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**Out Of Place: A Memoir by Par Edward W. Said**

*Présentation de l'éditeur* Edward Said experienced both British and American imperialism as the old Arab order crumbled in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This account of his early life reveals how it influenced his books *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. Edward Said was born in Jerusalem and brought up in Cairo, spending every summer in the Lebanese mountain village of Dhour el Shweir, until he was 'banished' to America in 1951. This work is a mixture of emotional archaeology and memory, exploring an essentially irrecoverable past. As ill health sets him thinking about endings, Edward Said returns to his beginnings in this personal memoir of his ferociously demanding 'Victorian' father and his adored, inspiring, yet ambivalent mother.

*Extrait* All families invent their parents and children, give each of them a story, character, fate, and even a language. There was always something wrong with how I was invented and meant to fit in with the world of my parents and four sisters. Whether this was because I constantly misread my part or because of some deep flaw in my being I could not tell for most of my early life. Sometimes I was intransigent, and proud of it. At other times I seemed to myself to be nearly devoid of any character at all, timid, uncertain, without will. Yet the overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place. Thus it took me about fifty years to become accustomed to, or, more exactly, to feel less uncomfortable with, Edward, a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic family name Said. True my mother told me that I had been named Edward after the Prince of Wales, who cut so fine a figure in 1935, the year of my birth, and Said was the name of various uncles and cousins. But the rationale of my name broke down both when I discovered no grandparents called Said and when I tried to connect my fancy English name with its Arabic partner. For years, and depending on the exact circumstances, I would rush past "Edward" and emphasize "Said"; at other times I would do the reverse, or connect these two to each other so quickly that neither would be clear. The one thing I could not tolerate, but very often would have to endure, was the disbelieving, and hence undermining, reaction: Edward? Said? The travails of bearing such a name were compounded by an equally unsettling quandary when it came to language. I have never known what language I spoke first, Arabic or English, or which one was really mine beyond any doubt. What I do know, however, is that the two have always been together in my life, one resonating in the other, sometimes ironically, sometimes nostalgically, most often each correcting, and commenting on, the other. Each can seem like my absolutely first language, but neither is. I trace this primal instability back to my mother, whom I remember speaking to me in both English and Arabic, although she always wrote to me in English--once a week, all her life, as did I, all of hers. Certain spoken phrases of hers like *tislamli* or *mish "arfa shu biddi "amal? or rouh"ha--dozens of them--were Arabic, and I was never conscious of having to translate them or, even in cases like *tislamli*, knowing exactly what they meant. They were a part of her infinitely maternal atmosphere, which in moments of great stress I found myself yearning for in the softly uttered phrase "ya mama," an atmosphere dreamily seductive then suddenly snatched away, promising something in the end never given. But woven into her Arabic speech were English words like "naughty boy" and of course my name, pronounced "Edwaad." I am still haunted by the memory of the sound, at exactly the same time and place, of her voice calling me "Edwaad," the word wafting through the dusk air at closing time of the Fish Garden (a small Zamalek park with aquarium) and of myself, undecided whether to answer her back or to remain in hiding for just awhile longer, enjoying the pleasure of being called, being wanted, the non-Edward part of myself taking luxurious respite by not answering until the silence of my being became unendurable. Her English deployed a rhetoric of statement and norms that has never left me. Once my mother left Arabic and spoke English there was a more objective and serious tone that mostly banished the forgiving and musical intimacy of her first language, Arabic. At age five or six I knew that I was irremediably "naughty" and at school was all manner of comparably disapproved-of things like "fibber" and "loiterer." By the time I was fully conscious of speaking English fluently, if not always correctly, I regularly referred to myself not as "me" but as "you." "Mummy doesn't love you, naughty boy," she would*

say, and I would respond, in half-plaintive echoing, half-defiant assertion, "Mummy doesn't love you, but Auntie Melia loves you." Auntie Melia was her elderly maiden aunt, who doted on me when I was a very young child. "No she doesn't," my mother persisted. "All right. Saleh [Auntie Melia's Sudanese driver] loves you," I would conclude, rescuing something from the enveloping gloom. I hadn't then any idea where my mother's English came from or who, in the national sense of the phrase, she was: this strange state of ignorance continued until relatively late in my life, when I was in graduate school. In Cairo, one of the places where I grew up, her spoken Arabic was fluent Egyptian, but to my keener ears, and to those of the many Egyptians she knew, it was if not outright Shami, then perceptibly inflected by it. "Shami" (Damascene) is the collective adjective and noun used by Egyptians to describe both an Arabic speaker who is not Egyptian and someone who is from Greater Syria, i.e., Syria itself, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan; but "Shami" is also used to designate the Arabic dialect spoken by a Shami. Much more than my father, whose linguistic ability was primitive compared to hers, my mother had an excellent command of classical Arabic as well as the demotic. Not enough of the latter to disguise her as Egyptian, however, which of course she was not. Born in Nazareth, then sent to boarding school and junior college in Beirut, she was Palestinian, even though her mother, Munira, was Lebanese. I never knew her father, but he, I discovered, was the Baptist minister in Nazareth, although he originally came from Safad, via a sojourn in Texas. Not only could I not absorb, much less master, all the meanderings and interruptions of these details as they broke up a simple dynastic sequence, but I could not grasp why she was not a straight English mummy. I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities--mostly in conflict with each other--all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian, and so on. I found I had two alternatives with which to counter what in effect was the process of challenge, recognition, and exposure, questions and remarks like "What are you?"; "But Said is an Arab name"; "You're American?"; "You're American without an American name, and you've never been to America"; "You don't look American!"; "How come you were born in Jerusalem and you live here?"; "You're an Arab after all, but what kind are you? A Protestant?" I do not remember that any of the answers I gave out loud to such probings were satisfactory or even memorable. My alternatives were hatched entirely on my own: one might work, say, in school, but not in church or on the street with my friends. The first was to adopt my father's brashly assertive tone and say to myself, "I'm an American citizen," and that's it. He was American by dint of having lived in the United States followed by service in the army during World War I. Partly because this alternative meant his making of me something incredible, I found it the least convincing. To say "I am an American citizen" in an English school in wartime Cairo dominated by British troops and with what seemed to me a totally homogeneous Egyptian populace was a foolhardy venture, to be risked in public only when I was challenged officially to name my citizenship; in private I could not maintain it for long, so quickly did the affirmation wither away under existential scrutiny. The second of my alternatives was even less successful than the first. It was to open myself to the deeply disorganized state of my real history and origins as I gleaned them in bits, and then to try to construct them into order. But I never had enough information; there were never the right number of well-functioning connectives between the parts I knew about or was able somehow to excavate; the total picture was never quite right. The trouble seemed to begin with my parents, their pasts, and names. My father, Wadie, was later called William (an early discrepancy that I assumed for a long time was only an Anglicization of his Arabic name but that soon appeared to me suspiciously like a case of assumed identity, with the name Wadie cast aside except by his wife and sister for not very creditable reasons). Born in Jerusalem in 1895--my mother said it was more likely 1893--he never told me more than ten or eleven things about his past, a series of unchanging pat phrases that hardly conveyed anything at all. He was at least forty at the time of my birth. He hated Jerusalem, and although I was born and we spent long periods of time there, the only thing he ever said about it was that it reminded him of death. At some point in his life his father was a dragoman who because he knew German had, it was said, shown Palestine to Kaiser Wilhelm. And my grandfather--never referred to by name except when my mother, who never knew him, called him Abu-Asaad--bore the surname Ibrahim. In school, therefore, my father was known as Wadie Ibrahim. I still do not know where "Said" came from, and no one seems able to explain it. The only relevant detail about his father that my father thought fit to convey to me was that Abu-Asaad's whippings were much severer than his of me. "How did you endure it?" I asked, to which he replied with a chuckle, "Most of the time I ran away." I was never able to do this, and never even considered it. As for my paternal grandmother, she was equally shadowy. A Shammās by birth, her name was Hanné; according to my father, she persuaded him--he had left Palestine in 1911--to return from the States in 1920 because she wanted him near her. My father always said he regretted his return home, although just as frequently he averred that the

secret of his astonishing business successes was that he "took care" of his mother, and she in return constantly prayed that the streets beneath his feet would turn into gold. I was never shown her likeness in any photograph, but in my father's regimen for bringing me up she represented two contradictory adages that I could never reconcile: mothers are to be loved, he said, and taken care of unconditionally. Yet because by virtue of selfish love they can deflect children from their chosen career (my father wanted to remain in the United States and practice law), so mothers should not be allowed to get too close. And that was, is, all I ever knew about my paternal grandmother. I assumed the existence of a longish family history in Jerusalem. I based this on the way my paternal aunt, Nabiha, and her children inhabited the place, as if they, and especially she, embodied the city's rather peculiar, not to say austere and constricted, spirit. Later I heard my father speak of us as Khleifawis, which I was informed was our real clan origin; but the Khleifawis originated in Nazareth. In the mid-1980s I was sent some extracts from a published history of Nazareth, and in them was a family tree of one Khleifi, probably my great-grandfather. Because it corresponded to no lived, even hinted-at, experience of mine, this startlingly unexpected bit of information--which suddenly gave me a whole new set of cousins--means very little to me. My father, I know, did attend St. George's School in Jerusalem and excelled at football and cricket, making the First Eleven in both sports over successive years, as center forward and wicket keeper, respectively. He never spoke of learning anything at St. George's, nor of much else about the place, except that he was famous for dribbling a ball from one end of the field to the other, and then scoring. His father seems to have urged him to leave Palestine to escape conscription into the Ottoman army. Later I read somewhere that a war had broken out in Bulgaria around 1911 for which troops were needed; I imagined him running away from the morbid fate of becoming Palestinian cannon fodder for the Ottoman army in Bulgaria. None of this was ever presented to me in sequence, as if his pre-American years were discarded by my father as irrelevant to his present identity as my father, Hilda's husband, U.S. citizen. One of the great set stories, told and retold many times while I was growing up, was his narrative of coming to the United States. It was a sort of official version, and was intended, in Horatio Alger fashion, to instruct and inform his listeners, who were mostly his children and wife. But it also collected and put solidly in place both what he wanted known about himself before he married my mother and what thereafter was allowed into public view. It still impresses me that he stuck to the story in its few episodes and details for the thirty-six years he was my father until his death in 1971, and that he was so successful in keeping at bay all the other either forgotten or denied aspects of his story. Not until twenty years after his death did it occur to me that he and I were almost exactly the same age when we, precisely forty years apart, came to the United States, he to make his life, I to be directed by his script for me, until I broke away and started trying to live and write my own. My father and a friend called Balloura (no first name ever given) went first from Haifa to Port Said in 1911, where they boarded a British freighter to Liverpool. They were in Liverpool for six months before they got jobs as stewards on a passenger liner to New York. Their first chore on board was to clean portholes, but since neither of them knew what a porthole was, despite having pretended to "great sea-going experience" in order to get the jobs, they cleaned everything but the portholes. Their supervisor was "nervous" (a word my father used regularly to signify anger and general bother) about them, overturned a pail of water, and set them to floor swabbing. Wadie was then switched to waiting on tables, the only memorable aspect of which was his description of serving one course, then rushing out to vomit as the ship heaved and pitched, then staggering back to serve the next. Arriving in New York without valid papers, Wadie and the shadowy Balloura bided their time, until, on the pretext of leaving the ship temporarily to visit a nearby bar, they boarded a passing streetcar "going they had no idea where," and rode it to the end of the line. Another of my father's much repeated stories concerned a YMCA swimming race at an upstate New York lake. This provided him with an engaging moral: he was the last to finish, but persisted to the end ("Never give up" was the motto)--in fact until the next race had already begun. I never questioned, and was duly submissive to, the packaged homily "Never give up." Then, when I was in my early thirties, it dawned on me that Wadie was so slow and stubborn he had in fact delayed all the other events, not a commendable thing. "Never giving up," I told my father--with the uppitness of a recently franchised but still powerless citizen--could also mean a social nuisance, obstructing others, delaying the program, maybe even giving impatient spectators an opportunity to hoot and boo the offensively slow and heedlessly stubborn swimmer. My father shot me a surprised, even slightly uncomfortable, smile, as if I had finally cornered him in a small way, and then he turned away without a word. The story was not repeated again. He became a salesman for ARCO, a Cleveland paint company, and he studied at Western Reserve University. Hearing the Canadians were sending a battalion "to fight the Turks in Palestine," he crossed the border and enlisted. When he discovered that there was to be no such battalion he simply deserted. He then signed up for the American Expeditionary Force and was consigned to

the rigors of Camp Gordon, Georgia, where his reaction to a battery of inoculations meant that he spent most of basic training ill and in bed. The scene then shifts to France, where he did time in the trenches; my mother had two photographs of him in the military dress of that time, a Cross of Lorraine hung round his neck in one of them, attesting to his French service. He used to speak of being gassed and wounded, then quarantined and interned in Mentone (he always used the Italian pronunciation). Once when I asked him what it was like to be in a war I recall him telling me about a German soldier whom he had killed at close range, "raising up his hands in a great cry before I shot him;" he said that he had recurring nightmares about the episode over several years of tormented sleep. After his death, when we had some reason to recover his army discharge papers (lost for half a century) I was stunned to discover that as a member of the quartermaster's corps he was recorded as having participated in no known military campaigns. This was probably a mistake, since I still believe my father's version. He returned to Cleveland after the war and set up his own paint company. His older brother, Asaad ("Al"), was then working as a sailor on the Great Lakes. Even back then it was the younger brother, "Bill"--the name change occurred in the army--who supplied the older one with money and also sent his parents half his salary. Asaad once threatened to attack Bill with a knife: he needed more money from his prosperous younger brother in order to marry a Jewish woman, whom my father guessed that he abandoned but did not divorce when he suddenly also came back to Palestine in the twenties. Curiously, nothing of my father's American decade survived except his extremely lean retellings of it, and such odd fragments as a love of apple pie à la mode and a few often repeated expressions, like "hunky-dory," and "big boy." Over time I have found that what his stint in the United States really expressed in relation to his subsequent life was the practice of self-making with a purpose, which he exploited in what he did and what he made others around him, chiefly me, do. He always averred that America was his country, and when we strenuously disagreed about Vietnam, he would fall back comfortably on "My country, right or wrong." But I never met or heard about friends or acquaintances from that time; there was one tiny photograph of Wadie at a YMCA camp plus a few laconic and uninformative entries in a soldier's log from the war year, 1917-18. And that was it. After he died I wondered whether, like Asaad, he hadn't had a wife and perhaps even a family that he too had left behind. Yet so powerfully instructive was his story for the shape my youth took under his direction that I cannot recall ever asking anything like a critical question. After America the story gathers immediacy and somehow loses even a suggestion of Horatio Alger romance: it was as if, having returned to Palestine in 1920 armed with U.S. citizenship, William A. Said (formerly Wadie Ibrahim) had quite abruptly turned sober pioneer, hard-working and successful businessman, and Protestant, a resident first of Jerusalem then of Cairo. This was the man I knew. The nature of the early relationship with his older cousin Boulos Said--who was also his sister Nabiha's husband--was never completely given, though clearly it was Boulos who founded the Palestine Educational Company, which Wadie entered (and invested in) on his return home. The two men became equal partners, although it was Wadie who in 1929 branched off from Palestine into Egypt, where, in a matter of no more than three years, he established the successful Standard Stationery Company, with two retail stores in Cairo, one in Alexandria, and various agencies and subdealerships in the Suez Canal Zone. There was a flourishing Syrian (Shami) community in Cairo, but he seems to have stayed clear of it, choosing instead to work long hours and play an occasional game of tennis with his friend Halim Abu Fadil; he told me that they played at two p.m., the hottest time of day, from which I was to conclude that an iron discipline, punishing in its rigors, ruled his efforts in everything he did, even sports. My father alluded infrequently to those years before his marriage in 1932, but it seemed that fleshly temptations--Cairo's rococo nightlife, its brothels, sex shows, and opportunities for general profligacy offered to prosperous foreigners--were of little interest to him; his celibacy was virtuous and without a whiff of debauchery. My mother--who of course didn't know him then--used to tell how he would come home to his modest Bab el Louk flat, eat a solitary dinner, then spend the evening listening to classical records, reading his Home Library and Everyman's Library classics, which included many of the Waverley novels as well as the Ethics of G. E. Moore and Aristotle (during my adolescence and after, however, he confined his reading to works on war, politics, and diplomacy). He was well-off enough in 1932 to get married, and to take his much younger wife--she was eighteen and he was thirty-seven--for a three-month honeymoon in Europe. The marriage was brokered by my aunt Nabiha through her contacts in Nazareth and, to some degree, by my mother's aunt in Cairo, Melia Badr (Auntie Melia), a formidable spinster who with her amiable chauffeur, Saleh, became an important part of my childhood landscape. All these details came from my mother, who must have heard them as a sort of preparation for entering the state of matrimony with an older man she had not met, who lived in a place she knew virtually nothing about. And then he turned into the model husband and father whose ideas, values, and of course methods were to shape me. Whatever the actual historical facts

were, my father came to represent a devastating combination of power and authority, rationalistic discipline, and repressed emotions; and all this, I later realized, has impinged on me my whole life, with some good, but also some inhibiting and even debilitating effects. As I have grown older I have found a balance between these effects, but from my childhood through my twenties I was very much controlled by him. With the help of my mother, he tried to create a world very much like a gigantic cocoon, into which I was introduced and maintained at, as I look back over it half a century later, exorbitant cost. What impresses me now is not that I survived it, but that by biding my time within his regime I somehow managed to connect the strengths of his basic lessons to my own abilities, which he seemed unable to affect, perhaps even to reach. What also remained of him in me, unfortunately, was his relentless insistence on doing something useful, getting things done, "never giving up," more or less all the time. I have no concept of leisure or relaxation and, more particularly, no sense of cumulative achievement. Every day for me is like beginning a new term at school, with a vast and empty summer behind it, and an uncertain tomorrow before it. Over time "Edward" became a demanding taskmaster, registering lists of flaws and failures with as much energy as accumulated obligations and commitments, the two lists balancing and in a sense canceling each other. "Edward" still has to begin every day anew and by the end of it normally feels that very little has gone right. My mother was certainly my closest and most intimate companion for the first twenty-five years of my life. Even now, I feel imprinted and guided by several of her long-standing perspectives and habits: a paralyzing anxiety about alternative courses of action; chronic, mostly self-inflicted sleeplessness; a deep-seated restlessness accompanied by an unending supply of mental and physical energy; a profound interest in music and language as well as in the aesthetics of appearance, style, and form; a perhaps overelaborate sense of the social world, its currents, delights, and potential for happiness and grief; and finally, a virtually unquenchable, incredibly various cultivation of loneliness as a form both of freedom and of affliction. Were my mother to have been only a simple refuge, or a kind of intermittent safe haven, from the day's passage I cannot tell what the results might have been. But she had the most deep-seated and unresolved ambivalence toward the world, and me, I have ever known. Despite our affinities, my mother required my love and devotion, and gave them back doubled and redoubled; but she also could turn them away quite suddenly, producing in me a metaphysical panic I can still experience with considerable unpleasantness and even terror. Between my mother's empowering, sunlike smile and her cold scowl or her sustained frowning dismissiveness, I existed as a child both fortunate and hopelessly miserable, neither completely one nor the other. She represented herself to me as an uncomplicated, gifted, loving, and beautiful young woman, and until I was twenty--when she was only forty--I saw her that way; if she abruptly turned into something else, I blamed myself. Later our relationship darkened a good deal. But for my early life I was in an enraptured state of precarious, highly provisional rapport with my mother, so much so that I really had no friends of my age, and my relationships with my younger sisters, Rosemarie, Jean, Joyce, and Grace, were attenuated and, to me at least, not very satisfactory. It was exclusively to my mother that I turned for intellectual and emotional companionship. She used to say that since her first child died in the hospital shortly after she gave birth to him, I was given extra doses of care and attention. But this excess could not disguise her strong underlying pessimism, which often neutralized her radiant affirmation of me. Though for very different reasons, my mother, like my father, revealed very little about her origins and her past as I was growing up. Born in 1914, she was the middle child of five, the others being four boys, with all of whom I had highly problematic ties as my maternal uncles. Everyone who knew my mother in Nazareth concurs in her claim that she was her father's favorite; though she described him as a "good" man, he sounded to me unappealing, a fundamentalist Baptist minister who was both a harsh patriarch and a repressive husband. Hilda, my mother, was sent to boarding school in Beirut, to the American School for Girls, or ASG, a missionary institution that tied her to Beirut first and last, with Cairo as a long interlude between. Undoubtedly a star there and at the Junior College (now Lebanese American University), she was popular and brilliant--first in her class--in most things. There were no men in her life, though, so thoroughly virginal was her existence in those two basically religious schools. Unlike my father, who seemed independent of all early attachments except for those of family, she maintained close friendships with classmates and contemporaries until her death: being a student in Beirut for five years was the happiest part of her life and stamped everyone and everything she knew or did then with a sense of lasting pleasure. Of someone whose company she enjoyed in the years after she was widowed she would say disappointedly and, to me, maddeningly, "Wadad is not really my friend, since she wasn't in school with me." In 1932 she was plucked from what was--or was retrospectively embellished as--a wonderful life and the successes of Beirut and returned to dour, old Nazareth, where she was deposited into an arranged marriage with my father. No one of us today can have a full grasp of what that marriage was or how it came about, but I was trained by

her--my father generally being silent on that point--to see it as something difficult at first, to which she gradually adjusted over the course of nearly forty years, and which she transformed into the main event in her life. She never worked or really studied again, except for taking French lessons in Cairo and, years later, a humanities course at her old Beirut college. There were stories of her anemia and seasickness on the honeymoon voyage, all of them interspersed with comments on my father's patience and kindness to her, the young, very vulnerable and naïve maiden-bride. She never spoke about sex without shuddering dislike and discomfort, although my father's frequent remarks about the man being a skilled horseman, the woman a subdued mare, suggested to me a basically reluctant, if also exceptionally fruitful, sexual partnership that produced six (five surviving) children. But I also never doubted that at the time of her marriage to this silent and peculiarly strong middle-aged man she suffered a terrible blow. She was wrenched from a happy life in Beirut. She was given to a much older spouse--perhaps in return for some sort of payment to her mother--who promptly took her off to strange parts and then set her down in Cairo, a gigantic and confusing city in an unfamiliar Arab country with her maiden aunt, Emelia ("Melina") Badr. Melina had come to Egypt early in the century and, as my mother was to do in her own way, had hewn out a life in essentially foreign territory. Melina's father (my great-grandfather), Yousif Badr, was the first native Evangelical minister in Lebanon, and through him perhaps, Melina had been hired by the American College for Girls in Cairo, an essentially missionary establishment, as local staff to teach Arabic. She was a tiny woman but had the strongest will of anyone I knew. She made the Americans call her Miss Badr (as opposed to a patronizing title reserved for the natives, Teacher Melina), and early on demonstrated her radical independence by boycotting the church services, an integral part of school and mission life. "Is there a god?" I asked her in 1956 a short while before her death. "I very much doubt it," she said wearily and even dismissively, with that strange finality she switched on when she no longer wished to be exercised by the topic at hand. Melina's presence in the Said family life, before and after my birth, was of central importance. We did not live next to or with our relatives. We were alone as a family in Cairo, except for Melina, and later in the forties her sister, my grandmother, Munira, who lived with us. Melina helped my mother understand the complicated Cairo social system, which was so tumultuously different from anything Hilda had ever experienced as a sheltered girl in Nazareth and Beirut. And Melina introduced the couple to various friends of hers, mostly Copts and Syrians ("Shawam," plural of "Shami") whose daughters were her students. Melina didn't seem overly attentive to my sisters, but she doted on me, although she never really let herself go as was normally the case with female family members: no effusions, extended embraces, or exaggerated declarations of ritual concern. I was uniquely conceded the right to ask her questions like "Are you married to Saleh?" the driver who seemed to practically live with her, and occasionally I was even allowed to look through her complicated little handbag. Between the years of 1945 and 1950, I saw her in action several times at the college. Slight and barely five feet tall, she always dressed in black, her head covered with a black turban, and she never wore anything on her feet except for delicate black patent leather pumps. Her gestures were economical in the extreme, and she never raised her voice nor expressed the slightest hesitation or uncertainty. She had a distinct method for every social class and subclass, but underlying each was a sense of formality that could not be violated, as well as a carefully and coldly sustained distance that allowed no one to pass beyond a point of familiarity that only she determined. She terrified maids and students; she forced even distinguished parents--including at least two prime ministers--to accept her strictures and judgments as unappealable and final; by her perseverance, longevity, and air of infallibility she compelled the American teachers (also spinsters) to conform to her way, rather than she to theirs. Through half a century at the college--she lived there as well, ruling her floor like a queen--no one ever got the better of her. She stopped teaching before I was born and became "director" of the college, a position created in deference to her ability to rule Egyptian students and staff as no American could. Auntie Melina took Hilda in hand, showed her where to shop, where to send her children to school, whom to talk to when she needed something. She supplied her with maids, piano teachers, tutors, names of ballet schools, dressmakers, and, of course, endless, very quietly stated advice. She always appeared for lunch on Tuesday, a habit begun before I was born and continued until she left Egypt in 1953 for her brief period of retirement in Lebanon, where she died in 1956. I was born and continued until she left Egypt in 1953 for her brief period of retirement in Lebanon, where she died in 1956. I was particularly fascinated by two things about her. One was her way of eating. Perhaps because of defects in her molars, tiny morsels of food were carefully deposited between her gums and her front teeth; they did not make their way back to where they could be chewed and then swallowed. Instead she worked on the food in the front part of her mouth by pressing it down with her tongue and then sucking from it a minuscule portion of juice and, say, a grain of rice, or a tiny chunk of meat, which she abruptly and almost imperceptibly gulped down. Then with her fork she

extracted what was left--which always looked pretty intact to me--and laid it down precisely on the plate's far corner. By the end of the meal, which she was always the last to finish, her plate contained seven or eight little mounds of food, neatly ringing the surface, as if they had been put there by a guileful chef. The second thing that transfixed me were her hands, always encased in black or white lace gloves, depending on the season. She wore bracelets but not rings. Her left hand always held a small rolled-up handkerchief in the palm next to the thumb, where she could open and reroll it all day. Whenever she offered me candy--bastilia, she called it--it always emerged from the hankie, always smelling of lavender cologne, always covered in cellophane, always of some gentle, unassertive flavor like quince or tamarind. Her right hand either carried her bag or rested on it.

Auntie Melia's relationship with my father was very correct, respectful, even at times cordial; it was quite unlike his attitude toward her sister, the kind and patient and hopelessly good Munira, whom he called *mart* "ammi, mother-in-law (literally, "my paternal uncle's wife"), and whom he always treated with a sort of playful condescension. As for his four brothers-in-law, he seemed to have qualified affection, and a great deal of criticism, for them. Hilda's brothers--Munir, Alif, Rayik, and Emile--lived in Palestine, and we would visit them there with some regularity; after 1948 they flowed in and out of Cairo, refugees mostly, variously "hard up," as my father would say, in need of help. They were more numerous than my father's relatives, especially if to their Palestinian number were added a whole host of Hilda's Lebanese relatives. One of my father's ironclad rules was never to discuss the Said family at all; he often told me that a man's family is his honor. But he had no qualms about discussing his wife's family, for whom (this must have greatly complicated my mother's life) he seemed to be, according to him, an unending source of loans. He was always wealthy, whereas Hilda's brothers were not. One of them borrowed money from my father to get married. The others borrowed sums for various unsuccessful business enterprises, and I was led to believe that these sums were never returned. My father told me all these things with distaste, and because of that information I must have subliminally developed a sense of discomfort and mild disapproval that made my adolescent interaction with them awkward and just short of pleasant. But his main objection to them over the years started with his marriage to Hilda. I never had all the details, but it had something to do with the fact that my mother's oldest brother, Munira's favorite, had sold off the small plot of family land in order to get married. This left the widowed Munira, plus Hilda and her other three brothers, without adequate means to live. I have long (perhaps inaccurately) supposed that part of the marriage arrangements made with my father by Hilda's family included stipulations for Munira's subsistence. She ended up spending many years with us, but it was quite routine for us to hear stories of her mistreatment at her oldest son's house, or of her other sons' inability--my father always called it unwillingness--to contribute to her upkeep. My father had a righteous sense of achievement after he had persuaded one of her sons to take my grandmother out to Groppi's for ice cream once a week. For my father all this represented a classic, not to say definitive, example of how sons should not treat their mother--and, he began after 1948 regularly to say, "their sister." This kind of talk, expressed in my father's laconic style, pervaded the family ambience for me in both a general and acutely personal way. Not only did it seem to put my mother's family under a permanent cloud of disapproval and fundamental disqualification, but as a brother and son I felt acute discomfort. The implicit syllogism, according to which I grew up, ran as follows: "Edward" resembles his maternal uncles (talih" mikhwil is the Arabic expression for the process; it also suggests that the older one got, the more strong the resemblance); his uncles are irrecusably bad sons and brothers; therefore "Edward" is far too likely to end up like them, and must thus be broken in his course, reeducated, re-formed to be less like them. This was awful for my mother, of course. To have her son, her mother (whom she always treated in my presence with an almost sneeringly cold dislike), and her brothers singled out for such a Darwinian fate turned her into an intolerable mix of defender-cum-agent of her original family, executor of my father's injunctions in her new one, and prosecutor of, as well as defense lawyer for, me. Whatever she did fell into these three categories of judgment simultaneously, and ended up tangled inside her, with very disorienting consequences for me, her admired and yet unfortunately wayward son, the child who confirmed the worst of her lineage. Her love for me was both beautiful and withheld, and also endlessly patient.

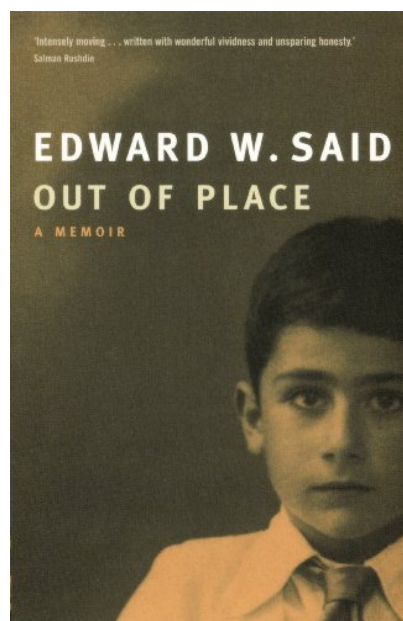
I grew up sliding between being--in my estimation of my father's attitude to me--a delinquent son and my uncles' all-too-dutiful nephew. I called my father Daddy until his dying day, but I always sensed in the phrase how contingent it was, how potentially improper it was to think of myself as his son. I never asked him for anything without great apprehension or hours of desperate preparation. The most terrible thing he ever said to me--I was twelve then--was, "You will never inherit anything from me; you are not the son of a rich man," though literally of course I was. When he died he left his entire estate to my mother. From the moment I became conscious of myself as a child, I found it impossible to think of myself as not having both a discrediting past and an immoral future in store; my entire sense of self during my

*formative years was always experienced in the present tense, as I frantically worked to keep myself from falling back into an already established pattern, or from falling forward into certain perdition. Being myself meant not only never being quite right, but also never feeling at ease, always expecting to be interrupted or corrected, to have my privacy invaded and my unsure person set upon. Permanently out of place, the extreme and rigid regime of discipline and extracurricular education that my father would create and in which I became imprisoned from the age of nine left me no respite or sense of myself beyond its rules and patterns. And thus I became "Edward," a creation of my parents whose daily travails a quite different but quite dormant inner self was able to observe, though most of the time was powerless to help. "Edward" was principally the son, then the brother, then finally the boy who went to school and unsuccessfully tried to follow (or ignore and circumvent) all the rules. His creation was made necessary by the fact that his parents were themselves self-creations: two Palestinians with dramatically different backgrounds and temperaments living in colonial Cairo as members of a Christian minority within a large pond of minorities, with only each other for support, without any precedent for what they were doing except an odd combination of prewar Palestinian habit; American lore picked up at random in books and magazines and from my father's decade in the United States (my mother did not even visit the United States until 1948); the missionaries' influence; incompleting and hence eccentric schooling; British colonial attitudes that represented both the lords and the general run of "humankind" they ruled; and, finally, the style of life my parents perceived around them in Egypt and which they tried to adapt to their special circumstances. Could "Edward's" position ever be anything but out of place? Revue de presse "Absorbing. . . . An almost Proustian portrait." --The New York Times "Said has turned the writing of a memoir itself into perhaps the most profound type of homecoming a perennial exile can know." --The Village Voice Literary Supplement "Engrossing. . . . [Said has] an almost Proustian feel for smells, sounds, sights, and telling anecdotes." --The New York of Books "If autobiography is above all a means of explaining one's self to oneself, then Out of Place . . . must be seen as a triumph." --*

*The Boston Globe*

*Par Edward W. Said*

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