

The Inseparability of Postcolonial Studies from Palestine: Reflections on Edward Said

Md. Mahmudul Hasan¹
International Islamic University Malaysia

Abstract

The plight of Palestinians in Palestine and in the diaspora is a result of Israeli settler colonialism. Israel's atrocious behaviour to colonised Palestinians is manifested through a myriad of crimes such as blockading occupied territories, demolishing homes, educational institutions, hospitals, and places of worship, restricting their movements, cutting power and communication, killing rampages, massacres to the extent of genocide, and other gruesome violations of human rights – all designed to force Palestinians off their lands and to eventually occupy them. Among academic disciplines, postcolonialism is most relevant to the discourse of Israel and Palestine and most promising to the cause of justice and the promotion of human rights in the region. In this essay, I argue that, owing to Edward Said's pioneering role in the development of postcolonial studies, the origin of this intellectual and literary movement is traced back to Palestinian resistance to Israeli colonisation. Therefore, practitioners of this decolonial discourse are in principle obligated to address the issue of Palestinian liberation from Israeli colonial oppression. Later in this essay, I also offer a cursory glance at some remarks of Salman Rushdie on the Israel-Palestine issue and discuss a perceived need for decolonising postcolonial studies.

Keywords

Palestine and postcolonial studies, Orientalism and Palestine, Edward Said, 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Salman Rushdie, decolonising postcolonialism

Introduction

Postcolonial theory documents a broad spectrum of anticolonial thought and resistance movements, and addresses a wide range of human experiences and

¹Md. Mahmudul Hasan is the Editor-in-Chief of *Asiatic* and Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at International Islamic University Malaysia. He completed a PhD in comparative/global literature at Portsmouth (UK) and was a postdoctoral researcher at Heidelberg (Germany). His research has been published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Brill, Georgia Southern University, IIIT, IIUM, Orient BlackSwan, Routledge, SAGE, Wiley-Blackwell, and other presses. Email: mmhasan@iium.edu.my

perceptions especially those of the colonised. It encompasses a wide variety of academic disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, economics, education, gender studies, geography, history, linguistics, literature, philology, philosophy, politics, and public health. Even though postcolonial theory has a profound influence on various disciplines, it began within literary circles or with an emphasis on literature; it was initiated with evaluating literary works through the prism of decolonial thinking and praxis. This is evident by the fact that the triumvirate of postcolonial theory or the so-called ‘holy trinity’ of postcolonialism – Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha – are all literary scholars.

Although it is believed that some earlier writers in many ways had anticipated postcolonial theory, the late Palestinian scholar-activist Edward Said is often credited for being instrumental in deconstructing colonial discourse and in advancing and influencing postcolonialism. His 1978 book *Orientalism* “laid the foundation for postcolonial thought” and proposed a “critical theory to understand the formerly colonized’s loss of power, culture, and identity that comes with the dominance of Euro-Western thought and practice” (Chilisa and Phatshwane 226). Said’s book transformed postcolonial thought and heralded the development of postcolonial theory. It created positive ripples in the literary world, challenged the cultural hegemony of the coloniser, and sought to dismantle the colonial structure of knowledge. Later postcolonial studies found confirmation and further theoretical support in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), authored by another triumvirate of postcolonial criticism – Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin.

There is a general consensus among scholars of postcolonialism² that, despite the contributions of a diverse group of theorists to the development of this critical theoretical approach, those of Edward Said have remained unsurpassed. As Philip Holden argues:

The conceptual framework of Said’s *Orientalism* has been extensively applied in colonial discourse analysis to reveal the binary oppositions which structure the life world of the colonizer. Said’s work, however, is perhaps most suggestive in its illumination of subject formation in colonial modernity in its broadest sense. (205)

The pre-eminence of Said’s *Orientalism* in postcolonial theory is clearly established, as the foundational book is considered the most important reference to date on, and an elegantly reasoned exemplar of, postcolonialism. Accordingly, in his “Foreword” to Andrew Teverson’s and Sara Upstone’s edited volume

²In this essay, I have used the terms postcolonialism and postcolonial theory/studies interchangeably. Both provoke activism and resistance against colonial domination of the past and the present.

Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture (2011), the geographer and spatial theorist Edward Soja states that “the work of Edward Said” is “[c]learly at the inspirational source ... of postcolonial studies” (ix). The late New York University professor, historian, and public intellectual, Tony Judt concurs and acknowledges the pioneering contribution of Said’s *Orientalism* to the study of colonialism, colonial legacies, and postcolonialism. Judt claims:

When Edward Said died in September 2003, after a decade-long battle against leukemia, he was probably the best-known intellectual in the world. [His] *Orientalism* ... has spawned an academic subdiscipline in its own right.... Even if its author had done nothing else, confining himself to teaching at Columbia University in New York—where he was employed from 1963 until his death—he would still have been one of the most influential scholars of the late twentieth century. (163)

While the depth of *Orientalism*’s impact on, and the magnitude of its success in, the initiation and direction of postcolonialism are rightly discussed and celebrated, the genesis of Said’s *magnum opus* is not adequately explained, emphasised, or recorded. Based on this premise, in what follows, I seek to establish that the conception of the book *Orientalism* was integrally linked with the Palestine question.

***Orientalism* and Said’s experiences as a Palestinian**

The author of *Orientalism* was born to Palestinian Anglican parents in the neighbourhood of Talbiyah in West Jerusalem in 1935. But he lived most of his life in the United States in exile, as the title of his memoir *Out of Place* (1999) indicates. Moreover, in his book *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century*, Tony Judt titles his chapter on the Palestinian-American intellectual “Edward Said: The Rootless Cosmopolitan” (163) which also points to Said’s peripatetic life outside of his home in Palestine. In a BBC 2 interview broadcast on 23 June 1988, Said describes his out-of-place-ness in the following words:

Right from the moment I arrived in the West in the early Fifties until the present, there has always been a sense in which, as an Arab, and obviously as a Palestinian, you feel in some way criminalized or delinquent. So powerful is the definition of you as somebody who is outside the pale, whose sole purpose in life is to kill Jews. (Said, “The voice of a Palestinian in exile” 40)

[Jews from around the world] are entitled to go to Israel or Palestine as I call it, become Israeli citizens at any time they wish. I was born there, my father was born there, my grandfather, great-grandfather... and I can’t

return. I don't have the same right. (Said, "The voice of a Palestinian in exile" 41)

Even though Said received Western education from an early age and was educated and taught at some of the most prestigious universities in the US, his background as an Arab and Palestinian made him feel a stranger to himself and to the host environment. He became a double victim: of exile and of anti-Arab cultural caricatures and stereotypes. He lived in cultural isolation and detachment, which left a psychological scar in him.

When the state of Israel was established in the land of Palestinians, Said, his parents (Wadie Said and Hilda Said), and other family members became permanently uprooted from home and from the past. Edward Said received his early education in Cairo. In 1947 when he turned twelve, the Saids moved back to Jerusalem and he

was enrolled in St George's School [his father's alma mater] in Jerusalem for a portion of the year [1947]. Here he enjoyed a fleeting sense of belonging because almost every student in this school was either a member of, or known to his extended family. (Sheble 261)

Edward Said and his family members moved back to Egypt in December 1947, and the time of his kith and kin left behind in Jerusalem did not last long because "every member of his extended family had been driven out of the city" in 1948 when Israel was established through an extensive process of ethnic cleansing or the *nakba* (catastrophe of expulsion); and "it would be forty-five years before [Edward Said] would set foot in Jerusalem again" in 1992 (Bayoumi and Rubin xix). Said conveys his impression of the 1992 visit to Jerusalem in the following way:

It is still hard for me to accept the fact that the very quarters of the city in which I was born, lived, and felt at home were taken over by Polish, German, and American immigrants who conquered the city and have made it the unique symbol of their sovereignty, with no place for Palestinian life.... Western Jerusalem has now become entirely Jewish, its former inhabitants expelled for all time by mid-1948. (*Out of Place*, 109)

After studying at Cairo's Victoria College, Said went to the United States for further education in 1951 and lived the rest of his life there. Like other displaced Palestinians, he had a longing for a return home to Jerusalem and clung to a hope of realising it. But during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Israel occupied more Arab lands, killed and displaced more Arabs, "erected a staging ground for aggression directed against Arab demands for liberty," and sought to "to break the [Palestinian] revolutionary alliance" (Ginat and Noema 888). In the words of Edward Said:

The really dramatic change was in 1967 ... when the entire map of the Arab world changed. For the first time Israel, which had been confined largely to the small boundaries of the state, had overflowed into Jordan taking the West Bank, and also taking Gaza, the Sinai and the Golan Heights. ("The voice of a Palestinian in exile" 43)

Thus, Israel occupied "the remainder of Palestine" and expelled "hundreds of thousands more Palestinians" (Massad 469). It shattered Said's dream of returning to his roots for good. As Said expresses a viscerally painful experience in *Out of Place*: "I was no longer the same person after 1967; the shock of that war drove me back to where it had all started, the struggle over Palestine" (293). In "The voice of a Palestinian in exile," Said says:

The whole idea of being an Arab and then beginning to discover what that meant, being a Palestinian, that all really came to the fore in 1967. That was, I would say, the great explosion and it had a tremendous effect on my psychological and even intellectual processes because I discovered then that I had to rethink my life and my identity, even though it had been so sheltered and built up in this completely artificial way. I had to rethink it from the start and that was a process that really is continuing. It hasn't ended for me. (43)

The outcome of the 1967 war led Said to study anti-Arab racism and the (Western) media misrepresentation of Arabs and Muslims, which were at the basis of both European colonialism in Muslim lands and Israeli settler colonialism in Palestine. Said appreciated the importance of what Bill Ashcroft calls "the task of taking hold of self-representation" which is, "for Palestinians, a matter of life and death" (Ashcroft 113). Later in 1989, Said wrote that Palestinians were victims of "long decades of Zionist propaganda, long decades of Western political complicity, long decades of hypocrisy and misrepresentation by intellectual, cultural and religious supporters of Israel in the West" ("The challenge of Palestine" 171). Therefore, as Ashcroft puts it, "[s]uccess for the Palestinian people will never come from armed struggle but from the control of representation and the communication of the Palestinian situation to a dominant audience" (113). Given the perennial media cynicism against Arabs and Muslims, in the wake of the 1967 Israeli aggression, Said understood this truth and sought to address the politics of representation and finally produced *Orientalism*. As Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin argue, "It was out of the experience of 1967, as a Palestinian living in the United States, that Said conceived the central theme of *Orientalism*" (xxi). In a later essay, Said betrays his frustration at the realisation that Palestinians have been caught in a vicious cycle of misrepresentation. As he says:

It is, however, no less a sign of Palestinian powerlessness and, it must be said, collective incompetence that to this day the story of Jerusalem's loss both in 1948 and 1967 has not been told by them [Palestinians], but – insofar as it has been told at all – partially reconstructed either by Israelis both sympathetic and unsympathetic to them, or by foreigners. In other words not only has there been no Palestinian narrative of 1948 and after that can at least challenge the dominant Israeli narrative, there has also been no collective Palestinian projection for Jerusalem, since its all-too-definitive loss in 1948 and then again in 1967. (Said, “The Current Status of Jerusalem” 61)

Therefore, in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war when the Palestinian resistance took the form of popular struggle, Said somewhat turned his eyes away from the haunting spectre of the horrors of war and observed in shock that, in the Western imagination, Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular were either nomadic Bedouins and wealthy, lustful, and exotic sheikhs or barbaric, violent terrorists and aggressors. He became drawn to the colonial politics of cultural representation and domination. As a result, in 1968 he wrote the essay “The Arab Portrayed” which was later included in Ibrahim Abu-Lughod's edited book titled *The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June 1967: An Arab Perspective* (1970). In the essay, Said argues that, “in the average film” in the US “an Arab appears ... as an oversexed degenerate capable—it is true—of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, and low” (1). Ten years later, in 1978, Said presented the world with *Orientalism* which heralded the rise of postcolonial studies.

The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* acknowledge the ground-breaking significance and foundational, formative role of Said's book *Orientalism* in explaining the basic tenets of postcolonial theory and argue that “Edward Said's analysis of imperial culture remains de rigueur” (163). They add: “Edward Said's proposal of orientalism as the discourse which constituted the Orient in the consciousness of the west offers an influential analysis of how the world was constructed in the European mind” (165). In *Orientalism*, Said spearheaded a new study of colonialism that would focus not only on its material ravages but also on the power-knowledge nexus that connects a certain type of representation of the colonised with the military and economic domination of colonial and neo-colonial powers. Undoubtedly, Said's main arguments in *Orientalism* were driven by the experiences and viewpoints of Palestinians and by a desire to eventually liberate them from Israeli colonial and apartheid rule.

Domination over colonial space

In addition to the interplay between Palestine and *Orientalism*, the Palestine question is also relevant to Said's understanding of space and colonial atrocities. At the root of the Zionist colonisation of Palestine lies the claim that Palestine is "a land without people for a people without land." This phrase seems to have gained the status of an adage among a certain group of commentators who want to strip Palestinians of both their humanity and national identity. As Edward Said laments, in the eyes of Israeli historians and propagandists, Palestinians are "two-legged beasts, terrorists, everything, but not Palestinians" ("The voice of a Palestinian in exile" 43). They attempt to "prove that historical Palestine was unoccupied," on the basis of which "Zionists have attempted to erase its native population from their land and from historical records" (Nasooha 100). Perhaps, this Israeli-Zionist geographical mentality was at the back of Edward Said's mind when he denounced the imperialist geographical theory of undiscovered lands. He makes his contention clear in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994/1993) where he discusses a dominant colonial strategy that suggests that "colonial space must be transformed sufficiently so as no longer to appear foreign to the imperial eye" (226). Tahrir Hamdi comments on Said's understanding of the geo-spatial dimension of colonial territorialisation and violence, stating:

Said's oeuvre, which focuses on exposing the discourses and strategies of imperialism, was first and foremost about the domination and colonization of geography, which for the imperialist represented empty spaces on the map ... that needed to be imaginatively explored and controlled before they were physically and forcibly colonized. The idea of an imaginative geography, as Said argues, is what made empire possible. (4-5)

Hamdi argues that this colonial spatial practice, as described by Said, "can be applied to Palestine with one important difference: in addition to subjugating the remaining Arab population, the occupier in Palestine has totally dispossessed and expelled the native inhabitants of the land" (5). Hamdi adds: "It is the entire memory of Palestine that must be erased (memoricide) by the usurping Zionist entity in addition to actual ethnic cleansing and complete dispossession of land" (16). There is a Zionist desire and agenda to dismiss and delete Palestine and the consciousness that it entails, which is partly manifested by Israel's and its collaborators' continuous attempts to obliterate Palestine from the map of the world. Israel launched this information genocide in 1948 through "programmatic policies designed to remove Palestinians, officially erase their traces, consign them to legal and institutional non-existence" (Said, "The Current Status of Jerusalem" 61).

In the above discussion, I have sought to acknowledge the primordial importance of Palestine in the development of postcolonial studies. However, the inalienable link between the experiences of Palestinians – in Palestine and in the diaspora – and the discourse of postcolonialism is not sufficiently discernible in the practices of postcolonial theory. There is a tendency among some experts of postcolonialism to mull over classical (European) colonialism and to engage in hair-splitting discussion of its ideological and material aspects, but they are averse to attending to the here and the now.

Postcolonialism and the past

Recently, I browsed the website of *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History* published by Duke University Press. In 2004, the journal produced a special issue (65.3) and titled it “Postcolonialism and the Past.” True to the title of the special issue, it seems that a large number of postcolonial theorists are sunk in the scholastic quagmire of discussing past colonial atrocities. As their minds have progressively slipped into the past, they find it convenient to navigate the nineteenth-century colonial world and are disinclined to discuss comparable crimes and cruelties that are happening in our contemporary world. Is postcolonialism all about lamenting and grieving past colonial injustices? Do scholars of postcolonial studies need to wait until present-day colonial structural relationships become ‘history’ to treat them as legitimate postcolonial issues?

The obsession of postcolonial scholars with the past is an antithesis to the definition of postcolonial theory which “deals with literature produced in countries that were once, *or are now*, colonies of other countries” (“An Introduction to Post-Colonialism” [emphasis mine]). The fact of the matter is that, while we can make good use of our knowledge of the past, we cannot reverse it; conversely, if we discuss current (neo)colonial practices and forms of dominance, we can perhaps help redress some of the injustices that are happening and continuing to haunt the colonised now.

Apparently full of rage for nineteenth-century European colonialism, postcolonial theorists often exercise extreme liberty to use pejorative terms to castigate past colonisers and agreeable expressions to show sympathy to their victims. But if they do not connect the past with the present and do not comment on the colonial and apartheid violence that is occurring now, their abstruse, recondite, and esoteric discourse and knowledge production may advance their academic career but will scarcely benefit humanity.

Postcolonialism and the present

Palestine is one of the worst victims of the present-day colonial order. Palestinians are driven by an indomitable spirit to challenge Israeli colonial policies and practices, and their struggle for liberation from settler colonialism is as old as the state of Israel. On 7 October 2023, the Palestinian resistance group Hamas made a surprise attack on Israel; hundreds of civilians and members of Israeli forces were killed in Israel by Hamas fighters and also by Israeli tanks (Atalay). Israel failed to defend itself on that day. With the help of its Western allies and the UN, Israel could take necessary legal measures and use international pressures to bring the culprits to justice. Sadly, Israel chose a habitual, different path, which some characterise as “escalation dominance.” It invaded Gaza and went on a genocidal rampage against Palestinian children, women, and men. As of June 2024, Israel has killed about forty thousand Palestinians (most of whom are children and women) and destroyed almost all educational institutions, health care facilities, and arable land. It has reduced almost the whole of Gaza to rubble under which dead bodies of many thousand Palestinians are buried and unaccounted for. The gruesome images of slaughtered and maimed genocide victims emerging from Gaza are simply unbearable. It is perhaps pertinent here to remind ourselves that in 1988, Edward Said made the following remark about Israel’s killing spree: “The Israelis have ... always killed Palestinian civilians, sometimes at the rate of a hundred to one Israeli death” (“The voice of a Palestinian in exile” 46). One year later in 1989, he wrote:

In Lebanon alone during the summer of 1982 it is estimated that Israel killed more than 20,000 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians.... Yet the media complains about Palestinian terrorism when a few Israelis are killed. I am against terrorism; I deplore the killing of innocent civilians by Palestinians, or by anyone else; but I also cannot stand the ignorance or hypocrisy that in general assumes that it is acceptable for Israel to kill say, four hundred civilians in one bombing raid ... but regales us with pictures of grieving Israeli families when one Israeli civilian is killed. (Said, “The challenge of Palestine” 173)

In 2024, the ratio has remained more or less the same. For example, on Saturday 8 June 2024, Israeli forces killed 274 Palestinian children, women, and men and rescued four Hamas-held hostages (three men and one woman) from Gaza (Mackintosh). What is more, Israel and many of its backers regarded this act as “heroic”³ and maintained a characteristic reticence about the Palestinian deaths.

³Israeli’s Yoav Gallant regarded the act of rescuing four Israeli hostages and killing 274 Palestinians as “one of the most heroic and extraordinary operations [he has] witnessed over the course of 47 years serving in Israel’s defense establishment” (Gallant).

What Said said in 1988 is still true that Israel depends “on *Phantoms* and cluster bombs and remote control devices to kill, just kill, large concentrations of Palestinians” (“The voice of a Palestinian in exile” 47). As a result, for Palestinians, especially those in Gaza, “fear has been forbidden, nobody seems to be afraid of armed Israelis and the subsequent beatings” (Said, “The voice of a Palestinian in exile” 48).

In the current spate of genocide, since 7 October 2023, Israel has demolished dozens of hospitals and hundreds of places of worship and killed many hundreds of doctors, health care workers, journalists, and UN aid officials working in Gaza. For example, in one incident “in the early hours of Thursday morning” on 6 June 2024, “Israel bombed a UN school sheltering thousands of displaced Palestinians in central Gaza” and killed “at least 33 people including 12 women and children” (Graham-Harrison). In her review of Refaat Alareer’s edited work *Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine* (2014), Rosemary Sayigh comments on Israel’s decades-long killing spree in Gaza, stating: “As one would expect, death is omnipresent in the stories from Gaza, where Israel enjoys impunity to test its weapons, or, as military top brass phrase it, to ‘mow the grass’” (263).

Given the extent of devastation in the ongoing mass murder of innocent Palestinians, it is difficult to put a number on how many thousands of children, women, and men have been injured and are at risk of languishing without treatment. This is because Israel has launched a war of starvation and extinction by preventing food, medicine, water, and other essentials from entering Gaza.⁴ The trauma of Palestinians – and Hamas-captured Israeli hostages – who are still alive in Gaza amidst the deafening sounds of Israeli air strikes and bombings truly beggars all description. Given the normalisation of Israeli cruelty and Palestinian suffering under genocidal conditions, one cannot say with certainty which is actually better in Gaza—life or death.

“Terrorism” through the Saidian prism

Many supporters of Israeli colonial rule are using loud microphones and blaring cries to repeat and regurgitate the theory that Hamas is to be blamed for all these atrocities. In doing so, they exhibit historical amnesia and ignore the fact that

⁴Those who have been following news stories about the plight of Palestinians only recently may mistakenly believe that the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip is a new phenomenon. It is not. It has been going on for decades. In 1989, Edward Said talked about Israeli actions of “the forbidding of media reporting, the cutting off of water, fuel, electricity and telephone links ... tear gas, curfews, barricades, closing of business and schools, imprisonments, and so on” (“The challenge of Palestine” 177).

Israel has been going on killing and demolition rampages in Palestine for a century. As Edward Said maintains:

Terrorism ... was, in fact, introduced to the Middle East by the Zionists in the Twenties.... The net result of Zionist terrorism and violence in the first third of the twentieth century has brought forth, to my mind, the anomaly, the horrific and unacceptable status in the Middle East today of the state of Israel, which is in fact an armed garrison state which now exports more arms and distributes violence all around the world, vastly disproportionate to its size. In that respect, I think it's a horrible cycle of violence, but in it the Palestinians are the victims. There is no question about that. ("The voice of a Palestinian in exile" 46).

Since the founding of the state of Israel, it has conducted its affairs and consolidated its hold on the land with "the apartheid notion that Jews and non-Jews live separate existences, with the Jews always in a dominant, more privileged position, the Palestinians crowded into narrow enclaves that are encircled by Jewish roads and settlements" (Said, "The Current Status of Jerusalem" 70). In its recent wave of violence since 7 October 2023, Israel has exacerbated the severity of its brutality against Palestinians. But for many decades even before 7 October 2023, it did everything to make Gaza and the West Bank a hell on earth for Palestinians. Accordingly, commenting on the 7 October attacks, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said to the Security Council on 24 October 2023:

It is important to also recognize the attacks by Hamas did not happen in a vacuum. The Palestinian people have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation. They have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence; their economy stifled; their people displaced and their homes demolished. Their hopes for a political solution to their plight have been vanishing. (Guterres)

Remarkably, what Edward Said wrote in his essay "The challenge of Palestine" in 1989 may still help us understand the 7 October 2023 surprise attack:

I want to suggest that what we have been witnessing is an eruption of history, an uprising of unarmed civilians whose political, cultural, civil and human rights have been repeatedly violated ... and that Palestine insurgency represents a major, and, as yet incompletely understood, challenge to the hegemony of Israel, a state which has become increasingly insecure and isolated internationally, undermined by its obdurate unwillingness to face up to the horrendous cost it has exacted from the Palestinians – not to mention to U.S. taxpayers. (170)

I want to suggest that resistance did not just happen on a certain day ... but that it has been long in the making, and deep in its intensity and force. (172)

[Israeli] settlers are permitted arms and the protection of the Israeli army, even as, next to them, the Palestinians suffer curfews and collective punishment.... Gaza was brutally pacified in early 1971, which resulted in mass evictions, deportations, razing of houses, and the turning of Gaza into a vast ghetto housing 650,000 people. The Palestinian uprising, spearheaded by the bravery and resourcefulness of the all-but-forgotten Gazans, is the result of a nationalism nourished on the food of suffering, humiliation and systematic debasement.... The Palestinians have suffered with scarcely a voice in the West to support them in this struggle. The miracle is not that we endured these cruelties, but that our spirit as a people has not been broken, that we have not capitulated. (174)

It is Israeli occupation of Palestine and the crippling siege of Gaza that are to be blamed for decades-long troubles in the region. It is hard to dispute the fact that Israel is a (neo)European satellite settler colony in the Arab world and that Euro-American colonial powers are involved in sustaining it and perpetuating the suffering of Palestinians. For many decades, Israel has exhibited a pattern of behaviour which is symptomatic of a racist, colonial, and apartheid mindset. Therefore, if postcolonial theorists refuse to academically engage in Israel's colonial project in Palestine, they will display a lack of commitment to the discourse of postcolonialism and to its inalienable practices. If they pay only performative lip service to sympathise with the plight Palestinians but, in reality, form ties and maintain underhand connections with (institutions in) Israel for opportunistic reasons and take a roundabout path to legitimise Israel's colonial dominance over Palestine, that will constitute a betrayal of the principles of postcolonialism.

Decolonising postcolonialism?

Salman Rushdie is often regarded as a postcolonial writer. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* give so much prominence to the Indian-born British-American novelist that they begin the book with an epigraph from him. In an interview with a German journalist in May 2024, when Israel was committing a full-blown genocide in Gaza, Rushdie sought to divert attention from Israel's cruelty by portraying the resistance group Hamas as "Taliban-like." Referring to the student movement against Israel's months-long slaughter and starvation of Palestinian children, he said: "I would just like some of the protests to mention

Hamas. Because that's where this started, and Hamas is a terrorist organisation" (Creamer). Among the issues that should be considered when analysing Rushdie's comment are the following: More than nine thousand Palestinian children, women, and men are unjustly detained, tortured, and sexually harassed in Israeli prisons (Boxerman); Israel's killing of more than 500 Palestinians (since 7 October 2023) in the West Bank that is not governed by Hamas (Farge); and on Tuesday 30 April 2024 evening a masked group of pro-Israeli hooligans swooped down on the peaceful Gaza solidarity encampment, threw fireworks, and violently attacked students at University of California – Los Angeles campus (Anguiano). Earlier on 25 April 2024, Rushdie appeared on "LBC's Tonight with Andrew Marr" show and commented on the situation in Gaza and the student protest movement against Israeli genocide in Gaza. He said to Andrew Marr:

And some, at least, of the protesters have made that journey from protesting against the Israeli government to straightforward hostility towards Jewish people.

Look! I am not a big fan of Mr Netanyahu and I'm horrified by the deaths happening in Gaza, but that doesn't mean I forget about what Hamas did on October 7th and ... continues to want to do.... [Hamas leaders] don't want peace, they want perpetual conflict with Israel. And [it's] difficult to have ceasefire now when one of the parties wants perpetual conflict. (LBC)

For a conscientious person it is unpleasant and distasteful to watch this particular interview of Rushdie with Marr. The world knows that encampments and protests at US universities in solidarity with Gaza have been peaceful (Beckett). It was shocking to see how some US university authorities (mis)treated students protesting against the genocide and cracked down on movements for an end to Israel's mass slaughter in Gaza. Again, it is ludicrous that Rushdie blames Hamas for the months-long hostility in Gaza, whereas the Palestinian group has wanted "Israel to commit to permanent ceasefire [and] full withdrawal from Gaza" right from the beginning of this war (Reuters). By emphasising the rhetoric of "hostility towards Jewish people" and by blaming Hamas, Rushdie has toed the official line of Israel and its sympathisers. This may suggest Rushdie's – to use Edward Said's words – "ignorance" about the extent of Israeli atrocities against Palestinians or "hypocrisy" about the true condition of colonised Palestinians. His principal emphasis in that interview seemed to be on the religious character of Hamas. This reminds me of what Said stated in 1989:

Of course the language, the rhetoric and the discourse of Palestinian nationalism is both Arab and Islamic but nowhere is there evident a role comparable to that of the religious Right in Israel. Thus, whilst emphasis

is placed upon the Islamic component of religious revivalism, little is noted about the influential rabbinical component in Israel's life as a state, much of its directed against Arabs as non-Jews. ("The Challenge of Palestine" 177)

While the Palestinian struggle for liberation and justice as well as for a right of return is defined in religious terms, obviously to capitalise on the wave of Islamophobia especially in the West, commentators like Rushdie rarely show an awareness of the rabbinical extremism of the Jewish settlers in Israel and in occupied Palestinian areas. Given that Palestinians have been fighting for independence from a settler colonial occupation, Rushdie's caricature of a Palestinian anticolonial resistance group complicates his perceived status as a postcolonial writer. It may act as fuel to fire for the idea of decolonising postcolonialism.

Recently, I came across an essay titled "Postcolonialism: Yet another colonial strategy?". As its title clearly indicates, its authors harbour deep misgivings about the Western model of postcolonialism, stating that the contested term is a "white concept" which Western countries use as a subterfuge "to define and represent themselves in non-imperialist terms" (Trees and Nyoongah n.p.) and to evade the customary moral condemnation of nineteenth-century European colonisation. Since it is commonly held that Israel is a Western colonial outpost in the Arab world, the silence of postcolonial scholars about its colonial domination in the region will question the ethical and academic integrity of postcolonial theory.

Conclusion

Edward Said's birthplace Palestine is known as the intersection of three religions – Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. As he puts it: "Palestine is a land drenched in historical, religious, political and cultural significance. Palestine is central to Christianity, Islam and Judaism" ("The Challenge of Palestine" 170). But it should be borne in mind that, given Said's roots in the land and the Palestinian experience that prompted him to write *Orientalism*, Palestine is also the birthplace of postcolonial theory. Hence, in the spirit of postcolonialism, scholars of this theoretical strand should be at the forefront of intellectual campaigns against Israeli (colonial) oppression of Palestinians.

The main thrust of postcolonial studies is to interrogate the colonialist categories of centre and periphery and to destabilise hegemonic discourse and colonial representations and practices. Practitioners of postcolonialism have been largely successful in contesting the colonial logics of the past, but many of them seem averse to discussing present-day colonial structural relationships and neo-

colonial dynamics. This is more conspicuously evident in the inadequate (or ambivalent) postcolonial discursive response to the Zionist colonisation of Palestine. In order to make postcolonial studies relevant and efficacious, its practitioners should address current colonialist expansionist policies and explore ways to redress the suffering of their victims. Otherwise, if a call to decolonise postcolonial studies is deemed imperative, the academic discipline will lose its inherent discursive value and potential.

References

- Abu-Lughod, Ibrahim (ed.). *The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June 1967: An Arab Perspective*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- “An Introduction to Post-Colonialism, Post-colonial Theory and Post-colonial Literature.” School of Art + Art History + Design, University of Washington. Retrieved on 21 June 2024 from https://art.washington.edu/sites/art/files/documents/about/an_introduction_to_post-colonialism_post-colonial_theory_and_post-colonial_literature.pdf
- Anguiano, Dani. “UCLA students describe violent attack on Gaza protest encampment: ‘It was terrifying.’” *The Guardian*, 2 May 2024. Retrieved on 22 June 2024 from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/may/01/ucla-campus-violence-protests>
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Ashcroft, Bill. “Representation and Its Discontents: Orientalism, Islam and the Palestinian crisis.” *Religion* 34.2 (2004): 113-121.
- Atalay, Dildar Baykan. “Another Israeli witness confirms Israeli tanks killed own citizens on Oct. 7.” *Anadolu Agency*, 11 December 2023. Retrieved on 22 June 2024 from <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/another-israeli-witness-confirms-israeli-tanks-killed-own-citizens-on-oct-7/3079514>
- Bayoumi, Moustafa and Andrew Rubin. “Introduction.” *The Edward Said Reader*. Vintage, 2000. xi-xxxiv.
- Beckett, Lois. “Nearly all Gaza campus protests in the US have been peaceful, study finds.” *The Guardian*, 10 May 2024. Retrieved on 23 June 2024 from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/may/10/peaceful-pro-palestinian-campus-protests>
- Boxerman, Aaron. “What We Know About Palestinians Detained in Israel.” *The New York Times*, 28 March 2024. Retrieved on 23 June 2024 from <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/28/world/middleeast/palestinian-s-detained-in-israel.html>

- Chilisa, Bagele, and Kencilwe Phatshwane. "Qualitative research within a postcolonial indigenous paradigm." *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design* 1 (2022): 225-239.
- Creamer, Ella. "Salman Rushdie says a Palestinian state formed today would be 'Taliban-like'." *The Guardian*, Mon 20 May 2024. Retrieved on 23 June 2024 from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/article/2024/may/20/salman-rushdie-says-a-palestinian-state-formed-today-would-be-taliban-like>
- Farge, Emma. "UN rights office criticises Israel over deaths of 500 Palestinians in West Bank." Reuters, 4 June 2024. Retrieved on 23 June 2024 from <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-rights-office-criticises-israel-over-deaths-500-palestinians-west-bank-2024-06-04/>
- Gallant, Yoav. "Hostage rescue op 'one of the most heroic and extraordinary operations' I've seen in 47 years." *The Times of Israel*, 8 June 2024. Retrieved on 23 June 2024 from https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/gallant-hostage-rescue-op-one-of-the-most-heroic-and-extraordinary-operations-ive-seen-in-47-years/
- Ginat, Rami, and Meir Noema. "Al-Fajr al-Jadid: A Breeding Ground for the Emergence of Revolutionary Ideas in the Immediate Post-Second World War." *Middle Eastern Studies* 44.6 (2008): 867-893.
- Graham-Harrison, Emma. "Dozens killed in Israeli strike on UN school, witnesses say." *The Guardian*, 6 June 2024. Retrieved on 25 June 2024 from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/06/israel-gaza-war-idf-strike-un-school-al-nuseirat-death-toll-hamas>
- Guterres, António. "Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council - on the Middle East." 24 October 2023. United Nations. Retrieved on 21 June 2024 from <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2024-04-18/secretary-generals-remarks-the-security-council-the-middle-east%C2%A0>
- Hamdi, Tahrir. "Darwish's Geography: Space, Place and Identity Under Construction." *Interventions* 19.2 (2017): 238-257.
- Holden, Philip. "Reinscribing orientalism: Gendering modernity in colonial Malaya." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 29.2 (2001): 205-218.
- Judt, Tony. *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century*. London, Vintage, 2009.
- LBC. "Salman Rushdie can't see 'path of justice' in Israel-Gaza conflict."

- Retrieved on 18 June 2024 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHrPqfAE730>
- Mackintosh, Thomas. "Gaza health ministry says Israeli hostage rescue killed 274 Palestinians." BBC News, 9 June 2024. Retrieved on 23 June 2024 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cw44ve90dppo>
- Massad, Joseph. "Conceiving the masculine: Gender and Palestinian nationalism." *The Middle East Journal* 49.3 (1995): 467-483.
- Nasooha, M. "'A History Buried Alive': Resisting Amnesia and Reclaiming Native Palestinian Ecology in the Works of Susan Abulhawa." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 46.2 (2024): 100-118.
- Reuters. "Hamass wants Israel to commit to permanent ceasefire, full withdrawal from Gaza." 5 June 2024. Retrieved on 23 June 2024 from <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hamas-wants-israel-commit-permanent-ceasefire-full-withdrawal-gaza-2024-06-04/>
- Said, Edward. "The Arab Portrayed." In *The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June 1967: An Arab Perspective*, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (Ed.). Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- . "The voice of a Palestinian in exile." *Third Text*, 2:3-4 (1988): 39-50.
- . "The challenge of Palestine." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2.1 (1989): 170-178.
- . *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994.
- . *Out of Place: A Memoir*. New York: Knopf, 1999.
- . "Edward Said's Lost Essay on Jerusalem: The Current Status of Jerusalem." *Jerusalem Quarterly* 45 (2011): 57-72.
- Sayigh, Rosemary. "Refaat Alareer (ed.) *Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine*." *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 18.2 (2019): 263-274.
- Sheble, Lisa. "Edward Said: The Human Being." *Islamic Studies* 44.2 (2005): 255-270.
- Soja, Edward. "Foreword." In *Postcolonial Spaces: The Politics of Place in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. ix-xiii.
- Trees, Kathryn, and Mudrooroo Nyoongah. "Postcolonialism: yet another colonial strategy?" *Span: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* 36, 1993.