

Online Conference

Freud and Said - Elective Affinities

29 January 2022, 1:00 pm - 6:30 pm

Abstracts

Robert Beshara

Edward Said: Psychoanalyst of Cultures

In this essay, I will highlight the unacknowledged influence of Sigmund Freud on Edward Said's thinking. I will argue that Said was not only experienced in the clinical side of psychoanalysis as an analysand, but also knowledgeable of the theory as is clear from a number of his texts, such as *Beginnings*, *Orientalism*, and *Freud and the Non-European*. In these texts, Said was engaging psychoanalysis critically, and often unconsciously, in order to think about modern, Orientalist, and imperialist cultures respectively.

Timothy Brennan

Freud and the Arab Mind

The title "Freud and the Arab Mind," is ambiguous. Although Said bookended his career with statements on Freud – in *Beginnings* (1975) and *Freud and the Non-European* (2003) – his immersion in psychoanalysis, both personally and intellectually, has been generally overlooked. In any case, he entered more controversial territory in two pieces of writing that most of his audience will not know: an essay for the Arab modernist journal *Mawaqif* titled "Withholding, Avoidance, Recognition" (published only in Arabic) and a long, angry letter from Beirut to his activist friend, Sami Al-Banna. In both, he bewailed the absence in the Arab world of a "theory of mind" – an absence, he felt, made the Arab world more vulnerable to the West's encroachments, less self-aware, and more subject to illusions. On the one hand, though, the claim seems dubious. A number of books -- Joelle M. Abi-Rached's *Asfuriyyeh: A History of Madness, Modernity and War in the Middle East* (2020) and Omnia El-Shakry's *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (2017), for example – provide a rich history of psychology, psychoanalysis, desire and the unconscious in the Arab Middle East that hardly support the notion of the absence of which Said wrote. On the other, it seems self-defeating. For the phrase "Arab Mind" is exactly what Said was targeting in *Orientalism* – the racist studies of Raphael Patai, Yehoshafat Harkabi and others that offer demeaning portraits of a supposedly singular "Arab psyche" to be used as an instrument of war. Why, then, would he talk of "Arabs" and "mind" in this

way? Said has been criticized for both statements, but I think he is misunderstood, particularly in his reading of Freud, which is more civic (Freud the Gesetzgeber) than psychoanalytic, and more strategic than scholarly. At any rate, by closely reading Said's various engagements with Freud (both known and unknown), I want to explain what I think he meant when he argued that this region of the world from which he came, and on whose behalf he fought, lacked a "theory of mind."

Beverley Butler

Heritage Syndromes and/as Archaeologies of the Mind and Place - The Contrapuntal Journeys of Freud, Petrie and Said

This paper is entered into as a journey-quest that follows in the footsteps of Sigmund Freud, Flinders Petrie and Edward Said. I use the motif of 'Heritage Syndromes' as a means to place in critical conversation the respective 'Father of psychoanalysis', 'Father of archaeology' and 'Father of postcolonialism' (the latter title Said fervently resisted). Freud as 'archaeologist of the mind', Petrie as 'archaeologist of place,' as Moses-figures of sorts, are examined in the context of Said's own excavations of the alternative origins-ancestry of Moses and of the 'figurative' and 'literal' usages of archaeology that feature in his 'Freud lecture' and accompanying text *Freud and the Non-European*. My overall objective is to draw out the 'pharmakonic efficacies' at play and to crystallise the diverse contrapuntal forms and forces by which the 'besieged heritage' of Palestine 'acts back'.

Lara and Stephen Sheehi

Theory as a Stone

On July 3, 2001, Edward Said threw a stone; the trajectory of that stone landed in a number of unexpected spaces within and outside psychoanalysis and the Academy over the next year. That stone brought Freud and the *Non-European* to London. In thinking about this arrival of a Palestinian re-directed to the Freud Museum to talk about psychoanalysis, Jewish identity and Palestinian selfhood, we consider another trajectory of that stone, a trajectory of that moment and today. In this talk, we explore what Freud, Said, and psychoanalysis looks like re-directed back to Palestine in the hands, lives and practices of Palestinian clinicians.