



Looking for Palestine: Growing Up Confused in an Arab-American Family

By Najla Said

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A frank and entertaining memoir, from the daughter of Edward Said, about growing up second-generation Arab American and struggling with that identity.

The daughter of a prominent Palestinian father and a sophisticated Lebanese mother, Najla Said grew up in New York City, confused and conflicted about her cultural background and identity. Said knew that her parents identified deeply with their homelands, but growing up in a Manhattan world that was defined largely by class and conformity, she felt unsure about who she was supposed to be, and was often in denial of the differences she sensed between her family and those around her. The fact that her father was the famous intellectual and outspoken Palestinian advocate Edward Said only made things more complicated. She may have been born a Palestinian Lebanese American, but in Said's mind she grew up first as a WASP, having been baptized Episcopalian in Boston and attending the wealthy Upper East Side girls' school Chapin, then as a teenage Jew, essentially denying her true roots, even to herself—until, ultimately, the psychological toll of all this self-hatred began to threaten her health.

As she grew older, making increased visits to Palestine and Beirut, Said's worldview shifted. The attacks on the World Trade Center, and some of the ways in which Americans responded, finally made it impossible for Said to continue to pick and choose her identity, forcing her to see herself and her passions more clearly. Today, she has become an important voice for second-generation Arab Americans nationwide.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

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Playwright Said was raised in Manhattan's Upper West Side as the Palestinian Lebanese American Christian daughter of parents who raised her as a secular humanist. Her father was the world-famous intellectual Edward Said. Idyllic, sun-soaked, early-childhood trips to 1970s Beirut, full of family and love, only slowly betrayed a simmering turmoil therein, and Said spends most of her life understanding and recalibrating her perceptions of her ancestral homelands versus those seen through the lens trained on the Middle East by the world at large. While Najla grows up a prep-school kid in the 1980s and 1990s, she digests narrow views of the Arab character, turns them inward in painful ways, and struggles to understand the complicated patchwork of her identity. Although those with stakes in any of Said's backgrounds will have a more pointed interest in her explorations, most readers will relate to her ultimately universal discussion of growing up other. Said's memoir is both a dear tribute to her father's work and proof that acceptance of one's roots—the hurdle to success and success itself—is most always hard earned. --Annie Bostrom

Review

"The scholar Edward Said was born in Jerusalem when it was Palestine under the British Mandate, immigrated to the U.S., was baptized an Episcopalian, supported Palestinian independence, married a Lebanese Quaker, and became a prominent professor at Columbia University. No wonder his daughter, Najla, was conflicted about her identity. If Edward's Orientalism provides the intellectual framework for understanding postcolonialism, Najla's memoir, "Looking for Palestine," is the other side of the coin, as those same complex forces tug her life in multiple directions while she tries to understand who she is."--
"Daily Beast

""In her engaging memoir, "Looking for Palestine," Najla Said explores the cultural confusions of growing up Arab-American in the 1970s and '80s New York City."--"Elle"

"What proves substantive and memorable about this book . . . is the author's exploration of her relationship with her family and her social surroundings. . . . her snapshots of personal interaction with her father and their sometimes droll exchanges give the book an undeniably warm and intimate feel."--"San Francisco Chronicle"

"Said's aching memoir explores her coming-of-age as a Christian Arab-American on New York's Upper West Side. . . . [Said's] complex persona, self-deprecating humor, and focus on the personal rather than the political broaden the appeal of Said's book beyond any particular ethnic, cultural, or religious audience."--
"Publishers Weekly "(starred review)

"In an illuminating memoir, the daughter of Edward Said, the writer, academic and symbol of Palestinian self-determination, explores her complex family history and its role in shaping her identity. . . . An enlightening, warm, timely coming-of-age story exploring the author's search for identity framed within the confounding maze of America's relationship with the Middle East."--"Kirkus"

"It can be a difficult story to tell: that of one's discontent in the midst of privilege. And yet with great skill, humor, and poignancy, Ms. Said accomplishes just that. In the end, she is her late father's great inheritor, ever-journeying toward that elusive home."--Alicia Erian, author of "Towelhead"

"Najla Said's "Looking for Palestine "is a compassionate and candid book on her courageous coming-of-age in contemporary America. Said is a brilliant, talented and sensitive artist with a larger-than-life, loving father."--Professor Cornel West

"A deeply penetrating, often hilarious, and occasionally devastating account of growing up Arab American. Of course, Najla Said's scramble for her identity is uniquely hers. How many of us, after all, have had world-

famous intellectuals as fathers, experienced the civil war in Lebanon first hand, and been kissed on the cheek by Yasir Arafat (which she hated)? But after finally finding the conviction to be at peace with herself, Najla Said has written more than a memoir. Looking for Palestine is a survivor's guide for all of us who live with that feeling of being out of place wherever we are."--Moustafa Bayoumi, author of "How Does it Feel to Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America"

"Thoughtful, searching, and open-eyed, "Looking for Palestine "takes readers on a journey into an Arab-American girl's search for identity. The joy and pain of growing up in the long shadow of a brilliant parent, the struggle for meaning and belonging, and the painful dispossession of the Palestinians are all treated with tender care as Najla Said gives us a haunting and singular life story."--Diana Abu-Jaber, author of "Crescent"

About the Author

Najla Said has performed off Broadway, regionally and internationally, as well as in film and television. In April 2010, Said completed a nine-week sold-out off Broadway run of her solo show, *Palestine*, which features some of the material in this book. She is a frequent speaker and performer at schools across the country, and lives in New York City.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jamie Lundquist:

Spent a free a chance to be fun activity to do! A lot of people spent their leisure time with their family, or their particular friends. Usually they doing activity like watching television, gonna beach, or picnic inside the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your free time/ holiday? Can be reading a book may be option to fill your free of charge time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of guide that you should read. If you want to try out look for book, may be the guide untitled Looking for Palestine: Growing Up Confused in an Arab-American Family can be great book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

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