

Swarthmore College

Works

Peace & Conflict Studies Faculty Works

Peace & Conflict Studies

6-1-2019

Complicity, Dissent, And The Palestinian Intellectual

Sa'ed Atshan

Swarthmore College, satshan1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-peace>



Part of the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

Let us know how access to these works benefits you

Recommended Citation

Sa'ed Atshan. (2019). "Complicity, Dissent, And The Palestinian Intellectual". *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature And Culture*. Volume 21, Issue 3. DOI: 10.7771/1481-4374.3549

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-peace/13>

An [accessible version](#) of this publication has been made available courtesy of Swarthmore College Libraries. For further accessibility assistance, please contact openaccess@swarthmore.edu with the title or URL of any relevant works.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 International License](#).

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Peace & Conflict Studies Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Sa'ed ATSHAN

Complicity, Dissent, and the Palestinian Intellectual

Introduction

In this article, I discuss the role of the university as a battleground, both metaphorically and literally, in the struggle for Palestinian freedom, and as an incubator and platform for Palestinian intellectuals whose acts of resistance and dissent challenge external and internal oppressions with equal vigor. Drawing on the major works of two Palestinian intellectuals—Edward Said and Hanan Ashrawi—I compare the experiences of Palestinian intellectuals living in the United States with those living under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank. The writings of these two exemplary figures shape the conceptual underpinnings of my exploration of the way Palestinian academics navigate questions of complicity with the different hegemonic political systems that govern them. I argue that Said and Ashrawi model a steadfast refusal to be complicit in the state-led repression around them at the same time as they engage in principled dissent from their own national institutions in the name of a broader vision of universal emancipation. Yet, Said and Ashrawi embody two distinct modes of intellectual and political activity, shaped by their relative proximity to Palestine. The critical difference between their forms of dissent reveals how, for Palestinian-Americans, engagement with the question of Palestine is discursive and intellectual labor, while for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, it can require interfacing one's body directly with the coercive apparatus of the state. In both cases, however, the Palestinian intellectual faces systematic assaults on his or her academic freedom.

I am not the first scholar to engage on these questions. In reflecting on my own experience as a Palestinian academic, my analysis is inspired by the work of anthropologists Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, who in their study of Middle East anthropology in the U.S. examine the "social practice of being a scholar within an intricate and historically constituted set of power relations"—a focus that "flips the ethnographic gaze onto us" (4). Deeb and Winegar raise questions about the pressures that Palestinians and other scholars of the Middle East face in environments mired in racism and discrimination. They describe the tensions between the "ethical imperative" of "advocating for a more just world" and the avoidance of "career-damaging repercussions" through "self-preservation" and "self-censorship" (182). For so many Palestinian intellectuals, the politically constructed tension between individual wellbeing and advocacy for the collective good impacts the moral calculus involved in resisting assaults on human dignity. As I show, when it comes to the question of Palestine, standing up for justice and academic freedom can occasion career-ending or life-threatening punishments, depending on one's positionality. Complicity, in this context, becomes a minefield to navigate.

The struggles of Palestinian intellectuals and university professors across geographic lines (though particularly in the U.S.) are also compounded by the more general institutional failures that have increasingly come to characterize the neoliberal academy. "[T]he University," argues Thomas Docherty, "has marginalized itself, by going along with the ideology that [scholarly] knowledge is a private matter, to be used for purposes of acquisitive individualism, or greed, and not for the widening of knowledge that can be shared in the interests of democratic engagement that constructs our society" (168). Docherty cautions academics against acquiescing to the profit-driven model of the contemporary university, one that, in responding to market cues, reflects "a social order that is racist, prejudicial, and shaped by the demand that thinking and thinkers should be sequestered away from everyday living" (15). He calls on intellectuals around the world to remain true to their vocation and regain the trust of their societies. For Palestinian intellectuals, a sense of accountability to Palestinian society, and the requisite disavowal of regimes of power, is particularly acute.

In what follows, I profile Said's and Ashrawi's specific modes of intellectual resistance and dissent, drawing out differences between the U.S. and Palestinian contexts while emphasizing their shared commitment to a humanist tradition that transcends nationalist imperatives. Drawing from my own experiences in Palestine and the American academy, I sketch out the different forms of oppression and denials of academic freedom that impact Palestinian intellectuals at home and in the diaspora. As these oppressions intensify and engender greater pressures for complicity, I argue that Said and Ashrawi model the type of humanistic dissent required to address the various tensions in the movement for Palestinian freedom.

Reading Ashrawi Alongside Said: Resistance, Dissent, and Humanism

It is no surprise that Docherty lauds Edward Said (1935-2003) for demonstrating the intellectual's true purpose. As a public intellectual, Said was famous for speaking truth to power, and he implored other

academics to take on a similar role in society. In his book *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said defined this role as

"an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public . . . someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront dogma and orthodoxy (rather than to produce them), . . . someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'etre* is to represent all those peoples and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug." (11)

Said was particularly invested in the question of Palestine and U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. As an academic in the U.S., he refused to be complicit in American imperialism in the region and passionately educated the public on the harms of Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people and U.S. support for the Israeli occupation. According to Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi, Said

consistently criticized the consensual complicity with American policy on the Middle East that is habitually shown by both representatives of the media and the so-called experts whom the media bring in generally to validate a point of view, or a conventional polarity, that they have already determined in advance... [M]ost of these paragons repeat the line of the current administration in almost Stalinist fashion where U.S. foreign policy is concerned. Said has always attacked this cozy complicity and has suggested critical ways of looking at U.S. policy in the Middle East. (161-77)

Taking on U.S. Middle East policy in this way was an act of bravery at a time when the question of Palestine was among the most taboo subjects in U.S. public discourse. Said thus embodied the quintessential dissident within the American academy.

But Said's dissidence was not limited to U.S. and Israeli policy. Although he served from 1977 to 1991 on the Palestinian National Council, the legislative organ of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Said never relinquished his right to criticize the Palestinian political leadership and later emerged as one of the earliest and most well-known dissenters from the Oslo peace process. As a member of the Council, he voted in favor of the PLO's momentous 1988 decision to recognize Israel and pursue Palestinian statehood in the Occupied Territories. Years later, he reflected on that decision with characteristic humanism: "As a Palestinian who has suffered loss and deprivations, I cannot morally accept regaining my rights at the expense of another people's deprivation" (*Peace and Its Discontents* 175). Yet, he viewed the specific provisions of the Oslo Accords as constituting a forfeiture of any real exercise of Palestinian self-determination—a poison pill for which he never ceased to criticize Yasser Arafat and the leadership of what became the Palestinian Authority (PA). As early as 1995, Said offered an assessment of PA complicity that is today commonplace: "I think that this type of self-rule is in effect a kind of collaboration between the Israeli forces and the Palestinian police force, which strengthens the Occupation authority and does not lead to a state. More clearly put, what I am saying is that the Palestinian Authority is slowly being turned into an instrument of the Occupation, and this will be its ultimate fate" (176-77).

Alongside Said, Hanan Ashrawi (born 1946) also emerged as a high-profile voice for Palestinians across the globe. Their similar early biographies highlight the important role of academic institutions in cultivating the voices of dissident public intellectuals. Said attended St. George's School in Jerusalem, followed by Princeton University and then Harvard, where he earned his doctorate in English Literature. Born and raised in Palestine, Ashrawi was educated at the Ramallah Friends School, a Quaker institution established in Palestine in the nineteenth century. She subsequently attended the American University of Beirut, before earning her doctorate, also in English Literature, at the University of Virginia. Unlike Said, who spent most of his career as a professor at Columbia University in New York, Ashrawi returned to the West Bank for a professorship and later deanship at Birzeit University. The peak of her public intellectual work occurred between 1974 and 1990, during which time she maintained her Birzeit affiliations. A former peace negotiator, legislator, and Minister of Education, Ashrawi became the first woman to serve on the Executive Committee of the PLO. Today, she regularly appears on news outlets around the world, continuing to radiate as an eloquent spokesperson for the Palestinian struggle.

Ashrawi and Said both credit their academic institutions for nurturing their intellects, and both gained respect from Palestinian society precisely because of their scholarly achievements. Most importantly, both were keen on extending their influence beyond the academy to redress the many injustices plaguing Palestinians. While Ashrawi has inspired countless Palestinians of all identities, she has been a particular source of hope for the many Palestinian women who admire her courageous work opposing gender-based barriers in Palestinian society. Her record of fierce resistance to the Israeli occupation—described in greater detail in the next section—is matched by an equally impressive record of dissent

against the patriarchal elements seeking restrict Palestinian women's public participation. As she describes in her autobiographical memoir, *This Side of Peace*, when the PLO established a series of all-male committees to implement the Oslo Accords, Ashrawi and her allies "began a campaign to empower women and ensure their participation in all political, economic, and social spheres on an equal participatory basis. 'We will not go back to the kitchen'" (294).

As resisters and dissenters, Said and Ashrawi shared a passion for literature and a belief in the power of literary narrative, discourse analysis, and cultural critique to elucidate the human condition. They identified the liberatory potential of literature as a vehicle for universal experiences that transcend borders and difference. These traits, in turn, reflect a common grounding in the humanist tradition. While they came from Palestinian Christian backgrounds, both were secular humanists in their approaches to questions of ethics, political resistance, and the struggle for freedom. In his book *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said writes, "The core of humanism is the secular notion that the historical world is made by men and women, and not by God, and that it can be understood rationally according to the principle formulated by Vico in *New Science*, that we can really know only what we make or, to put it differently, we can know things according to the way they were made" (11). And in his masterpiece *Orientalism*, Said describes humanism as "the only—I would go so far as saying the final—resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history" (xxiii).

Similar themes are evident in Ashrawi's memoir, in which she describes the universal character of humanism as essential to the development of her intellectual and political projects. In her memoir, Ashrawi writes, "My life has been taking shape as a Palestinian, as a woman—as a mother, daughter, wife—as a Christian and a humanist, as a radical and a peace activist, as an academic and a political being. And as a composite of all these constituencies, I am hopeful that one day I shall attain the only identity and name worth seeking—that of a human being" (Ashrawi 35). Elsewhere she notes, "My Palestinian perspective shaped my language—but was guided by my universal feelings" (193).

Like Ashrawi, Said not only saw himself as part of a universal assemblage of beings but also felt the need to reconcile various and seemingly disparate parts of his selfhood. Said was a Palestinian, an American, a global citizen, a public intellectual, a music critic, the president of the Modern Language Association, and much more. In his own memoir, *Out of Place*, Said confesses:

I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents... are 'off' and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations... A form of freedom, I'd like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. (295)

Said's reference to uncertainty reflects his fundamental generosity of spirit. Guiding readers through his thought processes, he models the humility required to linger on those doubts that always accompany true acts of intellectual labor.

In sum, the legacy of Ashrawi and Said is that of Palestinian intellectuals who connected the world of literature and cultural analysis to the political and analytic work needed for human emancipation. Their examples demonstrate the power of building bridges connecting the private realm of the university classroom with the public domains of media, politics, and social movements. While grounded in their Palestinian identities and contexts, both remained cognizant of the multiple currents that flowed through them, and both recognized their own inextricable connection to the universal. When it came to the question of Palestine, their intellectual struggles were mediated by their rejection of all forms of oppression and their steadfast maintenance of a secular humanist lens.

Academic (Un)freedom in Palestine

In response to the *First Intifada*, which began in 1987, the Israeli military closed down Palestinian schools and universities, effectively declaring education illegal in the Occupied Territories. Palestine's 1,200 elementary and secondary schools, serving more than 300,000 students, operated for as little as 17% and no more than 50% of the school year during the four-year period of the *Intifada*. Closures were irregular and unpredictable. Universities, with more than 22,000 students, were barely permitted to operate (Hussein 17-18). In *This Side of Peace*, Ashrawi reflects upon the significant role she played in resisting this repression in her neighborhood in Ramallah:

I headed the educational committee and conducted a survey of school students of all ages, diagnosed their needs, and tabulated the number of potential volunteer teachers and their fields of specialization. Over the course of one weekend, our committee set up a whole alternative educational system for the neighborhood, covering the entire range of classes from preschool to graduating class, for a total of eighty-two students and

nineteen teachers. With the schools closed down by Israeli military orders, it was up to us to prevent the forced illiteracy of our children. In closing down the schools, one military governor boasted, "We know the importance of education to the Palestinians; that's why we hit hard where it hurts most." That is how the education of our children, like their childhood, was held hostage by the Israeli occupation. (53)

The resilience of the educational sector was not limited to the infrastructure Ashrawi helped establish. Rather, the creation of alternative institutions was widespread in the Occupied Territories, and extended beyond education to the other domains impacted by Israel's military repression of the *Intifada*, such as healthcare and agriculture. In response, Israel moved to prohibit grassroots educational activity, instructing the UN Relief and Works Agency to stop distributing learning kits to children. According to education scholar Yamila Hussein, "Israeli soldiers raided and shut down rooms and buildings- including kindergartens- where educational activities took place, and they harassed and detained students and teachers, and confiscated books and equipment" (20).

Much of Ashrawi's memoir focuses on her later work as a Palestinian politician and high-level participant in diplomatic negotiations with her Israeli and American counterparts. Yet it is in her descriptions of the protests she participated in and the support she extended to her students at Birzeit University that Ashrawi the dissident is most vividly revealed. In another passage, she writes,

Often when there was a demonstration in town the army would then come to the university. With practiced skills, we went through the usual crisis procedure: check the emergency first-aid stations for the standard supplies of antiseptic, cotton wool, local anesthetic, bandages, oxygen canisters and respirators, stretchers, splints; check the stations for personnel, including doctors, nurses, early-warning scouts, runners, volunteer witnesses and guards; close down all gates and alert at all gatemen to admit only students and university personnel; send faculty members to each building; alert Human Rights Action Project members, the public relations office, hospitals, and press; inform the university administration on the new campus. Then we all poured out to perform our standard tasks--heads of departments, assistant dean, dean, and staff--to protest the students in case of a clash with the army and negotiate on their behalf should the need arise...

I took my position at the gate of the parking lot behind the dean's office... The shooting grew louder, and the tear gas tore through my lungs like a hundred sharp knives. Stomach lurching and face burning with a searing itch, I fought to keep my eyes open, peering through the thickening cloud for the first signs of the approaching army. Students began emerging from the mist, vague outlines approaching swiftly and soundlessly as in an old black-and-white horror movie. Gradually, the ghosts took flesh and color as they drew nearer, the rhythm of their pounding feet beating in the primeval dance of survival. A new variation of the *dabkeh*, our ancestral dance/ritual. I opened the gate and they swept in. Ahmad Harb, the assistant dean, helped the stragglers and directed them to the dining room and assembly hall in the main building, then closed the heavy oak doors and asked the students to secure them from within. I stepped outside the parking lot gate and closed it behind me. Then a different host of phantoms emerged from the mist. (39-40)

It is inconceivable for most Americans that college professors would have to supply their students with first aid kits, or that administrators would have to formulate action plans in the event that an occupying military surrounds and besieges a university campus. Most U.S.-based academics do not imagine their professional role to involve attending to the physical and psychological scars of their students or navigating the shifting boundaries between their campuses and the chaotic urban environment around them. Ashrawi, like all professors in Palestine—and indeed like all educators living under colonial regimes—had no choice but to grapple with these everyday realities.

Palestinians take pride in having established 14 institutions of higher education in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Despite the return to relative "normalcy" since the end of the *Second Intifada*, the Israeli occupation's assaults on Palestinian education have never ceased. Campuses are still threatened with closure, or actually shut down. Foreign professors are denied Israeli permits to live in the Occupied Territories, forcing them to abandon their Palestinian students. Israel limits the type and number of books and other indispensable supplies available to Palestinian schools and universities. The army targets participants in student government elections alongside those who engage in off-campus political activism. So much of this is done by Israel in the name of "security."

As the Middle East Studies Association recently noted in a letter of complaint to the Israeli government, these ongoing restrictions on education are among the most formidable challenges facing academics in the Occupied Territories (Brand and Tucker). The Israeli organization Gisha, which promotes freedom of movement for Palestinians, has documented cases of Palestinian students who are unable to leave Gaza as a result of the Israeli blockade ("student"). Similarly, the Right to Education and Right to Enter campaigns regularly report on the many ways that Israel targets Palestinian universities and limits travel for students and faculty affiliated with institutions of higher education in the West Bank (Right to Education; Campaign). During the 2017-2018 school year, for example, visa

renewals for 15 foreign passport-holding faculty members at Birzeit University alone were denied or significantly delayed by Israeli authorities (Right to Education; "Ongoing"). In recent years, Birzeit student leaders have been arrested and imprisoned, and its Student Union was raided by Israeli soldiers who confiscated all of the center's computers (Right to Education, "The Right"; "Statement"). Under these conditions, providing students with a normal post-secondary education is incredibly difficult.

My own guilt as a Palestinian in the Diaspora who has been absorbed by American universities compelled me to volunteer at Birzeit University during the 2010-2011 academic year. I was home in Palestine conducting ethnographic research for my dissertation and I secured an affiliation and office at Birzeit's Institute for Community and Public Health. There, I had the honor of co-teaching a course with Professor Rita Giacaman, a one-time colleague of Ashrawi's who is mentioned in her memoir. Having the opportunity to teach at Ashrawi's former institution was a pleasure.

At the same time, working with Palestinian students from all walks of life and engaging with Palestinian faculty offered a startling juxtaposition with my experience at elite institutions in the U.S. I had briefly forgotten what my colleagues in Palestine are forced to contend with on a routine basis—for example, a student arriving 30 minutes late to a morning class with mud on her clothes and face. Even though this student lived what should have been an hour's drive from campus, she diligently left home three hours early. Despite the precaution, she was held at an Israeli military checkpoint and then redirected up a dirt road. Her case is all too typical.

Teaching in Palestine forced me to recalibrate my expectations of students. Rather than asking them to sit through a one-hour exam, I found it necessary to divide the test into two parts as a way of accommodating a student with trauma who could not be physically contained for that long. At one point, I comforted a colleague who broke down upon learning that her student had been arrested by the Israeli military and confined to a prison cell. She explained that she had helped him find work to pay for his university expenses because his family was too poor to support him. These examples would be familiar to any Palestinian academic in the West Bank, and they resonate with the experiences that Ashrawi recounts.

Discussions of academic freedom in the U.S. too often elide the Israeli occupation's profound negative impact on academic freedom for Palestinian educators and students. The U.S. academy provides few venues for robust exchange about the institutional complicity of American universities in Israel's system of oppression. Palestinian-American intellectuals, after all they have seen and experienced, find it challenging to remain silent about the suffering of their people and the ongoing destruction of their ancestral homeland. While insulated from the physical threats and crises that defined Ashrawi's mode of resistance, they are forced to contend with a network of institutions aimed at quashing their ability to speak out. The next section describes these challenges and argues for Said's model of intellectual engagement as an antidote to the betrayal of one's conscience under increasingly repressive conditions.

Anti-Palestinian Silencing in America

Academics of Palestinian origin in the U.S., along with non-Palestinian academics sympathetic to the Palestine solidarity movement, frequently encounter what feels like a systematic effort to silence our voices. We do not know if and when our names will appear on a shadowy online blacklist, or whether our communications will come under surveillance, or whether a campaign will be launched to undermine our careers (Nathan-Kazis). So much of this anti-Palestinian activity is carried out through unethical practices and premised on unjust misrepresentations of our teaching and scholarship, together with the crudest forms of character assassination.¹ Unfortunately, today's American university campus is home to many well-resourced organizations and initiatives solely dedicated to preventing critiques of Israeli policies.

Discrimination against Palestinian and Palestinian-allied academics extends to hiring and tenure-granting processes as well. There is by now a long record of smear campaigns aimed at jeopardizing the tenure of Palestinian scholars. Between 2006 and 2009, for instance, Columbia University was embroiled in a series of public battles over the tenure status of Palestinian scholars Nadia Abu El-Haj and Joseph Massad. Just a few years after Edward Said's departure from Columbia (and subsequent death from cancer), right-wing forces attempted to intervene in the university's internal affairs. The pressure they applied was incredible. Placing the attacks on El-Haj in a broader context, *The Nation's* Larry Cohler-Esses noted that "In case after case, a network of right-wing activists has started an online furor based on a mélange of distorted or provably false charges against someone involved in Middle East studies... Right-wing media megaphoned the charges, stoking the furor. And mainstream media

¹ For more information, see the website of Palestine Legal, an organization that supports Palestinian and pro-Palestinian students and academics who face intimidation and suppression in unconstitutional manners in the U.S.

ultimately noticed and responded, often focusing their stories on the furor rather than the facts." While in some cases right-wing pressure has successfully derailed careers, Columbia ultimately granted tenure to both Abu El-Haj and Massad, revealing the limits of anti-Palestinian tactics when institutions refuse to succumb to anti-democratic forces committed to the overthrow of academic freedom.

At the same time, the case of Steven Salaita, who was "un-hired" by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign after accepting the school's offer of a tenured position and resigning his former post at Virginia Tech, reveals the extent of the repression and the chilling effect it can have on the Palestinian scholarly and non-scholarly communities. According to the Center for Constitutional Rights, donor lobbying of the university's board and administration resulted in the institution cancelling Salaita's tenured appointment before he was able to transition into his new role ("Dr. Steven Salaita"). The unusual—and, for a public university, likely illegal—revocation was a result of a series of tweets he posted expressing anger during Israel's 2014 war on Gaza. Salaita later shared that it was painful for him as a Palestinian father to see his own son while also absorbing the images of the 500 Palestinian children killed that summer. Reflecting on his subsequent departure from the U.S. academy altogether, Salaita writes:

I'm aware that people still invoke me as a cautionary tale of Zionist mendacity. I regularly get tagged on twitter with some variation of

"Just look at what happened to Salaita."

It's fine. I don't mind invocation. It's nice to be remembered, actually. But it's important that I make something clear:

I wouldn't change a thing--not the stuff of importance, anyway. I've had plenty of opportunities to repent and reclaim some respectability among those with the power to confer employment or grant entry to various media platforms. As long as Palestinians continue to exhibit remarkable courage in resisting a vicious colonizer, an attitude that is endemic to their very existence, I have no intention of relenting.

I always think, would I repeat to people in Gaza or in a West Bank refugee camp what I'm willing to say in the United States? If not, then I don't say it. The Western professional class isn't my audience. I'm trying to extricate myself from the spaces they inhabit (including the left). I will never sell out Palestinians, or the idea of a free Palestine, for mainstream praise or access to institutions governed by colonial logic.

All of this is to say: please don't invoke my situation as an excuse for caution or complicity. I don't accept that reading of my disenfranchisement. In fact, I consider it a type of conciliation to the very forces that we in the Palestine solidarity movement are supposed to oppose. (Facebook post)

Salaita's conception of complicity and its relationship to accountability is a powerful one. He envisions the dissident academic as accountable to the most vulnerable populations, in solidarity with movements for liberation, and a repository for—and shaper of—anti-colonial thought and practice. Yet, by highlighting the reality that a certain level of dissidence can result in one's complete ejection from the institutional fold, the Salaita case reveals the inevitability of complicity for so many Palestinian and Palestinian-allied intellectuals in the American academy. Academics, after all, are people with families and financial obligations and—like much of the rest of American society—increasingly tenuous job security. As technology creates new venues for political expression, so too does it create new tools for the surveillance and harassment of dissenters. With the continuing neoliberalization and "adjunctification" of the American university, it remains uncertain how much longer intellectuals will have access to the institutional frameworks that make true academic freedom possible.

In spite of these daunting constraints, Palestinian intellectuals in the diaspora must continue to challenge complicity through dissent, and to do so with an eye toward collective liberation. Said articulated this relationship clearly:

In its suspicion of totalizing concepts, in its discontent with reified objects, in its impatience with guilds, special interests, imperialized fiefdoms, and orthodox habits of mind, criticism is most itself, and if the paradox can be tolerated, most unlike itself at the moment it starts turning into organized dogma... Criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are noncoercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom. (*The World* 29)

While the recent experiences of Palestinian-American academics like El-Haj and Salaita reveal how the abuses Said cautioned against exist even within the academy, Palestinians remain more cognizant than

others that the separation between professional and political life is often a mirage. The holistic struggle for freedom can be connected to Said's call for intellectuals to embrace their roles as amateurs:

The intellectual today ought to be an amateur, someone who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of 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. In addition, the intellectual's spirit as an amateur can enter and transform the merely professional routine most of us go through into something much more lively and radical; instead of doing what one is supposed to do one can ask why one does it, who benefits from it, how can it reconnect with a personal project and original thoughts. (*Representations* 82-83)

Said envisioned the intellectual-qua-amateur "choosing the risks and uncertain results of the public sphere — a lecture or a book or an article in wide and unrestricted circulation — over the insider space controlled by experts and professionals" (87). It can be liberating for the justice-oriented intellectual to move beyond positivist social science, to embrace the need to loosen the technocrat's hold over society, and to be willing to pose the most challenging of questions in service of freedom, regardless of the risks. At the same time, as this essay has shown, the capacity for public ethical critique is always conditioned by political context, by institutional arrangements, and—for Palestinians—by the very fact of exile.

Conclusion

The Palestinian intellectual's struggle for freedom is inevitably shaped by his or her proximity to Palestine. In his book *After the Last Sky*, Edward Said reflects on the "national incompleteness" of the Palestinian condition and the distances that separate those who were able to remain in historic Palestine from the many more who live in exile (Said and Mohr, 165). While Said's intellectual legacy has eclipsed that of Ashrawi, the latter's deep rootedness in Palestine, and the pedagogy of survival that she demonstrates every day to the Palestinians whose lives she touches, makes her role as a Palestinian intellectual in some ways even more profound than that of Said.

This observation is not meant to further divide the Palestinian "inside" from the "outside"; many Palestinian bodies and souls traverse both realms. Palestinians intuitively grasp the expression that "most people live in their country, but for Palestinians, our country lives within us." And still, there is a kind of completeness to the Palestinian intellectual who feels, touches, sees, and smells her country every day, even as a stateless subject, even while living under military occupation with all the anguish that entails.

Many Palestinian-American intellectuals are grateful that America has opened its doors to them, that they are no longer stateless, and that they have access to the platforms they do. At the same time, as Said writes in *Reflections on Exile*,

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. (173)

Ashrawi's memoir includes a recognition of her good fortune for having not been forced into exile. She writes, "When my brother-in-law, the president of my university, the bishop of my church, my friends and faculty colleagues, and even total strangers were deported, I took upon myself their absence, and every Palestinian felt the diminution of his or her own inheritance" (*This Side of Peace* 225). She adds, "One day at home is worth a lifetime of exile" (181). The experience of home, of being amongst family and being held by one's society—even by strangers who, when our eyes meet, intimately recognize a shared history and struggle—is an unspeakably beautiful part of life in Palestine that some Palestinians have experienced and that many in exile unfortunately never will.

Perhaps the ultimate aspiration of the Palestinian intellectual is the realization of a freedom without exile for all Palestinians. Academic freedom is absolutely essential if the Palestinian intellectual is to work towards that larger freedom. Today, an array of political factors—the ramped-up attacks on dissident intellectuals, the gradual dissolution of the Oslo paradigm, the loss of Palestinian morale, the hardening of Israeli racism, and the brutal military measures imposed on Gaza—all threaten the humanistic orientation exemplified in the lives and legacies of Said and Ashrawi. In response to external attack and political despair, a culture of infighting threatens to engulf the Palestinian solidarity

movement, rendering the search for a universal perspective ever more difficult. Yet it is exactly at such moments of uncertainty, realignment, and contingency that a bold humanistic vision is most necessary.

Palestinian intellectuals do not have the luxury of losing hope in the potential for their work to contribute to the struggle for a universal freedom. In America, dissension from U.S. imperialism necessities raising one's voice, regardless of the forces aimed at enforcing complicity. In Palestine, resistance to Israeli occupation often demands more, necessitating the deployment of one's body, regardless of the forces aimed at enacting erasure.

Works Cited

- Ashrawi, Hanan. *This Side of Peace: A Personal Account*. Touchstone Book, 1996.
- Brand, Laurie and Judith E. Tucker. "Israeli Arrests of Palestinian Students and Professors, Israeli Assaults on Palestinian Campuses." *Middle East Studies Association*, 22 January 2019, <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2019/01/22/israeli-arrests-of-palestinian-students-and-professors-israeli-assaults-on-palestinian-campuses>.
- Campaign for the Right to Enter the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). <http://www.righttoenter.ps/>. Accessed 17 November 2018.
- Deeb, Lara and Jessica Winegar. *Anthropology's Politics: Disciplining the Middle East*. Stanford UP, 2016.
- Docherty, Thomas. *The New Treason of the Intellectuals: Can the University Survive?* Manchester UP, 2018.
- "Dr. Steven Salaita." *Center for Constitutional Rights*, 9 February 2015, <https://ccrjustice.org/professor-steven-salaita>. Accessed 17 November 2018.
- Hussein, Yamila. "The Stone and the Pen: Palestinian Education During the 1987 intifada." *The Radical Teacher*, vol. 74, 2005, pp. 17-22.
- Cohler-Esses, Larry. "The New McCarthyism." *The Nation*, 25 October 2007, <https://www.thenation.com/article/new-mccarthyism/>.
- Khalidi, Rashid I. "Edward W. Said and the American Public Sphere." *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic*, edited by Paul Bové, Duke UP, 2000, pp. 152-64.
- Nathan-Kazis, Josh. "1,000 Professors Condemn Blacklisting of Pro-Palestinian Activists." *The Forward*, 27 September 2016, <https://forward.com/news/350911/1-000-professors-condemn-blacklisting-of-pro-palestinian-activists/>. Accessed 17 November 2018.
- "Ongoing Israeli Policies to Disrupt and Isolate Palestinian Higher Education." *Right to Education, Birzeit University*, 13 January 2018, <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/ongoing-israeli-policies-to-disrupt-and-isolate-palestinian-higher-education/>. Accessed 29 January 2019.
- "Palestine Legal." <https://palestinelegal.org/>. Accessed 17 November 2018
- "Right to Education Campaign." *Birzeit University*, <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/>. Accessed 17 November 2018.
- Said, Edward W. *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- . *Orientalism*. Peregrine, 1985.
- . *Out of Place: A Memoir*. Granta, 2014.
- . *Peace and Its Discontents*. Vintage Books, 1996.
- . *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard UP, 2002.
- . *Representations of the Intellectual*. Pantheon, 1994.
- . *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Harvard UP, 1983.
- Said, Edward W., and Jean Mohr. *After the Last Sky Palestinian Lives*. Columbia UP, 1999.
- Salaita, Steven. Facebook post. 12 August 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/steven.salaita/posts/10216943925818878>
- "Statement Regarding Israeli Army's Raid on Birzeit University's Campus and Arrest of Students." *Right to Education, Birzeit University*, 16 January 2016, <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/a-statement-regarding-israeli-armys-raid-on-birzeit-universitys-campus/>. Accessed 29 January 2019.
- "Student Travel between Gaza and the West Bank 101." *Gisha*, <http://gisha.org/publication/1666>. Accessed 1 November 2018.
- "The Right to Education Campaign Condemns Arbitrary Arrest of Birzeit University's Head of Student Council." *Right to Education, Birzeit University*, 19 November 2018, <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/the-right-to-education-campaign-condemns-arbitrary-arrest-of-birzeit-universitys-head-of-student-council/>. Accessed 29 January 2019.

Author's profile: Dr. Sa'ed Atshan is an Assistant Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Swarthmore College. He previously served as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. He earned a Joint Ph.D. in Anthropology and Middle Eastern Studies and an MA in Social Anthropology from Harvard University, and a Master in Public Policy (MPP) degree from the Harvard Kennedy School. He received his BA from Swarthmore in 2006. His research interests are at the intersection of peace and conflict studies, the anthropology of policy, critical development studies and gender and sexuality studies. Email: <satshan1@swarthmore.edu>