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## **In His Footsteps**

### **By Hekmat Sadat**

Earlier this year, I wrote 'Muffled media' (Al-Ahram Weekly, 27 February - 5 March) about the media blackout on Edward Said talk at UCLA. I wrote about how angry I was at the self-censorship of the Los Angeles Times, but what I did not write was how awesome it was to be in the presence of such an educated and humanist intellectual.

When he took the stage that evening, the hall was packed with hundreds of people. He was greeted with a five-minute standing ovation. The lady to my right was an Arab professor from UCLA who was literally in tears. To my right was a young college student who adored his earlier literary works. A tired, weak Edward Said spoke and made the hair on my back stand as he discussed the then prospective invasion of Iraq.

At the end, there was a question and answer session. Of course, there was a heckler from the crowd. Then came a young Israeli exchange student to the microphone. She said "Professor Said, I agree with your presentation but what can I do?" Said said you are in a position of power and I, although an Ivy League professor, am not. Until this inequality is resolved the conflict will never be de-escalated. Said had a gift of reaching the hearts of people -- his true strength.

Before, during and for at least one hour after the event, there were lively discussions on Iraq and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. While Said was a unique man, his message was simple: "coexistence". I am sad that Said will not witness that dream in the Holy Land. Now that there is no longer the Said who so eloquently spoke and wrote, we as the people who believe in peace and justice must carry on the civil mission in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan.