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Dear Professor Al-Barghouti,

I have the pleasure to inform you that your article "**Edward Said and Freud: The Question of Identity and Sub-Consciousness**" submitted for publication in the volume tentatively titled: *Arab Palimpsest: Articulations of Identity, Human Rights and Democracy* has been selected by the committee of five professors at Villanova University.

I will be in touch to give you updates about the status of the book. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to include your excellent work.

Kind regards,

*Silvia Nagy-Zekmi*

Dr. Silvia Nagy-Zekmi  
Director of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies

## Edward Said and Freud: The Question of Identity and Sub-Consciousness

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### Abstract

This paper aims at exploring Edward Said's motives in choosing Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* as a (pre)-text to his lecture on *Freud and the Non-Europeans* and his memoir *Out of Place*. In addition, the paper will contrapuntally address the question of alterity and the undermining of the notion of "pure identity." In a postcolonial sense, my paper will uncover the "overlapping identities," if any, between Freud and Said in an attempt to resolve the paradox of "identity," be it national, religious, or ethnic in the "Middle Eastern" (con)-text. The displacement of Said's family and people, when he was still a young man, left powerful impacts on his personality. That influenced him in realizing the evils of colonial systems through, in part, remarking the life and works of Franz Fanon, and participating in establishing the so-called post colonial approaches in the transformation of the understanding of identity, exile and culture. Said's personality developed from (orientalism) into a more universal humane identity, which made Tom Mitchell compare his ideas with the works of Goya.

### Introduction

Regardless of the controversy triggered by the Freud Museum director's decision to revoke Edward Said's invitation to speak at the museum's headquarters in Vienna (Said, *Power, Politics and Culture* 447), the symbolism inherent in the lecture's relocation to London asserts that concepts such as "nomadism," "homeland," and "power" are still key elements to decode in fathoming the complexities of European identity. As I pointed out in an earlier article, Said's own overlapping identities—and the everlasting disagreement between "Edward" and "Said" as an intimate mode of animosity (Said, *Out of Place* 25)—have been the continuous trigger in Said's text, which aspires to detach itself from "Western discourse" both in identity and alterity (Barghouthi 23).

My concern in this paper is focused on the motives that led Said to tackle Freud. It stresses the fact that Said's obsession with "nomadism" was present not only while advocating and debating the fate of a traveling theory, but has been strongly present in his choices and treatment of ambiguous figures such as Freud. This tendency, however, never ceased to transcend ambiguity nor to delve through other references to re-construct a hybrid, secular identity that serves as a threshold to humanizing this world.

### Freud and the "Exile Condition"

Following Said's travels between cities and countries, cultures and theories unearths what he once called "immaturity/imperfection and dissatisfaction," (Said, *Reflections* 383) or what Freud himself coined as the uncanny result of an attempt to live on the periphery (Barakan 25).

In Said's memoir, *Out of Place*, we realize that his reading of Freud during his youth was a rebellious act to escape the "family-establishment"<sup>1</sup> and has undoubtedly colored the trajectory of his own nomadic and exilic life.

"Nomadism" has been an attribute, in the philosophical sense, of Said's travels, or it has been rather the "book of travels" towards *being-in-balance*. Therefore, Said's odyssey is an act intended to transcend the "beginnings" that are intertwined with "others." Though this act seems to be an act of detachment, it actually represents an answer to the question of how to maintain the richness and merits of multiplicity without being tarnished by the vices of a split personality or schizophrenia. As Said notes, it is necessary to view exile and nomadism "not as a fate for Freud or Judaism exclusively. It is possible for that (condition) to be felt in the exilic consciousness, in the nomad, the undetermined, and the cosmopolitan human who is simultaneously among his communal group and out of it throughout our time that is full of human displacement, big waves of refugees, exiles, transferred, and immigrants." (Said, *Freud* 75)

Said's understanding of "exilic consciousness" also establishes the necessity of contrapuntal reading to unlocking the richness and merits of such multiplicity. This type of reading produces a culturally hybrid and dynamic identity—an identity-on-the-move, rather—that at once explains and represents Said's humanism. The merits of hybrid identity have been at the center of Said's earliest and most recurring ideas. Ultimately, it is through a discursive analysis of this hybrid, exilic identity that Said uncovers what Orientalism—the making of a centralized European identity that manifested its mere existence and dominance by intertwining knowledge and power—has done. This discourse portrayed the identity of the "Other," who is located on the periphery as subaltern and reactionary, as one identity that will never claim any meaningful status until it succumbs to the Western Self.

Many scholars, like Homi Bhabha, tried to detach themselves from the trap of belonging to the western interpretation of identity through being part of its academia. Homi Bhabha suggests freeing one's self from Western hegemony by creating a positive liminality that secures a fair presentation and representation of the non-Western Other within Western modernity in spite of all the misrepresentations of this Other by the Western-constructed identities for Orientals, Muslims, Arabs, Indians and so forth (Bhabha 28-29). On the contrary to Homi Bhabha, however, Said searches for a "western other" within western culture through the vehicle of the contrapuntal reading he suggested in *Culture and Imperialism*.

At this point, we must realize that we are before a crucial question regarding representing the "Other" within Western culture: whether Western culture presents and represents only the marginalized and de-civilized other like the Muslim or the Indian? Or is it the agency of Foucauldian power that practices displacement and exclusion to knock the gates of Western culture itself? Is it true that the stability of Western identity only stems from excluding the non-

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<sup>1</sup> See "Edward Said: A Conversation with Subhi Hadidi," *Al-Karmel* 78 (2004): 9. Note also Said's recollection of his relationship with one of his Jewish classmates, David Ezra (while enrolled at the St. George School in Jerusalem), especially in regard to the impact of war and the Arab Zionist conflict on this relation. (See Said, *Out of Place* 150)

European—the Oriental—from the discourse of modernity, or is it the discourse technique of the “completed,” hence, dead, identity?

### **The Jewish Question: Said, Freud, and the German Factor**

In this paper, I will not delve into Said’s treatment of Frantz Fanon in the context of using violence to bring the struggle between the colonizer and the colonized to its end—the defeat of the colonizer. However, it will still be of a great benefit to read Said’s use of Fanon’s urge to find answers within the culture and the nature of the colonizer *himself*. The focal point of my paper is that in spite of the demonization of its Other, the Western centralized identities cannot stand and cannot practice its claimed supremacy without the doomed oriental Other. The decisive question here will be, how did western identities treat “local others” like the Jewish identity within the European context?

The persistence of the “Jewish Question,” as Marx and Said himself demonstrate, is a clear example of the everlasting European attempt to reconcile the components of its identity. This might be Said’s concern when he approached Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* to fathom the fate of the world in post-Freudian times, and perhaps to seek Freud’s aid to rethink the “Jewish Question” and to answer difficult contemporary questions regarding identity, supremacy, and colonialism.

In spite of the fact that Said’s reading of Freud seems to be an attempt to silence the hostility of hybrid and compound identities, it might be clearly understood as a trial to breakdown the frenzied tendencies towards centralization within Western culture. It might not be untrue, as well, to see this as another approach to resolve the question of Jewish identity within the post-Freud era witnessed and criticized by Said. Therefore, Said’s unearthing of the role of the Jewish Other in Western culture, and positioning Freud as a non-European and more as a non-Jew may provide a key answer to deconstruct western exclusivity towards Jewish and other Others.<sup>2</sup> At this point, one should ask what good Said’s reading of Freud is in such a manner. The answer is threefold:

*First:* The obsession of Freud, throughout *Moses and Monotheism*, is the centrality of the symbolic “father-killing” to Jewish identity. It might not be a super-imposed reading of this obsession as a manifestation of Jewish culture and its twin-ship with Western culture. It suggests that Freud, although he denies Moses’ Jewishness and his motto of the estrangement of Monotheism within the Egyptian context, should keep his own cultural identity. Said considers this as a mode of audacity that was aimed at underlining Freud’s secularism or rather laicizing the conventional “sacred” and sanctifying the conventional “secular”(Said, *Freud* 90).

*Second:* Said’s concern of giving his lecture the title of “Freud and the Non-European” could be understood as a demonstration of the fact that Jewish identity was open to its exterior—the Egyptian-ness of Moses—that is, the non-European identity. Once again, this could be understood as a preference by Said to Europeanize Freud’s identity in the context of its struggle with its outwardly exterior in our times—that is, the European.

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<sup>2</sup> See the manner in which Hannah Arendt viewed the Jew as “ the minority number one par excellence”. *Men in Dark Times*. London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968.

*Third:* The two mentioned obsessions came together to form Said's most pressing concern of the transcendental and exclusive tendencies of the European identity that excludes every non-European. The Jewish case is quite a paradox if one is to take Freud as a case to demonstrate the conflicted tendency to be Europeanized and/or live the "secondary identity of the ghetto" at once. This complexity is climaxed given Freud's fate in the post Nazi era that prevented any "reasonable" formation of an individual within his community at once. This might be a yearning for a unique cosmopolitan identity that holds both localism and universalism with which both Freud and Said could identify.

The ambiguity of Moses' identity created by Freud is a representation of the ambiguity of the Jewish identity itself, and it opens the door for Jews to be Europeanized. However, the claims of a "pure" European/Western identity leave no choice for the Jews to remain Jews, that is to belong to a broader and transcendental identity—a universal identity. Consequently, Said's "exile condition" that made him in a permanent state of exile *Out of Place* as a result of the "final solution of the Jewish Question" at the hands of the Nazis made the choice by the Jews of belonging to universal identity close to impossible. The impossibility of such an identity was furthered by the occupation of Palestine by the Zionist movement, and by the mere fact that Palestinians became the victims of the victims of Nazism.

The relationship that was asserted by Tom Mitchell between Said's work and Goya, as described by Said himself while dealing with the artist and his subject (Mitchell 47), reveals the psychological attributes in Said who tried to free himself from a special type of "unhappy consciousness" while dealing with Freud's "uncanny complex" when dealing with general human history.<sup>3</sup> However, Said's awareness of his own "uncanniness" may explain his nomadism and his choices of hybrid characters like himself. He travels through the world and its cultures to find solutions for this alienation. He travels to create a wider and less hostile world free of exclusive identities and chauvinistic cultures. He travels to form and reform the human condition he yearns for.

In a different vein, we find some echoes of this tendency in Said's treatment of another German Jew who lived the "exile condition" in a non-European terrain—Turkey. In Auerbach's case, Turkey represented "the Oriental Question" and lent him the ability to historicize the western identity in the absence of the western library (Said, *Reflections* 304). This, no doubt, contributed to a more tolerant understanding of a non-western identity, a human identity of the west if you wish, far away from the claimed supremacy dictated by the "Western library."

Shedding further light on Said's choice of Freud and his work on *Moses and Monotheism* are the latter's conversations and relationship with Daniel Barenboim—the European Jewish musician of Argentinean origins (see Barenboim and Said). This case brings to mind Jürgen Habermas' assertion of the impurity of the European identity and the contribution of Jews and Kabala in forming and reforming that culture (Habermas 92-94). Habermas' intention as a German was somehow apologetic. However, and with all the agreement between Said and

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<sup>3</sup> See the conflict between "happiness" as a motive to proceed in history and "civilization" as an inhibitor to it (Freud, 211).

Habermas, Said as a Palestinian; did not have to be apologetic in regard to the Jews who became enslaved by the Zionist movement to victimize their Oriental others—the Palestinians.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, one should ask—referring to Hannah Arendt’s notion about the “non-Jewishness of the Jew” used as a technique of camouflage by “un-wanted Jews” (Habermas 77)—if Freud was able through *Moses and Monotheism* to humanize the European Other and to humanize his fellow Jews by urging them to open up towards their European Other, was Said—the verbose Palestinian—able through *Freud and the Non-Europeans* to free the Jew from the burden of his past?

Said’s treatment of Freud and his work, though seemingly European in its approach, reformulated the question in a more complicated manner: how would one humanize a victim that became an oppressor? Is this not the essence of the mother of all questions of our time? Is it not the concern of maintaining hybridity without being schizophrenic? Is it not the question of sustaining your peaceful human nature amidst terror and genocides? Was it not Said trying to free Freud from being Israelized, in the modern sense, by reiterating Freud’s conclusions regarding the fact that the founder of Judaism was not Jewish, and that Judaism sprang from the heart of Egyptian *Monotheism*? Is official Israeli culture today trying to undo Freud and to strip his findings and recommendations from any indication that points towards the necessity of having a non-exclusive Jewish identity?<sup>4</sup> However, it is quite a relief to come to a realization that we are before a certain kind of a unique scene in which Said tries to purify and redeem Freud from the Israeli assassins of his mode of Jewishness. Only through such a liberating process was Said able to appease his soul regarding the question of hybridity and paradox in one’s identity. He opened the door in the face of each and every attempt of purifying this identity from any tendency towards chauvinism and exclusivity. The portico to this process for Said was a continuous process of humanizing identity until exhaustion as once recommended by the medieval priest that is often quoted by Said while talking about “universal identity” (Said, *Reflections* 185).

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