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The Politics and Poetics of Exile: Edward Said in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on one central trope of Edward Said's work—exile. Exile looms large in Said's personal, professional, and political life as an existential and epistemological condition, as a spatial and temporal state of being, belonging, and becoming, and in its material and metaphorical contexts. Said spent a large part of his early exiled life in Africa, in Egypt, and Egypt remained an important place where he would frequently return and the Egyptian academic and popular media provided a critical platform for his impassioned performances as Palestine's and the Arab world's leading public intellectual. Exile has also been the fate, welcome to some and unwelcome to many others, of numerous African intellectuals. Said's experiences and reflections on exile illuminate the exilic condition of the postcolonial world and offer us an opportunity to reflect on the dynamics and implications of African literary exile.

About ten years ago I wrote a rather critical review of Edward Said's Culture and Imperialism (1993), essentially characterizing it as an unwitting eulogy to empire despite its anti-imperialist claims. While my views of that particular text have not changed, Edward Said's oeuvre is much too large for easy generalizations, too complex to fit into the kind of neat categories beloved in academic analyses, for in a fundamental sense Said was that rarity of late twentieth-century intellectuals, a public intellectual in the best sense of that term, whose expansive writings and life delighted in the pleasures and power of probing the most pressing questions of our age, indeed the enduring questions of the modern era: the politics and poetics of imperialism, nationalism, citizenship, socialism, capitalism, migration, internationalism, globalism, cosmopolitanism, and exile.

One might disagree with a particular interpretation or inflection of his argument and narrative, as I still do with Culture and Imperialism and many have done with his various works, including his most famous, the seminal Orientalism, the foundational text of postcolonial studies, but one always remained enthralled by Said's vast
erudition, the beauty and elegance of his writing, the astuteness and originality of his insights, the anguish and urgency of his message, the honesty and hope of his vision, the independence and integrity of his intellectual mission, and the passion and generosity that animated him. His ethical commitment and compassion for the oppressed, especially his fellow Palestinians, was as enduring, endearing, and energizing as his unflinching opposition to the corruption of liberation movements and the tyrannies of postcolonial states. Said embodied and exuded a humanistic sensibility, a yearning for a more humane world subject to universal standards of justice, a world we could all call home, without the suffocating and terrorizing binaries of “us versus them.”

Since his untimely death in September 2003, Said has been widely eulogized among his numerous academic admirers for the many splendid “gifts” he left us (Davies), for his “passion, courage, boldness” (Hutchenson), for being an intellectual “lighthouse” in the murky politics of the Middle East (Pappe), for his devotion to global justice, ideas and literature (Loomba), and for his evocation of the “pleasures of exile” that speaks “powerfully to the experience of many [. . .] intellectuals” (Newton). Heartfelt tributes also poured from his political admirers including many in the Arab world, to whom he was “this ferocious critic of imperialism, this staunch warrior against oppression” (Barghouti), “the Palestinian’s envoy to human conscience” (Darwish), the “universal Palestinian” (Sid-Ahmed), the inimitable “mentor” with “a raging thirst for the recognition and validation” of the oppressed (Ashrawi), an exceptional scholar and musician who brought “together the radical denunciation of cultural hegemonism with such a deeply felt commitment to universalism” (Abdel-Malek), an eloquent defender of the aspirations of Palestinians and a fair and humane adversary of Israel (Barenboim), whose death was “a great loss to the ‘Wretched of the Earth’” (Khar). These are no polite requiems, but sincere tributes to a great mind, an exemplary public intellectual.

Many African intellectuals share in this sense of loss for Said’s work has profoundly affected African studies; his efforts to deconstruct and dismantle Western discursive hegemony is one that resonates with their deepest desires to commit what Mudimbe has characterized as some kind of epistemic patricide against the West whose “colonial library” dominates, indeed, dictates the contours of African knowledge production (see Mudimbe ch. 5). Samir Amin’s salute would elicit widespread support: “I salute the subtle intelligence that allowed Said to debunk the Eurocentric projects hidden in the folds of Western scientific and fictional literature, which inform the dominant discourse on Orientalism.” The African connections for Said go much further. In this essay I would like to focus on one central trope of Said’s work—exile. Exile as an existential and epistemological condition, as a spatial and temporal state of being, belonging, and becoming, and in its material and metaphorical contexts looms large in Said’s personal, professional, and political life. Said spent a large part of his early exiled life in Africa, in Egypt, and Egypt remained an important place where he would frequently return and the Egyptian academic and popular media provided a critical platform for his impassioned performances as Palestine’s and the Arab world’s leading public intellectual. Exile has also been the fate, welcome to some and unwelcome to many others, of numerous African intellectuals. Said’s experiences and reflections on exile illuminate the exilic condition of the postcolonial world and offer us an opportunity to reflect on the dynamics and implications of African literary exile.
Edward Said's memoir, *Out of Place* (1999), is a paean to his youth, to exile, and to Egypt that is at once poignant, painful, and pleasurable, written for solace when he was battling leukemia, the disease that would eventually kill him. In a moving passage, he intimates:

"The time of this book is intimately tied to the time, phases, ups and downs, variations in my illness. As I grew weaker, the number of infections and bouts of side effects increased, the more this book was my way of constructing something in prose while in my physical and emotional life I grappled with anxieties and pains of degeneration." (216)

Writing as an act of healing, of remembering, of recreating and returning to the elusive home of his youth. Words and memory are summoned in all their solemn and slippery power, in a heroic act of physical and psychic courage, to give meaning to an extraordinary, fragmented life, a life permanently "out of place," suspended in perpetual exile.

It is a multifaceted exile that involves spatial, ontological, and temporal displacements and entails alienation from homeland, family, language, and the continuities of self, a life continually yearning for the love and approval of parents, for the comforts of belonging, an existence battered by the dislocations of endless departures, arrivals, returns, travels. He says with a pathos tinged with biting humor:

"An extraordinarily increasing number of departures have unsettled my life from its earliest beginnings. To me, 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. Thirteen years ago I wrote in *After the Last Sky* that when I travel I always take too much with me, and that even a trip downtown requires the packing of a briefcase stocked with items disproportionately larger in size and number than the actual period of the trip. Analyzing this, I concluded that I had a secret but ineradicable fear of not returning." (217)

Egypt is the closest he comes to feeling at home. Cairo is invoked as home when he leaves for the United States in the early 1950s to finish high school and later attend college. At the high school, Mount Hermon, located in what he calls the "alienating and desolate" landscape of New England, he hankers for "some friendly contact emanating from home, something to make an opening in the immediate fabric of loneliness and separation that I felt surrounding me" (229). That home is Cairo. His life finds anchor in the times, literally and figuratively, of Cairo. Even the change of the seasons in America becomes a source of disorientation, reinforcing his sense of alienation:

"I longed to be back in Cairo; I kept calculating the time difference of seven hours (leaving my bedside alarm set on Cairo time), missing our family's Cairo food during school meals. [...] I experienced the changing of seasons from fall to winter with dread, as something unfamiliar, having come from a basically warm and dry climate. I have never gotten over my feelings of revulsion for snow, which I first saw on my sixteenth birthday, November 1, 1951. Since that time, try as I might, I have found little to enjoy or admire about snow. For me snow signified a
kind of death [...]. This gave my American days a sense of impermanence, and even though I spent three quarters of the year in the United States, it was always to Cairo to which I accorded stability. (234–35)

But this is no youthful nostalgia, the inevitable void of rupture, to be forgotten with age, dulled and dissipated by America's corrosive seductions that he recognizes—with disdain—as "the extraordinary homogenizing power of American life, in which the same TV, clothes, ideological uniformity, in films, newspapers, comics, etc., seemed to limit the complex intercourse of daily life to an unreflective minimum in which memory has no role" (233). The anguish of dislocation stays with him for the rest of his life, a festering wound that defies the healing capacities of time and worldly recognition. He laments:

To this day I still feel that I am away from home, ludicrous as that may sound, and though I believe I have no illusions about the "better" life I might have had, had I remained in the Arab world, or lived and studied in Europe, there is still some measure of regret. This memoir is on some level a reenactment of the experience of departure and running out. The fact that I live in New York with a sense of provisionality despite thirty-seven years of residence here accentuates the disorientation that has accrued to me, rather than the advantages. (223).

The advantages are many, indeed. He singles out the immense intellectual opportunities that education and later an academic career in the United States gave him. He records with ecstasy the intellectual pleasures stimulated and satiated by Mount Hermon, his flowering as an undergraduate at Princeton, and the beginnings of a brilliant scholarly career as graduate student at Harvard. This is how he remembers Princeton:

My readings in the history of music, of literature, and of philosophy formed the foundation of everything I have done as a scholar and teacher. The sedate comprehensiveness of the Princeton curriculum gave me the opportunity to let my mind investigate whole fields of learning, with at that time a minimum of self-consciousness. Only when that learning came into contact with the energizing criticism of Szathmary or the visionary empowerment of Blackmur did I find myself digging deeper, beyond the level of formal academic accomplishment, and beginning somehow to fashion for myself a coherent and independent attitude of mind. I was conscious during the first few weeks of my second year of further developing an early fascination with complexity and unpredictability—especially, and lastingly, in the multiple complexities and ambiguities of writing and speech. (277)

But Said's reminiscences of Mount Hermon, Princeton, and Harvard are, in comparison to his fulsome memories of primary and junior secondary school in Cairo, quite perfunctory. His recollections of his Cairo schools, from Gezira Primary School, Cairo School for American Children, and Victoria College, which he fondly refers to by their acronyms—GPS, SCAC, and VC—are wonderfully detailed, vivid, gripping, even lyrical and funny. The reader marvels at the sheer bountifulness and sensuous rhythms of life portrayed here, with its public triumphs and tragedies set against the background of the Second World War, the Palestinian dispossession of 1948, the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, and the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, as well as the private joys and losses of the exiled communities in Cairo that the Saids knew,
and always, the volatile gratifications and exacting intimacies of family life through the eyes of a growing child with a keen and tempestuous intelligence and sensibility. It is an emotionally intense, moving portrait, at once immensely sad and serious, but leavened with plentiful cheer and comic touches.

It was in Cairo that Said came of age. By the time he was born in 1935, in Jerusalem, Said’s parents already lived in Cairo. Although the family frequently traveled to Palestine before 1948, and spent their summer holidays in Lebanon from 1943, Cairo remained Said’s principal abode until 1951 when his parents sent him to the United States. It was in Cairo that the personal drama of his life was laid out, where he developed his complex and often troubling relationship with his devoted mother, demanding father, and distant sisters that permanently marked him and was the source of some of his most enduring insecurities. The portrait of his parents is searing in its honesty and seems to encapsulate better than anything else in this wistful narrative the pain of alienation from the nurturing comforts and bonds of home.

Said’s Cairo was colonial, bourgeois Cairo. He recalls:

The more significant and charged geography and atmosphere of Cairo was concentrated for us in Zamalek, an island in the Nile between the old city in the east and Giza in the west, inhabited by foreigners and wealthy locals. My family moved there in 1937, when I was two. [. . .] School, church, club, garden, house—a limited carefully circumscribed segment of the great city—was my world until I was well into my teens. And as the timetable for my life grew more demanding, the occasional deviations from it were carefully sanctioned respites that strengthened its hold over me. (22)

It was in this Cairo that Said’s entrepreneurial father made his fortune that financed the family’s high bourgeois lifestyle and made it possible for the young Said to be sent to an American private school and two Ivies. It was there that we see Said acquiring his early education and assorted passions, where he was first introduced to the pleasures of Western music, opera, theater, and films that he came to love so much and analyze with unrivalled perspicuity, where the nerve-wrecking transitions of puberty erupted, accompanied by the proverbial teenage rebelliousness that manifested itself in truancy and expulsion from school at one time, and the edgy stirrings of sexuality and political consciousness. A childhood neighbor, Nadia Gindi, reviewing Said’s autobiography many years later recollected fondly and wondered:

On the rare occasions, when he joined us (the girls) as we ‘loitered’ home from school, he would be always railing against something or someone, or muttering some invective. I had no idea what he was going on about. Obviously from an early age Edward was chafing against the trappings of British colonialism, rebelling against geographical centers of empire—but in those days his was a lone voice, an alien voice. Were the seeds of his ground-breaking theories that were to bear fruit in Orientalism being planted then in his early colonial schooling? (Gindi 286)

Said’s awakening political consciousness, brutally accelerated by the fall of Palestine, was predicated on a rising consciousness of his multiple identities. The Saids were Christians in a predominantly Muslim country and region, and Said’s father had an American citizenship that he had acquired in the 1910s as an immigrant, which he kept when he returned to the Middle East. The struggle for identity is expressed with
all the anguish of a confused child in this commentary—after a fight with another boy at school:

Such episodes were rare. CSAC forced me to take “Edward” more seriously as a flawed, frightened, uncertain construction than I ever had before. The overall sensation I had was of my troublesome identity as an American from which I derived no strength, only embarrassment and discomfort. [. . .] Daily at school I felt the disparity between my life as “Edward,” a false, even ideological, identity, and my home life, where my father’s prosperity as an American businessman flourished after the war” (Said, Out of Place 90)

He envies his schoolmates, who appear to have “much more enviable, rocklike hardness of an identity at one with reality,” who “could be themselves” because “they had nothing else to hide, had no American part to play” (Out of Place 91).

This conflicted, exilic identity could not ultimately, then, feel at home in Cairo. Indeed, Cairo could not be the “real” home, nor can any other place; he is permanently out of place. When Said started school he soon realized, he tells us ruefully, that Cairo was “a city I always liked yet in which I never felt I belonged. I discovered that our apartment was rented, and that although some of the GPS children thought we were Egyptian, there was something ‘off and out of place about us (me in particular), but I didn’t yet quite know why” (43). Later the reasons become clearer, but no less disquieting for that. He bemoans: “I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities—mostly in conflict with each other—all of my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian, and so on” (5).

Said’s alienation from Cairo and by extension Egypt and Africa is unmistakable from the silences in the narrative. We are given the expatriate Cairo, the Cairo of Arab exiles, in all its minutiae—its sights, sounds, smells, and scandals—but the Cairo of the indigenous Egyptians is largely invisible. Egypt intrudes in this island of comfortable exile, violently and almost annoyingly, through the revolution of 1952 and Nasser’s doomed socialist experiment, which prevents Said from visiting between 1960 and 1975, and when he finally does in 1977, Cairo is “a great disappointment,” as his former Egyptian neighbor, Gindi, records his impression; Cairo was no longer “the cosmopolitan city of his youth,” for “it had become,” she quotes him, “any large third-world city, so sprawling and demographically uncontrolled had Cairo become, its services crippled, its immense mass so dusty and crumbling [. . .] I have no wish to return” (Gindi 297; qtd. from Said, “Cairo Recalled” 20).

But return he did on many occasions to visit friends, family and institutions. And from September 1993 until August 2003, a month before he died, Al-Ahram, the venerable Cairo newspaper, became an important outlet for his regular commentaries on Middle Eastern and world politics.1 To read these finely crafted essays, calling them newspaper articles seems rather trite, is to encounter that rarity of intellectual and political pleasures in modern public discourse: they seduce and engross you with their dazzling intelligence, insights, intensity, passion, urgency, irreverence, erudition, and eloquence. His ability to capture and explain the essence of the burning issues of the day—from US culture and politics to the savage invasion of Iraq and always the trauma of Palestine—issues often camouflaged in obtuse state bureaucratese, corporate advertorials, and vapid academese is outstanding. There can be little
doubt as the tributes quoted at the beginning of this essay indicate that Said was one of the world's most influential intellectuals and Palestine's most compelling crusaders. His voluminous and always moving writings on the Palestinian struggle have left a lasting legacy for the Palestinians themselves and offer damning indictments against Western liberal humanism and human rights movements that have so far failed to reckon fully with the genocidal implications of the Israeli occupation.

Given the role that the Palestinian struggle was to play in Said's later life, it is quite surprising that when he was growing up, "the subject of Palestine was rarely talked about openly," he remembers, "although stray comments by my father suggested the catastrophic collapse of a society and a country's disappearance. [. . .] It seems inexplicable to me now that having dominated our lives for generations, the problem of Palestine and its tragic loss, which affected virtually everyone we knew, deeply changing our world, should have been so relatively repressed, undiscussed, or even remarked on by my parents" (Out of Place 116–17).

An intriguing feature of the memoir is that none of the Saids' Egyptian neighbors, such as the Gindis, are discussed at any length, yet we are often given copious depictions of European and American characters encountered by the young Said. In this textual reclamation of the memory of home, the Egyptians are largely faceless masses, Cairo merely a prop in the drama of exile. I was astonished that while Said waxes lyrically about European music and musicians, writers, and forgettable heroes from American films, including such dubious ones as Tarzan, there is hardly any mention of Arab, let alone Egyptian cultural producers and icons. Emblematic of this blindness, if not disdain, is the cursory and haughty dismissal of Om (sometimes spelled Umm) Khultum, the voice of Egypt, indeed the most treasured musician in the Arab world for five decades until her death in 1975: "The Diana's main distinction was that it was both a drab theatre where Om Khultum delivered her interminably long performances and a place where benefits for good causes could be held [. . .]" (205). The invisibility of the Egyptian cultural present, is followed by repudiation of its cultural past. He tells us about a visit with his mother at Christmas in 1950 "to Upper Egypt for a few days' sightseeing in the Valley of the Kings, Karnak, and other sites, whose silence and awful brooding emptiness put me off ancient Egypt forever" (208).

And Egypt is absorbed into the orientalist cartography of the "Middle East" and totally excised from "Africa," which is mentioned only a few times, almost invariably in reference to the mythologies of the venerable Tarzan for whom he "developed irre- cursable attachment" (35). Said's discursive disinclination to engage Africa seriously echoes his perfunctory treatment of African texts in Culture and Imperialism. As I wrote in the review mentioned earlier, the Western canonical texts examined in the book are treated with the kind of hermeneutic engagement, close scrutiny, and informed reading that is not accorded to a single African and Asian text, although he liberally drops names. The result is to reconfirm the privileged status, the supremacy of the Western literary canon, and marginalize and dismiss African and Asian literatures.

In the memoir, it is not only the cultural productions and politics of Egypt that are invisible. Said's representation of the United States also remains strangely silent on racism, the country's original and enduring sin rooted in the ravages of European settler colonialism that led to the genocide of the native peoples followed by the enslavement of Africans. He tells us that at Mount Hermon "I was never appointed a floor officer, a table head, a member of the student council, or a valedictorian (officially
designated as number 1 in the class) and salutorian (officially number 2) although I had the qualifications. And I never knew why" (230). This is a rather strange confession of ignorance or absolution of American bigotry. Instead of calling this exclusion by its rightful name—racism—he attributes it to hypocritical authority and with that discovery, he proclaims, "I began a lifelong struggle against capriciousness and hypocrisy of a power whose authority depended absolutely on its ideological self-image as a moral agent, acting in good faith and with unimpeachable intentions" (230). Quite a convoluted deodorization of racism.

He only mentions in passing that at the Princeton of the 1950s "there wasn't a single black" (274), offering no comment as if this were an inconsequential fact for a country then in the throes of the civil rights struggle, which he does not even address. He does mention Martin Luther King once not in the context of civil rights but for being on the wrong side of the Arab-Israeli conflict:

Eleanor Roosevelt revolted me in her avid support for the Jewish state; despite her much-vaunted, even advertised, humanity I could never forgive her for her inability to spare the tiniest bit of it for our refugees. The same was true later for Martin Luther King, whom I had genuinely admired but was also unable to fathom (or forgive) for the warmth of his passion for Israel's victory during the 1967 war. (141)

Support for Israel's aggression against the dispossessed and oppressed Palestinians does indeed deserve censure, but reciprocity is required, in this case in terms of support for African American civil rights struggles, which is noticeably absent in this memoir. This raises the intriguing question of what Pius Adesanmi has called the "territorial integrity of oppression," "how oppression, construed as a spatiochromatic territory, aspires to an insidious foundationalist essence" (35). The consequence is sometimes the construction of competitive exclusionary oppressions.

Exiles who ignore the politics of their hostlands and are singularly fixated on the desolation of their homelands run the risk of producing and peddling exceptionalist discourses of oppression. The Palestinians have suffered greatly from exclusionary formulations of oppression in the Middle East in which the Israel holocaust trumps Palestinian tragedy. "This is the dilemma Edward Said faced," contends Adesanmi, as he tried to clear a space for Palestinian suffering in a Euro-American topology of oppression monopolized by narratives of Jewish suffering and persecution, on the one hand, and the Napoleon-is-always-right posture of the American state vis-à-vis the state of Israel, on the other. Given this context, how do you narrate Palestinian suffering without appearing to water down the dominant Jewish narrative of suffering? (44)

United States support for Israel is mostly attributed to the muscular lobbying efforts of the Jewish lobby or even collective Western guilt over the holocaust. Often ignored, but crucial is the origins and development of the United States as a settler society and state that sympathizes with other settlers against natives and non-whites. The anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and the United States made this strategic link (Nesbitt, Race for Sanction).

Narratives of oppression in the homeland tend to serve as alibis for exile in that they provide a powerful moral force, political energy, and imaginative stimuli for the
exile, facilitating the perpetual deferment of constructing home in the hostland, of turning the exilic condition into a diasporic condition in which the “here” and “there” of the original rupture are inverted as the new homeland assumes existential primacy and the old retains ontological affinity.

At the end of his memoir, Said seeks the validation of exile not in his own eventual return to the homeland but in the freedom inherent in the very condition of exile.

My search for freedom, for the self beneath or obscured by “Edward,” could only have begun because of that rupture, so I have come to think of it as fortunate, despite the loneliness and unhappiness I experienced for so long. Now it does not seem important or even desirable to be “right” and in place (right at home, for instance). Better to wander out of place, not to own a house, and not ever to feel too much at home anywhere, especially in a city like New York, where I shall be until I die. (294).

This tortured recognition and resolution of the pain and possibilities of exile is fore-shadowed in an influential essay written fifteen years earlier, “Reflections on Exile” (2003, in Reflections of Exile). In the essay, exile is dubbed as “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. […] The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever” (173). Exile, he continues, is a debilitating solitude, a loneliness, a discontinuous state of being, a state of jealousy as the exile is full of resentment for nonexiles, and exiles are often eccentric, intransigent, unpleasant, and their isolation and displacement “produces the kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community” (183). Yet, for all this grimness, “there are some positive things to be said for its conditions. Seeing ‘the entire world as a foreign land’ makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal. […] There is,” he continues excitedly, “a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension, especially if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and elevate appreciative sympathy. There is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be” (186).

The estrangement of exile engenders the need to create “a new world to conquer. It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelists, chess players, political activists, and intellectuals. Each of these occupations requires a minimal investment in objects and places a great premium on mobility and skill. The exile’s new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction” (181). In fact, to the exile, as Said’s model, Theodor Adorno, believed: “the only truly available now, though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing” (184). The Algerian-born writer Hélène Cixous reached the same exhilarating, narcissistic conclusion: “From 1955 on, I adopted an imaginary nationality which is literary nationality” (qtd. in Penrod 144). Exile is a perquisite to the imagination, a preserve of intellectuals. The exile, in Said’s hierarchy of the displaced, is the true outsider ennobled by “a touch of solitude and spirituality,” unlike the expatriate who lives abroad voluntarily, or an émigré
who enjoys considerable choice in the decision to emigrate, let alone refugees who are “large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance” (Out of Place 181). Said’s exiles are cosmopolitan intellectuals. The rest are pretenders or undeserving of the true pathos and majesty of the exilic condition and experience.

In Culture and Imperialism the worldliness of intellectual exiles assumes revolutionary potential. Exile becomes an ontological and political space of freedom. Said’s argument is that the historical imperatives of anti-imperialist struggle now find expression and vitality in exilic and migratory energies and movements. The first stage of the ideological and cultural war against imperialism was located in the colonial world, from there it spread to the metropolitan world, where it is now concentrated partly because the resurgent nationalisms, despotisms, and ungenerous ideologies of the postcolonial world have betrayed the liberationist struggle, and partly because of the migrations from the global South to the global North, “voyages in,” as he calls them, not simply of “nearly forgotten unfortunates,” but of intellectuals. Let us hear it in his own words:

[It is no exaggeration that liberation as an intellectual mission has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, centred, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages. From this perspective then all things are indeed counter, original, spare, strange. [. . .] There is then not just the negative advantage of refuge in the emigre’s eccentricity; there is also the positive benefit of challenging the system, describing it in language unavailable to those it has already subdued. (332–33)

From here to the invocation of exile as an emancipatory experience is but a short step, especially in some of the celebratory, mischievous, and depoliticized narratives of postmodernism and postcolonialism that extol ambiguous, ambivalent, hybrid, contingent, cosmopolitan, borderless and unanchored identities. For Manthia Diawara in his In Search of Africa (1998), deracination is freedom that entails, for Africans, both cosmopolitanism and modernity, enabling them to enjoy the global public goods of cultural and political creations supposedly freely circulating in the world (see Posnock).

In these narratives exile is stripped of its “tragic edge,” to use Sophia McClennen’s poignant phrase (ix), and becomes an elixir of freedom from the suffocating grip of national identity. Our analysis of literary exile, McClennen insists, and I agree, should transcend the facile dichotomies as to whether “exile produces creative freedom or it traps the writer in restrictive nostalgia.” Rather than a series of exclusive binaries, literary production in exile is best understood as a complex “series of dialectic tensions revolving around central components of the exile’s cultural identity: nation, time, language, and space” (2–3) But the dialectics must lead somewhere.

Exile is exceedingly common in modern Africa, indeed in the world at large, so much that it could even be seen as one of the major characteristics of the twentieth century, yet it remains difficult to define as a concept and a condition. The causes, contexts, courses, constitution, and consequences of exile and the exilic life and identity are so complex and varied that they cannot but have multiple referents. Exile, the exile, as already noted, shares kinship with the émigré, expatriate, emigrant, and
refugee. Each of these terms has different moral and legal inflections: the exile is usually seen as a victim of banishment while the expatriate and émigré enjoy some choice and emigrant and refugee are legal statuses. In reality, the distinctions may be more abstract than real for the causes and consequences of displacement embodied in each nomenclature cannot be separated into neat boxes of exclusive biography; all are forms of exile or rather exile is a metonymy for various forms of dislocation from a physical and psychic homeland.

As a material process, exile entails flight from the "here" of home to the "there" of foreign abode, a transnational movement from one's native land to another. In this context, exile is predicated fundamentally on the existence of distinct nation states, imagined communities whose coercive power over citizens and aliens is far from imaginary notwithstanding the fantasies of some postmodernists and hyperglobalists who tend to wish away such boundaries. The expulsion or exit from one's national space can be either voluntary or involuntary, a product of political, economic, religious, cultural, social, sexual, and legal pressures, provocations, and persecutions. It is a rupture often marked by pain and loss, even if later the perspectives and experiences of exile, in all their tantalizing or terrifying dualities or pluralities, might come to be prized as a source of creativity, a space of new self-refashioning and literary production. But exile can also be metaphorical, referring to artistic representations of alienation from familiar traditions. This is to suggest that exile, in its literary dimensions, comes in three forms: the exile of the writers themselves, exile as a theme in literary work, and the existence of a corpus of exile literature or literature of exile.

It is no exaggeration to say that there is hardly any African writer of note who has not experienced exile at one time or another. Martin Tucker's compendium of Literary Exile in the Twentieth Century published in 1991 lists many of Africa's leading writers. Altogether, out of some 550 prominent exiles worldwide whose biographies are referenced, 65 are from Africa, out of whom 40 are South Africans, mostly political refugees from the brutalities of apartheid. The majority of literary exiles from the rest of the continent are also escapees from the destructive authoritarianisms of postcolonial rule. A few examples will suffice. They include Mbela Sonne Dipoko and Ferdinand Oyono from Cameroon; Ayi Kwei Armah and Kofi Awoonor from Ghana; Camara Laye from Guinea; Ngugi wa Thiong'o from Kenya; Frank Chipasula from Malawi; Luis Bernardo Honwana from Mozambique; Buchi Emecheta, Ben Okri, and Wolé Soyinka from Nigeria; Tchicaya U Tam'si from the Congo; Cheik Hamidou Kane, Sembene Ousmane, and Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal; Peter Abrahams, Breyten Breytenbach, Dennis Brutus, Bessie Head, Alex La Guma, and Es'kia Mphahlele from South Africa; Tayib Salih from Sudan; Abdulrazak Gurnah from Tanzania; and Taban lo Liyong, Peter Nazareth, and Okot p'Bitek from Uganda. Since then a new generation of African writers in exile has emerged, from Assia Djebar from Algeria, Jack Mapanje from Malawi, and Chinua Achebe from Nigeria, to Nuruddin Farah from Somalia, M. G. Vassanji from Tanzania, and Yvonne Vera from Zimbabwe. I could include myself in that company. Revealingly, the bulk of Africa's literary exiles are located in the former colonial metropoles of Western Europe and the United States. Bessie Head who lived mostly in Botswana and Ayi Kwei Armah based in Senegal are quite exceptional.

 Literary exiles are caught up in the maelstrom of massive international migrations, for which the social science literature has developed various theories, each employing radically different concepts, assumptions, and frames of reference, that
seek to explain the factors that, first, initiate, and second, perpetuate international migration, and third, that attempt to assess the effects of international migration on both the sending and receiving countries. Some causal accounts emphasize economic factors and motivations; others offer political or sociological perspectives and propositions. Space does not allow for any extended discussion of the subject, except to point out that a process as complex as international migration cannot but be the result of equally complex forces operating at various levels in space and time. Individuals and households make migration decisions in the context of structural and historical forces that they often do not control, that are defined by uneven development between countries and societies and unequal flows of capital, commodities, communication, and cultures, that create connections and networks that blur neat distinctions between sending and receiving countries. Much of the literature on African international migration tends to emphasize the operation of both economic and political factors. There is overwhelming evidence that political pressures produce large flows of refugees and other migrants, including otherwise patriotic professionals and intellectuals who are driven abroad to save their lives and serve the struggles against tyranny.

As for the factors and forces that perpetuate migration, emphasis is often placed on the role of social networks, institutional facilitators in the "migration industry," and the effects of cumulative traditions of migration. Once again, each explains an important dynamic and dimension of the migration process. It stands to reason that migration involves both social networks and enabling institutions and is a cumulative process. The interplay between these factors obviously varies in specific contexts. Increasingly, international migration has come to be seen as an integral part of globalization, or the phenomenon known as "transnationalism," a social process in which migrants establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. The case for the multiplicity of migrants' involvements, concerns, actions, and decisions that span borders is quite compelling. Less so is the argument that this is new, that contemporary transnational migration differs significantly from previous migration experience. Those concerned with the consequences of international migration examine the impact of migration for the migrants themselves as well as for their countries of origin and their countries of immigration. Much of the literature has focused on the economic dimensions of these questions, and increasingly on the political and cultural implications. The consequences are bound to vary in so far the migration experience is filtered through the spatial hierarchies of uneven development between countries and the unequalizing inscriptions of class, race, gender, and nationality among the migrants themselves.

This may seem like we are veering too far from literary exile. But the detour into the analytical gaze of the social sciences helps to demystify exile, to remind us that dislocation, expatriation from home is a prosaic condition experienced by millions of people rather than an exceptional reality only for those blessed with artistic souls. This is not to deny that writers and intellectuals experience exile in specific ways peculiar to their sensibilities and vocation, it is simply to disclaim the conceit that their experience is representative, universal, to guard against the fetishism of exile.

It is difficult to decipher the personal and psychic compulsions that sometimes force literary exiles to flee. Beneath the structural and social forces of politics, economy and culture that engender migration and exile may lie inscrutable ontological angst, flight from being "African," "Arab," "Asian," or "Latin American." Reading some African writers and scholars mired in the unrelieved gloom of Afropessimism, one is
left with an aching feeling that Africa's irredeemable agony, as they view it, is an alibi for their desperate attempts to escape from themselves, to assume another identity sanctified by Europe, to become one of Europe's own. For some, then, literary exile is ameliorative, a priceless prize whatever the pain, anguish, guilt and anxiety of the initial rupture.

There are African writers for whom exile represents nothing but artistic freedom. Listen to Nuruddin Farah sing "in praise of exile":

Except for *A Naked Needle* (which I am pleased to say is out of print), all my major writing has taken place outside Somalia. [. . .] For me distance distills, ideas become clearer and better worth pursuing. [. . .] One of the pleasures of living away from home is that you become the master of your destiny, you avoid the constraints and limitations of your past and, if need be, create an alternative life for yourself. That way everybody else becomes the other, and you the center of the universe. You are a community when you are away from home—the communal mind, remembering. Memory is active when you are in exile. [. . .] ("In Praise of Exile")

Some African literary exiles who cherish their mastery of the languages of empire, their artistic universalism, and their rootless cosmopolitanism always seem to feel compelled, as if in recompense for such turn of fortune, to repudiate Africa as a nurturing home, from their new spaces of enunciation and intellection, by enveloping the continent with representations of eternal chaos, decadence, banality, and death, images that disturbingly resonate with imperialist death wishes for societies—the postcolonies—that apparently forfeited civilization and the future in spurning the empire through decolonization.

For colonial and postcolonial writers immersed and enamored by the linguistic and artistic conceits of empire, exile in the global North might represent a search for the artistic legitimation and marketability that only the imperial heartlands can provide. Andrew Gurr sees literary exile primarily as an escape from colonial provincialism and postcolonial peripherality. "An artist born in a colony," he contends, "is made conscious of the culturally subservient status of his home and is forced to go into exile in the metropolis as a means of compensating for that sense of cultural subservience" (8). Once in the metropole, the exiled writer suffers from the anguish of alienation, from home and history in space and time, in short, from his or her identity, which she seeks to reclaim by using the artistic freedom and insights of detachment provided by that very exile, finding security in the home of memory, which is relentlessly mined to recreate a sense of identity and cultural belonging. The African literary exile, already alienated even at home from his culture through colonial education and language, finds prose, rather than poetry, more amenable to the urge to communicate explicitly to the new metropolitan audience. The fact that prose has a more lucrative market than poetry is an added consideration.

Gurr further observes that in their first years exiled writers concentrate on reconstructing the homes they left behind. This is clearly borne out in the writers he examines including Katherine Mansfield from New Zealand, V. S. Naipaul from Trinidad, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o from Kenya. The first four novels of Naipaul, the irascible foe of the nationalisms of the global South, were homages to home before he found singular glory in alienation and identity in being a writer. In contrast, Ngugi, the bulk of whose fictional and nonfictional prose has been written outside his home country, never deviated from recreating and reaffirming his home—he has yet to
write a work of fiction set outside Kenya in the lands of his exilic wanderings from Uganda to Britain and the United States.\(^\text{10}\)

I certainly recognize these impulses in my own creative writing. My first published work of fiction after I left the country was a novel, *Smouldering Charcoal* (1992), in which I sought to recreate the Malawi I knew in the 1970s, the terrifying dictatorship that I despised so much and desperately wished to see replaced by a new democratic dispensation. When the dictatorship finally fell from the winds of democratic change blowing across Africa in the mid-1990s, I was exhilarated, but I did not return as I had long fantasized. Orphaned from the tyranny that had nourished my exilic imagination, I set out in search of fresh inspiration, new themes, even rage, to write about. *The Joys of Exile* (1994), a collection of short stories set in various locations on my exilic itinerary represented my attempt to create a new literary voice, to come to terms with my newly discovered sojourn into the diasporic experience.

It cannot be overemphasized that the experiences of exile differ for different writers. The enigmatic issues of personal temperament and disposition aside, nationality, race, class, gender, and ideology play a role in determining states of exile. The exile of black and white South Africans differs because of their varied ontological and discursive connections to Europe and Africa, as does that between an Afrikaner writer like Breytenbach, writing in Afrikaans, and an English South African like Ronald Harwood.\(^\text{11}\) The young Ugandan-Dutch writer Moses Isegawa, author of the widely acclaimed first novel, *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2000), a reconstruction of the Uganda of his youth, reflects on his racialization in Europe:

> When you first leave Uganda for Europe you think, “At last I’m free to do what I want.” But when you arrive there, you become an African for the first time, in a sense. Because you are responsible for Somalia! They call you up and say, “What do you think about Somalia?” And you can’t say, “I’m Ugandan, I have nothing to say about Somalia.” You have this huge chunk of experience to defend—and you will defend it, because nobody else is defending it. They say, “Well, nothing ever works right in Africa, we are just wasting our money.” And you have to say, “Wait a minute! Think about what you have been doing in Africa for hundreds of years.” You become a sort of ambassador and for the first time you become conscious of what Africa means. Of what Uganda means. (Vasquez 144)

Class also makes its experiential and discursive claims on exile. An assertion such as the one made by Joseph Brodsky that “the plight of the exiled writer is indeed much worse than that of a Gastarbeiter or the average refugee [because] his appetite for recognition makes him restless and oblivious to the superiority of his income as college teacher, lecturer, small magazine editor or just a contributor” (102), is elitist in the extreme. Said’s narrative of exile clearly shows strong class biases. Equally critical are the gender biases. In fact, most discourses of exile, as Myriam Chancy charges in the case of the Caribbean and Africa, have “by and large failed to encompass the realities of women of African descent” (23).\(^\text{12}\)

Male and female experiences of exile display considerable variations because, as Alena Heitlinger reminds us, “the decision to become an exile could also be motivated by the politics of gender. Women who choose exile often do so in order to escape from oppressive nationalist, religious, and patriarchal discourses and laws” (5). Several contributions in *The Literature of Emigration and Exile*, for example, show women who have either benefited from relocation or adjusted better than men. One
author attributes this partly to the fact that "they write as women and as women they write of their private and public communities [. . .] this would seem to be a spirit that allows these women to tie self-creation to creation of community, and thus to make themselves integrally a part of the place they live" (Buss 60–61). Another argues that women are better able to negotiate the marginality of exile because they often already lack recognition in the societies they come from (see Shih).

It is certainly the case that several prominent women writers from the Maghreb, including Assia Djebar and Malika Mokeddem, have, to quote Valérie Orlando’s extensive study on their work, “preferred exile to the violence of patriarchal and religious fanatical regimes (such as those currently found in Algeria). Exile, therefore, has become a predominant factor in the reformulation of feminine identity of Maghrebian women on both a literary and cultural level” (7). These writers use exile to create new spaces of active agency for women disempowered by the triple patriarchal tyrannies of French colonialism, postcolonial authoritarianism, and religious fundamentalism. For many African and African diaspora women exile in the global North brings with it new marginalities and alienations of race, although they are often able to “find the strength to counter their multiple points of oppression and generate their own sense of self as they move homeward,” thereby turning exile into a “productive contradiction” in which the mechanisms of alienation are transformed into mechanisms of liberation (Chancy 14).

The experience of literary exile is also mediated by ideology. “Because nothing is secure,” Said observes, “exile is a jealous state;” it engenders “an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you” (Out of Place 178). Ideology colors and corrodes all it touches in the world of exile, inflaming passions, prejudices and phobias. As several exiled writers clearly show, and some even admit, in Literature in Exile, exiles can be an especially quarrelsome and opinionated lot. The constant shifts of the contesting ideologies and their labeling make for intriguing drama. During the Cold War liberals, nationalists, and Marxists in all their convoluted assortments fought it out.

More recently the battle lines are drawn between what Francis Njubi Nesbitt calls the comprador, the postcolonial, and the progressive exiles. The first cynically use their Africanity to authenticate neocolonial and neoliberal agendas and are infamous for defending the global order and condemning African countries for corruption, “tribalism,” and ineptitude. The postcolonial critics see themselves in a mediating role, as expert interpreters of the African experience to the West and transmitters of the ever-changing panorama of Euro-American perspectives, including most recently the “posts” (postmodern, poststructuralism, and postcoloniality) to Africa and to “explain” the African experience. The progressive exiles seek to use their new spaces to develop a dignified Pan-African identity by unabashedly promoting African knowledges and participating in the liberation struggles of both the diaspora and their countries of origin. Njubi suggests Ngugi wa Thiong’o as the paragon of the progressive exile and Kwame Anthony Appiah for the postcolonial critic, and one could point to a George Ayittey as the quintessential comprador intellectual.

It was noted earlier that most leading African writers have been in exile at one time or another in their lives and careers. Some are even citizens of Western and North American countries. Yet, the work they produce is often not considered as “exile literature,” a specific genre with its own aesthetic concerns and conventions. Rather, it is unproblematically included in the problematic corpus of what is called
African literature, or what this journal more properly calls African literatures. My short stories, for example, are included in several African and Canadian anthologies, and the designation of my literary identity shifts from location and audience and in cyberspace (on several online biographies I am referred to as a Zimbabwean, the country I was born; a Malawian, the country in which I grew up; a Kenyan, the country on which I wrote my doctoral dissertation and worked for many years in the 1980s and have written extensively; Canadian, the country where I did my doctorate and worked for several years and whose passport I use for travel). Where does my work belong—African literature, exile literature, diaspora literature, or Canadian literature? Many African writers find themselves in similar situations. Is J. M. Coetzee still a South African writer now that he has abandoned the rainbow nation for Australia? Even if this were not a personal quandary for me, which it is not, for I regard myself as an African first and foremost, it is a maze of categorization, conceptual cartography if you will, that our literary critics should help us decipher and navigate.

The theme of exile has received more critical attention. If I were to hazard an analytical typology as evident in two collections explicitly employing the terms “exile and African literature,” I would identify three tropes: exile as cultural alienation, exile as political angst, and exile as cosmopolitan affiliation. Of course, themes in works by the same author can easily cross these boundaries. Indeed, a dialectical reading of exile literature suggested by McClennen would expect such slippages and interpenetrating oppositions. The value of this typology is largely heuristic. The cosmopolitan trope that valorizes migration and migrant subjectivity is rooted in the antispatial and antifoundationalist predilections of globalization and postcolonial theories, which have become the dominant paradigms of our age, at least in the academies of the global North.

Rowland Smith, the editor of Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature (1976), opens the collection thus:

The similarity of concern among these essays is remarkable. Although they deal with the literature of areas separated from one another by geography, politics, even language, the authors return repeatedly to basic issues. These are traditions peculiar to African cultures and the sense of alienation which has so frequently resulted from the imposition of western codes on those formerly organic cultures. (ix)

The thirteen chapters, some by Africa's canonical authors including Chinua Achebe, Nadine Gordimer, and Wole Soyinka, are treatises on the consciousness of alienation wrought by the ravages of colonialism in their various mutations across West, North, and South Africa and the French Caribbean and the struggles against such cultural and epistemic violence in African imaginative writing and critical practice. This obsession with cultural integrity in African political thought and literary criticism, sometimes referred to as cultural nationalism, reflected a moment of return to history—the recuperation of historical agency—by societies recently freed from the colonial interregnum and anxious to forge monolithic nations, cohesive cultural spaces out of the cartographic caricatures of colonialism, and to register their civilizational presence on the world stage.

The second collection, Exile and African Literature, published in 2000 and edited by the distinguished critic Eldred Durosimi Jones, reflects different political and critical preoccupations. It examines works by exiled writers on the theme of exile. There,
exile is no longer framed as cultural alienation; instead the physical and psychic contexts of transnational displacement are foregrounded and the critics seek to decipher the representations of exiles and returnees and the role they play in struggles against the devastations of neocolonialism. Annie Gagiano looks at the fragmented fiction of Dambudzo Marechera in which exile is portrayed as an intertwined series of states: it represents an ontological condition of humanity, the experiences of African deprivation and estrangement under colonialism, their alienation as émigrés and emigrants in racist Europe, and as disenchanted citizens in totalitarian postcolonial states, all of which produce devastating personal and psychological dislocations, making meaningful political action by the exile and returnee all but impossible. Marechera's vision of exilic despair, or solipsistic nihilism as David Kerr calls it (21), reflects the prevalent disillusionment after the initial euphoria of independence had worn off. Returned exiles play an even more central role as protagonists in several of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels examined in this collection by Nnadozie Inyama. Armah's exiles are often lonely, traumatized and uncompromising individuals who return to an equally bleak, brutalized world of corruption where the promises of independence have been aborted. The possibilities of progressive change in Fragments hang on thin hope that frays into bitter defeatism in Why Are We So Blest? as the energies of Solo, the narrator, and Modin, the central character, both alienated and impotent intellectuals, are sapped and paralysed by a manichean understanding of the world. They come to dismiss all national liberation struggles as mystifications contrived by an omnipotent, conspiratorial imperialism. Theirs is a nihilistic world of unyielding structural dualities and little agency, of a passive “Africanity” and a destructive “Westernity.”

The experiences of exiles in Bessie Head are no less troubled, but the ordeals of ethnic, racial, and sexual violence they suffer, which in the case of the powerful, haunting novel A Question of Power drives the main character, Elizabeth, literally mad, serve to strengthen them in subtle, but potent ways and reaffirm their humanity and the possibilities of a more humane world. Sophia Ogwude believes that Head's characters demonstrate political commitment to meaningful change in their assertiveness and refusal to accept color and ethnic bars. Head's characters create hope through personal healing, the harmonizing energies of cooperative labor, and redemption from ostracism, not through a reaffirmation of the conventions of the past, but the invention of new traditions, the imagining of new communities, not the pretentious reclamation of some fossilised heritage. It would be tempting to suggest that Head's more humane vision reflect a feminist sensibility. Buchi Emecheta's feminist impulses in Kehinde, analyzed by Anna Arce, however, lead to the repudiation of return and home and the meaningful reintegration of exiles and a reaffirmation of exilic life, a syncretic, multicultural self. When Kehinde returns to Nigeria following her husband, she is horrified to find that he has married a second wife and by her inability to fit culturally, so she returns to London to the daily molestations of racism, but she gradually rebuilds professional and personal life. In choosing to live in London, she is not renouncing Nigeria as home, but affirming her womanhood. She finds racial otherness at the heart of empire less threatening to her integrity as a woman than the patriarchal betrayal of her husband, a decision supported by the spirit of her twin who died at birth. This spirit appears to her at all critical moments, a communion that suggests the erasure of the customary boundaries of belonging constructed by the imagined patriarchal communities of race and nation.
In narratives where the exiles do not return, or the author is primarily concerned with the representations of the exilic experience itself, we get a kind of contrapuntal affirmation of rootless cosmopolitan affiliation, one marked with anxieties and contradictions held in fluid, suspended tension. This is the world, for example, if Ayo Coly is to be believed, of Calixthe Beyala's two novels of an African immigrant community in France. Before writing these novels, she wrote two others reconstructing the Africa her protagonists are so anxious to escape from; it is a poverty-stricken, corrupt, and dying monstrosity that consumes its youth. But the hopes of finding a nurturing home in France are constantly shattered by racism and isolation. For Abdou, the main male character, this leads to profound nostalgia for home, for Mali, but this is a gendered angst reflecting his loss of masculine control in the new environment that is not shared by his wife, Mam, whose memories of Africa are far less ebullient and nostalgic. Nevertheless, “although Mam seems manifestly better in France than in Africa,” Coly notes, “more at home in France than in Africa, there is still a degree of ambivalence towards her new home. She enjoys the many possibilities that France offers her; however, she has to face the racism that does not allow her to call France home. Hence the collapse of France as a tentative home. [...] With her home neither here, nor there, Mam is in her own words ‘un oiseau apatride’ ‘a homeless bird’” (43-44).

The dialectics of exile is captured most poignantly in Malika Mokaddem's Forbidden Woman, in which the main character, Sultana, who lives in France and visits Algeria and returns to France, is estranged from both countries, is at the margins of the cultures of both. Consequently, France and Algeria, exile and home, become interchangeable spaces, indeed states of mind, real and imagined, present and absent, in which the borders of space, time, history, language, religion, culture and identity are perpetually transgressed, so that, to quote Mustapha Hamil, “such terms as flight or return, departure or arrival become equally irrelevant” (55). “The interchangeability of home and exile, here and there,” he continues, “memory and forgetting points to the fact that all concepts of origin and belonging—whether real or invented—that one venerates are mere fictions that one can construct as well as deconstruct.” Hamil finds Mokeddem's narrative of Sultana's ubiquitous otherness, her in-betweenness, fragmented subjectivity, and postcolonial anomic rather troubling in its circular futility, which he believes illustrates “a deep-seated malaise of contemporary Maghrebian discourse on identity and difference. Given the never-ending suspension between Western and Arab-Islamic narratives of identity, postcolonial cultural transformations in the Maghreb communicate a miserable Hegelianism: miserable because its dialectics seems to lead nowhere, but an Hegelianism all the same” (52). This is an exilic cosmopolitanism in which collective postcolonial subjectivities are endlessly negated, a solipsistic world of infinite solitude, of existential emptiness.

One of Said's lasting legacies is that he forces us to see the familiar in new light and face the unfamiliar, to appreciate the dialectics of the contemporary world more keenly, the intricate interconnections and intersections, amidst all the tensions and contradictions and polarizations, between the past and the present, the local and the global, imperialism and nationalism, culture and politics, society and economy, knowledge and ethics, home and exile. His profound reflections on exile have certainly forced me to think more deeply about my own exile as a person, an academic, and as a writer. Let me end with the opening remarks to the review essay I wrote more than ten years ago on his book Culture and Imperialism:
Edward Said, the Palestinian-American intellectual, is arguably the most exciting, if not the most distinguished, cultural and literary critic now writing in North America. In an age when literary critics seem preoccupied with the petty concerns of post-modernism, Said engages the large questions of comparative historical analyses of literature and cultural politics. His focus is unusually broad and complex, his analysis multi-layered and richly-textured; and when combined with the lucidity of his writing and his immense erudition and political compassion, he compels our attention and respect. (“Tribulations” 478)

This is an exile I refuse to countenance.

NOTES

2. For a biography of Umm Khultum see Danielson.
3. For a detailed examination of this view see Mamdani.
4. In succinct and eloquent elaboration that is worth quoting at length on what she calls the “interpenetration of opposites” in “the ways that exile texts include conflicts and oppositions,” McClennen states: “For example, exile writing often contains the following unity of opposites: the condition of exile is depicted as physical and mental; exile is a state that both liberates and confines the writers; writing is both the cause of exile and the way to supersede it; exile is both spiritual/abstract and material; exile is personal/individual and political/collective; exile writing recuperates the past and re-imagines it; exiles write about the past and also about the future; the experience of exile is both unique and universal; exile improves and also restricts the writer's work; exile heightens both regionalism and cosmopolitanism, both nationalism and globalization. These interpenetrating oppositions are only a few of the most salient dialectical tensions found in exile writing. These tensions track in a variety of different ways in each particular case, but these tensions are a common feature of exile writing” (30).
5. Needless to say, this is not a comprehensive listing. There were many more African literary exiles by the 1980s. For one thing, this encyclopedia hardly lists exiles from North Africa and there are few women and many of those resident in other African countries are not included.
6. Out of the 40 exiled writers, 29 are listed under “political exile,” 7 under “personal/social exile,” 2 under “expatriates,” 7 under “exile for diplomatic, educational, medical or career reasons,” and 4 under “cultural exile.” The total count—49—exceeds 40 because a few are placed under more than one category.
7. Ten are listed under “political exile,” another ten under “exile for diplomatic, educational, medical or career reasons,” and two each under “expatriates” and under “personal/social exile.”
8. Rarer still are literary exiles from elsewhere who migrate to Africa. For a fascinating example see the case of Kanchana Ugbabe the Indian-born Nigerian writer discussed by Andrew Smith.
9. For a detailed examination of these theories see my “African Migrations” (2002).
10. According to Oliver Lovesey, the major exception being the novel Devil on the Cross, “written in Kenya but within the state's maximum-security prison” (140).
11. For an interesting review of Breytenbach's exile, see Renders.
12. She critiques, for example, George Lamming's The Pleasure of Exile.
13. Buss is talking about the autobiographies of white American women in Canada who are obviously aided by the advantages of class and language and one could add race.

14. For an alternative characterization of African academics working in the United States, see my "The African Academic Diaspora."

15. Some of these observations are made in my review of these authors in my Manufacturing African Studies and Crises ch. 18–20.

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