

## Narrativising Illness: Edward Said's *Out of Place* and the Postcolonial Confessional/Indisposed Self

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### Abstract

Although Edward W. Said published a considerably large amount of articles and books during his professional life, his autobiographical memoir *Out of Place* (1999)—written during acute illness—remains a peculiarly special case for further study and assessment for what it is worth. For that, the book is a remarkable documentation of postcolonial themes within the general frame of a personal story taking the form of a confessional illness narrative. Illness, we argue, is what augments the writer's identity crisis of being an exile. The memoir interrogates mixed notions like terminal illness, the divided affiliations of the self, identity confusion, cultural dislocation and linguistic displacement. As the memoir makes clear, Said's name reflects the conflicting affiliations of his identity: the Western part and the Eastern Arabic one. Moreover, his American citizenship and Christian background add more conflicting values to his upbringing in Palestine, Cairo and Lebanon in dominantly Islamic societies and his early exposure through education and lifestyle to English, Arabic, and French. Therefore, the book is a confessional story of the postcolonial theme of cultural dissonance and identity confusion augmented by a sense of living through terminal illness, namely leukemia. As a non-fictional work, *Out of Place* is a book that interrogates postcolonial themes while it simultaneously edges into an illness narrative, reflecting a unique embodiment of the interplay between theory and non-fiction. Hence, the book is a hybrid cultural text par excellence working at the intersection of the private experiences of the individual and the public, sociopolitical context.

**Keywords:** confession, Edward Said, identity, illness narrative, *Out of Place*, non-fictional memoir, postcolonialism,

### I. Introduction: *Out of Place* and Postcolonial Identity Politics

Studies on Edward Said (1935-2003) have often highlighted his contributions to postcolonial studies and his role as a political intellectual and cultural critic (see Faysal & Rahman, 2013). Critics have often examined his work against a wide range of themes like orientalism, imperialism, the case of Palestine, literary criticism, cultural theory, media and music, to mention just a few examples. However, in as far as we know, critics have not examined the socio-cultural orientation of Said's memoir in question or its very human dimension as a private story of pain and mental anguish prior to ultimate death, which is what we endeavor to accomplish in this article. It is our contention to suggest that in this memoir Said is compelled by illness to write earnestly about a life of being "out of place." The memoir's confessional value as an account of family life and growing up in a turbulent Middle East before moving to the U. S. is directly linked to its position as an illness narrative. As Lezard (2000) writes, the memoir is "all about recovering his [Said's] early years after being diagnosed with leukemia." The candid details given about family life—like his father's stern nature and his mother's manipulative personality as well as intimate details about the writer's sexual life—are given in a necessary context of illness. The honesty and truthfulness of the memoir do not stem from its openness about all aspects of the writer's life. Rather, they stem from frankness about the details the writer chooses to share with/confess to the reader.

As a hybrid text, *Out of Place* (1999) interrogates the role of writing in coping with illness as well as revisiting earlier (and healthier) stages in a life of dislocation. Illness made Said more of an exile. It banished him from the realm of the well and healthy. It intensified his fear of displacement and rupture. Before his illness, Said viewed his typical life "as a series of farewells, a record of departures" (Barbour, 2007, p.299). Such feelings, we argue, got intensified by illness—by "the rigors of chemotherapy and the anxiety and pain of a long losing battle with cancer" (Barbour, 2007, p. 299). Just as the experience of cultural dislocation has been important to Said's sense of his fractured identity, the experience of terminal illness has added another dimension to this sense of identity crisis. Therefore, the discourse of identity that propels the text's postcolonial orientation finds a parallel path in the text's cultural import as an illness narrative.

Edward Said was born to a Palestinian father and a Lebanese mother. He went to English and American schools in Cairo, thus receiving colonial education and getting shaped as a colonial subject by colonial masters. And he lived as an exile, a dispossessed Palestinian leading a life of constant travel. This is the apparent postcolonial aspect of the work. The theme of exile is, therefore, often found in canonical literary texts, and this feeling of being out of place is a common postcolonial theme we often encounter in modern postcolonial fictional works in Arabic like Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966; trans.1969) and the short fiction of Ghassan Kanafani, among others. It is that of Mustafa Sa'eed and his divided loyalties—African and Western—in Salih's novel. It is also the overriding theme of Kanafani's short stories and novellas whereby Palestinians suffer the tragic consequences of dislocation and loss of their land as in *Men in the Sun* (1962) and "The Land of Sad Oranges" (1958). However, in *Out of Place* it is the memoir writer rather than a fictional character who expresses this sense of not belonging, that ambivalent space of in-betweenness postcolonial critics often project and negotiate.

According to Buruma (1999), the memoir has a political (but even more so) a clearer cultural aspect: "the hero emerging from his memoir is not the Palestinian activist so much as the

alienated intellectual”, i.e. making the Palestinian plight serve his position as an intellectual because of the pity involved. In “Reflections on Exile,” Said (2000) rightly argues that exile has become “a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture” (p. 173). Said adds that exiles are “cut off from their roots, their land, their past” (p. 177). And Said asserts that the overriding theme of his memoir is, contending (and confessing) “an exile ... always out of place” (p. 180). This phrase (“out of place”) is the dominant postcolonial theme of up rootedness shaping the entire memoir, giving it a sense of order and development. In addition to the appeal this memoir has for the literary and cultural critic, readers might as well be interested in what it offers about our understanding of illness and its social construction as will be demonstrated in the next section after we establish the postcolonial thrust of the work and its implicit critique of the dynamic extension of imperial power.

Throughout his memoir, Said (2000) presents himself as a (post)colonial “subject.” Trying to capture his exilic sense of his being, he memorably says:

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. (p. 5)

According to Dahab (2003), the overriding theme of this memoir is feeling anxious and restless because of displacement from Palestine but importantly because of “the Protean nature of his identity and talents that were to exfoliate into the multiplicity of persona we have come to know” (para. 4; web.) like the public intellectual, the musician, the literary and cultural critic, the political figure, ...etc. In a sense, Said fashions himself after the cultural misfits we encounter in postcolonial literature. He comes to embody the theories of hybridity, cultural marginality, expatriation, immigration, and ambivalence we encounter in postcolonial literary discourses and related critical jargon.

As a matter of fact, Said’s relationship with autobiographical criticism began with his Ph.D. dissertation on *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* that became his first book in 1966. In this study, as Said (2000) makes clear in *Reflections on Exile*, he works at the intersection between the writer and the writer’s work, in particular the writer who acquires a language and writes masterfully in it without getting rid of a sense of exile (p. 554). This is basically the same experience communicated to us when we read Said’s memoir *Out of Place* in English. The memoir, we are told in the preface right away, was written upon his diagnosis, few years before the onset of writing, with “a fatal medical diagnosis”, leukemia in 1991, a fact that made him feel the urge to leave behind “a subjective account of the life I lived in the Arab world ...and in the United States ...” (p. xi). Plainly put, illness becomes an occasion for stories that can help the sick handle their new lives and make such lives more meaningful for generations of readers. In this sense, the memoir seems to be propelled by an ethical duty on the part of the writer toward the reader. Frank (1995) put it memorably in a general discussion of illness and storytelling this way:

Ill people’s storytelling is informed by a sense of responsibility to the commonsense world and represents one way of living *for* the other. People tell stories not just to work out their own changing identities, but also to guide others who follow them. They seek not to provide a map that can guide

others—each must create their own—but rather to witness the experience of reconstructing one's own map. Witnessing is one duty to the commonsensical and to others. (p. 17)

In fact, Said comes to embody the split between the East and the West, the Orient and the Occident he articulated in his remarkably famous book *Orientalism* (1978) many years before he came to write this non-fictional memoir in the 1990s. Armstrong (2003), for example, reads Said's memoir as an account of the construction of narrative identity, of "how personal identities and community affiliations are created" (p. 98). Armstrong reads the memoir in terms of the contradictions and complexities of Said's life by juxtaposing the memoir against other texts and books Said wrote (p. 98). The essay articulates the doubleness inherent in Said's identity. By contrast, Abuhilal (2013) reads the memoir as a depiction of the exilic and diasporic identity of Said, as an ambivalent account of his "experiences of exile, displacement, and homelessness" (p. 30) beyond the essentialized position and dichotomies of colonial discourses where "Diasporic identities function with a multiplicity of roles and categories in a Post-Orientalist colonial discourse" (p. 32). However, both articles share a common postcolonial theoretical focus on identity politics at the expense of the cultural import of the memoir as an illness narrative.

The memoir, hence, is evidently a text interrogating identity politics within an unavoidable postcolonial framework. Besides religion and language, geography is another factor to consider in Said's identity conflict, based on a life of exile, dislocation, and travel between "Jerusalem, Cairo, Lebanon, the United States" (p. xiv). The writer was not only torn apart between divided loyalties and cultural affiliations, but also trapped in a life of geographical dissonance. For that, this aspect of the memoir, one might still argue, is a bit obvious for the theory-oriented critic or reader. Although rich and significant in its own—and although critics who argue this aspect of the memoir may not necessarily be stating the obvious—it is our contention that equally important and relatively more novel is the memoir's cultural value as an illness narrative, as a private and confessional story of pain, ill health and suffering. We further develop this idea in the next section.

## II. *Out of Place* as an Illness Narrative

A scrupulous scrutiny of Said's memoir reveals that it can legitimately be read as an illness narrative because we are reading it now after Said's death in 2003 from the illness he refers to several times in the course of the text. One critic has listed some known functions of the illness narrative as "biographical reconstitution, identity-work, political resistance to organized medicine" (Atkinson, 2009). Another critic has suggested that illness narratives can present "a corrective to biomedicine's objectification of the body and, instead, embody a human subject with agency and voice" (Riessman, 2002, p. 4). Such criteria can be applied to the memoir under discussion. The memoir writer voices his identity and builds a life story against a personal history of hospital visits and difficult treatment sessions. Reading the memoir leaves the audience with the voice of the ill narrator trying to construct a life story out of shreds of travel and study years. According to the body theorist Slattery (2000), the body is "both a location and a field for experience as well as for interpretation" (p. 8). Just as the memoir writer experienced his failing health and used his physical condition to ground his diverse life events, we as readers can use the indisposed, unwell body as a cultural site for locating and understanding human experience as well as cultural texts like the one under discussion.

To reiterate, the preface tells readers that the memoir was triggered by illness as an event, by “a fatal medical diagnosis” (p. xi) that made it important for the writer write an autobiography, “to leave behind a subjective account of the life” (p. xi) he lived in the Arab World of his birth and early life and the United States of his mature life and education (p. xi). The writer clearly articulates from the start the confessional nature of this memoir and its possible nature as an illness narrative. The book was written for the most part “during periods of illness or treatment” and begun in “May 1994 while I was recovering from three early rounds of chemotherapy for leukemia” (p. ix). The writer’s “memory” was essential to the conception of the work because the book was written during times of “debilitating sickness, treatment, and anxiety” (p. xi). If the book is “a great autobiography: measured, penetrating, and exact” as Lezard (2000) described it, it is also a worthy illness narrative written after the onset of leukemia. As a cancer patient, Said would find himself sometimes proudly “intransigent” and other times “devoid of any character at all, timid, uncertain, without will” (p. 3). This is the confessional aspect of the memoir associated with illness. Said articulates the anxieties and uncertainties caused by cancer. Moreover, the embodied experience of suffering the text communicates and presents as an outcome of chemotherapy makes it more of an illness narrative rather than a typical autobiographical memoir.

One reader (2007) once wrote that Said’s memoir was begun in 1994 “with a sense of urgency” after a diagnosis with leukemia in 1991 (“Literary Studies”). It is this urgency that can be understood in terms of narrating illness and experiencing a sense of fatality. In fact, Said’s illness gives his memoir an individual peculiarity of articulating a personal experience of suffering beyond the political and historical value of such a text written with the loss of Palestine, WWII, and the civil war in Lebanon. The sense of urgency the text communicates to the reader equally underscores the effect of viscerality that the language of the body leaves on the reader. And the immediacy of description heightens the emotional and imaginative appeal of the text.

As an illness narrative in the first person, the memoir has an expressive potential about Said the man, thus creating a personal history for the writer out of a larger historical and political context of events in the Arab world in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The memoir, in its capacity as an illness narrative, bears witness to personal suffering related to illness while simultaneously testifying to an ethical dimension of concern with the other, i.e. the reader to whom Said confesses a personal history by way of purging a tumultuous life history. During five years, the writer worked on the manuscript under medical care and rounds of chemotherapy (p. ix). Eager to be remembered and wanting to deal with the imminent loss of self, the writer draws on memory to document his life and give it shape through writing. Early in the memoir, Said asserts the following: “My memory proved crucial to my being able to function at all during periods of debilitating sickness, treatment, and anxiety. Almost daily, and while also writing other things, my rendezvous with this manuscript supplied me with a structure and a discipline at once pleasurable and demanding” (p. xi). The critic Frank (1995) argues that “Stories have to *repair* the damage that illness has done to the ill person’s sense of where [he] is in life, and where [he] may be going. Stories are a way of redrawing maps and finding new destinations” (p. 53). This makes memoirs a means of identity construction necessary after the shattering illness effects. It is as if illness augmented Said’s already existing sense of identity crisis and conflicting affiliation—linguistic, religious, and cultural.

In fact, Said struggled with cancer for more than a decade. While illness shaped the last years of his life, Ali (2003) praised Said's will to life and "refusal to accept defeat" ("Remembering Edward Said"). In this memoir, we find the discourse of illness, that of confessional autobiography, and that of postcolonialism. The book is not an illness narrative in a conventional sense of expressing pain and trauma. Rather, illness is used as an occasion for examining the writer's life and reconstructing this life from different pieces. For example, Said's life story is written against a background of the political situation in Palestine and the rise of Israel and the political turmoil in Lebanon and Egypt. Said's desire to reconstruct his life in the act of writing the memoir is clear when he asserts: "The main reason, however, for this memoir is of course the need to bridge the sheer distance in time and place between my life today and my life then" (p. xiv). Throughout the memoir, the personal story of the writer's life is intertwined with the political situation in Middle Eastern countries, namely a colonial Egypt, a lost Palestine, and a Lebanon in a state of civil war.

The book was written during diverse phases of illness. Therefore, the writer heavily drew on memory to overcome the impact of absence of health on his body. The book is thus an attempt at recalling the past—which is what many illness narratives do. It is no wonder that Said sees it a "record of an essentially lost or forgotten world" motivated by the onset of disease (p. xi). Commenting on the cultural dissonance of his life, Said writes: "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" (p. 5). Therefore, the memoir is an attempt to articulate this identity chaos by way of ordering or structuring his life. If he is not to accept such multiple identities or adopt the American one, he should seek and try another alternative. Said contends: "I was to open myself to the deeply disorganized state of my real history and origins as I gleaned them in bits, and then to try to construct them into order" (p. 6). Regardless of Said's success in any regard, what he articulates here is one of the functions of illness narratives. The writer is examining his life from the vantage point and enlightened perspective of a sick man assessing the truth of his professional and personal life.

Bury (2001) studies different kinds of chronic illness narratives in terms of nature and function. One relevant kind he calls "moral narratives" gives accounts about "the changing relationship between the person, the illness and social identity" (p. 265). Unlike core narratives or contingent narrative, the focus here is not the cultural or metaphorical meanings of illness or the causes and symptoms of disease (p. 265). In moral narratives, Bury argues that sufferers seek to "account for and perhaps justify themselves in the altered relations of body, self and society brought about by illness" (p. 274). In a related line of thought, Said contends: "The basic split in my life was the one between Arabic, my native language, and English, the language of my education and subsequent expression as a scholar and teacher..." (p. xiii). The moral aspect of the memoir becomes its truth value about the writer's dislocated life—now wasting life—and his conflicting affiliations. In fact, the memoir's written nature as a record for future generations of readers endows it with an authenticity stemming from its serious occasion. Frank (1995) repeatedly asserts that illness is "an occasion for stories" (p. 53) and that telling a story of illness is "the attempt, instigated by the body's disease, to give a voice to an experience that medicine cannot describe" (p. 18). No wonder, Said's last interview (2002) before his death in 2003 begins

by underscoring—to his interviewer Charles Glass—his incurable illness as one of his main personal preoccupations since it altered the crux of his life, not allowing him to listen to music or play the piano or work as an adequate academic (www.youtube.com). At the beginning of this interview, Said clarifies the lack of energy leukemia brings about and his inability to master the disease mentally (www.youtube.com) despite his refusal to rest from intellectual and critical endeavors. Just as in the memoir, illness is used in the interview as an occasion for storytelling. And in both outlets, Said narrativises his illness.

Just like Frank, Hayden (1997) argues that “One of our most powerful forms for expressing suffering and experiences related to suffering is the narrative” (p. 49). Hayden also adds that those with chronic illness use narrative “as a means for understanding the attempts of patients to deal with their life situations and, above all, with the problems of identity that chronic illness brings with it” (p. 51). This attempted understanding can take the form of reconstructing one’s life history, trying to make sense of a new social reality, or reexamining one’s life at different levels. In this regard, the overall goal of the memoir is exposing how Said felt out of place. The memoir writer rhetorically asks: “Could ‘Edward’s’ position ever be anything but out of place?”(p. 19). This self-justification of Edward Said as the creation of his parents and odd circumstances makes the memoir fulfill the promise of an illness narrative that seeks to make its writer come to terms with his life. It is the enlightened position of illness that makes the sick storyteller see the truth of his/her life. It is ironic, though, that this memoir—written in late age and after disease—mainly attempts to capture the early years in Said’s life, his childhood years with his family in Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt and the strict discipline his parents exercised over him. This is apparently the phase in his life that he probably forgot or missed most after achieving international fame as a literary/cultural critic and leading the hectic life of a public intellectual.

As would be expected in an illness narrative, there is a manifest personal dimension that cannot be missed. On many occasions, the narrative arouses our sympathy by telling us about a fatal illness. Moreover, the family shots and portraits incorporated in the memoir, together with school report cards, (reproduced in between pages 110 and 111 with a total number of 32 items) and featuring Said the child, the young boy, and the young man augment the personal investment of the memoir and heighten its *pathos* effect. One would guess that compiling the graphic illustrations into the memoir touched the writer looking into his life in retrospect just as it might touch the reader. The shots and portraits taken in different years show the noticeable effects and ravages of time on the Saims.

Aside from the memoir’s allusions to illness, Said articulates his neurotic anxiety over his own thin tall body as compared with his father’s broad and strong body (p. 55). In a way reminiscent of Franz Kafka’s sense of the inadequacy of his body compared with the father’s masculine body articulated in *Letter to His Father*, Said moves from the initial assertion of the memoir as a reaction to terminal illness to a description of “innumerable physical defects” he acutely felt early in his life (p. 55). Said asserts that he developed his “awareness of [his] body as incredibly fraught and problematic” (p. 61) mainly through his mother’s attention to her children. Moreover, we are told that his sense of his body was formed by “a demanding set of repeated corrections” ordered by his parents (p. 62). Again, and like the Austrian writer Kafka who became emblematic of modern man’s fears and anxieties—bodily and otherwise—with relation

to authority figures in the first half of the twentieth century, Said says, "Neither a winner nor a star, I sensed myself at a threshold of a breakthrough, particularly in tennis, but routinely found myself held back by the doubts and uncertainties about my body inculcated in me by my father" (p. 191). Said mentions problems like flat feet, convulsive shuddering while urinating, stomach problems, and shortsightedness (pp. 62-63). On another occasion, Said complains: "My parents' fear of my body as imperfect and morally flawed extended to my appearance" (p. 66). What Said states is a form of uncertainty and anxiety about his physical identity. The hypochondria Said articulates in terms of "sometimes feigned, sometimes exaggerated" illness (p. 105) was used by him during school years as a way out of school discipline. Such details ground the memoir in the genre of illness narratives that feature the body in its different states as their main concern. Ironically, as if the body reacts to Said's childhood fears and anxieties, the memoir writer finds himself sick with a serious blood disease he tries to suppress. Said's treatment of this bodily affliction is the basis for our contention that the memoir is an illness narrative:

And now by some devilish irony I find myself with an intransigent, treacherous leukemia, which ostrich like I try to banish from my mind entirely, attempting with reasonable success to live in my system of time, working, sensing lateness and deadlines and that feeling of insufficient accomplishment I learned fifty years ago and have so remarkably internalized. But in another odd reversal, I secretly wonder to myself whether the system of duties and deadlines may now save me, although of course I know that my illness creeps invisibly on, more secretly and insidiously than the time announced by my first watch, which I carried with so little awareness then of how it numbered my mortality, divided it up into perfect, unchanging intervals of unfulfilled time forever and ever. (p. 106)

In September of 1991 forty years after leaving the Middle East for America, and while in London attending a seminar for Palestinian intellectuals, Said received his annual blood test results which indicated that he had "chronic lymphocytic leukemia" (p. 215). It took Said weeks and months to fully absorb the diagnosis and deal with his new life as a cancer patient in need of medical care (p. 215). It is logical that writing such a memoir was one reaction to the writer's illness because the memoir probes into Said's past life. As he states, "So many returns, attempts to go back to bits of life, or people who were no longer there: these constituted a steady response to the increasing rigors of my illness" (p. 215). This took the form of visits to Palestine and Cairo or attempts at vague letter communication with his dead mother, who died from the same cancer illness, all to get in touch with familiar people or places (p. 215).

Said had to take chemotherapy about two months before beginning to write this memoir. By the time he was under therapy and simultaneously writing the memoir, he was certain that he was living his last years and that he could not regain health: "By the time I began treatment in March 1994 I realized that I had at least entered, if not *the* final phase of my life, then the period-like Adam and Eve leaving the garden—from which there would be no return to my old life. In May 1994 I began work on this book" (p. 216). The first-person description of illness that follows confirms the status of the memoir as an illness narrative and builds a correspondence between the unfolding illness and the writing process: "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” (p. 216). In addition, Said directly establishes a relationship between recording his life via the memoir form and his aggravating illness: “This record of a life and ongoing course of a disease (for which I have known from the beginning no cure exists) are one and the same, it could be said the same but deliberately different” (p. 216). The memoir writer attempts to construct another self hidden behind years of travel and work and displacements.

The memoir, hence, logically emerges as a reaction to illness, as an attempt to assimilate it and make sense of it. In “Between Worlds”, Said (1998) states that a few months after the medical diagnosis of his cancer in 1991 he found himself writing “a long explanatory letter” to his dead mother and that the letter “inaugurated a belated attempt to impose a narrative on a life that [he] had left more or less to itself, disorganised, scattered, uncentred.” This letter was written before the writing and publication of *Out of Place*. By implication, the memoir can achieve the same function a personal letter aspires for: coming to terms with illness and making sense of a life of exile by giving it some form and significance.

Just as the memoir began with an account in the Preface of “a fatal medical diagnosis” (p. xi) that prompted the writer, aided by memory, to leave an account of the formative influences in his life in the Arab World and then in United States, the memoir also returns to the same issue of illness at the end. The writer recalls the cancer of his own mother and her refusal to take chemotherapy to avoid the pain of it and the misery of trying to but not being able to sleep (p. 294). Unlike his mother, Said took “four wasting years of it [chemotherapy] with no success” (p. 294). But like her, he cannot sleep well during illness: “Now I have divined that my own inability to sleep may be her last legacy to me, a counter to her struggle *for* sleep” (p. 294). In fact, Said’s life story is framed by references to illness at the beginning of the memoir and toward its end. The last couple of pages of the memoir articulate the misery of drugs taken to ward off fever and chills and the helplessness, “the sense of being infantilized” by aggravating illness (p. 295) and being upset by “induced somnolence” (p. 295). The very end of the memoir confirms its status as an illness narrative in which the storyteller recounts a personal history and resists established medicine: “I fought the medical soporifics bitterly, as if my identity depended on that resistance even to my doctor’s advice” (p. 295). It is a new form of identity struggle related to life and death that Said here articulates rather than one based on cultural dissonance and a sense of exile as he does early in the memoir and sporadically elsewhere. Up until his college years, Said lived with the sense of being “unaccomplished, floundering, split in different parts (Arab, musician, young intellectual, solitary eccentric, dutiful student, political misfit)” (p. 281). This sense of identity crisis is the overriding theme of the memoir as we have stated before. However, it is illness that intensifies this feeling.

### III. Conclusion: Illness and Confession

Although the preceding argument has focused on what the memoir says, equally important, we believe, is what Said’s memoir *Out of Place* leaves out or implies. So touching is the insight it gives into the emotional and psychological state of Said in his last years before death. However, the personal or subjective experience should not necessarily be given priority over “social thought” or reduce the sociological value of narratives of illness as Atkinson (2009) argues. Nor should our goal be placing this memoir within the field of narrative medicine or judge its value in terms of what it offers to the medical practitioner. The memoir can easily lend itself to the

postcolonial critic looking for the discourse of identity or the theme of exile that the memoir's title captures. However, it is by reading the memoir against the grain that we can present it as an illness narrative within a postcolonial context. Scarry (1985) argues in her well-known study on *The Body in Pain* that since "the person in pain is ordinarily so bereft of the resources of speech," it is logical that "the language for pain should sometimes be brought into being by those who are not themselves in pain but who speak *on behalf of* those who are" (p. 6). To be fair, Said's memoir does not dwell on bodily pain. Nor should it necessarily do so or become pathetic to appeal to us. What it does, nevertheless, is articulate a certain level of bodily consciousness and suffering related to illness at a serious juncture in his life. And it was our intention to speak "on behalf of" an indisposed Said in this regard. In fact, a conventional postcolonial reading of the memoir in terms of identity politics and exile seems to be modeled on Said's career and writings as a cultural and postcolonial critic. *Out of Place* as an illness narrative is not what classical historical and political kinds of literary criticism would care to tackle but what cultural theorists would fondly pursue.

One thing the memoir leaves out for the reader to infer/interpret is its form and structure as an illness narrative with a confessional value. Illness is typically an occasion for confession, for confession as a form of autobiographical writing tells "an essential truth about the self" (Coetzee, 1985, p.194). Illness narratives are often personally invested and emotionally intense. In this sense, the memoir has an autobiographical value beyond doubt in documenting the lost or forgotten Arab world of Said's early life—an aspect of his life that his intellectual fame and western education has eclipsed. As the famous South African writer Coetzee argues (1985), secular confessions can be fictional or autobiographical (p. 194). *Out of Place* is, to be sure, an autobiographical confession communicating the truth of the writing self while also, as a memoir, trying to recapture "the historicity" of the self (Coetzee, 1985, p. 194). Said does establish a history of family life and growing up in different places. And the memoir constructs the writer's life story. However, what the memoir persistently confesses is the writer's sense of cultural dislocation, homelessness, and his being eternally "out of place," physically torn apart as a living death! Nevertheless, in his death, is his life. It is what Said confesses about a troubled life altogether, a confession speeded up by illness and imminent death, that ultimately allows us to experience the memoir's grim, indisposed postcolonial ramifications.

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