



International Research Journal of Humanities, Language and

Literature ISSN: (2394-1642)

Impact Factor 6.401 Volume 5, Issue 12, December 2018

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An analysis of the Concept of Exile in Edward Said

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Abstract: This paper studies the concept of “exile” in Edward Said’s writings. Said distinguishes exile from expatriate and refugees in the essay “Reflections on Exile”. In the case of expatriate there is the voluntary involvement from the person’s side. He decides to stay abroad on his own. Refugees on the other hand are bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance. Exiles alone are the cosmopolitan intellectuals having a touch of solitude and spirituality. Exile, for Said, is a symbol of freedom, emancipation and liberation. It is no exaggeration that liberation as an intellectual mission has now shifted to its unhoused, decentred and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant.

Keywords: Exile, Migration, Liberation.

The history of exile dates back old. There are instances of Ovid¹ and others being given the punishment of exile. The punishment may be due to social, political, economical, cultural or religious reasons. Etymologically the word ‘exile’ comes from the Latin word ‘exilum’ meaning

¹ Ovid is a Roman poet of 8th century A.D. His works include *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria* (Art of Love) and the epic poem *Metamorphoses* among others. He is banished to Tomis for reasons still unclear though he has stated in his *Tristia* that it is *carmen et error* i.e. “a poem and a mistake.”

banishment. Numerous thinkers have been subjected to undergo the hardship of banishment². Exile as such has been the thematic concern for a countless number of literatures till today. It is one of the major characteristics of contemporary period yet as a concept and a condition it is hard to define owing to its complex and varied nature which subsequently invites multiple referents. Only few have come forth with clear and sound theories of exile. In this paper I will analyze the concept of exile from the perspectives of the twentieth- century thinker Edward Said. Furthermore, I will discuss how his perception of exile has molded the formation of varied other ideas in his works

It may not be wrong to say that exile has been the central theme of many of Said's works. This thematic concern may not appear at all surprising once we take into consideration the 'uniquely punishing destiny' that Said shares with other Palestinians. He spends his early life as a refugee in Egypt – 'I was born in Jerusalem and had spent most of my formative years there and, after 1948 when my entire family became refugees in Egypt' (Said 2001: 556)). His *Out of Place*, which is 'a record of an essentially lost or forgotten world' (Said 1999: xi) clearly mentions the influence of exile on his life:

an extraordinary increasing no. 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 they have kept me in motion all these years
(Said 1999: 217).

His life is a life 'out of place'; always in exile which carries a sense of dissatisfaction and grief. He writes - 'To this day I still feel that I am away from, 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 Arab world or lived and studied in Europe, there is still some measure of regret'(Said 1999: 223). He stays in New York after being displaced from – Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon. He was born in Jerusalem in 1935. Still there is the constant awareness of being at odds with his environment

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

² Martin Tueker in his *Literary Exile in the Twentieth Century* (1991) has listed some 550 prominent exiles worldwide while Wikipedia has given the names of 144 notable people who have suffered the hardship of exile. Please see < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exile> >

ever to feel too much at home anywhere, especially in a city like New York, where I shall be until I die. (Said 1999: 269)

In 2000, Said pens an essay entitled “Reflections on Exile” where he delineates exiles as ‘the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home’(Said 2001:173). There is the trace of ‘regret’ regarding exile in this essay. He continues that ‘exile is a debilitating solitude; a loneliness, a discontinuous state of being, a state of jealousy as the exile is full of resentment for non exiles and exiles are often eccentric intransigent, unpleasant...’(Zeleva,2005:9). Despite all these negative connotations, the condition of exile, for Said, lends a contrapuntal³ awareness of perspectives. This is all due to the fact that people in general are aware of only one culture, one perspective whereas people in exile are exposed to different cultures and perspectives. This exposure is of great value to an exiled person and his outlook as Said notes:

There is 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 (Said 2001:168).

With this ‘contrapuntal juxtaposition’ an exile experiences the need to create his separate world. This world resembles the world of a fiction because it is ‘unnatural’. It is a world of imagination and therefore we see that exiles generally are people from the field of literature, politics and academics⁴. Of course, thousands of people do experience exile however writers and intellectuals experience it in a totally different manner which for them is paradoxically⁵ a catalyst of creative productivity. They have shown to write more in the condition of exile than while

³ It can be well observed that Said chooses the word ‘contrapuntal’ instead of ‘dialectics’. It may be because contrapuntal is a lighter term though it also suggests dynamism between two contradictory forces.

⁴ Talking about the exiled community especially in Palestine and Egypt, Said says that ‘these communities after all produced prominent writers like Edmond Jabe, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Constantine Cavafy’ (Said 1994: 35-36)

⁵ ‘paradoxically’ since banishment is imposed to inhibit the writer or the intellectual from having his words however, the contrary is seen to be happening in the condition of exile.

being in the comfort zone of their homeland. Nuruddin Farah⁶ who has been in exile since 1970s produces a work entitled “In Praise of Exile”⁷ where he empathically mentions that ‘distance distills; ideas become clearer and better worth pursuing’ (Farah 1990: 65).

Briefly, Said distinguishes exile from expatriate and refugees in the essay “Reflections on Exile”. In the case of expatriate there is the voluntary involvement from the person’s side. He decides to stay abroad on his own. Refugees on the other hand are ‘bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance’ (Said 2001:181). Exiles alone are the cosmopolitan intellectuals having ‘a touch of solitude and spirituality’ (Said 2001:181). Exile, for Said, is a symbol of freedom, emancipation and liberation. It is no exaggeration that liberation as an intellectual mission has now shifted to its unhoused, decentred and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant (Zeleva 1994:114)

In his *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*,⁸ Thomas Tweed has discussed three concepts – locative supralocative and translocative ‘Locative’ in simple term is the centre, it values the belongingness to a place while ‘supralocative’ is associated with periphery rather than the centre and values transcending space instead of being located in one place. ‘Translocation’ somewhat swings between locative and supralocative i.e. it constantly moves between centre (homeland) and periphery (adopted land). Said’s notion of exile resembles Tweed’s supralocation that emphasizes periphery or exiled state, and also to that of translocation (in between centre and periphery). The in-between position is the sacred space for Said for it helps to acquire the contrapuntal vision which is essentially a deconstructive way of looking at things.

⁶ Nuruddin Farah is a Somali novelist whose works include *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), *A Naked Needle* (1976) and *Gifts* (1993). He deals with the theme of women’s liberation, and has received international acclaim for his works but at the same time, he suffers from self-imposed exile for twenty-two years owing to the threat of arrest by the Somali government. The government finds his works politically objectionable.

⁷ In the conference of writers in exile held in Vienna in Dec 1987, he presented the paper “In Praise of Exile”

⁸ Please see Barbour D John. “Edward Said and the Space of Exile”. *Literature and Theology* 21, no 3 (Sept 2007): 293-301. In this article he has discussed Tweed’s concept in detail.

The unique position of exile gives significance to the marginalized and ignored section of the society and the culture.

Said's experience of exile has led to see the concept of culture in a totally different mode. He sees 'culture' as 'an environment process and hegemony in which individuals and their works are embedded' (Said 1983: 8). According to Said, culture has a boundary that defines what is inside the culture and what is outside the culture. In other words, it has an environment within which it functions. Said cites the example of Auerbach. He (Auerbach) moves away from his familiar environment and goes to the alien place of Istanbul. Said also notes the dominating and authorizing position of culture. Auerbach's *Mimesis* is written when he is exiled to Istanbul. The book deals with Europe but he himself confesses⁹ that the book would not have been written in the same manner if he has not been exiled. The situation of exile has lend a different perspective to Auerbach which otherwise would have been reconfigured by what Said says as 'grid of research techniques and ethics by which the prevailing culture imposes on the individual scholar its canons of how literary scholarship is to be conducted' (Said 1983: 9).

In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold speaks of 'the great men of culture' who have 'best knowledge, best ideas of their times'¹⁰. Said remarks that these 'best knowledge' and 'best ideas' are in fact the privileged ones out of all other ideas in the society, which Arnold terms as 'culture'. Said highlights the fact that it is the State that promotes and safeguards the so called 'culture' and therefore culture and State are strongly linked. Edward Said writes that 'the power of culture is potentially nothing less than the power of the State' (Ashcroft 1999: cited 53). Anything that harms the State is labeled as 'anarchy' and it includes strikes, demonstration and so on. Arnold writes:

Thus in our eyes, the very framework and exterior order of the State, whosoever may administer the State, is sacred; and culture is the most resolute enemy of anarchy (Said 1983: cited 11).

⁹ Auerbach writes '...it is quite possible that the book owes its existence to just this lack of a rich and specialized library. If it had been possible for me to acquaint myself with all the work that has been done on so many subjects, I might never have reached the point of writing' (Said 1983: cited 5).

¹⁰ Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961.

The sacredness of the State is established and the culture is promoted to safeguard against any sort of anarchy. This paradigm is nothing but ‘an assertion of hegemony by the State to maintain its power over the people. It is only by the hegemonic strength of the culture that Macaulay asserts that English language should be taught in India instead of the vernaculars language like Sanskrit. He does not hesitate to say that ‘a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia’. He is speaking with a pre conceived notion that European culture is superior to that of the Orient. The idea of the involvement of hegemony will be clear when we consider the fact that he is pronouncing his statement from ‘a position of power’ where he can easily ‘translate his opinions into the decision’ (Said 1983:13). Said’s idea of culture revolves around the notion of hegemony. It is not merely a way of life. Being in exile, Said has been able to see (from the median state) the clash of civilization – of the Orient and the Occident¹¹, and the role of hegemony in determining what is ascribed as ‘culture’ and whose interest it is serving.

In his work *The World the Text and the Critic*, Said discusses a form of criticism which he calls ‘secular criticism’. Secular criticism reflects his engagement with the notion of exile. This criticism transcends the traditional literary criticisms – practical, academic, literary history, literary apprehension and interpretation and literary theory. Said argues that these criticisms (the traditional literary criticisms) have an orientation towards a doctrinaire set of assumptions and a language of ‘specialization and professionalization allied with cultural dogma’ (Said 1983:25). These ‘assumption’ and ‘cultural dogma’ according to Said bring an end to criticism for criticism should not have any ‘solidarity’ beforehand. Secular criticism unlike the rest does not occupy specific position and label like ‘Marxism’, ‘Feminism’. It deals with the texts by being in the state of median; by being in between the processes of ‘filiation’ and ‘affiliation’. It has a sensitive response to the dominant culture with the acute awareness that the individual consciousness is but a product of the dominant culture. This sensitive response caters a capacity for an analytical distinction which is lacking in the traditional criticism owing to their solidarity. Said points out:

¹¹ He has written a well known work on the relation of the Orient and the Occident, and the involvement of hegemony in maintaining the supremacy of the West over the East. The book is entitled *Orientalism*.

These (the attribute of the secular criticism) trouble the quasi religious authority of being comfortable at home among one's people supported by known powers and acceptable values, protected against the outside world (Said 1983: 16).

It will not be wrong to say that Said accurately perceives this form of criticism (secular criticism) because of his own exiled condition where he himself is located in between two cultures experiencing 'filiation' and 'affiliation'. Said explains the two terms – filiation and affiliation.

If a filial relationship was held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority – involving obedience, fear, love, respect and instinctual conflict – the new affiliative relationship changes these bonds into what seem to be transparent forms – such as guild consciousness, consensus collegiality, professional respect, class and the hegemony of a dominant culture (Said 1983:20).

The process of affiliation is important in the modern time. In fact Said asserts that it is increasingly becoming difficult to maintain filiation to one's native culture and avoid affiliation to the new values and new ideals. Said cites the example of Eliot and draws our attention to the shift in his poetry as it has occurred in course of his life. In the poem like *Prufrock*, *Gerontion*, and *The Waste Land*, Eliot has expressed the failure of man to regenerate. This failure is starkly the characteristic feature of the modern time which Eliot depicts in his poems through the images of aridity sterility wastefulness and alienation. The phase up to the writing of *The Waste Land* is a painful period for Eliot both psychologically and emotionally. John Xeros Cooper writes that *The Waste Land* was written by a man who seemed on the edge of a breakdown'¹²(Cooper 2006:80). Gradually, it becomes too hard for Eliot to continue with these filial values. He therefore seeks new affiliation in the Church of England. He calls the English Church as 'something representative of the finest spirit of England of the time' (Said 1983: cited 17).

The Church of England seems to have consoled his ailment. He begins with a new series of poems after *The Waste Land*. In poems like *Ash-Wednesday*¹³ and *Four Quartet*, Eliot is seen

¹² He faces problem with his marriage, and this contributes to his traumatic condition at that time to a good extent.

¹³ *Ash-Wednesday* is written in 1930. The new series of poems that I have mentioned begins in 1925 onwards. Cooper writes that 'only those closest to Eliot were aware of the spiritual struggle

taking a totally different direction which his earlier readers have least expected. *Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartet* are religious poems. They reflect the affiliation of Eliot to new values and ideals which are found within the English Church. It is in the English Church that Eliot has found ‘the lost family mourned in his earlier poetry’ (Said 1983: 18). Speaking about this shift of Eliot, Said says that it is

Publicly completed in *After Strange Gods* whose almost belligerent announcement of a credo of royalism, classicism and Catholicism form a set of affiliations achieved by Eliot outside the filial pattern given him by the facts of his American birth (Said 1983: 18).

The movement from the process of filiation to affiliation characterizes the worldliness of texts according to Said. Before going into the details as such it would be good to know how the ‘text’ is perceived by Edward Said. The text as used and understood by Said is somewhat different from that of Roland Barthes. Barthes views text as a form of structure having syntagmatic and paradigmatic elements.¹⁴ Said however goes further to take into account the involvement of culture in the production of text. For Said, it is a ‘cultural act’ what Barthes has done is the separation of the text from the world by giving it an autonomous identity. Said on the other hand speaks of the worldliness of the text by locating it in the world. Said writes: ‘A text in its actually being a text is being in the world’ (Said 1983: 33)

Regarding the relation of the text and the world, the classicists view that the world exists outside while the text simply represents it. Structuralist on the other hand sees the world as being constructed by the text. The world as such does not exist. There cannot be any non textual experience of the world. These two views are balanced by Said. According to him,

The text does not exist outside the world, as is the implication in both the realist and structuralist positions, but is a part of the world of which it speaks, and this

through which he was passing in the late 1920s. For others, it would have been difficult to understand the significance of *Ash-Wednesday* in Eliot’s evolution as an artist’ (Cooper 2006: 80).

¹⁴ Syntagmatic and paradigmatic elements are introduced by Saussure to explain his theory of language. Signs in linear sequence are syntagmatic while signs in contrast with other signs are paradigmatic. The result of this binary pair of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relation is a network of mutually defining elements, in other words, a linguistic system.

worldliness is itself present in the text as a part of its formation (Ashcroft 1999:39).

Thus text plays a significant role in the ways we perceive the world however the existence of the world as such is not denied by Said. Coming to affiliation, it is (as a critical approach towards text) is of crucial importance for Said because it breaks the text from its filiative connection with other texts and is replaced by affiliation to the world thus establishing the worldliness of the text.¹⁵ A reader is liberated to see the text as a phenomenon in the world with all sorts of affiliation – non canonical, non traditional and non literary.

Bill Ashcroft explains:

Affiliation, then is a feature of the text's worldliness. While filiation suggests a Utopian domain of texts connected serially, homologously and seamlessly with other texts [...] The affiliation of the text constantly leads us back to its worldliness, for we are drawn to ask the question: 'Where is the text taking place?'; 'How is it taking place?' Affiliation draws us inexorably to the location and the locatedness of the text's production (Ashcroft 1999:43).

Perhaps it will not be wrong to say that Said's ideas generally involve location and its association to culture. His views are embedded in the 'worldliness' which we can attribute to his state of exile.

In the essay entitled "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginal" Said brings forth the concept of Intellectual Exile. According to him, an intellectual exile is comparable to the person who has suffered a shipwreck and has landed on an island, thus compelling to live 'with the land, not on it.' The image of Robinson Crusoe might have come to the reader's mind. However, Said observes that an intellectual exile does not try to 'colonize his little island' like Crusoe. An

¹⁵ The idea of worldliness has been explained by Said himself in his *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* 'Worldliness' is a notion I have often found useful because of two meanings that inhere in it together, one, the idea of being in the secular world, as opposed to being 'otherworldly' and two, because of the suggestion conveyed by the French word *mondanite*. Worldliness as the quality of a practiced, slightly jaded savior faire, worldly wise and street smart' (Said 2001:301).

intellectual exile is more akin to Marco Polo who is always on move from one place to another, and never settles down.¹⁶

The condition of the homelessness which is the destiny of an intellectual exile gives ‘certain rewards and yes privilege’ (Said 1994: 44). According to Said, an intellectual exile carries in him both what is left behind and what is present in front of him now. He is provided with a double vision which does not allow him to see things separate. This double vision engenders a new and unpredictable component which for Said is ‘a better perhaps even more universal idea’ (Said 1994:44)

Perhaps even more important than this aspect of a double vision is the intellectual exile’s perception of ‘situations as contingent’. The change in place and with it the change of culture, ideas and values make it possible for an intellectual exile to apprehend situations as human made and not natural or god given and therefore subject to change. Said writes:

What in effect is the exile standpoint for an intellectual is that you tend to see things not simply as they are but as they have come to be that way.

(Said 1994: 45)

The reflection on how a situation has ‘come to be that way’ opens the possibility for modification and change (for a better one). Undoubtedly, an intellectual exile is thus endowed with revolutionary ideas. He is ‘necessarily ironic, skeptical even playful’ (Said 1994:45).

An intellectual exile needs not to be an ‘actual immigrant’ observes Said in his essay “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginal”. By the exercise of the faculty of imagination an intellectual can ‘move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins’ (Said 1994:47). This brings us to something he has said about exile somewhere around the beginning of the essay – exile as a metaphorical condition.¹⁷ The intellectual exile in this case is very much a member of the society in which he lives. The membership is there so he is not an exile in

¹⁶ A good example can be had from the movie *Castaway* (2000). The name itself is suggestive. In *Castaway*, Tom Hank who plays the lead role suffers a plane crash and is forced to live on an isolated island. He experiences an exilic life and struggles to maintain his social and cultural being by speaking to a lifeless basketball named Wilson. The traumatic and heart wrenching condition of isolation from one’s culture, language and society is depicted in the movie.

¹⁷ Said discusses this concept in page 39 of the text *Representations of the Intellectual* in the essay entitled “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginal”.

‘actual condition’ but he is at war with the society and therefore his ‘privileges, power and honors’ are somewhat diminished. Said writes in this context:

The pattern that sets the course for the intellectual as outsider is best exemplified by the condition of exile, the state of never being fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives so to speak, tending to avoid and even dislike the trappings of accommodation and national well-being (Said 1994: 39).

In the discussion of Intellectual Exile, it is importance to bring forth the notion of amateurism as given by Said. He calls the critic who follows secular criticism as amateur. The word ‘amateur’ contrasts with ‘professional’. This is significant. Said’s choosing of this particular word ¹⁸ hints at his attempt to freed the critic from the bondage of the ‘narrow professional specialization’ which dissociates criticism from the worldliness. The worldliness of the critic is as crucially important for Said as the worldliness of the text. Bill Ashcroft explains the importance of criticism by describing the drawback of professional expertise in criticism:

The cult of professional expertise in criticism is pernicious because it surrenders the actual material and political concerns of society to a discourse dominated by economists and technocrats (Ashcroft 1999: 47).

It is important that we do not translate Said’s concept of ‘amateurism’ as an easy and superficial substitution of criticism. Rather it seeks to accomplish a vital task of foregrounding the real situations and circumstances in criticism. He himself stands as a good example of an amateur. His study of a wide range of discipline is strongly grounded in the worldliness; in the politics of culture. His own works and varied pronouncements show his affiliation to the real situations. He never divorces himself from the environment which engenders both his criticisms and the texts. An exile himself he understands the impact of the worldliness most probably better than anyone else.

Said’s intellectual works in a framework which is not static but dynamic in nature resulting from the interaction of varied cultures – the marginalized as well as the centralized culture. The intellectual while having a critical perspective on certain issue locates himself within his particular culture and then attempts to expand the horizon to include the one which is

¹⁸ ‘Amateur’ comes from the French word *amateur* meaning ‘love of something’. Said has been inspired by this meaning of the word while coining the term.

ignored. The consequence of such an attempt is the textured universalism in which one side is not neglected for the other side; in which the marginal and the central come together for a better whole.

Further this attempt is a real test for an intellectual and is by no means easy. His capacity to leave or abandon his royalty to a specific vulture is put under scanner. Generally, a person has prejudices and inclinations which establishes his 'non secular' attitude and also formulate his individual identity. Said is asserting the intellectuals to dissolve their individual identities¹⁹ with the realities of other people instead of trying to overrule them.

It may be argued that Said, being denied of any culture in particular due to his fragmented and partial situatedness, voices for in-between situations. For him it is not a matter of choice but rather a compulsion subjected by his exilic condition²⁰. If an exile is claiming to be on one particular side, then the claim itself is empty and rightly so for once he has been pushed out of his inherent culture, he can never belong to any other culture. Said speaks of affiliation to new values and ideas yet an exile remains somewhat aloof from all sorts of attachments. His key tenets celebrate the in-between condition which he himself occupies. Various reasons are ascribed for this exaltation - contrapuntal vision, worldliness, secular outlook, affiliation and so on so forth. Still this can be looked as a maneuvered or a clever attempt to valorize his unique condition which many consider as unfortunate. It will not be wrong to say that this so called 'unfortunate' has been transformed by Said to make it a blessing in disguise.

Nonetheless, to flatly assume that he has romanticized the state of exile will be an act of overlooking on our part. Said understands the gap that one may experience in perceiving exile from the level of imagination and from the level of lived experience. While being in the mental level, a person might be charmed by it even literature is abundant with the stories of men who have admirably conquer the miserable condition of the exile. So much so for the imagination but when one actually lives it and experiences it in its harsh actuality then the terrible nature of it is revealed in full swing. 'The crippling sorrow of estrangement' remains forever with the exile.

¹⁹ Dissolving of identity is perhaps easier when a person is in exile. 'Identity – who we are, where we come from, what we are – is difficult to maintain in exile' (Ashcroft 1999: cited 7).

²⁰ He writes in *Reflections on Exile* that 'exile is not, after all a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you (Said 2001:184).

Antonio Gramsci has discussed two types of intellectual – traditional and organic ones. The traditional one remains aloof from the social change and is conservative by nature. On the opposite pole is the organic intellectual. He is revolutionary and is well grounded in society. He strives to change tradition and bring modification for the betterment of the society. Apart from Gramsci there is another thinker whom Said discusses in *Representation of the Intellectual*. She is Julian Benda. Benda has given the notion of intellectuals as ‘Philosopher Kings who constitute the conscience of mankind’. It echoes Plato’s idea of the Philosopher King who is most apt to rule his Republic. Benda’s Philosopher King will uphold the standard of truth, justice, and morality in the society. Gramsci’s intellectual and Benda’s intellectual get juxtaposed in Said’s idea of an intellectual. His intellectual should have the organic nature while at the same possessing the vision of a philosopher who is concerned with justice and equality. ‘There has been no major revolution in modern history without intellectuals; conversely there has been no major counter-revolutionary movement without intellectuals’ (Said 1994:8). Elsewhere he observes that

The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously
(Said1994: 9).

Comparable to the movement of an exile, ideas and theories move from one place to another. Said gives the example of the idea of transcendence moving from Orient to Occident. The intellectual life as such is given impetus by this circulation of ideas and therefore it is a positive condition. In his essay “Traveling Theory” Said explains that we can have four levels of this circulation. One, there is the initial situation or the point of origin from which the idea engenders. Two, the idea moves from its natal location and time to another location and time. Third, there is the struggle for space i.e. the confrontation as well as the acceptance of the original idea into a new one to suit the purpose of the new users. Coming from the first level to the last one, ideas lose some of their originality and they refigure themselves into a new pattern. In Said’s words, the ideas lose ‘their original power and rebelliousness’ (Said 2001:436). Said is influenced by Lukac’s theory of reification. An idea or a theory is generated under the pressure or provocation of a ‘real historical circumstances’. These circumstances fail to remain same in

the later time and so the other versions of the theory do not possess the same strength and forcefulness. Said says ‘the theory is degraded and subdued, made into relatively tame academic substitute for the real thing’ (Said 2001:436).

In the argument as to what should constitute a canon, Allan Bloom has written in *The Closing of the American Mind* that the then existing canon for an American literature student should be kept unaltered in order to prevent the decline in the quality of the American literary education. This step will help the student to come into contact with better individuals who are more cultured, intelligent, educated and sensitive. Said argues against Bloom’s view of canon saying that it is one sided in dealing with the plurality of cultures and therefore suggests a canon of texts where the heterogeneity and the plurality of the society are reflected. Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* should be studied but not in isolation. It should be read along with the text like Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. The combination of such texts will provide a deconstructive reading of both the texts and a better understanding of the real scenario. Bill Ashcroft sums up:

So the debate about the curriculum unleashed by Bloom’s book circulated around questions about the monocultural and Anglocentric character of American society. While the Bloom position advocates the confirmation of a particular Eurocentric tradition, many university teachers, along with Edward Said saw the need to adjust the traditional curriculum to the needs of a rapidly changing American population (Ashcroft 1999: 16).

In the ‘curriculum debate’ Said’s attempt has been to seek for an inclusive and liberal canon where both the centre as well as the marginal finds a voice of their own. This perspective has come from his exilic positioning as Ashcroft writes ‘the specular displaced intellectual reads the works of the Western canon because that become the site of his or her own strategic act of reading as resistance (Ashcroft 1999: 16).

Said’s originality in analyzing text and critic lies in his giving importance to the location and situatedness of them. He has asserted the worldliness of the text and the critic thus, advocating the materiality of the condition of writing. This materiality has been subdued by the emergence of the poststructuralist theory. The text in the poststructuralist theory has been completely disassociated from the environment it has come forth. Said is thus reversing the poststructuralist’s stand. Bill Ashcroft gives his conclusion:

So Edward Said's originality lies in his determination, his unflappable persistence in promoting a notion of the materiality and worldliness of writing, textuality, reading, criticism and intellectual work in general (Ashcroft 1999: 24-25)

Said's lasting contribution is that he makes people see exile in a new light. He suggests that exile can be a negative as well as a positive condition. He accepts that the condition of exile is truly merciless 'produced by human being for other human being' tearing 'millions of people from nourishment of tradition, family and geography'(Said 2001:174). But at the same time, exile engenders critical insights, independence of thought and originality of vision. Said has frequently used exile as a metaphor to describe his vision of the role of the modern intellectual who needs a critical detached perspective from which to examine his culture. His (Said's) identity and worldview are shaped by his condition of exile, and therefore he repeats the act of leaving again and again.

I fabricate occasions for departure others giving rise to the fear voluntarily. The two (displacement and fear) seem absolutely necessary to my rhythm of life and have intensified dramatically during the period I've been ill (Said 1999: 217)

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