

Exile, Cosmopolitanism and the Diasporic Intellectual: The Example of Edward Said

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Abstract: *This paper is an attempt to study Said's career as a literary critic and theorist stimulated by creativity by not being "quite right" and inspirational because "out of place." It will range throughout his works, taking in everything from his first work, Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Autobiography (1967) to his posthumously published final books, Humanism and Democratic Criticism (2005) and On Late Style (2006) to demonstrate how he has made out of his uprooted condition and diasporic imaginings a contrapuntal mode of criticism, a skeptical engagement with the western world, and a constant, restless quest for the right to be engaged with the world because he finds it out of place and because he would like to intervene in it to draw attention to at least some of the places where he finds it is askew if only to change it.*

I

A key essay in Edward Said's oeuvre is "Reflections on Exile." Originally published in *Granta* in 1984, it was made the titular work of his 2001 collection, *Reflections on Exile and Other Cultural and Literary Essays*. In this sustained meditation on the anxieties and achievements as well as the fate and condition of exilic individuals, Said shows us how it is both an enabling and an alienating experience. He points out how much of twentieth century literature is the work of "extraterritorial intellectuals," a phrase he picks up from one of them, George Steiner. More than any other age, Said stresses, the modern one is full of "exiles, émigrés, refugees" (RE174), for the politics of the twentieth century has led again and again to refugees, displaced intellectuals, and gifted men and women forcibly removed from their homelands who have meditated on their situations and ended up with work of lasting importance. Forced to relocate, permanently estranged, exilic intellectuals are compelled into creativity and made to re-root themselves and find new avenues of expression – through art, politics, and a restless search for alternatives and affiliations. Exile can thus be a complex route to creation and self-expression. Said finds the fate of the exiled intellectual perfectly encapsulated in an observation by the twelfth century Saxon monk, Hugo of St. Victor, that he is fond of quoting at length again and again in his works:

The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places, the perfect man has extinguished his. (RE 185)

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All of Said's heroes have achieved this last state of permanent independence and detachment: Joseph Conrad, Theodor Adorno, and Erich Auerbach. All of them embrace homelessness and secularism, and articulate a complex, contrapuntal vision. Exile, diaspora and cosmopolitanism have become conducive to musings on their state, stimulating them to experiment, precisely because their condition allows them to have "a plurality of vision" (RE186). Their nomadic sensibility prevents them from being reified, assimilated and subject to the herd mentality. Instinctively, the exilic intellectual veers towards ironic, oppositional work and radical or off-center postures.

In this essay and in everything Said wrote, one realizes in these years that have passed after his death, he is driven by the obsessions and uncertainty that mark him as the quintessential intellectual in exile. He is driven in particular by the loss of the Palestinian homeland of his people and the Jerusalem home of his ancestors, but also by the trajectory of the cosmopolitan education he had acquired. This trajectory has made him the consummate extraterritorial intellectual, at home in the shifting, contested terrain of theory and the sophisticated world of "high" culture. The result is that he has become an incomparably interdisciplinary comparatist, theorist and critic, and a passionate and exemplary intellectual who felt he had to engage with the cultures in which he had found himself locked in opposition, whether of the east or the west. He seemed to believe that it was his unique destiny to arraign western cultures for their imperial investments and postures.

Edward Said, in other words, is a fascinating case study of the diasporic intellectual. His career and achievement appears to be especially appropriate in a discussion about diasporic spaces and voices and the travels and travails of exilic minds. But as I will argue in this paper, his example shows that mooring is not necessarily the answer to the quest of the postcolonial voyager. Indeed, Said's life and works show him embracing permanent estrangement as a desirable condition. To quote from the excellent conclusion of his brilliant 1999 memoir, *Out of Place*, induced or inspired by the sleeplessness that he used to experience perennially:

I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents, like the theme of one's life, flow during the waking hour, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing. They are "off" and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the forms of all kinds of combinations, moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally, yet without one central theme. A form of freedom, I'd like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place. (OUP 295)

This paper is an attempt to study Said's career as a literary critic and theorist stimulated by creativity by not being "quite right" and inspirational because "out of place." It will range throughout his works, taking in everything from his first work, *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Autobiography* (1967) to his posthumously published final books, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2005) and *On Late Style* (2006) to demonstrate how he has made out of his uprooted condition and diasporic imaginings a contrapuntal mode of criticism, a skeptical engagement with the western world, and a constant, restless quest for the right to be engaged with the world because he finds it out of place

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II

A good way of understanding Said is to listen to him talking in his interviews and lectures. Most of his major interviews are collected in *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*. In one of them, he talks of his life as “a series of displacements and expatriations which cannot be recuperated” and which has given him a permanent feeling of “living between cultures” (PPC 70). Born in a Palestinian Christian family in Jerusalem of a father who had an American passport and business interests in Egypt, Said moved with his family to Cairo because of his father’s financial investments there but the family’s home in Jerusalem was soon taken over by Zionist settlers. But as *Out of Place* reveals, he was not at home in Cairo either, despite or perhaps because of the family’s affluence, and his own exclusive English-medium schooling. His sense of exile was accentuated as he left his family behind to study in another boarding school in America. Much later, he would keep returning to the Middle East in general, and Lebanon in particular, where his mother had settled. Though settled in New York and a teacher of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University who had become a full professor at a very early age, he never owned a home in the city or elsewhere and continued to use it as only as a base, opting for a peripatetic existence which saw him travel all over the world despite the virulent form of blood cancer with which he was diagnosed in the early 1990s and which led to his death in 2003.

This experience of displacements and exile, as he reveals in another interview, as well as his mastery of the piano and western classical music, leads to his keenness for counterpoint as a mode of criticism congenial to the diasporic sensibility. As he explains in it, the exilic individual remembers what he has left behind as he experiences a new world and plays off the old one against the new one, becoming instinctively a comparatist in the process and developing forever a suspicion of purity, authenticity, and fixed locations. To quote him, “The notion of a *single* identity, the polyphony of many voices playing against each other, without . . . the need to reconcile them, just to hold them together, is what my work is all about” (99). For similar reasons, he prefers to go beyond the nation-state and embrace secularism as a mode of imagining in every possible instance. Also for these reasons, he is attracted to hybrid texts and “issues of exile and immigration” and “the crossing of boundaries,” although he has strong reservations about critics like Homi Bhabha who make a fetish out of hybridity but retreats from opposition and activism.

Instead, Said made use of his diasporic experience to oppose marginalization, misrepresentation, and ghettoization everywhere. As a Palestinian and Arab in America faced endlessly with the travails of his people and their misrepresentation and vilification in the west, he opted to become an activist in his scholarship as well as in the media. To him, his unique destiny is to be engaged contrarily and even abrasively with issues of misrepresentation, the knowledge-power nexus, and the savants predicting “the clash of civilizations” in the west. He would rather use his privileged location as a cosmopolitan intellectual to intervene strategically to provide alternative narratives and readings and confront the powers that are. His vocation, he

has determined, is to be a proactive critical and oppositional intellectual. This made him become for a long time proactive in the Palestinian resistance movement and its most visible spokesman in the west. It also helped him evolve critiques of misrepresentation and chauvinism and produce exposés of dispossession such as *Orientalism*, *The Question of Palestine* and *Covering Islam*. His experience of immigration and expatriation has led him to the recognition that we live in an irreversibly mixed world where texts like people have become interdependent and thus must be read contrapuntally. Imperialism's unwitting legacy, he stresses, "is a world full of interconnections . . . interlacings . . . interdependencies" (247), and it is the task of the postcolonial critic to study these formations in cultural work, as his 1992 book *Culture and Imperialism* testifies. Such a critic is also focused on imaginative geography and "the struggle over competing conceptions of geography" (252). He or she must read a cultural text in a "decolonizing way," revealing its deep structure and exposing culture's complicity with imperialism, as he does with his reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in his book. But the postcolonial critic's interest must extend also to decolonizing cultures, the pitfalls of the nationalist consciousness, and the "tremendous dimension of exile and dislocation" in contemporary cultural productions (256).

At the same time, Said says in another interview, he is "opposed to most forms of nationalism" as well as "secession, to isolation, to separatism of one sort or the other" (424). In the same interview, he confesses that he does not see himself returning to Palestine. Certainly, return to Jerusalem is not an option for him, and in his case at least, once uprooted, he is content to stay uprooted for the rest of his life and defer the "question of an actual return" (429). In one interview, Said even suggests that he is disinclined to using the term "diaspora" for himself, since it connotes an element of nostalgia where the lost homeland becomes the locus of one's life. Indeed, he says that he prefers to use the Arabic word *shatat* or dispersion (442). One can surely say that he is inclined to make a virtue out of his necessity, opting to be a wanderer, disinclined to going back to originary sites and opposed to valorizing any pure state of being.

A useful supplement to Said's interviews is his 1994 book, *Representations of the Intellectual*. Based on the Reith lectures he delivered in England the previous year, the lecture distills his ideas about the role and responsibility of the intellectual who has opted to travel permanently and become the perennial outsider. Such a position, he suggests in this lecture, is conducive to critique. It enables the exilic intellectual to oppose the status quo and confront essentialist or reductive categorizations. The vocation of the intellectual in our time, Said declares throughout this lecture, is to "speak truth to power" and be the perennial outsider. For the intellectual who has become part of a dispersed population, the task is not only to represent "the collective suffering" of his people and testify to "its travails," he must commit himself to "reasserting its enduring presence, reinforcing its memory" and universalizing its predicament (RI 44). He must, he emphasizes again and again, make use of his location in the metropolis to remind his readers and listeners of occluded, marginalized and dislocated people such as the Palestinians.

Chapter III of *Representations of the Intellectual* is wholly focused on the intellectual in exile, which Said describes as "a median state, neither completely at one with the setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments" (49). Said is well aware that some exilic intellectuals prefer to adjust to their new world as quickly as they can, forfeiting their old identity opportunistically

in their desire to survive at any cost. Some of them thus prefer to be trimmers; others such as V. S. Naipaul, after going through a state of alienation and irony end up being what Said sarcastically calls "native informants" or "witnesses to the prosecution." He, of course, prefers the perennial "nay-sayers," that is to say, those who are disinclined to be "fully adjusted, and who unsettled themselves," unsettle others. The epitome of such an intellectual to Said is Theodor Adorno whose "paradoxical, ironic, mercilessly critical" stance Said had admired all his life (56), though he is himself too much the Palestinian to be as distanced from activism as Adorno is. What attracts Said most is Adorno's epigrammatic formulation in *Minima Moralia*, "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home" (57). Writing, then, becomes a provisional home, an explanation which no doubt accounts for Said's productivity and books streaming out of him, even as he struggled with a lethal strain of blood cancer, while juggling, teaching, mentoring, performing and writing about music, and opting for political activism. Writing, in fact, is to him one of the pleasures of the intellectual in exile, which also include adopting "different angles of living and eccentric angles of vision" that "enliven the intellectual's vocation, without perhaps alleviating every last anxiety or feeling of bitter solitude" (58). Said thus indicates that there is no need to moan about being exiled if you see it as an opportunity for creativity stemming from the peculiar freedom that comes from not belonging to the majority. Such freedom allows one "to move away from centralizing authorities towards the margins, where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the comfortable" (62). What Said says at the conclusion of this chapter is, in fact, quite upbeat, and will explain the extraordinary output of this exiled, embattled Palestinian-American writer, "The *exilic* intellectual does not respond to the logic of the conventional but to the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on, not standing still" (64).

III

A key and canonic writer in exile for Said is Joseph Conrad and it is fitting that his first sustained work, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966) should be a study of the Polish émigré novelist. Based on his doctoral dissertation, it is one of many works he has devoted to Conrad. As Abidrahman A. Hussain has observed in his *Edward Said: Criticism and Society*, one reason for Said's obsessive interest in the novelist here and elsewhere could be that "the Polish exile's existential and artistic development prefigures in an uncanny sort of way the career of the Palestinian exile" (19). The connection between homelessness and modernity evident in Conrad's intellectual evolution is something that Said no doubt found fascinating and illustrative. For Said, there is something uncanny about Conrad. In "Between Worlds," a late essay collected in *Reflection on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, he notes that "the moment one enters his writing the aura of dislocation, instability, and strangeness is unmistakable" (RE 554). But Conrad attracts Said too because the Polish writer is able to indict at least a few aspects of European imperialism and enlightenment and strip Europeans of some of their illusions about their empires in works such as *Heart of Darkness*. Such unmasking has become instructive to Said. To quote Hussain again:

Said's fascination with Conrad . . . involves a multiplicity of agendas: the homeless citizen of the world; the postcolonial critic of Eurocentrism and western imperialism;

the corrosive genealogist – the profoundly suspicious historian of ideas and their interconnections with the material realities of bodies, institutions, artifacts, and societies; the interpreter-historian of literary culture; the demystification of ideological epiphenomena – all of these different Saidian phenomena find specifically appropriate points of departure in Conrad's large body of writing. (22)

In *Culture and Imperialism* Said notes the limits of Conrad's criticism of imperial ventures in his novels and his obtuseness not only to some of the heads of this hydra-headed monster but also to the dehumanization of natives consequent to the empire's onset; nevertheless, Said's examination of Conrad's letters in his book on the novelist shows him that the "multiple tensions" (28) induced by exile were profoundly instructive for Conrad and led to the skeptical, ironic vision underlying his work.

Said made his presence felt in the world of theory at the height of the poststructuralist movement with his 1975 book, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. It is easy to see now that this extended meditation on intentionality and creativity is essentially the work of an exilic intellectual who knows that he must begin again and again and construct his own world and impact on the one that he finds himself in so that it becomes more humane. As he acknowledges in an interview: "for me the notion of beginning also meant really the beginning of a fairly deep political and moral affiliation with the resurgence, after 1967, of the Palestinian movement" (PPC 167). In the book itself, self-reflexively, Said presents the act of beginning as an exercise ideally suited for the wanderer, whom he envisages as someone "going from place to place for his material, but remaining a man essentially *between* homes" (8). Beginning can involve rupture, since the beginner might have to depart from a familiar position and take a route that will lead in "unforeseen estrangement from the habitual" (9).

Said the critic also meditates about beginnings by drawing upon Georg Lukacs's theorizing of the novel as the genre of the "transcendentally homeless" (11). This is what the critic must also be, for Said feels that the critical vocation requires one to leave familiar positions and assay forth. The writer, Said argues in his Introduction to his book, aptly titled "Beginning Ideas" must be necessarily "nomadic . . . never in the same place . . . never always at the center" (23). Each act of writing, he implies, is a matter of reinventing the self and repositioning it in terms of not merely previous works on the subject but on the writer's own previous work. Beginning, he emphasizes self-reflexively once again, also leads to dispersion and difference, which is why this book is the most post-structuralist of all of Said's works. Indeed, in addition to Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida, he refers in it to Deleuze's notion of "nomadic centers, provisional structures that are never permanent, always straying from one set of information to another," (376), finding in the theorizing of the French intellectual a very apt metaphor for the methodology of his book.

Beginnings, one can see with hindsight, is a turning point in Said's *oeuvre*, for although embedded in the dense and hermetic world of the theory of the nineteen seventies, it is the work of the exile seeking to break free of conventional scholarship and criticism so that he can begin work in the realm of scholarship on projects that would allow him to meld his exilic obsessions with his increasing impatience with a west which preferred to not view the havoc wrought by contemporary imperialism's depredations. As he puts it in his conclusion to the book:

To make explicit what is usually allowed to remain implicit; to state that which, because of professional consensus, is ordinarily not stated or questioned; to begin again rather than to take up writing dutifully at designated points and in a way ordained by tradition; above all, to write in and as an act of discovery rather than out of respectful obedience to established "truth" – these add up to the production of knowledge, they summarize the method of beginning about which this book turns. (379)

In the event, the next three books that Said wrote, which we can for convenience label as the *Orientalism* trilogy, launched Said decisively into active engagement with imperialism's past and present traditions as far as the Middle East is concerned.

Orientalism (1978), the first book of the trilogy, and undoubtedly the most controversial as well as influential of Said's works, is a massive indictment of the distortions of the discourse of Orientalism and an unremitting exposé of its connections to colonial power, which Said sees as stretching back to thousands of years. Gathering momentum in the nineteenth century, this discourse peaked by the mid-twentieth century, although it continues to thrive in the American imperium. In his Introduction to the book, where he talks about the personal dimension of his work, Said reveals that in many ways his study is "an attempt to inventory the traces" upon him, "the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals" (25). He also stresses the way the book grew out of an exilic state where he, an Arab Palestinian in America, finds himself caught in a "web of racism, [and] cultural stereotypes" and subject to a "dehumanizing ideology" (23). Said confesses at the end of the Introduction to his book that by "an almost inescapable logic" he has found himself writing the history of a "strange, secret sharer of Western anti-semitism" (927). As a Palestinian living in New York, he can understand the xenophobia that had targeted Jews and sympathize with the surge of victimization that they went through in Europe in the recent past, although ironically he and his people were now the recipients of their aggressive and intolerant intent.

Like *Orientalism*, the two other books of the trilogy, *The Question of Palestine* (1979) and *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981) are works that grew out of the exile's repeated trips back to his homeland and his renewed involvement in the plight of his people at a time when the region was in extraordinary turmoil. Prior to writing *Orientalism*, Said had spent a sabbatical year in 1972-1973 in Beirut. Earlier, he had been particularly affected by the 1967 war that broke out in the region and upset by its consequences for Palestinians. From now on till the last few years of his life, Said would be intensely involved in the politics of Palestine and in touch with the leaders of the Palestinian diaspora. In other words, Said the elegant and urbane Columbia University professor, already an academic celebrity because of *Beginnings*, was observing from up close and on a regular basis the sufferings of his people in their camps and makeshift homes all over the Middle East. At the same time, while in the States, he was being repeatedly exposed to the media distortions and falsifications of Palestinian lives and witnessing the biased images broadcast regularly of Arabs as the perpetrator of terror. The three books of the *Orientalism* trilogy are, in effect, critiques of imperial misrepresentations and exposés of jaundiced scholarship, media stereotyping and the unholy alliance of intellectuals and latter day imperialists. Said castigates the insidious and persistent discourse of empire in these works and they are made keener by his ability to contrast the reality of

the suffering of dispersed Palestinians with their vilification in books and the media in Israel and the West.

Always in this trilogy, Said writes about the Middle East polemically. He knows that his mainly American audience must be demystified and disturbed. In an interview, he says pointedly that *The Question of Palestine* was “not meant to be written for an Arab audience, but a Western readership” to whom the reality of Palestinian suffering had been eclipsed by the portrayal of uninterrupted Jewish suffering. He emphasizes that he “wanted to give Americans a sense of what the dispossession and the alienation of Palestine meant . . . from the Palestinian point of view” (PPC 171) and evoke their sympathy so that they would consider giving his people the right to their land and their entitlements. His constituency, he explains, included the American Jewish community as well as American policymakers. The three books, therefore, are attempts to indict, reveal, but also inform, arouse, and evoke compassion amongst adversarial Americans by someone who believes that he can intervene strategically, taking advantage of his privileged but exilic status in the west.

The *Orientalism* trilogy was succeeded by *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983), a book which illustrates splendidly the leverage Said tries to get from his location between two worlds for the causes he believed in so passionately. In the essays collected in the volume, he ranges over theory and criticism, western literature and orientalist discourse, and cultural work and hegemonic structures of representation. His intent, he declares, is to “affirm the connections between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies and events” and to focus on “the realities of power and authority” (5). Said’s fascination with exiles, extraterritorial writers, and the intransigent, dislocated intellectual who has embraced a skeptical, ironic vision comes out clearly in two essays on Swift and the study of Conrad’s mode of narration. His interest in traveling and theory is put to brilliant use in the first of two seminal essays he has written on travelling theory (the second one is collected in *Reflections on Exile*). The essays of the book also meditate on the ferment in theory and the state of radical criticism in the contemporary American academy. Said believes that the radical cosmopolitan intellectual must engage with the world, formidable though the forces arrayed against him may be. As far as he is concerned, “criticism cannot assume that its province is merely the text, not even the great literary text.” It must see itself “with other discourse, inhabiting a much contested cultural space” (225). Not textual radicalism but “a sense of the greater stake in historical and political effectiveness” of intellectual work distinguishes this brilliant collection of essays. As he points out in “Secular Criticism,” the introduction to the collection, the pieces collected in it were all written while he was working on the three books that constitute the *Orientalism* trilogy, and like them these essays are passionate and committed “to speak truth to power,” to use one of his favorite phrases, although they are much more academic in intent. Like the works of the *Orientalism* trilogy though, they indicate that he wants his readers to recognize through his writing the nexus between knowledge and power, scholarship and politics and academic research and its worldly affiliations and consequences as a matter of urgency.

Perhaps the most passionate of Said’s book, a work that is truly *sui generis*, and one in which he is most eloquent in making visible what his western readership tends not to see is *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1986). This book consists of remarkable photographs by the Swedish photographer Jean Mohr and five eloquent

essays by Said spotlighting Palestinian lives under occupation in vivid prose. The photographs and the text focus on Palestinians as victims of people who were once victims. Said and Mohr depict the displaced and colonized Arabs trying to get on with their lives even under extremely difficult circumstances. What the duo manages to do also is make their readers look at Palestinians as people, for this is precisely what the western media will not let them do. To invoke the punning title of the third book of the trilogy, in "covering" the Arabs and Islam, they have "covered" it up! Israel has dispersed the Arabs and crippled them politically and financially in their territories, but because of the sympathy and support Jews have attracted after the holocaust, and the control Zionism exerts over the western media, Palestinian lives are occluded or misrepresented. In fact, the Arabs are almost always seen as terrorists and permanent threats to Israel and its Jewish population although the truth more often is that the majority of them are trying to get on with their lives in the most difficult of circumstances as well as they can. What Said has set out to do in this book, then, is "to deny the habitually simple, even harmful representations of Palestinians and to replace them with something more capable of capturing the complex reality of their experience" (ALS, 6). Drawing on his own intense feeling of being out of place, Said has collaborated with Mohr in this work to create something that is "unconventional, hybrid and fragmentary" in form as well as in content.

In *Edward Said at the Limits*, Mustapha Marrouchi calls *After the Last Sky*, Said's "most profound and moving essay on the 'figure of the exile'" (113). Marrouchi sees the book as "an essay of 'self-exploration' as well as an attempt to come to terms with the Palestinian historical experience" (114). To quote Marrouchi again: "The whole narrative conveys a sense of loss, invasion and rupture, both in a writer and a people from whom he in the United States is himself separated by time and distance" (117). Certainly, this is a book created by the exilic imagination. In writing it he has tried to bond with his people and explore the question of Palestinian identity and take recourse to his own memory and experience of the region. No wonder that as he wrote the book, he found himself "switching pronouns, [and moving] from 'we' to 'you' to 'they'" (6). Said's conclusion, on the other hand, stresses that he and his people are "migrants and perhaps hybrids in, but not of, any situation in which they find themselves" (163). The positive lesson Said has learned from this act of self-exploration is that every Palestinian has learned "to transform the mechanics of loss into a constantly postponed metaphysics of return" (150). Consequently, while the tone of the book can be wistful and somber on occasions it can also be upbeat too as it is at the end. Said then concludes that Palestinians can turn the rigors and agonies of exile into energy that can be creative and productive. As he puts it elliptically: "Fragments over wholes. Restless nomadic activity over the settlements of held territory. Criticism over resignation" (ibid).

The distinctively new note in Said's next book, *Culture and Imperialism*, is precisely the notion that there was, is and must be criticism over resignation just as there was, is, and will be complicity between knowledge and power, cultural work and imperial ventures, literature and colonization. What Said considers most important in this book is his spotlighting "the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment" that "mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection" (CI xiii). This is why the book highlights resistance to imperialism. It is almost as if the Palestinian intifada movement that was going on at the time and his insurgent emotions after the writing of *After the Last Sky* had led him to write a book

that could take him beyond the mindset of *Orientalism*. As he acknowledges in an interview, while *Orientalism* emphasized cultural formation in the west under imperialism, *Culture and Imperialism* goes a step farther to depict “resistances to it, and [underscore] the fact that imperialism *could* be overthrown and *was* – as a result of resistance and decolonization and nationalism” (PPC 268, emphases Said’s) For this reason the book incorporates the contrapuntal method of reading that can be seen now as one of Said’s legacies for criticism.

Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia are thus justified in noting in their book, *Edward Said: the Paradox of Identity*, that *Culture and Imperialism* reveals the exile in a celebratory mood. They also suggest that such a book could only be the product of a critic who has a “plurality of vision” poised, as he is, between cultures. They note, too, that “the form of contrapuntal reading” that Said incorporates in *Culture and Imperialism* whereby he can connect the very English country estate depicted by Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park* to its owner’s plantations in the West Indies, reveal how imperial interests are embedded in English culture . . . Said has acknowledged in his 1998 essay, “Between Worlds” that studying in the United States and becoming an American academic allowed him “to think and write contrapuntally, using the disparate halves” of his experience (RE 562) and it is obvious that he makes good use of this technique in *Culture and Imperialism*.

Culture and Imperialism was followed by *Reflections on Exile* (if we bypass Said’s voluminous works on Palestine and his essays on music on this occasion). Essentially a collection of essays, it showcases his diverse interests and cultural work, reveals his literary affiliations and acknowledges his cultural heroes, indicts the writers he dislikes and the politics of knowledge and the persistence of Orientalism in our time. It shows the exilic condition can be a spur to creativity and emphasizes the necessity of defiance. Fascinating though this work is, it is best to conclude this survey of Said’s writings as productions of the exilic intellectual with a consideration of the posthumously published *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004). This book, based on a series of lectures he first delivered at Columbia University in January 2000 and then in an expanded version at Cambridge University in 2003, can act as a coda to the work of the quintessential diaspora intellectual of our time, at least seen from our postcolonial perspective.

The first thing that needs to be said about *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* is that it is a work devoted to the idea of coexistence of cultures. In it Said the exilic intellectual brings his experience of years of living and teaching in America, his specialist interest in Comparative Literature, his expertise in teaching “The Humanities” at Columbia, his idealism about the university as the place for “the critical investigation of values, history, and freedom” (14), and his unwavering commitment to humanism as the guiding light of all intellectual work to bear on bringing disparate cultures together through what he calls “democratic criticism.” Said envisions in this book the possibility of an America where instead of the melodrama of the “clash of civilizations” enacted by a group of academics and neo-conservatives, there is movement towards reconciliation and reformation through critique, self-exploration, self-criticism, dialogue, contrapuntal movement and acceptance of each other’s similarities as well as differences. He opposes humanism to nationalism, which he accepts up to a point and even finds inevitable in many cases, but which he notes can also be crippling, overbearing and counterproductive. Said, it may be pointed out, is

probably influenced in taking up such a position by Tagore, whom he has quoted approvingly in many of his books.

On the other hand, Said is also wary of the "disengaged humanist" (38) who is Eurocentric, oblivious of the workings of ideology, and insular in tendency. Instead, Said recommends "the dialectics of opposites" (43), something he sees as being enhanced by a world where the movement of populations across boundaries has promoted diasporic communities and placed disparate ethnic groups together. He suggests to his American audience that true humanism in our time would mean receptivity to "the non-European, genderized, decolonized, and decentered energies of our time" (67). He has no doubt that the greatest threats to "humanistic enterprise" all over the world are "religious enthusiasm" and "exclusivism" (51). Here, as elsewhere, he reaffirms his commitment to "secular criticism," to an expansive vision, "of catholic inclusiveness, of genuinely cosmopolitan or internationalist perspective, of intellectual curiosity" (53). Hectoring the "great traditions" obsession with "great books," "high seriousness," "mass civilization and minority culture," etc., he asks, "When will we stop allowing ourselves to think of humanism as a form of smugness and not an unsettling adventure in difference, in alternative traditions, in texts that need a new deciphering within a much wider context than has hitherto been given them?" (55) Opposing "the overmastering paradigm of globalization" (78), he gestures towards intellectual work whose horizon is the entitlement of peoples and nations excluded by narrow specialization and Euro- or American-centered, or for that matter nationalistic and sectarian, perspectives. Instead, he aligns himself with "younger humanists" who adopted perspectives that have made them "cosmopolitan, worldly, mobile," devoted to internationalism, small nations, "and marginalized peoples outside as well as inside the maw of the metropolitan center" (81).

Said concludes *Humanism and Democratic Humanism* with a chapter on "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals" where he expresses his dismay at "the generally hermetic, jargon-ridden, unthreatening combativeness" of mainstream "academic intellectual discourse" of recent debates (123). Here, too, he urges his audience to look beyond Eurocentric and purely academic intellectuals and exhorts them to take on adversarial positions and present "alternative narratives" and look for "fields of coexistence." In the conclusions of this posthumously published work one can see that in this work Said the Palestinian-American is addressing his "home" audience at Columbia University in the mode that he, Adorno-like, has made his true home. For, as we can now see with hindsight, seven years after his death, writing was his true home. As he says in his final sentences of the book:

I conclude with the thought that the intellectual's provisional home is the domain of an exigent, resistant, intransigent art into which, alas, one can neither retreat nor search for solutions. But only in that precarious exilic realm can one truly grasp the difficulty of what cannot be grasped and then go forth to try anyway.

IV

It may be worthwhile, in concluding, to contrast Said with some other leading diasporic intellectuals who shares his cosmopolitanism and have the kind of status in contemporary theory which he had when he was alive. In particular, Said's life work can be contrasted with that of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. However,

Acc. No. 872, Summer-2019

it must be emphasized at the outset that the three of them, all resident in the United States, complemented each other in some ways and acknowledged the importance of each other's writings. When Said died, for example, Spivak and Bhabha were among the many leading postcolonial intellectuals who lamented the passing away of the man whose books and example, more than that of any other writer, established postcolonialism as an important locale of intellectual work all over the world.

But Said's position and writings are different from that of Spivak and Bhabha in ways that are instructive for the student of postcolonial theory. For one thing, unlike them, he is an exilic intellectual because he is truly the product of a diaspora; settling abroad and embracing cosmopolitanism was for him determined by history and not by choice. He has also been a lifelong activist for his people; not for him the pure good of theory or radical chic. In his books and essays he has embraced everything from classical music and opera and philology to belly dancing and Tarzan of the Apes; in other words, his range of interests, his "worldliness" – to use one of his favorite words – sets him apart from Spivak and Bhabha who move mostly within the realm of theory. Perhaps because of this reason, while making use of theory, he has frowned on the use of jargon and refused difficulty and obscurity, and elliptical expressions (*Beginnings* is an exception in this respect). Moreover, towards the end of his life, he displayed explicitly something that had been implicit in his early work: his commitment to humanism and his readiness to be eclectic in his work. He has never been bothered about the hobgoblin of consistency either. A couple of minutes ago we heard him decry "the generally hermetic, jargon-ridden, unthreatening combativeness" of contemporary theory in a manner that suggests that he would have massive reservations about the style of the two Indian exponents of postcolonialism and their existence at rarefied heights. Indeed, Said's style, except perhaps in his first two books, is always accessible, insistent and even rhetorical – he intends to be persuasive and is not interested in splitting hairs or arguing in a logic-chopping or elliptical manner. His tone is passionate, polemical, and persuasive; he does not intend to be playful and has no time for punning endlessly or using circuitous routes to establish his points.

One is also reminded here of the critiques of postcolonial textual radicals by writers such as Aijaz Ahmed, Arif Dirlik and E. San Juan, Jr. Ahmed, for example, uses his 1995 essay, "The Politics of Postcoloniality" to lament "the globalised *condition* of postcoloniality" which seems to be upheld in the works of a Spivak or a Bhabha (Ahmed 288). True, Ahmed is critical of Said too for not being sufficiently historicist, or dare one say, Marxist, and of overemphasizing postcolonialism as a binary of colonialism, in his essay, "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said" in his major work, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Nevertheless, even Ahmed, one of the most rigorous of Marxist theorists writing about literary theory, it can be noted, began his essay with an expression of solidarity with Said's work on Palestine and acknowledges his participation in the resistance movement of his people. Dirlik for his part, is caustic about "Third World intellectuals" in the "First World academy" of the ilk of Spivak and Bhabha and sees these postcolonial critics as complicit with late capitalism in his trenchant essay, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism." But Dirlik, too, has written with great understanding and appreciation of a text like *After the Last Sky* and in the essay that I have just mentioned he has almost nothing to say against Said's position although he is quite severe about Spivak and Bhabha. In other words,

even the most abrasive critics of postcolonial intellectuals and their privileged locations are not able to discount Said's work or castigate him as frivolous or elitist or under the thrall of global capitalism or complicit with its late manifestation.

The Philippine-American critic E. San Juan, Jr. has recorded in a recent essay titled "Postcolonial Dialogics: Edward Said Versus Antonio Gramsci" that recent postcolonial criticism has been moving away from Said. This may be the case; it is hard to keep up with the latest postcolonial fashions in Bangladesh and I plead guilty to not knowing much of the latest trends. But San Juan notes that this swerve away could be caused because of Said's "almost obsessive engagement with the global power of capitalist or corporate finance capital (both European and US), with the tension between secular and religious ideologies, with varying nationalisms, and so on, no longer preoccupy postcolonialists" (1). Also, these things do matter for us in this part of the world and surely do to every Palestinian and progressive people in the Middle East. San Juan, Jr. himself is quite unsparing of many aspects of Edward Said's work in his paper, once again largely from a Marxist perspective, but his endorsement of the late and forever exemplary figure in his conclusion is worth repeating:

Overall Said, despite a resort to a singular brand of militant humanism, provides a critical perspective on the complicity of academic discourse with predatory and neocolonial attacks on people of color everywhere, and on the value of popular-democratic ideals of democratic sovereignty and egalitarian community that can reconcile Europe/the Atlantic world with the revolutionary movements of the 'postcolonial' subalterns around the globalized planet. (13)

It is of course fair to say – as do these three critics implicitly or explicitly-- that Said has not engaged with Karl Marx's work in any significant way. It could be argued that the author of *Capital* should have been an ideal exemplar for an exilic intellectual like Said who uses his unique position in the society in which he had relocated to show its propensity to building empires and oppressing whole nations. It will also not be unfair to note that he has only engaged with postcolonial literature marginally. Certainly, even C. L. R. James and Fanon get minimal attention in his work compared to the space he habitually allots to, say, Adorno or Auerbach.

But surely Edward Said has given us more than enough ideas and left sufficient critiques to help us contend with neoimperialists and combat hegemony and contend with globalizations's latest postures. No one can deny that he has taught us passionately and persistently to unmask misrepresentations and has encouraged us to write counternarratives and shown us how to narrate and create alternative histories. And, of course, he has demonstrated how to spearhead an oppositional movement without compromising one's position from within the academy. Truly, Edward Said has given us a lot to be thankful for; he had made out of exile and his cosmopolitan life a body of works that is still indispensable for all of us in the decolonized parts of Asia, Africa, and the Americas at this juncture of world history.

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