctance to accept the validity of Western claims of genocide committed by Saddam Hussein against the Kurds, or the perception of the U.S.-led Oslo Peace Process as a reincarnation of European 'peace treaties' to African chiefs, without referring back to *Orientalism*? *Orientalism* is the soil in which Said's political positions are rooted. Varisco's wholehearted embrace of Said's political positions, without any word of qualification or explanation, is at odds with the devastating critique he provides of *Orientalism*.

The particular point I make against Varisco, and now against Al-Shawaf, stems from two premises. The first is the belief that if an author's major piece of work (here *Orientalism*) is found to be tendentious, the result of sloppy research, and inadequate in analytical rigour, then it is perfectly legitimate to at least question the ability of that writer to provide worthwhile political analysis. Therefore, I believed

that Varisco should have explained to his reader why he thinks Said is right about the modern Orient especially since Varisco thought Said was wrong about so much in *Orientalism*. I believe that the flaws of *Orientalism* should caution us against accepting Said's political positions without reservation or before due critical assessment.

The second premise is that *Orientalism* does indeed help to explain how Said arrived at the political conclusions he did. I agree with Al-Shawaf that we must not discredit Said's political analysis based on the flaws of *Orientalism* alone, but to think that I advance such a view is a misreading of my work. Each of Said's ventures into the world of political commentary should be studied on their own merits and this is what I have tried to do when analyzing his positions on Iran, Iraq and Kosovo. At the same time, one cannot help but notice similarities that exist between *Orientalism* and Said's political views. The flaws and tendentiousness that can be found in *Orientalism* repeat themselves in a number of Said's political opinions. A few examples illustrate this point.

Said's failure to pay appropriate attention to the ideas expressed by Khomeini when considering the Iranian Revolution mirrors an approach he adopted in *Orientalism*. As Varisco notes, in *Orientalism* '[t]he impact of indigenous Arab, Persian, and Turkish newspapers and journals in writing back against cultural as well as political imperialism does not even warrant a sentence in Said's polemic.' Similarly, Khomeini's writings barely 'warrant a sentence' in his analysis of the Iranian Revolution. Said, analytically, was more interested in attacking the way the West analyzed Middle Eastern events than understanding these events themselves. This analytical method is exactly what *Orientalism* is built on: a study of perceptions without the requisite grounding in the history, society and politics of the region. It is this point to which the late Malcolm Kerr alluded in his 1980 review of *Orientalism* when he asked: 'Does Said realize how insistently Islamic doctrine in its many variants has traditionally proclaimed the applicability of religious standards to all aspect of human life, and the inseparability of man's secular and spiritual destinies? What does he suppose the Ayatollah Khomeini and Muslim Brotherhood were all about?' [2] In other words, Said failed to comprehend the very subject he criticized others for supposedly not understanding. Along similar lines, Robert Irwin noted that 'it was typical of [Said's] style of thought that he seemed to find western coverage of the [Saudi] beheading [of a princess] more reprehensible than the beheading itself.' [3]

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Said's criticism of U.S. foreign policy towards the Arab world also drew heavily on *Orientalism* where Said argued that the U.S. dominated the Middle East in the same way the British and French once did. In addition, in *Orientalism* Said posited that the driving force behind foreign policy is domestic political culture. In his political commentary, Said followed a similar path, asserting that the U.S. had a political culture of imperialism. In 1993 Said stated: 'the United States was founded as an empire, a dominion state of sovereignty that would expand in population and territory and increase in power.' [4]

Of course, as an attempt to understand international relations, Said's emphasis on a monolithic domestic political culture leaves much to be desired, because it leads Said to ignore the strong isolationist tendencies that also exist in American political culture. The denying of this complexity is entirely consistent with the essentialist and simplistic understanding of Western political thought that Said advances in *Orientalism*. Moreover, his argument, which insists that from its birth America was pre-determined to become a super-power ignores drastic changes in the international system that both allowed, and to a certain extent forced, America to take a more prominent role in global affairs; events such as the Russian Revolution, the First World War, the Great Depression, the rise of Hitler, the Second World, and the collapse of the British Empire.

A meaningful debate on the validity of Said's political views requires an analysis of those views and of Said's major work, *Orientalism*, which in large measure served as Said's pedigree to express his politics. In earlier editions of *Democratiya*, I have attempted to express what I believe to be the deficiencies and limitations of Said's political analysis on three significant political events and to review two recent books that point out the numerous and serious problems that plague Said's *Orientalism*. For all that Al-Shawaf has to say of a critical nature, it is important to recall that he does admit that Ibn Warraq's book is a 'largely successful case against Said's *Orientalism*.' Al-Shawaf is reluctant to turn this conclusion into serious doubt about Said's political positions, and he fails to make a compelling case for not doing so.

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Notes

- [1] 'Genocide in Iraq – The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds,' Human Rights Watch, 1 July 1993. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/08/14/iraq13979.htm> [Accessed 22 May, 2008].
- [2] Malcolm Kerr, 'Orientalism, Review,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (1980), p. 545.
- [3] Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), p. 306.
- [4] Edward Said, 'Culture and Imperialism,' speech given at York University, Toronto. 10 February, 1993. <http://www.zmag.org/zmag/articles/barsaid.htm> [accessed 23 January, 2007].