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Edward W. Said: Not so lost reflections *On Lost Causes* such as the one-state solution

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the enduring relevance of Edward Said's perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, juxtaposing contemporary challenges with Said's visionary advocacy for a one-state solution. The analysis delves into the complexities of the evolving Middle East dynamics, emphasising the need to reconsider alternative frameworks. Central to our analysis is Said's intellectual ethos, which champions the role of secular intellectuals and profoundly influences his democratic values, his defence of a binational state, and his staunch support for academic freedom. Said's legacy serves as a guiding beacon, stressing the moral imperative to challenge entrenched power structures and advocate for truth. The article explores Said's arguments for a binational state rooted in democratic principles and universal values, arguing that despite scepticism and political marginalisation, his vision offers a compelling pathway toward reconciliation and peace, transcending conventional paradigms and amplifying marginalised voices. This approach highlights how Said's commitment to democracy and intellectual freedom shapes his support for causes other believe to be hopeless and continues to inspire contemporary discourse.

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Introduction

Amos Oz's recollection of his grandfather's emotional reaction to the first Israeli coin in Jerusalem in 1948 is striking in how the old man embraced and blessed the coin despite being an atheist. Reflecting on this anecdote, Amos Oz said that he no longer kisses Israeli coins because he does not have to as his grandfather did it for him. 'Now the Palestinians need a grandfather who would kiss a coin and a grandson who would no longer have to', he then added.¹ For many contemporary young Palestinians, Edward Said could be the grandfather whose actions on behalf of the Palestinian issue could be compared with the gesture of Amos Oz's grandfather. Unfortunately, after 7

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¹Goldkorn, *Osiol Mesjasza*, 103.

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October 2023, when a day after the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the Yom-Kippur War, Hamas attacked Israel, rekindling the Middle East, the blessing and prosperity of the Palestinians is an even more distant vision than during Edward Said's lifetime. More than two decades following Said's passing, his perspective on the Middle East conflict remains remarkably pertinent, characterised by incisive observations and discerning conclusions.

The Middle East conflict extends beyond the interests of Palestinians and Israelis, involving the broader Arab world and other influential powers in the region, thus engaging the international community on multiple levels. The proposed solution, endorsed by various international representatives, political leaders, and supported by Arab nations,² entails the establishment of a separate Palestinian State within the Middle East. Many commentators argue in favour of reverting to a two-state solution as the most feasible route to peace.³ Nonetheless, there exists a dearth of international consensus regarding the precise details and execution of this proposed arrangement. The current escalation of military operations and resulting civilian casualties has drawn unprecedented criticism toward the State of Israel, significantly tarnishing its political standing in international relations and altering public perceptions across numerous nations.⁴ In this context, it is pertinent to revisit Edward Said's perspectives on this matter, as his advocacy for a one-state solution, once marginalised, may now find receptive ears.

It is difficult to imagine that during Said's lifetime at Columbia, with which he was associated from 1963 until his death in 2003, there would be any restrictions on the activities of pro-Palestinian organisations. Yet, 20 years later, in November 2023, in the context of Israel's very aggressive military actions against the civilian population of Palestine, Columbia University, Said's alma mater, banned two pro-Palestine groups, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish Voice for Peace.⁵ Said would most likely vehemently protest the university's decision, since he believed that

Our role is to widen the field of discussion, not to set limits in accord with the prevailing authority. I have spent a great deal of my life during the past thirty-five years advocating the rights of the Palestinian people to national self-determination, but I have always tried to do that

²Arab states and the European Union agreed at a meeting in Spain in November 2023 that a two-state solution was the answer to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Eighth Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) gathered Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Euro-Mediterranean region on 27 November 2023 in Barcelona under the Co-Presidency of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the European Union to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in particular the grave situation in Gaza, its impact on the region and the way forward. In the Text of the Joint Communiqué they supported the convening of a peace conference with the parties as soon as possible, in order to achieve a just peace by implementing the two-state solution, with clear time lines and agreed implementation mechanisms, with two sovereign and secure states, Palestine and Israel, living side-by-side in peace and mutual recognition on the basis of the 4 June 1967 lines; https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/union-mediterranean-joint-communication%C3%A9-co-presidency-after-8th-regional-forum-barcelona_en (Accessed March 24, 2024).

³<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/what-is-two-state-solution-israel-palestinian-conflict-2024-01-25/> (Accessed March 24, 2024).

⁴For example, in March 2024, British newspapers reported that half of British publishers 'won't take books by Jewish authors', <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/03/03/half-of-british-publishers-wont-take-jewish-authors/> (Accessed March 24, 2024). Simultaneously, over 8,700 artists and curators have signed a petition to the organizers of the 60th Venice International Art Biennale to exclude the Israel Pavilion, <https://anga.live/index.html> (Accessed March 24, 2024). Finally, on a more personal note, the manager of the Israel program at the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, which promotes Polish culture abroad, resigned from her position, citing disagreement with Israel's actions towards the Palestinian people (resignation was accepted by the author of this article).

⁵The university imposed a ban on their gatherings on campus until the end of the semester following an unauthorized demonstration organized by students. Columbia University received Said's entire library and archive upon his passing. Gerald Rosberg, 'Statement', Columbia News (10 February 2023), <https://news.columbia.edu/news/statement-gerald-rosberg-chair-special-committee-campus-safety> (Accessed March 7, 2024).

with full attention paid to the reality of the Jewish people and what they suffered by the way of persecution and genocide.⁶

Thus, unsurprisingly, the university ban, issued by the institution housing the Centre for Palestine Studies and Edward Said Archival Collection, was met with a swift response on social media. Quotes from Edward Said and videos featuring his speeches quickly went viral, contributing to a resurgence of interest in his works. Indeed, Moustafa Bayoumi, one of Said's students and co-editor of a significant collection of his texts from 1996 to 2006, noted in February 2024 a notable surge in sales, marking an elevenfold increase since October 7.⁷ These include essays on the Palestinian issue and the one-state solution. In recent months, the momentum to boycott Israeli activities has notably intensified within American and European academic institutions. However, given Edward Said's well-documented perspectives on the responsibilities of intellectuals and the role of the university, it is plausible to suggest that he would not align himself with these protests. This stance will be explored and substantiated in our analysis.

In the ensuing sections, we first dissect Edward Said's reflections on Palestine, which are deeply rooted in his understanding of the role and responsibilities of intellectuals, as well as his staunch advocacy for academic freedom. This foundational analysis sets the stage for exploring the pivotal influence of Said's personal and academic experiences on his political stances, particularly his advocacy for a one-state solution. Following a brief overview of this idea, we delve into Said's compelling arguments, which he termed 'the only alternative', elucidating why the concept of a binational state should not be dismissed. This segment aims to bridge the gap between Said's theoretical insights and his real-world engagements, highlighting how his experiences shaped his views on potential resolutions to the conflict. Through a comprehensive exploration of Said's perspectives and the historical context surrounding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, we aim to illuminate the enduring relevance and merit of considering alternative paths towards peace in the region.⁸ Ultimately, this paper not only scrutinises Said's arguments in favor of one-state solution, but also explores the ideals he championed and embodied in public life. This exploration compels us to consider the value of supporting what are often perceived as 'lost causes',⁹ thereby underscoring the transformative potential of intellectual engagement in geopolitical discourse.

The tops of a secular intellectual

Said's reflections on Palestine are first and foremost rooted in how he comprehended the intellectual's responsibility to uphold universal values and advocate for the marginalised.

⁶Said, *Orientalism*, XVIII.

⁷Moustafa Bayoumi, "Edward Said Seems Like a Prophet: 20 Years on, there's Hunger for His Narrative," *Guardian*, 15 February 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/15/edward-said-palestine-israel-gaza> (Accessed March 7, 2024).

⁸It should be noted that there are numerous other Palestinian authors who write on this topic. Among them: Rouhana, "Decolonization as Reconciliation," 27–46; Abu Hatoum, "Decolonizing [in the] Future," 397–412; Mahamid and Berte, "Happiness, Sadness, and Hope for the Future in Narratives of Palestinian Refugee Children," 1638–51.

⁹This is the title of Said's important essay, "On Lost Causes," first published in 1997 in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Vol. 18, ed. Grethe B. Peterson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997) about the role of hope in sustaining all political movements. According to Said, this hope revives causes that were considered lost thanks to the tenacious attitude of their defenders. In the case of the Middle East conflict, it is expressed in a belief 'that the Palestinian cause continued to represent an idea of justice and equality around which many others could rally. By being for Palestinians rights we stood for nondiscrimination, for social justice and equality, for enlightened nationalism' [*Reflection on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, 547].

In *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), a book based on lectures prepared for the BBC, he delineates the role of intellectuals as distinct from experts, coterie members, consultants, or other professionals, emphasising their duty to challenge entrenched power structures and champion truth. The difference is that the former group 'should be the ones to question patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, racial or gender privilege'.¹⁰ They are the ones who should speak on behalf of the poor, the excluded, those deprived of their voice and self-representation, and the powerless. Said critiques the tendency for intellectuals to align with special interests, urging them instead to confront nationalist, corporate, and socio-economic privilege. Already in the introduction, he declares that 'nothing disfigures the intellectual's public performance as much as trimming, careful silence, patriotic bluster, and retrospective and self-dramatizing apostasy'.¹¹

The protest by Columbia students against Israel's policy, referenced earlier, represents just one instance among numerous forceful responses from American academic circles that have aligned with the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement. This alignment has not only augmented the presence and visibility of Palestinian students and scholars on American campuses but has also been associated with calls to curtail collaborations with Israeli scientific institutions.¹² An interesting double take on this matter was presented by Flora Cassen and Ilan Pappé.¹³ The former, an associate professor of Jewish, Islamic, and Middle Eastern Studies, as well as an associate professor of history at Washington University in St. Louis, holds the conviction that the academy should safeguard freedom and diversity of thought, as these are fundamental to its function. Consequently, she views the boycott of Israeli institutions as contradictory to the inherent nature of the university. Cassen argues that the university should not serve as a judicial body, making judgments on issues that ought to remain external to its precincts. Allowing such practices, she warns, would open the back door to ideological influences that would prove challenging to eliminate. Ilan Pappé, an Israeli historian, political scientist, former politician, and professor at the College of Social Sciences and International Studies at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom, holds a contrasting viewpoint. He asserts that 'Israeli academia is complicit directly or indirectly in the crimes of the state'. According to Pappé, this complicity justifies the limitation of research cooperation with Israeli institutions and the abandonment of joint projects. This stance is relevant not only in the USA but also in Europe, which has similarly experienced a surge of student protests.¹⁴ In May 2024, the University of Barcelona urged the EU to exclude Israel from

¹⁰Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, xiii. Unless noted otherwise, all quotations are sourced from this edition of *Representations of the Intellectual*. The authors cite extensively to preserve the rhetorical vigor and performative essence of Said's language, emphasising its dynamic qualities. This approach underscores how language serves as another realm through which Said's active engagement is manifested [see also Said, *Peace and its Discontents*]. Even in his major scholarly works, Said's writing retains a performative quality, often imbued with descriptions that project nuanced meanings. This characteristic is most evident in his seminal work, *Orientalism* [Said, *Orientalism*]. The essays compiled in the collection *Representations of the Intellectual* reflect Said's profound conviction regarding the roles of intellectuals, constituting a latent biographical motif within these texts.

¹¹Ibid., XII–XIII.

¹²The press has extensively reported on the wave of violent protests that swept through American campuses during the winter semester of 2023/2024. The most prestigious newspapers, including Nature (22 May 2024), <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-01492-9> (Accessed June 8, 2024) or New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/17/us/campus-protests-agreements-divestment-israel.html> (Accessed June 8, 2024) covered this topic.

¹³The Guardian, 1 June 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jun/01/academic-institutions-boycott-israel-debate> (Accessed June 8, 2024).

¹⁴EUObserver, 8 May 2024, https://euobserver.com/*ar177febce, (Accessed June 6, 2024).

Horizon Europe – the EU-funded research programme.¹⁵ Following this, universities in Barcelona and Granada proceeded to cancel student collaborations with Israel. Such drastic measures, it appears, would likely not have been endorsed by Edward Said, were one to speculate on his response to the question: ‘What would Edward Said say about it?’

His disapproval of the protests would likely not be absolute, as he might see the blockade of Israel as a state, including its institutions, as justified under the circumstances of war. However, the crux of the matter is that, in his view, intellectuals should guard universal values and resist political pressure. Furthermore, Said’s inclination towards restraint in limiting university freedom is highlighted by an anecdote shared by Dominique Eddé.¹⁶ In March 2001, on the pages of the French newspaper *Le Monde*, Arab intellectuals demanded the cancellation of a conference scheduled to be held in Beirut, entitled ‘Revisionism and Zionism’. The event was to include Holocaust deniers, which sparked controversy. Dominique Eddé initiated a protest letter signed by 14 prominent figures, including Said. When the scandal erupted and caught the attention of President Jacques Chirac, the conference was cancelled. Subsequently, Said publicly distanced himself from the letter stating: ‘I have always been against bans. Condemnation would have been enough.’¹⁷ This suggests that his enthusiasm for severing academic ties between the USA, EU, and Israel would likely be moderate. Additionally, a second, perhaps more significant issue arises: Said’s beliefs regarding the role of intellectuals.

Edward Said outlines a comprehensive framework for the responsibilities of intellectuals consisting of seven main points. Firstly, he emphasises the importance of recognising universal values and the common human experience. Secondly, he urges intellectuals to cultivate knowledge not merely for personal enrichment, but with the explicit aim of effecting social change, aligning with the artist’s pursuit of a fulfilling life. Thirdly, Said advocates for a critical approach to entrenched dogmas, authorities, and simplistic solutions, grounded in a sense of mission to challenge prevailing norms. Furthermore, he calls on intellectuals to courageously champion just causes in public life, even if it entails enduring loneliness, misunderstanding, and abandonment. Furthermore, Said emphasises the imperative to advocate for the marginalised and voiceless, shedding light on issues overlooked by mainstream discourse. Finally, he underscores the importance of maintaining steadfastness and impartiality amidst challenges, while also recognising the ethical dimensions inherent in social issues. Through these principles, Said articulates a profound vision of the intellectual’s role in society, one that transcends mere academic pursuits to embrace active engagement with pressing social concerns.

¹⁵In section 4 of the Declaration of The Governing Council at the University of Barcelona dated 22 May 2024, we read that the university authorities adopted the following:

- (i) Call on the European Union to block immediately and as a precautionary measure, the participation of Israeli institutions in all projects financed with European funds, in accordance with the European treaties and the principles on which they are based.
- (ii) Until the European Union provides these guarantees, the University of Barcelona will not participate in any academic or institutional event in which Israeli institutions are involved.

<https://web.ub.edu/en/web/actualitat/w/universitat-clama-per-la-pau?tn=np> (Accessed June 8, 2024).

¹⁶Eddé, *His Thought as a Novel*, 162–4.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 163.

These fundamental principles remain pertinent and enduring, resonating across temporal and geographical contexts, underscoring their enduring relevance also in contemporary discourse and intellectual inquiry. Firstly, central to Said's argument is the importance of a universalist perspective, which necessitates transcending the safe boundaries of upbringing, language and our own nationality, which separate us from understanding the universal human condition. Said explains why a universalist horizon is important, using to the language of power and politics: 'if we condemn an unprovoked act of aggression by an enemy, we should also be able to do the same when our government invades a weaker party'.¹⁸

This is underscored by the fact that the role of intellectuals is crucial not only in relation to the production of knowledge, but also in their influence on the course of history. No revolution or counter-revolution in the modern world will be possible without their involvement. They are the fathers and mothers of all movements, as well as their children and grandchildren. Moreover, Said posits that intellectuals hold a distinct social role characterised by their ability to represent and articulate views that challenge prevailing orthodoxy. He draws parallels to figures like Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre, who exemplify intellectuals' dedication to advance human freedom and knowledge.

Inevitably, such role necessitates a sense of mission and the belief in the rightness of publicly asking embarrassing questions and confronting dogmas and orthodoxy. Intellectuals, as defined by Said, are not concerned with appeasing audiences but rather with provoking critical reflection on problems are swept under the rug. The intellectual does all this by appealing to universal values. However, an intellectual is

neither a pacifier nor a consensus-builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy solutions or ready-made *chilés*, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do.¹⁹

Furthermore, Said emphasises the public nature of intellectual engagement since 'intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing on television'.²⁰ This public outspokenness may not lead to popularity, Said contends that it enriches the intellectual's own sense of purpose and integrity. Said acknowledges the inherent loneliness of intellectualism, marked by a refusal to conform to the *status quo* and a propensity for self-irony, which is better than herd tolerance of the way things are. The point, says Said, is that 'intellectuals are not required to be humourless complainers'.²¹ But there is something fundamentally disturbing about them for Said: they have neither offices to protect them nor land to guard it. Therefore, Said notes, 'self-irony is there fire more frequent than pomposity, directness more often than hemming and hawing'.²² No wonder they do not gain any sympathies among the ruling elites and it is difficult to find them on the list of those awarded for special merits. In navigating their special position in the world and the

¹⁸Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, XIV.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 13.

²¹*Ibid.*, XVIII.

²²*Ibid.*

role of knowledge in socio-historical processes, intellectuals exist in a state of ambivalence, balancing between alliance and loneliness.

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, autobiographical reflections by Said further illuminate the roots of his unwavering advocacy for Palestinian nationalism, underscoring the intersection between personal experience and political conviction, a connection we delve into further in subsequent analysis. Despite his assertion that he refrained from overt activism during lectures or dedicated classes to the Middle East, Said's perspective, both in public discourse and academia, undoubtedly influenced the intellectual landscape. He remained committed to universal values and secular principles, despite facing criticism for his views. Said's stance may be perceived as 'stupidly stubborn secular intellectual',²³ particularly in his refusal to align with any political party and his critique of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) actions, which led him to occupy peripheral positions. One might even argue that by distancing himself from those in power, he 'rationalized the virtues of outsider hood'.²⁴

Indeed, much of the *Gods that always fail* chapter takes on the tone of a personal creed. Many people serving important causes, writes Said, become victims of unstable marriages. His origins, or as he puts it, his fate, saved him from this fate. Said maintained his independence by declining managerial roles and avoiding alignment with specific factions or associations. He also did not officially support or accept invitations to cooperation from Arab countries. Although he sympathised with the leftist faction of the Palestinian National Council, where he was an independent member for fourteen years, this function was mostly titular. Said consistently refused lasting collaborations, demonstrating his commitment to impartiality. He believed that it had symbolic meaning to publicly appear as someone who opposed Israel's policy and supported Palestinian efforts towards self-determination.

Despite eliciting objections and inciting polemics, his steadfast dedication commands respect, for he not only championed noble causes but also bore the consequences of his convictions. Said's discerning voice, akin to a Socratic gadfly, rebuked those who simplified the complexities of achieving peace in the Middle East. As Ella Shohat aptly observed, he paid a heavy price for his courage: 'Said was called a Nazi by the Jewish Defence League, his office at the university was set afire, and he and his family received innumerable death threats'.²⁵ Said's courage extended beyond highlighting Palestinian displacement to include recognition of Jewish suffering, a stance that incurred the ire of his former allies within the Palestine Liberation Organization. This, coupled with his critiques of Arafat, resulted in a ban on the sale of his books within the Palestinian Authority.²⁶

Lived and learned experience

Said's milieu, aptly encapsulated by the title of his essay *Between Worlds*,²⁷ reflects his dual engagement within American academic circles and the Arab world. As a refugee, an

²³Ibid., 107.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements*, 194.

²⁶Wood, "On Edward Said."

²⁷Said, *Reflection on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, 554–68.

American of Arab descent, a committed intellectual and a Palestinian voice in the Western world, Said recognised the limitations and the artificial constructs built to dominate and rule Oriental culture.

In the Introduction to *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said invokes a statement from *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi Bhabha, asserting that 'nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them'.²⁸ This underscores the crucial role of narratives in shaping culture and imperialism. Palestinians demand the right to their own narrative, as articulated in the title of Said's essay, *Permission to Narrate* (1984). This necessitates a critical re-examination of history, which has often been distorted by Zionist and pro-Israeli biases, denying Palestinians their identity and right to return to their homes abandoned in 1948. Despite holding keys to homes long gone or occupied by Israelis, successive generations of exiled Arabs are denied recognition as a Palestinian people. Said laments that 'Facts do not all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them'.²⁹

In *The Question of Palestine* (1979), Said staunchly asserts that Palestinians constitute a nation, not merely a collection of anonymous Arab refugees. He adamantly defends their right to reclaim their homes and highlights the existence of a distinct Palestinian national identity. Said laments the exclusion of Palestinians from Middle Eastern peace processes, even though there was broad consensus on recognising Palestine's political identity by the time of the book's publication in 1978.³⁰ Despite their dispersal and exile, Said argues for Palestinians' right to self-determination, freedom, and independence in their homeland. He delves into the emergence of Palestinian national consciousness, particularly after the pivotal Six-Day War in 1967, underscoring the resilience and determination of the Palestinian people. *The Question of Palestine* not only delves into the intricacies of Zionism and the Arab-Israeli conflict but also exposes the Western, orientalist perspective on Palestine. Alongside *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam* (1981), it forms a thematic trilogy. Initially conceived as a brief companion to a textbook on the Palestinian situation, *Orientalism* evolved into a comprehensive critique.

However, the crux of the book lies in its endeavour to construct a Palestinian narrative, beginning in the nineteenth century. Said sought to portray Palestinians not merely as inhabitants of refugee camps but as wanderers, adept at adapting to diverse cultures and nations. He challenged the notion that nomadic lifestyles preclude the formation of a national identity, presenting it instead as a strength. By doing so, Said countered the Zionist narrative epitomised by Israel Zangwill's claim of 'a land without people for people without land'. To this day, Palestinians continue to grapple with the task of writing their history, countering the unjustified thesis perpetuated by figures like Benjamin Netanyahu. In *A Place Among the Nations: Israel and the World*,³¹ Netanyahu quotes nineteenth-century visitors to Palestine such as Twain, Lamartine, and Bovet, who depicted the land as desolate and barren. For Said, these accounts epitomise the orientalist discourse, portraying the indigenous inhabitants as backward and devoid of agency.

²⁸Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xiii.

²⁹Said, "Permission to Narrate," 34.

³⁰Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 118.

³¹Netanyahu, *A Place among the Nations*.

Said vehemently opposes the Zionist narrative that suggests Palestinians voluntarily left their homes during the Nakba, or the 1948 war, at the behest of Arab leaders. In contrast to the Zionist version of history, Said champions the Palestinian narrative, criticising Western intellectuals and journalists for their limited understanding of the Middle East.

Throughout his book, Said exposes the unjust and biased portrayal of Palestinians as terrorists in American and European media. Such labelling overlooks crucial realities: Palestinians are denied civil and political rights, and the terrorism label impedes their efforts to reclaim their homes and lands from which they were forcibly displaced. In *Covering Islam*, Said also delved into the pervasive issue of Islamophobia, which he identified as the cornerstone of US policy towards the Middle East. Similarly, in *Permission to Narrate* (1984), he delves into the ideological underpinnings behind the media's fascination with the Palestinian terrorist archetype. The discourse of terrorism often emerges when complexities are reduced to a simplistic binary of 'us' versus 'them', perpetuating the dehumanisation of Palestinians by Israeli authorities. Said further critiques the disparity in violence between Palestinians and the Israeli state, highlighting media hypocrisy that disproportionately favours the Israeli perspective, as discussed in the introduction to the 1992 edition of *The Question of Palestine*.

In the second chapter of this book, titled *Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims*, shocking for many, Said challenges conventional perceptions by redefining the dynamics between victims and perpetrators. Firstly, he contextualises the state of Israel within the framework of European colonialism, highlighting the irony of Holocaust survivors becoming agents of unjust aggression. Secondly, Said contends that labelling Palestinians as terrorists is a deliberate tactic to render the majority of Palestinians invisible to the public eye. He emphasises that "Unlike the Israelis ... most Palestinians fully realise that their Other, the Israeli Jewish people, is a concrete political reality with which they must live in the future",³² advocating for a secular democratic state in Palestine as a crucial step towards peace. This caveat is important because Said emphasises that 'to write critically about Zionism in Palestine has [therefore] never meant, and does not mean now, anti-Semitism',³³ a statement that should perhaps be reiterated especially today. Said imagines a future where human connection transcends borders, fostering mutual exchange and understanding among neighbours. The alternative he proposed was a democratic, secular, non-national, and non-monoethnic state, free from the influence of fundamentalism or totalitarian regimes, which are prevalent in the Middle East. He advocates for a secular effort and envisions a binational state as the future model for Israeli-Palestinian relations. Said contends that the Oslo Accords failed to bring an end to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, a reality he recognised. In the 2002 edition of *The End of the Peace Process*, which includes analyses of the second intifada, Said articulates his core belief:

as a Palestinian I believe that neither the Arabs nor the Israelis have a real military option, and that the only hope for the future is a decent and fair coexistence between the two peoples based upon equality and self-determination.³⁴

³²Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 174.

³³*Ibid.*, 59.

³⁴Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, XX.

The idea of a binational state

Certainly, Said, born in 1935, was neither the originator nor the first supporter of the one-state solution. Its roots trace back to the early days of the Zionist movement.³⁵ Figures such as Judah Magnes, Martin Buber, and Hannah Arendt were proponents of this idea during the interwar period. Arendt, a German philosopher of Jewish descent known for her thesis on the banality of evil and her observations during the Eichmann trial, embarked on a voyage to Haifa precisely in the year of Said's birth. There, she sought to witness firsthand the organisation of kibbutzim and Jewish settlements in Palestine. While in Paris, Arendt had indirect involvement with young individuals preparing for emigration to Palestine through the Aliya Young organisation. Despite not identifying as a Zionist, she made the 'Jewish question' her central focus in the 1930s. Arendt's experience in Palestine likely prompted deep reflection. Witnessing the Jewish colonisation efforts may have left a profound impression on her.³⁶ Although she continued to support prospective emigrants upon her return to Paris, her personal stance towards the settlement movement evolved. While she valued the interests of the Jewish community, she foresaw inevitable conflict between the burgeoning Jewish population in Palestine and the native Arab inhabitants. Arendt believed this friction stemmed from the inherent logic of Zionism, which, in creating an external and then internal enemy, sowed the seeds of discord. Observing the mounting tensions and foreseeing the outbreak of war in Palestine in 1948, Arendt advocated for the establishment of a binational state. The fifty-year gap between Arendt and Said arriving at the same conclusion is pivotal in assessing the viability of implementing a one-state solution in the Middle East. In Arendt's times, such a solution seemed plausible, as various scenarios for Jewish-Arab coexistence were contemplated prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. However, fifty years later, the proposal of a binational state faced significantly greater obstacles.

The idea of a one-state solution did not gain significant traction among the Jewish settlers in Palestine, and over time, their efforts to establish their own state proved more successful than those of the Arabs.³⁷ While Resolution 181, adopted by the United Nations in 1947, envisioned the creation of two states in the Middle East – one Jewish and one Arab – the latter has yet to be effectively established. Instead, the reality in which 14 million Palestinians exist³⁸ is often referred to as a 'one-state reality'.³⁹ Nevertheless, even before 7 October 2023, discussions about possible answers to the Palestinian issue began to include the one-state solution. Influential figures such as former advocates of the two-state solution, including Ian Lustick, Tony Judt, Sari Nusseibeh, and Virginia Tilley, have shifted their support to this idea. Demographic arguments, particularly regarding the proliferation of illegal Jewish settlements in the Palestinian Authority,

³⁵Morris, *One State, Two States*.

³⁶Arendt, *Pisma żydowskie*, XII.

³⁷A historical outline and the position of some of contemporary supporters of the one-state solution are neatly presented by Ziv in "The Long Israeli-Palestinian Impasse," 19–35. However, there is no mention of Hannah Arendt in Ziv's overview.

³⁸Based on population estimates prepared by Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), there are about 14.3 million Palestinians in the world in mid-2022, of whom about 5.35 million in the State of Palestine. The Palestinian Population is Young: More than One-third of the Population is Less than 15 Years. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) Presents the Conditions of Palestinian Populations on the Occasion of the International Population Day, 11 July 2022*. https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_InterPopDay2022E.pdf (Accessed March 28, 2024).

³⁹Lustick, *Paradigm Lost*, 2.

have played a significant role in this conversion. Lustick's notable book from 2019 advocates for a return to the one-state solution, arguing that 'Two states for two peoples' was a viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the past but is no longer feasible today.⁴⁰ Yet, in 2024, discussions about the two-state solution have experienced 'a strange resurrection',⁴¹ despite numerous declarations of its demise in recent years.⁴² Nonetheless, the two-state solution has enjoyed long-standing support from the United States, and there are indications that negotiations may be moving in that direction following the ceasefire mandated by UN Resolution 2728.

Said's advocacy for a binational state stemmed from his personal experiences living in the Middle East, his specific beliefs about Zionism, and his commitment to universal values and democracy. Simultaneously, unlike Hannah Arendt, who supported the idea of creating a federation of states, Said did not explicitly endorse a specific legal framework for enabling the coexistence of Jews and Arabs on one land. In contrast, Arendt advocated for the establishment of a federation of states. Her contemplation on the Jewish-Arab question, featured in the December 1943 edition of 'Aufbau' an emigre magazine of German Jews based in the United States, diverged from the Zionist-oriented editorial stance (which was emphasised in the introduction penned by emphasised by the editor-in-chief). Arendt's column coincided with a period during which Great Britain was contemplating the establishment of an Arab federation encompassing Iraq, Syria, Transjordan, Palestine, Egypt, and potentially Saudi Arabia. This geopolitical initiative disregarded the aspirations of Zionists seeking to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Arendt critically evaluated two scenarios proposed by Zionist authorities at the time. She deemed the notion of creating a Jewish state in Palestine as an 'extreme demand', given the prevailing Arab demographic majority in the region. taking into account the still existing predominance of the Arab population in these areas, she assessed negatively such a solution in which 'the future majority will grant minority rights to the current majority' as something 'completely new in the history of nation states'.⁴³ The alternative scenario, envisioning the establishment of a binational state in Palestine within the framework of an Arab federation connected to the Anglo-American union, was, according to Arendt, grounded in geopolitical realities and aligned with the British Empire's policies. Nonetheless, this arrangement would render Jews a minority within the broader Arab state, subject to the patronage of either British or American authorities.⁴⁴

On the other hand, Said's formative years in Mandate Palestine, facilitated by his American citizenship, afforded him the opportunity to relocate to the United States, complete his education, and pursue academic endeavours. This unique blend of experiences,

⁴⁰Ibid., 126.

⁴¹Indyk, "The Strange Resurrection of the Two-state Solution."

⁴²Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 207; and Hilal, *Where Now for Palestine?* See also Azoulay and Ophir, *The One-state Condition*; Chomsky and Pappé, *On Palestine*; Schabowska, *The Works of Edward Said*, and Ziv in "The Long Israeli-Palestinian Impasse," 19–35.

⁴³Arendt, "Czy kwestia arabsko-żydowska może zostać rozwiązana?" 219.

⁴⁴In recalling current events related to university freedoms and the diversity of thought in the public sphere, it is pertinent to remind the reader of the controversy surrounding the latest recipient of the Hannah Arendt Prize, awarded by the German Heinrich Böll Foundation. Masha Gessen nearly lost this honor after daring to compare the Holocaust to another historical event in one of her writings. This incident was notably covered by The Guardian, which questioned the feasibility of awarding the prize to Hannah Arendt herself in today's politically correct climate. *The Guardian*, 18 February 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/dec/18/hannah-arendt-prize-masha-gessen-israel-gaza-essay> (Accessed June 8, 2024).

juxtaposing life in the Middle East with exposure to American culture and democratic principles, significantly shaped Said's perspectives on the future of the Palestinian state. Edward Said was the first Palestinian intellectual to achieve such success in American academia and public recognition. Renowned as the foremost advocate for the Palestinian cause globally, frequently featured in American media, he criticised all parties involved in the conflict, including the United States, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority leadership, Said believed that 'Orientalism and modern anti-Semitism have common roots'.⁴⁵

Yasser Arafat, recipient of the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize and chief negotiator behind the Oslo Accords signed in 1993 between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the State of Israel, envisioned these agreements as a pathway to peace in line with United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. However, Edward Said held a starkly contrasting view of Arafat during this period, a perspective that remains remarkably relevant despite Arafat's successor, Mahmoud Abbas, assuming the presidency. Said's evolving perspective on Arafat transformed him from a hopeful negotiator to a perceived traitor to the Palestinian cause, who not only did not deserve peace laurels, but actually buried Palestine's independence hopes. Said unapologetically characterised the Oslo Accords as the 'Palestinian Versailles',⁴⁶ drawing parallels to the Treaty of Versailles which exacerbated societal tensions in post-World War I Germany and the rise of National Socialism. This comparison underscores the argument we make here insofar as The Oslo Accords clearly focused on a two-state solution in the Middle East.

We recall this to show how awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Arafat further entrenched the dominance of the two-state solution while also enshrining the memory of the PLO founder – a figure who transitioned from a militant fighter to the first president of the Palestinian Authority. His historic address at the United Nations on 13 November 1974, widely acclaimed as one of the most compelling and effective speeches delivered at the forum. Notably, Edward W. Said, serving as Arafat's translator and to some extent a co-author,⁴⁷ is credited with writing the following words, spoken as the last sentences of Arafat's speech, which were later quoted by newspapers around the world: 'Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom-fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. I repeat: do not let the olive branch fall from my hand'.⁴⁸

Indeed, a few days later, on 22 November 1974, UN Resolution 3236 was adopted, recognising the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination without external interference, asserting their right to independence and national sovereignty, and affirming the right of Palestinians to return to their pre-1948 homes while urging states to support their struggle to regain these rights. However, between 1974 and 1993, events unfolded that strained Said's relationship with Arafat, leading him to become one of the latter's most vocal critics. Said directed intense personal criticism

⁴⁵Said, *Orientalism*, xviii.

⁴⁶Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, 7.

⁴⁷Shafiq Al-Hout, one of the founders of the PLO, and a friend of Edward W. Said, writes in his diary about the background of the Palestinian delegation to the USA in 1974, Arafat's speech and the subsequent press conference, *My Life in the PLO*.

⁴⁸Transcript of Arafat's speech before the UN General Assembly, 13 November 1974, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/A238EC7A3E13EED18525624A007697EC> and the NYTimes coverage, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/11/14/archives/dramatic-session-plo-head-says-he-bears-olive-branch-and-guerrilla.html> (Accessed March 28, 2024).

towards Arafat, attributing the failure of the Oslo Accords to his leadership deficiencies. He believed that Arafat bore sole responsibility for the detrimental consequences of the agreements, arguing that broader consultations or a referendum would have revealed widespread scepticism among Palestinians. In his final years, Said's criticism of the PLO and Arafat intensified even further.⁴⁹ He emphasises that genuine progress can only come from a sincere examination of one's own history, whether Israeli or Palestinian, as well as an understanding of the other's history. However, significant efforts are required in both cases to realise this vision, which he believed to be the only alternative.

The only alternative: The one-state solution

In the contemporary discourse surrounding the pursuit of a peace resolution in the Middle East, Virginia Tilley invokes Said's insights dating back to 1999, as documented in her renowned work *The One-State Solution*⁵⁰ (2005), highlighting his early recognition that

Palestinian self-determination in a separate state is unworkable, just as unworkable as the principle of separation between a demographically mixed, irreversibly connected Arab and Jewish population in Israel and the occupied territories ... I therefore see no other way than do begin now to speak about sharing the land that has thrust us together, sharing it in a truly democratic way, with equal rights for all citizens.⁵¹

Tilley juxtaposes this statement with the perspective of Professor Ali Jarbawi from Berzeit University in the West Bank, who asserts that the majority of Palestinians would endorse such a viewpoint. They acknowledge that while they would ideally prefer an independent state, the current circumstances would likely only allow for a small enclave at best, making a binational state a more favourable option. Continuing in the vein of Said's pointed critique of Zionism, Tilley finds it logically incongruent with the pursuit of peace. Consequently, she aligns herself with the one-state solution as the sole viable recourse although she notes that difficulties on the way to its implementation such as 'national ideologies, internal politics, and mutual antipathies ... are formidable'.⁵²

In *The Only Alternative*, published in *Al-Ahram* in March 2001, Said paints a grim picture of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, likening it to Sartre's vision of hell as 'other people'. He contends that 'There is no escape. Separation can't work in so tiny land, any more than apartheid did'.⁵³ Said's moral perspective resurfaces strongly here, as he argues that mere talk of peace is insufficient, and that resolving the conflict requires more than just relations of power and force. He believes that a common moral ground rooted in democratic values is a necessary precondition, rejecting pragmatism or practicality alone as inadequate. While acknowledging the utopian nature of this 'moral vision', Said insists that it is essential for the coexistence of both nations. These ideas were articulated amidst the turmoil of the second intifada, a conflict that Said did not live to see

⁴⁹These critiques, published posthumously in the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram* and compiled in the volume *From Oslo to Iraq and the Roadmap* portrayed Said as an outspoken Cassandra, challenging Palestinian leadership for incompetence and betraying their cause.

⁵⁰Tilley, *The One-State Solution*, 188.

⁵¹Said, "Truth and Reconciliation," 318.

⁵²Tilley, *The One-State Solution*, 209.

⁵³Said, *From Oslo to Iraq and the Roadmap*, 51.

resolved. He passed away a few months after the announcement of the peace plan, known as *The Roadmap*.

We continue to witness the enduring impact of the Oslo Accords, underscoring Edward Said's foresight regarding its long-term ramifications. Some analyses,⁵⁴ echo Said's assertion that genuine peace necessitates a departure from the ballast of the Oslo framework. Said's perspective, articulated decades earlier, emphasised the need to recognise the changing demographics and political dynamics of Israel and Palestine. He contended that the current reality, wherein today's Israel is simply not an exclusively Jewish state, and Palestine is not an exclusively Arab Palestine, points towards a binational solution as one viable option for Palestinians. Said acknowledged the inherent challenges and utopian nature of this proposal, yet viewed it as a necessary pursuit given the limitations faced in establishing a separate entity, since Palestinians have 'neither the military, nor the political nor the moral will or capacity to create a real independent Palestinian state'.⁵⁵ His reflections, penned before subsequent developments such as the second intifada and Hamas's ascension to power in Gaza, underscore the ongoing relevance of his visionary approach. It should be emphasised that for him one state meant equal civil and political rights for all its inhabitants.

However, the question of what would be most advantageous for the Palestinians, whose population significantly outnumbers that of Jews, diverges from their own aspirations and expectations regarding their own state. Advocates and opponents of the one-state solution often cite surveys in which the stakeholders themselves are polled for their views.⁵⁶ A study conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in December 2022 revealed that only a quarter (26%) of Palestinians support a one-state solution that would afford them the same rights as Israeli Jews, while 71% are opposed to this notion.⁵⁷ In the eyes of many, this outcome appears akin to a 'lost cause', echoing Said's sentiment.⁵⁸

Conclusions: The one-state solution is not a lost cause

Identifying a successor to Said, who would advocate for the Palestinian cause while also acknowledging the genuine suffering of the Israeli people, presents a challenge. As this paper demonstrates, Said's legacy transcends mere prolificacy, epitomising a fusion of intellectual rigour with unwavering political commitment and public activism. Edward Said believed that a common moral ground rooted in democratic values is a necessary precondition for peace, rejecting pragmatism or practicality alone as inadequate. While acknowledging the utopian nature of this 'moral vision', Said insisted that it is essential for the coexistence of both nations. These ideas were articulated amidst the turmoil of the second intifada, a conflict that Said did not live to see resolved.

⁵⁴Lovatt, "The End of Oslo."

⁵⁵Said, "What can Separation Mean," 328.

⁵⁶A comprehensive overview of recent survey findings, spanning the past two years, as conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and Tel Aviv University, is summarized by Gui Ziv, as referenced in footnote 19.

⁵⁷Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 'Public Opinion Poll No. 86,' 13 December 2022, <https://pcpsr.org/en/node/926>.

⁵⁸For an in-depth discussion of the implications and dynamics of the one-state solution from a contemporary perspective, readers are directed to a special issue in *Frontiers in Political Science on Israel/Palestine: The One-State Reality – Implications and Dynamics* [Lustick and Jamal, "Israel/Palestine," 1247990].

Central to Said's intellectual framework is the notion of a secular intellectual's responsibility to challenge entrenched power structures, advocate for truth, and represent the voiceless. His call for intellectuals to uphold universal values and confront nationalist, corporate, and socio-economic privilege remains pertinent in contemporary discussions on academic freedom, social justice and human rights. Edward Said's extensive body of work continues to resonate profoundly in contemporary academic and political discourse underscoring the enduring relevance of his ideas in addressing complex socio-political issues, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In considering potential solutions to the conflict, Said's advocacy for a binational state in Palestine emerges as a compelling alternative to the traditional two-state paradigm. Drawing on his lived experience in Mandate Palestine and exposure to American democracy, Said envisioned a future where Jews and Arabs coexist in a democratic, secular state based on equality and mutual respect. While the one-state solution advocated by Said faces significant obstacles, including entrenched national ideologies and mutual antipathies, Said's moral vision of a shared land governed by democratic principles offers a compelling alternative to the status quo and underscores the urgent need for a just and equitable resolution.

Certainly, while the one-state solution remains under-researched by academics and marginalised by politicians, Edward Said's advocacy for this approach highlights its inherent merit and relevance in addressing the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Said's profound insights challenge conventional wisdom and compel us to reconsider traditional paradigms. By advocating for a binational state grounded in democratic principles and universal values, Said transcends the limitations of entrenched national ideologies and offers a visionary alternative that prioritises equality, justice, and mutual respect.

Said's vision of a shared land, where Jews and Arabs coexist as equal citizens, reflects a commitment to transcending sectarian divides and fostering genuine reconciliation. While the practicalities of implementing such a solution may be daunting, Said's moral clarity and intellectual rigour compel us to confront uncomfortable truths and confront the root causes of the conflict. Moreover, Said's arguments for the one-state solution underline the importance of challenging dominant narratives and amplifying marginalised voices in the pursuit of peace. Despite the scepticism and opposition it may face, particularly from vested interests invested in maintaining the status quo, Said's voice advocating for the one-state solution invites us to imagine a future where coexistence and cooperation prevail over division and conflict. By centering the principles of democracy, equality, and human rights, Said offers a path forward that transcends the zero-sum logic of traditional diplomacy and embraces the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals. The same applies to his attitude towards the academic world.

As this paper shows, Edward Said's intellectual legacy serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for those committed to advancing social justice, freedom of university, human rights, and peace in the Middle East and beyond. His unwavering commitment to universal values and his visionary advocacy for a binational state in Palestine offer valuable insights and directions for future research, activism, and policymaking in pursuit of a just and lasting peace in the region.

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