

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,