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Charles C. Lemert
Wesleyan University, clemert@wesleyan.edu

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Said & "Edward":

Dispossession and Overcoming Nostalgia[1]

Charles Lemert

Wesleyan University

clemert@wesleyan.edu

The head spins when one ponders what he left behind when he left this world. Edward Said gave so much on so many fronts. He has been celebrated for most of these. But one, though prominent, may well turn out to be among the most enduring. It is certainly the most apt to the present situation, early in the 2000s, when global differences threaten much of what he, and we, valued in the remainder of late modern culture. Because of Said, it is possible for social theory, in the broader sense of the practice, to begin the work of rethinking an idea that, in one or another form, preoccupied him from the beginning such that it came to be the defining feature of his politics after 1967, as it had been in the theme of his earliest writings.

Said was, and remains, the social theorist of dispossession *par excellence*. Though it is heterodox to say so, his *Out of Place* (1999) could turn out to be one of his most enduring works for the way it establishes dispossession as the organizing experience as much of his personal life as of his work in literature, music, and politics. Such a remark must be made with caution. There are so many other works that have earned a place in cultural history of our time; so many so familiar that it seems absurd to mention them: *Beginnings* (1975), *Orientalism* (1979), *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), and, uneven though it is, the collection of political writings from which I draw the theme of this essay: *Politics of Dispossession* (1994).

Out of Place was the book of his last decade of life—the book of his cancer. Nowhere more than in *Out of Place* does Said display so many of his finest skills as an artist of memory in the service of global politics. As he made clear in the book's preface, it is a memoir of his beginnings and how, in childhood and youth, he came to be the man whose mortality was, after the diagnosis, a looming presence of his coming absence. *Out of Place*, in a sense, is an attempt to recover the always absent times and places of the beginning of one's life—those events that never were as remembered nor ever will be again. The writing of them is a putting off of the endings toward which all beginnings move. This is one of the principles laid down, most theoretically, in *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, especially in that book's stunningly brilliant essay "*Abecedarian Culturae*: Absence, Writing, Statement, Discourse, Archeology, Structuralism." The allusion is to an alphabet book for teaching children the elements of language. In 1975, and especially outside Paris, there was need for a primer in the ABCs of the new theoretical language. "*Abecedarian Culturae*" is hardly a primary in the usual pedagogical sense. But it was the only primer possible for a language that, as we now understand, begins where it begins in the absence of an original intention, much less a method for arriving at the founding subject of the discourse at hand.

Said was never more true to these values than in *Out of Place*, which he began with a meditation on the universal human element of dispossession, of the shear impossibility of revisiting those lost times and places where, we presume,

1.Parts of the following essay appear in the new edition of *Postmodernism is Not What You Think: Why Globalization Threatens Modernity* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005).

we began:

> *Out of Place* is a record of an essentially lost or forgotten world. Several years ago I received what seemed to be fatal medical diagnosis, and it therefore struck me as important to leave behind a subjective account of the life I lived in the Arab world, where I was born and spent my formative years, and in the United States where I went to school, college, and university. Many of the places and people I recall here no longer exist, though I found myself frequently amazed at how much I carried of them inside me in often minute, even startling concrete, detail.[1]

Important to "leave behind a subjective account of the life I lived in the Arab world"—why? what kind of importance? One might suppose that the importance of the account is tied somehow to an assumption of his self-importance. Yet, reading on, it becomes soon evident that the work's literary effect is more political than merely personal. To be certain, Said had every right and reason to give the account of his life. His individual importance was surely more than sufficient to justify the book. But *Out of Place* upends this justification in two ways—first in being the story of childhood rather than adult accomplishment; second by being composed in an unexpected style.

Out of Place is elegant yes, vastly more so than his early writings; but it is also eerily plain in the sense of plain-spoken—unblinking to the point of the places and people who failed to determine his fate; of those, that is, who sought to possess his being in reaction to their own gnawing sense of dispossession. One of the literary filaments throughout is that his given name, "Edward," is marked-off, qualified, thus drained of its meaning. Edward was the name given by parents who, though of the Arab world, thought of themselves as other than the world from which their wealth was gained. The oddity of the identification of "Edward" with the Arab "Said" is offset by the contradictory aspirations of the upper-indigenous classes in the colonies such that, though Said's family ties were to be with America, the name "Edward" was royal and British. "Edward" was sent to British schools in Cairo and Jerusalem wherein Arab children were taught mind-numbing facts of British history—a recollection that serves to secure Edward Said's beginning amid the slow ruination of the European colonies. But these, from the vantage point of *Out of Place* in 1999, are not the only worlds lost to his present.

This "Said" became a brilliant interpreter of English literature, due in large part to education in America where the penetrating social vacuity of places like Mount Herman and Princeton in the 1950s and to a lesser extent at Harvard was relieved along by way of the growing importance of his music and emerging scholarly involvement with literature. The ironic effect is that the intention of sending the boy away from the Arab world to become European in some ill-defined way served the effect of reinforcing his already born conviction that another better self than "Edward" could dismantle and dispossess the child made anxious by the remote relations of his family life. In the book, this "Edward" works and operates under the marks of uncertainty, thus fixing the reader in peculiarly intimate distance, like the one the author had with his mother. *Out of Place* is neither a romance nor a Proustian meditation on the fine grained particulars of early family life. Childhood in Cairo is described against a penumbra of comfort as a succession of the sort petty tortures routinely inflicted on boys of the universal bourgeois class in the post-war decades. Save for the gathering sense of loss that becomes acute at its conclusion where mortality comes full circle to enclose the morbidity of his beginnings, the writing is devoid of sentiment. The emotional costs suffered by "Edward" are treated with wry wit or blank description, as if the Said "Edward" had become was taken aback by the bringing up. He writes, for example of the way "Edward's" father lectured him in adolescence as to the moral effects of "self-abuse"—a fact surmised by inspection of the boy's untainted night clothes. The logic was impeccably bourgeois: The absence of evidence of wet-dreams meant the presence of masturbation—a surmise young Edward did not deny once he figured out what the father was talking about. Similarly, Said tells of the long boring summers in the mountains outside Beirut where his mother filled his day with pointless errands. The idea was to get him out of the house but for reasons made mysterious by the contrast with the intimacies of his childhood. The unexplained withdrawal of the mother, like the obtusely formalistic lectures by the father, had emotional effects that endured through his life. The implication is that he was out of place, dispossessed in the childhood home, which was itself a displacement of the family's movement from place to place to seize or escape one or another aspect of the Arab world. Said tells the stories from a narrative location defined by mild irony, just off the scene of the travails of the miserable boy—kept at distance by the parents who would have him be "Edward," as by the schools to which he was sent, as by teachers and fellow students who kept him unsettled in their colonizing condescension and adolescent foolishness.

1.Edward Said, *Out of Place* (New York: Random House, 1999), ix.

The beginning of life was, for Said, no place in particular amid these mostly sad abuses of childhood. Yet, without them, one supposes, "Edward" would not have become Said who came to define himself and his work as the Palestinian his parents sought to repress. Thus is set the book's implicit political purpose—less to write of the importance of his personal beginnings than to use them to the end of illuminating the importance of the Palestinian troubles of his homeland.

> The underlying motifs for me have been the emergence of a second self buried for a very long time beneath a surface of often expertly acquired and wielded social characteristics belonging to the self my parents tried to construct, the "Edward" I speak of intermittently, and how 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.[1]

Here, evidently, Said is describing the effects of his personal displacements in the formation of the second self he excavated from under the ruins of his upbringing which in turn were spoiled by ruins of partitions meant to limit the damage after 1948 and 1967 in his postcolonial world.

Yet, Said does not offer *Out of Place* as an apologia either for his literary works or his politics. On the contrary, and apart even from the astonishing array of his accomplishments, the work seems to have developed along the same lines well before his first scholarly work. One might say that, of course, a person's literary work and political attitudes are influenced, if not determined, by his background. But Said's experience with "Edward" was not a Du Boisian sort of double-consciousness. It marks the two selves off from each other—a pointed, if not exactly plausible, move. More, however, to the point of disturbance between the second, excavated self and the beginnings as "Edward" is that the interior relation is itself one of dispossession. Well before Said, the scholar, came clear to his social theory of dispossession he was immersed in the question of the literary effects of the story told across original languages as across cultural experiences. His first book, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), is his Harvard doctoral thesis. The literary distance between this book and *Out of Place* would be measured in light years. *Joseph Conrad* has all the roughness of graduate school work—shallow by comparison and awkward in many ways except the central idea. Like Conrad, Said was working in his second language, having been dispossessed of his first.

> Conrad's stake in the structures of experience he had created was absolutely crucial, since it was rooted in the human desire to make a character of and for himself. Character is what enables the individual to make his way through the world, the faculty of rational self-possession that regulates the exchange between the world and the self; the more cogent the identity, the more certain a course of action.[2]

The character of self-possession, by implication here at the beginning of his life, and by explicit mention near the end, is not so much a moral attribute as a strength whereby the individual puts himself in exile in order to combat the dispossessing effects of his beginnings.

Though the theme comes and goes in the subsequent writings, it is never far off—*Beginnings* is an extended meditation on beginnings without an origin; *Orientalism* is on the dispossessing effects of the colonizing culture, as is *Culture and Imperialism*; *Representations of the Intellectual* is a manifesto for the intellectual in exile, and the political writings are of the exiled Palestinian people in relation to whom he repossessed his character from the string of dispossessions that, smoothed by the family's wealth and privilege, would have fixed him ever as "Edward."

Dispossession from one's homeland turns a people into refugees—emotionally and socially. Said was of the few since Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* (1962) to give account of the inextricable complications between the subjective and objective that modern, European culture took for granted.

The modern world was (or is, as the case may be) a world in which, in principle at least, everyone had a right to a home, if not a house. Modernity was the culture of social space—the space of the territorially defined nation-state, the space of exploration and colonization, the space of new frontiers for new conquests, the space of future time toward which the privileged ones moved in the vain search for the good life. If now, early in 2000s, modernity is slipping away before the effects of globalization, then it might be said that postmodernity is the space of time—of a time so fast that

1.Ibid, 217.

2.Said, "The Claims of Individuality," selection from *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* in Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, eds. *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Random House, 2000), 12.

when one moves house it is very difficult, even a bit bizarre, to back track. Some still go home to die; but most do not, if only because the hospitals back there, if any, are lousy with lice.

Globalization, whether it turns out to be postmodern or not, is a social process in which the grotesque failures and social evils of the modern world cannot be easily painted over. One sees the homeland for what it is, filled as much (or mostly) with misery as with what pleasures one may have. It is not merely a matter of virtual experiences of distant realities—by television or other information technologies—but of the fact that even the beggars may beg outside the all-night convenience store with its tiny black and white television blaring away the news of distant realities. In a world—if this one is what it once was meant by the word—where it is next to impossible to avoid the realities as they are, the fable imagined community is seen for what it is and for what it requires of us, however different we, if any, are.

To speak of the dispossessed as a social theory is increasingly a way of naming normal life amid the pressures and possibilities of globalization. *To dispossess* is to oust or dislodge someone from what he possesses. Curiously, the history of the word in the English language seems to be limited entirely to the modern era and to refer almost exclusively to an action directed at persons—literally "to put (anyone) out of possession; to strip of possession."[1] Of all the possessions, the loss of which would be most widely felt, the first would be home—and nowhere more so than in the modern world. If home is where a person is *from*, then *not to be from anywhere* in particular is to suffer a terrible fate in a culture that values the conquest of social space as much as modernity has. The colonizing ambitions of the masters of the modern world are not limited to the taking of lands and lives for economic gain. As Juergen Habermas has repeatedly said, the personal world in which we live, our lifeworld, is continuously at risk of being colonized.[2] More specifically, in the modern lifeworld, the social space in which one lives is a way of saying who she is.

In bourgeois circles of the modern rat-race, when strangers meet, after names are exchanged, one of the two questions they will ask the other is "Where are you *from*?" The other is often, "What do you *do*?" What a member of the privileged classes *does* (her profession or job) is a function of where she is *from.* In more traditional times, the tie of one's place in the social world to the place of her home was direct and intimate. People worked, if not *at* home, in nearby fields or enterprises. Roads were few and made of mud and dirt. In modernizing times, the tie is indirect and conflicted. People must leave home to find work; if they find it, then they are often able to pay the price of putting down new roots, but seldom a home from which they derive their sense of who they are. They may pretend of course as *les nouveaux* must that they are at home in the new play pen, but eventually as slip of tongue betrays them as strangers. Modernity's roads and sidewalks are many and made for speed. But in a globalizing world, people more and more work at home; but when they do their work is on the electronic highway. Those still in traditionally modern employment understand very well that it is their jobs that are on the fast track to somewhere else. Global roads to income are made for speeds early moderns could not imagine, speeds so great as to collapse the social value of being from anywhere and, at the extreme, of being anyone in particular; or the worst of being consigned the lot of the economically and socially doomed. Consider the factory worker, globalization's blacksmith, if not exactly its court jester.

The changes are palpable but the understandable determination of the modernist to possess all the more his native culture leads to a prevailing sense of nostalgia, in the form of attempts to say that the changes are real but no more than transformation of modernity. The attitude has its appeal, except when it leads to influential declamations of the attitude by disguising it behind the appearance of acceptance. Among other striking examples, one of the more influential is Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* which identifies transformations in the leading combatants in the global cultural wars, only to reframe them as a threat to the modern West.[3] Against which, Said not surprisingly dismisses the universalizing method as more of the same, as a clash of ignorance.[4] To speak of global realities as organized neatly according to large, unifying cultural systems that serve to mark off the different ways human beings define what is civil to them seems, at first, a progressive move beyond the silly universals of the modern age. But the ignorance behind even this superficially wise division of social things is that it carries forward the organizing principle of human community in the modern world—that human communities whether global or regional are gatherings of people of a collective like-mind. Hence, Huntington stipulates Islamic, Chinese, Latin American, Hindu, Buddhist, Japanese, African, Orthodox and, to be sure, the West—as if any one of these is a proper name for a civilizational order without significant interior clashes. What looks like a serious liberal qualification of humanistic essentialism turns out to be

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1.*Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edition, 1989).

2.Juergen Habermas, *Toward a Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: Lifeworld and System* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

3.Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993).

4.Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *Nation* (October 21, 2001). See also Stanley Hoffman, "The Clash of Globalizations," *Foreign Affairs* (August 2002).

nothing more than the same thing writ-smaller. In fact, the sensation stirred by the essay and the book that followed owes in part to its catch phrase: the West and the Rest that threaten the modern West. The Rest, it happens, usually know better, at least when they are willing and able to reflect on the nature of local conflicts. Said's biting criticism is that civilizational thinking is in and of itself the weak heart of modernity's ignorance.

Though Said's academic preparation was more than sufficient to the criticism of Western culture's confidence in essentializing categories, his criticism of writings like Huntington is based more on his experience of coming to terms with modernity as a Palestinian—as a displaced person. If as Claus Offe has suggested,[1] Prague is the ideal city of modernizing civil society wherein a vital public sphere grows out of political oppression and chaos, then perhaps Palestine would be the metaphoric space of globalization—as if the emergence of wherein differences like those between Palestinians and Jews in the West Bank and Gaza are so unbridgeable as to be beyond reasonable hope of resolution. Anyone who struggles to any important degree with real and complicated social conflicts realizes that real conflict is always local, always tied to local interests, always remembered because the opponents cannot ever move far enough away from the other—in real as well as symbolic terms—to forget, much less to forgive.

It would be better to follow Said's lead when speaking of differences among global things, to speak of ways groups have been dispossessed of their home places. The number of social theorists willing to think through the misery of the world is small,[2] but it is growing in some more or less direct proportion to the unyielding strain of global differences. In the wake of global violence and suffering, social theory is beginning to consider the dispossessed according to their several different kinds of losses of home, thus of a social place, thus of a *from* wherefrom they might make a single, uncomplicated identity in the worlds. Loosely put, the most striking cases of dispossession would be, first, those millions around the world who might be called the *truly dispossessed* who are without means or method to find a home—including equally those in the global cities who are homeless but also the much larger number of refuges forced to flee their homelands because or civil strife, genocide, disease, and starvation. Then, second, might be the *economically uprooted* who have the method but not the means to root themselves—including those reasonably well shelter in their native places but forced to migrate to find what work can be found. And, third, there is a large number of individuals and their families who might be called the *socially unsettled,* people who in various ways may have the means to settle somewhere in the world, even in their homelands, but who are not able to work their way into the inner circles for social reasons—racism, ethnic hostilities, gender discriminations, among other of the usual forms of man's inhumanity to man and woman. They may be well housed, even, but still dispossessed—a condition that women and gays, not to exclude Blacks and other people of color, have endured for centuries.[3] There can be no question that, from the point of view of the failure of the modernity to provide for its poor and marginal, these three types are greatest in number and most urgently in need of justice.

What defines the dispossessed in a sociology of global misery is the extend to which people are defined according to the economic means they possess or lack and the social methods by which they succeed or fail to come to grips with globalization. The differences among them are uneven as to justice, leaky as to analytic precision, uncertain as to the meaning of their global situation. The differences within and between the five groups—or better put social movements—provokes conflict within each and with each at the others. In a global world the fundamental structural conflict is neither class nor race nor gender, but global position—a more complicated structure even that all the hitherto existing categories: first/third world, core/periphery, North/South, developed/underdeveloped, colonizer/colonized—which turn out to be vulnerable to critical traditions of thought like queer theory and subalterity, among others. To speak of the dispossessed in this way comes down to the risk of using analytic loose, politically temporary, and cultural partial methods as a means to think the global unthinkable.

One of the more appealing, if not yet worked through concepts for locating the differences among the disposed may be Patricia Hill Collins's matrix of domination which has the potential for application to the struggle among people at odds with each other as the terror of local conflict as the articulation of a global matrix of domination.[4] Collins's

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1.Remarks were made in a seminar discussion based on Claus Offe, "Civil Society and Social Order," paper presented at Seoul National University seminar, *Rethinking the 'modern' in the globalizing world,"* May 26, 2005.

2.The phrase is Pierre Bourdieu's, but the task is perhaps better defined by Said, for one, and Jacques Derrida for another, in the writings at the end of his life on globalization and forgiveness. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001). The tradition has its roots, theoretically, in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) and the emergence of Subaltern Studies at about the same time; for example, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

3.The types of dispossession are discussed and illustrated in *Postmodernism is Not What You Think/ Why Globalization Threatens Modernity* (2e; Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), chapter 9.

matrix is used to illuminate the moral power of the Black woman in American—a power that is ironically due to her being the subject of so many vectors of domination. Though in *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) Collins does not consider the matrix of domination in relation to global process, it is obvious that, in the background, is the contention that, world-wide women of color suffer from their social locations—as Black in a white world, as postcolonial and subaltern in a modernizing world, as women, as poor, as members of the lowest classes and castes in their societies. And yet it is very well know that, as in America, the woman of color is very often the pillar of strength of her village and community and, even, her national society. To say that domination is a many-sided and multi-dimensional system in which, so to speak, power moves in all directions is to describe a system that seems, more and more, to apply to the globalized world.

Globalization uncovers the rough edged universal facts of the matrix—that even the privileged are afflicted, at least relatively, by elements of their social privilege—the afflictions of exaggerated responsibility for the world order, of defensiveness against attacks on all quarters, of guilt for the evil they inflict and so forth. One need not pity the powerful to understand that they use their power as they do with the trembling hand of uncertainty. Think of George W. Bush, panic-stricken before the children, when first he heard of the 9/11 attacks. Wherever one is in social space—a space that while virtual is usually neatly superimposed on the global economic geography of first and third worlds and the like—one is *in* a local place where the sewers overflow, the relief foods are distributed (or not), the fields are parched, the diseases are communicated, and all the rest that goes with suffering and its absence in real social time. One notices the effects of misery *from* whatever home she has, whether well furnished or barren.

To allow for a global matrix of domination is to allow for social conditions that become epidemic under globalization in which any given local place is as likely to be uprooted or looted as any other. The realities are that the poorer, more dominated places, are in fact unsettled and looted more often and more severely, but the *threat* seems to be ubiquitous. In form and, to a remarkable degree, in style, the gated community in Los Angeles and the political prisons in places like Guantanamo are much the same in principle. The guards may be differently armed—with electronic alarms or digitalized weapons of personal destruction—but the social function is much the same: Keep close guard at the walls in order to keep the undesirables in or out as the case may be. The common result is that, whether one locks himself in or is locked up, all are to some degree dispossessed of their freedom, prisoners in an open world. It may *sound* flippant to equate wealthy scum in their gilded mansions with the political prisoner of uninspected guilt, but sociologically the equation is just even if the human injustice is out of any known proportion. Hence, the irony of global things—they turn modern social assumptions on their heels, if not their heads.

From the point of view of a general theory of dispossession as the ubiquitous condition of a globalizing world, there must be added another group—those who seldom deserve compassion, yet who suffer in a particular if generally privileged way just the same: the *politically nostalgic*, who might be described as the remnant, if not saving remnant, of modernity. Because they are generally those with local, national, regional, and even global power and influence, the way this group attempts to manage this sense of dispossession must be clearly analyzed.

The still dominant political culture in the West is rooted in liberal individualisms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe. Though the most visible structure of modernity is the capitalist system of economic exploitation, the deepest cultural aspect of modernity is the liberal dream of rational progress toward a good society. If it is even remotely possible that the most salient historical fact of modernity is the contradiction between its political promises and its economic realities, then no wonder that nostalgia is a leading form of dispossession for moderns with a stake in the world that was.

Nostalgics are unsettled by global change precisely because globalization, like modernization, promises what it cannot afford to give. Unlike modernization, globalization spreads wealth thickly on the global upper crust, all too thinly to the rest of the pie. In the United States, than which none is more boastful of its human values, early in the 2000s,

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4.Matrix of domination owes to Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1990), who uses the concept (borrowed from bell hooks, among others) to account for the political and cultural standpoint of the black feminist. The idea of the matrix of domination is, in part, Collins's attempt to rethink domination, somewhat in the manner of Michel Foucault's theory of power as knowledge, as diffused up and down and across social and global spaces. The Black woman in America (and by implication everywhere) may in some in social sense among the "most" dominated figures (which as many have argued may also be a source of her moral power) but if power dominates ubiquitously then all suffer its effects according to their social position. What Collins leaves out, I think, is a reckoning of the Black woman's global position. To begin, any social position in a region like the core of the American hegemony who owes her home place to the slave trade is, one would suppose, necessarily in a global position—one more enduring and definitive than any other. The *locus classicus* of the Black women's moral power as a function of her domination is Anna Julia Cooper's 1892 classic *A Voice from the South*—in respect to which, one notes in passing, that the argument turns on the title's phrase "from the South"—the Black woman in Jim Crow America in the 1890s was *from* the South, even if *in* the North, in the sense that her moral home is the feudal South of slavery and its subsequent entailments.

the miniscule top one-tenth of one percent (0.1%) richest, gained eight percent (8.0%) on the nation's personal income; while the top 20% received 62% of the income, compared to bottom 20%'s 2.5%. In other terms, the wealthiest 0.1% (about 145 *thousand* taxpayers) earn (if that is the word) roughly the same combined income as the bottom 40% (60 *million* taxpayers). Or, still worse, in the United States (the least equalitarian of modernized nations) the ratio of very rich to poor is *better* by far than the same ratio in the world as a whole.[1]

In the between of the most poor twenty-percent and obscenely rich tenth-of-a-single-percent in America one finds the nostalgics—aware that the very rich live in another reality altogether, while they have mortgages and tuition checks to write, if they are lucky. What the nostalgics realize, whether they admit it or not, is that when a great nation in which they have placed their trust fails to come even close to its professed commitment to human life and fair play, something is wrong with the system. Hence, the acute nostalgia for a better time in a simpler past or a (remotely) possible future—a dilemma that is fundamentally political because in allegedly free and democratic societies, granting the differences in governmental and social forms, politics ought ultimately be the art of distributing the goods by some reasonable scheme that, at the very least, preserves and protects individual rights even when it falls way short of economic justice. If the modern West cannot do better for its own (granting the burgeoning number of immigrants who get, sneak, or want in), then how can the modern world be moving globally toward anything like the ideal of a good society? The genius of the modern world system was that it colonized at a distance in foreign lands (or segregated states) from whence the bad news seldom travels far. The stark honesty of a globalizing world is that it is possible for almost anyone to dig up the bad news and with very little digging at that.

The politically nostalgic are many in number, irregular in kind, and more sympathetic than previously thought.[2] They are the moral and demographic core at the core of the global system—those with hard-won investments in the world as it once was. Nostalgics, while wealthy beyond the hope of the poor, are seldom among the obscenely rich. Many do quite well, but most are of comfortably modest means, and some have fallen to the economic margins.[3] They are, almost always, privileged in the local sense of being near to the upper reaches of the social scheme. They may be of modest, even threatened, social statuses like that of the working poor but they cling to the hope that social things will get better. Their hope is rooted in the modern idea that progress is a necessary history that suffers occasional set backs, but never a reversal of fortunes. Their hope is troubled by globalization, if not completely dashed, because, seeing (often against their will) the terrible misery of the truly dispossessed, they are made to see that their advantages, however modest, are real because the number of those, worldwide, who are homeless, hungry, sick without care, and poor without prospect is growing not declining; and that the truly dispossessed are more the global norm than a good century ago (even perhaps a millennium ago) they were. The effect of the realization is created by the visible evidence that progress, being far from inevitable, may have been, if not a joke, at least a moral trick their forbears turned on those they colonized and raped.

In a world where the combined wealth of the 400 richest *individuals* is greater than that of *half* the global population, the emperor is more than naked. He's a prick. The inequality is so far beyond obscene as to be salacious—the asymptote where violence and pornography meet on the curve of their true and identical natures. Modernity's culture always *claimed* to be, first, the most human—hence, by implication, the culture most free of inhuman violence; and, second, to be the most progressive because it was morally the most pure—hence, by implication, the one puritan culture than transposed raw sexual energy into wealth. Neither is true to its claim. The price of the formula was that the wealthy few relieved their pent up libidos by screwing the miserable many. There is a saying among philanderers, born out in divorce courts: "The screwing you get isn't worth the screwing you get." Yet, the one sphere of marital life that rewards the capitalist pricks is their devotion to economic gain. They fuck the rest to save the West.

Harsh though it necessarily is, there is moral room left over for a degree of sympathy for the nostalgic who is only occasionally able to laugh at his global situation. His (and one uses gendered generic because his or her roots are in

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1. The comparisons here are loose in places where I compare wealth to incomes, a move justified only partly by the fact that the point made is about differences so extreme as to be unthinkable. Thus, as rough measures the income of the wealthiest is a good enough estimate of the degree of wealth relative to the income of the most poor who, in fact, have virtually no accumulated wealth in the sense of investments, real estate, and personal property. The estimates and precisely numbers are report in the *New York Times* (June 5, 2005), A27. See for sources nytimes.com/class/sources; in particular for income estimates: Edward Wolff, "Changes in Household Wealth in the 1980s and 1990s in the US," *Working Paper 409/ The Levy Economics Institute of Bard College* (May 2004), which actually attends to wealth while the *New York Times* report is for the most part on income.

2.The reference is, in part, to the first edition of his book where I took a wholly unsympathetic attitude toward certain of the more prominent nostalgics. Now in the passage of time some of them I think of as merely pathetic; others as struggling in to me a strange way to come to terms with their loss. I am sure that the ability to accept loss has grown from the loss of my son Matthew in 2000.

3.The allusion to core and margin is a serious play on Immanuel Wallerstein's terms.

the classically homocentric nineteenth century), his lack of perspective is not due to failure in deeds. The modern era, from 1500 to 1990 or so, sparkled with brilliance achievements one might fully enjoy where it not known that the brass and silver were polished by the indentured poor. Given that no other previous age, nor the one that may be succeeding the modern, has shown any great capacity to do better at doing good honestly, it is wrong to be too harsh on the moderns. To paraphrase whoever it was, the trouble with modernity is that it is the worst possible system, except for all the rest. Modernity's evil is not so much in the evil it does, but in the lies it tells to pretend is better that it really is. To be a civilizational culture better than, say the slave or feudal modes of social production, is not exactly an assurance of human progress.

Hence, the sad nostalgia of the late modern era. Those with a stake in modernity rightfully appreciate the cultural, scientific, and even political accomplishments of their forbears from whom they inherited their advantages. But as the global truth dawns, they find it more difficult than did their predecessors to believe the deceptions upon which their claims to superiority rely. What is one to do when the cultural jig is up and you've staked your claim to a moral territory that seems to be losing its inherent value? There are only two general approaches to the dilemma. One is to long for the dreams of the past, when men were brave and women were obedient and the entire middle world seem headed for social paradise. The other is to dream of a future where all men and women are equal and the social utopia just might come true.

The two extremes of nostalgic excess are, as one comes to expect these days, topsy-turvy, the flip sides one of the other. They differ, thereby, in the direction they look which determines the attitude they take toward the present. The first is the pure nostalgic. The second is the romantic. Both have roots deep in modern culture. The first grows from Enlightenment, which in turn derives its commitments from the political value of knowledge and the social hope of progress founded in a myth of the people in the original position—whether the Adamic myth or the philosophical method of the elementary forms of human being. The second grows from Romanticism, which in turn derives its utopian purpose from a projection forward of local culture onto the drift of human progress. The second was formed in the eighteenth century in considered opposition to the French and Anglophone Enlightenments. The American Enlightenment that stood behind 1776 took the form of English and French ideas of freedom but the spirit of its own sort of Romanticism of America's special providence.

As philosophies the two nostalgias are opposed. As political theories the two suffer a more complicated relation. In their better moments they serve each other as reminders of the subtle whole of European culture; in their worst moments of opposition they reduce the realities of modern life to their least common denominators: the hegemony of free market individualism without responsibility in the former case; the totalitarianism of the collectivized romance of a pure or exceptional people in the latter case. If one had to chose but one, it would be better to abstain. In the long run, the West chose enlightenment freedom as the basis for the open capitalist market—a choice confirmed in the aftermaths of 1789 in France, in 1919 in the failure of the Versailles treaty, 1939 in Fascist Germany, in 1948 in Palestine after the Balfour settlement. Whenever the romance of local progress turns corrupt, then Enlightenment looks the better choice—even if the proclamations of democratic truth turn out to be weapons of mass destruction. Whenever, on the other hand, the global marketplace is driven by a ruthless core of capitalist pricks, the romance seems the only way out—even if the romance is that of jihad and martyrdom.

In the 2000s, nostalgia and romance continue to play out against and with each other. They are in the dominant West the dominant social philosophies with a furtive urgency and in the dominated Oriented with an enraged fury. The West and the Rest share a common proclivity to choose, or choose to obey, cultural and political leaders whose hearts and minds are turned to a better past. Their hold is occasionally broken because global markets have a way of turning regional minds to future growth. Nostalgics, whether true or romantic, do not always appear to be what they are. They tend to hire or persuade others to do their dirty work. As a result, nostalgia, as for type of global dispossession, is more or less self-righteous because it is self-assumed. Nostalgics are people of economic means and cultural competence. Their means may be linked to their methods, as they are in case of mullahs who feed off their followers, the evangelicals who do much the same to theirs, the dictators and bullies who destroy their national assets in the interests of their ruthless aspirations to be like the West, the impulsive cultural warriors who feed the small minds of political empty suits with all manner of blather about such things as "the American people believe," and—most surprising of all—there are the fatuous one-time radicals who denounced the new waves of cultural opposition in the name of their half-baked political ideas about a universal class, the rise of labor, revolutionary movements. But so too are the more sympathetic nostalgics who with the best of intentions as their method attempt to pave the road to a hell that pretends to be the past's heavenly place.

Classically, the most prominent pure nostalgic did his most important work at the very same time as the most in-

fluential nineteenth century romantic did his. Not at all coincidentally, they wrote within two years of each other in the late 1860s just when industrial capitalism was growing most fiercely with already evident disparities between the political philosophy of fairness and the economic realities of exploitation. The romantic was of course Karl Marx whose masterwork, *Capital*, first appeared in 1867. Seldom has a romantic dream of a good and classless society been lodged in so philosophically and technically brilliant an historical analysis. This perhaps because Marx, in *Capital*, was attempting to counter the classical liberal individualism of the early political economists by a perverse, if highly imaginative, refiguring of Hegel's global history. The opposite and true nostalgic to Marx was Matthew Arnold whose 1869 *Culture and Anarchy* was, if not a direct response to what Marx had wrought, at least a nostalgic meditation on the necessary of high culture as "sweetness and perfection" to calm the rising tide of political and economic disturbances.

Neither Marx nor Arnold was a fool. Pay your money and make your choice as to the side you prefer. But whichever you take, if you pursue the romantic far enough around the bend you will sneak up behind the time of the nostalgic. In the modern West, the romantic promises were always projections across the myth of history of the allegedly elementary forms of political necessity. To be sure, some nostalgics are real bastards, but not as a rule. For safety's sake one might do better choosing them over the romantics who tend to turn to bully when the romance is over. Still, either way, the political nostalgics stalk the lost object of their desire for a good that, however plausible as a value, is at best the bitter pill of a notably superficial and time-bound culture.

Granting the tentativeness of this classification—if it is granted that many of the political conflicts of the late or post modern world are due in very large part to the disembodied culture of modernity set against the terrible effects of global dispossession, if the powerful are nostalgic—then the reality will be overlooked in the searching for a past or a future that never kept its promises in the past and seems unable to do so anytime in the future.

This is where Edward Said's politics of dispossession are truly original as well as bold and important. *Out of Place*, like many memoirs of childhood, could well have been nostalgic, at least to the extent of romanticizing his Palestinian past. Yet, the book is anything but. Said tells his story at the literary remove he invents in order, I suppose, to open a space for the distances in the story—the social distances from his family, his late coming to terms with the politics of dispossession, his career in English literature as distant from the orientalist attributes of Anglo-phone culture, the political and economic distances between his family comforts and misery of the Palestinians he devoted himself to serving. Said himself was distant by every measure from the truly dispossessed, the economically uprooted, and the socially unsettled. Yet, having settled deeply into the higher cultural circles of the West, he did not lapse into sentimentality for his past. *Out of Place* is very much a story of childhood, but very much NOT nostalgic. It could not have had the effect it has had had it been. And, this, when it comes to literary work is as much a political as a cultural accomplishment. Rather, for him, this book and all the books of his career were cultural achievements only to the extent that they were based, either biographically or historically, in the politics of his own dispossession within (and at odds with) Palestinian dispossession.

More than anyone else, Said has transformed the experience of dispossession into a prerequisite of the culturally elite. He would have meant "elite" in another sense than customary. He would have meant not the capitalist pricks but the socially and politically alert intellectuals who use their cultural capital to stir the social pot. Pierre Bourdieu, who invented the expression "cultural capital," once described the role of the sociologist as being a cultural terrorist. For reason of his attachments to Palestinian politics, Said would have put himself at risk were he to have used such an expression. Even if, as was the case for Bourdieu, one is born to modest circumstances, once one has a cultural home in Paris, there are freedoms denied others. Said was born to wealth and elite status in Cairo's Arab society, but he refused absolutely to squander his elite status by overplaying his Palestinian past. Quite a few have accused Said of pretending to be a real Palestinian—a charge Said dismissed out of hand. Yet, this was not a question of character in the moral sense but of a character in the more literary sense of one who plays out a political role with stunning originality. He took the personal experience and put it to public use much as he had invented Said out from under "Edward."

At the very end of *Out of Place*, Said describes the personal effects of his willingness to embrace his status as one of the dispossessed:

> Sleeplessness is for me a cherished state to be desired at almost any cost; there is nothing for me as invigorating as immediately shedding the shadowy half-conscious-ness of a night's loss, than the early morning, reacquainting myself with or resuming what I might have lost completely a few hours earlier. If sometime experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self. … These currents, like the themes of one's life, flow along during the waking hours and, at their best, they require no reconciling,

> no harmonizing. There are "off" and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme.[1]

Could there be a better description of an attitude that may be necessary for getting-by in a globalizing world where everything sooner or late comes up against everything and everyone else? For Said, the figure of the uprooted, unsettled exile was the model for what others would call the social theorist. In *Representations of the Intellectual*,[2] Said describes the culturally elite intellectual as an exile by identifying a fact that is seldom considered. Said mentions, in particular, Theodor Adorno, the founder of German critical theory and, if there was one, an elite intellectual. But Said also reminds that Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and all the others associated with that form of critical theory were exiles, dispossessed by Hitler. In fact, one could hardly imagine the history of social theory without the exilic factor: Marx and Durkheim left their homes. Du Bois and Weber stayed home, more or less, but put themselves in exile to the prevailing ideas of their times. There would be no feminist theory had not women left home; nor queer theory; nor postcolonial theory. Frantz Fanon and Aime Cesaire were exiles from Martinique, as Foucault and Derrida were from native homes in a rural city and Algeria.

Though the types of dispossession differ in degree and kind, Said is surely right. Like it or not, to do the critical work of using one's elite cultural capital to unsettle the world is to become an exile—even a traitor to the class, even a terror to the prevailing culture. One cannot do social theory without being an exile. The modern world of the liberal romance, so pleased with itself that it welcomes the uprooted, has never taken well to free-floating intellectual social critics, many of whom find their way to prisons of other or another kind. Against the modern, Said set the Palestinian as a global figure able to confront the global world as it is by repossessing what had been lost—not by a crude fundamentalism of the original, but by a daring new beginning of a story already being told.

1.Said, *Out of Place*, 295.
2.Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Pantheon, 1993).