

The Other Said

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IN the collaborative photo-essay *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, Said shared telling words about community belonging, which often proves more provisional than it first seems. He gave the example of the Palestinian word *awdah*, which stands at the heart of the Palestinian political cause, yet means vastly different things to different Palestinians: ‘To some it means return to a Palestinian state alongside Israel, yet to others it means a return to *all* of Palestine.’²⁴ Said mused:

To be on the inside, in this sense, is to speak from, be in, a situation which, paradoxically, you do not control and cannot really be sure of even when you have evolved special languages – sometimes evasive, always idiosyncratic – that only you and others like you can understand. The structure of your situation is such that being inside is a privilege that is an affliction, like feeling hemmed in by the house you own.²⁵

This passage, about the misapprehensions and uncertainties that transpire among insiders, stands in provocative juxtaposition with Said’s *Orientalism*, which analyses the stereotyping distortions of outsiders in their representation of foreign cultures. Both projects speak to Said’s lifelong scepticism towards homogenizing and bounded concepts of community (whether one is speaking from a position on the supposed ‘inside’ or ‘outside’), categories that themselves become blurred in exile, as exemplified in the extreme case of Israel/Palestine in *After the Last Sky*.

Inhabiting an academic field like musicology can also amount to being ‘hemmed in by the house you own’, with special languages that bind constituents together yet remain outside any individual’s control. Said made this point himself, while highlighting the authority that ‘insider’ academic discourses consolidate and project: ‘Is it the inevitable conclusion to the formation of an interpretive community that its constituency, its specialized language, and its concerns tend to get tighter, more airtight, more self-enclosed as its own self-confirming authority acquires more power, the solid status of orthodoxy, and a stable constituency?’²⁶ Said’s rhetorical question was self-reflexive. By the time he wrote it in 1982, he had long occupied a secure professional position in the academy, and his work underwent formidable institutionalization in subsequent years, especially in the emergence of postcolonial studies.

Within historical musicology, Said’s institutionalization took place primarily in the crystallization of musical exoticism scholarship from the 1980s onwards. Yet musicology has performed virtually no close reading of that other great through-line of his oeuvre, exile – a thematics that destabilizes ideas of collective, community and belonging that are so central

²⁴ Edward W. Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York, 1986), 52.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52–3.

²⁶ Edward W. Said, ‘Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community’, *Critical Inquiry*, 9 (1982), 1–26 (p. 9).

to the study of music. Inside folds into outside. Little remains fixed. Privilege becomes an affliction, or the other way around. Said's exilic insights have the potential to illuminate more than just exile as a subject matter, but to interrogate the most seemingly known and rooted aspects of culture: those 'inside' things that become more uncertain than first apprehended. This contribution therefore takes the form of a Saidian lexicon of exile. The keywords below have little presence in our field to date; they are personalized in Said's work. I hope that within our 'specialized languages' they might open possibilities beyond 'self-confirming authority'. What follows is not a unified arc of argument, but rather a series of incomplete notes for the future.

Secular criticism

Said coined the term 'secular criticism' as the preferred descriptor for his critical practice, which he infused with an exilic scepticism towards homogenizing ideas of collective and their institutionalization.²⁷ He avoided pinning down secular criticism with definitions: this lack of fixity was part of the point. For Said, to avoid defining the term was to avoid the possibility of labelling a critical school, with the risks of scholarly conformity that this entails. Given its definitional instability, secular criticism has caused confusion in Said's reception, exacerbated by the fact that he used 'secular' in an idiosyncratic way – not exclusively in opposition to religious matters, nor as an ideal endpoint in the development of human reason. Rather, the word was meant to take aim at totalizing visions of belonging, which in his terms resemble a 'religious consciousness'.²⁸ Said's most public targets on this front remain well known: religious fundamentalism and nationalist ideology. Yet he also directed a profound 'unbelief' at seemingly more benign and domesticated targets, at basic categories often taken for granted in the production of knowledge.²⁹

In this spirit, I want to focus on one object of Said's secular critical 'unbelief' that has remained a staple of humanities disciplines including our own: a nation-orientated matrix for organizing objects of study. Though explicit nationalism is eschewed in contemporary musicology (and questions of cultural mobility have moved increasingly to the foreground), the nation still works implicitly as a primary conceptual prism through which historical topics are highlighted, made intelligible and assigned value. In historical musicology, Said's work has often been associated with New Musicology's turn towards the study of 'music in society' or 'music in the public sphere'. But the questions remain: whose society? whose public? 'Society' and 'public' often become naturalized in relation to a national horizon (or a global/

²⁷ See Edward W. Said, 'Introduction: Secular Criticism', *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (New York, 1991), 1–30. For further discussion of interpretative dilemmas around Said's secular criticism, see Bruce Robbins, 'Secularism, Elitism, Progress, and Other Transgressions: On Edward Said's "Voyage In"', *Social Text*, 40 (1994), 25–37 (esp. pp. 26–9); Aamir R. Mufti, 'Critical Secularism: A Reintroduction for Perilous Times', *Boundary 2*, 31 (2004), 1–9 (esp. pp. 2–3); Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London, 2013), esp. pp. 214–16; and Stathis Gourgouris, *Lessons in Secular Criticism* (New York, 2013), esp. pp. 12–13.

²⁸ Said, 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community', 17, 19.

²⁹ Mufti, 'Critical Secularism', 2.

transnational horizon subtended by the national), which helps to define the value of a given musical repertory, figure, community or historical episode.³⁰ This approach draws strength from a vision of national community and a mythology of Western art-music culture with roots in the nineteenth century – music resonates with a national public and reveals its cultural accomplishments in history (reflected in the composer's genius), testifying to that nation's place in broader humanity.³¹ Few historical musicologists today would overtly espouse this mythology (or 'religious consciousness?'), yet it has imprinted the discipline's inner workings: the focus on musical texts, composers and received ideas of society and public. Said's secular criticism drew inspiration from the experiences of national minorities, the displaced and the stateless. Yet, as scholarship seems increasingly to acknowledge, such a secular critical practice would need to do more than simply address musical lives and phenomena in transit. It would need seriously to rethink the toolkit of the discipline, that which authorizes its subjects of study.³²

Untimeliness

If Said found himself 'out of place' in exile, then he also found himself 'out of time'.³³ Said's critique of unified ideas of community also entailed a critique of 'empty homogeneous time' – the apprehension of time by clock and calendar that Walter Benjamin identified as fundamental to historicist narrations of the past.³⁴ Such historiography does not necessarily imply a vision of progress, but it nonetheless posits history as unfolding over a continuum of time with some degree of internal consistency and forward movement. From an authoritative perch in the present, the historian surveys the past as a visible continuum. Benedict Anderson famously described this temporality as essential to the 'imagined community' of the nation: it naturalizes history as a chronological chain of events, allowing the narration of a national

³⁰ I have addressed this historiographical question in more depth elsewhere. See Brigid Cohen, *Stefan Wolpe and the Avant-Garde Diaspora* (Cambridge, 2012); *eadem*, 'Limits of National History: Yoko Ono, Stefan Wolpe, and Dilemmas of Cosmopolitanism', *Musical Quarterly*, 97 (2014), 181–237.

³¹ Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of 'Folk Music' and 'Art Music': Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge, 2007), 236. Although invested in divergent methods, metaphors and disciplinary relationships, scholarship on popular and vernacular musics has also contended with the long shadow of national culture as a primary framework through which musical meaning is made intelligible. Mark Slobin's work represented an early intervention on this front; see his *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Middletown, CT, 1993).

³² Divergent critical moves in this direction appear outside musicology in Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York, 2005); Peggy Levitt, 'What's Wrong with Migration Scholarship: A Critique and a Way Forward', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 19 (2012), 1–8; and Roger Waldinger, *The Cross-Border Connection: Immigrants, Emigrants, and their Homelands* (Cambridge, MA, 2015).

³³ Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London, 1999; repr. 2001).

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', trans. Harry Zohn, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1996–2003), iv: 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 389–400.

past, present and future.³⁵ Historical musicologists often justify the value of their research by asserting the consistency and boundedness of their topics within ‘empty homogeneous time’ – by demonstrating, for example, how this or that figure or episode is ‘representative’ of a historical moment.

Drawing inspiration from the temporal dislocations of exile, Said’s notion of untimeliness eschews this historicist mastery of the past. Intrusive memories of a previous life sometimes block an exile’s ready assimilation in one time or place. In ‘Reflections on Exile’, Said highlighted an exilic experience of time that simultaneously actualizes and collapses past and present: ‘Both the new and old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally.’³⁶ He asks: ‘But is there any place that fits us, together with our accumulated memories and experiences?’³⁷

Ultimately, Said’s ‘untimeliness’ proposes an alternative ethics of historical narration, as elaborated in *After the Last Sky*. Here he described Palestine as a virtual non-place with peculiar temporal dimensions incompatible with historicist renderings of the past:

Our past is still ragged, discredited, and unassimilated [...]. We have no dominant theory of Palestinian culture, history, society; we cannot rely on one central image; there is no completely coherent discourse adequate to us and I doubt whether at this point if someone could fashion such a discourse, we could be adequate for it. Miscellaneous, the spaces here and there in our midst include but do not comprehend the past; they represent building without overall purpose, around an uncharted and only partially surveyed territory. Without a center. Atonal.³⁸

At the same time, Said advocated a response of further intransigence: of staying put, of practising *sumud* or ‘steadfastness’, of replanting olive trees, of insisting upon ideals of cohabitation and autonomy despite the fact that it is never ‘the right time’. His writings on exile, memory and untimeliness encourage us to attend to the hauntings, silences, irreconcilabilities, erasures and resistant persistence of practices that disjoint our narratives of the unfolding past.

Internal colonialism

In this vein, Said also demands sensitivity to the violent fractures of ‘internal colonialism’ – a concept with so little explicit presence in historical musicology that it may itself qualify as an untimely erasure. Internal colonialism refers to the structural political and economic inequalities within a nation that mimic and interact with relations of subjugation on the exterior.³⁹ In

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), 24–6.

³⁶ Edward W. Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 173–86 (p. 148).

³⁷ Said, *After the Last Sky*, 33.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁹ ‘Internal colonialism’ is a flexible concept that has been adapted from varied theoretical perspectives to describe situations ranging from settler colonialism to class oppression to apartheid to genocide. For a historical overview, see Robert J. Hind, ‘The Internal Colonial Concept’, *Comparative Studies*

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, for example, the aggressive capitalist expansion into colonial markets abroad also depended upon exploitative practices at home, from slavery to workhouses to industrialized labour. Yet internal colonialism did not operate solely along lines of class. The so-called 'Jewish Question', for example, can hardly be considered apart from colonial histories. Said recognized this fact, and tied it to the 'Palestinian Question' when he described *Orientalism* as the history of 'a strange, secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism'.⁴⁰ His remark keeps faith with Hannah Arendt's observation that the race-based ideologies of high imperialism 'paved the road to hell' that led to global genocides including the Holocaust and the mass displacements of the twentieth century.⁴¹ With the birth of the modern nation state came the birth of the national minority, a status that always renders a population 'potentially movable'.⁴² Drawing from Said and Arendt, Aamir R. Mufti argues that 'exile is an actualization of the threat inherent to the condition of the minority', the minority that emerged in the modern nation state standing on the knife's edge of empire.⁴³

Ideas of internal colonialism thus help us to recognize structural inequalities within a nation's borders as bearing a relationship with those outside, all the while implicating class, minority status and the 'mobility' of populations within those structures of inequality. The ramifications of internal colonialism extend far beyond the scope of this contribution, because it complicates dichotomies between West and non-West, between colonizers and colonized (illuminating, for example, situations in places like Latin America that do not easily fit these binaries).⁴⁴ Rather than presenting a fixed diagram of power, it draws attention to multifaceted and contingent relations of power that dislocate communities from within. The concept also intervenes at the heart of a discipline traditionally focused on musical creators of European and North American origin. From the nineteenth century onwards, these figures have typically been viewed as cultural representatives of their nations and artists with considerable autonomy. What would happen, however, if some of these creators were also seen as internal colonial subjects? This question became apparent in my study of the German-Jewish refugee composer Stefan Wolpe, who explored music as a medium to conceptualize historical experiences like statelessness and genocide that elude the historical archive.⁴⁵ Said himself recognized music as a medium for such work when he repeatedly turned to musical metaphors (like 'contrapuntal' and 'atonal') to capture experiences that defy historicist description.

in Society and History, 26 (1984), 543–68. For a capsule discussion within postcolonial studies, see Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, 2001), 9.

⁴⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 27.

⁴¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 2004), 160, 210–384.

⁴² Aamir R. Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 2007), 13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See, for example, Edward W. Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization', *The Edward Said Reader*, ed. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin (New York, 2000), 291–316 (p. 307).

⁴⁵ Cohen, *Stefan Wolpe and the Avant-Garde Diaspora*, 267–74. See also Lydia Goehr's discussion of Said in 'Music and Musicians in Exile: The Romantic Legacy of a Double Life', *Driven into Paradise: The Musical Migration from Nazi Germany to the United States*, ed. Reinhold Brinkmann and Christoph Wolff (Berkeley, CA, 1999), 66–91 (pp. 86–8).

Musical nomadism (in lieu of closure)

In *Musical Elaborations*, Said first critiqued and then espoused music as an allegory for history. He criticized Thomas Mann's and Theodor Adorno's turn to music as an emblem for the Nazi catastrophe, because they elevated the 'European avalanche' to 'the level of the essential and the universal'.⁴⁶ 'A secular attitude', he continued, 'warns us to beware of transforming the complexities of many-stranded history into one large figure, or of elevating particular moments or monuments into universals [...]. There is always the possibility to transgress.'⁴⁷ Said subsequently transformed music into an allegory for his own purposes, to embody the spirit of secular criticism animating his work. Drawing from a vocabulary of displacement, he argued that music shows 'nomadic' qualities, because of its profligate involvement in the world, its excessive fluidity of meanings and its impurity of origins. Music holds 'a nomadic ability to attach itself to, and become a part of social formations, to vary its articulations and rhetoric depending on the occasion as well as the audience, plus the power and the gender situations in which it takes place'.⁴⁸ Said was drawn to music's capacity to embed itself in cultural contexts without becoming subsumed by them, as well as to its enactment of temporalities different from a smooth, consistent unfolding of time. In short, music opened up conceptual spaces alternative to the schematic ideas of historical time and belonging with which he battled in text-orientated disciplines of literary scholarship and cultural and political history. Remembering this music-allegorical dimension of Said's legacy is important for us as musicologists: we have grown used to importing theory from outside fields, yet that 'nomadic' object within may also open the possibility to transgress.

Sensing beyond Orientalism

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EVEN while attributing importance to Said's *Orientalism*, scholars have not been slow to point out that it created at least one intractable challenge. Said argued convincingly for the colonial constitution of European literature and managed to bring the politics of representation to the forefront of scholarly debate; but he tended to reify precisely the dualistic relationships he set out to critique. One reason for this was that although he deplored the totalizing perception of nineteenth-century Orientalists, his own writing held fast to foundations in the same intellectual tradition.⁴⁹

Our situation today, nearly four decades on, is conducive to exploring further, however. Broad epistemological shifts have made us critical of the humanities' and social sciences'

⁴⁶ Said, *Musical Elaborations*, 51.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 70. Stathis Gourgouris presented related ideas on Said's musical nomadism at the Edward Said Conference in Utrecht in 2013.

⁴⁹ For Said, the Orientalist was 'principally a kind of agent of [...] comprehensive visions', working through a system that 'presumes that the whole Orient can be seen panoptically'. Said, *Orientalism*, 239–40.