# Postmodernism and Subjectivity Reconstructed in Edward Said's Out of Place: A Memoir

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## Abstract

This paper studies the connection between the textual politics of ethnic autobiography and postmodern aesthetics as demonstrated in Edward Said's Out of Place: A Memoir (1999). It explores the complexities of the relationship between the dominating western discourses of identity and constructing subjectivity. This paper shows that Said is rewriting the diasporic model of subjectivity as a position of difference, by doing so he challenges both the traditional prevailing notion of a coherent universal transcendental subject, and the essentialist concepts of the other. It also examines the way in which Out of Place as a postmodern autobiography provides insights into the contemporary dilemmas about the limits of an autobiographical discourse attempting to speak in the name of truth and yet of difference.

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## 1. Postmodernism and autobiography

Much postmodern aesthetic theory concerns itself in particular with the rejection of all-inclusive grand universal narratives of modernity in history and politics. This point of view is in harmony with an opposing emphasis on the transformational autobiographical narratives of marginal minorities and the self-articulation narratives of decolonization. We can begin to explore these points by concentrating on one of the most influential texts of postmodern theory, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1984) by Jean-Francois Lyotard. Although Lyotard's focus in that work is mainly on science, we will go on to see how some of the topics he addresses have had consequences for the study of culture at large. For Lyotard, the basic aspect of postmodernism is the "suspicion of metanarratives", those "totalizing" universal guiding values and beliefs (such as Christianity, Marxism, humanism, capitalism, or the myth of scientific progress), which previously seemed to control, define and interpret all the different forms of discursive actions in the social world and representation (xxiv; 31-7). According to Lyotard, the postmodern disapproval of universalizing narratives supports a "severe re-examination […] on the thought of the Enlightenment, on the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject" (73). Lyotard argues for the openness to the diversity that resides within any culture, which cannot be assimilated within the idea of a grand narrative and which must be, instead examined within smaller and multiple narratives accompanying focal points of power and activity which do not seek (or obtain) any universal truths and absolutes as was the tendency in the modern age (3-15). Steven Conner argues that the dominance of postmodern theory offers cultural studies, especially postcolonial theory the idea of "splintering the center into dissident micro territories" and "constellations of voices" (1997, 266). This allows "promoting specificity and regionalism, social minorities and political projects which are local in scope, or surviving traditions and suppressed forms of knowledge" (266). In fact, both postmodernism and postcolonialism rely on the principles of deconstruction. On the one hand postmodernism deconstructs the inherent assumptions of western grand narratives, on the other postcolonialism deconstructs the hierarchies on which colonial power relationships are built. They can be viewed as complementary strategies; one performs a critique of western values from the inside and the other from the outside.

Issues of subjectivity and self-representation are essential ones when it comes to exploring the actual efficacy of postmodernism and postcolonial practices since postmodern politics looks for ways in which we can all, as Lyotard puts it, "gnaw away at the great institutionalized narrative apparatuses" (34), and "search for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable" (81). The decentring processes of postmodernism have questioned Anglo-Eurocentric epistemological and cultural models, foregrounding marginalized traditions, and opening theories of discourse to the voices of those represented as the 'Other'. As Edward Said observes, women's studies, black and ethnic studies for example all rest upon one rule, "the right of formerly un- or misrepresented human groups to speak for and represent themselves in domains defined, politically and intellectually, as normally excluding them, usurping their signifying and representing functions, over-riding their historical reality" (1986, 212). The idea is to take control not only of actual power, but also of the languages and images that seem intended to silence those whom they exemplify in representation. The American culture of the 1980s and 90s for example became more and more preoccupied with questions of an interracial, multicultural society. Accordingly, the literary scene of the 1980s and the 1990s perceived a flood of autobiographies, especially a "florescence of ethnic autobiography" (Fischer, 1986, 194).[†] As Linda Anderson observes, autobiography has become the text of the culturally excluded since it demonstrates a potential for representing a particular marginalized group through one's personal experience (2001,

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[†]  Presently, the field of autobiography studies, in which this essay must be contextualized, can be represented through this very short list of important texts: Paul John Eakin. (1985). *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. Princeton UP, Princeton; Francoise Lionnet. (1989). *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. Cornell UP, Ithaca; Bella Brodzki and Celeste Shenck, (eds.). (1988). *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Cornell UP, Ithaca; Sidonie Smith. (1987). *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*. John Hopkins UP, Bloomington; Valerie Smith. (1987). *Self-Discovery and Authority in African-American Narratives*. Harvard UP, Cambridge. Domna Stanton, (ed.). (1987). *The Female Autograph*. Chicago UP, Chicago; William Andrews. (1986). *To Tell A Free Story: The First Century of African-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*. Illinois UP, Urbana; Sidonie Smith. (1993). *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body. Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*. Indiana UP, Bloomington; and Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield. (2000). *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*. Routledge, New York.

104). This noticeable trend in the production of autobiographies seems to be in line with the principles of postmodern writing, and the growing understanding of diversity which postmodernism has brought to the revision of literary canon and culture (Hornung, 1997, 222).

Narratives of the self have materially replaced abstract theoretical paradigms, challenging the views of an unspecified poststructuralism. Thus, at a time when postmodern thinkers like Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault pronounced the death of the author" – as a part of the poststructuralist critique of the transcendental subject of the enlightenment – those marginalized by gender, race, and ethnicity have shown their crucial cultural intervention through autobiographical writing. In a postmodern contemporary West, were Jane Flax remarks that as voice and meaning in individual stories become more important and local truths more available, the possibility of reconciling these voices seems to diminish (1989, 4-6). The implications of the individual's voice, has altered the critical landscape because ethnic bio-fictions and women's personal narratives help to bring out theoretical problems that cannot be approached by theory alone.

Several critics argue for autobiography as a strategic point of departure for postmodern theorizing. The issues of identity reconstruction, agency and subjectivity represent major concerns for postmodernism. Gilmore's Introduction to Autobiography & Postmodernism (1994) seeks to demonstrate the "mutual historicization of autobiography and postmodernism in the context of their shared interest in theorizing the subject" (1994a, 3). In other words, each needs the other in its challenge to the metanarratives of universal, transcendent Enlightenment self. Gilmore argues that reading subjectivity as dynamic and multicultural emphasizes "the subject as an agent of discourse, where the subject itself is understood as necessarily discursive" (3).[‡] Such considerations have served to assert the status of autobiography as "postmodernism's most adequate form of art",

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[‡] Feminist criticism and theory have been involved deeply in integrating politics and postmodernism on the topic of self-representation and in developing a conception of the human agent as a creator of culture. See especially Judith Butler. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, London; Jane Flax. (1990). *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West.* California UP, Berkeley; and Teresa de Lauretis. (1987). *The Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Indiana UP, Bloomington.

and as "an expression of multicultural existence" (Hornung, 1997, 222; 228). Hence both autobiographical and postmodern texts appear to be the privileged sites of identity production "both resist and produce cultural identity" (Gilmore, 1994a, 4).

Michael M. J. Fischer in his important essay "Ethnicity and the Postmodern Arts of Memory" (1986) suggests that "ethnic autobiography and autobiographical fiction can perhaps serve as a key form for explorations of pluralist, post industrialist, late twentieth-century society"(1986, 195). Moreover, autobiography has become an influential tool of cultural criticism, paralleling postmodern theories of textuality and knowledge, such as "juxtapositioning of multiple realities, intertextuality and inter-referentiality" (1986, 230). Fischer considers ethnic autobiography as an "art of memory" that serves as protection against the hegemonic tendencies of cultural assimilation of contemporary western culture (195). Therefore, it is not exaggerated to argue that postmodern practices occasioned a shift from autobiography's "identification with a western, bourgeois, white, male self" to "more multi cultural modes of self-representation" (Gilmore, 1994a: 10f). According to Fisher, what ethnic studies borrow from postmodern theory is actually its critique of essentialism in identity formation. So instead of focusing too exclusively on the ethnic identity of the author, postmodernism appoints itself to the task of deconstructing the universal meanings and legitimacy of categories like race, identity, and ethnicity which are seen as fictional constructs, due to the vague nature of language (1986, 198-200).

Such discussions on self-representational discourse and postmodernism are central to Edward Said's autobiography, Out of Place: A Memoir (1999). The perspective of the Arab-American intellectual inhabiting combined Arab and American histories is therefore of particular theoretical and practical interest. It is the nature of engagement with multiple subjectivities that places this work solidly in contemporary theoretical explorations of postcolonial and postmodern discourses. As a Palestinian born in Jerusalem, raised in Egypt, lived and taught in the United States since 1951. Said writes: "Many displacements from countries, cities, languages, environments […] have kept me in motion all these years" (1999, 217). The Young Edward grew up mostly in Cairo in British and American schools where he learnt more about British and American history than Arabic history and where he felt constantly Out of Place. The recurring theme of

this book is "the overriding sensation [he] had […] of always being Out of Place" (1999, 3). Not being allowed to live in Egypt in the 1960s, exile has been a reality for him for most of his sixty-six years. The book ends with his graduation from Harvard in 1964. Actually it is likely to read his book, Reflections on Exile (2000), a group of essays written between 1967 and 1998 which describe a life story that starts from the point at which Out of Place (1999) ends, as the second part of his autobiography. The titles of both books obviously examine the same theme of displacement.

This paper will deal with the way in which Out of Place as an Arab-American autobiography, in focusing on local and contextual voices and specific histories rather than on universal principles or truths, has developed a postmodern performative discourse. As both Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain that "a performative view of life narrative theorizes autobiographical occasions as dynamic sites for the performance of identities constitutive of subjectivity" (2001, 143). In this view, "identities are not fixed or essentialized attributes of autobiographical subjects; rather they are produced and reiterated through cultural norms, and thus remain provisional and unstable" (142). According to Smith and Watson theorizing performativity challenges the traditional notion of autobiography as the site of fixed and coherent identity (143).

Said's postmodern performative discourse offers self-reflexive approach to theorizing as practice, or, to use Nancy Miller's concept, as a "personal criticism". Miller asserts "personal criticism entails an explicitly autobiographical performance within the act of criticism" (1991, 1). Miller explains that "personal criticism […] is often located in a specific body (or voice) marked by gender, color, and national origin; a little like a passport" (4). She adds "personal criticism may include self-representations as political representativity" (2). This article uses Miller's concept of "personal criticism", but in the opposite direction of the movement explained by her. Miller's idea focuses on the insertion of the personal into the theoretical. In Said's work the shift is from the theoretical toward the personal.[§] Said uses his autobiography to open up another space within his theoretical and academic writing, and to carve in the genre of autobiography his troubled relationship to multiculturism, language, cultural imperialism, and exile.

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[§] As for the transformation of academic theoretical writing into personal reflection, see Susan Suleiman's *Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* (1994).

Indeed, Out of Place is an expansion of Said's academic work and exhibition of its prehistory. It provides the biographical information behind issues that Said's theoretical and political works have examined at length, such as his theoretical discussion of in-betweenness, the role of the intellectual, and reconceptualizing the Orient. Referring to Said's first book, Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography, the subject of his Ph. D. dissertation at Harvard, F. Elizabeth Dahab argues that already his early text displays the idea that "rather than being a career, becoming a writer was a project, one that involves pouring oneself into a series of works which come to define who one is" (2003, 2). Indeed, this work displays the major themes – home, exile, geography – that would stay with Said throughout his intellectual life. Ashcroft argues that, "the conditions of his [Said's] own life, the text of his identity, are constantly woven into and form the defining context for all his writing" (2001, 5).

## Negotiating identities

> Identity – who we are, where we come from, what we are – is difficult to maintain in exile […] we are the 'other', an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of restlessness, an exodus. Silence and discretion veil and hurt, slow the body searches, soothe the string of loss. (Said, 1986, 16-17)

This section explores Said's *Out of Place* as a Palestinian dialogic intervention of Arab-American identity in the United States. Given the marginal position of Arab-Americans in the United States, whose identity is determined by, and in relation to, the dominant mainstream American culture, *Out of Place* tries to achieve a double process: challenging the identity imposed by the prevailing mainstream discourse while at the same time employing its authorized narrative in order to inter into its system of presentation. In other words, it is not enough for Said to destabilize socially constructed identity; he must be able to interact with the dominant American discourse ideologically in order his intervention to negotiate a probable identity effectively. The idea is to transmit not so much the truth of the self as the personal or autobiographical effects of a discourse. As Gilmore points out:

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> whether and when autobiography emerges as an authoritative discourse of reality and identity, and any particular text appears to tell the truth, have less to do with the text's presumed accuracy about what really happened than with its apprehended fit into culturally prevalent discourse of truth and identity. (1994b, ix)

In this context, it is possible to argue that the reception of Arab-American autobiography is restricted by two implicit demands:  first, that it creates a subjectivity that is comprehensible in light of the ideal American model of subjectivity, and second, that it attends to Western conceptions about Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners.

The first demand entails Arab-American autobiography to create a narrative of self-emergence and actualizing the American dream, while the second necessitates such a narrative which sets out to answer 'where do I come from?' This narrative is expected to demonstrate cultural differences, and politics of the Middle East. Said's autobiography's "apprehended fit into culturally prevalent discourses of truth and identity" (Gilmore 1994b, ix) depends on fulfilling those demands. Actually, Said's *Out of Place* not only presents the subjectivity of America's most influential contemporary literary and cultural critic, but also narrates the catastrophe of the Palestinian dispossession from their lands which the prevailing Zionist discourse in the West erases.  The stories of his people are interwoven into his narrative, collaborating in the book's structure as well. Said's life becomes the example of the stories of individuals (Palestinians) that are frequently left out in numerous stories. *Out of Place*, then, constructs a personal identity that departs from conventional western individualist notions of the self's independence, the selfhood constructed in *Out of Place* is unimaginable outside of its cultural origins and historical context.  Doing this openly challenges the alleged truth of the overriding Zionist dogma which claims that Palestinian collective subjectivity does not have an actual being. This strategy of narration is also employed in his auto-ethnography, After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives (1986), which also adopts the same theme of individual/collective dispossession. All Said's writings on Palestine aim to give "Americans a sense of what the dispossession and the alienation of Palestine meant from the Palestinian point of view" (2001, 171). Thus Said's narrative is part of his struggle for political and human rights for Palestinians in a pro-Israeli American context.

By writing *Out of Place*, Said ascertained a narrative for the Palestinians whose narrative has repeatedly been negated, as he states, being "stateless, dispossessed, de-centered, we are frequently unable either to speak the 'truth' of our experience or to make it heard" (1986, 6). In his article "Permission to Narrate"(1984), Said insists on the Palestinian's right to narrate the Palestinian's perspective. The most important pro-Israeli narrative in America that Said counters is the one that says: "there are no Arab Palestinians. The land did not exist as Palestine, or perhaps the people did not exist either; 'we Palestinians' have almost imperceptibly become 'they,' a very doubtful lot" (1986, 75). Said himself has been accused of fabricating his Palestinian origins in order to elect himself spokesman of the Palestinians. Thus it is inevitable for him to reconstruct his family's early history in Palestine. He exhibits his family's genealogy in order to answer questions about his Palestinian origin. It is an urgent need, an effort to give depth to his childhood world which is negated by the present reality of the United Sates, and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Said devotes the first two chapters of his book to writing the biography of his parents, maternal and paternal grandparents. By doing so, he gives these layers of family history a sense of coherence, and thus he prevents it from disappearing. Writing on his family constitutes a part of his more general search for Palestinian origin and identity, and it establishes a sense of legitimacy in his own life story. For validating his story, he uses photographs, church archive as definitive documents to prove the refrentiality of his text, and as a proof of Palestinian existence. Walid Khalidi's documentary collection of largely personal photographs of Palestinians during the period between 1876 and 1948, *Before Their Diaspora: The Photographic History of the Palestinians* (2010) serves as a meaningful example similar to Said's autobiographical attitude.

Thus, the rewriting of home, and coming to terms with his Palestinian heritage become critical aspects of the articulation of his Palestinian-American identity. Bill Ashcroft argues that "a common strategy of post-colonial self-assertion has been the attempt to rediscover some authentic pre-colonial cultural reality in order to redress the impact of European imperialism" (2001, 2). But what complicates his efforts is that his memories of Palestine are basically unexceptional considering his deep participation in Palestinian affairs later on: "It was a place I took for granted the country I was from where family and friends existed (it seems so

retrospectively) with unreflecting ease" (1999, 20). Said self-consciously problematises the making of his personal narrative.

The key to this conceptual problem is the inevitable figure of the father. His father, a Palestinian who held American citizenship, had fought in World War 1 before turning to Palestine.  His father "hated Jerusalem, although [he] was born and spent long periods of time there" (6).  And "the only thing he ever said about it was it reminded him of death" (6). The narrator receives very limited access to his father's history in Jerusalem; "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" (6). Instead the father focuses on the subjects of reclaiming American history, citizenship, and pursuing the American dream. Said writes "one of the great stories, told and retold many times while I was growing up, was his [father's] narrative of coming to the United States" (8). Said's father always declared in a "brashly assertive tone" that "I am an American Citizen" (6). The distance between the father's two assertions, amazingly complicates the narrator's invention of personal identity, and emphasizes more the perception of rootless-ness. Susan Winnett argues that Said's experience of exile began within his relation to his father, "the distancing enforced by his father" provided the "impetus for the intellectual project devoted to the study of exile and homelessness that bears the name 'Edward Said'" (2004, 354). The obvious split evidenced here reveals the often shrouded tension between the Palestinian-Arab ethnic heritage on the one hand and the construction of a cultural, national American identity on the other.

More importantly, though Said tries to recreate his own self through a redefinition of his Palestinian heritage and a revision of his cultural memories "the problem of Palestine and its tragic loss […] have been so relatively repressed, undiscussed, or even remarked on by [his] parents"(117). Said's immediate family left Palestine in 1947 and never went back. By mid-1948, his whole extended family had left Palestine. As a child, he did not understand the extent of what had happened because he was sheltered from it by his parents. He describes himself at that time as "a scarcely conscious, essentially unknowing witness" of his family's dislocation. This "repression" of Palestine occurred "as a part of a larger depoliticization on the part of [his] parents" (117). Said inevitably has to face the difficulty of the ultimate 'unknowability' of all the historical details of his past. This has been constantly addressed by him:

> It was open to 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 information; there were never the right number of well-functioning connectives between the parts I knew about or able somehow to excavate; the total picture was never quiet right. (6)

He feels the ethnic anxiety of losing precious part of his identity, his Palestinian heritage which is constantly threatened by assimilation. In *Out of Place*, memory not only serves identity construction, but it also serves a political function. His memories of Palestine prove to be partial and fragmented recollections. Said responds to his parents' silence by transforming the memories of other members of his extended family, especially his paternal aunt Nabiha, in creative space for the self. By including stories told by members of his extended family, Said tries to validate these people's experiences into that of his own. Their presence makes him acknowledge that his identity, his "I", originates in other Palestinians' rich stories. It can be seen also an attempt to offer some sense of cohesion and closure to the 'unclear', and 'loose ends' of his parent's life and thereby create a solid base from which to view his own distant Palestinian past. This complex of connection is a representation of the very process of narrative which creates a ramification among diverse Palestinian lives, a mirroring of locations and private Palestinian histories.

Most of the stories about Jerusalem are remembered from his aunt Nabiha's perspective. For Said, her memories of Jerusalem create a strong sense of Palestinian identity; she becomes the metaphor of Jerusalem. He writes: "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 peculiar, not to say austere and constricted, spirit" (7). It was through aunt Nabiha and her voluntary work with Palestinian refugee families in Cairo that "[he] first experienced Palestine as history and cause" (119). For Said, his aunt holds the key to his family's past in Jerusalem. He was thirteen and a half when he first realized the travails of Palestinian identity as mediated by his aunt. The importance of this change in Said's life is linked to the fact that for the first time he starts to think about his own identity as a Palestinian, expressing the sense of a cultural origin that has been devalued and obscured by his father. Thus Said didn't experience his Palestinian identity naturally as something taken for granted, but he had to learn it from his aunt despite his parents'

efforts to educate him to a different set of cultural identifications. Identity, in this case, becomes the result of a series of possible transformations that express the shaping of contexts over who we are.

## The Worldliness of the Autobiographical Subject

> My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. (Said, 1983, 4)

From a postmodern perspective, we must challenge the notion of the essentialist self at the center of the autobiography and recognize the multiply situated subject in autobiography, socially and historically shaped. In the politicization of the personal, Said's identity is played out among several cultural discourses. As Linda Hutcheon believes that postmodern 'narcissistic' narrative reveals the past as always ideologically and discursively constructed, prompting questions not about 'the' truth, but 'whose' truth prevails (1989, 47-61). According to Hutcheon, the subject "in history" is rendered destabilized and incoherent, a site of discursive pressures and articulations. Accordingly, it is important to apprehend more the effect of different discourses in which the autobiographer is situated, since such an approach permits a cultural critique of prevailing ideologies. Alfred Hornung argues that "postmodern versions of autobiographical self-representation function also as powerful forms of critique" (230, 1997), because their "postmodern discourses about the self brings about a change in a perception of otherness and a revision of cultural stereotypes" (230). Said bases his autobiography on the British education he received in Egypt and on his experience as a student in the United States. So it is hardly surprising to see Said uses autobiography to expose the political and cultural dominance of English colonialism, and to demonstrate the psychological experience of living during that colonial era. This is a typical Saidian approach, which eventually locates not only the text, but also the critic in the world, connecting them to a political, historical and social context. They effectively expose existing structures of power and, in so doing, show both the potentials and the restrictions of theses structures.

Said resents the racism and chauvinism of British schoolteachers and curricula (42-4; 184-7; 195). He is still troubled by an "explicit colonial encounter" (44), in which he was kicked out by an English administrator from a sport club in Cairo. He was told that "Arabs are not allowed here, and you are an Arab!" (44). It would be decades before Said would come to reflect on these issues in his life:

> What troubles me now, fifty years later, is that although the episode remained with me for such a long time and although it smarted both then and now, there seemed to be fatalistic compact between my father and myself about our necessarily inferior status. He knew about it; I discovered it publicly for the first time face to face with Pilley [the English administrator]. Yet neither of us saw it then as worth a struggle of any kind, and that realization shamed me still. (44)

Indeed, there is a personal psychological purpose which *Out of Place* serves. The act of exploring his past and of writing it down serves as an essential instrument in discovering the self. Said is not emancipating himself from the past, but instead, he puts the past to work in the service of understanding the present. As Paul Eakin points out:

> The act of composition may be conceived as a mediating term in the autobiographical enterprise, reaching back into the past not merely to recapture but to repeat the psychological rhythms of identity formation, and reaching forward into the future to fix the structure of his identity in a permanent self-made existence as literary text. This is to understand the writing of autobiography […] as an integral and often decisive phase of the drama of self-definition. (1985, 226)

Whereas Said's "search for coherence is grounded in a connection to the past", "the meaning abstracted from the past, an important criterion of coherence, is an ethic workable for the future" (Fischer, 1986, 196). For Said, the struggle for the subjugated past is linked to the struggle over what sort of future expectations are feasible. He emphasizes this in the title of the concluding chapter of Culture and Imperialism (1993), 'Freedom from domination in the future'. This attitude is strongly linked to the necessity to remember and articulate his past and to put it to work in the service of understanding the present.

He also reveals the psychological struggle with the superimposition of English language on his Native Arabic. His colonial education was achieved at the cost of linguistic colonization. It "[resulted] in more than twenty years

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of alienation from Arabic literature before [he] could return to it with some pleasure and enthusiasm"(185). The differential linguistic complexes have shaped his voice, as he writes, "the basic split in [his] life was the one between Arabic, [his] native language, and English, the language of [his] education and subsequent expression as a scholar and teacher […] to produce a narrative of one in the language of the other […] has been a complicated task" (xv-xvi). Of course, the choice of English language for narrating one's self is a statement of a complicated identity in itself, and is a proof that Said has embraced his new language.

The second discourse that both challenges and shapes the autobiographer's subjectivity and position in the world is the discourse of Americanization. The Americanization process started with the day the father registered the young narrator at Hermon School. This served as a primary signifier of the Americanization discourse and a central tension of the autobiography. As he explicitly says: "to my increasing sadness, by early December 1951 I had become Americanized as "Ed Said" to everyone" (236). For the narrator, his education at Hermon represents "the American leveling and ideological herding"(236). The six-hundred-student boarding school was under the force of "the extraordinary homogenizing power of American life in which the same TV, clothes, ideological conformity, in films, newspapers, comic, etc., seemed to limit the complex intercourse of daily life to an unreflective minimum in which memory has no role" (233). This applies to the same homogenous cultural environment of Princeton University, which was mainly white and entirely male in the fifties (274). As at Mount Hermon, his classmates "nearly everyone wore the same clothes […] talked in much the same way, and did the same things socially" (274). He struggled against this American melting pot cultural assimilation, and refused to be "the passive Ed" (236). He couldn't accept a coherent unified sense of identity that is prescribed for all students, masking their ethnic complexities and different histories.

Surely the psychological struggle of the narrator is related to two essential reasons. The first one is the enormous contradictions between his father's idealization of the American culture, and the actual conditions of the son narrator – an Arab, Palestinian, the 'Other'. He felt at the time "as marginal, non-American, alienated, marked" (248). The father identified with the dominant cultural ideologies. He felt content with his son's new cultural position after the graduation; "The key to my father's mood seemed

to be his cheery satisfaction with a school that had at last turned me into a citizen with a cap on my head" (248). Thus by situating his son in the American school, the father assumed a place for him in the dominant prescribed American culture. The father claimed all the time that the ethnic Palestinian-Arab past is ill-equipped for a contemporary world. The second factor causing this psychological struggle is the difference between how Said's parents felt about coming to the United States, and the loss he felt. For his parents, they were going to the "land of dreams" but he felt that he was leaving behind the multicultural paradise of his childhood in Egypt. The narrator as a child straddled several other cultures in addition to the English-Arab divide. There were the children with whom he attended the English school in Cairo – Turks, Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians as well as Egyptians of Christian, Jewish and Muslim backgrounds. For Said, the cultural contrast between the two worlds is huge. He writes:

> I suffered from the social vacancy of Mount Hermon's setting. I had spent all my life in two rich, teeming, historically dense metropolises, Jerusalem and Cairo, and now I was totally bereft of anything except the pristine woods […] stripped of their history. The nearest town of Greenfield has long symbolized for me the enforced desolation of Middle America. (235)

Amazingly, Said's description of Cairo's rich overlapping cultural worlds is antithesis of the Orientalist conceptions of Islam, and the Arab world as somehow static, homogeneous and backward. Thus he undermines the Orientalist expectations of his western readers. Furthermore, he proves that his hybridity finds no place of residence in such American homogenous educational environments, which are dominated by an essentialist view of other cultures. A view which tends to universalize its vision of the human being, it has a tendency to disregard the histories and ideological practices that constitute individuals.

Within the range of forbidden and prescribed places, the autobiographical subject assumes multiple and contradictory subjectivities throughout the narrative, and transgresses the prescriptions of Anglo cultural superiority. Accordingly, Gilmore argues that if "the mark of autobiography […] is the discursive signature of the subject and signifies agency in self-representation", then its narratives are necessarily "discontinuous and even contradictory" (14). For the narrator, the dominant American cultural discourses exemplified by the "unimaginative conformity" (281) of Princeton provided no language for the way he felt as "split in different parts

(Arab, musician, young intellectual, solitary eccentric, dutiful student, political misfit)"(281). Consequently, adulthood for the ethnic Palestinian becomes unimaginable. Rendering the Palestinian-Arab-American identity unstated since the prescribed dominant cultural narratives offer "neither the vocabulary nor conceptual tools, and [he] was too often overcome by emotions and desires"(281). He adds, "To make those distinctions clear would later become so central to [his] life and work"(281). Until the 1967 Arab-Israel War, politics are almost completely absent from his life at school. Neither Princeton nor Harvard had been very political. During Princeton years, he was isolated from his Palestinian and Arab community in a rather solitary struggle; his subjectivity resided only in the school that guaranteed prevailing social relations. He felt vaguely the tension between the two parts of his identity during the Suez Crisis of 1956. But the 1967 War changed his life (Ashcroft, 2001, 3). Indeed Said positioned his discovery of an Arab Palestinian identity between the twin poles of the foundation of Israel in 1948 and the Six Days War of 1967. Hosam Aboul-Ela uses Out of Place as a proving evidence for his claim that "a dissident relationship to United States foreign policy is a large component of Arab American identity" (2006: 15). Aboul-Ella demonstrates Said's feeling *Out of Place* in America as a Palestinian Arab, largely as a result of the American's support of Israel against the Palestinians.

Said's five years as a Harvard Graduate student were intellectual continuation of Princeton so far as formal instruction was concerned. He felt some kind of disconnection between his academic world and his actual position in the world:

> Conventional history and a wan formalism ruled the literary faculty, so in fulfilling my degree requirements there was no possibility of doing much beyond marching from period to period until the twentieth century. I recall hours, days, weeks, of voracious reading with no significant extension of that reading […] all of us [students] were Out of Place, or uncomfortable in the institution. My own intellectual discoveries were made outside the regimen […]. (289-90)

Said's dissatisfaction here is obvious: so much formalism, and no association made with the realities of power (politics, societies, and events). He is anxious to return literature to the historical and social dynamics which give it its shape. He broadens his attack on the formalism of New Criticism. Indeed, it was the first in the history of American academy that such brave

views as Said's, combining "the two things [Said] was most interested in: literature and culture, on the one hand, and studies and analyses of power, on the other" (Said, 2001, 210) were exposed explicitly. The most exhilarating areas of theoretical work over the last three decades have precisely been in the postcolonial field – much of it certainly indebted to Said, and all of it aimed at analyzing imperialism in some way. The established academy's evasion of imperialism has been altered by Said's important study Culture and Imperialism (1993). Connectedness provides Said with his principle interpretative strategy: contrapuntal reading, which involves "a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated [in the cultural archive] and those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (Said 1993: 59). The extent of connectedness also shows that the penetration of culture by imperialism is more widespread than normally accepted. Said writes in his book The World, the Text and the Critic (1983): "My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (4). Said's approach eventually locates the text in the world, connecting it to a political, historical and social context. He extends this approach further to argue that while all texts are "worldly", great "masterpieces" encode the greatest difficulties and concerns of the world around them.[**] Consequently, by recognizing the 'worldliness' of the text, the work of the literary critic is unreservedly politicized and this renders the critic to contradiction, "criticism is thus not a science but an act of political and social engagement, which is sometimes paradoxical, sometimes contradictory but which never solidifies into dogmatic certainty" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2001, 32). Thus for Said, the critic, like the text, is fashioned by the complexity of his or her own being in the world. It is this worldliness which offers intellectual work its understanding of belonging to humanity and its sense of responsibility in regard to the public sphere. Indeed, it was the Palestinian cause which required Said to study the imperial discourse of the West, and to intertwine his cultural study with the narrative of his own identity. Thus he posits alternative subjectivities for a postmodern, postcolonial cultural discourse.

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[**]A postcolonial reconsideration of these cultural texts reveals, for instance, that the civilized realm of Austen's *Mansfield Park* is sustained by the distant slave plantation of Antigua. See Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (95-116).

**Crossing Borders**

Out of Place reproduces the past as a reflection of a postmodern nostalgia, since postmodernism does not reinscribe the touch stone culture; it reinscribes a display of multiple cultures. This fits with Fischer's argument that ethnic autobiographical voices are "mosaic compositions" (1994, 79). He explains that "in the contemporary world, people increasingly construct their sense of self out of pieces that come from many different cultural environments"(82). "Re-membering", which Carole Boyce Davies explains as "bringing back all the parts together", has been central impulse in the structuring of *Out of Place* (1994, 17). For Davies, "the process of re-membering is therefore one of boundary crossing" (17). Indeed, Said needs to cross the borders of several cultures, histories, places, languages, and limited consciousness in order to make reconnections and mark gaps and absences in his story. Said states: "I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other – all of my life" (5). While living in Cairo, he realized that his character is woven of many identities.  "I had always felt there as the non-Arab, the non-American American, the English-speaking and –reading warrior against the English, or the buffeted and cosseted son" (236). As a child the narrator perceived all the apparent contradictions of his cultural background with confusion.  He even wished that he "could have been all Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian, and so on" (5). Paul B. Armstrong argues that Said's "lack of a straightforward, unitary national and cultural identity" is marked by "a profound ambivalence" (2003, 100). But while *Out of Place* superficially maintains a traditional linear narrative, it is not attempting at achieving a stable condition; this stability does not rest in the capacity to construct a defined, consistent subject but in the ability to communicate all the cultural contradictions in his subjectivity.

Said's refusal to represent any specific identity is consistent with his deconstruction of conventional modes of self-articulation within his autobiography. Thus, he not only reinforces the cultural dislocation of postcolonial subjectivity, but also shows that to stick to a perception of a coherent, unified individual – both generally and at the centre of this autobiography – seems a ludicrous parody. The parody is particularly obvious in the middle of a postmodern world – a world described by

fragmentations, by numerous and conflicting narratives, and by global struggles of the oppressed. Alfred Hornung in his essay "*Out of Place*: Extraterritorial Existence and Autobiography" (2004), focuses on Said's self-declared status as an intellectual exile in his autobiography. He suggests the term "extraterritorial" for assessing the text. According to him, postcolonial times "seem to request a bicultural context for the construction of a national frame of reference in the same way in which it seems to require a hybrid literary form", thus "extraterritorial autobiography" suits such conditions (368). Hornung argues that Said's gesture of imaginatively locating himself beyond the confines of any national identity, claiming an 'exilic' identity instead, "serves to accentuate the uncertain national status of many autobiographers as well as the extraterritorial space of the genre of autobiography" (370).

He prefers the "cluster of flowing currents" that shapes his subjectivity "to the idea of solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance" (295). His condition of "exile" is developed into "a plurality of vision", "because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation" (Said,1996,60). His double consciousness is one of "crossing over", as described by Davies or "plural personality, which resists unitary paradigms and dualistic thinking" (16). Said embraces exile as a means of achieving intellectual freedom, he states "with so many dissonances in my life, I have learned actually to prefer being quite right and *Out of Place*" (295). Because of his border position, Said has been unrestricted by intellectual identification, and this has enabled him to break through much of the overwhelming complexity of contemporary cultural life.[††] Francoise Lionnet claims that to accept exile "means taking up the problematics of the particular and the universal from a new angle, taking the longstanding cultural pluralism of the postcolonial world as a positive point of departure, rather than as an aberrant from the cultural difference or homogenize universality"(1995, 70). For example, even though being born

[††]Issues of positionality and the geographies of identity are especially complex in narrative of de/colonization, immigration, displacement, and exile, areas of autobiography studies commanding more attention as critics such as Carol Boyce Davies (1994), Homi Bhabha (1994), Rosi Braidotti (1994), and Susan Stanford Friedman (1998) use new terms for subjects in process, terms such as hybrid, border, diasporic, mestiza, nomadic, migratory, and minoritized.

into a Christian family, he wrote Covering Islam (1981). The book deconstructs the false representations of Islam as being the religion of violent extremist people, and shows in what ways those unjust representations are yet another aspect of support for imperialist foreign policy and interests. Furthermore, Said creates an intellectual revolution from his marginalized position in the United States; he exposes how culture is linked to colonial/imperial power.

Exile means a detachment from pre-existing prevailing notions. Said uses his position to form unbiased opinions on identity, culture, home as opposed to the normal sense of belonging to one culture with unexamined ideas about them. Said's book articulates intellectual and cultural discourses that reflect those states that Homi Bhabha names "inbetweenness" (1994:38), or what Rosi Braidotti describes as "the nomadic consciousness" (1994: 21). The nomad does not stand for homelessness (i.e. complete detachment from all roots) nor "compulsive displacement" (with its attendant longing for home), but rather for "the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity"(22). Braidotti argues that the nomad is a "form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity" (23). Nomadic concepts are those which do not observe disciplinary boundaries.

Furthermore, much of the contradictory nature of Said's relation with being "*Out of Place*", intellectuality and culture, can perhaps be clarified by the fact that his exile is both a real and a metaphorical condition. As Said describes it:

> The pattern that sets the course for the intellectual as outsider is best exemplified by the condition of exile, the state of never being fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty familiar world inhabited by natives … exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one in your home or situation. (1996: 39)

One realizes that home as expressed in *Out of Place* is one of the principle sites of domination and conflict for the narrator. The sense of 'homelessness', which is activated in postmodernist discourses, is already

simultaneously articulated in Said's experience of conflict with home. While he, of necessity, has to identify with Palestine as a historical basis for identity and self-assertion, the themes of his postcolonial scholarship eventually transcend the boundaries of ethnicity and nationalism to announce a significantly more liberal double consciousness.


Conclusion

Out of Place shows how the individual is subsumed into a discourse of singularity whose force goes beyond the individual's voice or position. Edward Said is influenced by cultural memory that goes beyond him. Said, by writing down his life story, repeated the phases of his identity formation as a Palestinian-American. But his post-colonial consciousness has raised the difficulty of putting cultures together and coming up with harmony and consensus. Thus, Out of Place does not seek to resolve conflicts; it marks out and takes stock of the space in which those conflicts occur. It aims to question and unsettle, to refocus issues with a view to change. It acts in the name of an identity, however constructed, to engage and even provoke others to make of controversy a locus of dialogue. By bringing up local issues, contextual positions, anecdotes that point out the differences, not to sameness, Said is creating a form of cultural criticism in the shape of autobiography. By privileging the informal testimony as a locus of social revision, Said's cultural theory meets ethical and social issues as they emerge in his individual story.


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