

[Bernard Lewis Strikes Back](#)

Author : Jacob Thomas on May 10, 2008 - 01:14 AM

By Jacob Thomas

The war against radical Islam is being waged militarily in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, this conflict is being sabotaged by academics who occupy important chairs in American universities within the departments of Middle East Studies. The public is unaware of their activities as they spread their propaganda within the classrooms of our universities. This sad state of affairs was recently highlighted in an article in The Wall Street Journal, of Friday, 2 May, 2008.

In the print edition, the article had this headline:

Bernard Lewis Takes on Political Correctness in Middle East Studies

When I looked up its online version, it carried this revealing title:

Balance of Power: A New Group Counters Leftist Agitprop in Middle East Studies

I would like to quote from this article, adding my comments on this extremely important subject that should receive the attention and scrutiny of the Western public.

Charlotte Allen began the article by asking, *“What to do if you are a college professor and the academic society that represents your field has been overrun by political correctness? One answer is: Form your own organization.*

“That is how, six months ago, the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (Asmea) came into being. Now claiming 500 members and gearing up to publish its own scholarly journal, Asmea is meant to be a corrective to the 2,600-member Middle East Studies Association, the premier professional society for scholars of the Middle East. That organization is now regarded by many as stiflingly politicized. Institutionally, it engages in nonstop Israel-bashing and seems to blame America for every economic and geopolitical wrong on the planet.

“Interestingly, both the Middle East Studies Association and the new Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa were founded by the same person: Bernard Lewis. Now 91, Mr. Lewis is the eminence grise of scholars of Islam. His 60-year scholarly career encompasses more than two-dozen books and decades of teaching, first at the University of London and then at Princeton, where he is now a professor emeritus. He gave up on MESA to found Asmea last fall because he wanted there to be “a truly open academic society.”

Mr. Lewis spoke those words at Asmea’s first annual conference at a Washington hotel last weekend. The two-day gathering -- featuring only eight panels and roundtables, in contrast to the hundred or so at MESA’s annual meeting in Montreal in November ---

showed the promise and also the problems that are part of any professional society's attempts to defy orthodoxy."

We may be extremely puzzled as to how MESA that was founded by Mr. Lewis became such an ideologically motivated association of academics who are bent on destroying the very *raison d'être* of their discipline. The answer is found in the life and writings of the late professor Edward Said (1935-2003). By the way, I have always been puzzled by the transliteration of the Arabic name of our professor, since for English-speaking people, it should have been properly spelled, Sa'eed!

In 1978, he published "***Orientalism***," a book that charged "*Western scholarship on Islam was all but worthless because it had been motivated by efforts to further the 'colonial' interests of Western imperial powers, still intent on dominating the East.*"

It is unbelievable how many "experts" in the history of the Middle East, fell for the unsubstantiated thesis of Mr. Said. As the WSJ article explains, "*Unlike Mr. Lewis, Mr. Said had no training in Islamic or Mideast studies (he was in fact, for years, a professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University). Even so, Mr. Said continues to exert a powerful influence on many American Islamicists; He is their guru, and "Orientalism" is their catechism.*"

Over the years, I have always regretted the trajectory of Edward Said's life. Coming from an Eastern Christian background, rather than devoting his scholarship to deal with the plight of his people over fourteen centuries of Islamic imperialism, he became the typical ***Dhimmi*** who offered his services to the defence of Islam, and to the denigration of the excellent work of British and French Orientalists. Furthermore, he was not equipped to deal with the subject as his training was in another field of knowledge.

An American Orientalist, and President of the American University of Beirut, Malcolm Kerr, who was murdered by radical Islamists on the campus of his university on 18 January 1984, described "***Orientalism***" in December, 1980:

"This book reminds me of the television program 'Athletes in Action,' in which professional football players compete in swimming, and so forth. Edward Said, a literary critic loaded with talent, has certainly made a splash, but with this sort of effort he is not going to win any major races. The book contains many excellent sections and scores many telling points, but it is spoiled by overzealous prosecutorial argument in which Professor Said, in his eagerness to spin too large a web, leaps at conclusions and tries to throw everything but the kitchen sink into a preconceived frame of analysis. In charging the entire tradition of European and American Oriental studies with the sins of reductionism and caricature, he commits precisely the same error."

From the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 12 (December 1980), Pp. 544-547.

In 2007, Ibn Warraq wrote a masterpiece, "**Defending the West: A Critique of Edward**

Said's Orientalism." (Prometheus Books, 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, NY 14228-2119)

This 556-page work, demonstrates the utter nonsense of "***Orientalism***," and should be read by academics and politicians, in order to understand the nefarious impact of a book that claimed to be a scholarly expose of the West, but was actually a literary fraud.

Here are some quotations from Ibn Warraq's book:

"To argue his case, Said very conveniently leaves out the important contributions of German Orientalists, for their inclusion would destroy --- and their exclusion does indeed totally destroy --- the central thesis of Orientalism, that all Orientalists produced knowledge that generated power, and that they colluded and helped imperialists found empires. As we shall see, German Orientalists were the greatest of all scholars of the Orient, but, of course, Germany was never an imperial power in any of the Oriental countries of North Africa and the Middle East. ... Would it have made sense for German Orientalists to produce work that could help only England and France in their empire building?" P. 44

Another relevant excerpt shows the unbelievably disastrous effects of Said's work:

"Said has much to answer for, Orientalism, despite its systematic distortions and its limited value as an intellectual history, has left Western scholars in fear of asking questions --- in other words, it has inhibited their research. Said's work, with its strident anti-Westernism, it has made the goal of modernization of Middle Eastern societies that much more difficult. His work, wherein all the ills of Middle Eastern societies are blamed on the wicked West, has rendered much-needed self-criticism by Muslims, Arab and non-Arab alike, nearly impossible. His work has encouraged Islamic fundamentalists, whose impact on world affairs needs no underlining. P. 54

One last quotation from Part 3 of Warraq's superb book is sufficient to demonstrate the unbelievably destructive nature of Said's ***Orientalism***:

"Stephen Schwartz once wrote, '[Bernard Lewis] has, it is true, been brutally attacked -- most notably by the charlatan Edward Said. Said's Orientalism, a ridiculous imposture from its first page to its last, is now a standard text in Anglo-American universities, but reads like the product of a rather dense college student who has discovered Marxism; there can be no more telling condemnation of the present sate of American academy than the ascendancy of Said.'" P. 299

Back to the WSJ article,

"The MESA Web site features links to the society's many denunciations of Israel and its defense of such controversial academics as Rashid Khalidi, an apologist for the Palestinian Liberation Organization and a member of Columbia's faculty. As for last year's MESA meeting in Montreal, some 11 panels were devoted solely to Palestinian grievances."

As to the newly organized ASMEA, one academic who attended its meeting in Washington, D.C., said,

“There’s been a lot of lamenting about the political correctness that’s taken over MESA,” says Tristan Mabry, a visiting assistant professor of government at Georgetown University who decided to attend the Asmea conference for a breath of fresh air. ‘The A-No.1 issue that dominates MESA is always Israel, and even if you’re not interested in Israel [Mr. Mabry’s research focuses on Pakistan, India and Bangladesh], where you stand on Israel is always a litmus test.’”

“Asmea aims to attract centrist scholars such as Mr. Mabry, and its conference dealt with matters that are clearly off-limits at MESA unless approached from an anti-American and anti-Israeli perspective: terrorism and suicide-bombing, for instance. In point of fact, however, relatively few of the 250 attendees last weekend were scholars at universities. Many were members of the military, defense specialists, think-tank researchers and free-lance writers. The presence of the defense contingent was understandable: In today’s highly politicized academic climate, many scholarly societies forbid their members to consult for the U.S. military or intelligence services. The scholarship of Asmea’s members may be the government’s only academic resource for information useful in current Mideast conflicts.”

The chairman of ASMEA is Bernard Lewis, and its vice-chairman is the Lebanese-American scholar, Fouad Ajami, the director of Middle East studies at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies.

My sincere thanks go to the WSJ for publishing an article on the decline and fall of MESA, and the birth of a truly scholarly association that deals accurately with the history and culture of the Middle Eastern nations. It’s high time that the Western public discovers what has taken place in the departments of Middle Eastern Studies at several of our universities, where they had uncritically swallowed the spurious thesis of Edward Said’s ***Orientalism***. The war against global jihadism cannot be won as long as the home front is being weakened by the writings of Edward Said and his disciples who are still very active in spreading the lies about Western Orientalism.