

Edward W. Said, Literary Critic and Advocate for Palestinian Independence,

By RICHARD BERNSTEIN

Edward W. Said, a polymath scholar and literary critic at Columbia University who was the most prominent advocate in the United States of the cause of Palestinian independence, died on Wednesday in Manhattan. He was 67.

The cause was leukemia, which Dr. Said had been battling since 1991.

Dr. Said was born in Jerusalem during the British Mandate in Palestine and immigrated to the United States when he was a teenager. He spent a long and productive career as a professor of comparative literature at Columbia and wrote several widely discussed books, among them "Orientalism" and "Culture and Imperialism."

He was an exemplar of American multiculturalism, at home both in Arabic and English, but, as he once put it, "a man who lived two quite separate lives," one as an American university professor, the other as a fierce critic of American and Israeli policies and an equally fierce proponent of the Palestinian cause.

Though a defender of Islamic civilization, Dr. Said (pronounced sah-EED) was an Episcopalian married to a Quaker. He was also an excellent pianist who for several years wrote music criticism for *The Nation*. From 1977 to 1991 he was an unaffiliated member of the Palestine National Council, a parliament in exile. Most of the council's members belong to one of the main Palestinian organizations, most importantly to Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization, but some belonged to smaller organizations believed responsible for terrorist operations against Israelis and Americans, such as George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

"The situation of the Palestinian is that of a victim," Dr. Said said in a *New York* magazine interview in 1989, making the kind of statement

wrote in a 1999 essay in *The New York Times Magazine*. "There can be no reconciliation unless both peoples, two communities of suffering, resolve that their existence is a secular fact, and that it has to be dealt with as such."

Among the criticisms leveled against Dr. Said by Jews and others was his failure to condemn specific terrorist acts by Palestinian groups, including some groups that served alongside him on the Palestine National Council. One such person, for example, was Abu Abbas, a member of the P.L.O. executive committee who is believed responsible for the hijacking of the Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro* and the murder of an American tourist, Leon Klinghoffer, who was in a wheelchair. In his interview with *New York*, Dr. Said called Mr. Abbas "a degenerate," but he then argued that important Israeli leaders, like former prime ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, had been terrorists responsible for killing women and children.

Among Dr. Said's political views cited by his defenders was his condemnation of the Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini for urging his followers to assassinate the writer Salman Rushdie. Dr. Said, while opposing the American-led Persian Gulf war in 1991, called the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "an appalling and dreadful despot," and he made similar statements about the Syrian President Hafez al-Assad. But Dr. Said was far more critical of the West and of Israel and their approach to the Arab world than he was of the Arabs or their leaders.

While Israel and its supporters saw the crux of the Middle East conflict as the Arabs' unwillingness to accept the existence of Israel and the Arabic threat to Israeli security, Dr. Said saw matters in terms of Zionist atrocity and Palestinian victimhood. "In sheer numerical terms, in brute numbers of bodies and prop-



Krista Niles/The New York Times

Edward W. Said in his office at Columbia University.

hood of thick-walled stone houses that is now one of the main Jewish districts of the city. His father, a prosperous businessman who had lived in the United States, took the family to Cairo in 1947 after the United Nations divided Jerusalem into Jewish and Arab halves. At the age of 12 Edward went to the American School in Cairo, then to the elite Victoria College, where his classmates included the future King Hussein of Jordan and the actor Omar Sharif.

In 1951 his parents sent him to the Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts. He went on to Princeton and then to graduate school at Harvard, where he earned his Ph.D. in English

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His next book was "Orientalism," with its theory that the Orient and especially the Arab world have been created by the Western imagination as a series of demeaning, reductive stereotypes.

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erally exciting," wrote the British historian J. H. Plumb in *The Times*. But Plumb and others contended that Dr. Said made no effort to actually examine the real, historical relations between West and East, or "to sort out what was true in the Western representation" of the East from what was false and caricatured.

They argued that Dr. Said's assumption was that the Orientalists simply invented the East to satisfy the requirements of cultural superiority and Western imperialism and that he ignored the vast body of scholarship that grappled with the East on its own terms.

At Columbia Dr. Said came to play a more active role as a spokesman for the Palestinian cause, becoming a member of the Palestine National Council in 1977 and helping, in 1988, to draft a new Palestinian constitution. Though seen by most American supporters of Israel as a radical, Dr. Said was viewed by many Palestinians as a moderate who reportedly urged Mr. Arafat to help break the Middle East impasse by acknowledging Israel's right to exist. He often called himself an outsider influenced by Arabic and American cultures, but fully belonging to neither.

"I've never felt that I belonged exclusively to one country, nor have I been able to identify patriotically with any other than losing causes," he wrote in *The Nation* in 1991. As Dr. Said became more prominent, defending Palestinians in written statements and in interviews as victims of Israeli brutality, he came under attack from supporters of Israel who accused him of supporting terrorism.

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Feeling like an outsider who does not fully belong to the East or the West.

that put him at the center of the roiling debate about the Middle East. "They're the dispossessed, and what they do by way of violence and terrorism is understandable. But what the Israelis do, in killing Palestinians on a much larger scale, is a continuation of the horrific and unjust dispossession of the Palestinian people."

"I totally repudiate terrorism in all its forms," Dr. Said said in that same interview. "Not just Palestinian terrorism — I'm also against Israeli terrorism, the bombing of refugee camps."

Dr. Said was a widely recognized figure in New York, a frequent participant in debates on the Middle East and an outspoken advocate of a Palestinian homeland. For many years he ardently supported Mr. Arafat, whom he called the leader of a genuinely national and popular movement, with a legitimate goal of self-determination for Palestinians. But Dr. Said became a bitter critic of Mr. Arafat after the 1993 Oslo peace accords between Israel and the P.L.O., believing that the agreement gave the Palestinians too little territory and too little control over it. After Oslo he argued that separate Palestinian and Jewish states would always be unworkable and, although he recognized that emotions on both sides were against it, he advocated a single binational state.

"I see no other way than to begin now to speak about sharing the land that has thrust us together, and sharing it in a truly democratic way, with equal rights for each citizen," he

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While Israel and its supporters saw the crux of the Middle East conflict as the Arabs' unwillingness to accept the existence of Israel and the Arabic threat to Israeli security, Dr. Said saw matters in terms of Zionist atrocity and Palestinian victimhood. "In sheer numerical terms, in brute numbers of bodies and property destroyed, there is absolutely nothing to compare between what Zionism has done to Palestinians and what, in retaliation, Palestinians have done to Zionists," he wrote in "The Question of Palestine" (1979).

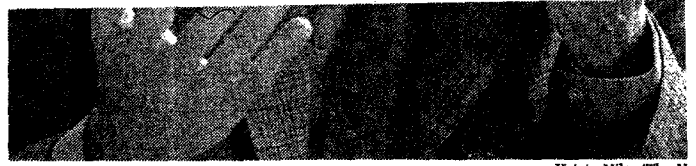
Dr. Said's most influential book was "Orientalism" (1978), an amalgamation of his scholarly position and political views. In it he laid out a vision of history in which cultural power — the power to define others — is inextricably linked with the political power to dominate. The Western view of the East as sensual, corrupt, vicious, lazy, tyrannical and backward exemplified this power, he argued.

"The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination of varying degrees of a complex hegemony," Dr. Said wrote in "Orientalism." The idea, which seemed to be anchored in his sense of belonging to a dispossessed people, was that the West invented the East to reinforce the power of colonialism over the colonized. Influenced by French thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Dr. Said was one of the first scholars to introduce such notions of culture and power into the American academy.

In a 1993 book, "Culture and Imperialism," Dr. Said argued that 19th- and 20th-century British novelists — even so apparently nonpolitical a writer as Jane Austen — provided a cultural legitimization for colonialism. He maintained that writers like E. M. Forster, Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling engaged in a novelistic process whose main purpose was not to raise more questions, not to disturb or otherwise preoccupy attention, but to keep the empire more or less in place.

Dr. Said's first marriage, to Maire Jaanus, ended in divorce. He is survived by his wife, Mariam Cortas; a son, Wadie; and a daughter, Najla.

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Krista Niles/The N

Edward W. Said in his office at Columbia University.

hood of thick-walled stone houses that is now one of the main Jewish districts of the city. His father, a prosperous businessman who had lived in the United States, took the family to Cairo in 1947 after the United Nations divided Jerusalem into Jewish and Arab halves. At the age of 12 Edward went to the American School in Cairo, then to the elite Victoria College, where his classmates included the future King Hussein of Jordan and the actor Omar Sharif.

In 1951 his parents sent him to the Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts. He went on to Princeton and then to graduate school at Harvard, where he earned his Ph.D. in English literature in 1964. The year before that, Dr. Said became an assistant instructor in the English department at Columbia, becoming full professor in 1970.

In 1977 he was appointed to an endowed chair, becoming the Parr professor of English and comparative literature and later the Old Dominion Foundation professor in the humanities, a position he held until he was named a university professor, the highest academic position at Columbia.

Dr. Said's first book was "Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography" (1966), in which he began to explore themes that led to his theories about culture and imperialism. His second book, "Beginnings" (1975), examined literary inspiration. Richard Kuczowski praised that book in *The Library Journal* as

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"Orientalism" established Said as a figure of enormous influence in American and European universities, a hero to many, a younger faculty and graduate students on the left for whom became an intellectual credo. A founding document of what he called postcolonial studies, central to Dr. Said's argument was the notion that there was no neutral scholarship on Asia, especially on the Arab world. A Western study of the East, viewed, was bound up in the system's prejudices about the non-Western world that turned it into clichés. Since the enlightenment, Said wrote, "every European what he could say about the East was a racist, an imperialist, most totally ethnocentric."

This view did not go unchallenged even among specialists on the Middle East who found many of his arguments valid but who rejected numerous as overdrawn, highly and oversimplistic.

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107

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ly exciting,” wrote the British historian J. H. Plumb in *The Times*. But Plumb and others contended that Dr. Said made no effort to actually examine the real, historical relations between West and East, or “to sort out what was true in the Western representation” of the East from what was false and caricatured.

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Interviewed by a reporter for *The Times*, Dr. Said replied that he had never denied that he had grown up in Cairo as well as in Jerusalem. “I don’t think it’s that important, in any case,” he said. “I never have represented my case as the issue to be treated. I’ve represented the case of my people, which is something quite different.”

An earlier *Commentary* article, “Professor of Terror,” elicited a spirited response, with Jews and non-Jews defending Dr. Said. “To portray Said as a devotee of terrorist politics is a gross distortion of his

life’s work as a scholar and militant,” wrote Richard A. Falk, a political scientist at Princeton.

In July 2000 Dr. Said became embroiled in an international contretemps over a widely published photograph that showed him at the Lebanese border about to hurl a stone at an Israeli guardhouse. Dr. Said, who was traveling with his family at the time, dismissed the action as trivial, calling it a “symbolic gesture of joy” that Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon had ended.

But others demurred and some urged Columbia to reprimand him or to repudiate his action. Several months later, Columbia announced that no action was needed and that Dr. Said’s behavior was protected

His vision of history linked cultural power to the political power to dominate.

under the principles of academic freedom.

“To my knowledge, the stone was directed at no one; no law was broken; no indictment was made; no criminal or civil action has been taken against Professor Said,” Jonathan R. Cole, then the provost and dean of faculties, wrote in an open letter to Columbia’s student government and the student newspaper.

In his last years Dr. Said’s literary production became more and more political. In 1981, two years after “*The Question of Palestine*,” he published “*Covering Islam*,” in which he attempted to show how Westerners depicted Arabs as synonymous with trouble — “rootless, mindless, gratuitous trouble.” Dr. Said’s last book was “*The Politics of Dispossession*” (1994), which extended his criticism of Western attitudes toward the Palestinians, but also portrayed the Palestinian leadership as profligate and corrupt.

102