

Edward Said and the Dilemma of Home: Identity from a Middle Space Encounter

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ABSTRACT

“Between Worlds”, the focus of the present paper, is considered as one of the most distinguished essays Edward Said wrote and a seminal work any scholar interested in Saidian thought would turn to for a comprehensive vision about the major events, cultural and other, that shaped Said’s theoretical assumptions and worldview. Edward Said is acclaimed as the father figure of postcolonial theory, the architect of much of what today’s scholars refer to as issues of identity, displacement, alterity, self and other, and other jargon that has brimmed writings in the second millennium. Said’s ingenious invention of a whole theory that stands out with vigor as the most controversial and unsettling narrative that human thought has produced, and the credibility it has garnered, so far, and which is the very reason behind the division it sparked among scholars, rests heavily on the fact that Said spoke from an immediate, personal experience. Said’s biography, which he penned towards the end of his life lifts the veil on the driving motives that fuelled his early interest in the self and other duality, in the dilemma of home and “the out of place”, in linguistic and physical displacement, and in the centre and the periphery that authoritatively marked his academic writings. I intend to investigate these concepts in light of his article “Between Worlds”. Said’s experience of the Diaspora worked on shaping his career both as an academic and as a committed intellectual with genuine concerns about the historical right of subordinated groups to representation and recognition on an international scale. The systematic, sustainable alienation of peripheral groups, Palestinians for that matter, and the persistent muffling of their voices in mainstream media and in academia at large, put Said on the defensive and made him spell the articles of faith of what came to be worldly known as postcolonial theory.

Keywords: *postcolonial, identity, alterity, experience, dilemma, home, centre, periphery.*

INTRODUCTION

My Moroccan identity has always lain behind closed doors, perpetually hidden in the interstices of my “habitus”, to borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s coin, so natural that it has invariably gone “misrecognised”, to use yet another of his meticulously chosen terminology. The first time my long ensconced identity was thrust upon me, and, so, in a belligerent, hostile manner, dates back to the time when a French doctor, while in the process of discussing the possibility of extending my sick infant’s stay in a renowned hospital there in Paris, retorted, impatiently, in my face: “mais c’est votre pays Madame!”, which translates as, “but that is your country, madam!”. I was arguing on behalf of my child’s right to continue to benefit from the nursing services it urgently needed, when the administration of the hospital, following what looked like irresolvable differences with the Moroccan health insurance (CNOPS), decided to suspend its medical care. I tried to explain

that the infant needed to stay until full recovery as treatment had already been attempted in Morocco but, as I, literally, put it “ça n’a rien donné au Maroc”, which rendered in English reads as, “but I have already tried treatment in Morocco to no avail”, upon which he swiftly answered “mais c’est votre pays madame!”.

“Votre pays”, or “your home country” in English, awakened within me a long dormant sense of belonging to a particular world, or home, and in parallel, a sense of unbelonging to another alien one. The French doctor’s special interest to draw my attention, faltering up to that time as it was, to the fact that I came from a different world/ home made me experience a feeling of living “between worlds”. I borrow a phrase Edward Said articulately uses to name one of his famous essays describing his own personal experience as an immigrant. I was a transient immigrant at the time, and the sense of straddling two worlds was short lived, despite the psychological damage it inflicted upon me.

For permanent immigrants, I imagine things were more complicated.

For Edward Said, “Between Worlds” was not only a title adorning a deftly written article. It was much more than that. It was a state of mind, an arena of contest of power, a sustained state of affairs with serious ramifications that shaped Said’s entire life, dictated his choices, and determined his worldview. Straddling two worlds without being able to nurture any feelings of belongingness to any one in particular is the core issue of Said’s essay. The author investigates with characteristic scholarship that finds full accreditation in firsthand experience the situation of immigrants, having to deal with more than one home country. Flanked between two homelands, two languages, two cultures, and two worldviews, immigrants find it hard to articulate in clear, unambiguous terms the broad lines tracing the contours of their identity. The mundane feeling of being at home, experienced by common people as a given, unquestioned matter, is simply non-existent, or else hard to obtain.

Within a colonial context such that Said experienced, the dilemma of home and belonging takes on far reaching dimensions. Said argues how the “between worlds”’s position immigrants occupy brings along with it a totally different set of values and concepts that challenges the hegemonic discourse in force. Said evokes a certain linguistic underachievement that, in extreme cases, might develop into total muteness, a state of affairs occurring when immigrants are incapable of finding words to describe their unusual living human condition.

The dilemma of home and the identity related issues accompanying it goes beyond simple psychological temperament to acquire significant dimensions related to power negotiations and to the perennial clash and/or connivance between knowledge and power. Said points to the necessity to deconstruct and read contrapuntally what is considered as official history, which presents itself as immune to investigation and analysis. Such self-contained hegemonic discourse about identity and alterity in a colonial context, to Said, is the product of an intentional, well thought of, and carefully planned exercise of power. Yet, Said concedes that the conceptual representation invested in mobile identities is not all mere self and other relationship, or “them” and “us”, or any other binary configuration of meaning that

sets the dominant group in a confrontational position against the subordinated one. More of a Bhabhian place “in-between” emerges at a point in the essay, when Said confesses an inability to state with any clear terms his home country, his native language, or his original culture. The oscillation between the binary system of “self”, “other”, and more ambiguous positions of in-betweenness is what mostly characterizes the essay, with the balance tilting towards binary conceptual representations, when the author expounds on the colonial rules enforced in order to subdue the dominated social groups caught in its grips.

Said highlights the power/knowledge paradigm much further, evoking the Palestinian issue and the Israeli authorities’ sustainable efforts to efface the Palestinian identity through a propagandist, mainstream narrative that denied Palestinians their rights. Such systematic abnegation of basic necessities, that culminated in Golda Meir’s notorious declaration that Palestine was an unpopulated territory, a no man’s land, and so without its original people. The power relationships that undergirds Meir’s declaration and similar other ones, not the least, the latest American recognition of Jerusalem as the official capital of Israel invites an alternative reading of history that throws into question what colonial, supremacist, hegemonic narratives establish as irreproachable truths. “Between Worlds” is an essay that raises timely issues related to identity and to the power struggle that continues to shape the lives of individuals and nations around the world.

EDWARD SAID AND THE DILEMMA OF HOME

For a writer and theorist like Edward Said, who lived all of his life as an immigrant in the USA and before that as a refugee in other parts of the Arab world, the term “home” stands for the “no-home”, for wandering, displacement, and instability? An intellectual exile that spent part of his life in Jerusalem, his place of birth, and the remaining part in Lebanon, Egypt, and then the US, Said was in a good position to evoke the predicament of exile that shaped his mobile identity and informed, approximately, all his writings, *Orientalism* being his chef d’oeuvre.

In “Between Worlds”, Said points to how he was continuously drawn to writers like Joseph Conrad, Theodore Adorno, Eric Auerbach, and other figures who typically exemplified intellectual exiles. Of all of these intellectual exiles, Conrad is presented as Said’s alter ego

with a considerable difference. The author emphasizes what he terms “the aura of dislocation, instability, and strangeness” in Conrad’s writings, showing how the latter persistently challenged critics, who had to wait until after his death to be able to establish the necessary link between his writings and his personal experience of exile.

Said draws parallels between himself and Conrad, claiming that his predilection for Conrad’s writings stemmed essentially from the affinity existing between them. Both were exiles, and both had to deal with feelings of alienation, disorientation, and lostness. Yet, unlike Conrad, Said argues, whose mobility was restricted to the vicinity of Europe, having to go from Poland to England, Said’s own was a far more removed one, jettisoning him from one world to another world, utterly different and alienating. Said highlights the discrepancy, saying that “Once again, I recognized that Conrad has been there before me—except that Conrad was a European who left his native Poland and became an Englishman, so the move for him was more or less within the same world”. Conrad’s mobility “within the same world”(2), to Said, was unarguably less damaging than his own mobility, which compelled him to move from an Arab, non-European, and, so, undeveloped third world to an American, super developed, first one. The shift was dramatic and the normalization, according to the postcolonial theorist, was farfetched if there be possibility for any form of reconciliation at all.

It is interesting how Said notes insightfully that his baptism as a Christian did little, if any, to abate his feelings of alienation in the Christian, Western, British school he attended while a little boy. In his own words “It did not make matters easier for me to have been born, baptized and confirmed in the Anglican Church, where the singing of the bellicose ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ and ‘From Greenland’s Icy Mountains’ had me in effect playing the role at once of aggressor and aggressed against”(4). Religious affiliation, it seems, was of no significant value, and the wedge driven between Said’s world and the Christian western one was articulated, rather, as the writer insists, in “linguistic, cultural, racial, and ethnic” terms.

What is more is that no matter how Said, the student in the British school, excelled in adapting and adopting the British ways and the British style of living he was inculcated on a

daily basis, he never felt that he could stand with the British on equal footing. In parallel with the English program Said studied, he was delivered another message, indicating that he was a non-European and reminding him that he had special interest in staying as such and never aspire to equal his British “masters”. With exquisite candor, Said explains this peculiar dichotomy of being educated to be a British boy, on the one hand, and of being trained constantly not to become one, on the other. He insightfully points out: “But although taught to believe and think like an English school boy, I was also trained to understand that I was an alien, a Non-European Other, educated by my betters to know my station and not to aspire to being British. The line separating Us from Them was linguistic, cultural, racial, and ethnic” (4).

Is this a situation similar to what Homi Bhabha labels “in-betweenness”, “ambiguity”, and “anxiety”? Bhabha’s rendition of the postcolonial encounter demarcates away from Said’s “Us” vs. “Them”. He contends that both the colonizer and the colonized get impacted by their dealing with one another, and that colonizers get influenced by the encounter. Bhabha argues that the colonial discourse wants the colonized to be extremely like the colonizer, but by no means identical. The colonial discourse’s goal of creating the colonized in the colonizer’s image is motivated by a willingness, a moral one essentially, to justify the coercive side of colonialism and vindicate it through the narrative of the civilizing mission and the white man’s burden, which start from the premise that the subordinated nations are in need of the colonizer’s help to overcome their state of primitiveness. What results from the encounter, however, completely overturns these expectations, giving rise to a set of different interpretations and counter effects. A state of “ambiguity” establishes, and both colonizer and colonized lose control of the situation, opening, thus, unlimited possibilities for negotiation of meaning. Bhabha refers to the process of colonialism generating its doubles as “mimicry”. He explains:

Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a

subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to

say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*;

in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its

excess, its difference. (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 86)

Such desire to produce a “reformed, recognizable” Other, yet, an Other that is still discrete and different is what colonial discourse strives to achieve, an aim that raises high stakes, creating ambivalence, which Bhabha considers as symptomatic to every colonial setting.

Said’s interpretation involves such meanings, but with a characteristic difference. For Said, “in-betweenness”, “ambiguity”, and “anxiety” are the lot of, not the British colonizer, but of the Arab colonized “Other”. It is a one-way street whereby colonizers enforce their will and shape forever the destinies of their subdued groups. As a boy in a British colonial school, Edward Said was meant to fully comprehend the fact that despite being inculcated the same program and the same subjects as other British schoolmates, he had to guard against stepping over the borders separating him from the British. Such borders had to be observed carefully. As Homi Bhabha puts it, Said and other similar non-British, non-European boys were educated to be “almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 122)

According to Said’s experience, the Bhabhian concept of “mimicry” does not originate from the colonized group as a way of resisting a dominant force, as it is in Bhabha’s theory. It is the colonizer who tries to impose his own worldview and strive to shape the colonized in his own image, while yet retaining his supremacy and hegemonic influence. At stake are two conflicting views that coexist for all their incongruity. The binary “Us” vs. “Them” that characterizes the Saidian position and the Bhabhian hybridity that renders the line between the two extremities hardly visible.

DIASPORIC SUBJECTIVITIES AND A CONTESTED VISIBILITY

Visibility, as evoked in “Between worlds” hints at a very different meaning from what is commonly believed as the invisibility of the subaltern groups. In Said’s case, his alienation was compounded not by him being less visible but by being too visible, visible beyond what was required. The author’s peculiarly stark presence in the colonial canvas made that he was the center of attention and so a soft target to the colonial whims and fits of unjustifiable and gratuitous anger. Said relates how his

magnified visibility went as far as driving him out of Victoria College:

In the spring of 1951 I was expelled from Victoria College, thrown out for being a troublemaker, which meant that I was more visible and more easily caught than the other boys in the daily skirmishes between Mr. Griffith, Mr. Hill, Mr. Lowe, Mr. Brown, Mr. Maundrell, Mr. Gatley and all the other British teachers, on the one hand, and us, the boys of the school, on the other. (4)

Etienne Balibar explains how, paradoxically enough, the identificatory language of discrimination of the colonizer lends more visibility to immigrants, where the latter were meant to stay unnoticed. She claims, “The racial/ cultural identity of “true nationals” remains invisible but is inferred from...the quasi-hallucinatory visibility of the “false nationals” – Jews, “wops”, immigrants, *indios*, *natives*, blacks.” (qtd.in Bhabha, “Culture’s In-between” 55). It follows that Said’s “quasi-hallucinatory” visibility worked well on expelling him from the colonial college because he failed to fit the requirement of the colonial discourse put in action. It is interesting how ambivalence operates in the colonial encounter, rendering visible what is essentially meant to go unremarked, and how the colonizer acquires visibility only when associated with its anathema: the colonized. Said’s deduction that he was more visible than others points towards the fact that he was undoubtedly more vocal and more daring in his arguments with his unanimously British teachers, a daringness that was to bear fruit and evolve into an outstanding, full-fledged critical theory, bearing the brand name of post colonialism.

EXILIC IDENTITIES BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

Said devotes a large part of his article talking about his school days, a fact that showcases the extent to which his education in British schools at first and the American ones at a later station in his life, shaped his personality and laid the founding stones for his later career as a critic and an outspoken organic intellectual. Said’s emphasis on the role of the colonial school highlights the importance of this institution in creating what Michel Foucault labels “docile bodies” (135). In a similar breath, Pierre Bourdieu singles out the school as the most effective tool the state puts at its disposal in an instrumental way to further its views and establish its categories of thought about class,

race, gender, and other. Bourdieu links the school to the state's overall political framework, claiming that:

School is the state school where young people are turned into state persons and thus into nothing other than henchmen of the state. Walking to school, I was walking into the state and, since the state destroys people, into the institution for the destruction of people... The state forced me like everyone else, into myself, made me compliant towards it, the state, and turned me into a state person, regulated and registered and trained and finished and perverted and dejected, like everyone else. When we see people, we only see state people, the state servants, as we quite rightly say, who serve the state all their lives and thus serve unnature all their lives. ("Rethinking the State" 1)

Related to the colonial context Said experienced firsthand, Bourdieu's words assume more credibility. The British school started from a well-defined political agenda, of which principle item was to transform students, the majority of whom, in this case, were non-British, into state persons serving the British Empire. What is interesting, though, is how this site of molding people's personalities may overturn expectations in an extraordinary Derridian fashion, and instead of being an instrument of the state becomes an instrument against it, turning thus into a site of resistance and exercise of agency as Edward Said's experience clearly demonstrates. The school, which was intended to homogenize, unify, and normalize, transformed into a place that heightened feelings of alienation, drove wedges between students on account of race, colour, and language to further deepen the identity crisis already induced by the existence of colonial rule. The impact of the colonial education on Said turned out to be decisive. His early contact with colonialism in the elite schools he attended acquainted him with the multifarious ways in which power relationships mold identities and pigeonhole them within tiny shells, most of which are the product of a supremacist European imagination, an idea that Said elaborated in his seminal work *Orientalism*.

With relation to the decisive role the school plays to establish and perpetuate its worldview, Said mentions how the British colonial school issued a series of regulations governing as he said "every aspect of school life". That the school regulations cared for the mundane and

the everyday and did not lose sight of the minute details of the students' lives is suggestive of the fact that the colonial rule exercises its power at this usually neglected level. Both Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu argue that power should be traced in these areas that people normally tend to either overestimate their value as benevolent and altruist, and so beyond suspicion, like schools and hospitals, or dismiss altogether as disgraceful like the prison. Bourdieu invites sociologists to be particularly cautious towards established traditions, representations and presuppositions that seem obvious, taken for granted and "go without saying". For Bourdieu, such representations, linguistic and other, obfuscate a legacy of power contention and fierce struggle. He holds issue, especially, with representations of power, which skip attention, slyly permeating the social fabric of a particular community. To use Bourdieu's words, they are "misrecognized" (*Language and Symbolic Power* 23), and operate mainly at an unconscious level.

Among the numerous British regulations that touched upon the unconscious of students, the most preposterous for Said was the first rule which stipulated that the only language allowed was English and that anyone caught speaking another language, Arabic for that matter, would be punished. The compounded loss of home and language was too heavy for Said to endure, and, in an act of defiance to the colonial draconian rule, he relates how he and his Arab colleagues would "take refuge" in a common language, an attempt at alleviating the sense of alienation they were made to feel. The selective and purposive use of the word "refuge" while referring to the use of what is presumably regarded as a native language is telling. Linguistic alienation is one further complication of the condition of exile. The British colonial school that outlawed native languages in Said's case is one example of how colonial establishments issue regulations to that very effect.

Pierre Bourdieu is suspicious about such a phenomenon whereby some languages are thrown into the darkness of oblivion while others are promoted to the rank of official language. Such state of affairs is the overriding rule in colonial contexts and in various forms of exilic conditions where immigrants cease to use their native tongue in favor of a more dominant language. Language here emerges as a disciplinary tool, granting favors and privileges, or visiting retributions and penalties.

Language enjoys a specific status in Bourdieu's sociological and political theory. It is not merely a means of communication people make use of to understand each other. Besides this primary function, language, according to Bourdieu, is laden with power and is capable of bringing about radical change to the social and political landscape of a given community, or a set of individuals. The British school's instance of the way language was used to consolidate the political rule of the empire is very instructive in this regard. Bourdieu talks about "the unification of the linguistic market" (*Language and Symbolic Power* 40), that is, literally, eliminating difference and homogenizing the linguistic field so that everybody speaks the same language after which subordinated groups, émigrés or exiles, gradually lose their native tongues. In Said's essay, this issue is also present. Said expounds on how his loss of his native language and the loss of Arabic literature and culture resultant from that exacerbated his sense of homelessness, not only with regard to his native language, but also vis a vis English, of which he enjoyed a very good command. The "Between Worlds" condition Said experienced made him belong to none, and no genuine feeling of affiliation evolved to any. The writer sheds light on this peculiar state confessing that:

To make matters worse, Arabic, my native language, and English, my school language, were inextricably mixed: I have never known which was my first language, and felt fully at home in neither, although I dream in both. Every time I speak an English sentence, I find myself echoing it in Arabic, and vice versa. (4)

The Bhabhian ambiguity that hovers over the use of language by immigrants and exiles culminates in a loss of meaning, or at least, a failure at articulating in plain, unambiguous terms, what really goes on within the diasporic self, an impotence that is much portrayed and emphasized in Conrad's novels. Said singles out two of Conrad's most famous writings, *Heart of Darkness* and *Amy Foster* to show that the predicament of exile does not lend itself to linguistic description or definition. It is impervious to any kind of pinning down in language. Said relates how "Marlow enters the heart of darkness to discover that Kurtz was not only there before him but is also incapable of telling him the whole truth" (1). This inability to "tell the whole truth" and say exactly what happened makes Marlow "end up producing approximations and even falsehoods of which he and his listeners seem quite aware" (1).

The predicament of the loss of linguistic expression in *Heart of Darkness* reaches its climactic point in *Amy Foster*, which Said describes as "the most desolate" of Conrad's writings. Like Kurtz, the protagonist in *Amy Foster* fails to speak out his ordeal and gets deserted by his wife, who left him face his demise alone. The ending of *Amy Foster*, Said argues, is the culmination of a diasporic, exilic condition that defies linguistic expression. The linguistic underperformance that accompanies exile occurs because the experience of alienation entailed within is irredeemable, or as Said himself puts it, while appraising Conrad's writings:

We realize that the work is actually constituted by the experience of exile or alienation that cannot ever be rectified. No matter how perfectly he is able to express something, the result always seems to him an approximation to what he had wanted to say, and to have been said too late, past the point where the saying of it might have been helpful.(1)

At a certain point in the article, Said confesses how, upon knowing about his fatal disease, he started writing his memoir in a "belated attempt to impose a narrative on a life that I had left more or less to itself, disorganized, scattered, uncentred" (2). The author's realization that the writing of his memoir was long overdue reinforces the idea of inarticulate exile mentioned above. Notice how Said utilizes the verb "impose", which is suggestive of the fact that the experience of exile hardly lends itself to any form of linguistic pinning down. Homi Bhabha has also dealt with the linguistic inadequacy of immigrants, when they are required to talk about their lived experience of exile. Bhabha attributes this phenomenon to what he labels as "cultural difference", which supposes that "the discriminated subject, even in the process of reconstitution, be located in a present moment that is temporarily disjunctive and effectively ambivalent" (56). This temporal disjunction, to Bhabha, is at the very root of the linguistic impotence witnessed in immigrants and diasporic selves in more general terms. They are invariably belated and fail to render their experience squarely on time. Franz Fanon has also been alert to the temporal dysjunction both Said and Bhabha talk about. In this sense, he says, "too late. Everything is anticipated, thought out, demonstrated, made the most of. My trembling hands take hold of nothing: the vein has been mined out. Too late." (qtd.in Bhabha, "Questions of Cultural Identity" 56).

“Too late”, or “past the point where the saying... might have been helpful” both indicate what Homi Bhabha refers to as the moment of “enunciation”, which is slippery and difficult to take hold of within a colonial, or a post-colonial context. Bhabha delineates this untimeliness of the colonial encounter, claiming, “The discriminated subject or community occupies a contemporary moment that is historically untimely, forever belated” (Bhabha, “Questions of Cultural Identity” 56).

Seen from another angle, Hermans et al. attributes this linguistic numbness to what they label as the “multiplicity of I positions” (44), a situation peculiar to an exile who is compelled to deal with different selves within his own self. Herman et.al’s views take its cue from Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism. The constant shifting between different “I positions” makes immigrants, or exiles in general, experience feelings of restlessness, displacement, loss, and lack of orientation. The feeling of living “Between Worlds”, of being “out of place”, and of having something “not –quite- right” about oneself, to quote Edward Said, are distinguishing features of the mobile identities of immigrants. Bakhtin’s dialogism is deeply anchored in hybridity, which hints at two epochs and at an idiosyncrasy, which is doubled in all of its constituting features:

The...hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented...but is also double-linguaged; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousness, two voices, two accents, *as there are two [doublings of]socio-linguistic consciousnesses, two epochs...that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance ...it is the collision between different points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms ...”* (qtd.in “Questions” , Bhabha, 58. Emphasis added)

Bakhtin’s emphasis on the more profound level of the “two linguistic consciousness” and “two epochs” translates an awareness of the complexity of the situation of hybrid identities, whose linguistic deficiency is best apprehended at this level.

With relation to the framework of the multiplicity of I positions, Said emphasizes how the “Edward” part of him is, constantly, on a “warring relationship” with the “Said” part, an ongoing conflict with no signs of being amenable to settlement in any way. This also highlights the power of nomination, and how the

English name “Edward”, assigned to him by his mother, only made things worse, as it created within him something akin to a schizophrenic divide, opposing his English name with the connotations and cultural and civilizational load this name harbored to his Arabic identity. S.I. Hayakawa writes about the rhetorical importance of naming and labeling, showing how labels serve to identify individuals by squaring them into definable categories: “*when we name something, then, we are classifying.* The individual object or event we are naming, of course has no name and belongs to no class until we put it in one”(210; emphasis in the original)). Following this argument, it becomes clear how the name “Edward” was more of a liability to Said than an asset, compelling him to deal with two conflicting identities, two divergent worlds, with very scant chances for reconciliation.

We should not lose sight, however, of the fact that the “multiplicity of I positions” mentioned above, which is characteristic of diasporic identities is also linked to the hyphenated and hybrid status of immigrants. Said’s being an American, from a Palestinian origin, and brought up in Lebanon and colonial Egypt renders an issue like belongingness or affiliation a veritable challenge. The dilemma of home and the schism of double identity are described with candor by Said in these words:

I found myself reliving the narrative quandaries of my early years, my sense of doubt and of being out of place, of always feeling myself standing in the wrong corner, in a place that seemed to be slipping away from me just as I tried to define or describe it. Why, I remember asking myself, could I not have had a simple background, being all Egyptian, or all something else, and not have had to face the daily rigors of questions that led back to words that seemed to lack a stable origin. (3)

The lack of a stable origin, as Said deftly puts it, compounds the dilemma of home for diasporic selves. The estrangement of immigrants from their own heritage, from their home and language and culture, creates an unhealable rift in their being.

In his memoir *Out of Place* , Said speaks more explicitly about this unrelenting mobility that devastated him, advancing that “nothing more painful and paradoxically sought after characterizes my life than the many displacements from countries, cities, abodes, languages, environments that have kept me in motion all these years” (qtd.in Amos 1). In light

of this confession, one concludes that the title of the article is no misnomer. Said relates how his straddling of two worlds, mutually exclusive as they were, affected him deeply and left indelible marks on his vision of life.

The apocalyptic fate of the Palestinian diaspora, of which Said makes an integral and indissociable part, and the Israeli concerted efforts to efface the Palestinian identity and existence were factors that alerted Said to the subtle process of power embedded in culture and in the ideological apparatus designed to shape minds, form and transforms pasts, presents and futures. Said voices his concern about the connivance between power and reality, and how the latter is a mere construct to be deconstructed and reread “contrapuntally”. In his essay, he imparts this major concern, saying:

What concerned me now was how a subject was constituted, how a language could be formed-writing as a construction of realities that served one or another purpose instrumentally. This was the world of power and representations, a world that came into being as a series of decisions made by writers, politicians, philosophers, to suggest and adumbrate one reality and at the same time efface others. (7)

Unlike Theodore Adorno, whom Said quotes as encouraging a kind of non-committed and suspended life, presenting the latter as “the best mode of conduct” for exiles, Said demarcates away from this Western, Adornian angle of vision to emphasize his strong, unconditional commitment to his Palestinian past and heritage, an engagement that put him at insurmountable odds with his Western American position as a renowned academic, earning him as he ironically points out, the label of “the professor of terror”. His political activism and support of the Palestinian cause was the tangible translation to his resistance to forces of effacement and annulment practiced on a daily basis by the superpowers and mainstream media. In this respect, Said mentions Golda Meir’s famous (and infamous) declaration in 1969, “There are no Palestinians”, which, he states, triggered off his determination to disprove her and salvage the history of his people from the systematic process of annihilation they were subjected to by the Israeli establishment and its Western allies.

Yet, despite his identification with the Palestinian issue, Said is careful to distance himself from all forms of crude nationalisms

premised upon the ground of cultural specificity or some chauvinistic national pride. Said particularly rejects the instrumental whipping up of national provincialism in order to serve well-defined political agendas, making it clear that salvaging the past and heritage of subordinated people should not be bent for reasons of power:

Nothing seems less interesting than the narcissistic self-study that today passes in many places for identity politics, or ethnic studies, or affirmations of roots, cultural pride, drum-beating nationalism, and so on. We have to defend people and identities threatened with extinction or subordinated because they are considered inferior, but that is very different from aggrandizing a past invented for present reasons. (10)

The invented past, what Benedict Anderson labels “imagined communities”, elucidates the discourse of power much further.

CONCLUSION

Edward Said’s mobile identity, his hybridity, and the predicament of exile he had to put up with were not all negative, however. Bakhtin alludes to what he labels “the potential” of hybrid identities, and their ability to create new formulations of history, reality, and meaning in broad terms. He insightfully claims that “such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new ‘internal forms’ for perceiving the world in words”. (qtd.in “Questions”, Bhabha, 58). In effect, Said’s mobile identity opened up multiple chances for him to reread reality in his most renowned contrapuntal fashion. His hybrid, diasporic identity brought him to deal with two different worlds, without being able to claim affiliation to any, a state of affairs that acted as the major driving force that shaped his views about “self” and “other” and about the “in-between” space he was destined to occupy. Furthermore, the “multiplicity of I positions” associated with the diasporic self empowered Said, granting him specific privilege to particularly shake age-old assumptions and long entrenched values about identity and alterity and about the shady relationship between historical reality and power. Such deconstruction of time-honored, fixed grand narratives has allowed for a new conceptualization of history and opened the gate to new formulations of human thought that lifts the veil from the other part of the story, left unaccounted for by the official hegemonic discourse.

Said's diasporic self waged an unrelenting war against all forces of effacement and abnegation of an Other's past, language, and home, consecrating the bulk of his time to bringing to view the opaque inter linkages between power and reality. In "Benefits of Diaspora", Eric Hobsbawm expounds on the exceptional feat of exiles, and how the latter's particular condition, occupying the Saidian "between worlds" place, has enabled them to see from inside and outside, thus enjoying a special clairvoyance that was at the origin of many a significant avant-garde intellectual achievement. This explains largely why remarkable figures in the history of human thought, Edward Said included, were professed exiles.

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BIONOTE

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