

Edward Said and Kosovo

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Introduction

Beginning in the late 1970s Edward Said, who had just bust out of scholarly obscurity with his publication of *Orientalism*, became the target of sharp and pointed criticisms from notable scholars such as Albert Hourani, Malcolm Kerr, Bernard Lewis, and Maxime Rodinson. Despite the strength of their critiques and others lobbed against him, notably by Kanan Makiya in the early 1990s, Said's standing as a trusted and important voice on Middle Eastern affairs, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and American foreign policy remained generally untarnished. Throughout his career his popularity increased in reverse proportion to the state of his health that was ravaged by cancer. By 2002, a year before his death, Said was considered a towering figure on the intellectual left whose work was widely read and quite influential. The outpouring of emotion on the days after his death attests to how genuine and widespread this support was. Over the last few years, defenders of Said have been given good reason to revisit their sympathetic views of his work.

In 2005, in *The Journal of the Historical Society* Mark Proudman questioned Said's depiction of Benjamin Disraeli's Tancred and argued that his depiction of Disraeli as the archetypal 'orientalist' was based on factual errors as well as a decontextualised and tendentious methodological approach. In 2006, Robert Irwin published *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its Discontents* where he attempted to refute Said's use of the adjective 'orientalist' to be a term of derision meaning racist, imperialist, and even Zionist. In January 2007, in *Israel Affairs* Cameron Brown criticised Said's *The Question of Palestine* for being riddled with historical and factual inaccuracies that were central to the arguments he was making. And upcoming are two more works that aim to provide more critical scholarship on Said, entitled *Postcolonial Theory and the Arab-Israel Conflict* edited by Philip Carl Salzman and Donna Robinson Divine, and *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* by Ibn Warraq.

This new scholarship takes aim at Said's core texts such as *Orientalism* and *The Question of Palestine*. While this scholarship provides important insights, it does suffer from one key shortcoming. This shortcoming was articulated unknowingly by Rashid Khalidi – who is the Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia

University – when he wrote that Said’s impact on American public discourse came not from his core texts or numerous books but rather from his journalism. If Said’s intellectual legacy is to be properly assessed, then his work for the print media must also become the focus of scholarly analysis.

Of course, the attempts to demystify Said have not gone unanswered. In May 2007, a conference was held in Istanbul in tribute to the ‘erudition and seminal scholarship of Edward Said.’ The participants of the conference included American scholars Rashid Khalidi and Joseph Massad, British scholar Jacqueline Rose, Lebanese author Elias Khoury, and Israeli historian Ilan Pappé. The stated objective of this conference was to utilise Said’s ideas to repudiate an international culture that was feeding war, violence and the ‘clash of civilizations.’ The intention was to promote a more just and cooperative international order through Said’s work. [1] The question of whether Said’s work contributes to or hinders the realisation of an improved international order is central to an assessment of his intellectual legacy. To answer this question, let’s look at Said’s writings on war.

The usefulness of war for analytical purposes stems from the unique analytical duality that it creates. On one hand, as the phrase ‘fog of war’ accurately implies, war is a confused, complex, and unclear event obfuscated by state propaganda, faulty intelligence, deadly working conditions, and patriotism. On the other hand, war is also an act of great clarification. Not only does it illuminate important features of the state actors involved and their relationships with other states, but it also clarifies significant intellectual characteristics of those who engage in war-time debates. War’s discourse is effective in highlighting the observer’s ideological persuasions, political priorities, and worldviews for the very reason that it is a ‘foggy’ event. It is therefore a highly useful medium through which to assess an observer’s ability to think through complex political realities and contribute to our understanding of a violent world.

This essay will consider Said’s position on the Gulf War in 1991 and NATO’s intervention in Kosovo in 1999 with more emphasis on the latter.

Responsibilities of the Intellectual and Anti-war Politics

Said’s ruminations on the responsibility of the intellectual provide a good starting point to consider his war-time politics. In 1993, Said gave a set of six lectures as part of the Reith Lecture series promoting one big idea. The intellectual, Said

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insisted, 'who is 'principally serving and winning rewards from power is not at all conducive to the exercise of that critical and relatively independent spirit of analysis and judgement that, from my point of view, ought to be the intellectual's contribution.' [2] The responsible intellectual had to distance himself/herself from the grips of power; it was treasonous to do otherwise. The responsible intellectual did not restrict his/her public output just to their expertise but engaged broadly in public discourse contributing to issues of public and moral concern. In each venture into the public forum, the responsible intellectual challenged authority, asked the difficult questions, and made people uncomfortable with their received wisdoms. The responsible intellectual was also a professed amateur thrusting moral stakes into the 'heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity.' [3]

In international relations, the responsible intellectual upheld the norms of international behaviour in defence of human rights everywhere. He/she was principled, unrelenting, and universal in this posture. The responsible intellectual also exercised a 'special duty' to criticise his/her own society 'particularly when those powers are exercised in a manifestly disproportionate and immoral war, or in deliberate programs of discrimination, repression, and collective cruelty.' [4]

There was an obvious tension between Said's declared responsibilities to maintain a universal outlook to human rights while exercising a special critical vigilance against one's own society especially when it was at war. This tension became most acute in instances of humanitarian intervention when the observer had to deal with a humanitarian catastrophe abroad and his/her own society's decision to use military force to end it. How Said dealt with this tension is a central feature in understanding his position on the Gulf War and on Kosovo as each crisis involved regimes – Saddam's Iraq and Milošević's Serbia – broadly condemned for widespread abuse of human rights, engaging in attacks on others – Kuwaitis and Kosovar Albanians – and involving attempts led by Americans but including other nations, to combat what they were doing. Said opposed the Gulf War and NATO's intervention in Kosovo. Let us turn to why.

The Imperialism-Fascism Equation

In April 1999, three weeks into the NATO intervention in Kosovo, Said told an audience at Columbia University that:

I think these false dichotomies, either you're with, as it used to be said during the Gulf War...either you are for [Serbian] fascism or you are for [NATO] imperialism, and you have to be for imperialism because it is always slightly better than fascism...these are the kinds of false dichotomies that we are placed into in the current moment. [5]

Rejecting the imperialism-fascism dichotomy, Said replaced it with an imperialism-fascism equation. To uphold this equation both imperialism and fascism had to be viewed and understood as equally objectionable forms of power. To assess this position, we must first briefly consider Said's intellectual interests in imperialism and fascism.

The overwhelming majority of Said's work deals with America and her relations with the Middle East. In explaining this relationship, Said located American foreign policy along a historical continuum that begins with British and French imperialism in the 18th century. In 1973, in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* he argued that British, French, and American presences in the Middle East have all been governed by a shared disregard for local Arab interests. [6] In *Orientalism*, first published in 1978, Said expanded on this idea and asked the question: how did Britain, France and America develop the desire to dominate the Middle East and acquire the requisite political will to turn that desire into reality? This work is a study of imperialism, and of the ideas and civil structures that nourish it. It is also a study that argues that 'since World War II America has dominated the Orient and approaches it as France and Britain once did.' [7] Not only was American imperialism fed by European sources, Said argued, but it was also a product of indigenous patterns in American history. In 1993 he explained that 'the United States was founded as an empire, a dominion state of sovereignty that would expand in population and territory and increase in power.' [8]

Consequently, Said perceived all American international behaviour as imperialist. This understanding of U.S. policy is evident in much of Said's work. For instance, he depicted the American-led Oslo peace process between Israel and the Palestinians as reminiscent of 'nineteenth-century Africa, where European powers would sign pieces of paper called "treaties" with various African chiefs in order that trade and conquest could take place behind a façade of legitimacy, complete with "negotiations" and elaborate ceremonies.' [9] This view of U.S. policy is especially apparent in his position on the Gulf War and Kosovo.

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The Imperialism-Fascism 'Equation' in Practice: Said on the Gulf War

Said's opposition to American foreign policy was grounded in his understanding that it is imperialist and that imperialism was always a nefarious and pernicious force. Reiterating his position on the Gulf War in an interview in 1992 – a position that closely resembles his stance on the NATO intervention in Kosovo – Said explained:

Basically, I opposed Iraq. I opposed the depredations of the Kuwait regime, I opposed Saudi policy, and I opposed the American position. I opposed the war. But I refused to fall into the position taken by people like Fred Halliday and Hans Magnus Enzenberger – that in a war between imperialism and fascism you back imperialism. I was against them both. I think that was the honourable and only serious position to take. [10]

Even when fascism expands by aggressive action against its neighbour's, Said argued, one should never support imperialist opposition to such an act. To assess this 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.

According to Ba'athist official rhetoric, the end of the Iran-Iraq War in August 1988 was a tremendous victory for both Iraq and the Arab world. Many Iraqis hoped that the end of this war would usher in a new era of peace and prosperity as the Iraqi government began calling for elections and the establishment of a multi-party democracy. [11] Little would change, however. Days after Iran agreed to sign a cease-fire with Iraq, Saddam launched the final wave of chemical gas attacks against the Iraqi Kurds as part of Operation Anfal which killed at least 50,000. [12] Iraq soon spiralled into an economic crisis.

On the 2 August, 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait, annexing it six-days later. In response, the United Nations imposed sanctions but the international community quickly grew impatient with Iraq's aggression and uncooperative stance. A broad coalition, including a number of Arab states, aligned with America to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. In January 1991 an intervention was launched that successfully liberated Kuwait and forced the total withdrawal of Iraqi soldiers by the end of February.

Developing arguments for or against this war was contingent upon how one

understood the key players involved. Said's depiction of Saddam shifted in relation to events taking place in the Gulf as he adopted a pragmatic approach to argue against an American-led military action against Iraq. This approach was revealed after the war when he spoke of his belief that if the intellectual wants to effectively 'speak truth to power' he must do it in 'such a way as to influence with an ongoing and actual process, for instance, the cause of peace and justice.' [13] The idea that the intellectual must seek to influence while maintaining an opposition to both American imperialism and Ba'athist fascism does not easily coalesce because it was the realities of Saddam's regime that posed the strongest challenge to any anti-war position.

Days after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, Said described the Iraqi action as a 'military intervention.' [14] He condemned Saddam as an appalling dictator 'whose rule in Iraq has turned the place into a graveyard of democracy' but sought an alternative explanation for his act of territorial aggrandisement. Saddam's decision, Said believed, was consistent with the behaviour exhibited by the world's dominant powers:

But [Saddam] is neither mad nor, I would suggest, an unexpected figure to emerge out of the desolation that has characterized recent Arab history. He is admired today by many Arabs who deplore his methods, but who say the world is essentially dominated by powers who invade, grab land, and attempt to change governments with scant regard for the principles and moral imperative they proclaim exclusively against Arabs, nonwhites, wogs, and the like. [15]

As the American-led military response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait took place, Saddam's role in Said's oppositional politics greatly diminished. Take, for example, two articles Said wrote in early January and February 1991 that appeared in *the New York Times* and *The Nation*. Both articles employ the same approach to marginalise Saddam. In *the New York Times*, Said began:

Many Arabs, for example, are against Iraqi aggression, are also for a total withdrawal of Iraqi troops, and yet are not at all in favour of a U.S. attack against Iraq. I include myself in this group, as I also include myself among those Americans who feel that our military presence in the Gulf is far larger, more expensive, and potentially disastrous than is merited by the case the

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United States has been making for its intervention during the past few months. [16]

In *The Nation*, Said began:

Saddam Hussein, a dictator the kind the United States has typically found and supported, was almost invited into Kuwait, then almost immediately demonized and transformed into a worldwide metaphysical threat. Iraq's military capabilities were fantastically exaggerated, the country verbally obliterated except for its by now isolated leader, U.N. sanctions given a ludicrously short run, and then America began the war. [17]

In both instances there is some acknowledgement of Saddam as an aggressor and as a dictator. Such remarks are then flooded and overshadowed by a much longer analysis of U.S. policy which, by the end of the article, renders the critique of Saddam impotent.

Immediately after the Gulf War, Said re-introduced Saddam back into his analysis although he still remained on the sidelines. For instance, on 7 March, 1991 in the *London Review of Books*, Said adopted a defensive tone: 'I do not excuse and have not excused the aggression of Iraq against Kuwait. I have condemned the abuses of Saddam Hussein's government, and those of the other governments of the region, whether Arab or Israeli.' [18] Like his previous condemnations of Saddam, the condemnation found in this article rejected the idea that Saddam had any unique dictatorial qualities which broke the threshold of the 'standard' or 'normal' dictator.

Supporting this understanding of Saddam, Said wrote in the same article 'the claim that Iraq gassed its own citizens has often been repeated. At best, this is uncertain.' [19] Said's use of the word 'uncertain' is important because it connotes a negative scepticism. The word 'probable,' on the other hand, connotes a positive scepticism implying that there is more evidence in favour of the claim that Saddam had gassed his own citizens than against it. Said's negative scepticism ignores the considerable evidence widely available at the time to show that it was 'probable,' if not certain, that Saddam had gassed the Kurds. For instance, in 1988 the United Nations declared Iraqi use of chemical weapons in its war with Iran, and in August it was concluded that Iraqi use was far more frequent than Iranian use. [20] In October 1988, both the *United Press International* and the U.S.-based NGO Physicians for Human Rights reported Iraqi use of chemical weapons against its own citizens. [21]

This corroborated the utterances of Iraqi Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani who told *Le Monde*: 'It is no exaggeration to say that using chemical weapons has become routine for the Iraqis...The army uses them routinely when it undertakes a major operation in Kurdistan and even resorts to it to cover its retreat.' [22] Despite this, Said's use of the term 'uncertain' was an attempt to further the idea that Iraq was undeserving of the treatment it was getting by the American media and supporters of the Gulf War, and to undermine the perception of Iraq as the most brutal regime in the region. More than one year later, in September 1992, Said finally acknowledged that Saddam had indeed committed a genocide when he wrote that the U.S. 'actually supported [Saddam] during the Ba'ath genocide against the Kurds.' [23] In his belated acknowledgement of this Iraqi crime, Said expressed himself in such a way to say something damning about American foreign policy. What Said leaves out in this statement is the central point that for such an act of barbarity the party responsible was the Iraqi regime regardless of its relationship with other countries.

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.' [24] The actions of the Ba'athist regime were 'disgraceful.' They were 'repressive at home, mischievously adventurous and violent abroad.' [25] In an interview in early 1992, he spoke of Saddam as a 'murderer,' a 'tyrant,' a 'fascist,' and a 'pig.' [26] 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.

In 1992, Said depicted the anti-war position he had taken as one of opposition to both American imperialism and Ba'athist fascism. He spoke in principled terms of the need to apply a universal standard to the actions of both belligerents. Said's analysis, however, betrays this principle. Days after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Said described American foreign policy as the 'great enemy of Arab nationalism.' [27] One might have expected that description to have been used against Iraq who had just invaded a neighbouring Arab state. Said also portrayed the American drive for war as rooted in an 'imperialist ideology.' [28] Despite being a blatant act of imperialist aggression, Saddam's move to incorporate a neighbouring sovereign

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state into his own was not described in this way. In fact, Said even granted Saddam's Iraq anti-imperialist credentials. [29] Said also put forth the notion that American political thinking had a puritanical streak that sought to punish non-white nations. America, he wrote, was an 'energised super-nation imbued with a fervour that can only be satisfied with compliance or subservience from "sheikhs", dictators, and camel-jockeys.' [30] This same language was absent from Said's depiction of Iraqi foreign policy which sought the subservience of Kuwait. Iraq was described as acting not out of initiative but out of reaction. Unlike America whose policies were products of domestic ideological impulses, Iraqi foreign policy was described as disconnected from Ba'athist impulses which were indeed expansionist, violent, and racist. [31] Said contended that American foreign policy found sustenance in a deep-rooted hostility to, and ignorance of, Islam and Arab culture. For instance, he wrote, the notion underpinning the drive for war is that 'Arabs only understand force: brutality and violence are part of Arab civilisation; Islam is an intolerant, segregationist, "medieval," fanatic, cruel, anti-woman religion.' [32] Assuming this to be true, was Saddam's invasion and subsequent occupation of Kuwait not an affront of equal ferocity to Arab civilization? (Perhaps not since Said described the Kuwaiti government as lacking in historical legitimacy. [33]) Was Saddam's attack on a fellow Muslim state not indicative of an abhorrence to, and ignorance of, Islam? Was his attack not a betrayal of the traditions set by the flowering Abbasid Empire whose capital once rested in Baghdad?

These inconsistencies are further seen in Said's response to Kanan Makiya's expressed hope that America would remove Saddam from Baghdad after it had liberated Kuwait. Said depicted these feelings as 'extraordinarily sad,' 'with no realism in perspective,' and 'astonishing!' [34] This type of response only seems possible if Said had more oppositional fervour to America than he did Saddam. Illustrating his hostility to Makiya, Said told one audience that:

A very small handful of Arab intellectuals suddenly discovered a new role for themselves in Europe and the U.S...One of them in particular, a man who had once been a loyal Trotskyist, later abandoned the Left and turned, as many others did, to the Gulf, where he had made a handsome living in construction. He re-presented himself just before the Gulf crisis, and became an impassioned critic of one Arab regime in particular. He never wrote under his own name, but using a string of pseudonyms that protected his identity (and his interests) he flailed out indiscriminately and hysterically against

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Arab culture as a whole; he did this in such a way as to win him the attention of Western readers. [35]

This personal invective against Makiya was criticised by Fred Halliday who, in a personal letter he sent to Said in 1994, deplored the abrasive and contentious 'way in which many in the US, including yourself, have treated [Makiya] and his arguments.' [36] In an interview in 2005, Makiya described his intellectual shifts for which Said had scorned him:

My case has always rested on an Iraqi perspective, on what is in the best interests of the 25 million or so people of Iraq. That's very important and something that people don't often see... Abstract categories like 'anti-imperialism' and 'anti-Zionism' concealed behind them a cover-up for terrible things that were taking place inside Iraq, things that are implicitly condoned by people like [Noam] Chomsky and [Edward] Said. I can't engage in that kind of obfuscation any more. The be-all and end-all of politics for me is tyranny and totalitarian dictatorship. [37]

What seems obvious is not only that Said misrepresented his own anti-war position by professing an equal opposition to both imperialism and fascism, but that he attempted to conceal a facile anti-imperialism with a veneer of principle. Had this principle been adhered to the logical outcome would have been an anti-war position based on ambivalence. When sociologist Murray Hausknecht described his ambivalent position on the war he spoke of George Bush as a leader 'who lacks judgement, prudence, and honour.' He combined this sentiment with his opposition to Saddam whose acts such as the 'unprovoked missile attacks on Israel, the deliberate spilling of oil into the Gulf, and the previous genocidal attack on the Kurds should be sufficient grounds for ambivalence among those who do not support the war.' [38] What is clear is that Said's opposition to Saddam was not strong enough to counter-balance his opposition to America. For that reason, Said was unable to take an ambivalent stand on the war which would have been more in tune with his own declared responsibilities as an intellectual.

Certainly, an ambivalent position is difficult to maintain in wars in which fascism is involved for it, in effect, countenances the actions of a fascist dictator which sometimes demand foreign intervention. This was the dilemma of Irving Howe, a democratic socialist, whose position on the war was initially one of ambivalence but who soon moved to the understanding that to 'list all such criticisms of American

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policy even to multiply them tenfold, is not yet to answer the immediate question: *What should be done with or about Saddam Hussein?* [39] Howe weighed his political priorities. While American foreign policy was highly objectionable, he thought, the central issue remained Iraqi fascism. Said's priority, conversely, was *what should be done with or about America?* His repulsion to American foreign policy outweighed his repugnance for Ba'athist policy. This anti-war position would have left Saddam in possession of Kuwait and his regime would have been bolstered by the impotency of the international community to repel the most egregious forms of state aggression and annexation.

Under scrutiny, not only does the idea that Said was equally opposed to both imperialism and fascism unravel, so too does the notion that Said offered anything substantive to say in opposition to Ba'athist fascism. With this understanding, we can now move to assess Said's specific writings on the NATO intervention in Kosovo.

NATO's Intervention: Left-wing Support and the Notion of Serb Centrality

On the 24 March, 1999 after the failure to resolve the Serb-Kosovar conflict through negotiation, American bombers under NATO auspices began airstrikes against Serb targets. After ten-weeks of bombing, on 10 June 1999 Milošević finally agreed to surrender and withdraw his forces from Kosovo. Although it was not unanimous, NATO's intervention in Kosovo created a groundswell of support among certain left-wing circles. Justifying the intervention in international law, pro-interventionists paid homage to an alternative theory of law articulated by British prosecutor Sir Hartley Shawcross at the Nuremburg War Crimes Tribunal:

International law has in the past made some claim that there is a limit to the omnipotence of the state and that the individual human being, the ultimate unit of all law, is not disentitled to the protection of mankind when the state tramples upon his rights in a manner which outrages the conscience of mankind. [40]

Václav Havel, then President of the Czech Republic, told the Canadian parliament that NATO's war in Kosovo was not for oil, territory, or simple national interest. On the contrary, NATO 'is fighting because no decent person can stand by and watch the systematic, state directed murder of other people.' [41] Just war theorist Michael Walzer and scholar Michael Ignatieff believed that Serbia had renounced

its right to protection as a sovereign state because of its domestic policies against its own people and its neighbours. [42] Legal expert Marc Weller argued that NATO's intervention was justified to contravene Serbian sovereignty because of the 'overwhelming necessity of averting a humanitarian disaster in general international law.' [43] And Samantha Power nodded in support of the intervention stating that it was the first time the United States had committed itself to preventing genocide. [44] These supporters agreed that it was Serbian policies that were the central problem. The Serbs' history of brutality in the Balkans through the 1990s, notably the massacre at Srebrenica of 7000-8000 civilians by the Bosnian Serb army, its oppression of the Kosovars throughout the 1990s which became violent in 1998, and then its rejection of the peace accord offered to them in March 1999, which the Kosovar delegation ultimately accepted, fed this perception. Milošević's rejection of Richard Holbrooke's final diplomatic push on 22 March to bring the Serbs back to the negotiating table provided further justification for the belief that the Serbian regime had to be defanged, militarily if need be, to protect the Kosovars from further abuse and brutality and to ensure regional stability. [45] Ivo Daalder and Michael O'Hanlon illustrated this sentiment when they wrote that 'the Serb leader of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević had been most responsible for a decade of violence that accompanied the breakup of Yugoslavia.' His war against the Kosovars pushed NATO to intervene on their behalf. [46]

When negotiations had failed, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana declared the intention to use force against Serbia for humanitarian ends. 'Our objective,' he said:

is to prevent more human suffering and more repression and violence against the civilian population of Kosovo. We must also act to prevent instability spreading in the region. NATO is united behind this course of action. We must halt the violence and bring an end to the humanitarian catastrophe now unfolding in Kosovo. We know the risks of action but we have all agreed that inaction brings even greater dangers. We will do what is necessary to bring stability to the region. We must stop an authoritarian regime from repressing its people in Europe at the end of the 20th century. We have a moral duty to do so. The responsibility is on our shoulders and we will fulfil it. [47]

The next day President Clinton reiterated NATO's humanitarian message adding an additional justification for the intervention in accordance with American values and national interests. 'That is why we have acted now' he said, 'because we care about saving innocent lives; because we have an interest in avoiding an even crueller

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and costlier war; and because our children need and deserve a peaceful, stable, free Europe.’ [48]

Against the backdrop of this professed intellectual and official concern for human rights in support of an American military action, Edward Said penned four articles from April to June 1999 articulating his opposition to NATO’s intervention. These articles appeared in the *New Left Review*, *The Observer*, *The New Statesman*, and the Egyptian weekly *Al Abram*.

NATO and American Motives: Misrepresenting America’s Kosovo Policy

Said’s understanding of NATO’s motives play an important part in his anti-war position. In tune with his depiction of all American actions as imperialist, he too saw NATO’s policy as imperialist. NATO, he asserted, was a cover for American designs to assert its will and strength abroad. Its humanitarian rhetoric was a trick and a facade. [49] Rather than a military intervention, Said believed that the solution to the region’s problems lay in a multi-party conference for all peoples of the former Yugoslavia to negotiate an agreement based on the principle of self-determination for all. [50] He believed that only if America could extricate itself from the region, the people could solve their own problems. For this reason he insisted that the ‘smaller, lesser, weaker peoples realise that this America is to be resisted at all costs, not pandered or given in to naively.’ [51]

One of Said’s major arguments against NATO’s intervention had to do with what he saw as American inconsistencies in regards to human rights abuses. For America to claim any semblance of morality, according to this logic, it must intervene consistently all over the world to try to end all humanitarian crises. After Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, Said used the same argument wondering why Iraq’s invasion was due more attention than Turkey’s invasion of Cyprus or Israel’s invasion of Lebanon. [52] In the context of a humanitarian situation, Said noted: ‘Why [Turkish attacks on Kurdish civilians] isn’t considered as bad as what Milošević is doing puzzles me, but one supposes that a higher logic is at work which ordinary human beings cannot easily comprehend.’ [53] When used to criticise an intervention to protect the Kosovars, Said’s logic is faulty. It utilises a reverse double-standard which, if Said means to assert he would have supported an American intervention against the Turks but not against the Serbs, places more importance on the lives of Turkish Kurds than it does on those of the Kosovars. [54] But Said did not express a desire for a NATO intervention in Turkey on behalf of the Kurds but used American and

NATO inaction and the suffering of one people to oppose American and NATO action to end another peoples' suffering. Had America intervened in Turkey and not in Kosovo Said presumably would have used the suffering of the ethnic Albanians to counter that intervention arguing that it was just another American imperialist foray into the Middle East. What many perceived to be American moral inconsistencies, Said argued, was in fact its immoral consistency which was of the utmost threat to world order.

Another important element in the use of American inconsistencies to oppose the NATO intervention is Said's reference to a 'higher logic' which he believed explained why America and NATO acted in Kosovo but not in Turkey and elsewhere. This 'higher logic' is the result of an American power governed by those who intervene unilaterally on a whim, 'destroying, tampering with, building and re-building as it wishes for no other reason, finally, than that it CAN do so.' [55] This depiction not only fails to take into account the numerous voices in the American government who opposed NATO's intervention, but also fails to appreciate the complexity of the decision to commit troops abroad. [56] Understanding the American decision to intervene in Kosovo requires examining four essential elements that played a crucial importance in the decision-making process. As can be seen, Said's analysis paid little attention to any of these or assumed them out of existence.

The first element is national interest. Clinton was explicit on this point when he claimed that a NATO intervention in Kosovo served American national interest by preventing instability from leeching out and threatening the region. He spoke of the possibility of a broader conflagration due to the sensitivity of Balkan demographics which would be exacerbated by massive refugee flows out of Kosovo – notable into Macedonia which maintains a careful ethnic balance between Slavs and Albanians – without the requisite international support systems. [57] (Arguably, the same national interest was not an issue in the case of Turkish actions.) Senator Joe Biden referred to this element in American thinking when he said that 'the loss of a life in Kosovo and the loss of a life in Somalia have totally different consequences, in a Machiavellian sense, for the United States' interest. If there is a chaos in Europe, we have a problem; we are a European power.' [58] Undersecretary of Defence Walter Slocombe said that the intervention is born out of 'our cold-blooded, calculated national interest as much as our humanitarian sympathies.' And Senator Carl Levin believed that 'our participation there advances a national goal – to contain a conflict from spreading and having allies fight each other.' [59] British Prime Minister Tony Blair also justified the intervention in Kosovo in terms of national interest when

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he stated that ‘many of our domestic problems are caused on the other side of the world...Conflict in the Balkans causes more refugees in Germany and here in the US. These problems can only be addressed by international co-operation.’ [60] But for Said, American national interest could not be a justification since his description of America as irretrievably imperialist rendered its national interest illegitimate.

The second element in NATO’s decision to intervene addresses the principle of humanitarian thresholds. Serbia was seen to have exceeded this threshold. The issue with Serbia was not one that emerged out of nowhere in 1999. There were important antecedents that played into the ultimate decision to intervene. For instance, the stain of U.N. and NATO failure to prevent the ethnic cleansings and genocide in the early 1990s in Bosnia was significant. Most notable was the massacre of 7000-8000 Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica in 1995 by the Bosnian Serb Army under the leadership of Radislav Krstic who was later charged as a war criminal. [61] This failure, coupled with Clinton’s failure to act to prevent genocide in Rwanda, undoubtedly played a role in American thinking regarding Kosovo. [62] There was also a precedent of Serb actions in Kosovo throughout 1998 and 1999 that took place before NATO’s bombing began. These actions resulted in approximately 200,000 Kosovars being displaced from their homes. [63] This was combined with Serbia’s reluctance to cooperate with international mediation efforts to solve the problem with Kosovo diplomatically. As Marc Weller notes, the Serbian government used a break in negotiations in February to renew its military operations in Kosovo. [64] A statement prepared by the chairman of the Paris negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo supported this point: ‘In Paris, the Kosovo delegation seized this opportunity and, by their signatures, have committed themselves to the Accords as a whole. Far from seizing this opportunity, the Yugoslav (Serbian) delegation has tried to unravel the Rambouillet Accords.’ [65] All of this contributed to the perception that Serbia was beyond the pale. Illustrating this breach of threshold, Tony Blair believed that ‘no one in the West who has seen what is happening in Kosovo can doubt that NATO’s military action is justified.’ [66] Said’s analysis discounted this point by first requiring that to be a credible intervention on humanitarian grounds complete consistency of action was required; and second by paying little attention to what the Serbs had actually done in Kosovo up to the time of NATO’s intervention.

A third element of the intervention, which distinguished it from issues taking place in Turkey or Africa, was that Kosovo was considered to be a part of the West. This notion resonates with one of Said’s stated intellectual responsibilities

to be universal while maintaining a vigilant eye on one's own society. As Kai Bird argued in *The Nation*, 'if the West cannot stop these episodes of genocidal warfare in Yugoslavia...how can we have the standing to say anything about human rights in the rest of the world.' [67] Peter Beinart in *The New Republic* believed that the decision to intervene in Kosovo, as opposed to in Africa, was partially a product of American racism which manifested itself in the fact that most Americans did not view Africa within their own realm. 'Most Americans are not analytically equipped to see African slaughter as aberrant,' he wrote. [68] Said adopted a similar tack when he argued that 'in 1994, when a US intervention might have averted genocide in Rwanda, there was no action. The stakes were not high enough, the Black people were not worth the effort.' [69] For Said, this was an argument against the validity of NATO's action in Kosovo. Contrary to the use of America's failure in Rwanda as ammunition against America's intervention, Beinart believed that although American policy was driven by a particular racism, this did not invalidate the mission in Kosovo. The intervention, he argued, signalled the extension of America's moral community to the Balkans and the repudiation of the myth that violence there was a result of the region's DNA. Beinart insisted that these same myths about Africa needed to be exploded and that the continent had to be included in America's moral community as well. [70] Echoing Beinart's calls, Senator Gordon Smith stated that 'we largely intervened in Kosovo because of humanitarian goals. If it's good for Kosovo, it ought to be good for Africa too.' [71]

The fourth element was one of feasibility. Samuel Berger, Clinton's National Security Adviser, spoke of this element when he told reporters that 'we can't be everywhere; we can't do everything, nor should we try. That means at times we'll be criticised because there is fighting in Sierra Leone and we're not stopping it.' Clinton, similarly, stated that 'whenever we can stop a humanitarian disaster at an acceptable price, we should do it.' [72] As Said even noted, although with the intention to depict NATO's act as targeting a defenceless people, NATO's military action had 'little chance of retaliation from the enemy.' [73] This factor improved the chances that NATO military strikes would be successful and ensured that minimal losses would be incurred. Feasibility also helps to explain the reluctance to commit ground troops. But Said's analysis ignored this point given its assumption about imperialist motives.

Beyond Motives, Towards Blame

A persuasive anti-war position, however, could not only rest on an opposition to motives especially if that war had the possibility of having a positive humanitarian impact. If NATO was intervening on behalf of the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo, then it would seem to be a point in favour of the intervention if it was effective to stop the Serbian campaign of ethnic cleansing and killing. By June 1999, this goal was achieved with a large withdrawal of Serb forces from the province and the beginning of the return of refugees to their homes. [74] During the war, however, those in opposition to NATO policy, such as Said, argued that it was doing more harm than good.

Many on the anti-interventionist Left gathered around the American weekly *The Nation* to oppose the war. In its first print on NATO's intervention on 19 April, the cover-page was split in half: the top-half of the page pictured a NATO bomber flying overhead; the bottom half pictured a stream of people, presumably ethnic Albanian refugees, leaving their homes. Mothers held their children in one hand, and their possessions in the other; fathers looked on as they marched towards an uncertain future. The contention was obvious. On the next page, the editors validated this contention arguing that 'the bombing has left the Kosovars far worse off than before the NATO offensive.' [75] This was a consistent editorial theme from April to June. [76] Hungarian essayist George Konrad adopted a similar position when he posited that not only was NATO and the West responsible for the increased suffering of the Kosovars but it was also responsible for the break-up of Yugoslavia and the subsequent rise of Balkan ethnic nationalism. 'The West recognized ethnic nationalism,' he wrote, 'and helped it to victory, opening the door to the violent expulsions.' [77] Slovenian sociologist and post-modernist Slavoj Žižek agreed:

When the West fights Milošević, it is not fighting its enemy, one of the last points of resistance against the liberal democratic New World Order; it is fighting its own creature a monster that grew in large part as a result of the compromises and inconsistencies of Western politics. [78]

This notion of Western culpability was highly amenable to Said's worldview. By adopting this view, Serbian fascism received little attention much like Said's description and condemnation of Iraqi fascism. Compare, for instance, the way Said described Saddam's invasion of Kuwait to the way he described Milošević's actions in Kosovo. On Iraq's invasion, he wrote:

Saddam Hussein is an appalling dictator whose rule in Iraq has turned the place into a graveyard of democracy. Everyone knows that, especially Arabs. But in the American campaign to demonize, isolate, and destroy him for his shocking invasion of Kuwait, he had been inaccurately separated from the environment and politics that have produced him. [79]

On Serb actions, he wrote:

No one at all doubts that horrific things have been done to the Albanians under Serbian domination, but the question is whether US/NATO policy will alleviate things or whether they will in fact be made worse by a bombing campaign whose supposed goal is to make Milošević give up his policies. Certainly, the increased suffering of ethnic Albanians is a direct result of US policy. [80]

In each case Said contends that there is a universal understanding that Saddam and Milošević are brutal leaders. If the crimes of these regimes are widely known and understood then there is no need for Said to dwell on them. Rather, according to Said, the problem at hand – whether it is the invasion of Kuwait or the suffering of ethnic Albanians – is at its core a product of American policy. Consequently, the particular brutalities of each regime can be passed over allowing Said to then make the transition to what he suggests is less well known. In the case of Kosovo, Said argues that while Serbia has done some ‘horrific things’ the real problem lies with US/NATO policy which is making things worse. The aim of NATO policy, Said believed, was ‘massive destructiveness wholly disproportionate to the goal’ of a humanitarian intervention. [81] Said’s sentiments were similar to those of Nobel laureate Harold Pinter who believed ‘that the bombing of civilians [which were declared as mistakes by NATO] was part of a deliberate attempt to terrorise the population.’ [82] This idea produced a war-time assessment based on the assertion that the massive refugee flows out of Kosovo could only be understood and discussed in the context of NATO actions.

Working within this framework, Said’s anti-war position aimed to expose the crimes of NATO. To do so, Said shifted his war-time discussion away from Milošević and towards Clinton and other Western leaders. Said believed that if Milošević was being tried for war crimes then the American and NATO leadership should be tried as well. As Said wrote:

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The International Tribunal that has branded Milošević a war criminal cannot in the present circumstances have either viability or credibility unless the same criteria are applied to Clinton, Blair, Albright, Sandy Berger, General Clark and all the others whose murderous purpose completely overrode any notion of decency and the laws of war. [83]

Milošević While at first it seems as if Said is equating the crimes of Clinton and, this turns out not to be the case. Instead, Said argued that Clinton was the worse of the two:

In comparison with what Clinton has done to Iraq alone, Milošević for all his brutality, is a rank amateur in viciousness. What makes Clinton's crimes worse is the sanctimony and fraudulent concern in which he cloaks himself and, worse, which seem to fool the neo-liberals who now run that Natopolitan world. Better an honest conservative than a deceptive liberal. [84]

An abhorrence of Clinton, however, does not sufficiently expose the roots of Said's position on the intervention since a pro-interventionist stance was possible despite a deep opposition to Clinton. Leon Wieseltier, for example, supported the intervention despite, as he explained in *The New Republic*, his strong dislike for Clinton:

Everything Clinton does is so tiresomely Clintonian. The war is no exception. Its limitations and his inconsistencies are his limitations and his inconsistencies... Impunity is his ideal. It is no wonder that such a man would kindle to the cruise missile, and more generally to the moral convenience of technology of precision guidance. [85]

In contrast to Said, Wieseltier's opposition to Milošević and his crimes against the ethnic Albanians outweighed his opposition to Clinton. This led him to depict the intervention in Kosovo as 'a good fight being badly fought.' [86] The core of Wieseltier's position rested on his belief that and Milošević the Serbs had to be stopped. After Milošević had surrendered, he argued that as long as Milošević remained in power, trouble still lurked for the region. [87] Said's position, conversely, was centred on the belief that Clinton and NATO had to be stopped. By calling Clinton a war criminal for his policy of sanctions toward Iraq and his intervention in Kosovo, Said insisted on focusing his war-time discussion on American and

NATO actions. This idea was embraced by Alexander Cockburn who perceived the International Criminal Tribunal as a Western tool of distraction from the real problems of the world. It was designed, he argued, 'to function as a star chamber for the New World Order, nabbing an occasional small fry but impotent to go after big-time Western perps.' [88]

NATO Bombs and the Refugee Crisis

Said believed that it was NATO who bore primary responsibility for the mass civilian exodus from Kosovo. This charge, if true, would greatly undermine any justification for the intervention that was supposed to stop and reverse ethnic cleansing. Unlike Said, those sympathetic to the idea of military intervention based their view on an awareness of a history of Serb actions against the Kosovars. Providing this sympathy with substance and evidence was the work conducted by Human Rights Watch (HRW). Throughout 1998 and early 1999, HRW produced a number of reports on Serb actions in Kosovo. In one October 1998 report, Serb violations of international humanitarian law were documented from February to September of that year. The report informed that attacks by Serb forces in response to assaults by Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) resulted in numerous civilian deaths. In one specific attack on a KLA stronghold in early March 1998, Serb special-forces, armoured vehicles, and artillery killed eighty-three people including twenty-four women and children. [89] A report two months later detailed the detention of hundreds of ethnic Albanians under a broadly-defined Serb anti-terrorist law. The report also noted the Serb government's wilful oppression of ethnic Albanians:

since coming to power Slobodan Milošević has undermined the rule of law and breached the separation of power, making the courts the judicial organs of the ruling Socialist party. While violations of due process are endemic throughout Yugoslavia, there is no question that the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo are especially prone to abuse. [90]

In January 1999 HRW reported Serb atrocities in the Kosovar village of Racak. In August 1998, the population of the village was 2000; by January 1999 it had dwindled to 400. This exodus was in response to Serb attacks committed against the village that peaked on the 15 January. On this day the Serbs launched a heavy artillery bombardment against Racak's civilian neighbourhoods. HRW reported the summary execution of twenty-three men. 'All of them,' HRW noted, 'were wearing rubber boots typical of Kosovo farmers rather than military footwear.'

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[91] In total, Serb forces killed 45 civilians, amongst them women, children and the elderly. Recalling what he saw in the village after Serb troops had left, American Ambassador William Walker told reporters:

I do not have words to describe my personal revulsion . . . at the sight of what can only be described as an unspeakable atrocity. Although I am not a lawyer, from what I personally saw, I do not hesitate to describe the crime as a massacre, a crime against humanity. Nor do I hesitate to accuse the government security forces of responsibility. [92]

In Said's argument, none of this evidence surfaces. Barely noting Serb brutality against the Kosovars, Said exposed his real commitment to denouncing NATO actions. On 24 June 1999, he wrote 'that the illegal bombing increased and hastened the flight of people out of Kosovo cannot be doubted.' [93] Said's absolute assuredness in this claim was problematic because it betrayed one of his own declared responsibilities as an intellectual. Describing this responsibility, he said 'the goal of speaking the truth is...mainly to project a better state of affairs and one that corresponds to a set of moral principles – peace, reconciliation, abatement of suffering – applied to *known facts*.' [94] This was a betrayal because what Said purported to be a 'known fact' was neither known at the time nor a fact.

In May 1999, Said acknowledged the absence of this 'fact' when he criticized American journalists for reporting very little on what was going on in Kosovo.

[A] conspiracy of silence has been fobbed on to the public. The media has played the most extraordinary role of propaganda and encouragement, which, seems to get worse everyday. Obviously Serbian propaganda has been playing its own role which I make no attempt to justify or minimise. But CNN and its co-conspirators have played the part of a cheering partisan team. No journalist has dared raise the question of how it is that the number of refugees has actually increased since the bombing began (the bombing that was supported to save them), and any suggestion that NATO may have made matters worse is scarcely given a hearing. [95]

If we accept Said's depiction of the American media's coverage of the intervention as truth, then we must assume that new authoritative information appeared between the times these two statements were made from May to June. However, nothing of

the sort appeared. The new information that did surface substantially undermined Said's position.

On 14 June 1999, a study was published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science on the attitudes of Kosovar refugees. One major finding of their report was the obvious desire of all refugees to return home. The conditions they placed on this return say something quite significant in regards to Said's charge against NATO. The report indicated that 'when [the refugees] were probed, they replied that they wanted NATO to guarantee their safety, or that they want to be safe from the Serbs...A few said they actually wanted to be escorted by NATO troops.' [96] If it had been NATO strikes that these refugees were fleeing from, as Said claimed, and not Serb actions then their positive attitude towards NATO would be inexplicable. Some refugees even reported, without being probed, of their adamant refusal to return to any regions of Kosovo that were placed under Russian control who was seen as a close ally to Serbia. [97] This evidence also significantly undermined Said's early claim that 'not even the Kosovo Albanians believe that the air campaign is about independence for Kosovo or about saving Albanian lives: that is a total illusion.' [98]

To be sure, this evidence is only circumstantial and does not provide a definitive account of what prompted such a massive refugee exodus from Kosovo. Despite Said's confidence in his argument on NATO culpability, general knowledge on what happened in Kosovo during the intervention was quite murky. This murkiness was prevalent at the beginning of the intervention when rumours were circulated of a Serbian plan entitled Operation Horseshoe designed to empty Kosovo of its ethnic Albanian population. These rumours, however, were taken with caution. As one senior U.S. State Department official indicated, the information on Operation Horseshoe was extremely vague. When asked if he was surprised by the mass exodus of refugees from Kosovo, he responded, 'quite a bit!' [99] A post-intervention report commissioned by the U.S. State Department criticized NATO policy planners for not predicting a Serb campaign of ethnic cleansing. [100] The UN was also caught off-guard. In a post-war report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, it was stated that 'the UNHCR did not anticipate the size and speed of the exodus, nor could it reasonably be expected to have done so.' [101] Kosovo expert Tim Judah effectively summed up the lack of availability of authoritative accounts of the war when he pointed out that 'while there was without doubt a major [Serbian] plan to crush the KLA which would have resulted in large

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numbers of refugees, until the archives are opened in Belgrade, the real picture will remain unclear...No one has yet managed to piece together a comprehensive picture of exactly what happened.' [102]

Today, evidence is available that greatly improves our understanding of NATO's role in creating the refugee crisis. This evidence is found in a 2002 statistical study that set out to answer the question of responsibility for the Kosovar refugee crisis. Comparing the patterns of NATO air strikes to the movements of the Kosovars, the report found that:

it was clear that most of the air strikes occurred after the major flow of refugees in the first phase. Only occasionally did air strikes precede a local peak in refugee flow...More often we found that there were no air strikes in a given municipality until after most of the refugee flow had occurred. [103]

Further, the report stated:

The possibility that NATO airstrikes had caused migration was not supported by these findings... [In addition] we were unable to find an association between NATO activity and/or KLA activity and deaths. We therefore reject the hypothesis that NATO and KLA activity were plausible causes in Kosovar Albanians deaths...The overall affect of KLA activity and NATO airstrikes does not much change the killing and refugee flow patterns. [104]

The report concluded that its findings are most significant in what they disprove rather than what they prove: 'Given the results of our study, key hypotheses which might support the defendant's (Milošević) innocence are simply not plausible.' [105] Popular sentiment today in Kosovo further disproves Said's thesis of NATO culpability. In Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, plans were recently declared to place a statue of Bill Clinton on a prominent avenue that bears his name. 'This is my way of saying thank you,' sculptor Izeir Mustafa told reporters. There are also plans to build a statue for Tony Blair. [106]

Could Said have supported NATO's Intervention?

The explanation for Said's thesis on NATO culpability can be traced back to his analytical focus on American foreign policy. As we saw with the Gulf War, a central element of his anti-war position lay in the minimisation of the crimes of Saddam's

regime and the overarching opposition to American policy. The same practice dominated his position on the war in Kosovo in which the actions of the Serb forces against the ethnic Albanians were barely given a hearing and when they were, they were systematically crushed under the weight of Said's criticism of America and NATO. Appreciating this focus of Said's anti-war writings, it is understandable that Said would oppose both the Gulf War and NATO's intervention since the principle actor was America.

One of Said's consistent critiques of American foreign policy was that it was purposefully devastating to the Muslim world. In 1981 he argued that American public discourse, fed by the media, was propagating myths that Islam was a threat to the west using it 'as a kind of scapegoat for everything we do not happen to like about the world's new political, social and economic patterns.' [107] A few years later, Said told an audience at a Middle East Scholars Association debate that the negative messages of Islam and Arabs being presented by the media were perfectly in tune with American foreign policy. 'We can safely characterize the United States,' Said argued, 'as being abetted in its policies by its media.' [108] At the time of the Gulf War, Said wrote that 'in all this frightening rhetoric, the sustained ignorance of Arabs and Islamic culture is turned into a useful mode of warfare: The enemy has been so dehumanized for so long that we never hesitate to deliver the final blow.' [109] In 1997, he was more forthright on this position:

had Iraq not been a Muslim country that militarily occupied another in an area of huge oil-reserves that are considered to be the United States' preserve, the invasion would not have taken place, just as Israel's invasion and occupation of the West Bank and Golan Heights, its annexation of East Jerusalem and the implementation of settlements were not seen by the United States as requiring intervention. [110]

The reason for this American hostility to Islam is that 'it is only from within the Islamic world that signs of determined resistance are still strong.' [111] Said's reading of history deserves its own separate treatise but it is sufficient to say that his understanding of American foreign policy would seem to be devastated when NATO decided to intervene on behalf of Muslim ethnic Albanians suffering under Christian Serb oppression.

By supporting the NATO intervention in Kosovo in principle, if not in terms of strategy or tactic, Said would have been consistent with his declared concern for

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Muslim suffering. Support for the intervention would also have been consistent with brief criticisms he made of American foreign policy throughout the 1990s regarding its inaction in Bosnia. In 1993, Said criticised numerous governments, including America, for looking at the human rights situation in Bosnia ‘practically, not consistently.’ [112] In 1997, he wrote that a ‘morbid and obsessional fear and hatred of Arabs and Islam has been a constant theme in U.S. foreign policy since World War II’ which resulted in the suffering of Iraqis and Bosnian Muslims. [113] The linkage he made between the suffering of Iraqis and Bosnian Muslims is quite significant. Said’s writings on the sanctions regime imposed on Iraq contain some of his most vitriolic condemnations of American foreign policy. Take, for example, a series of three articles that appeared in Al-Ahram from July 1998 to March 1999 just before the start of NATO’s intervention. In July 1998, Said described the American habit of laying sanctions on ‘states it doesn’t approve of’ as a manifestation of this animosity to Islam. He explained that ‘many of the states (Sudan, Syria, Iran, Iraq) are Muslims states, and several –like India and Pakistan, against whom sanctions were levied unilaterally in a fit of U.S. petulance and pique – are considered inferior, less developed, not like “us.”’ [114] In December of that year, he spoke of Clinton’s ‘genocidal’ policy against Iraq and other Muslim states: ‘It’s his unauthorized, homicidal forays against Sudan, Afghanistan and now Iraq that are the truly impeachable crimes.’ Turning his opposition from American foreign policy to American society, Said believed that these acts play into an ‘American penchant for cruel wars of extermination against lesser, dehumanised creatures’ of which Islam is thought to produce so abundantly. [115] In March 1999, one week before NATO’s intervention, Said spoke of the need to ‘organise against the campaign to “scourge” Iraq not only because it is morally wrong...but because it is very likely that another Arab or Muslim country will be next.’ [116]

As we now know, the next country targeted by America was a Christian nation oppressing a Muslim population. This is where Said’s sympathy for Muslim suffering ended. Indeed, he may have been aware of this contradiction as he attempted to reconcile his professed concern for Muslim suffering with his opposition to NATO’s intervention:

the constant reference to ‘ethnic Albanians’ prevents people from realising that most of the refugees are Muslims. Consider that whenever Hamas or Hezbollah or Iranians or Palestinians, are referred to by the media, the adjective ‘Muslim’ never fails to appear. In Yugoslavia, the tactic is used to

suggest that these are European refugees and hence more deserving of NATO attention. [117]

Clearly, this statement sidesteps the reality that American military action was taking place on behalf of a Muslim population who was under attack. Reserving his sympathy exclusively for Muslim victims in the Middle East, Said told David Barsamian that the Turkish atrocities against the Kurds, who America failed to intervene on behalf of, 'makes what happened to the Albanians in Kosovo look like a Sunday school picnic.' [118] This statement negates the brutal facts of Serb actions against the Kosovars: approximately one-million – 90 percent of the whole province – were made refugees and approximately 10,000 were killed by Serb forces from March 1998 to the end of the conflict in June 1999. [119] If such apathy was Said's true feeling on the suffering of the Kosovars, then it remains curious why he would compare their experiences and suffering to the Palestinian experience of 1948. [120] After all, 'for Palestinians' Said wrote, 'a vast collective feeling of injustice [from 1948] continues to hang over lives with undiminished weight.' [121] 'There can be no erasing the historical truth,' Said insisted, 'that the existence of Israel is predicated, indeed imposed upon, the obliteration of another society and people.' [122] This strong language describing this Palestinian experience was missing from Said's description of the ethnic Albanian suffering under Serb brutality. This moral inconsistency was most noticeably expressed in an endorsement he gave to a petition that appeared in *The Observer* in December 2000 entitled 'Stop this Slaughter Now.' This petition read:

We are appalled by the lack of action by Western governments to stop the slaughter [of Palestinians]. More than 9,000 Palestinians have been injured since October. Israel is using unprecedented force against those who are seeking basic rights: access to land and water, employment, freedom from military occupation and political independence. [123]

Endorsing this statement, while failing to endorse a similar statement on behalf of the ethnic Albanians was in violation of one of Said's own stated intellectual principles. Approaching human rights issues practically not consistently, Said believed, 'are the norms of power, which are precisely not those of the intellectual, whose role is at very least to apply the same standards and norms of behaviour now already collectively accepted on paper [in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights] by the entire international community.' [124] Said neither drafted nor signed any such petition decrying the slaughter in Kosovo by Serbs and the use of

‘unprecedented force against those who are seeking basic rights’ – ethnic Albanians. If Said was calling for Western action against Israel to prevent such abuses, then he should have called for Western action to stop Serbian abuses. But to call for action on behalf of a people whose suffering does not form a central feature of one’s worldview is an impossible task just as it is to call for an intervention from those permanently consigned to the label ‘imperialist.’ In *Al-Abram* in late April he put scare quotes around the term ‘ethnic Albanian’ and questioned why the media persisted in calling them such. [125] In his treatment of ethnic Albanian suffering, Said committed the same sin he urged others not to commit regarding Palestinian suffering: ‘Fudging, waffling, looking the other way, avoiding the issue entirely, or accepting pabulum definitions of “peace” will bring Palestinians and, in the long run Israelis, nothing but hardship and insecurity.’ [126]

Conclusion

Said’s dedicated opposition to America rendered him unable to provide concrete ways to improve the lot of a suffering people. In the heat of the Kosovo crisis, Said urged his readership ‘to develop resistance [to leaders like Milošević and Clinton] that comes from a real education in philosophy and the humanities, patient and repeated criticism, and intellectual courage.’ [127] Patience, in the case of the Gulf War, meant the continued occupation of Kuwait which Robert Fisk described as evil incarnate. [128] Patience, in the case of Kosovo, meant the expulsion and death of thousands of ethnic Albanians. The founder of the term ‘genocide,’ Raphael Lemkin, detested the word ‘patience’: ‘patience is a good word to be used when one expects an appointment, a budgetary allocation or the building of a road. But when the rope is already around the neck of the victim and strangulation is imminent, isn’t the word ‘patience’ an insult to reason and nature?’ [129]

The limitations of Said’s position on the Gulf War and on NATO’s intervention are the limitations of a facile and simplistic anti-imperialist approach to war. Despite Said’s claims, his approach to the world at war was not universal or principled. More accurately, it was born out of a singular opposition to American foreign policy which he deemed to be consistently imperialist regardless of context. His all-consuming commitment to denounce American actions rendered him ill-equipped to deal substantively with fascist – whether Iraqi or Serbian – crimes. That he professed a deep concern for Muslim suffering but then saw no legitimacy in the NATO attempts to end this suffering is a clear example of the analytical deficiencies

that come from an excessive reliance on a particular worldview that posits all evil in this world to be of American doing.

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