

**Revising Culture, Reinventing Peace:  
The Influence of Edward W. Said**

*Naseer Aruri and Muhammad Shuraydi, eds.  
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In 1997, a group of scholars gathered at the University of Windsor to honor Edward W. Said and his lifetime achievements as a scholar and activist with a conference entitled “Culture, Politics, and Peace.” The present volume, a

collection of the papers presented, show just how far reaching his influence has been over the last three decades. While his profound influence on comparative literature and Palestine studies are well known, this volume reveals how his writings have prompted generations of scholars to question taken-for-granted postulations, discourses, and paradigms in literature, area studies, and politics. The papers also applaud his role as an advocate of the Palestinian cause and the way he has tirelessly and critically observed and documented the Palestinians' fate.

The three parts following Richard Falk's introduction, "Nationalism," "On Orientalism," and "To Palestine," address three dominant themes in Said's works. In "Empowering Inquiry: Our Debt to Edward W. Said," Falk celebrates Said's work as a scholar of many interests and talents, and outlines how his deeply humanist worldview, personal experience as an exile, and critical mind have produced the impressive *oeuvre* of a leading intellectual of our time. Falk is also the first to mention Said's emphasis on secularism and his constant critique and warning against bringing religion into the realm of knowledge and politics. This has not prevented Said from defending religious freedom and Muslims in particular, but might have led him to underestimate the moral and intellectual appeal of religious traditions and a religious approach to knowledge. In the case of Palestine and Palestinian politics, his uncompromisingly secular and anti-sectarian views at times make his visions for the future seem incompatible with the region's realities. Falk points out that Said's rejection of religion relates to his rejection of absolute truths, or the claim to it, and that he instead chose a "compassionate and engaged rationalism" as his worldview.

The section on "Nationalities" starts with Lennard J. Davis' fascinating essay on "Nationality, Disability, and Deafness," in which he convincingly argues for the status of deaf people as a nation or community with nation-like features. He explains his work with disability as influenced by Said's work and engagement in political activism. Davis recalls his personal encounters with Said as a teacher and scholar, and relates his own engagement in advocacy for the deaf to Said's influence.

In "Imperial Britain & the American Nation," Deirdre David revisits the literary production of eighteenth-century Britain to demonstrate the complex relationship and mutual images of British and Americans as represented in the works of British writers of the time. Based on Said's ideas in *Culture and Imperialism*, David shows how America evolved from being Britain's uncivilized and unrefined former colony into a young nation having ties with the mother-nation and which Britain can proudly consider as a daughter.

Marc H. Ellis, in his “Edward Said & the Future of the Jewish People,” presents a thorough discussion of the Jews’ self-perception in history from victims and the chosen people to influential actors in the centers of power and politics. He asks what the future of Jewish identity can be if one considers the inherent tension between these two perceptions. Said is presented as an intellectual challenge to the Jews’ self-ascribed and external essentialism, especially in the case of Jewish intellectuals. His rejection of assigning an unchanging identity (or essence) to Jews or Palestinians in the conflict over land has enabled Said and his supporters to demand and envision a joined future of Israelis and Palestinians, and to criticize essentializing tendencies and their devastating implications in both groups. Ellis argues that for Jews to have a future, they will have to choose ethical propensity over their abuse of power in order to reclaim a positive and righteous image as a people.

The second section, “On Orientalism,” presents three papers on the reception and influence of Said’s book *Orientalism*. In “Humanizing the Oriental: Edward Said & Western Scholarly Discourse,” Yasmeen Abu-Laban presents three of Said’s most influential works: *Orientalism* (1978), *The Question of Palestine* (1979), and *Covering Islam* (1981). She asserts that these make Said’s ideas come full circle. *Orientalism* bases its critique of western discourse on the study of Orientalist literature to show the purpose and evaluation of non-western peoples and cultures, and then relates it to the West’s colonial interests. *The Question of Palestine* takes this task to the particular experience of the Palestinian people, whereas *Covering Islam* draws the wider circle of Muslim representation to a twentieth-century western audience. Abu-Laban then uses this idea to contest Huntington’s clash of civilizations paradigm.

Timothy Brennan, in his “Angry Beauty and Literary Love: An Orientalism for All Times,” traces the emergence of postcolonial studies as related to Orientalism. He calls for a reevaluation of the statement that Said’s work was the basis and triggering factor for this field’s development. He then argues that Said’s work came at a time and in the spirit of already existing tendencies, but did shape the ideas and paradigms of postcolonial studies.

As’ad Abu Khalil presents the impact of “Orientalism in the Arab Context,” and demonstrates that, partly because of bad translation into Arabic and other limitations, this path-breaking work has not attained the critical and/or praising attention in the Arab world that it deserves. Responses came from the neoconservative camp and scholars related to al-Azhar, as well as other scholars. Abu Khalil examines the responses in Arabic, which makes one wonder how the Arab world and Arab intellectu-

als can be defined in an age of global movement of books and ideas and, not least, the intellectuals and scholars themselves.

The third section, "To Palestine," focuses attention on Said's works related to Palestine and his impact as an advocate for the Palestinians and their just cause. Aruri reassesses the history and possibility of an Israel/Palestine existing on the same land in his "Toward A Pluralistic Existence in Palestine/Israel." The essay outlines the implications of the Oslo process and demonstrates, based on Said's argument, that the same two-state solution he advocated in the 1970s (the PLO adopted this idea much later), is not a viable solution. Said has been a staunch supporter of a one-state solution for more than a decade, and has called for reconciliation based on acknowledging historic injustice and that eventually the two peoples will have to share the same land. The alternative – mutual annihilation – should not even be considered. Said has emphasized this opinion many times, even though it currently seems unattainable and futile.

Atif A. Kubursi, in his "The Arab Economy in Western Eyes: The Economics of Orientalism," seeks to apply the idea of Orientalism to economics and show how an Orientalist bias has affected the approach to non-western and particularly Arab economic systems and strategies. The essay is less convincing than the other papers in utilizing Said's work for a critical reassessment of world economic politics.

In "Peace for Palestine: Building a More Humane Future," John Sigler relates his personal encounter with the Middle East conflict and the influence of Said and other Arab and Palestinian scholars. He addresses Said's emphasis on humanism as a means to solve the conflict and closely links his engagement to the intellectual's role and responsibility to educate others and, ultimately, to change society through knowledge. Following Said's example and demand, Sigler advises today's intellectuals to live up to their role as educators and tireless advocates of justice and a better world.

Shuraydi's "Epilogue" shows that intellectuals and their scholarship can be – and are – used to the opposite effect. Two years after the conference and in the wake Said's memoir *Out of Place*, a group of pro-Israeli scholars sought to discredit him by accusing him of falsifying his childhood memories and claiming to be a Palestinian. Shuraydi reclaims Said's credibility as a scholar and an activist.

As a collection, the papers succeed in presenting Said's tremendous influence as a scholar, intellectual, activist, and as a person. The reviewer found some authors' personal recollections of Said's impact upon them particularly interesting. *Revising Culture, Reinventing Peace* can be rec-

commended to a large audience, scholars, students, and interested readers alike.

Juliane Hammer  
Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC