

## Chapter Two

### Said and Political Margins

Said's *The Question of Palestine*, written in 1977-78 and published in 1979, tries to put before the Western audience a Palestinian position and perspective to the simmering Palestinian problem. The book tries to "speak" for the Palestinians, who always carry the burden of the label of "terrorism," and plead for their case before a world, which is terribly biased towards the Zionist position on Israel. It does not try to argue that "terrorism is justified," or that there is "no such thing as Palestinian terrorism;" instead, it tries to draw attention towards the nuances and complexities of the ground realities, where a comparison between "the brute numbers of bodies and property" destroyed by Zionists on the one hand and the Palestinians on the other would force a reassessment of where "real terrorism" emanates from (*The Question* xxxvi).

The actuality of Palestinian lives abounds in "small histories" endured daily. Said's book is a political essay which tries to rescue Palestinian existence from the margins of history. It tries to make "the question of Palestine a subject for discussion and political understanding," while being firmly grounded in an inalienable "sense of human rights," immersed in the "contradictions of social experience," and soaked in the "language of everyday reality" (*The Question* xli). It is in fact a quest for Palestinian self-determination.

Said deciphers at the heart of the Palestinian problem a mode of Orientalism at work, which was termed as the “Eastern Question” since the late Victorian period. By 1918, the European powers had about 85 percent of the globe, with a large segment belonging to the regions formerly known simply as Oriental. The “romance of the Orient” gave way to the question of “dealing with the Orient” (*The Question* 3). Said delves into the connotations of the term “question.” First of all, it means as a “matter apart from all others,” which has to be dealt separately; second, as a long-standing problem of rights; and third, as a suggestion of the uncertain and unstable status of something (*The Question* 4). The late 1960’s and 70’s saw many diverse demonstrations on the streets of major American cosmopolitan centres, which raised opposing slogans of “Palestine is,” and “There is no Palestine.” Israeli parlance, even today, refers to the Palestinians as “so-called Palestinians,” which is in fact ironically gentler when compared to Golda Meir’s flat denial, in 1969, of their very existence (*The Question* 4-5).

The Palestinians are made up of both Muslim and Christian Arabs, who simply refuse to go away, accepting a fate similar to other refugees (*The Question* 7). They were a largely pastoral, yet socially, culturally, politically, and economically identifiable people who had existed for hundreds of years on this land before their dispossession (*The Question* 7). Said points out that the eighteenth and nineteenth century accounts of travel in the Orient by Chateaubriand, Mark Twain, Lamartine, Nerval, Disraeli, etc., do chronicle the Arab inhabitants on the land of Palestine but many of them tried to cancel

and transcend this reality and project the land as a “marvelous place for an imperial or colonial project to be undertaken . . .” (*The Question* 9). This later led to the Zionist slogan of Israel Zangwill (1864-1926), “a land without people, for a people without land” (*The Question* 9).

Said notes that Palestine was famous for its beauty and fertility in the entire Islamic world since the end of the seventh century and was known by its Arabic name *Filastin* and in 1516 it became a province of the Ottoman Empire (*The Question* 10, 11). Jewish colonists started their arrival in 1882, and the region had a huge Arab majority till the establishment of Israel in 1948 (*The Question* 11). In 1895, Theodor Herzl had noted in his *Diaries* that they had to “spirit the penniless population across the border” (qtd. in *The Question* 13). Lord Rothschild’s memorandum of July 18, 1917, on behalf of the Zionists, to the British government which eventually led to the Balfour Declaration spoke of “the principle that Palestine should be re-constituted as the National Home for the Jewish People” (qtd. in *The Question* 13). Said points out that the November 1917 Balfour Declaration—which has long formed the juridical basis of the Zionist claims—was made, “(a) by a European power, (b) about a non-European territory, and (c) in a flat disregard of both the presence and the wishes of the native majority resident in that territory; and (d) it took the form of a promise about this same territory to another foreign group, so that this foreign group might, quite literally, *make* this territory a national home for the Jewish people” (*The Question* 15-16).

By the middle of the twentieth century there occurred a seamless merging of Western liberal discourse and Zionism. The Arab had become a “nonperson” and the Zionist “the *only* person” in Palestine (*The Question* 37). Said identifies the issue of Palestine as one involving “representation,” akin to an Orientalist strategy, where Zionism always undertook to speak for Palestine and the Palestinians, blocking effectively the voices of the Palestinians from the world stage (*The Question* 39).

The 1948 dispossession created between 5,00,000 and 8,00,000 refugees (*The Question* 45). After 1967, Israel occupied more Arab-Palestinian territory creating three types of Arab-Palestinians: “those inside pre-1967 Israel, plus those inside the Occupied Territories, plus those elsewhere outside former Palestine” (*The Question* 46). While international laws clearly affirm the moral and political right of a person to return to his place of uninterrupted residence, Israeli laws which declare Arab-owned land in Palestine as “absentee property,” and consequently “liable to expropriation by the Jewish National Fund,” and the Law of Return, which entitles Jews born anywhere to the claim of “immediate Israeli citizenship and residence,” makes it impossible for the Arab Palestinian “to return, be compensated for his property, or live in Israel as a citizen equal before the law with a Jewish Israeli” (*The Question* 49).

The patterns of Zionism bear a great resemblance to the nineteenth century European colonialism. Palestine was not just an elusive and abstract concept for them, but was “surveyed down to the last millimeter, settled on,

planned for, built on, and so forth, *in detail*” (*The Question* 95). The situation of Israeli Arabs in the Occupied Territories is one of “internal colonialism,” having to face a “Zionism and Israel for Jews, and Zionism and Israel for non-Jews . . . keeping them apart, including the much admired (but completely apartheid) kibbutzim, to which no Arab has ever belonged” (*The Question* 106, 107). In 1948, when David Ben Gurion declared the birth of the State of Israel, he deliberately avoided the mention of Israel’s borders (*The Question* 206). Israel continues its settler-colonialism, even to this day, with its ever-expanding borders.

Just as no Jew has been left untouched by Zionism in the past one hundred years, no Palestinian has been unmarked by it (*The Question* 114). While the Palestinians in “internal exile” strongly want to “remain,”—as shown in Tawfiq Zayyad’s poem “*Baqun*” (“We Shall Remain”) which pronounces “Our roots are entrenched / Deep in the earth / Like twenty impossibles / We shall remain”—those in “manifest exile” want to move, their lives having been made unbearable “because they have *no* roots where they are now” (*The Question* 130).

From the late sixties, the Palestinians encountered three main problems: their aspiration to self-determination, the absence of a secure and possible territorial base, and the need to set up a Palestinian authority (*The Question* 133). The Palestinian revolution movement tried to forge “a liberation from nonentity, oppression, and exile” (*The Question* 135). The PLO undertook to be responsible for all Palestinians and “took over schooling,

arming, protecting, feeding, and generally providing for Palestinians, wherever it could” and tried to project and interpret Palestinian reality to international attention (*The Question* 139). Said points out that the PLO was the first to espouse the idea of a secular, democratic state in Palestine (*The Question* 164).

Palestine is a “nation-in-exile.” Said affirms that the Palestinians and Jews must sit down together and discuss their common future, without hermetically sealing off each other. The long-term goal should be to allow each human being to live a life “free from fear, insecurity, terror, and oppression, free also from the possibility of exercising unequal or unjust domination over others” (*The Question* 53). While for the Jews this would mean a freedom from the “historical pressure of anti-Semitism,” “freedom from the fear of the Arabs,” and “freedom from the blindness of programmatic Zionism in its practice against the non-Jew,” for the Arabs it would mean “freedom from exile and dispossession, freedom from the cultural and psychological ravages of historical marginality, and freedom also from inhuman attitudes and practices toward the oppressing Israel” (*The Question* 53-54).

*The Politics of Dispossession* (1994) is a collection of Said’s political essays on the struggle for Palestinian self-determination from 1969 to 1994. After 1967 it became possible for the Palestinians to choose between movements like the Fatah, the Popular Front, or the Democratic Front, each “jealously guarding its own vision of a Palestinian future” (*The Politics* xv). Said’s role in the West was that of a pioneer, for there never had been a

Palestinian lobby, and what he had set out to do was fairly unprecedented (*The Politics* xix). He had to live with death threats, his office was vandalized and sacked, and he had to endure “libelous abuse” about his people and the Palestinian cause. He was branded not only as a “terrorist” but also “a professor of terror, an anti-Semite, an accomplice to murder, a liar, a deranged demagogue” (*The Politics* xix).

When Menachen Begin’s Likud party came to power in 1977 in Israel, all acts of resistance by the Palestinians against Israeli attacks were termed as “terrorism” (*The Politics* xxvi). Both the print and visual media portrayed them as dehumanized, “frenzied collectives bent on killing innocent Jews” (*The Politics* xxvii). After the 1982 Israeli invasion, the PLO had weakened, and got located far away in Tunisia. The *intifadah*, which broke out in Gaza in December 1987, led to the appearance of images on television, of almost two million unarmed Palestinians being beaten and shot by Israeli soldiers (*The Politics* xx). This started a stirring of international consciousness. The Palestine National Council held in Algiers in 1988 carried the motion to divide historical Palestine into two states, one Israeli and one Palestinian. Said had voted in favour of it (Hagopian 21).

The Gulf crisis of 1990 sealed the PLO’s unhappy fate. Yasir Arafat’s support of Saddam Hussein prompted all the Gulf regimes to cut off the PLO completely, endangering the lives of thousands of Palestinians. Kuwait alone threw out three hundred thousand Palestinians in 1991 (*The Politics* xxxi). In 1992, Said visited Palestine for the first time in forty five years, after his

family had left it in 1947 (*The Politics* xxxiii). Said calls the 1993 Oslo Declaration of Principles “an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles,” with the famous handshake at the White House between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat, showcasing Bill Clinton like a “twentieth century Roman emperor shepherding two vassal kings through rituals of reconciliation and obeisance” (*The Politics* xxxiv). It required so many unilateral concessions towards Israel, virtually degrading the PLO into the status of Israel’s enforcer, which Amos Oz described as “the second biggest victory in the history of Zionism” (qtd. in *The Politics* xxxv).

Said’s aim in publishing *The Politics of Dispossession* was to “make sure that the past and the present that derives from it are not forgotten,” and to rediscover elements of reconciliation between the Jews and Palestinians, for a better future, where they coexist as equals—“equals in rights, equals in history and suffering” (*The Politics* xli, xlvi). The book effectively traces the transition of the Palestinian experience from “*being* in exile to *becoming* a Palestinian once again” (*The Politics* 4).

“Peripherality” takes an important role in the Palestinian existence. Political and paradoxical silences, coupled with isolation, accompanied it, which slowly underwent metamorphosis into “a politics of accommodation” (*The Politics* 35). Palestinians, besides being labelled as “terrorists,” were to be treated, in Begin’s rhetoric, as “two-legged beasts, and neither as human beings nor as potential citizens” (*The Politics* 72). This nomenclature helped Israel to bomb them, and pretend to have worked on behalf of humanity.

The Palestinian movement faces many insurmountable difficulties, their colonizers being so morally creditable—the Jews who bear the scars of the Holocaust. In addition to simultaneous expulsion, dispossession, colonization, and international illegitimacy, the Palestinians do not have a national base to fight from, against a world class military-political alliance—the Israel and the United States (*The Politics* 73). The conflict is not just a territorial issue but also a conflict between opposing world views, one which states that the Jews have more rights than non-Jews, and the other which demands equality in civil rights for all communities present (*The Politics* 76). Said points out that this political theatre houses “Arab nationalism, Zionism, the history of anti-Semitism, anti-colonialism, Islamic, Jewish, and Christian apocalyptic millenarianism, decolonization, imperialism, the threat of nuclear annihilation,” and other forms of “human degradation and exaltation” all at the same time (*The Politics* 76).

The position of Jews in the West has always been special not only because of the horrendous trauma of the Holocaust, but also due to their impressive intellectual achievements. This has led the liberal intellectuals in the West to turn a blind eye to the atrocities unleashed by Israel. Said points out that while the US napalm bombing in Vietnam was criticized, no voice was ever raised against Israel’s continuous use of napalm and cluster bombs against the Arab civilian population (*The Politics* 83). Palestinians are never considered as “a people,” but only as individual Arabs (*The Politics* 84).

Said believes that only the creative acceptance of the “ideology of difference,” rather than its reification—one that acknowledges the “historical, cultural, and material distinctions between Jews and Palestinian Arabs, while refusing to privilege the experience or contemporary situation of either”—can help in evolving a new dynamic of healing, where “‘difference’ does not entail ‘domination’” (*The Politics* 100).

Said painfully details the epithets used by Zionists to describe the Palestinians. In 1969 Golda Meir said “there are no Palestinians.” Then they were called “two-legged vermin.” In 1983 General Etyan referred to them as “drugged roaches in a bottle,” and they were threatened to be “crushed like grasshoppers.” Said observes that there has been a small vertical rise in these descriptions, moving up the scale, “from nonexistence to vermin, to roaches, to grasshoppers . . . to achieving the status of cattle or of monkeys” (*The Politics* 138).

During World War I, Britain had promised independence to the Palestinian Arabs as a *quid pro quo*, if they would join the Allies against the Ottoman Empire. At the same time Palestine was promised to the Zionists too. In 1917, when the Balfour Declaration was made, 90 percent of Palestine’s population was Arab. By 1948 it was only 30 percent Jewish, despite continuous Jewish immigration, and the land owned by the Zionist settlers was only 6 percent. Despite this, 55 percent of Palestine was allotted to be partitioned into a Jewish state (*The Politics* 139).

Said mentions that the UN resolutions 242 and 338 passed after the 1967 and 1973 wars “made no mention of Palestinians, but of anonymous ‘refugees’” (*The Politics* 141). Though the resolutions make it inadmissible to acquire territory by war, Israel has always been in the forefront to violate these provisions, and it is ironical that the United States and Israel consistently clamour that the PLO should accept the 242 (*The Politics* 141). Said states that the resolution ignores the “national rights” of the Palestinians, asking them to “renounce their national aspirations, especially self-determination” (*The Politics* 141). How long can they continue without a state to defend, repatriate or enfranchise them? (*The Politics* 155).

Said critiques that while the apartheid in South Africa was condemned worldwide, no one bothers about the apartheid practised by Israel (*The Politics* 170). While returning to Palestine in 1992, Said had found that the road signs were all in Hebrew; only some had English translations, and very few in Arabic, amounting to a “national snubbing of Palestinians” (*The Politics* 176). It was in fact his encounter with his own mortality, in the form of a medical diagnosis, which prompted him to return to Palestine (*The Politics* 181). He had visited the Jabalya Camp, which had the highest population density in the world, housing 65,000 refugees. Palestinians were dying a slow death, *mawt bati*’ (*The Politics* 195). Crossing the Allenby Bridge into Jordan, Said and his family were greeted by the sign, “You are in Jordan. Smile.” The barbed wires were over (*The Politics* 199).

Palestine is privileged to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, and cultural texts abound in its references, be it Dante, Shakespeare, Augustine, or Blake (*The Politics* 256). Palestine was razed of its orchards in Gaza in 1972, to make way for settlements, which Noam Chomsky condemned as “what is called in technical terms ‘making the desert bloom’” (qtd. in *The Politics* 258). Said notes that the Middle East is not a homogenized place; it is precisely a “mongrel’s region” made up of a huge diversity (*The Politics* 310). In Latin America this would be called the *mestizo factor*. What the region abounds in is not purity of one sort, but “consecrated hybridity” (*The Politics* 310). The daunting challenge is to respect each identity and preserve the right to live within safe and secure borders.

Said admires the spirit of Nelson Mandela who had unwavering convictions, even when in prison. Mandela never compromised his party’s positions for temporary gains, and this is what Said believes to be the cause of the resounding victory of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa (*The Politics* 367). He admits that Mandela was always an “unbending guerilla leader,” and no saint or a sage “like King or Gandhi” (*The Politics* 368). Said always cautioned that the Palestinian trend of ceding ground to the Israel under US pressure was political suicide. This has proven true in the ensuing years, with the Palestinians being shrunk to tinier territory, separated by geography, and by Israel’s designs, which keep them fragmented and isolated, with very little communication (*The Politics* 419).

*Peace and its Discontents* (1995) contains essays on Palestine in the Middle East Peace Process, written for an Arab audience, on a bi-weekly basis for *al-Hayat*, the Arabic language daily edited in London (but printed in every Arab capital) and also published in Cairo's *al-Ahram Weekly*. Christopher Hitchens in his Preface to *Peace and its Discontents*, titled “. . . . And they call it Peace,” mentions why Said was absent from the White House ceremony that culminated in the “historic handshake” of 1993; Said was sure, he says, that the whole process was “a sellout, a shabby and abortive thing,” and he chose not to be “part of the furniture of the stage” (*Peace* xv). Hitchens, on the other hand, calls Said, and Sara Roy—a Jewish researcher and world expert on the Gazan neocolonial slum—as “the real peacemakers” (*Peace* xvii). Said was always insistent that there should be no replication of the “banana-republic style” and method among the Palestinians, and *Bantustan* would in fact be an inadequate term to describe the “ghetto state” into which the Palestinians have fallen (*Peace* xix).

Said's essay titled “The PLO's Bargain” of September 1993, which appeared in the *Guardian*, *al-Hayat*, *al-Ahram Weekly*, and *The Nation* was the only dissenting Palestinian voice against the Oslo Accords (*Peace* xxiv). Said criticizes the Accords because, for the first time, Palestinians accepted their division into “residents of the Occupied Territories and all the others,” and “made an agreement to co-operate with a military occupation before that occupation had ended” (*Peace* xxix). Said considered the Declaration to be “an instrument of capitulation” and September 13 (1993) to be “a day of

mourning” (*Peace* xxix). He believed that there was no real independence for the Palestinians as long as Israel controls all exits and entrances to Gaza and Jericho.

Said emphasizes the “need to connect, rather than forget” (*Peace* xxxiii). He cautions about a Middle East common market based on “Western capital, Israeli know-how, and Arab labour and consumer appetites,” where “trade and tourism are touted as eradicators of barriers” (*Peace* xxxiv). Said is skeptical how this would occur in a region festering with the wounds of war and conflict. He believes that the future lies in “an abiding faith in real justice and real self-determination” rather than “blind loyalty to one or two personalities and their rhetoric” (*Peace* xxxv).

The peace process had an interesting spin-off. Arafat, who had been symbolized as the “most unattractive and morally repellent man on earth” by the Western media, had turned into “an accepted, even lovable roly-poly figure” overnight (*Peace* 14). The accords were negotiated in English, a language that was unknown to Arafat, who had no legal advisor with him (*Peace* 16). Said vehemently criticizes the process for rushing into the creation of a “Palestinian state,” without dwelling on “what kind of a state” it would be, for there are numerous examples in the modern world of “rapacious oligarchies,” and “one-party tyrannies,” engendering famine, civil war, and pauperization, proving that “mere nationalism” is not the answer to the problems of “new secular societies” (*Peace* 16). He is also doubtful regarding the renunciation of violence and terrorism by the PLO, in response to the

accords; whether this would also include non-violent resistance and civil disobedience, which are “the inalienable right of any people denied full sovereignty and independence” (*Peace* 19).

Said points out the importance of maps, which played a crucial role in colonial invasions. The cartographic detailing was always done first by the victors, making geography “an art of war” (*Peace* 27). It is Israeli sources that have to be relied upon for facts about land and water as there are no similar reliable Palestinian sources. Said exhorts that geography can be turned into an “art of resistance if there is a counter-map and a counter-strategy” (*Peace* 28).

Said cautions that though he believes in the dialogue between cultures, “real principle and real justice have to be implemented before there can be true dialogue” (*Peace* 38). The Palestinian movement did slide down “from struggle and resistance to accommodation and pacification,” and, therefore, any cooperation should be carefully watched over, lest it should shade into collaboration (*Peace* 36, 38). He remarks angrily that the premature compromises made by intellectuals endangered Palestinian self-determination and the word “peace” was made synonymous with “giving up before getting anything” (*Peace* 39).

Said dwells on Sara Roy’s *The Gaza Strip Survey* (1986), which details the ground realities of Gaza that has become “an overcrowded hell on earth” (*Peace* 47). Roy points out how the Israelis had always prevented industrial development, keeping the Palestinians at very low levels of economic viability (*Peace* 48). She calls this deliberate process “de-development” (*Peace* 49).

Abject poverty, oppressive sadness, and universal despair characterize Gaza. Ruling Gaza in this state was next to impossible, and consequently Yitzhak Rabin wanted the PLO to take it over (*Peace* 50). It was wrongly assumed that after the “historic handshake” money would pour into Gaza. Mass pauperization followed instead (*Peace* 51).

Jennifer Loewenstein calls the Gaza Strip “far more than a prison” and adds that “in Gaza you are not just an inmate in a giant penitentiary. You are a walking human target, shadowed by snipers who can obliterate you and your surroundings at will. Your home belongs to bulldozers and dynamite, your cities and refugee camps to F-16s and helicopter gunships” (104). Her journey to Rafah revealed whole families crammed together in single-room shacks made of corrugated iron, with dirty floors, sheet metal, cardboard, and tarpaulin roofs, ill-clad, and ill-fed children running around barefoot (Loewenstein 104). An interesting comparison between the thirty year British rule in Palestine (1918-1948) and the Israeli occupation would show that while the British had built airports, power stations, roads and buildings, Israel had built nothing but prisons which are now ironically being used by the Palestinian police (*Peace* 103).

Said believed, as Walter Benjamin did, that the historian’s task “is to dissociate oneself from the so-called march of progress, then to provide a different history *against* the main, apparently victorious current” (*Peace* 84). Consequently, Said was highly critical of Arafat and pronounced him “incompetent”(*Peace* 99). The need of the hour was the decolonization of the

mind, for true liberation to follow. Said affirmed that the role of the intellectual would be to testify “against the misuses of history or against the injustices that befall the oppressed” (*Peace* 184).

*The End of the Peace Process* (2000) tries to deal with the events of Oslo and after like the Hebron Massacre in 1994, and the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, which were devastating moments. The perpetuation of the Middle East imbroglio accounts for more than 60 percent of world arms sales, even when basic human rights and democratic conditions for the living are abrogated (*The End* xx). The essays in this collection try to bear “testimony to an alternative view,” of the past, present, and future as well. Said salutes those Revisionist Israeli historians who have tried to expose the myths and propaganda narratives which deny Israel’s responsibility for the Palestinian disaster (*The End* xxi).

Said worries about the role of the NGOs connected with the Palestinian life. Can they be substituted for a real “political movement”? (*The End* xxvi). No, says Said; they can never become “political movements,” for they operate in relationship with the funders who insist that the “work on democracy, health care, education—all important things—is forthcoming only within the overall framework of the . . . peace process” (*The End* xxvi). These organizations do keep life going on for the Palestinians, but it is disconcerting when they “themselves become the goal, instead of, for instance, liberation, or ending the occupation, or changing Palestinian society” (*The End* xxvi).

Said warns that the effect of Oslo is to depoliticize Palestinian society, substituting nationalism with social movement, placing it right in the midst of American globalization (*The End* xxvi-xxvii). Via Fanon, Said argues that “liberation” should not be just the substitution of powers, but an essential change in consciousness (*The End* xxvii). “Sovereignty” should rise above the mere acquisition of a flag, fostering an inquiring attitude towards other peoples and other histories (*The End* xxvii).

While the PLO conceded to the partition of historical Palestine into two states in 1988, Israel has never explicitly recognized this notion (*The End* xvi). The longest military occupation of the twentieth century continues unabated, getting more streamlined every day. Said warns about the vacuum in moral leadership, which sways educated young Arabs towards “the certainties of religion,” and the usurpation of political and social space by “a mean-spirited, uninspiring brand of ‘realism,’” which adds fuel to the crisis (*The End* 67). He argues that it has to be replaced instead by a “new politics” which gives rise to a “new human being” (*The End* 68).

Said sharply criticizes Arafat for his “colossal failures as a leader,” and accuses that he has learned nothing from Gandhi, Martin Luther King, the armed struggles of Vietnam or Algeria, or the South African experience (*The End* 73). Said’s books were banned in Palestine, some of them existing only as Xerox copies, for having dared to have spoken against their own “Papa Doc”—Arafat (*The End* 71, 89, 107). Said believes that a literate, critical education can provide instruments of resistance, and foster self-defense, while

an imprecise hold on “language and reality produces a more easily governable accepting citizen, who has become not a participant in the society but an always hungry consumer” (*The End* 150).

Palestinians have their history being written by the outsiders—Israel and the United States. They fail to dwell on their collective memory, which is indeed “a people’s heritage and also its energy,” which needs to be activated to gain a sense of identity and prerogative (*The End* 158). Palestinian refugees remain stateless, are quarantined in camps, have no permission to work or move, and face mass deportation. Though the Oslo Accords specify autonomy, they “leave sovereignty, exits and entrance, resources like water and land, as well as overall security in Israeli hands” (*The End* 163). Said advocates a massive investment in innovative education and the exploration of modes of secular community in order to create a democratic civil society, which is “unavailable in the ‘returns’ either to Judaism, Christianity, or Islam which are characteristic of religious fundamentalism” (*The End* 166).

Oslo had a detrimental and corrupting effect on Palestine, for personal interests and quick profit were at the forefront (*The End* 259). Said urges the Palestinians to recognize their own central role, and prevent themselves from becoming “the Middle East’s Red Indians” (*The End* 259). They need to rid themselves of their “racial prejudices and ostrich-like attitudes,” and make a concerted effort to change the situation (*The End* 277). Adopting a strategy to boycott all Israelis would be too blunt, impractical and self-destructive. Neither can the clock be turned back to pre-1917 or pre-1948 days. Instead,

Said proposes that they assure “as Mandela regularly assured the white South African community, that we want them to stay and share the same land with us on an equal basis” (*The End* 280).

Why is political separation not a feasible option in the Palestinian context? It is almost impossible to draw lines between “people whose cultures, histories, and geographical proximity cannot be separated” (*The End* 329).

Said calls partition “a legacy of imperialism,” as demonstrated in the cases of Pakistan, India, Ireland, Cyprus, and the Balkans, and in the disasters in Africa (*The End* 330). The Herculean task would be to think of “coexistence, after separation, in spite of partition” (*The End* 330). For this, a politics of the local, based on ground realities, has to be revived and resuscitated. Summits in faraway palaces and luxury residences will not solve the problem.

*After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1986) is an extraordinary book which attempts to deal with the subjectivity and historical consciousness of Palestinian lives. It employs the viewpoint of “memoirists and unregimented historians,” along with superb photographs by Jean Mohr, and the story is told in “fragments, disjointed scenes and intimate particulars” (*After* xi). The book has Mahmoud Darwish’s lines as its epigraph: “Where should we go after the last frontiers / where should the birds fly after the last sky?”

The book grew out of a curious incident. In 1983, while Said was serving as a consultant to the United Nations for its International Conference on the Question of Palestine (ICQP), he had suggested that the photographs of Palestinians be hung in the entrance hall to the main conference site in

Geneva. Said had recommended Jean Mohr to be commissioned to do the photography, as he was familiar with Mohr's work done in collaboration with John Berger. Mohr had returned with wonderful photographs, but the officials disallowed any writing to be displayed along with them. A compromise was worked out; the name of the country or place could be affixed, and nothing more. This incident provoked Said and Mohr to work together to produce a photo-text to vocalize the Palestinian plight (*After 3-4*).

The photos show Palestinians as at once both "inside and outside" their world (*After 6*). This double vision runs throughout the text and Said admits that there are abrupt switches in the pronouns from "we" to "you" to "they," to designate the Palestinians (*After 6*). The book thus has a multifaceted vision which brilliantly captures the statelessness, de-centredness and dispossession of the Palestinian topos (*After 6*). Said comments poetically that, "it is only through a recognition of these complexities that we can approach the elusive nature of identity, or integrate public and private realities, or apprehend that extraordinary variety of individuals and activities called Palestinian" (*After 7*). The collaboration of the Swiss Mohr and the Palestinian Said has thus given us a wonderful example of how this integration can be achieved.

The book is divided into four main chapters titled "States," "Interiors," "Emergence," and "Past and Future." The Palestinians face the "paradox of mobility and insecurity" daily (*After 11*). Wherever they be, they are never in Palestine. They are referred to as "the Arabs of Judea and Samaria," "non-Jews," and "present absentees," and are given special cards, in all Arab

countries except Jordan, identifying them as “Palestinian refugees” (*After 11*). Though they maybe respectable engineers, teachers, business people, or technicians, they remain “aliens” in the eyes of their host country. Said laments: “We have no known Einsteins, no Chagall, no Freud or Rubinstein to protect us with a legacy of glorious achievements. We have had no Holocaust to protect us with the world’s compassion. We are ‘other,’ and opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement and exodus” (*After 17*).

“Stability of geography,” and “continuity of land,” has disappeared from the lives of all Palestinians. Meron Benvenisti, the ex-deputy mayor of Jerusalem explains that the Zionist “master plans” follow a criteria; “interconnection” for the Jewish settlements, and “separation” for the Arab ones (*After 20*). Discontinuity, dispossession, and dispersal become the order of the day for the Palestinians. There is no “straight line” in their lives which runs right from “home to birthplace to school to maturity,” and “all events are accidents, progress is a digression, all residence is exile” (*After 20*). Their lives continue to be undocumented, and uncounted (*After 21*).

Said notes with alarm that Palestinian children seem to skip a phase of growth, maturing out-of season (*After 25*). Whispers and occasional proclamations declare that they are “the population factor,” “potential terrorists” to be feared, deported or be constituted as “special targets for death” (*After 25*). While Mahmoud Darwish’s poem *Bitaqit Hawia* (“Identity Card”) depicts the plight of the Palestinian existence intimately connected to the identity card, Emile Habiby’s novel about the Pessoptimist, who is both

hopeful and hopeless at the same time, being half here and half not here, is emblematic of the nature of their lives (*After 26*).

Fruits and vegetables are an indispensable part of Palestinian lives. Jaffa oranges and Gaza vegetables are marketed by the Israeli export companies to London or Paris, and rarely consumed in their homeland. Said notes that the land and the peasants “are bound together through the work whose products seem always to have meant something to other people, to have been destined for consumption elsewhere” (*After 28*). Laws like “1015” and “1039” stipulate that any Arab who wants to plant a new vegetable or fruit tree on the land he owns in West Bank or Gaza must get written permission from the military governor before planting it, and failure to get the permission risks the destruction of the tree or vegetable, in addition to one year’s imprisonment (*After 28*).

Said discusses Ghassan Kanafani’s novella *Men in the Sun*, in which three refugees concealed in a tanker truck are transported illegally across the border into Kuwait. While its driver converses with the guards, the Palestinian refugees die of suffocation in the scorching sun, abjectly forgotten. The novelist is worried not about the forgetfulness of the driver, but about the silence of the men in the truck. Said asks; “Why did they not knock and bang on the sides of the tank?” and answers, it is because of “our fear to press” (*After 32*).

Said asks a poignant question regarding the phrases “Palestinian love” and “Palestinian kisses,” with which the Palestinians normally sign off letters:

“Are there really such things as Palestinian intimacy and embraces, or are they simply intimacy and embraces, experiences common to everyone, neither politically significant nor particular to a nation or a people?” (*After* 34). It is ironic to note that the interior world of Palestine has no way of preventing others from entering the inside, violating their privacy, be it the Crusades, Balfour, or Weizmann (*After* 53).

About a photograph of boys practicing karate, Said mentions that “the cult of physical strength, of fascination with body-building, karate, and boxing . . . is obviously the response of the weak to a strong, visibly dominating other” (*After* 54). Another characteristic feature of Palestinian life is “the compulsion to repeat” as evident in the interiors of all the houses, regardless of class. They have the same food, eating rituals, and routine hospitality always offering excess food to the guest, more than what can be consumed. The same intimacy and display of objects and artifacts like “replicas of the Mosque of Omar, plates inlaid with mother-of-pearl, tiny Palestinian flags” occur everywhere (*After* 58).

The steady trickle of memoirs, journals, albums, daybooks, diaries, and recollections grounded in personal authority do help in keeping the flame of Palestine alive. Yet, there is a crucial absence of women from many of these writings; reducing them to the role of a “hyphen, connective, transition, mere incident” (*After* 77). On the contrary, Said perceives “women everywhere in Palestinian life . . . and how they exist between the syrupy sentimentalism of roles we ascribe to them (mothers, virgins, martyrs) and the annoyance, even

dislike, that their unassimilated strength provokes in our warily politicized, automatic manhood” (*After 77*).

The Palestinians are an impoverished labour force. Said notes that more than 70 percent of them travel to work in Jewish locales, the cost of travel wiping out most of their wages, since they are not permitted to stay overnight in predominantly Jewish areas, and because “some Israeli employers lock in Arab workers from the Territories between the hours of 2:00 and 6:00 A.M” (*After 98*). Arab child labour is also a matter of concern, flourishing in the poorest areas like Gaza. The Arab daily wage labourer has turned into “a disconsolate, transportable commodity, loitering in the marketplace until picked by a Jewish labour entrepreneur for piecework elsewhere” (*After 98*).

Said dislikes the term “Palestinian diaspora” because there is apparently very little symmetry between the Palestinian and Jewish experiences, and the Diaspora as such does not exist as it once did in central Europe “with tragic figures like Kafka, Schoenberg, and Benjamin at its core,” but is represented centrally by “American Zionism, a far different phenomenon” (*After 115*). He finds it thus much easier to debate with an Israeli than an American Jew, and notes that the demographic ties of the Palestinians to their land is more substantial than Judaism’s in the period before 1948 (*After 115*).

Said worries that the Palestinians have been reduced to “only a people of declarations, resolutions, statements,” and are “therefore only creatures imprisoned by the affable international consensus telling us that, yes, we

deserve self-determination, but that we must still be dependent on others, and still wait before we get it” (*After* 122). The Palestinians have donned a de-centred role, always in transit, with “suitcase or bundle of possessions in hand, each family vacates territory left behind for others, even as new boundaries are traversed, new opportunities created, new realities set up” (*After* 130). Yet outside the debilitating confinements, the Palestinians do find a way to sustain, reinvent and re-present themselves.

Mohr’s photographs are an evidence of a “Palestinian ecology that is neither symbolic nor representative in some hokey nationalist way;” it rather addresses their world as “a secular place, without nostalgia for a lost transcendence” (*After* 146). It is the material world that these people face with grit and purpose, on a daily basis, which is starkly depicted in them. The photographs in the book are scenes of people “who, in having left behind some untellable trauma, some offstage catastrophe (*nakba*), now respond directly to the task at hand with an unmistakable determination” that Said recognizes as “irreducibly Palestinian” (*After* 147).

Said compares the Palestinian margins of existence with those of the Armenians, the Jews, the Irish, the Cypriots, the American blacks, the Poles, the American Indians—all those who had to confront the terrifying frontiers “where resistance is a necessity, but where there is also sometimes a growing realization of the need for an unusual and, to some degree, an unprecedented knowledge” (*After* 159). Amidst the counterpoint and cacophony of the multiple desperate dramas of the “various Palestinian existences,” Said asks:

“Can we see what we are, have we really *seen* what we have seen?” (*After* 159). The book does not have a resolution, but instead conveys the essential sense of “national incompleteness” (*After* 165).

*After the Last Sky* is a book which uses “aesthetical questions to enter the realm of politics” (Hawley 204). W. J. T. Mitchell calls it the “most ambitious of books, a nation-making text” (qtd. in Hawley 209). Said has left an indelible trace on the photographs with a huge personal investment. While all other peoples have their identity typically connected to their land, it is “landlessness” that is the paradoxical essence of Palestinian identity (Beus 211). The term “Palestinian,” essentially derived from the “land of Palestine,” thus becomes ironical in this respect. Terms like “Holy Land” and “Zion” are all geographical spaces, while “Palestine” has metamorphosed into an “imaginary homeland.”

*After the Last Sky* manifests the “very hybridity of art forms (photographs and prose), self-positionings, (a Palestinian in exile writing from the outside and a Swiss photographer shooting on location) and cultural memories in sketching out a ‘third space’ for signification that can never arise from either self or other alone” (Beus 211-212). The narrative tone of the book differs from that of Said’s other works—it abounds in calm lyricism and nostalgic romanticism, as against the sharp and keen analytical criticism of the others (Beus 212). A zone of “in-betweenness” is created in its juxtaposition of subjectivity and objectivity. Just as he was both a Palestinian and a New

Yorker, neither of which describes him completely, Said talks of the loss of land, though he never owned any real estate in his lifetime (Beus 212).

Yifen Beus argues that, just as Stuart Hall points out, identity is more of a positioning than an essence, a constant flux, and a process of becoming, rather than a state of being (212-213). The essay/album by Said/Mohr aptly captures this. These photographs occupy equal space, if not more than the text, unlike photographs in the traditional reportage pattern. In the fundamental agony of homelessness, it is only words that Said can use as the “semiotic location” to fill the void (Beus 214). The structure of the chapters tries to map the “paradoxical, border-crossing identity and the politics of statehood in relation to the notion of the ‘self’” (Beus 215). While life becomes fragmentary, like broken mirrors, it is only these images that retain permanence. It is only through a “liminal sentiment that a brave new world of syncretism can hope to resolve conflict and break down boundaries to reach a utopian state of humanity,” and Said was the occupier of such a space (Beus 219).

It was in 2000 that Said returned to Lebanon, travelled to the South and tossed a stone across the border at Israel. It was a symbolic act of resistance and solidarity. Equally significant was his decision to have his remains interred in Lebanon, ‘the final return’ (Hassan 227). Said’s map of the Middle East is premised on “linkages, sharing, hospitality, and autonomy,” largely different from a Nasserite vision of unified Arab nations, or the Islamist project of reviving the Caliphate (Hassan 228).

Mustapha Marrouchi comments that *After the Last Sky* negotiates the dialectic between photography and writing, exile and its overcoming, and estrangement and reunification, and posits a precarious relation between “text and image (the *inside*) and (the *outside*)” (*Edward Said* 108). Marrouchi adds that Said is a “baroque writer” and an “elliptical encrypter: what is happening is not what you see, but what you cannot see, until you adjust your perception—Wittgenstein’s duck/rabbit,” and the book rises to the level of “a national epic . . . offering a people their own heritage freshly caught on paper and raised to the heights of poetry” (*Edward Said* 109).

The book does not fit into any fixed categories and is unclassifiable. The photographs are never captioned, but they offer to the reader an eloquent sense of documentary reality, reminding that “even in a book that is carefully chosen, carefully organized words, there should also be a place for wordlessness” (Marrouchi, *Edward Said* 114). Marrouchi lists “marginality, boundary, minority, space, theories of narrative knowledge—textuality, discourse, enunciation, the unconscious as language” as some of the strategies used in the text to evoke “the ambivalent margin of space and its in between” (*Edward Said* 115).

Said’s narrative voice has no fixed place; “it is both nowhere and everywhere at once,” a “ghostlike spectre” that haunts the text, “without centre, placing, or closure,” disrupting and dislocating it, not permitting it to exist as a final or complete one. This “atopicality and hypertopicality” is read by Marrouchi as symptomatic of the victims who have been denied the basic

human rights (*Edward Said* 119). Marrouchi notes that the word “text” is the one most often used in the book, and it variously means “*history, story, predicament, side of the question, perspective, version of events*, and occasionally nothing at all, or what is aptly called in linguistics: ‘an absence that signifies’” (*Edward Said* 120).

*Culture and Resistance* (2003) is a collection of conversations between Said and David Barsamian. Said talks of the “figure of the nomad,” constructed deliberately by Israeli narratives, which depended entirely on a kind of “heroic vision of pioneers who come to a desert and in the end deal not with native people in the sense that these are people who have a settled existence and lived in towns and cities and have their own society, but rather with nomads who could be driven away” (Barsamian and Said 21). Said caustically remarks that the Israelis are not there just as people escaping the Holocaust, but also largely “at the expense of another person” whom they have “displaced or killed or driven away” (Barsamian and Said 21).

Commenting on the combined future of Israeli and Palestinian peoples, Said notes that there has to be a way “to deal with the Other and render that Other a place, as opposed to no place. So it’s very far from utopia. A utopia means no place. So this is a placing of the Other in a concrete history and space” (Barsamian and Said 22). Therefore, an actual grounding of history in geography is necessary, and maps do play an important role in demystifying airy fantasies and constructing real and crucial spaces. Israeli strategies abound in the “occupation of the West Bank and Gaza with settlers and

settlements and roads and the constant expropriation of Palestinian lands, the destruction of crops and olive trees to make way for roads, the redesigning of the geography of the West Bank” (Barsamian and Said 37).

Said always wanted maps to be published, and notes that it was “one of the hardest things to publish maps of Israel/Palestine in North America” something which *Culture and Resistance* finally does with no less than thirteen maps in its appendix, to “tell the story of conquest more eloquently than words can” (Razack 280). Said points out that in the whole tiny area of Palestine,

78 percent of historic Palestine that was Arab has become Israeli. That has been conceded. The West Bank and Gaza together constitute 22 percent of historical Palestine, and this is what the current fight is over. The Palestinians are not fighting over the 78 percent that they’ve already lost. They’re fighting over the 22 percent that remains. Of this 22 percent, the Israelis are still in control of 60 percent of the West Bank and 40 percent of Gaza. So if there was ever to be a Palestinian state, there would be no contiguous territory. It would all be chopped into little pieces, controlled by the roads which the Israelis have built and which are now encircling each of the Palestinian area, which is why Palestinians today are besieged within their little territory. (Barsamian and Said 38-39)

There has been persistent circulation of the image of “Palestinians as losers,” as those who would “never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity” (Barsamian and Said 45). The atrocities of Israel abound to the extent that it is the only country in the world where torture is legally sanctioned (Barsamian and Said 47). Barsamian points out that after the Balfour Declaration, Chaim Weizmann had remarked about the indigenous population of Palestine that, “there are a few hundred thousand Negroes, but that is a matter of no significance” (53).

The massacre at the Hebron mosque in 1994 by Baruch Goldstein killed twenty nine worshippers. While visiting the mosque in 1992, Said had noticed that in order to get into it one had to pass through Israeli barricades and metal detectors, and a group of soldiers “sitting at the door of the mosque with their feet up on the table, which is a very provocative thing in an Islamic context, and their boots stuck in the faces of the worshippers trying to go through” (Barsamian and Said 54).

Said had made a documentary film for the BBC titled “In Search of Palestine” (1998) (Barsamian and Said 57). After being shown on the BBC2 and on BBC World, it just disappeared. It was shown once on Channel 13 in New York, PBS, and once on public television in San Francisco (Barsamian and Said 57-58). Said notes that the Zionist organizations try to stop and block all films from a Palestinian point of view, the “representation of Palestinians as human beings with a history and a cause is simply forbidden,” and if one

Palestinian film is shown, they ensure that at least five from the Israeli point of view are broadcast (Barsamian and Said 57-58).

In the context of the September 11, 2001, bombing of the twin towers, Barsamian points out Eqbal Ahmad's comment that "terrorism is the poor man's B-52," to which Said replies that the particular act was perpetrated by middle-class and educated people who could fly to Florida and speak English, with no demands, political message or claims for terror bombing. Said disagrees that it was "the poor person's B-2 bombing" (Barsamian and Said 113).

Said believes that there are a lot of people who want peaceful coexistence between the two worlds, many "who believe in rational argument, who believe in a secular rather than a religious politics, and who think that force, militarization, and repression have been so counterproductive as to be eschewed and avoided at any cost" (Barsamian and Said 154). Said places his trust in "civil society through the churches, universities, the places where there is relative freedom to discuss" (Barsamian and Said 154-155).

Barsamian calls Said the *hakawati* (the Arabic word for storyteller) in the United States, for telling the Palestinian story. He praises that over the years, Said has introduced "new combinations of notes, new chord structures, new permutations to advance the piece, to tell the story, as it were" (Barsamian and Said 186-187). Said muses that the story has to be told on, in order to keep its memory and narrative alive, and prevent it from disappearing altogether. The intellectual has to provide a counterpoint, "by storytelling, by

reminders of the graphic nature of suffering, and by reminding everyone that we're talking about people" and not about abstractions (Barsamian and Said 187).

Said mentions the fate of the film *Divine Intervention* (2002) by Elia Suleiman, which was refused in the category of foreign film at the Oscar by the Motion Picture Academy on the ground that "there's no country called Palestine" (Barsamian and Said 188). Said adds that Palestinian identity cards do not have the term "Palestinian" listed as their nationality; instead it is listed as "undetermined" (Barsamian and Said 188).

Valerie Kennedy points out that being a Palestinian by birth, and an American citizen, Said is "both inside and outside the narratives he constructs," which can be both enabling and problematic at the same time, as it leads him to "depict the Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, from an Orientalist perspective" (51). Said's vision always looked out for alternatives; "a democratic and secular state in Palestine, non-nationalist and non-ethnic or sectarian visions of identity, and an alternative, non-totalitarian, non-fundamentalist form of government" (Kennedy 69). Said gave the Palestinians "a presence and a voice in the West" fulfilling a "triple function" of the Palestinian intellectual by "bearing witness to injustice, acting as a kind of conscience and defending 'the identity which is under threat from many directions'" (Kennedy 80).

William D. Hart notes that Said's question of Palestine is framed within the question of "fundamental human rights," like that of "the rights of

self-determination, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and the right to leave and return to one's country" (146). Saree Makdisi points out that Said recognized the fact that "the struggle for the *idea* of Palestine, though tied to its people and their cause, is somehow larger than Palestine itself," and it was animated by "a sense of justice and a concept of humanism not predicated on claims of ethnic, racial, or religious exclusivity but, rather, on inclusivity and community" (443).

Both militant and peaceful Zionism followed "a biopolitics of the crudest and most reductive form" based on ethnic or demographic separation (Makdisi 446). The Oslo Accords offered a "territorially discontinuous Palestinian Bantustan (divided into over sixty disconnected fragments)" with no control over water resources, borders, or airspace, with no independent "economy, currency, or financial system," and nominal sovereignty, which would be "punctuated by heavily fortified Israeli colonies and an autonomous Jewish road network," under Israeli army control (Makdisi 447).

Said tried to engineer a larger humanism in tandem with the idea of Palestine, which was "creative of new relationships, expressive of the desire for the immanent generation of new identities, new forms of knowledge, new forms of thought, new communities of expression and of being—while never forgetting or ignoring the history of suffering from which the idea of Palestine emerged" (Makdisi 453). This humanism was "heterogeneous and infinitely open-ended," "indeterminate, expansive, and existing precisely in the connections and affects that tie human beings together" (Makdisi 453).

Many Israelis, as well as Palestinians, today recognize the practical solution of a single state, between Jordan River and the Mediterranean, instead of the two-state solution of 1988 (Makdisi 460). Instead of trying to convert Tel Aviv into the “Geneva of the Middle East,” which it can never be, for it is built on the ruins of six Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948, Ilan Pappé argues that it should aspire to be Alexandria or Beirut “so that Jews who invaded the Arab world by force could at last show a willingness to be part of the Middle East rather than remain an alien and alienated state within it” (qtd. in Makdisi 460). Makdisi believes that the idea of Palestine articulated by Said reflects not the antagonism towards Zionism but instead “a humanism of liberation . . . that would free Jews as well as Arabs” which could overcome the “traumatic encounter of colonizer and colonized, occupier and occupied, self and other . . . by an affirmation of unity rather than division, sharing rather than denial” (461).

Dan Rabinowitz points out that Said always had misapprehensions about the inherent flaws of the Oslo process and was “so brilliantly outspoken about [it] throughout his life” (511). Said was quick to recognize that the regime of Israeli-Palestinian relations forged by the Oslo Accord “turned the newly formed Palestinian Authority (PA) into a subcontractor for Israeli security (Rabinowitz 506).

Lorenzo Veracini makes an interesting observation that “if it was ‘God’s American Israel’ that was founded by Puritans on Massachusetts Bay, it is God’s Israeli America that a specific constituency is seeing founded on

the hilltops of the West Bank” (305). Veracini notes that the only way of breaking the isopolity between US and Israel in the Palestinian liberation struggle is by “displacing existing identitarian structures and recognizing alternative creation stories and narratives of oppression and emancipation,” and Said being aware of the “power of narrative and rhetorical invention” always strived to “shape different affective possibilities” (306).

Patrick Wolfe identifies a “logic of elimination” in Israel’s relationship to the Palestinians similar to that in Australia’s relationship to its Aborigines, and as in other European settler colonial instances (314). Zionist narratives try to depict themselves “no more responsible for harming Palestinians than a man leaping from the roof of a burning building would be responsible for harming the passer-by on whom he happened to land,” while Wolfe succinctly notes that “from the native’s point of view, settler-colonisers’ particular circumstances and intentions are not the issue;” instead, for them, “the issue is that, at the hands of the settlers, they face elimination” (315).

The Israeli journalist and historian Tom Segev in his work *The Seventh Million* notes:

Free people—Arabs—had gone into exile and become destitute refugees—Jews—took the exiles’ places as the first step in their lives as free people. One group lost all they had, while the other found everything they needed—tables, chairs, closets, pots, pans, plates, sometimes clothes, family albums, books, radios, and pets. Most of the immigrants broke into the

abandoned Arab houses without direction, caught up in frenzy of take-what-you-can, first come, first served. (qtd. in Wolfe 317)

Meron Benvenisti recalls that, as a pioneer of the youth movement, he had “made the desert bloom” by uprooting the ancient olive trees to clear the ground for a banana grove in accordance with the farming principles of his kibbutz (Wolfe 317-318). Settler colonialism under the leadership of Menachem Begin set out to redesign and create a new image for the Jew—“the fighting one”—hitherto unknown to the world for over eighteen hundred years. Begin’s Irgun fighters, harking back eighteen hundred years to the fighting Jews of Masada, also rejected the “fallen Jews of the diasporan interim” (Wolfe 322). A refocussing from the diaspora to Palestine replaced the Arabs with the place of the fallen Jews.

Wolfe notes that there were many kinds of Jews: the Arab Jews in Israel, the *Mizrachim* (Eastern ones) from such places as Yemen or Iraq, the dominant European-Jewish (*Ashkenazi*) consciousness, the Sephardic descendants of the Jewish community that was expelled, along with Muslim Moors from al-Andalus (Iberia) namely the *Spharadin* (324). Zionists had nothing but contempt towards the Oriental Jewries portraying them as “primitive, feudal, and unprogressive” (Wolfe 324, 329).

Why would a single state be a better solution than two states? Wolfe points out that, in such a case, there would be the loss of theocracy, and a secular state would exist for its citizens, rather for “foreign coreligionists,” and

Israel would not be able to annex the Occupied Territories; it would have to incorporate their Palestinian population, violating the goal of “ethno-racial exclusiveness” (329). Zionism is noted for its reluctance to assimilate, and a unified state would thus dismantle Zionism. It would not require the “elimination of either—or, better, any—of its constituent ethnicities,” and would consequently dismantle settler-colonialism too (Wolfe 330). Territorial expansion would also die out with ethno-racial exclusivity, and it is this negation—secular, inclusive and territorially secure—which Edward Said strongly believed in and propagated throughout his *oeuvre* (Wolfe 330).

The Palestine experience has been immortalized by Joe Sacco in his comic book *Palestine* (2001). Said in his introduction to the book notes that people do tend to associate comic books with what is “frivolous or ephemeral,” but there are rare instances when a grim subject is treated by a serious comic book artist, the primary requisite still being “a first-rate talent” to create a liberated and subversive universe with a “colourful, riotous extravagance of its pictures” (i).

Said first encountered Sacco’s comic book on Palestine when his son brought it home. It had plunged him into the “world of the first great intifada (1987-92)” and back into the “animated enlivening world of the comics” he had read long ago (Sacco iii). Sacco’s work is an antidote to the media-saturated world of controlled news images. There are

no smooth-talking announcers and presenters, no unctuous narrative of Israeli triumphs, democracy, achievements, no

assumed and re-confirmed representations—all of them disconnected from any historical or social source, from any lived reality—of Palestinians as rock-throwing, rejectionist, and fundamentalist villains whose main purpose is to make life difficult for the peace-loving, persecuted Israelis. (Sacco iii)

Instead we see through the eyes of Sacco, who himself appears as a character, the inhospitable world of “military occupation, arbitrary arrest, harrowing experiences of houses demolished and land expropriated, torture (‘moderate physical pressure’) and sheer brute force” (Sacco iii). Palestinians living at the mercy of Israeli soldiers, on a daily, even hourly basis, is what forms the crux of the comic book. Uncertainty, unhappiness, deprivation, aimless wandering, and perennial waiting are what characterize these lives.

The depiction of life in Gaza, the “national inferno,” is more graphic than anything read or seen on television. Said points out that its “vacancy of time,” “the drabness” and “sordidness of everyday life in the refugee camps, the network of relief workers, bereaved mothers, unemployed young men, teachers, police, hangers-on, the ubiquitous tea or coffee circle, the sense of confinement, permanent muddiness and ugliness” are rendered with “almost terrifying accuracy and, paradoxically enough, gentleness at the same time” by Sacco (Sacco iv-v). Sacco’s comic world is populated with “history’s losers, banished to the fringes where they seem so despondently to loiter” with very little hope, except sheer indomitable will to pull on (Sacco v). Sacco’s art with

its “power to detain us” is an indispensable read on Palestine, in contrast to other superhero comic stuff which always depicts the victory of the hero.

In their joint essay titled “A Profile of the Palestinian People,” Edward Said, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Janet L. Abu-Lughod, Muhammad Hallaj, and Elia Zurek point out that Palestine was home to the earliest villages and also the birthplace of urban life (Said et al. 235). Janet Abu-Lughod writes about the dismantlement of the Palestinian society: “Except for the extermination of the Tasmanians, modern history knows no cases in which the virtually complete supplanting of the indigenous population of a country by an alien stock has been achieved in as little as two generations” (qtd. in Said et al. 237). This “startling recency” of the Palestinian destruction breeds the dangerous assumption that “what exists today has always been” and it may afford “psychic peace but only at the terrible cost of denying reality” (Said et al. 237-238).

Zionism believed in destroying Palestine for constructing a Jewish life there. Fayeze A. Sayegh notes that the “detachment of Jews from their respective countries and their mass transfer to Palestine, and the detachment of the indigenous Palestinian Arabs and their mass transfer from Palestine” was like the two rhythmic operations of the heart beat—“pumping in and pumping out” (qtd. in Said et al. 238). Both Gandhi and Nehru were critical of the Zionist policies; while Gandhi reminded them that “you want to convert the Arab majority into a minority,” Nehru criticized that the Zionists “neglected one not unimportant fact . . . Palestine was not a wilderness or an empty,

uninhabited place. It was already somebody else's home" (qtd. in Said et al. 239).

Zionism tried to hide its intended victims of colonization from the view of the world, and tried to create a cultural vacuum suitable for colonization. Menachem Begin warned an Israeli audience in 1969: "If this is Palestine and not the land of Israel, then you are conquerors and not tillers of the land. You are invaders. If this is Palestine, then it belongs to a people who lived here before you came" (qtd. in Said et al. 241). Palestine had to face both doctrinal annihilation and demographic purges. The fertile land was destroyed, and its society was quickly transformed into a "community of landless peasants" (Said et al. 243).

Israel controls the Palestinians through segmentation and co-optation. While the former is based on an elaborate institutional separation between Arabs and Jews, the latter is a method of control made possible by the continued economic dependency of the Arabs on the Jewish sector (Said et al. 277). Palestinians have been reduced to drawers of water and hewers of wood. The refugee camps nevertheless have managed "to keep families together in the face of adversity and sustain a sense of solidarity instrumental to maintaining Palestinian identity (Said et al. 286). In the near future, controlling the Palestinians may not be economically viable to Israel.

Jacqueline Rose points out that Said was always concerned with justice, never mincing words about "the cruel asymmetry of the conflict and the peculiar injustice of the settlements" with regard to the question of

Palestine (512). She also points out that the carving of the Zionist state was traumatic not only to the Palestinians but to the Jews as well (517). Rose sadly remembers that Said had promised to read her lecture “The Question of Zion,” which was a tribute and echo to his *The Question of Palestine*, but unfortunately illness took him away, while she had “held back in the blithe belief that our dialogue would be endless, that having defeated your illness so many many times before you would go on doing so forever” (Rose 518).

Said was a “true intellectual” who could never be the fawning servant of power and interest, always speaking “the truth to power,” caring the least for its personal consequences. Ardi Imseis discerns three distinctive roles that Said played while advancing the discourse of Palestine. The first was that of a “narrator” of the Palestinian experience, insisting that the Palestinians be “addressed on their own terms and that they be acknowledged by the world at large as a people possessing agency and the capacity, like all other peoples, to represent themselves” (Imseis 248). Secondly, Said was a “critic” of power—of the Zionist, Western, Arab, and Palestinian ones. His third role was that of a “visionary,” who was able to foresee before many others, “various solutions for bringing about a just and lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis” (Imseis 248). Said’s clarion call to “speak truth to power” was not directed just to the “ivory-tower elites,” but was also “a rallying cry, an attempt to awake in one and all a culture of dissent” (Imseis 273). The stories of the victims have to be told, their histories acknowledged, and their rights realized.

Avi Shlaim detects four phases in Said's thoughts on the settlement of the Palestinian problem. Initially Said favoured a one-state solution, including the whole of historic Palestine as a binational state for both the Jews and Arabs. But at the PNC meeting in 1988, he voted in favour of the two-state solution. In 1993, he opposed the Oslo Accord and its implicit two-state solution. During the final days of his life, he returned to the one-state solution (Shlaim 283).

Shlaim identifies the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the rapid eruption of the First Intifada of December 1987, as two reasons for Said's advocacy of the two-state solution, which tried to capitalize on the success of the Intifada, and translate it into a lasting political achievement (Shlaim 284). But in 1992, when Said returned to visit Palestine for the first time after 1947, he came face-to-face with the grim reality of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation. This made him realize that the two communities were too intertwined and that the two-state solution was an unrealistic one (Shlaim 285).

Bill Ashcroft critically observes that though Said's works deal with the question of representation and liberation, *Orientalism* and his works on Palestine have not yet brought about the complete liberation of Palestine, signalling that "analysis has not led and perhaps cannot lead, to liberation" (291). He adds that in the case of Palestine, the term "postcolonial" would mean not "after colonialism," but "after colonization," and the key to success

of resistance in all postcolonial societies “has not been opposition but the seizing of the power of self-representation” (294).

The futility of “counterforce” is blatantly obvious in the Palestinian context, the conflict being so unequal, and its logical conclusion only meaning the “extermination of the Palestinian people” (Ashcroft 299). The site of struggle for Palestine, notes Ashcroft, should be the imperial centre, transforming its Western media images, capturing the audience, appropriating English, and interpolating the dominant discourse at the site of power (299). One has to learn not just to speak, but also to speak in a manner that maybe heard, replacing the images of futility and despair with those of cultural validity (Ashcroft 300). The Israel/Palestine struggle is one for a “home,” but Ashcroft defines “home” as neither paradise nor Utopia, but as “the luminous possibility of the present” (302).

Ghada Karmi observes that Said had won the battle for hearts and minds against Israel, and was more devastating than “a dozen armies and fleet of F16s in the struggle against the Zionists” (304). A similar instance in the obverse was when the rumours of the Deir Yassin massacre by Zionists in April 1948 had terrified thousands of Palestinians to flee from their homes, and Menachem Begin consequently remarking that “the massacre had been worth half a dozen battalions in the war against the Palestinian Arabs” (Karmi 304).

Said’s project countered the intellectual dispossession and eviction of Palestinians by the Israelis, who were bent on not leaving any traces of their

memory, history, language and culture (Karmi 306). Crossing intellectual boundaries, stepping in and out of “apparently unrelated topics—literary criticism, politics, culture, history, methodologies—in a fluid and effortless way,” Said resisted the double dispossession of Palestinian bodies and souls (Karmi 307).

Ella Shohat points out that Said’s ideas have travelled through many worlds, and reading him translated into Hebrew would need a sense of “cross-border mediation and translation, as ideas are hybridized, resisted, contained, and recontextualized,” and Said’s “out-of-placeness” becomes more precarious when he invokes “the right to return” to the very place which engendered his exile, with a state in place not only to “authorize or deny his return but also to oversee the circulation of his texts about displacement” (“The ‘Postcolonial’” 333).

Shohat throws light on an incident wherein a 1988 Hebrew translation of a book by Christopher Norris transliterated Said’s name incorrectly as “Sed,” when it could have been rendered correctly in Hebrew which possesses the exact and equivalent letters to the Arabic. Shohat presumes that “the name ‘Sa’eed’ in its Arabic pronunciation was perhaps hard to ‘hear’ or digest within a deconstructionist academic ambience” and that “Edward Said’s name condenses an oxymoronic tension. The miswriting—or better, misreading—of his last name betrays the disconnect between the worlds of anti-colonial literature and Israeli literary studies” (“The ‘Postcolonial’” 338-339). Said rests in Broummana, Lebanon, rather than New York or Jerusalem. To Shohat

this is “a suitably troubled and inconclusive allegory for the equally ruptured voyages of his ideas across national borders” (“The ‘Postcolonial’” 349).

Marc H. Ellis observes that, for Said, the “language of religion” was dated while “secularity”—as a release from the bondage of religion—was the way to penetrate the mysticism that reified identity and politics (362). As a “Jew in exile,” Ellis understands that the voice and witness of Said is necessary for the Jews to embrace the Palestinian people, and it is Said’s vision that continues to offer a beacon amidst the gloom (364).

Tony Judt, in his Foreword to Said’s collection of essays *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map* (2004), points out that Said had lived all his life “at a tangent to the various causes with which he was associated” (vii). Said was more fascinated with the notion of human rights than with the shallow and facile linguistic ploys of anti-foundationalism, for they were real issues rather than mere grammatical aberrations. Judt adds that in matters of “reading” and “writing”, Said was a “traditional humanist” who was depressed with the “over familiarity” of younger literary scholars “‘with theory’ at the expense of the art of close textual reading” (*From Oslo* viii). Judt points out that though Said renounced all forms of terrorism, he was not placid nor a pacifist; instead, he was in certain ways “a deeply angry man” (*From Oslo* ix). He was a “rootless cosmopolitan” whose lasting achievement was “to make *others* uncomfortable” (*From Oslo* x).

The essays in *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map* span the period from December 2000 to July 2003. In addition to the Oslo decade, it discusses

the massacres of September 11, 2001, and the American retaliation in Afghanistan and the attack on Iraq. Though these essays were written during his ill health, there is nothing more than a casual allusion to his illness in them. Said was always speaking truth to power, never fawningly elastic, nor disfiguring “the history of intellectuals since time immemorial” (*From Oslo* xi).

Said notes that just as “historic Palestine” has been lost, so has been “historic Israel” too (*From Oslo* xx). A single state cleansed of “the other” is now virtually impossible, and it is here that Said’s vision of a mutually inclusive future gains paramount importance. Judt remarks that Said’s death has left a “yawning void,” and that “he is irreplaceable” (*From Oslo* xxi).

Said points out that Israel is the only state in the world with no officially declared borders, while attempts like that of the “Camp David Fraud” of July 2000 (as termed by Tanya Reinhart) would completely encircle the Palestinian territories “as to let them have no borders with any state except Israel, in addition to retaining the notorious ‘bypassing’ roads and adjacent areas” (*From Oslo* 11). While the Palestinians view this land as their national patrimony, Israel believes it to be theirs by Biblical fiat and diasporic affiliation. Said opines that a “Historical Truth and Political Justice Committee” would be appropriate in this context (*From Oslo* 25). Meanwhile, Israel continues, without respite, its strangulation of Palestine, the economic blockade, and bombings of cities and towns. Palestinians are forced to spend their time endlessly on the roads, with searches, detours, humiliations, and

interrogations, failing to reach their destinations, enduring Israeli caprice  
(*From Oslo* 44).

Said points out that his stone-throwing incident was carried like wildfire in the media. It was in July 2000 that he and his family had made a visit to Lebanon and to a “security zone” recently evacuated by Israeli military, after twenty two years of occupation (*From Oslo* 52). On July 3, after visiting the Khiam prison, they drove to a border post, abandoned by the Israeli troops. A large number of Lebanese visitors were celebrating it by throwing stones across the border. “No Israelis, neither military nor civilians, were in sight” (*From Oslo* 52). Said was photographed without his knowledge while he was engaged in “pitching a tiny pebble in competition with some of the younger men present, none of whom of course had any particular target in sight,” and two days later his picture appeared in all leading newspapers describing him “as a rock-throwing terrorist, a man of violence” (*From Oslo* 52).

He also mentions how, bowing to Zionist pressure, his 2001 annual lecture on Freud titled “Freud and the Non-European” was cancelled by the Freud Institute and Museum in Vienna (*From Oslo* 54). Said remarks that “Freud was hounded out of Vienna by the Nazis and the majority of the Austrian people. Today those same paragons of courage and intellectual principle ban a Palestinian from lecturing” (*From Oslo* 55). Interestingly, the London Freud Museum invited him to deliver the very same lecture in London where Freud had spent the last year of his life (*From Oslo* 56).

Said discusses the campaigns against the translation of Arabic literature into Hebrew. He denounces them as foolhardy. Said points out that these translations would instead help the Israelis to understand the Arabs better, and would prevent them from being treated animal-like. “Getting translated into a foreign language is always a victory for the writer,” and Said believes that the Hebrew translations of Arabic literature would enter into the life of Israelis and make a positive change in it, moving away from “bloody passion to reasonable understanding” (*From Oslo* 75-76).

The spectacular horror that struck the twin towers on September 11, 2001, saw the unleashing of jingoistic attacks against Arab and Muslim communities. Said notes that the United States was transformed into “Captain Ahab in pursuit of Moby Dick” pursuing a “geography of conflict, without clear borders or visible actors” (*From Oslo* 108). Said decries this tendency of “demonization of the Other” which has become the bane of decent politics, which should instead address the roots of terror—misery and injustice—and pursue its redressal (*From Oslo* 111).

Said notes with a tinge of sadness that the Palestinian struggle has not caught the world’s imagination as the South African one because “we cannot seem to be clear about our goals and our methods, and we have not stated unambiguously enough that our purpose is coexistence and inclusion, not exclusivism and a return to some idyllic or mythical past” (*From Oslo* 118). The time for re-examination and reflection has dawned, the recognition that this is not a military struggle but a moral one has to be acknowledged, and it

should be remembered that skepticism and re-evaluation are no more luxuries but necessities (*From Oslo* 118).

Said leaves a very optimistic message. He notes that the Palestinian society still keeps going. It has “neither been defeated nor crumbled completely. Kids still go to school, doctors and nurses still take care of their patients, men and women go to work, organizations have their meetings, and people continue to live” (*From Oslo* 292). Wadie Said, his son, poignantly declares that though Said is no more his writings “remain as a testament to the historic victory that an oppressed people might achieve” (*From Oslo* 302).