



## **Power, Politics And Culture**

*Edward W. Said , Bernard Lewis , Leon Wieseltier , Christopher Hitchens , William H. McNeill*

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No single book has encompassed the vast scope of Edward Said's erudition quite like Power, Politics and Culture - a collection of his interviews from the last three decades. In these twenty-nine interviews, Said addresses everything from Palestine to Pavarotti, from his nomadic upbringing under colonial rule to his politically active and often controversial life in America, and reflects on Austen, Beckett, Conrad, Naipaul, Mahfouz and Rushdie as well as fellow critics Bloom, Derrida and Foucault. Said speaks here with his usual candour, acuity and eloquence - confirming that he was in his lifetime among the truly most important intellectuals of our century.

## Power, Politics And Culture Details

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## Erica says

Very dense, but very good. Mr. Siad is amazing.

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## Andrew says

Interview collections always feel so incomplete. No real thesis comes out of them, and the reader just gets a very fragmentary notion of a writer's life and works. I feel like I should have read a bunch more Said before settling on these interviews, but that said, they were still quite enjoyable, even if they often repeated the same points. What comes out, again and again, is not only how original and provocative Said's arguments remain (something I expected before starting), but also what a good person he was. After I finished each interview, I felt like I'd gotten a chance to speak with a deeply, deeply humane individual. I'd give my front teeth to have sat down and had a coffee with him.

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## Zahra Rasheed says

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## Ahmed says

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## **Adam says**

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is so often regarded as complicated, ancient, and intractable. At the same time, the media deprives Americans of meaningful investigation of the issue and presents insulting and tiresome stereotypes.

Edward Said's skillful interviews bring simple (but not simplistic) and clear analysis to the conflict. While this collection touches on other themes of Orientalism and music and literary criticism, the majority deals with Palestine. At its essence, the conflict is about an unjust occupation, in which some humans are being denied the same basic rights that are granted to a different group of inhabitants of the same land. Said lays out the primary problem of the Israeli state: "What it requires, I think, is the giving up the notion that Israel...is not the state of its citizens, but the state of the whole Jewish people, wherever they are" (161).

Part of what makes open conversation about the conflict difficult is the persistent and shrill cry for the need to recognize the Israeli state and the palpable fear that the recognition of the human rights of Palestinian inhabitants would somehow cause its destruction. Said calmly gives this response: "I am not talking about the destruction of anything. I am talking about the transformation of the State that would allow all the citizens of the State—Arabs and Jews. Now, Arab citizens of the State of Israel don't have the same rights as Jews" (209).

A key phrase from the above quote is "transformation of the State." He is talking about a democratic process to ensure equal rights. Throughout the interviews, Said holds all accountable by the same standards, and is not afraid to criticize Palestinian figures and perspectives. He calls out fellow Palestinians for their shortcomings as far as their understanding of the occupation is concerned:

"And it's important for Arabs to understand, too, that Israeli Jews are not like Crusaders or imperialists who can be sent back somewhere. It's very important for us also to insist, as I often do, that the Israelis are Israelis. They are citizens of a society called Israel. They're not 'Jews,' quite simply, who can be thought of once again as wanderers, who can go back to Europe. That vocabulary of transitory and provisional existence is one that you have to completely refuse" (174).

Like Chomsky, Said does not put forth blueprints for an ideal society. Instead, he favors to analyze the existential issues at hand and propose concrete strategies to overcome them. Indeed, such pragmatism is evident by the fact that he spent years as a member of the Palestinian National Council. But it was this very commitment to the cause that led him to abandon Arafat, after concluding that the "Peace Process" talks served more for leaders to perform for their constituents than to really put forth solutions.

Said continued his work in civil society, serving as the pre-eminent public intellectual for the Palestinian cause, and collaborating with Daniel Barenboim to bring together Israeli and Palestinian youth musicians. His faith in civil society as opposed to state-directed strategies is implied when he says, referring to Ariel Sharon, "...what so many Israelis want [is] is a normal life in a secure environment. But they seem to have a penchant for picking leaders who will deliver exactly the opposite" (238).

Said's work is informed by the recognition that the primary Palestinian question is liberation, not nationalism. That is, we should be most concerned with the struggle for equal rights and the right to return, whether the result is "one state, two states, or a hundred states," in the words of Husam Zomlot of Fatah. Said observes that youth in particular are less concerned with the national question. He believes this is for good reason for the simple fact that a separate Palestinian state would be nearly impossible to achieve given the geographical and social reality: "...Israeli Jews and Palestinians are irrevocably intertwined. The place is so small that you can't possibly completely avoid the other side" (166). He points out that 20% of Israeli citizens are in fact Palestinians—what would become of them? And what about the myriad employment relations between Israelis and Palestinians? Said muses that "...there's no way of writing the history of either Israelis or of the Palestinians without also writing the history of the other" (190). Therefore, he concludes, the same holds for the future.

One section, in a rare moment of emotion, sums up Said's personal and political themes that are found throughout the interviews:

"Most Palestinians, including myself—I've been there and I've visited the house I was born in—my family's house in West Jerusalem where I grew up. I don't want it back. I understand. I don't want to dispossess another people, even though they dispossessed us. But I don't want to be considered a terrorist. I don't want to be considered subhuman. I don't want to be considered only a non-Jew. There has to be a sense in which we're talking about a tragic situation in which two people must coexist as equals on this blood-soaked tiny piece of territory" (120-121).

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### **Kristoffer says**

A collection of interviews spanning thirty years on everything from music and literary theory to the Gulf War and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Also a proof that Said was a better talker than writer.

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### **Alia Salleh says**

I particularly enjoyed the second part of this collection, probably because it deals more with his involvement in the Palestinian struggle, and critic of it - an easier topic to digest than lit theory (Will try to reread that part sometime later). Interestingly the interview I find most beautiful is the final one, with Ari Shavit from an Israeli daily.

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### **Zana Fauzi says**

As someone who had (tried to) read *Orientalism* at a much younger age and didn't finish because I was too young, uninformed and couldn't get used to the writing, this interview format of a book helps me reacquainted with Edward Said's work and thinking. I love it so much, the format made me feel like I am speaking to Said face-to-face, to someone highly knowledgeable, worldly and always in pursuit of learning more (in this book he spoke many times of his interest of finding things work and progress rather than segregating one against the other e.g. If you are a scholar you can't be political). I am going to reread *Orientalism* and pick up the rest of Said's books now.

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## Sarah says

I just can't recommend this highly enough. I hate to sound like a stereotypical liberal-hippie-multi-culti-Said-lover, but I couldn't put this book down. I like the interview format much more than the essay--you feel like you're engaged in a relaxed conversation with him, and his scholarly depth and breadth are astonishing. The guy knows how to communicate, and I refer back to this book a lot in critiquing all sorts of stuff.

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## Joe says

The best possible introduction to literary criticism, in an easy-to-read format that belies its depth and intensity.

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## Eman Emara says

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## Jibran says

This collection came out after Edward Said's untimely death and contains all his major interviews since 1976, when he was still writing his magnum opus 'Orientalism' till before his death in the early 2000s.

The interviews collected here are the ones which deal with his critical works and his political activism, so these are not light biography-type exchanges. Some of them are pretty dense and challenge you a lot if you

do not have a basic acquaintance with literary theory and the developments in literary criticism in the last quarter of the 20th century.

It is an extremely rewarding read, a fascinating book for the range of subjects it deals with. This collection is a valuable source material through which I got a good idea of a man who brought about a whole paradigm shift in Western literary criticism and the way how the West looked at the East. Edward Said, without doubt, was a great thinker.

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## **Sunny says**

stunning book. got me thinking about so many things beyond politics, power and culture. you dont have to believe evertthing that he says (though he does say it pretty damn eloquently) but the places he takes your mind is pretty cool. the book is about a series of interviews he has and his responses on some very interesting questions. it took me a while to get into the language of this and i found it a bit hard to start with but as it is slightly repetitive (not ina boring way at all) by the end you do get what hes saying most of the time. he talks about music, phiulosophy, literature, art, politics and skips in between those subjects like a dancer changing styles between the foxtrot and drumm and bass.

really enjoyed this book. already got orientalism and have ordered gramscis notebooks. it helps if you have read stuff like fannons wretched of the earth, and a few of the other books he menioned (tayeb salih migration to the north is amazing) and also ordered foucoult! cant wait to tuck into those.

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