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## Edward Said Remembered

*September 25 was the 12th anniversary of his death*

by Edward C. Corrigan / September 27th, 2015

Edward Said was an amazing individual and an incredible speaker, writer and academic. He is gone, but the power of his ideas lives on. I was fortunate to meet Edward Said on a few occasions.

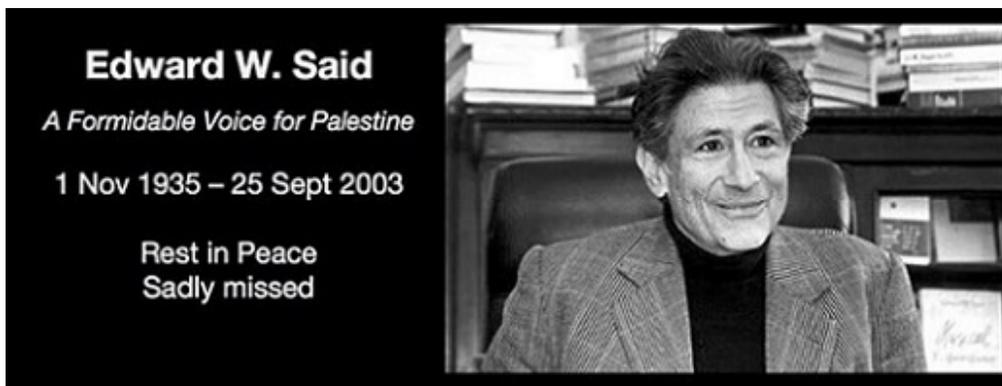


Photo by Sonja Karkar

There is a bit of a story about how I first met Edward Said. After Canadian's Concerned for the Middle East (CCME) was refused ratification by the University of Western Ontario Student Council in December 1982 a number of academics at UWO sought to bring a few speakers to campus to broaden the access to ideas on the Palestinian issue and in support of academic freedom and free speech.

I was the graduate student representative to the University Community Centre Directorate (UCCD) from 1985-1987. Habeeb Al-Aidroos, the director of the UCCD, and I helped raise money to bring Professor Edward Said to campus and the next year Professor Noam Chomsky. However, the main credit goes to the Dean of Arts, Tom Lennon, who controlled the money for a prestigious lecture series at UWO.

Before that occurred Edward Said was invited to give a series of lectures to some graduate English students by Professor Balachandra Rajan, who was a world recognized authority on English Comparative Literature on India. He was the author of *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macaulay* (Duke University Press, 1999). Professor Rajan was a personal friend of Edward Said.

Nobody noticed that Edward Said was coming to Western University. The title of his talk was extremely academic

and obscure. The day before Edward Said was scheduled to speak one of the posters caught my eye. I quickly contacted the local Arab community and students interested in the Middle East. The Vice-President Academic for the University of Western Ontario, Tom Collins, somehow heard about what I was doing and came to the talk and sat beside me during the talk wondering what the heck I was up to. We knew each other because I had served on the UWO Senate and had been the University Student Council Vice President Education several years earlier.

When the talk was set to start many students and members of the local Arab community poured into the lecture Hall. I had also contacted the local media who expressed no interest in Edward Said and the obscure topic of the lecture. That was the case until I told them that Edward Said was a member of the Palestinian National Council. Unfortunately that was the day after the *Achille Lauro* hijacking which occurred on October 5, 1985. A bit of a media circus resulted from my telephone calls. It also generated a great deal of media coverage. There was a magnificent picture of the extremely handsome Edward Said published in the *London Free Press*.

Edward Said graciously agreed to meet with the local Palestinian and Arab community and us students after his talk. So myself and the many extra visitors patiently sat through the academic lecture and Edward Said returned and met with the community. It was a wonderful meeting and exchange. Professor Rajan and I later became good friends after my uninvited intervention.

A few months later in 1986 I attended the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Conference in Boston. One of the main events was a debate on American Middle East policy on Israel and Palestine between Edward Said and journalist Christopher Hitchens (who I also had a memorable meeting with but that is another story) and renown Middle East historian Bernard Lewis and Leon Wieseltier who was the Literary Editor of the *New Republic*.

There were over 5,000 professors and graduate students, all highly informed on Middle East issues, in this massive hall. I thought that the breakdown would be 50-50 as to who would support Israel and who would support the Palestinians. I was surprised that based on applause the support in the room was about 95% pro-Palestinian and 5% pro-Israel. Edward Said was excellent as was Hitchens. They clearly won the debate. The transcript of the debate was published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*.

When I was at the MESA Conference I had a chance meeting with Edward Said. He said to me, "What the hell are you doing here?" I explained I was a graduate student in Political Science specializing in Middle East studies and attending the conference. He remembered me from the stunt I pulled at the University of Western Ontario. Apparently I made some impression on Edward Said from my actions at UWO.

The next year Edward Said came back to the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario and gave a series of lectures on the latest book he was writing and also gave a political talk on Palestine. Hanny Hassan, a prominent member of the London Arab community, hosted a reception for Edward Said at his house for members of the community and student activists like myself. Again an excellent opportunity to socialize with Edward Said and members of the community.

The next year, in the fall of 1987, Professor Noam Chomsky came to the University of Western Ontario and gave three lectures on linguistics and also a lecture on politics of the Middle East. Again the Dean of Arts and the UCCD, with Habeeb's and my support, provided the funding.

At the time I had started first year law at the University of Windsor and returned to UWO to attend the Chomsky lectures. As always with Chomsky the lectures were excellent. Chomsky also met with a very small group of academics and university officials over dinner to which I was also invited. It was an intimate three hour conversation with Noam Chomsky and truly one of the highlights of my life. To this day when I ask for assistance

for some political fight Chomsky always helps.

A number of years later the University of Windsor hosted an academic conference on Edward Said and his works. I attended the conference. Edward Said was there and his health was clearly failing but the mind was still as strong as ever. Edward Said died not long after, but his writings are still widely read and his ideas and impact are as powerful as ever.

In many respects the attempt to ban CCME and the Palestinian viewpoint at the University of Western Ontario opened many doors and exposed over a thousand people to the radical idea that Palestinians' deserved human rights. It brought Edward Said and Noam Chomsky to the usually conservative quiet University of Western Ontario.

On the CCME issue in the end we won the support of many Jewish academics and rabbis, many organizations including the American Anti-Arab Discrimination Committee (ADC) and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. The *Globe and Mail* (a national newspaper in Canada) also wrote a supportive editorial. And finally with the support of the Ontario Human Rights Commission CCME won the right to present speakers as an officially ratified student club with full access to the universities facilities and to present opinions supportive of the Palestinians at UWO.

I wrote an [article](#) which covers much, but not all of this issue, which can be found on my web site or any library that carries *American Arab Quarterly* now known as *Middle East Affairs*.

We must remember the important contribution Edward Said has made to the academic world and the Palestinian cause and work hard to make the dream of an independent Palestinian State come true.

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This article was posted on Sunday, September 27th, 2015 at 10:55am and is filed under [Activism](#), [Israel/Palestine](#), [Middle East](#).

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