

This article was downloaded by: [Korea University]

On: 06 January 2015, At: 01:05

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Israel Affairs

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fisa20>

### The Muslim Man's Burden: Muslim Intellectuals Confront their Imperialist Past

DAVID COOK

Published online: 21 Sep 2007.

To cite this article: DAVID COOK (2007) The Muslim Man's Burden: Muslim Intellectuals Confront their Imperialist Past, Israel Affairs, 13:4, 806-818, DOI: [10.1080/13537120701445240](https://doi.org/10.1080/13537120701445240)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13537120701445240>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# The Muslim Man's Burden: Muslim Intellectuals Confront their Imperialist Past

DAVID COOK

Arab Muslims have a long and well-documented imperialist and colonialist past. The vast majority of present-day Arabs would not exist in the countries they occupy today had their ancestors not conquered and colonized them, swallowing up in the process the previous occupants of these countries and gradually assimilating them. This reality is not a pleasant one for Arab Muslims to confront for several reasons. First, their historiographic material has been presented in such a way as to minimize the claims of the previous owners of these lands, and to maximize the Muslims' rights to supersede all previous claims (after all, Islam as a faith abrogates all previous revelations, and is designed to be the faith of the entire world). Second, after having themselves been recently on the receiving end of an imperialist occupation (colonialist only in places such as Algeria and Israel, where large numbers of non-Arabs came to dwell), they are reluctant to see themselves in the same light. In order to get rid of the hated European imperialists, the very words 'imperialist' and 'colonialist' were demonized in the Arabic language and made illegitimate. In fact, this remains true today, because the accusation of being either one of the above epithets usually calls forth the most strenuous denials of the same. Bearing these facts in mind, there is a great deal of cognitive dissonance for the Arab Muslim when confronting his past. Despite their own rationalizations, they were not greeted with open arms by the conquered population, nor were they doing the latter a favour by 'liberating' them.<sup>1</sup>

The past is much more immediate for the Arab than for the Westerner (especially an American, who is usually cut off from ancestors who immigrated to the continent not more than 100 years previously). Extensive and intimate knowledge of the period of the great Arab conquests is common, and many of the better-known names are heroes

---

David Cook is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University, Houston, Texas.

to the common man. In some cases, especially in religious circles, one can be excused for thinking that the knowledge of this distant (purported) past is sometimes greater than the knowledge of the present or of the immediate past. For this reason the issues are not merely academic, they are personal for a great many people. To date there has been little effort among Arab Muslims to establish accurate historical facts about this time period. This should be sharply differentiated from the vast, and for the most part scientifically accurate, effort for later periods. Many established scholars, who can be balanced and accurate when dealing with later periods, when writing in Arabic for an Arab audience, cannot be distinguished from religious apologists. Although in some cases this fact has enabled them to maintain their careers (and for some one could doubt whether they really believe the uncritical things they write in these other fora), nonetheless the change is significant.

This defensive attitude has been the single most common factor in the creation of a huge anti-Orientalist literature in both Arabic, and in a number of Western languages. There are several types of critiques. One is accomplished by scholars who are themselves eminent Orientalists (or who would be if they worked in the Western world) such as Fazlur Rahman, Ihsan 'Abbas, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Duri or Faruk Omar. All of these scholars, while critiquing the excesses of Western Orientalism, are themselves participants in the field, although usually placing themselves on the conservative side of the spectrum.<sup>2</sup> Of course, there exists a lively polemic between these scholars and some of their Western counterparts about the interpretation of events, but there is a mutual respect. There is a much sharper tongued group epitomized by the late 'Abd al-Latif al-Tibawi, who wrote a number of pungent critiques of Orientalists.<sup>3</sup> Although Tibawi wrote in the era prior to the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, he, like Said, says that Westerners have such a history of hatred towards Islam and misrepresentation of it that they should probably avoid the subject, and not publish anything that could possibly be offensive to Muslims. Again, although the author tends not to accept the critique, and especially the invective with which it was written, what both Tibawi and Said said was not entirely without merit. For example, Tibawi's first critique of English Orientalists such as Alfred Guillaume must be largely accepted because it is clear that the latter was not competent to translate Ibn Hisham's *al-Sira al-nabawiyya*, and in general made a mess of the organization of it.<sup>4</sup> A number of critiques of translations of the Qur'an come under this heading.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the facts Said pointed out in *Orientalism* about the connections between early Orientalists and European imperialism and in some cases colonialism are undeniable.<sup>6</sup>

However, to point out these facts is different from saying that there is no legitimacy to the field as a whole or that no students of Islam during the colonialist period studied it for purely scientific purposes, and it certainly

casts no reflection upon the field as it stands, because none of the names critiqued in this manner have any prominence today, and many are recognized to have written tainted research and are not cited. Roughly, Said's critique of Orientalism has the same relevance to the field today as one who would critique the field of chemistry, and point out that many of the early medieval leading lights in it were alchemists, or critique the field of astronomy and point out its connections with the pseudo-science of astrology. Imperialism is dead and has been for most of the last part of the twentieth century. However, the study of Islam continues without apparent connection to any imperial ventures or without any apparent power motivation. Indeed, as a number of Muslim critics of present-day Orientalism point out, in many cases the study of Islam in Western universities is funded by Muslim countries.<sup>7</sup>

However, in contrast to these two categories, among Arabic language and fundamentalist Muslim-based critiques the dominant discourse does not belong to the two groups described above, who in spite of their occasional harshness do actually not deny the *right* of others to actually study Islam (Tibawi comes close, though). These critics, on the other hand, would seek to prevent anyone from studying Islam who does not actually subscribe to all of its dogmas, in their entirety. This, of course, is distinct from the critique of Said, who, being a Christian, would automatically be excluded from this privileged group. Ghorab, says, for instance, that for the study of Islam, the minimal initial conditions—and I stress *minimal* conditions [are]:

1. to study Islam as a revealed religion (this means to study it as the truth from Allah, whose authority is not to be challenged but to be understood and therefore confessed intelligently)
2. to take Islam from its own original and authentic sources (i.e., the Qur'an and the Sunnah)
3. to take it as both knowledge and practice (meaning that the fruits of study are not intended as academic pastime, nor is the immediate purpose the display of work in a library or museum; rather, the aim is to improve and extend consciousness of Allah and to inform submission to His Will)
4. to take it from qualified Muslim scholars (the qualifications in question are *iman* (faith), *ilm* (knowledge) and *taqwa* (fear of Allah)).<sup>8</sup>

As Ghorab himself notes, there is no chance that Western Orientalists will ever accept these preconditions, which would effectively preclude any real study of Islam and simply turn each department of Arabic or Near Eastern Studies into a *madrassa*. One can note that rarely in these more extreme critiques of Orientalism are what those in the field would call 'the revisionists' (those such as Crone and Cook, who would seek to radically rewrite Muslim history) mentioned. The ones who come in for criticism are

the traditional scholars, such as W. Montgomery Watt, who is featured a great deal in Ghorab's book, or the Saudi-funded Centre for Islamic Studies at Oxford University. Both Watt and the Centre can hardly be said to be the main focus of contemporary Islamic studies; in both cases the a-critical methodology practiced is seen as suspect by serious scholars. Rarely are the more contemporary scholarly discussions of Islam critiqued by Ghorab and his ilk; usually the emphasis is upon those books from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were translated into Arabic. However, the positions of these early scholars, such as Noldeke, Goldziher, Schacht and many others are sufficiently shocking even today for the Muslim critic to elicit extreme responses, even though these are somewhat dated for the Western scholar.

It is not unusual for accusations of conspiracy to be a prime component of these critiques. For example, Bassam 'Ajak does an in-depth study of the part played by Orientalists in saving the Arab manuscript heritage and publishing key texts in a scientific manner (which has yet to be duplicated in the Arab world, except by a few competent editors).<sup>9</sup> But instead of being appreciative, one is startled to note that he begins to take a look at the types of Arabic books they published, and comes to the conclusion that this gigantic effort was a conspiracy to present Islam in the worst possible light.<sup>10</sup> According to him, four areas were the subject of intense effort: legal disagreements, Sufism, philosophy and literature (*adab*).<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, this issue becomes clear that the Orientalists turned to the publication of this sort of heritage, and to edit it and to send it to us and to distribute it throughout the entire world in order to distort the picture of the Islamic civilization and to distort the picture of the Muslims among others, and even among the next generations of the Islamic community. Because of all of this, every researcher must be asked and ask [himself]: why did the Orientalists never edit, distribute and publish the other [positive] type of the Islamic heritage?<sup>12</sup>

With these critiques in mind, we will examine the realities, and the apologies, and see what Arab Muslims have to say about their own history.

#### THE HISTORICAL REALITY

Historical reality is unpleasant for the fantasy-addict. It is always so much less clear-cut and so much more varied. People previously thought of as heroes now are realized to be human beings, subject to fallacies, foibles, errors in judgement and lapses of all sorts. What therefore is the reality of the Muslim conquests? Because in criticism, especially of this nature, one must be fair to the other side as well as to oneself, one should start by stating baldly: no one knows why or how the Arab Muslim conquests occurred. The fact is that fate has placed a blinder over just that particular

key period of history. Historian after historian has pointed this out: there is an inexplicable lack of even reasonably objective historical sources for this time. Leaving aside the mass of Muslim 'historical' material (which we will come back to), there is not one non-Muslim historian who is informed in a credible manner about the momentous events taking place, nor a single historical source for this period which is focused upon the events in the way which we would like. Either the non-Muslim sources were concentrated upon ecclesiastical events, or were too local in their focus to be useful, or are fragmented and have not come down to us in a usable form, or are themselves dependent upon the Muslim sources ultimately and thus supply us with no independent information.

This is a depressing reality, and if it were not for the immense and intractable nature of the Arabic sources, whose endless contradictions and implausibilities confront the researcher reading them, one would be tempted simply to take their version of events and accept it, if only on the grounds of better and fuller documentation. Indeed, as several have pointed out, it would be perfectly possible to write not one or two, but *several* histories based upon the sources, each with the ability to stand on its own merits. However, the researcher reaching this level of depression is then confronted with the problem of *which* version to accept (of the many versions available in the Arabic sources), a question that sets him in an endless Catch-22. It is for these reasons that many have finally come to the conclusion that if there is a historical truth concealed among the endless contradictions, second-hand reports, tendentious and slanderous traditions and implausibilities in the Arab historical material it will only come to light as a result of carefully controlled research using non-Muslim accounts and other less patently shaped sources such as papyri and inscriptions. Having stated these realities, one can come at the problem in a different way. Although we know that there are many models and versions available to describe and explain the conquests, there are some that can be altogether rejected on the grounds of implausibility.

It is with these realities that Edward Said can be discussed. Said's *Orientalism* pours scorn upon the Orientalists because of their connections with the imperialist and colonialist ventures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in some cases with justification, and their consequent objectification of the 'Orient' (whatever that means). The major problem with this thesis is the fact that, if anything, Muslim scholars are far more guilty of their connections with Muslim imperialism and colonialism, and their justification of Muslim aggression in the past (and in some cases in the present) than are the despised Orientalists. Why did Said, who speaks with ridicule of Kipling's notorious phrase 'the White Man's burden',<sup>13</sup> not recognize exactly the same phrase and similar ideas as they occur in both classical Muslim historical writing and contemporary apologists?

One of the major problems that the Muslim historian must overcome is to dilute the cheerleading nature of the sources with which he works. For all medieval historians were not objective observers. They were on the side of the Muslims (just as the Christian medieval historians were on the side of the Christians, and so forth), and they wrote their histories as part of a larger project of the Islamization of knowledge and the creation of a past in accordance with the belief that Islam is the final and authoritative revelation from God. Logically, the conquests of the first Muslim century were one of the major and incontrovertible miracles proving the veracity of this truth. Obviously, then, they are described in a laudatory fashion, and the only criticism that we find in them is towards those caliphs, sultans or commanders who were obviously incompetents in the pursuit of this endeavour.

Therefore, one can easily tell the level of emotional involvement on the part of the modern Muslim historian as he uses his terminology. The words available for him are loaded ones such as *fath*, *ghazwu*, *ihtilal*, *isti'mar*, and so forth. Although the Arabic language obviously constricts the historian in these ways, it is rare to find an author who makes the attempt to free himself from this vocabulary. For example, the word *fath/futuh* 'conquest, lit. opening' (with the implication that it was given by God) is used for the conquests of the first century. Although this term's religious connotations are not in any doubt, they are made crystal-clear by the numerous occurrences in the Qur'an, for example, 48:1 'We have indeed given you a manifest victory' (*fath*) and 110:1 'When Allah's support and victory come'. It is perfectly legitimate to translate the word *fath* as 'victory', but it would also indicate God's intervention in history to ensure victory for the side He favours (the Muslims). We also find the word *tahrir* 'liberation' used for the conquests, although this raises the question of who (or what) was being liberated.<sup>14</sup>

Similar ideas are attached to the word *ghazwu*. The other side of the coin is found when non-Muslims win a victory over the Muslims or occupy territory once controlled by Muslims. For example, speaking about the Normans who took Sicily from the Muslims we find that this was an *ihtilal* 'occupation'.<sup>15</sup> In this same article on the Christian conquests of Muslim Andalus (Spain), Sicily and Crete, we find innumerable value judgements. The Christians who resist the Muslim conquests are *muta'ssiba* 'fanatical',<sup>16</sup> and in the same way Muslims are generally praised up until al-Mansur (ca. 978–1002), who attacked the Christian kingdoms of northern Spain no less than 50 times, laying waste to the entire area. It is curious that the writer should not include such an example of Muslim brutality, but he desists.<sup>17</sup> These are only a few examples of fairly obvious imperialistic attitudes in contemporary Arab Muslim historical writing. According to Saidian analysis these examples demonstrate a hopelessly biased and compromised presentation of history. When Arab Muslims are

unable to see the imperialistic nature of their conquests they forfeit their right to present the history of others in the way that Said suggests should happen to Orientalists.<sup>18</sup>

#### HISTORIANS AND APOLOGISTS FOR HISTORY

There are several groups of rationalizations for the conquests used by Muslim Arab writers. The first is the most blatantly religious: Islam is the divine religion and therefore has the right to rule the world. It goes without saying that this explanation does not appear often in non-Arabic writings, because it is obvious that no one who is not already a Muslim could possibly have any sympathy for it. Another group of justifications, closely related to the above, was that the conquests only conquered those peoples who were actually already Arabs. Because the peoples of these lands were already Arab, they were not really conquered; the entire process was something of a replenishment of peoples from the desert:

Since the present inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent are Arabs, and the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent were called Arabs during the Jahiliyya [before Islam] and previous to the birth of the Messiah [Jesus] by at least 10 centuries, how is it possible to call the descendants by any other name than that of their ancestors? If we begrudge them this name, then we should say: the ancestors of the present-day Arabs, or the ancestors of these descendants. How could it be right that the Akkadians, the Assyrians, the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, the Canaanites, the Phoenicians, the Amorites, the Arameans, the Nabateans and others emigrated from the Arabian Peninsula to the Fertile Crescent, and that they are not the ancestors of these descendants who currently inhabit the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent, and that their present-day descendants are not from them? Were the ancestors sterile, and did not beget or were the descendants disrespectful and take ancestors other than their own?<sup>19</sup>

For this reason we emphasize that all of the peoples which emigrated from the Arabian Peninsula to the Fertile Crescent and the Nile Valley, and to North Africa, from the earliest times, are only Arab peoples, and that the present-day Arabs are the descendants of these ancestors. We emphasize also that all of the civilizations and cultures which they produced were Arab civilizations and cultures, even if the branches differed in their emigration partially. Their origins in their original homeland were one. It is not correct to say that Arab-ness (*'uruba*) began in the area at the appearance of Islam, not detracting from the value of Islam or its legacy, but only establishing a truth and reality. Islam was only the last of these Arab expansions and the greatest of them, confirming the Arab-ness of the Arab area, from the [Atlantic] Ocean



to the [Persian] Gulf, and did not Arabize it, as they claim, because it was Arab originally...

So the Arabs expanded with Islam and crossed the Pyrenees Mountains into south France, and traversed the Oxus and Jaxartes Rivers, and gathered to them a number of the communities of the world and its peoples. When they returned and their shadow receded, replacing their rule (*dawlatihim*), the original Arab area remained Arab in face, hand and tongue, and the non-Arab peoples returned to their previous origins from before the Arabs came to them: the Indian returned to being Indian, the Turk to being Turk, the Persian to being Persian, the Kurd to being Kurd, and the Spaniard to being Spanish.<sup>20</sup>

This is an interesting argument; however, it is also one that is not borne out by the evidence.<sup>21</sup>

There is also the 'superior civilization' explanation. Frequently it will be pointed out that the peoples conquered were backward and benefited immensely by the introduction of Muslim rule.<sup>22</sup> Clearly the Muslims were the more enlightened and they deserved to be the rulers. This argument is remarkably close to various Western justifications of imperialism and colonialism (aka, 'the White Man's Burden'). Although these arguments sound quite hollow in the face of modern political realities, Arab Muslims still use them freely, apparently not realizing that they would also justify the imperialist interlude in their own countries. A good example of this argument is from anti-Orientalist writings:

The conquests of Islam were only for the propagation of light and truth, and to free the nations from unjust systems, and to inform the people of the call of their Lord, and to liberate their minds and consciences from the subjection to those [deities] other than God. The goal of the conquests was to guide the people to truth, firstly, and then the establishment of a proof for God against all who denied Him, secondly, and then the realization of benefit for the nations whose lands were conquered, thirdly.<sup>23</sup>

It is difficult for anyone other than a Muslim to read this with a straight face, and once again raises the question: what right does a Muslim colonized by a European have to protest when they use such justifications for their own colonialization of others? What could Kipling have added to such comments?

Another well-worn rationalization is that the peoples of the conquered countries invited them to invade. Frequently this argument is heard with reference to the Muslim conquest of Spain in the first part of the eighth century.<sup>24</sup> This is a difficult argument, because by definition it begs the question of what right the person or persons doing the inviting had to invite a foreign conqueror into a country that was not theirs in the first place?

In the case of Spain, the fact is that probably the Arab imperialists were invited in by the aggrieved Count Julian, whose daughter had apparently been raped by the Visigoth king (although this story might still be a tall tale circulated by the Arabs). Still, it must irritate anyone using this argument that the Arabs had to fight their way through the entire peninsula. Perhaps the invitation was not quite as blanket as they would like to have believed. In addition to these facts, it is also true that various Muslim Arab and non-Arab rulers 'invited' their eventual European occupiers into their countries; this justification does not make the attendant imperialism any less heinous. A ruler or an aggrieved party within a country does not have the right to give away his country and call it justified. The equation of power may well justify facts on the ground for the moment (as it did in Spain, where the Arab imperialists stayed for seven centuries), but it does not change the reality of the matter.<sup>25</sup>

Another group of rationalizations is less easy to characterize. Primarily those using this theme concentrate on proving that Islam was not spread by force. This argument was popularized by the Indian-Pakistani Islamic radical Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdudi (d. 1979), in his *al-Jihad fi sabil Allah* (first published in the 1930s). In this work al-Mawdudi attempts to portray all of the conquests as defensive, and to state without any proof that the first Muslims were merely missionaries, responding to force when attacked, but bent upon spreading Islam peacefully.<sup>26</sup> According to Mawdudi, although the conquered peoples must have seen the Muslims as imperialists when they first appeared, they only fought the Muslims for a certain time, until 'it was clear to them the purpose of the Muslims, and the reason why they had come out of their homeland [the Arabian Peninsula]; then they knew the completely revolutionary way of life that was their [the Muslims'] desire to spread and to propagate its belief-system to the corners of the earth'.<sup>27</sup> Such an approach makes a mockery of the classical Muslim texts—not to speak of the records left by non-Muslims—and is scarcely to be believed. And yet it is widely repeated or assumed by Muslims in the West or their apologists.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly Hasan al-Banna' (assassinated 1948), the founder of the Muslim Brethren (Ikhwan al-Muslimin) in Egypt spoke concerning the conquests, and described them by saying that 'God did not impose *jihad* upon the Muslims as a tool for aggression or as a method for personal aggrandisement, but in order to protect the call [of Islam], as a safeguard for the Muslim and to fulfil the great mission that Muslims undertook. This mission was guidance of humanity toward truth and justice.'<sup>29</sup> Again, this citation is so much in the spirit of Kipling that one would have thought that Said would have been moved to critique it. Anyone who compares the statement above with the massive amounts of loot and women that the early Muslims took,<sup>30</sup> the basic injustices that they perpetrated, and the

number of people that they murdered will see the incredible exaggerations of al-Banna'.

Another prominent Indian Muslim thinker, Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Nadwi, in his influential book *Madha khasara al-'alam bi-inkhifat al-Muslimin?* (*What did the World Lose because of the Decline of the Muslims?*) describes all of the societies existing during the period of the first Muslim conquests as fundamentally sick, and longing for the coming of the Muslims who re-established justice and order in the world.<sup>31</sup> He carefully avoids anything like a historical examination of the realities, or the reasons why all of the states bordering on the *jihad* state fought to the bitter end, and a striking number of them never capitulated or at least fought this type of 'justice' for centuries before being overwhelmed (like Byzantium, Nubia, Ethiopia, India). Similar to this type of apologetic is what one finds in a great many Western histories of Islam—the gross injustices and cruelties of the Muslim invasions, coupled with slavery and degradation of the Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian and Hindu minorities are passed over, whereas the achievements of Islamic civilizations are emphasized.<sup>32</sup> In many cases the fatuousness of these historical authors is revealed simply upon translation and their arguments require no refutation. Indeed, in certain cases, the explanations given are so ridiculous that they would seem to imply ignorance of even the most basic texts of Muslim history, where many facts are openly discussed.

## CONCLUSIONS

Muslims have yet to fully confront and acknowledge their imperialist history. One hears no calls for them to apologize to the world for their unprovoked invasions. It is rather ironic that the Pope and numerous Western political and religious leaders make haste to apologize for the Crusades and for various other Western-initiated excesses, yet these apologies are not echoed in the Muslim world. Indeed, one finds that because of the careful distinctions in terminology between the 'illegitimate' European conquests and the 'legitimate' Muslim ones that there is a complete break in the discussion.

Several remarks must be made about criticism in scholarship. As opponents of Orientalism such as Ghorab have stated, this is a cornerstone of the study of Islam, as it is of any scholarly field of higher learning. Yet it is precisely this quality of scholarship that comes in for the fiercest attack. Why do Orientalists constantly point out the weak spots in whatever area of Islamic studies they are focusing on? This is a source of a great deal of anger on the part of the critics of Orientalism, and is not brought out by Western critics such as Said, to whom the necessity of critical thinking is obvious. Noting the evil effects of Orientalism, Mu'aliqi says:

Secondly, the dissemination of a spirit of religious disagreement between Muslims and the awakening of doubt concerning Arab history, its social values—this is by the creation of different defects and the manufacture of imaginary events and fantastic interpretations. . . . Most of the studies of the Orientalists have highlighted the defects of the Arabic and Islamic society, and ignored the powerful aspects and the majesty in it, and affected the creation of stories and the dissemination of reports to show the barrenness of Arabic and Islamic thought, and the inflexibility of its schools, which are no longer compatible—according to their opinions—with the spirit of the twentieth century and modern culture. . . . it is apparent that the goal of the Orientalists is not the revelation of truths, nor the clarification of matters and the investigation of their depths, because their practice is to cast doubt and belittle the value of Islamic knowledge and its law, and to fabricate against the Arabic culture, criticize its classical language, and to express it as unable to accompany the language of the present.<sup>33</sup>

The question must be honestly asked whether there is in fact history writing among modern Arab scholars. This is of course an insult to those scholars, such as Ihsan ‘Abbas and ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Duri, who have established a high standard for their studies.<sup>34</sup> However, the vast majority of the Muslim and Arab scholars are not so careful. If one takes Said’s critique of the study of Orientalism to heart, it would be impossible for anyone to examine critically Arab and Muslim history, and all that would be left would be those, as Ghorab said, who were either Muslims writing with the goal of advancing the faith or those Westerners who were willing to parrot anything that Muslims thought acceptable. Anything resembling serious discussion of Arab and Muslim history would come to an end.

It would be incumbent upon Said and his followers to prove to the outside world that Arabs and Muslims can actually present their cultural and religious history, specifically with regard to those issues sensitive to both of these groups, in a critical and plausible fashion before telling Orientalists not to research and write about them. Because this has not happened, Said’s critique has failed and needs to be turned upon the group that is much more ethnocentric and arguably even racist.

#### NOTES

The author thanks Deborah Tor for reading this chapter and making corrections.

1. See, for perspectives of that time, ‘The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius’, trans. S. Brock, in Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, Liverpool, 1993, p. 232; This portrait is borne out by John Moorhead, ‘The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions’, *Byzantion*, Vol. 51 (1981), pp. 579–591; and by Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, Princeton, NJ, 1997.
2. ‘Ali Zay‘ur, ‘Ana, wa-l-istishraq wa-l-mustashriqun: ma bayna al-mustashriqun al-muta‘ssibun wa-l-mustashriqun al-ijabiyun’, *Dirasat ‘Arabiyya*, Vol. 31, No. 5–6 (1995),

- pp. 85–104; and for more positive assessments of Orientalist research, see Samir al-Durubi, 'Min juhud al-mustashriqin fi dirasat al-adab al-idari 'inda al-'Arab wa-nashruhu', *Majallat Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya al-Urdunni*, Vol. 20 (1996), pp. 63–97; Jasir Abu Safiyya, 'Juhud al-mustashriqin fi dirasat al-bardiyyat al-'Arabiyya wa-nashriha', *Abhath al-Yarmuk*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1994), pp. 55–67; for some praise of Orientalists, Bassam Da'ud 'Ajak, 'al-Turath al-Islami wa-l-istishraq', *Majallat Kulliyat al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya*, Vol. 7 (1990), pp. 160–217, 205–208.
3. 'Abd al-Latif al-Tibawi, 'The English-Speaking Orientalists', *Muslim World*, Vol. 53 (1963), pp. 185–204, 298–313; 'Abd al-Latif al-Tibawi, 'English-Speaking Orientalists: A Critique of Their Approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism', *Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. 8 (1964), pp. 23–45, 73–88; 'Abd al-Latif al-Tibawi, 'A Second Critique of English-Speaking Orientalists and their Approach to Islam and the Arabs', *Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. 23 (1979), pp. 1–54.
  4. 'Abd al-Latif al-Tibawi, 'The Life of Muhammad: A Critique of Guillaume's English Translation', *Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. 3 (1956), pp. 196–214.
  5. There is also a singular difficulty for the Westerner in translating the Qur'an to the satisfaction of the Muslim. A vast number of words (such as *islam*, *muslim*, *masjid*, and so forth) have clearly changed meaning from the time of the Prophet. Therefore it is difficult to translate the Qur'an both in the way it was originally understood and in the way in which contemporary Muslims understand it. Reading a number of these critiques, this is one of the cardinal dividing issues (but also there is incompetence in Arabic on the part of Westerners and occasional insensitivity). See M.M. Ahsan, 'The Qur'an and the Orientalists', *Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. 24 (1980), pp. 84–95; Mofakkhar Hussain Khan, 'English Translations of the Holy Qur'an', *Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. 30 (1986), pp. 82–108; Maurice Boucaille, 'al-Afkar al-khati'a al-lati yanshiruha al-mustashirun khilal tarjamatumum li-l-Qur'an al-karim', trans. Muhammad Husam al-Din, *Majallat al-Azhar*, Vol. 58 (1986), pp. 1368–1375; Reza Shah-Kazemi, 'The Sublime Qur'an and Orientalism—Muhammad Khalifa', *Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. 31 (1987), pp. 205–210. But Orientalists themselves frequently publish critiques of this nature: L.I. Conrad, 'Notes on al-Tabari's History', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1993), pp. 1–32; A.F.L. Beeston and L.I. Conrad, 'On Some Umayyad Poetry in the History of al-Tabari', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1993), pp. 191–206; Ella Landau-Tessarou, 'The Waning of the Umayyads: Notes on Tabari's *History* Translated, Vol. XXVI', *Der Islam*, Vol. 69 (1992), pp. 81–109; Michael Lecker, '*Shurtat al-Khamis* and Other Matters: Notes on the Translation of Tabari's *ta'rikh*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Vol. 14 (1991), pp. 276–284.
  6. See also Muhammad al-Sayyid al-Dasuqi, 'Khasa'is istishraq fi marhalatihi al-thalitha', *Majallat Kulliyat al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya*, Vol. 1 (1983–84), pp. 75–88 (he divides Orientalism up into Spanish, Crusader, imperialist and scholarly phases; his 'third' phase, therefore is the imperialist one).
  7. Ahmad Ghorab, *Subverting Islam: The Role of the Orientalist Centres*, Washington, DC, 1994, pp. 9–33, details the Saudi Arabian connections with Orientalist ventures for example.
  8. Ghorab, *Subverting Islam*, p. 18.
  9. 'Ajak, 'Turath', pp. 185–186, although he states that up until 1980 only 10 percent of all Arabic texts were published by Orientalists, he ignores the fact that they were instrumental in many of the earlier publications in the Arab world as well; see also Faruq 'Umar Fawzi, *al-Istishraq wa-l-ta'rikh al-Islami*, 'Amman, 1998, p. 151, which asks why Orientalists never publish anything which affirms the Muslim consensus.
  10. 'Ajak, 'Turath', p. 190.
  11. The answer why many Orientalist publications concentrated upon these subjects is probably much simpler than a conspiracy. Both philosophy and Sufism interested a number of the early greats, who saw both of these subjects as bridges between the Western world and the Muslim world (for them, far from being detrimental to the image of Islam, they were the best possible texts to publish). Literature fits into this category as well, and this author believes Bassam 'Ajak is exaggerating as to how many texts were put out concerning legal disputes.
  12. 'Ajak, 'Turath', p. 198 (the 'other' type of the heritage is the religious side); those Orientalists who praised the Arabs are described as even-handed (*munsif*), such as Gustave Lubon; see Mundhir Mu'aliqi, *al-Istishraq fi al-mizan*, pp. 131–33.
  13. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, 1994, pp. 226ff.

14. See, for example, Muhammad Jasim Hamadi al-Mashhadani, 'Masadir al-Baladhuri 'an ma'arik tahrir al-'Iraq', *al-Mu'arrikh al-'Arabi*, Vol. 55 (1997), pp. 107–116.
15. Tawfiq Amin al-Tibi, 'Tasamuh al-Muslimin tujah al-nasara fi al-Andalus wa-Siqilliya wa-l-Kurayt', *Majallat Kulliyat al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya*, Vol. 9 (1992), pp. 188–198, at p. 172. On p. 194 he refers to the initial conquest of Sicily using the word *iftataha*.
16. al-Tibi, 'Tasamuh', p. 190.
17. al-Tibi, 'Tasamuh', p. 193.
18. Because Said refuses to be prescriptive in *Orientalism* (cf. pp. 325–328, 337) it is hard to know precisely what he wanted Orientalism to change into, but presumably his idea was more of a politically correct discipline.
19. Da'ud 'Abd al-'Afu Sunnaqrat, *Judhur al-fikr al-Yahudi*, 'Amman, 1983, p. 31.
20. Sunnaqrat, *Judhur al-fikr al-Yahudi*, pp. 32–33.
21. See Abd al-Rahman 'Atba, 'Harakat al-ta'rib wa-duruha al-hadari fi al-'uhud al-Islamiyya al-ula', *University of Libya, Faculty of Arts*, Vol. 5 (1976), pp. 115–130.
22. Examples of this approach are 'Abd al-Latif al-Tibawi, 'Christians under Muhammad and his First Two Caliphs', *Islamic Quarterly*, Vol. 5 (1961), pp. 30–46; R.J. Asali, 'Jerusalem in History: A Note on the Origins of the City and its Tradition of Tolerance', *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 16 (1994), pp. 37–46; 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Ibrahim al-'Umari, 'Nasara al-'Arab fi al-'Iraq wa-mawqifuhum min al-futuh al-Islamiyya fi 'ahd al-Rashidin', *Majallat Jami'at al-Imam Muhammad*, Vol. 11 (1994), pp. 151–209.
23. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Marta'i, *Iftira'at al-mustashriqin 'ala al-Islam*, Cairo, 1992, p. 71 (a great deal of similar hokum follows on pp. 72–74); see also al-Nadwi, *Madha khasara al-'alam bi-inhibat al-Muslimin*, p. 182 on the Muslim invasions of India.
24. E.g., Nasir al-Din al-Babra, 'al-'Arab lam yaghzu al-Andalus!', *al-Turath al-'Arabi*, Vol. 18, No. 69 (1998), pp. 9–23 (on p. 11 he notes that a Cairo journal *al-Adab wa-l-naqd* in 1992 that said there should be no regrets for leaving Spain because the Muslims were colonialists).
25. Amin al-Tibi, 'al-Muslimun fi al-Andalus wa-l-Siqiliyya', *Majallat Kulliyat al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya*, Vol. 2 (1985), pp. 186–206; also Mahmud al-Samra, 'Fath al-'Arab li-l-Uruba', *Afaq al-Islam*, Vol. 4, No. 16 (1996), pp. 88–93.
26. Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdudi, *Jihad fi sabil Allah* (edition of *Thalath rasa'il fi al-Jihad*), 'Amman, 1991, pp. 58–62.
27. Al-Mawdudi, *Jihad fi sabil Allah*, pp. 50–51.
28. E.g., Salima 'Abd al-Jabbar, 'al-Gharb wa-l-Islam', *Majallat Kulliyat al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya*, Vol. 11 (1994), pp. 162–175, at p. 165.
29. Hasan al-Banna', *Majmu'at rasa'il al-Imam al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna'*, Cairo, n.d., p. 297.
30. For figures see M.J. Kister, 'Land Property and *jihad*', *Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient*, Vol. 34 (1991), pp. 270–311, esp. pp. 306–308.
31. Al-Nadwi, *Madha khasara al-'alam bi-inhibat al-Muslimin?*, p. 160f.
32. Hasan al-Hajawi, 'al-Asas al-Ruhiyya wa-l-'Ilmiyya li-l-fath al-Islami', *Ta'rikh al-'Arab wa-l-'Alam*, Vol. 171 (1998), pp. 32–40; Muhammad 'Amara, 'Islamiyyat al-ma'rifa wa-l-wada'iyya al-gharbiyya ba'd al-futuh', *Mustaqbal al-'alam al-Islami*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1991), pp. 223–252; even by the convert Murad Hofmann, 'The European Mentality and Islam', *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 35 (1996), pp. 87–97 (at pp. 91–92 on the Crusades).
33. Mudhir al-Mu'aliqi, *al-Istishraq fi al-mizan*, Beirut, 1997, pp. 31, 33–34.
34. Suhayl Zakkar, *Ta'rikh al-'Arab wa-l-Islam*, Beirut, 1977, pp. 73–75 also rejects triumphalism, although he still uses the terms *fath/futuh*, etc. for the conquests.