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“Embodying” the Intellectual: Edward Said, Public Sphere and the University

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Abstract

This essay delves into a pivotal incident where Edward Said’s Palestinian identity collided with entrenched conservative American values, revealing the dichotomy of his dual role as a Columbia University professor and outspoken advocate for Palestinian statehood. The catalyst was a provocative article, “Edward Said Accused of Stoning in South Lebanon,” from the *Columbia Daily Spectator*. Said, renowned for his incisive critique of Western depictions of the East and the global dissemination of “orientalism,” brazenly condemned American foreign policy, particularly its support for Israel’s colonial expansion. I examine the episode’s portrayal in the *New York Times* and *Columbia Daily Spectator*, highlighting Edward Said’s seemingly conflicting intellectual legacy. Drawing from his essays like “On Nelson Mandela, and Others” (1994), “Homage to a Belly Dancer” (1990), and the memoir “Out of Place” (1999), I explore Said’s views on the public intellectual’s role in America. This investigation probes whether Said’s public identity aligns with his academic persona, and how visibility shapes his concept of the “public.” It questions if public intellectuals can maintain autonomy within academia or if they inevitably conform to university norms.

Keywords: academia; exile; memoir; orientalism; Palestine; public intellectual

Intellectuals are often revered as architects of ideas, embodying the principles they espouse. However, they also wield agency in catalyzing tangible change.¹ This dichotomy prompts a fundamental inquiry: Is the intellectual’s role limited to theorization, or can they effectively instigate real-world impact? Furthermore, does action precipitate ideology, or does ideology empower action? These queries are central as we delve into an incident intertwining Edward Said’s political conviction with his tenure at an American university (Columbia University).

Debating a professor’s gesture

In July 2000, the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Columbia University’s student-run newspaper, covered an incident involving Edward Said, a faculty member, and his activities in Lebanon. The article headline “Edward Said accused of Stoning in South Lebanon” was dramatic albeit somewhat exaggerated. The newspaper took it upon itself to analyze the implications of a

¹ Small 2002, 2.

photograph involving one of its most provocative and arguably renowned professors. On July 3, just days before the article was published, Agence France-Presse, the French news agency, released a photograph ostensibly depicting Said throwing a rock across the Lebanon-Israel border fence toward an Israeli watchtower during his visit to the Lebanese border.²

Despite the hyperbolic headline, the article feigns objectivity by including quotes from Said's statement, which he issued in response to the debates sparked by the photograph. The narrative details, though sparse, feature the essential facts: Said and his family visited El-Khiam prison, a grim site of incarceration and torture for Lebanese resistance members. Following this, they traveled to Kafr Killa, a border village hosting an Israeli military post. There, along with many others, Said and his family participated in a symbolic act of throwing stones to celebrate the end of Israeli occupation.³ Critics persisted to vilify Said with this inflation of events. Professional rivals such as Justus Reid Weiner, an Israeli scholar from the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Morton A. Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, and journalist Dennis Zinn, bolstered the *Spectator's* standpoint. The image indicated a Said in motion, but it wasn't an individual act, despite what the *Spectator* had suggested.

A few months later, in October, *The New York Times* broadcasted an article titled "Columbia Debates a Professor's Gesture." It was prompted by a statement from Jonathan R. Cole, Columbia University's provost and Dean of faculties, who penned an open letter addressing the university's student government and the *Columbia Daily Spectator*. The debate had now turned inward to Columbia, where the principles and core values of the university took center stage in the article. The *New York Times* presented views for and against Said, aiming for balance. Colleagues were named and students were quoted – battle lines were drawn as academic rivalries were laid bare.⁴ Cole's statement clarified the university's position – Said's behavior was protected under the principles of academic freedom.

The principal point of *The New York Times'* article, which is critical to my analysis, came from Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. In his message to Columbia's President, George Rupp, Foxman underscored, among other points, that "this is not what professors should do."⁵ Foxman's words, conveying reproach and dismay, draw attention to a critical aspect: they emphasize a type of respectability politics that aims to confine a professor when speaking truth to power. Said's conduct, although political, was deemed unprofessional and improper. The boundaries between "proper behavior" and Said's actions had exposed a type of elitism – an unspoken code of conduct – that exists in higher education the world over.

This is, in many ways, a more significant problem. The very conception of the public intellectual, Helen Small reminds us, emerged from the anxieties of Western imperialism.⁶ It arose from defiance – a longing to undermine the many impediments that hindered the rendition of thoughts into political action.⁷ In many ways, Said confounded the idea of the disengaged intellectual, redefining traditional notions of scholarly detachment.

² Kim 2000.

³ Kim 2000.

⁴ Arenson 2000.

⁵ Arenson 2000.

⁶ Small 2002, 2.

⁷ Collini 2002, 222.

In his 1993 Reith lectures, Said addressed this recurring concern:

Every intellectual has an audience and a constituency. The issue is whether that audience is there to be satisfied, and hence a client to be kept happy, or whether it is there to be challenged and hence stirred into outright opposition or mobilized into greater democratic participation in the society. But in either case, there is no getting around authority and power and no getting around the intellectual's relationship to them. How does the intellectual address authority: as a professional supplicant or as an unrewarded, amateurish conscience?⁸

His words remind us of two things: intellectuals are individuals who occupy physical space, and they do not exist in solitude but alongside others. This mutual presence defines the intellectual and their audience – they shape each other. In such situations, Said observed the imminent danger posed to intellectuals by professionalism. He drew attention to how academia prioritized marketability and being uncontroversial, avoiding anything deemed too political or unconventional.

Indeed, a concern over professionalism contributed to Said's response to the (Western) idea of the *public intellectual*. He once described his intellectual identity as oppositional,⁹ aimed at challenging the prevailing features of American media – conservative, anti-Islam prejudice, and neglect of Palestinian suffering.¹⁰ Said's intellectual identity took shape through his contemplations on the role of media and its interplay within the public sphere. Self-definition through reinvention was the cornerstone of his approach to his intellectual role.¹¹

One is left pondering: Was the infamous “stone-throwing” incident a calculated move in a man's ongoing process of self-reinvention? Or was it a spontaneous act of defiance? Who was truly present that day in South Lebanon – the Professor or the (provocative) public intellectual or was it an embodiment of both?

Meditations on self-definition

Said's public persona emerged as a meticulously crafted expression shaped by the intersection of private emotions, scholarly work, and political intent. His memoir, *Out of Place* (1999), and his more subtly political writings dramatize his meditations on the intellectual's duty to the public sphere. These writings do not present an intellectual fully realized but rather an intellectual gradually unfolding, still shaping his identity and discovering the complexities of becoming.

Of Said's many writings, one of the most compelling reflections on performativity – on the deliberateness of shaping one's persona – is “Homage to a Belly Dancer” (1990). Its intrigue lies in how it defies conventional expectations, disclosing aspects of Said's past that are both

⁸ Said 1996, 74.

⁹ Barsamian and Said 2003, 98–9.

¹⁰ In *Orientalism*, he traces the history of such racial prejudices, and *Covering Islam* offers a contemporary account of such prejudices.

¹¹ I am reminded of Arundhati Roy's observation of Noam Chomsky as the “instinctive mistrust of power.” Of Chomsky, she said, “He embarks on his course of inquiry with an anarchist's instinctive mistrust of power. He takes us on a tour through the bog of the U.S. establishment and leads us through the dizzying maze of corridors that connects the government, big business, and the business of managing public opinion.” See Roy 2003.

unexpectedly personal and strikingly absorbing. We are drawn in because he reveals an unfamiliar, and perhaps vulnerable, side of himself. It is a rare glimpse of the man behind the intellectual persona. The essay opens with a playful tone, as Said gently teases the reader with subtle, sensual portrayals of Tahia Carioca (1915–1999). It is a portrait that emerges alongside a light-hearted recounting of his early encounters with (sexual) repression. As Said recounts his past and revives the elusive figure of Tahia from his early years, the writing maintains its evocative tone without slipping into sentimentality. The details, though sparse, reflect a mind trying to remember. The resulting images are uneven without being chaotic.

In the spring of 1950, a classmate took Said to see Tahia perform at a casino along the Nile. For Said, whose youth had been defined by psycho-sexual repression and rigid parental control, it was his closest brush with eroticism. In the years that followed, he would return to that night in his reflections, reframing the memory through the more discerning lens of a matured intellect:

Tahia's dance was like an extended arabesque elaborated around her seated colleague. She never jumped or bobbed her breasts or went in for bumping and grinding. There was a majestic deliberateness to the whole thing that maintained itself right through even the quicker passages. Each of us knew that we were experiencing an immensely exciting – because endlessly deferred – erotic experience, the likes of which we could never hope to match in real life. And that was precisely the point: this was sexuality as a public event, brilliantly planned and executed, yet totally unconsummated and unrealizable.¹²

In his memoir *Out of Place* (1999), when Said revisited this episode, he resurrects the visceral sensations of his youth, meticulously choosing each word to breathe life into the image of Tahia as she remained etched in his memory.¹³ Said restores his younger self by returning to the original experience. As he wrote, the older Said confronts his younger self – one shaped by his Palestinian roots, one he had persistently sought to reshape and reinvent over the years. In this regard, Tahia's presence in Said's narrative is both subtle and revelatory. In a memoir infused with deeply personal reflections, her reappearance holds considerable significance – an understated yet compelling testament to her enduring influence on his reflections about the nature of intellectual performance.

However, Tahia does not maintain a singular identity in Said's imagination. As the essay unfolds, Said recounts a subsequent encounter with an aging and markedly different Tahia. In the summer of 1975, Tahia was part of a pro-Sadat, anti-Nasser play, *Yahya al-Wafd*, written by her then-husband Fayek Halawa. Of this encounter, Said wrote:

She had the role of the loudest, toughest village woman, whose prize ram was rented out for breeding purposes (lots of predictable jokes about sexual potency). But it was her appearance and manner that took my breath away. Gone was the tawny seductress, the graceful dancer who was all elegance and perfectly executed gestures. She had turned into a 220-pound swaggering bully.¹⁴

¹² Said 1990.

¹³ Said 1999, 475.

¹⁴ Said 1990. For a similar account of Tahia, refer to the 1979 essay "The Arab Right Wing," which appears in the essay collection (Said 1994).

As much as this surprised Said, the episode, we learn, urged him to discover the many facets of Tahia's identity that he was formerly unfamiliar with.¹⁵ Said's last description of Tahia was occasioned by a visit with Nabihah Loutfy (a documentary filmmaker) to her apartment, where she greeted them with the solemn dignity of a *Hajj*.¹⁶ This final visit was perhaps Said's most significant encounter with Tahia, for it laid bare many truths concealed beneath layers of complex identities that the performer assumed. She emerged as a pivotal figure in Egypt's cultural renaissance during Saad Zaghloul's liberal independence movement of 1919. In the 1950s, she faced imprisonment under Nasser for her involvement with the League for Peace, identified as a Moscow-backed organization. Tahia, Said concedes, was not merely the embodiment of contrary personalities; her most captivating attribute was her steadfast capacity for reinvention – a trait that enabled her to navigate her contradictory identities and adapt to Egypt's evolving political landscape. Said's Tahia is an artifact of his past, which he reaches out and reclaims from obscurity. The essay is, therefore, as much about Said as it is about Tahia. Said's Tahia is an unconventional introduction to his musings on the embodiment of a public intellectual.

Few things, however, capture Said's yearning for reinvention and the essence of the Palestinian exile experience as poignantly as the opening lines of *Out of Place*:

All families invent their parents and children, give each of them a story, character, fate, and even a language. There was always something wrong with how I was invented and meant to fit in with the world of my parents and four sisters. Whether this was because I constantly misread my part or because of some deep flaw in my being I could not tell for most of my early life. Sometimes I was intransigent, and proud of it. At other times I seemed to myself to be nearly devoid of any character at all, timid, uncertain, without will. Yet the overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place.¹⁷

Said reveals the inner struggle to “fit in” and maintain a certain façade and how that translated to his later life.¹⁸ He is uncertain and anxious, and this sense of self-doubt saturates his memoir.¹⁹ The memoir carries a sense of humility; he is not merely a scholar or public intellectual but a human being with fears and insecurities. His vulnerability is disarming – qualities we, as scholars, are often taught to conceal rather than embrace. However, one anticipates such revelations as one reads the opening paragraph of its “Preface”:

Out of Place is a record of an essentially lost or forgotten world. Several years ago, I received what seemed to be a fatal medical diagnosis, and it, therefore, struck me as important to leave behind a subjective account of the life I live in the Arab world, where I was born and spent my formative years, and in the United States, where I went to

¹⁵ Said discovered that Tahia was part of the Communist Party during the forties and later emerged as one of the leaders of a syndicate of cinema actors, directors, and photographers.

¹⁶ An Islamic epithet was accorded to elderly women who made the pilgrimage to Mecca. Refer to “Homage to a Belly-Dancer.”

¹⁷ Said 1999, 27.

¹⁸ In *Hitch-22*, Christopher Hitchens admits to a genuine surprise upon discovering this facet of Edward Said. He devoted an entire chapter to Said in the same book. The intellectual he knew was the suave, sophisticated gentleman who helped him choose the right tailor and pick the right suit.

¹⁹ It is intriguing that most of his memoir is dedicated to reconstructing his formative years in the Middle East. Only in the last two chapters does Said venture into his early experiences in college and as a young adult.

school, college, and university. Many of the places and people I recall here no longer exist, though I found myself frequently amazed at how much I carried of them inside me in often minute, even startlingly concrete, detail.²⁰

That Said chose to recreate and revisit his childhood in the face of death is symbolic of the very history of his disenfranchised people.²¹ Imminent demise motivated Said to record his past and reclaim an aspect of it in a way that was otherwise inaccessible to his audience. The act of recording is a means of reclaiming a lost past, and with the re-imagination of the past, Said and other Palestinians arrest the faded imprints of history. This act is not simply reclaiming the past, it allows us as readers to bear witness and recognize how imperialist framing of history corrupts our understanding of the past.²² For instance, the recent surge in scrutiny concerning the wearing of the keffiyeh emphasizes the enduring bias of Western perceptions and the creativity and the diverse expressions of socio-political resistance. From its origins among the Bedouins to its present embodiment as a symbol of Palestinian resistance, the keffiyeh has emerged as a focal point for numerous debates worldwide.²³ What the West regards as a symbol of hate and aggression is, for the Palestinians, a declaration of their history. It is a testament to their strength.²⁴

Intellectual as provocateur

In the final chapter of his *Edward Said: The Charisma of Criticism* (2010), H. Aram Veerer attempts to summarize Said's intellectual contribution and measure his historical significance in intellectual history. He suggests that Said's most significant intellectual contribution to society has been in his capacity as a provocateur. He states:

Said's name has become shorthand for righteous resentment and a proud banner carried by scholars determinedly building postcolonial reputations ... As an expert inciter, he turned himself into one of the few visible figures of late-century literary culture.²⁵

Visibility, Veerer insists, was Said's most vital and possibly radical instrument of self-expression. The controversial photograph of him throwing the stone, which made its way to Columbia University, established Said's image as the radical dissenting Arab, the "expert

²⁰ Said 1999, 17.

²¹ The memoir was written after he was diagnosed with leukemia. He mentions this in his Acknowledgments. Later in Chapter 5 of the memoir he writes,

"...now by some devilish irony I find myself with an intransigent, treacherous leukemia, which ostrich like I try to banish from my mind entirely, attempting with reasonable success to live in my system of time, working, sensing lateness and deadlines and that feeling of insufficient accomplishment I learned fifty years ago and have so remarkably internalized."

²² The *New York Times*' publication of photographs of Gaza and the unfolding of violence against the Palestinians demonstrates the ongoing trend of the deliberate (mis)framing of contexts of violence. Despite this, the viewing and consumption of such photographs occur within the context of our own environments, where we ultimately determine their meaning. Refer to Varghese 2024.

²³ Mohammed, 2023.

²⁴ The recent incident with Jhumpa Lahiri is telling. She turned down the Noguchi Museum award because of its new dress code banning the keffiyeh and the firing of three employees that resulted from it.

²⁵ Veerer 2010, 204–5.

inciter” – constrained neither by his institutionalism nor by his own self-professed “Americanness.”²⁶ Said clarified that his motives were hardly political, but the circumstances of his action and his position in the American or more broadly Western intellectual milieu transformed the *photograph* into one of the most visible symptoms of intellectual contradiction. It embodied the irreconcilability of Edward Said’s person. Veesper, however, interpreted the incident in a different light. The photograph, Said’s reaction to the photograph, the university’s reaction to the photograph and the language of news reportage centered on it – all of these were different stages of what he identified as the institutionalization of intellectual *charisma*. To Veesper, Said’s dissenting person is produced by the university and nurtured within the University space. Veesper’s Said is chiefly an *academic* (defined by the dictums of the university) before he is an intellectual. Veesper attaches Said’s dissent, his role as the “provocateur” to his image as the star academic. By this reasoning, academia should have shielded Said. Yet, it did not.

This is evident in a *New York Times* article, “A Stone’s Throw is a Freudian Slip,” published a year after the infamous image was captured. It claimed that Said’s lecture, set to be held at the Freud Society of Vienna, was canceled owing to several anonymous complaints received by the society’s president, Johann August Schülein. Said was understandably outraged by the cancellation but was not alone in demonstrating outrage. Prominent psychoanalysts, including Jonathan Lear, André Green, Julia Kristeva, and Adam Phillips, rallied to his defense. The Freud Museum in London even extended its venue, inviting Said to deliver his lecture on Freud there.²⁷ Ultimately, even Columbia University’s statement could not save the star academic from the fallout.

Veeser is correct in suggesting that *visibility* was one of Edward Said’s defining contributions to American intellectual history. However, Said’s visibility, the orchestrated negotiations with his spectators and the receptivity of his image were motivated by a singular purpose – to counter the markers of racial prejudice prevalent in the American media, to re-configure the Palestinian identity, to rescue it from the loudly asserted suffix – “terrorist,” by showing America an alternative. These attributes of his intellectual project – to make visible – were essentially configured around his interpretation of his exilic condition.

In *Out of Place*, he made the Palestinian struggle personal, telling the story through the eyes of a younger self. The memoir, as a result, embodied the unseen private tragedies of the public spectacle of war. More importantly, it humanized the conditions that eventually precipitated the Palestinian *intifada*. This project – of the humanization of the Palestinians – is the foundation of *After the Last Sky*.²⁸ In it, Said countered the “objective” language of news reportage with his subjective narrative voice, lending the Palestinians a human voice that they are never privileged to acquire in the American media. The book is Said’s intimations of his former home, recollected and reinterpreted from a distance to reduce the spatiality of the Palestine of his past and the Palestinian present. Using Jean Mohr’s photographs, Said reshapes the conditions of Palestinian visibility by lending it his voice and, on other occasions, by lending it his face.

A public intellectual, by definition, contrasts with corporate media, fulfilling the role of socio-political critic and fostering public debate. Said presented himself as the most celebrated contradiction (of the intellectual class) to his audience and, in the process,

²⁶ According to Aram Veesper, Columbia University was the most Jewish of the Ivy League Universities.

²⁷ Smith 2001.

²⁸ Said 1986.

frustrated all possibilities of classification channeled through the media. He designed his affiliations and then worked to redefine them, often reinventing them to suit his immediate narrative predicament. This process of assuming narrative agency, adapting the self to narrate one's own story to the audience, is a formula Said suggests at the end of *After the Last Sky*:

We too are looking, we too are scrutinizing, assessing, judging. We are more than someone's object. We do more than stand passively in front of whoever, for whatever reason, has wanted to look at us.²⁹

However, this project of scrutinizing while being scrutinized, redefining the subject-object relationship in personal terms, has another incidental effect crucial to exposing the institutionalism of intellectual roles. By announcing his irreconcilabilities, Said makes himself vulnerable to scrutiny. While this ensures a continued engagement with his project, it also aids in the dismantling of what Chomsky referred to as the "guild structure" of the intellectuals in society.³⁰ This process of exposing the self to expose the system is one of the lasting contributions of dissenting intellectuals like Noam Chomsky and Edward Said. They remain exceptions, forcing scrutiny and engagement; in the process, their peculiar station in the society – as dissenters, as oppositional,³¹ as amateurs³² – becomes a symptom of the American media's failure to critique power.

To embody the condition of exile

Said's Reith Lectures illustrate how an intellectual and their audience are engaged in an unyielding process of shaping each other. Just as much he was the intellectual giving the talk, his own location as an intellectual was defined by the appropriation of his person by BBC and the (primarily) English audience. The lecture series also revealed Said's deliberate orchestration of his identity as the central theme of the lectures; his persona adapted to suit each subject he addressed. Said, we realize, was as much a spectacle as he was a voice. We've seen this before in his writings. Said's *Peace and its Discontents* (1995) was primarily addressed to an Arab readership in the wake of the Oslo Accords, while his conversations with Daniel Barenboim, published in *Parallels and Paradoxes* (2002), were orchestrated in front of a New York audience. On every platform, Said staged his dissenting person, expressed his non-conformity, and incessantly worked to redefine the terms of intellectual visibility. Nonconformity, we realize, is the central theme of his essay, "On Nelson Mandela and Others" (1994).

In the essay, while admiring the ANC leader, Said foregrounds the "inflexibility" of Mandela's rebellion and the leader's conscious "assumption" of the role of the uncompromising freedom fighter. Said's opening paragraphs introduce Mandela as an *idea* that is scattered in the American media – celebrated in a fashion peculiar to the language of the media – to translate him into the new age Martin Luther, to reduce his politics to parallel American history and in the process establish America as the site of historical precedence. However, Said admires Mandela's own resistance to such classifications. Even as Said watches Mandela

²⁹ Said 1986, 166.

³⁰ Chomsky 1987, 38–9.

³¹ Barsamian and Said 2003

³² Said 1996

on the television screen (Said reports), the ANC leader remains an uncompromising picture of the anti-apartheid movement; Mandela's persona projects the apartheid experience as untranslatable across the Atlantic. Said perhaps sought to emulate this unwillingness to conform to the American imagination.³³ This merits reflection.

The story connecting Edward Said to the incident in South Lebanon, Columbia University, and the *New York Times* shows the demanding role of a public intellectual in America.³⁴ However, Said was different from the conventionally accepted intellectual. He was both Palestinian and American. He viewed his identity as hyphenated, often challenging the American imagination with his sharp and intelligent critiques of the Western world. He held up a mirror, and he held it high.

His writings, therefore, demonstrate the many intricate specifics that informed his personality – the forcible entanglement of the English “Edward” with the Arabic “Said,” the difficulty of negotiating the two distinct languages of Arabic and English, the contrasting nature of his mother's soft, endearing Arabic, and her more objective and severe English – contradictory aspects of his identity that Said worked hard to suppress if not erase.³⁵ The experience of out-sidenedness – the condition of exile – was, therefore, something that Said was forced to confront from a very young age. It was an experience that mutated as he moved through Gezira Preparatory School, Victoria College, Mount Hermon, Princeton University, and Harvard University. The exilic condition was predicated, Said claimed, on the yearning for connection with one's home. In his case, home existed in a state of contestation. Palestine had been stripped of its autonomy and its right to self-definition.

To Said, the condition of exile – nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal – offered an opportunity for self-reclamation.³⁶ As a performer and a narrator, Said never restricted himself to one forum. He shifted his roles to suit the parameters of any forum he was invited to speak from; the process of *telling* and *re-telling* was most crucial to him. His many interviews, talk shows, and testimonials of his friends and allies testify to Said's consistent efforts at self-definition. Self-definition was a project that Said incessantly repeated. As an expert narrator, the tempo and rhythm of his repetition were adapted to suit his audience, but the theme, which was never compromised, was consistently Palestine. In the performance of this repetition, Said often dismantled the credibility of the American media. It is at this juncture, where the performative narrator and the media intersect that Said's identity as a public intellectual assumes shape.

The unfolding tragedy in Gaza underscores the enduring legacy of Said's ideas. As the conflict intensifies, Said's discernments on power dynamics, colonialism, and representation resonate with heightened relevance. His scrutiny of Western narratives and steadfast advocacy for the Palestinian cause provide a crucial framework for understanding and addressing the current humanitarian crisis. This essay examines Said's strategic maneuvering of the intellectual's “body” as a performative expression of exile. Such portrayals uncover the delicate politics pertaining to the intellectual's manifestation within the American academy, while concomitantly asserting the legacy of the public intellectual as

³³ Zakarriya's 2015 article compares both Said and Mandela as pioneers of Humanism.

³⁴ Goodman 2001. In the interview, Goodman and Said discuss the important role played by *The New York Times* in broadcasting the photograph.

³⁵ Said reports that his mother named him after Edward after the Prince of Wales, who cut a fine figure in 1935, the year of Said's birth.

³⁶ Said, 2002, 186.

a provocateur. This is because Said's manifold identity underscores the persuasive role that public intellectuals play in shaping discourse and challenging prevailing narratives. In taking on the mantle of the public intellectual, Said provoked a confrontation between two Western ideals – the public sphere and the university. His scrutiny of the exilic condition lay at the heart of his vision of the intellectual's role. Said the Palestinian-American wielded his privileges to navigate discussions on the Palestinian condition. In this pursuit, he eschewed “professionalism” in favor of embracing “amateurism.”³⁷ In his engagements, the personal and political collided, laying bare emotions. The intellectual, emerging from this fray, was flawed, as we all are, but more human.

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³⁷ As he concludes his essay on the professionalization of intellectuals Said proposes a new mode of intellectual engagement that is amateurish. Said asserts, “The intellectual today ought to be an amateur, someone who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of a society one is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one's country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens as well as with other societies” (*Representations*, 103).

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