The Subversive Potential of Inconsistency

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JEANNIE Morefield's *Unsettling the World* begins with an absence.[1] Where is Edward Said in political theory? Said should need no introduction to political theorists. His theoretical insights on empire, justice, power, critique and oppression, among numerous other topics, are central to the concerns of political theory on any given understanding. Said's 1978 classic Orientalism inaugurated the field of postcolonial studies, and his Foucauldian insights pushed those within the discipline of political theory to see how and why they might contend with Foucault. Yet, Morefield argues, professional political theorists are yet to produce a thorough and critical engagement with Edward Said and his work. Morefield's project begins with this historical observation and moves on to do something about it. Over six chapters of exquisite writing, the text shows why Edward Said is a thinker with whom political theorists should be more regularly engaging.

Morefield argues that political theory's occlusion of Edward Said is emblematic of a deeper disciplinary compartmentalization: postwar North American political science segregated fields of inquiry into 'domestic', 'comparative', and 'international'.[2] As such, even though political theorists commit themselves to a critical interrogation of fundamentally large structural concepts such as race, class, gender and sexuality – systems of oppression that are honed transnationally – 'international politics' is ceded to International Relations scholars. Morefield suggests that this creates a double unseeing – 'first unseeing imperialism, then unseeing postcolonial theory and the study of imperialism outside political theory'.[3] This double unseeing stops pollical theorists from accessing the theoretical insights of scholars who have been marked as belonging to 'other' fields. Edward Said is but one of them. Morefield's book urges theorists to disturb this compartmentalization. What it means to do that, she says, is not simply to cite him, but genuinely and thoroughly to engage him.

What would such an engagement entail? First, Morefield says, it requires of theorists an willingness to 'unsettle'. Morefield fairly warns that political theory cannot uncritically offer itself as a new Saidian house. For if the

[1] A version of this commentary was first presented on 6 March 2023 in New College, Oxford at a roundtable on Jeanne Morefield, *Unsettling the World: Edward Said and Political Theory* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022).
[2] Morefield, *Unsettling the* World, xxxv.
[3] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, xl.

inclusion of Said is sincere, political theorists risk an unsettling not just of disciplinary boundaries (between political theory and international relations) but also of the content and methodology with which they are familiar. 'Said both uses theory and theorizes differently from the way most political theorists use theory and theorize', Morefield writes.[4] While political theorists err on the side of conceptual closure and parsimony, Said brings an 'intellectual nomadism' that others have rightly called 'theoretically unhoused, methodologically untidy and spatially fluid'.[5] A strength of Morefield's book is that she makes the case for why this kind of 'unsettling' is exactly what contemporary theory needs. Morefield welcomes the discomfort and the critical perspective Said invites. As a long tradition of theorists have shown, and as Morefield reiterates, theory, in both its evolution as a discipline and in many of the arguments its proponents have made, is entangled with imperialism, race and settler colonialism. As such there is much to learn from Edward Said because his manner of theorising and work 'illuminates the discursive complexities of imperial history'.[6]

How does he do this? Here, Morefield emphasises Said's insistence that one begin theorising from a place of connection rather than a desire for foreclosure. This does not simply mean requiring close knowledge of the particular contexts about which one writes; it also means scaling out to try and see sociological, political and ideological connections across perhaps quite different contexts. For those housed in the North American academy – the primary object of Morefield's focus – this means a structural analysis including interrogating who theorises, what is theorised, and what makes theorising possible.

Via meditations on exile, music, humanism, public intellectualism and liberal narcissism, *Unsettling the World* elucidates the depth and range of Said's theoretical insights and exalts their value for political theory. In a chapter on exile and loss, Morefield presents Said's unique approach to exile as a position which is generative for critique. For Said, exile was both a 'necessary habit of life' for the critic and a completely horrible, frequently intolerable way of living.[7] But Said's reflections on exile substantially differed from the romantic ideal of exile found in much Western literature by refusing to be preoccupied with the isolated individual thinker. Rather, Said insisted that, by comparison, contemporary exile was a mass phenomenon, gravely violent, and 'absolutely necessary for critical inquiry'.[8] Likewise, in a chapter on liberal narcissism Morefield utilises Said's theoretical insights to foreground the irrefutable historical and discursive connections between 'liberal global order' and 'imperialism'.[9] But simply asking 'is liberalism imperialist?' – an old question – isn't enough. In fact, Morefield shows that attempts to answer this question 'in principle' are counter-productive. Instead, Morefield suggests that one must

[4] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, xlvi.
[5] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, xlvii.
[6] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, xxv.
[7] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, 5.
[8] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, 6.
[9] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, 175.

once again turn, like Said, to the actual historical and contemporary connections between imperialism and liberalism.

Across the text, Morefield takes on numerous critics of Said who have been frustrated by his resistance to neatness. For example, in the chapter on exile and loss, Morefield addresses the critics who are uncomfortable with the fact that Said sometimes appears to make claims that stand in tension with one another. So, for example, at one point Said speaks of as exile as 'serving no humanism', while elsewhere he says that it is 'absolutely necessary for a critical subjectivity'.[10] Some even remark that his concerns for exilic refugees were disingenuous, his work depoliticising.[11] Morefield addresses this by pointing to Said's own response to his critics that 'inconsistencies are at the core of an exilic experience'.[12] 'Inconsistencies are, Said maintained, at the core of his work because they are the hallmark of the exilic experience, captured in the irritating rub between state violence and individual suffering, between mass migration and the longings of the lonely poetic soul, between political violence and political art', Morefield writes.[13] However, Morefield insists that these inconsistencies were not simply Said's intellectual gloss on a generalised exilic experience but rooted in his specific experiences of exile. For Morefield, Said's work on exile cannot be separated from his occupation as a Palestinian professor in a North American university who could rally resources to resist, in some ways, the violent erasure of exile. But this does not necessarily imply that Said's elite status, and the positions that status sometimes led him to articulate, undermines his support for Palestinian liberation. By drawing on several examples from Said's vast range of works, Morefield nuances this charge of 'elitism' by pushing the reader in directions that do not 'foreclose generative and genuinely complex' ways of reading Said.[14]

However, one wonders if political theory would benefit much more from a critical engagement with Said rather than a wholesale defence of his inconsistencies or lacunae. Given that Morefield's text inaugurates a detailed engagement with Said as a political theorist, perhaps many other sections of political theory such as Black Political Thought and Feminist Theory, can now be brought into conversation with a Saidian framework. For example, Said's argument that a desire to detail the complexities of the world be prioritised over an urge for foreclosure for the sake of a 'theoretical machine' seemed interestingly similar to Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's reimagination of the university space from a fugitive lens.[15] Said's *Treason of the Intellectuals* and Moten and Harney's *Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* are somewhat united in their interrogation of the North American liberal academia for disregarding the not so tenuous connections with imperial labour. Similarly, Said's theorization of exile as a site of critique reminds the reader of bell

[10] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, 7.
[11] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, 8.
[12] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, 7.
[13] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, 7.
[14] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, 156.
[15] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 16.

hooks's insights in theorising marginality as a site of resistance.[16] Said's exile as generative of critical faculty and hooks's urge to reconsider marginality also as a site of radical possibility – both assert that resistance is 'sustained by a remembrance of the past'. Morefield's urgent appraisal of Said also forces one to seek more from Said – for example, to ask, if Said prioritised gender as an important lens for understanding the material processes, institutions and ideology that shaped both resistance and oppression? Especially as so much painstaking academic work has now shown how the conditions of imperialism disproportionately disadvantage those who are left outside the neatness of gender division or those who do not predominantly uphold its values.

Insofar as we might seek theory beyond 'unsettling', the reader is perhaps left wondering: is there also a rehabilitative Said? Morefield's Said can unsettle several fundamental assumptions on which political theory is based. But what might it mean to think of a Said that focuses on 'rehabilitation', post critique? Might there be merit in showing how thinkers such as Said can also help us to rethink central concepts that political theorists often deploy: freedom, equality, justice among them. Perhaps the project of constructing a rehabilitative Said in political theory might also lead us to a closer engagement with his later texts, including *Freud and the Non-European* (2003) or *On Late Style* (2007).

Morefield's book is especially welcome at a time when the dilemmas of intellectualising from a position of exile cannot be ignored. It is difficult to see the subversive potential of exile when almost two million people are being displaced from Palestine, a fact that makes a conversation about theory's implication in present imperialism even more urgent. In a 1984 essay 'Reflections on Exile' Said recounts the time he met Faiz Ahmed Faiz, whom he calls 'the greatest of contemporary Urdu poets'. Faiz was also an exiled poet, forced to move out of his homeland by Zia Ul Haq's military regime in Pakistan and stationed in Beirut at the time.[17] Said's poignant description merits quotation in full:

> To see a poet in exile – as opposed to reading the poetry of exile – is to see exile's antinomies embodied and endured with a unique intensity. Several years ago I spent some time with Faiz Ahmed Faiz…naturally, his closest friends were Palestinian, but I sensed that although there was an affinity of spirit between them, nothing quite matched – language, poetic convention, or life history. Only once, when Eqbal Ahmed, a Pakistani friend and a fellow exile came to Beirut, did Faiz seem to overcome his sense of constant estrangement. The three of us sat in a dingy Beirut restaurant late one night, while Faiz recited poems. After a time, he and Eqbal stopped translating his verses for my benefit but as the night wore on, it did not matter. What I watched required no translation: it was an enactment of a homecoming expressed through defiance and

[16] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984).
[17] Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', *Granta* 13 (1984): https://granta.com/reflections-on-exile/

loss, as if to say, 'Zia, we are here'.

Said's account of this meeting reaffirms Morefield's insight that Said was comfortable with contradiction. At the same time, it shows another Said – one who is hesitant to engage in any kind of broad generalization even when reflecting on his own exilic intellectual experiences.

Counterpoint, Late Style, Polyphony

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Jeanne Morefield opens her new book, *Unsettling the World*, with poet Mahmoud Darwish's elegy for Edward Said.[1] The elegy, 'Tibaq' or 'Antithesis', is a good introduction to the motif which runs through Morefield's book and holds it together: Said's idea of 'contrapuntal' reading and writing, by which the dominant narratives of the imperial core and the perspectives of the colonised are analysed simultaneously. Darwish not only mirrors Said's use of counterpoint in his poem; he was himself an important influence on it. Said read and translated, for example, Darwish's Palestinian Declaration of Independence, a document which communicates well the kind of composite and exilic Palestinian identity advanced by the PLO during that period.[2]

Edward Said takes the notion of contrapuntal analysis from music—from his life as a pianist—where counterpoint refers to the relationship between two or more melodic lines, simultaneously independent and interdependent: they create a higher harmonic whole, but crucially there is also an element of friction, the possibility of notes being set against one another. Counterpoint puts us in the realm, then, of what the Soviet literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin called 'polyphony', which he associated primarily with Dostoevsky's novels: "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses"[3] which, in dialogue, created a truth that could not be contained by any one consciousness. Said suggests, however, that this truth might be contained within the contrapuntal consciousness of the exile.[4] Where Bakhtin thinks that Dostoevsky *creates* this kind of polyphony, Said uses counterpoint in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) as a practice of criticism, as a means of exploring the imperial connections contained—but half-buried—within a novel like *Mansfield Park*.[5]

How useful is counterpoint for political theorists? Said and Morefield

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[2] Karma Nabulsi provides an excellent Rousseauian reading of the text in her 'Being Palestinian', *Government and Opposition* 38, no. 5 (2003): 479-496.
[3] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6-7.
[4] We might think too here about W. E. B. Du Bois's conception of double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).
[5] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

make a compelling case for it. My own attraction to it and reservations about it are inseparable. Counterpoint combines lots of different kinds of relations in one: it simultaneously suggests a shared whole—a shared history—while also assuming co-constitutive differentiation, identity-formation by opposition, one melody defining itself in opposition to the other. Describing the contrapuntal connections between Palestinian and Israeli identity, Morefield writes:

> …for Said, Palestinian and Israeli identities have co-evolved through the unfolding colonialist logic of the mandate period, the massive immigration of displaced Holocaust survivors from Europe, the Palestinian exodus of 1948, the 1967 war, the first Intifada, the rise of Hamas, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the ongoing land dispossession, and the brutal geographic incising and settler colonial dispossession that continues to this day.[6]

Of course, violence has escalated even further since the most recent Netanyahu cabinet was formed in December of 2022—the most far-right government in Israeli history, which has described West Bank settlement expansion as its top priority.[7] Even parts of the IDF are horrified by the scale of the violence; a senior IDF general described the march on Hawara as a "pogrom"; the Finance Minister, meanwhile, a Religious Zionist, has said that the village should be "wiped out" by the Israeli state.[8] At the same time, a contrapuntal approach is supposed to evoke a kind of worldly humanism, emphasising cosmopolitan connections between human cultures and their shared inheritances.

Holding together seemingly impossible tensions is in some sense the point of a contrapuntal analysis. But are there not political limits to such an approach? Consider, for example, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra,[9] founded by Said and the Argentine-Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim in 1999, which brought together young Arab and Israeli musicians into one orchestra. As Timothy Brennan documents in his recent biography of Said, this project was hugely important to Edward and Mariam Said, with Mariam keeping the torch alive after Edward died. It was created, however, before the call for BDS; the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel has since criticised the orchestra for normalising relations with Israel. Most of Said's other family members have also been critical of it. This dispute perhaps gets at two (incompatible?) versions of counterpoint: one which

[6] Morefield, *Unsettling the World*, 47.

[7] For context: this commentary was first presented on 6 March 2023.

[8] Al Jazeera and News Agencies, 'Palestine's Huwara should be wiped out: Top Israeli minister', 1 March 2023: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/1/israel-arrests-settlers-after-anti-palestinian-pogrom

[9] The orchestra was named after Goethe's poetry collection inspired by Hafez, the *West-östlicher Divan* (1819).

emphasises a harmonious vision of cooperation—Mariam Said has invoked counterpoint to defend the orchestra's philosophy—and another which reveals discordant, atonal opposition.

Said's final book *On Late Style,* compiled posthumously by Michael Wood and published in 2006, argued that 'lateness', like exile, can also give rise to a plurality of vision, a contrapuntal awareness of simultaneous dimensions and a home which is irrevocably lost. In these essays we see Said grapple with Adorno most seriously—in an interview he joked that he was the "only true follower" of Adorno.[10] On Adorno's reading, as Beethoven approached death his work proclaimed, in Rose Subotnik's words, that 'no synthesis is conceivable.'[11] Instead, there are only the 'remains of a synthesis, the vestige of an individual human subject sorely aware of the wholeness, and consequently the survival, that has eluded it forever.'[12] In Said's words:

> For Adorno…[Beethoven's last works] constitute an event in the history of modern culture: a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it. His late works constitute a form of exile … [They] remain unreconciled, uncoopted by a higher synthesis … their irresolution and unsynthesised fragmentariness are constitutive, neither ornamental nor symbolic of something else. [They] are in fact about 'lost totality', and are therefore catastrophic.[13]

Of course, Said is here writing as much about Adorno (and himself) as about Beethoven: remorselessly alienated and exiled; his thought resistant to any kind of reconciliation; his work—and here Said is explicitly talking about Adorno—'like a contrapuntal voice intertwined with fascism, bourgeois mass society, and communism, inexplicable without them, always critical and ironic about them.'[14]

How might we compare the exilic writing of Adorno and the Frankfurt School with Said's? Morefield writes that Said 'parts company with Adorno' over the 'exilic intellectual's "special duty" to actively *resist* this world both intellectually and politically.'[15] Said himself certainly did worry that Adorno injects Marxism with 'a vaccine so powerful as to dissolve its agitational force

[10] Said takes the phrase 'late style' from Theodor Adorno, 'Late Style in Beethoven' [1937] in Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 564-567.
[11] Rose Rosengard Subotnik, 'Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven's Late Style: Early Symptom of a Fatal Condition', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 29, no. 2 (1976): 242-275, at p. 270.
[12] Subotnik, 'Adorno's Diagnosis'.
[13] Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 4-8.
[14] Said, *On Late Style*, 14.
[15] Morefield, *Unsettling the Word*, 146.

almost completely.'[16] But Said also writes that unlike many of his counterparts, Adorno never pretended to an apolitical neutrality. And—dare I say it—Said at times adopted an apolitical stance towards the university. In fact, Said called campus security to have anti-Vietnam student protestors ejected when they disrupted his class around the same time that Adorno called the police on his own student protestors. In 2000, meanwhile, Said claimed that 'in 30 years of teaching, I've never taught a course on the Middle East. I don't believe in politicizing the classroom.' How should we understand what Said means here, especially in relation to his political theory?

Outside the classroom, Said was famous as a public intellectual and a Palestinian activist. But he also came from a left tradition—influenced strongly, for example, by post-Lukácsian writers —and I wonder if that tradition's hostility to totality also influenced Said. His work, as *Unsettling the World* makes clear, resists the overly neat closures of analytic political theory. Perhaps this comes from his involvement in the messiness of real politics; perhaps it comes partly from the practice of literary criticism itself. But perhaps it can also be situated within a broader tradition of left-wing melancholia, intellectual exile, and catastrophe.

[16] Said, *On Late Style*, 8.

Author's Response

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I would like to begin by thanking Simple Rajrah and Samuel Holcroft for their extraordinarily thoughtful responses to *Unsettling the World*. It is a rare treat to have a print conversation with people who have taken the time to engage so closely and carefully with your work. It is also equally rare to find that you are largely in agreement with their criticisms. Both Rajrah and Holcroft quite rightly observe that my book is extraordinarily light on criticism of Said's work (public and scholarly) and his activism. In Rajrah's words, 'one wonders if political theory would benefit much more from a critical engagement with Said rather than a wholesale defense of his inconsistencies or lacunae'. Indeed, Rajrah is being too generous here. I am the first to admit that there is an almost fan–girl like quality to the book at times.

To this I can only respond: *Unsettling the World* is an over–correction, written in an extended fit of pique at political theory's glaring lack of interest in a man whose work shaped the very intellectual environment in which we theorize. More crucially, my uncritical orientation toward Said in the book is also overdetermined by my growing conviction that the field's refusal to see Said mirrors the field's refusal to see imperialism in itself, and that this refusal has political consequences. In other words, I am increasingly convinced, it isn't enough to simply engage the co–constituting relationship between imperialism and political theory in the textual / political / material entanglements of the past. Instead, like Said, we need to be constantly interrogating the indwelling traces of imperial ordering, imperial culture, imperial violence, and imperial geography in the structuring terminology and conceptual vocabulary that is the bread and butter of political theory today. In the book, I channelled Said's irrepressible will to unsettle everything–everywhere–all–the–time–all–at–once into a vexed attack on mainstream political theory for not interrogating these traces in everything we do everywhere–all–the–time–all–at–once.

Hence, the book overcorrects by leaning so hard on the disruptive utility of Said's criticisms that it neglects criticism of Said. Indeed, as I re–read the book now, I am a little amazed (and slightly embarrassed) by my willingness to turn even the most maddening of Said's vices – e.g. his refusal to resolve *anything* – into virtues.

All of this means I am deeply sympathetic to nearly all of Rajrah's and Holcroft's criticisms. For instance, I too wonder, with Rajrah, what would have happened if Said had 'prioritised gender as an important lens for

understanding the material processes, institutions and ideology that shaped both resistance and oppression'. What, for instance, would Said's account of the 'imaginative geography' of Orientalism have looked like had he taken the time to develop the obviously gendered notions of masculinity, sexuality, veiling, and secrecy that structure the cultural formations and species of power–knowledge he describes? What imaginaries for resistance might be revealed through these engagements? Or, what would we find if we took more seriously Holcroft's critique of Said's overly rosy attitude toward the university as a location free from precisely the kinds of power knowledge he spent his career excavating? What forms of politics might he have unintentionally offloaded to an ideal space in the process of interrogating non–ideal politics? Is there an irredeemable naiveté at work in Said's commitment to the university in our neoliberal era?

At the same time, I want to push back gently against two related criticisms that Rajrah and Holcroft make about Said's project in general and in the context of my book. These observations both circle around a version of the same question: when is Said's unsettled criticism simply ineffective, or worse, defeatist? For Rajrah, this question is one of theoretical urgency. At what point, she asks, do we query the benefits of a relentlessly unsettling, exilic project and instead start exploring the 'rehabilitation' qualities of 'post critique'? 'Might there be merit', she argues, 'in showing how thinkers such as Said can also help us to rethink central concepts that political theorists often deploy: freedom, equality, justice among them'?

My irritatingly Saidian response to this is yes. And no. Said simply did not believe in 'post critique' but this did not mean that he was against – or that his work can't be used in the service of – 'rethinking' key concepts in political theory. But that 'rethinking' can never be 'rethought'. A Saidian disposition, I suggest, demands that theory be wary of the fixity that 'rehabilitation' projects engender. In other words, for Said, 'rethinking' concepts like 'freedom, equality, and justice' from an exilic perspective means reading them 'not simply as they are, but as they have come to be that way', a project that can never be totally 'rehabilitative' in the context of a world striated with imperial power knowledge.[1] For instance, he once argued, any search for what might constitute a 'just peace' in Palestine–Israel that attempts to move beyond critique inevitably find itself 'at the starting point, looking for a solution now, even as that 'now' itself bears all the marks of our historical diminishment and human suffering'.[2] Because 'freedom, equality, and justice' – and 'peace' – are worldly concepts, embedded in history and power, they cannot be read otherwise. A Saidian inclined theorist, I thus argue in the book, is constantly on their guard against re–concretising and re–essentialising concepts. This doesn't mean that we give up hope for the thinking the world otherwise. It does mean, however, that the critical process of worldly reassessment follows the horizon of possibility into the future.

Holcroft asks a similar question about Said, but his concerns are political rather than theoretical. Yes, he argues, 'holding impossible tensions together'

[1] Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 60.
[2] Edward Said, 'A Method for Thinking About a Just Peace', in Pierre Allan and Alexis Keller (eds.), *What Is a Just Peace?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 190.

is all well and good but, is there 'a point at which, politically, this becomes inadvisable'. The example he provides is of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (started by Said and Daniel Barenboim) which has become the subject of BDS criticism. My response to this critique is not unlike my response above: yes. And no. Obviously, there are times when Said's absolute commitment to the phrase, 'never solidarity before criticism' can undermine political coalitions in the moment.[3] At the same time, as Said's long history of involvement with the PLO in the 1970's and 80's attests, 'never solidarity before criticism' does not mean *never* solidarity, nor does it mean that we don't take sides. But, he insisted, even in the midst of political battle, when 'one is unmistakably on one side against another, there should be criticism'. There must, Said continued, 'be critical consciousness if there are to be issues, problems, values, even lives to be fought for'.[4] Nothing exemplifies this commitment to criticism better than Said's prescient rejection of the Oslo Accords which he quite rightly predicted would lead to an increasingly restrictive, Byzantine forms of apartheid. His refusal, in the face of massive political pressure, to set aside his interpretation of the contrapuntal history that shaped the political geography of Palestine–Israel, is testament to the power and necessity of 'inadvisable' criticism before solidarity.

Importantly, for Said, critical exilic consciousness looked different in the context of those broad, Third Worldist goals embraced by the PLO in the 1970's and 80's than it did in the context of the narrow, accommodationist politics of the PLO in the 1990's. One assumes that it would look still different today, in the stark light of Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza and the internal displacement, as Rajrah points out, of two million people. However different these contexts, and regardless of whether the urgency of today diminishes the 'subversive potential' of exilic criticism, for Said, that criticism provided the contrapuntal thread that ties the fight for Palestine together with the global, anti–imperial struggle and with the history of imperialism itself.

Perennially inhabiting a critical disposition that never stops to rest can be utterly exhausting and sometimes deeply irritating for the people around you. One gets the sense that people sometimes felt this about Said and that he sometimes felt it about himself. The exilic intellectual, he once argued, 'tends to be happy with the idea of unhappiness, so that dissatisfaction bordering on dyspepsia, a kind of curmudgeonly disagreeableness, can become not only a style of thought, but also a new, if temporary, habitation'.[5] He called this type of intellectual a 'ranting Thersites', but I think a 'ranting Casandra' is an equally appropriate name for an equally irritating disposition. At the end of the day, Said himself was often clearly exhausted by the work it took to inhabit this disposition – to live as an unsettled, exilic critic – and this is an exhaustion both Rajrah and Holcroft rightly associate with those moments in *Late Style* when he expressed a poignant, almost melancholic, longing for stillness. And yet, I want to insist, even in that late moment, in the midst of melancholy, Said was still reminding us that the 'precarious exilic realm' can be neither a

[3] Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, 32.
[4] Edward Said, 'Secular Criticism' in *The World, The Text, and The Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).
[5] Said, *Representation of the Intellectual*, 53.

place of retreat nor a place where we 'search for solutions'. Instead, he ends the last passage of one of his last books, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism,* by affirming that only within this realm, can we 'truly grasp the difficulty of what cannot be grasped and then go forth to try anyway'.[6]

I realize full well the irony of ending this exchange by doubling down on precisely the thing I began by admitting: I am an uncritical champion of Said the critic. Rajrah and Holcroft are right to observe this, and I truly look forward to reading more of their insightful (and no doubt, more balanced work) on Said in the future. And yet, I also just want to point out that the three of us *are* having an exchange about Said and we are doing so in the context of talking about political theory at Oxford. This wouldn't have been possible that long ago. I'm not convinced it took such a vociferous over–correction on my part – sometimes uttered in the voice of a ranting Thersites, more often in the urgent trill of a Cassandra – to make that conversation possible. But I like to think it helped to kick a Said–shaped hole in the door.

[6] Edward W. Said, 'The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals', in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 144.