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THE VOICE OF MARGINALISED IN EDWARD SAID'S *PEACE AND ITS DISCONTENTS*

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ABSTRACT



In this paper, Postcolonial writing is perceived as the attempt in the work of Edward Said's *Peace and its Discontents* (1995) and at the Palestine present situations. Said's works are emerged depicted the situation of Palestine straggles and his work constantly rehearses the features of his own peculiar academic and cultural location or the text of his own life-exile, politicisation, the living of two lives, the insistent question of identity, and the passionate defense of Palestine. In *Peace and its Discontents* (1995), Said abandons his traditional audience, speaking, as it were, directly to the Palestinians and the Arabs. A version of the book was published originally in Egypt under the title Gaza- Jericho: An American Peace. He notes that 'this is the first of my books to have been written from start to finish with an Arab audience in mind' (xix).

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We can see in the text, how the Palestine is subordinated, Israel and United States (US) Imperialism power and Terrorism upon the Arab Countries. Palestinian self-determination, to human rights, democracy, and reconcile the truth. We can find an interstitial space in between a Palestinian colonial past and an American imperial present, he has found himself both empowered and obliged to speak out for Palestine, to be the voice of the marginalised and dispossessed, and crucially, to present Palestine to the American people.

Edward Said began to write about the fate of Palestine after the 1967 war, his first sustained work on Palestine, *The Question of Palestine*, aimed to articulate a Palestine position to a Western, and in particular an American, audience. This is a passionate account of the injustices that accompanied the formation of the modern state of Israel, and an effort to 'write back', to illustrate that there is a counter narrative to the commonly held perception of the Arab as terrorist and murderer of innocent victims. Said compelling argues for a reassessment of the injustices on both sides of the divide between Israelis and Palestinians. The construction of the place and its inhabitants as tabula rasa demonstrated to Said that the British and Zionist-promoted occupation of Palestine was a further example of the long history of European colonialism, with the difference that this version emphasised the Messianic flavour of the 'civilising mission'. As he says:

Balfour's statements in the declaration take for granted the higher right of a colonial power to dispose of a territory as it saw fit. As Balfour himself averred, this was especially true when dealing with such a significant territory as Palestine and with such a momentous idea as the Zionist idea,

which saw itself as doing no less than reclaiming a territory promised originally by God to the Jewish people (16).

It was the colonisation of Palestine which compelled Said to examine the imperial discourse of the West, and to weave his cultural analysis with the text of his own identity.

Jewish people are indigenous to what is now Israel, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) as well as western Jordan (the East Bank) and southernmost Lebanon. Ryan Bellerose says "Israel is the world's first modern indigenous state. Those who are arguing for Palestinian "indigenous rights" are usually those who have little grasped of the history, and no understanding of the truth behind indigenous rights." In Palestine Israelis were settled and controlled under their power, Nayar says "Non- European cultures and knowledge were destroyed, modified, or disciplined by colonial rulers" (Nayar, 2009). Further he says that "Colonialism cannot be seen merely as a political or economic condition: it was a powerful cultural and epistemological conquest of the native populations" (Nayar, 2009).

By deploying the justification of European colonialism, Zionism effectively adopted the racial concepts of European culture. While in Orientalism it was pointed out how anti-Semitism was transferred from a Jewish to an Arab target, Said argues that Zionism itself internalised such representations and rendered the Palestinian as backward and hence in need of being dominated. However, the colonisation of Palestine was a colonisation that differed from other colonial settler states. It was not simply a matter of could be mobilised. Rather, it was a project that entailed displacing the Palestinians as well as creating a state that was the state of all Jewish people with a 'kind of sovereignty over land peoples that no other state possessed or possesses' (Said, 84). The manner, in which this enterprise was brought to fruition, Said suggests, included representing the Palestinians as an aberration who had challenged the God-given status of the 'promised land'.

Said placed considerable hope and promise in the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the leadership of Yasir Arafat. For Said, the PLO under Arafat had come to symbolise freedom, as had the African National Congress under Nelson Mandel. The PLO, an organisation that operated in exile, became the place where all Palestinians could be accommodated – a key achievement of the organisation despite its leadership and policy weaknesses. It kept the 'Palestinian cause alive, something greater than provisional organisations and policies' (165).

Edward Said's criticism of Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasir Arafat's authoritarianism attests to his unrelenting courage in telling the truth about the much-loathed Arab leaders that have often purged their opponents in medieval-like prisons. Said today is one of a handful of Palestinian and even Arab intellectuals who have been brave enough to speak their minds about Arab and Palestinian terror regimes that belong to the Middle Ages but continue to survive due to fear and silence. Yasir Arafat, for example, persists in speaking of his "friend" Bill Clinton, even as (like all his recent predecessors) that "friend" supports Israel unconditionally, has refused to condemn Israeli settler violence, and has not lifted a finger in favor of Palestinian (to say nothing of the PLO's) well-being (Said, xxiii). It is enough to mention that Said remains on a death list in half a dozen Middle Eastern countries. Said's ideas and realism appeal to all of us alike: Arabs, Palestinian, Israelis, and Americans concerned with a genuine and real end to the conflict that has taxed the regions resources for the last sixty years.

Said argues that prior to 1948 Palestine was occupied primarily, although not exclusively, by Arabs, and that the creation of the Israeli state entailed turning these people into refugees. After the 1967 war, Israel occupied additional Arab Palestinian Territory. This Israeli occupation has meant that there is more to the idea of Palestine than the occupied territories. There is also a larger Palestine that exists in the Palestinian migration living in exile, dispossessed from its homeland, which has been marginalised. Ultimately Said sees his role as one of connection rather than alienation. For him to be critical of Zionism is not to criticise 'an idea or a theory but rather a wall of denials'. It is also to say that the persistent need in Israel is 'for Palestinians and Israeli Jews to sit down and discuss all the issues outstanding between them' (Said, 51).

To occupy such a position has required sometimes taking a stand against the leadership of the cause that he has supported ardently, against Arafat, the PLO and a number of Arab states. In 1989, he was highly critical of the PLO, claiming that its representatives were corrupt and inept, and that they had failed to come

to terms with American society. The critique is one he has repeated often, claiming that the PLO was wrong in its strategy of working through middlemen rather than focusing its attention on American civil society (Said, 1995). Said reveals how very early on he had become disenchanted with the PLO leadership, and he speaks of the despair with which he witnessed them take decision such as the support for Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War and the manner in which 'we had already ceased being a people determined on liberation; we had accepted the lesser goal of a small degree of independence' (Said, xxiii). It was not until the intifadah began in December 1987, a movement that Said has called 'one of the great anti colonial insurrections of the modern period' (Said, xxvii) that public opinion shifted, as a result of the images aired on television screens in the West of the Israeli soldiers killing Palestinians.

Said makes principled denunciations of terror attacks against innocent Israelis, but also downplays Israeli fears and says it is "demagoguery" to call Hamas and Islamic Jihad "terrorists" because "they have said several times they will not use violence against other Palestinians" (Said, 1996). This amounts to a refusal to come to terms with the elemental fact that progress for Palestinians can only be made when, for example, long-demanded border openings are not immediately followed by suicide bombings, no matter how thin Palestinian popular support for such bombings and how excessive Israeli countermeasures. Said offers no alternative to reconcile the mutual need of Palestinians and Israelis for peace and security.

One might first reply that the vast majority of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are under Palestinian authority since the Oslo II accord was implemented -- percentage of land is only one way to measure the degree of Palestinian autonomy and Israeli concessions. More to the point, Said seems not to understand the basic definition of two simple words: "interim phase". No serious observer could have argued that Arafat had traded Palestinian rights for Jericho and the Gaza Strip when it was obvious that these were simply the first in an envisioned series of Israeli pullbacks. Nor was it serious to claim after the second stages of Israeli pullbacks that (in the same words he used to describe the first Gaza-Jericho phase) "no other liberation movement in the twentieth century got so little -- roughly 5 percent of its territory" (Said, 418). In fact, this again is an interim phase, meaning that it specifically stipulates completing Israeli pullbacks from Areas B and C in three further stages that are to take place regardless of progress in the final-status negotiations, and in addition to whatever is agreed upon during these final-status negotiations.

Said says about Israel economy depending on US in his "Everything about the Gazan economy is dependent on Israel", (48) Said violently opposes economic separation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), but just as violently opposes Israeli domination of the Palestinian economy, which would result from free trade and flow of labor. Again, his alternative is not spelled out. The most specific Said gets in his critique is that dispossessed Palestinians are entitled to compensation. He neglects to mention that the status of refugees and compensation are among the issues that have been specifically placed on the final-status negotiating agenda.

When asked what his alternative to the peace process would be, Said's full response to the question is representative of the rejectionists' inability to develop a coherent alternative to the peace process. He makes three points: one that the Camp David alternative had always existed. He hastens to add, however, that he has always rejected Camp David. Thus, the first point is of another alternative rejected, rather than an actual alternative. Said ends this rather convoluted first "alternative" by saying "this question about alternatives should not be asked of me, but of them. The third point is criticism of the Builders for Peace program for funding construction of tourist facilities and a water-bottling plant in Gaza, but nothing in Jerusalem. How this particular criticism constitutes an alternative is unclear. Said's alternatives, thus, come down to: not Camp David; ask them; I'm not a politician; and a very specific criticism of an aid project.

The Oslo agreements laid out a risky path to peace and are certainly not beyond criticism. Palestinians' minimum demands were not immediately satisfied and the agreements do not contain an effective mechanism to enforce their implementation. Nonetheless, simple rejectionist without an alternative is both impractical and unprincipled. As a matter of practical strategy, one would think that something would have been learned from previous Palestinian leaders' refusal to positively engage with their adversaries. As a matter of principle, is it not troubling simply to seek the continuation of a status quo in the West Bank and

Gaza Strip that was humiliating and debilitating to both Palestinians and Israelis, while awaiting a hoped-for *deus ex machina* that would fulfil Palestinian dreams?

Said, like other rejectionists, early on made clear his unwillingness to engage in the slow and difficult transitional stage toward coexistence that the Oslo framework prescribes. Regrettably, he has also been unwilling to sustain a reasoned critique of the peace process specifying how and why Oslo's compromises are distinct from those he supports, and what he proposes in its place. Specifically, Said ignores the peace process' immediate benefits as well as the future it offers of broad autonomy and, possibly, statehood in favor of a call "to stop negotiations dramatically" (Said, 1995). He thus rejects the only tangible path so far presented to the coexistence he professes to advocate. The illogic of Said's argument becomes clear when one tries to cut through his heated rhetoric and understand exactly where he stands on the issues at hand.

This is not the end of Said's impracticality. Like many rejectionists, he originally argued that Jericho and the Gaza Strip do not equal justice for Palestinians (describing it as "autonomy in two little places with no hint at all of where the peace process is heading. No other liberation movement in the twentieth century got so little") (Said, 1995) and refused to recognize that engagement in the peace process offered Palestinians much more than this limited initial withdrawal. Following the Oslo II agreement and the subsequent withdrawals, Said now argues that Palestinians are receiving only a small percentage of their land, again not justifying the notion of substantial concessions by Israel. Rather than arguing that Israel must implement the peace agreement or that the long-term vision of the peace process is flawed, Said simply ignores this long-term vision and blindly argues against the first two interim withdrawals, as if these were the only plays in the process.

In refusing to tangle with what the Israeli-PLO negotiations actually might offer, Said joins the long history of Palestinian rejectionism that has made a principle of resisting substantive negotiations that take into account practical political realities and the notion of step-by-step progress. In so doing, he rejects the first positive move toward coexistence rather than mutual destruction between Palestinians and Israelis. While it may not be immediate, and it may not constitute perfect justice, the autonomy of the Palestinian Authority does reverse this century's tailspin in Palestinian political fortunes, it is the first significant grant of political rights to Palestinians, and it does allow a much stronger foundation than any that Palestinians have had in recent years from which to argue and negotiate for further concessions (i.e., regarding Israeli settlements, refugees, shared sovereignty in Jerusalem, and statehood). By taking what is available and continuing to push for more, the peace process offers the only constructive path to Palestinian self-determination.

This is a far cry from where Palestinians stood before the first Oslo agreement, when the intifada was dwindling in the Occupied Territories and, internationally, the Palestinian political and intellectual leadership was discredited by their politically unwise and morally corrupt support for Saddam Husayn. It would have been difficult at that time to imagine interim autonomy and substantial negotiations over the fundamental issues that divide Israelis and Palestinians.

Yet, even after the Oslo II agreement (and before Likud took power in Israel), Said insisted that "no negotiations are better than endless concessions that simply prolong Israeli occupation" (Said, 1995) Only the most bitter opponent of peace could argue that if one is against Israeli military occupation, Israeli military pullbacks and transfer of political power to an elected Palestinian authority are worse for Palestinians. The inhabitants of the newly Palestinian-controlled towns clearly do not agree, but then Said seems to have written them off too, explaining wearily that they are a people "which seems to have given up all hope and all will to resist" (Said, 1995); elsewhere, he deplores their "sense of passivity and defeat"(Said, 1995) as well as their "ignorance and laziness (Said, 132)." Perhaps a more just explanation would be that they simply disagree with Said, and the vast majority of Palestinians are instead valiantly opting for a reality of coexistence and its concomitant compromises rather than an eternity of confrontation (Said, 1978).

Although Said rhetorically accepts Palestinian-Israeli coexistence, on closer inspection this is really quite nebulous. Not only does he reject both the Oslo agreements and Camp David, but he resigned from the PLO before the Madrid conference, partly in protest at the negotiating platform agreed to by both the independent leadership from the territories and the PLO (Said, xxviii). On a different note, he refuses even

informal dialogue with Israeli counterparts as well as "the extraordinary haste in which cooperation between Palestinians and Israelis is being urged. "In his mind, "real dialogue is between equals. . . . Then we can begin to talk seriously about cooperation. In the meantime cooperation can all too easily shade into collaboration" (Said, 38). This is a peculiar condition for talks at either the personal or political level. At a time when Sinn Fein is clamouring for all-party peace talks in Ireland, when talks have brought an end to the worst of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and when talks in South Africa resulted in a peaceful transfer of power, it seems odd to fold one's arms and avoid cooperation (or "collaboration") until such a time that there is "equality". Is it not more heroic, if less satisfying, to reject impossible conditions and try and take advantage of whatever openings for progress exist?

What is saddest about Said's position is the language in which he expresses it. He does not just disagree with those who support the peace process; he decries them as "sycophants," "hypocritical," and even implies they are collaborators, which he explicitly calls Arafat and those in his "Vichy government." "Intellectuals and scholars" who disagree with him have "completely capitulated" and "betrayed their vocations, expertise, and knowledge."

Most Palestinian intellectuals who are capable of understanding the reality are too anxious to bolster their self-esteem by actively seeking to cooperate with Israel and the U.S. with results for their compatriots which are dispiriting. In this, they follow Arafat and his lieutenants who have abandoned all principles and their history just to be recognized by the White Man. Said's name-calling even resorts to pulling out Fanon's simplistic maxim of "black skin/white mask" to describe those with a more realistic view of what coexistence means.

This sort of rhetorical excess is not atypical for Said. From his blanket, undifferentiated dismissals of scholars in *Orientalism* to his characterization of Afsaneh Najmabadi (a brilliant and highly respected scholar) as "zany," "wacko," and a "careerist" for her disagreement with his apologia for Saddam Husayn -- which included his discounting evidence of Saddam's genocidal chemical gas campaign against Iraq's Kurds -- Said and respectful disagreement have often been strangers. In this case, such excessive language continues Palestinian leaders' history of absolutist rhetoric rather than constructive leadership. More immediately, it echoes and gives political support to the small rejectionist front while ignoring the wishes of the overwhelming majority of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza who support the peace process (a number that, contrary to the predictions of Said and others, increased dramatically as the peace agreements were implemented). Are those who have lived or continue to live under the Israeli military "collaborators" if they choose the path of accepting the possible rather than holding out for the utopia that diaspora Palestinians have long promised? It is ironic that Said, who has done so much to make visible to the world the harsh realities of Palestinian life under Israel, is now working to make invisible the political wants and desires of these same Palestinians.

Said denounces "Yasir Arafat's tyrannical regime" and cogently notes that "we should remind ourselves that much more important than having a state is the kind of state it is"(16). A lack of respect for human rights, rule of law, free press, and independent civil institutions under Arafat are indeed ominous. While one can wonder why Said never showed public concern with Arafat's party-boss tendencies in the decades prior to the peace process, and why his own rhetoric hardly seems to favor democratic dialogue, it is more immediately troubling that he refuses to join with Hanan Ashrawi and the many other activists engaging with the Palestinian Authority to try and forge a democratic political culture rather than complain that it is not being handed down from on high. What is essential is the creation of a civil atmosphere both among Palestinians and between Palestinians and Israelis, an atmosphere of a commitment to peace by all sides, which is the only context in which Palestinians can gain concessions from Israel and build the civil and political foundations of their own future.

Said's rejectionism speaks for few in the West Bank or Gaza, which should be kept in mind by Said's readers in the West. There is no utopia waiting around the corner if Palestinians return to saying "no" to substantial negotiations and compromise. Most Palestinians in the PA have apparently recognized this hard truth. Islamic Jihad or Hamas present two options, but they are accepted by only a small minority and it may be that they have come to parallel the IRA or the Basque ETA, in which a hard core of violent rejectionists

continues to cost the lives of innocents and the interests of their own community. Secular rejectionism -- whether headquartered in Damascus or New York -- is another option but is accepted by an even smaller minority.

It is hoped that those who mouth the rhetoric of compromise will engage in the peace process, voicing both specific criticisms and positive proposals. In addition, as important as progress with Israel is, it is perhaps just as important that the PA institutionalize representative and accountable governance. The PA, be it ever so modest, has the potential to become a model to the rest of the Arab world. Its people's high level of education, political sophistication, and, importantly, expectations of democracy and human rights make it a ray of hope in the dark night of Arab politics. Should strong, independent institutions - civil and governmental, each governed by the rule of law - be established under the PA, it won't matter what Arafat's personal proclivities are: if he wants power, he will conform to what these institutions, and the people behind them, require. This is an extraordinarily difficult battle, but it is essential for prominent figures such as Said to engage in it.

Success in this endeavour is not separate from success in negotiating with Israel. If the world sees a democratic Palestinian political entity that maintains its commitment to peace despite extreme provocation, the Palestinian claim to self-determination will be strengthened. On the other hand, those who refuse to engage in these difficult processes will have to bear their share of the responsibility for failing to support the only path thus far presented to peace and coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians, and a democratic and accountable Palestinian political entity.

John Collins's *Global Palestine*, on the other hand, firmly situates Palestine within international debates about globalization. His monograph offers a refreshing and perceptive account of the current situation in the Middle East, arguing that "Palestine remains both the site of a struggle to decolonize itself and a key node in the globally networked struggle to decolonize a world whose current structures of inequality and injustice have been shaped by the global politics of settler-colonialism" (Collins, 18). Collins applies this global phenomenon convincingly to the situation in Palestine, suggesting that dromo-colonization "brings with it distinct forms of violence, social control, and resistance, but also the growth of a frightening politics of disappearance that may be fatal for democracy" (Collins, 85). However, Collins clearly states the ways in which he believes Palestine can and should be decolonized, namely through a wider acknowledgement of Israel's settler-colonial occupation of Palestine and by engaging with the Palestinians for their own sake rather than only in relation to Israel.

In the current global formation of imperial power, terrorism operates as a form of metalepsis that presents opposition to military intervention in Gaza as the cause of repressive counter-terrorist measures rather than a revolutionary political response to a repressive and exploitative system of colonial or postcolonial sovereignty (Morton, "Terrorism" 36-42). If, as Robert J. C. Young has suggested, terror "violates the smooth transition between causes and effects" (Young 307), the discourse of counter-terrorism mobilizes an army of tropes and narratives to mask and obfuscate the terror and violence of new forms of imperial sovereignty

Of all the many reasons for scholars of the postcolonial to turn to Palestine, perhaps the most compelling of all is the ethical possibility of bringing into clear sight the violations of life and liberty that occur under colonial domination. In one, Caroline Rooney's article in this special issue, "Prison Israel-Palestine: Literalities of Criminalization and Imaginative Resistance" (Caroline, 2013), Caroline Rooney turns her attention to what she terms the "settler logic" of "criminalization" exercised by Israel over Palestine. While Gaza has often been termed "the world's largest open-air prison" due to the air, land and sea blockades imposed upon it by Israel, Rooney reveals much more extensive forms of imprisonment encircling Palestinian existence -- from the literal experiences of imprisonment prevalent amongst Palestinian men in particular, to the self-imprisoning nature of Israel's denial of individual consciousness and indeed of humanity to Palestinians. Ultimately, though, Rooney's textual analyses of Palestinian prison narratives reveal how individual imaginative insight can break through this imprisoning "settler logic": a powerful affirmation of post colonialist long-standing belief in creativity as a form of resistance (Darwish, 4-33).

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