

Visual Autoethnography: Reconstructing the "Other" in Edward Said's *After the Last Sky*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate Edward Said's "After the Last Sky" as a specific instance of visual autoethnography. Said returns to the critical potential of autoethnography in order to examine ethnographic photographs about Palestinian people – images used to document patterns of Palestinian culture, usually within discourses of the 'other'. Said engages with autoethnography as a critical identity discourse which tries to comprehend the complexity of fragmented identities informed by dislocation. Autoethnography is the ideal method of choice, because it allows Said to highlight the Palestinian culture that is often voiceless within the dominant media discourse. It is compelling in part because it reveals in vivid details those whose presence might not be noticed if they spoke abstractly. This paper will deal with the way in which this autoethnography, in focusing on local voices with specific histories rather than on universal principles, has created a performative discourse played before others.

Keywords: Visual autoethnography, Edward Said, Palestine, representation and reconstruction of the 'other'.

INTRODUCTION

Representation, says Said in *The World, The Text, and The Critic* (1983), is "one of the key problems in all criticism and philosophy" (200), one to which he himself returns on numerous occasions in his books and articles. Said focuses on the interrelation of power and knowledge, and on the ways in which power relations are constitutive parts of practices and forms of representation. In his critique of anthropology's representation of other cultures, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors" (1989), Said refers to the historical context of imperialism as "the true definition horizon, and to some extent, the enabling condition, of such otherwise abstract and groundless concepts like 'otherness' and 'difference'" (217), and he also emphasizes the disruptive force of counter-narratives (210). Said's *Orientalism* (1978) examines the practices through which ethnographic descriptive accounts normalize non-Western cultures as "primitive other," and different in the negative sense. Said has suggested that through their refusal to appreciate the discipline's

imperial legacy, anthropologists maintain to "act to shut and block out the clamor of voices on the outside asking for their claims about empire and domination to be considered" (1989, 219). Said explains that anthropologists do not usually consider within their reports either their own positionality or the circumstances of transcultural encounters.⁽¹⁾

In his ongoing reflections on the problems of representation, and his permanent effort to rethink the role of the intellectual and criticism, Said insists on a practical and applied poetics that has the potential to subvert academic authority and to identify the interrelationship between European culture and the imperial enterprise. He argues for what he calls "secular criticism" for analyzing colonial encounters and postcolonial interrelations as well as the plurality of minority and border discourses in the United States. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said describes this kind of criticism as "contrapuntal criticism", which involves "a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated [in the cultural archive] and those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (Said, 1993, 59). This approach locates the text either canonical or ethnographic in the world, connecting it to a political, historical and

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social context.⁽²⁾ Said writes in his book *The World, the Text and the Critic*:

My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. (1983, 4).

Thus, he describes contrapuntalism as a connection or mutual consideration of otherwise distinct social practices, of culture and empire and the present. The extent of connectedness also shows that the penetration of culture by imperialism is more widespread than normally accepted. Ashcroft and Ahluwalia argue that Said's "contrapuntality emerges out of the tension and complexity of Said's own identity, that text of self that he is continually writing, because it involves a continual dialogue between the different and sometimes apparently contradictory dimensions of his own worldliness" (2001, 92). Indeed, it is the colonisation of Palestine which required Said to study the imperial discourse of the West, and to link his cultural inquiry with the narrative of his own identity.⁽³⁾

Said's constant effort to reexamine representations is accompanied by a constant search for alternative narrative forms and other perspectives on history that over the years led him again and again to creative revisions, and new beginnings. Said's critiques of the old ways of representing, and essentialising non-western cultures as 'others' provide a new understanding of the interaction of cultures as "permeable," as complex intercultural flows that interact in multiple encounters and "contact zones." In "Arts of the Contact Zone," Mary Louise Pratt describes contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermath" (1991, 34). This cultural interaction under conditions of unequal power, shows cultures as historically formed and open to change: "Exile, immigration, and the crossing of boundaries and experiences can therefore provide us with new narrative forms or, [...] other ways of telling" (Said 2000, 315). Autoethnography the hyphenated genre is one

of the "other ways of telling" the complex, hybridized and, multicultural stories of "cultures and imperialism" in contemporary world. Pratt locates autoethnography as an art of "contact zone." Pratt argues that "if ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their usually subjugated others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in a dialogue with those metropolitan representations (1992, 7). Autoethnography has been influenced by postmodern sensitivities, especially "the skepticism towards representation of "the other" and misgivings regarding generalizing theoretical discourse" (Anderson 2006, 377).⁽⁴⁾ This postmodern tendency causes considerable challenges to anthropology – a field embedded in the enlightenment scheme of rationality and objectivity and systematically linked the history of Western imperialism. Thus, Pratt sees auto-ethnography as a concrete strategy of knowledge production and of political involvement in the questioning of the authority invested in metropolitan representations, or representations from the so-called "centre". For Pratt it is a way of promoting marginal voices.⁽⁵⁾ While she is careful not to romanticize their use as forms of resistance, she does suggest that they serve as such.

Because of its intense focus on the in-between and the examination of established assumptions in terms of subjectivity, ethnicity and genre, Edward Said's *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1986) engages with many of the issues raised by the term auto-ethnography and the debates about representations. This paper examines *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* as an autoethnography. As a hybrid genre that combines the interests of autobiography and ethnography, autoethnography allows the writing subject in *After the Last Sky* to reconstruct both individual and collective identities, and to blur the borders of subjectivity and cultural experience. *After the Last Sky* works at the limits between American and Palestinian identities, between the public and private spheres, between fiction and reality, between high theory and practical instantiation, between writing and reading, between past and present, and, as we will see, between photograph and text.

This paper argues for autoethnography as a site for the interplay of Said's concepts of the worldliness, and the exilic quality of the critical consciousness. As a

Palestinian born in Jerusalem, raised in Egypt and lived and taught in the United States since 1951, Said writes: "Many displacements from countries, cities, languages, environments [...] have kept me in motion all these years" (1999: 217). Such different displacements all contribute to "the overriding sensation [he] had [...] of always being out of place" (1999: 3). In the preface of *After the Last Sky*, Said states that this book is "an exile's book, written in the mid-1980s as an attempt to render Palestinian lives subjectively, at a great distance from Palestine itself" (vii). According to Deborah Reed-Danahay Said's stance is a particularly auto-ethnographic one: "Cultural displacement or situations of exile are characteristics of the themes expressed by autoethnographer. This phenomenon of displacement [...] breaks down dualisms of identity and insider-outsider status" (1997, 4). As a Palestinian by birth and an American citizen he is both inside and outside the narrative he creates. This can be enabling, but it is also at times problematic. "Exile," a sense of diaspora, for Said, is on the one hand, a "painful" experience, a characteristic situation in our age of refugees, displaced persons, and mass migration (Said 2000: 174). If life as exile, on the other hand, is "nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal," that position allows a "plurality of vision" (Said 2000, 186). Said argues that "exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation" (1996, 60). In his dynamic participation in the Palestinian cause, Said brought all his intellectual energy to the complicated situations, however, never sticking to ideological positions. This worldly – as opposed to professional of ideological self-situating allows the individual consciousness to function not as "naturally and easily a mere child of culture, but a historical and social actor in it" (Said, 1983, 15). According to him the critic's position at a "sensitive nodal point" both supportive and critical of the "collective whole" of which he is part. The critic, in other words, acknowledges and understands the imperatives of "dominant culture" but carries "individual consciousness" sufficient to recognize its failings and interrogate its premises (Said, 1983, 15).

The title *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* suggests that the book is an exemplary, an all-inclusive discourse for all Palestinian who grew up in exile after

the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and the establishment of Israel. The title is taken from a poem by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish which mirrors the loss of Palestine and uprootedness, the frustration being under siege, of being occupied. Here is a couplet from the poem: "The earth is closing on us, where we should go after the last frontier, where should the birds fly after the last sky"? (Quoted in Said 1999, 1). Although Palestinians had faced different fates during the Israeli occupation, they were all connected by their exile which entailed discrimination and suffering. Autoethnography allows Said to provide a fresh personalized account from his experience to extend understanding of already configured experience of Palestinian diaspora. In the preface of *After the Last Sky*, Said writes:

My family left Jerusalem for the last time in December 1947; I was twelve [...] By the mid-spring of 1948 my extended family in its entirety had departed, evicted from Palestine along with almost a million other Palestinians. This was the *nakba*, or catastrophe, which heralded the deconstruction of our society and our dispossession as a people: it coincides exactly with the establishment of the state of Israel. (vii)

The opening of this work does not establish a distinct and independent I, but instead, it represents a communal phenomenon that cannot exist without the people who have told their stories of exile. In *After the Last Sky* there is no solitary voice that retells stories; there is a gathering voice that is the product of a community to which it is indebted and which recognizes and respects this interdependence. Autoethnography is a method and a text, a "form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). Said interweaves the (hi) stories of his parents, relatives with improvisations on Palestinian stories of exile by finding parallels and a common ground which justify their use. The best example is the opening story of his own exile whose goal is the allegorical presentation of forced exile of Palestinians. Therefore, the different voices in *After the Last Sky* justify classifying it as an autoethnography.

Photographs and Narrative Text as a Visual Autoethnography

After the Last Sky may not be representative of the amazing variety of auto-ethnographic texts, but it shows different strategies that combine self-representation with cultural critique. I consider it a visual autoethnography because it examines the construction of self-identity through combining photographs and personal narrative text.⁽⁶⁾ Many critics admire this visual-textual combination, and classify the work as a "photographic essay/text" (W.J. Mitchell 1994, 319; Shloss 1996; Ashcroft & Ahluwalia 2001, 130). These images came from a gallery in the United Nations showing the Swiss photographer Jean Mohr's photographic exhibition of Palestinians. The idea behind the work as Said explains:

grew out of the peculiar circumstances that first brought Jean Mohr and me together [...] Mohr left on a special U.N. sponsored trip to the Near East. The photographs he brought back were indeed wonderful; the official response, however, was puzzling [...] You can hang them up, we were told, but no writing can be displayed with them. No legends, no explanations. A compromise was finally negotiated whereby the name of the country or place (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank, Gaza) could be affixed to the much-enlarged photographs, but not one word more. When Jean and I met it was this strange and inflexible formula that we confronted. (3)

Thus *After the Last Sky* came as a result of this censorship against writing about Palestinians, but not against exhibiting pictures of Palestinians. As Said argues in *Orientalism*, "the exotic is already known" (1978), there is no need for explaining what is already shown and known. *After the Last Sky* is written in the form of Said's commentary and retelling the contents of the photos taken by Mohr, and thus he discovers a method of destabilizing the relations of power in the mainstream discourses of representation such as media and communication. In "Double-Crossing Frontiers: Literature, Photography, and the Politics of Displacement." Carroll Shloss argues that the photo-textual collaboration in *After the Last Sky* allows Palestinians to "double-cross" those

representational and political obstacles that typically obscure them from the world's understanding. It is obvious that combining narrative along side photographs in this context creates a great deal of challenge.

Narrative is an essential element not only in *After the Last Sky*, but in all Said's work. By writing *After the Last Sky*, Said ascertained a narrative for the Palestinians whose narrative has repeatedly been crossed out and refuted. As he states "being stateless, dispossessed, de-centered, we are frequently unable either to speak the 'truth' of our experience or to make it heard" (1986, 6). In his article "Permission to Narrate" (1984), Said insists on the Palestinians' right to narrate the Palestinians' perspective. The most important pro-Israeli narrative that Said counters is the one that says: "There are no Arab Palestinians. The land did not exist as Palestine, or perhaps the people did not exist either. 'We Palestinians' have almost imperceptibly become 'they,' a very doubtful lot" (1986, 75). Said's *After the Last Sky* is one version of the Palestinian narrative. As he says, "Facts do not all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain, and circulate them" (1995, 254). Thus Said writes as a "participant" or "an engaged Palestinian" (386, 348) on behalf of people with a history of subjugation, as someone who sees such narrative as part of the struggle for political and human rights for Palestinians. This gives his work a particular urgency.

While the formal structure of most personal narratives is chronological, linear and topical order, the structure of *After the Last Sky* reveals that Said bases his strategy on "broken narratives, fragmentary compositions, and self-consciously staged testimonials"(38), complemented with photographs which, in view of the fragmentariness of narrated events, seems an appropriate choice. In personal texts there exists a close relation between the self and its style. As Elionr Ochs and Lisa Capps argue that [omit that and use colon after argue]: "narrative and self are inseparable in that narrative is simultaneously born out of experience" (1996, 19). Leigh Gilmore argues as well that self-narrative is "a site of identity production" (1994, 4). Said associates his style with the Palestinian experience:

Since the main features of our present existence are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our

stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent us. What I have quite consciously designed, then is an alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered in the media, in works of social science, in popular fiction. It is a personal rendering of the Palestinians as a dispersed national community. (6)

Said depicts exile itself as an experience of fragmentation, internalized and materialized by the individuals who live through it. *After the Last Sky* meets with Trinh T. Minh-ha's standards of being responsible, reflexive autoethnography that "announces its own politics and evidences a political consciousness. It [will] interrogate the realities it represents" (1991, 188). He maintains that *After the Last Sky* "is an unreconciled book, in which the contradictions and antinomies of our lives and experiences remain as they are, assembled neither (I) hope into neat wholes nor into sentimental ruminations about the past" (xi). Although some stories appear to be merely a selection of free associations, they constitute a thematic unity integrated by the figures of different Palestinians in various exiles. The episodic structure of *After the Last Sky* mixes history, documents, disjointed scenes, intimate particulars and testimonies, photographs, family reminiscences, diaries, and recollections of various Palestinians, and literary criticism. This fragmented structure allows Said to extemporize on the well-known accounts of history, family stories and media stories. Thus, what the narrator offers here is a collection of possible stories of Palestinian individuals. The same stories are retold in various ways and from different perspectives (the old timers' and more current one). Said thus demonstrates that his story cannot have a chronological structure because it is a story constantly retold and changed by different Palestinians. Consequently, the multiplicity of versions may have one additional feature: that of preserving family and Palestinians' heritages of exile. The common factor for all the sections is the narrator's discourse which clearly situates him in the context of his Palestinian cultural tradition of exile.

The various fragments also help to emphasize the

importance of cooperation with other Palestinian writers. The narrative is filled with other Palestinian intertexts. But most important is the way he acknowledges the influence of others on his work, including the journals of Akram Zuaytar; Hisham Sharabi's autobiography *Ashes and Embers (al-Jamr wa al-Ramad: Dhikrayat Muthaqqā Arabi)*; the testimony of Zakariah al-Shaikh on resisting the Sabra and Shatila massacres in his eye witness-report; the writings of Emile Habibi; the novel of Jabra Jabra: *The Search for Walid Massood (Baḥṭh 'an Walīd Mas'ūd)*; the poetry of Mahmood Darwish and Tawfik Zayyad; Ghassan Kanafani's tales "The Land of Sad Oranges" ("Ard al-Burtuqāl al-Hazīn"), *Men in the Sun (Rijāl fī-Sh-shams)*; and the works of Halim Nasser and Ezzat Darwaza in the early twentieth century. Said locates himself within a group of writers that nourish his narrative. By including them, Said emphasizes the significance of Palestinian self-narratives to restore Palestine's history. In the process, Said undermines the notion of the "writer/critic," by challenging the objectivity traditionally linked with the critical stance as he becomes both reader and writer, reading others and writing himself into other's writings. Said destabilizes the self/other binary. This breaking down of the binary between self and other further reflects Said's interest in showing the complexities of giving voice to other Palestinians in this autoethnography. Said situates *After the Last Sky* among other Palestinian self-narratives which all "rely on the notion of statement-enunciations grounded in personal authority – and strive for the clarity of unquestioned evidence" (75). The growing popularity of personal narratives and storytelling, visual methods such as documentary films of the Palestinian director Michel Khleifi, or Walid Khalidi's documentary collection of largely personal photographs of Palestinians during the period between 1876 and 1948, *Before Their Diaspora: The Photographic History of the Palestinians* serve as meaningful examples of this direction.

By including photographs from Mohr's exhibition of Palestine, Said creates a fragmented narrative shaped by the reality of his exile, and also shaped by his aspiration to bring back critical involvement to the practice of photography and image production. *After the Last Sky* offers a "cross-cultural critique" (Fisher, 1994, 93). As Fischer argues, *After the Last Sky* uses photographs and

texts "as two voices mutually calling attention to the limitations of the other, thereby keeping the reader's critical skills awake".⁷ Fischer adds that "the pictures often show up the contradictions in the assertions of the text" (1994, 89). Indeed W.J.T. Mitchell argues, "The relation of photography and language is a principal site of struggle for value and power in contemporary representations of reality; it is the place where images and words find and lose their conscious, their aesthetic and ethical identity" (1994, 281). This relationship is even more complicated in the context of *After the Last Sky*, since it is a book that observes the viewer, compelling with its complex style of address as he, the photographer, who is a foreign outsider, offers photos to be seen while Said, the commentator is removed from the places and people photographed. Said explains the method of the production of the book, and the loss implied in such method:

Exile is a series of portraits without names, without contexts. Images that are largely unexplained, nameless, mute. I look at them without precise anecdotal knowledge, but their realistic exactness nevertheless makes a deeper impression than mere information. I cannot reach the actual people who were photographed, except through European photographer who saw them for me. And I imagine that he, in turn, spoke to them through an interpreter. (14)

Said articulates here an everlasting sense of loss, being distanced from the origin. Exile is the future in this work, a world of appearances cut off from origin. As Said says: "The absence of resolution in this book is true one: It comes from exile" (165). So his narrative produces loss at every turn. For instance:

Even a picture of an Arab town – like Nazareth where my mother was born and grew up – may express this alienating perspective. Because it is taken from outside Nazareth (in fact, from Upper Nazareth, a totally Jewish addition to the town, built on the surrounding hills), the photographer renders Palestine as 'other'. I never knew Nazareth, so this is my only image of it, an image of the 'other', from the 'outside', Upper Nazareth. Thus the insider becomes the outsider. (40)

After the Last Sky suggests how the visual means of the photos works as a means of splitting identity, not only in analogous style of photo and narration, but within the position of the image itself. Palestine is depicted as something to remember, to see, but not to experience. The photographic image becomes the site of a complex relationship between the photographer's perceptions of Palestine as "other", and Said's distant perceptions of Nazareth literally "from the outside/from the Jewish addition to the town". He is forced as well to see Palestine as the "other". The experience of exilic loss, which Said shares with many Palestinians, affects the meanings that the images gain over time. Mohr's photographs capture not just a moment that has passed, but a place that has been essentially changed. As the narrator says of the exilic photographic experience, "something has been lost. But the representation is all we have" (84). In other places the narrative situates the images at a distance that embodies the aspect of memory.

Throughout the book, Said's melancholy is more complex than simply just nostalgia for the homeland. His melancholy reflects a sense of "essential national incompleteness" (165). He writes, "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" (129). Adjoining to this passage there is a photo of Nablus city, there is a cemetery at the centre of the city. The cemetery here is seen by Said as a sign of annihilation of a unified Palestinian identity, or it reflects that Palestinians are "without a centre" (129). But it is precisely loss that they share, a kind of hollowness. Palestinian refugee identity has had significantly ironic meanings: on the one hand as a signifier of statelessness, the eventual cancellation of nationality; and on the other hand, as the personification of exile, that most defining experience of being Palestinian and by the very means by which a Palestinian nationalism became distinctive. Things have got more complicated since 1986. The challenges that the Palestinian national movement faces are arguably even more difficult today: the spread of the settlements, the split between Hamas and Fatah, and the several Israeli wars on Gaza. Still, *After the Last Sky* reflects a distinctively unifying Palestinian identity which is born from uprootedness. Only when Said realizes that

"everything in the Palestinian situation flows directly from one original trauma", "can [he] then see a pattern emerging inexorably, as intertwined and as recountable as any sequential tale of misfortune" (130). It is such a text which imposes an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which has been integral to the Palestinian experience. Krista Kauffman argues correctly that *After the Last Sky* represents "an attempt to give shape to Palestinian experience, to sketch its counters, and to define its boundaries, proffering this attempt at representational unity in order to counteract the effects of disposition and dispersion" (2013, 116). It also attempts to restore a sense fullness or plenitude, to set against the rift of separation, and the loss of identity.

Though all photographs shot in different refugee camps and places in the Middle East originate in the gaze of the absent author, they are linked in the book only by the eye of the narrator that is absorbedly and explicitly subjective. Throughout his narrative, a sense of self emerges that is thoroughly grounded in observation. Said develops a socially constructed identity, one who finds himself in a shifting series of others, in the topography of Palestinian towns, cities, and refugee camps. This is, however, only one of three levels on which the writer inscribes himself, the other two being at the origin of the gaze, and the body image. The manifold versions of these three elements— speaker, seer, and seen – are what creates the rich synthesis and multiplicity of this visual autoethnography. W. J. Mitchell explains that "the two lenses of this book are writing and photography, neither understood abstractly or generically but constructions of specific histories, places, and displacements" (1995, 316). Both visual and textual data therefore, create a double substantiation for understanding Palestinian self-identification construction.

Each photograph has a corresponding narrative section that textually creates discourse for the viewer/reader's comprehension of the image's subject matter and content. These narratives are used in similar fashion to Barthes' idea that a text works together with the photograph; "the text loads the image" (1977, 26). In order to understand the connotative representation in the photographs, Barthes suggests that the image needs to be read in conjunction with surrounding text: caption, title, article, etc. (1977, 16). Said's methodology insists on

detailed image reading, in order to elucidate meaning from the multifaceted levels available in Mohr's photographs. *After the Last Sky* is an example of Said's strategy of writing about photos of Palestinians as reading, and he manages to be both writer and reader in a way that collapses the distance between these two activities and encourages new reading practices. I consider *After the Last Sky* an example of a text that, through its explanatory attempts and reading of photos, meditates between the Palestinian and Western discourses; the two discourses are not juxtaposed to show them as competing. This approach enables Said who belongs to a culture that has, in general, been the object rather than the subject of representation, to challenge predetermined concepts of the self and other as well as the aesthetic borders between photos and narrative, between autobiography and ethnography.

As an explicator of his culture, Said seeks in his counter narrative to do away with one of the stereotypes portrayed by the popular representations, namely the one concerning media representations of Palestinians "as fighters, terrorists, and lawless pariahs. Say the word 'terror' and a man wearing a *kaffiyah* and mask and carrying a *Kalashnikov* immediately leaps before one's eyes" (4). Therefore, in contrast to the wide-spread typical images of Palestinians as fighters, the majority of Mohr's photos depict Palestinians at their daily jobs in fields, factories, building constructions, offices, schools, universities, markets, in the interiors of their homes, raising children, etc. Said writes: "Work becomes a form of elementary resistance, a way of turning presence into small-scale obduracy" (100). Though most of the people in Mohr's photos are anonymous, a section of photos named "Emergence" includes photos of distinctive Palestinian figures in exile; engineers, writers, poets, financial experts, educators, doctors, industrialists, intellectuals whom Said emphasizes as just a sample of Palestinian exiles who are "renown[ed] for being productive, dedicated, and extraordinary resourceful workers" (115). Therefore, Said works hard through the choice, selection, and commentary to produce a new form of representation of camps and refugees beyond the static and traditional symbols of victimization, passivity and poverty. It reflects a culture that reclaims the capacity to live and to go on in spite of loss. He wants to portray the

resilience and determination of the Palestinian struggle rather than a life of suffering.

Said aims at raising reviewer's consciousness about how to interpret those images. For instance, the only image of a man wearing a *kaffiyah* which is taken to stand for Palestinian terror is included in a sequence of photos named by Said as "Past and Future." This sequence starts with the photo of a girl in a camp in Damascus, a cheerful energetic face, followed by a photo of an elegant young woman, a student from Bir Zeit in the West Bank, smiling graciously and assertively into the camera. Then we have a photo of a Palestinian young man's face, covered up in a *kaffiyah*, showing only his eyes. This photo is followed by another one of an old woman's face from a camp in Galilee/West Bank. She looks self-composed and peaceful (163). Both photos show the two faces, meditating sadly, absorbed deeply in contemplation about their situation of exile. Both confront the camera with some sense of self-awareness. None of the faces pictured by Mohr represents terror or fear. Said's main objective is to highlight the humanity of Palestinian people which has been always denied and shrouded by the image of terror. *After the Last Sky* as a counter narrative tries to explain some of the terror done to the Palestinians which is ignored by Western media, and also examines the construction of Israel in the western media as the model of a democratic country. As a result of 1948 war, exile has become a permanent condition in which they have attempted to express the wounds of a lost homeland and of a people transformed into a nation of refugees. Said shows through details and numbers the harsh conditions and the continuous injustice from which the Palestinians have suffered under occupation for 45 years, the confiscation of lands, destruction of infrastructure and property, including agricultural lands, demolition of homes, and obstruction of Palestinian access to 40% of the land of the West Bank. He explains some of the factors causing the deterioration of living and political conditions of Palestinians, which undermine the prospects for their rehabilitation and development. The displaced lives of the Palestinian people are now further fragmented by the Israeli wall and overrun by new Israeli settlements.

While the main objectives of ethnographic description have been to precisely analyze, and show cultures as they

are, the identity discourse included within this narrative invites viewers to critically examine stereotypes of Palestinians, while visualizing new prospective of being. Said invites readers to:

look, really look carefully at this sequence of photographs that represents the universal process of aging, perhaps more harshly imposed on us by our predicament; the process takes us from the happy potential of childhood, to the openness of cheerful adolescence, to the strong defensive awareness of being Palestinian under siege, to the careworn and suffering symbol of the modern casualty. If you look at this dynastic passage from youth to age, if you take it in with the eyes of someone for whom photographs are not the exhibition of a foreign specimen of some sort, you will see in it the representation of people for whom you care with concern and affection – family members or intimate friends. (161- 62)

In the process of negotiating the complex relationship between text and photo, the reader turns into a kind of co-creator or collaborator. The narrator here accomplishes a level of closeness to the viewer, who is constantly addressed on an emotional intimate level. Thus the I/You structure serves as a discourse of sincerity that is subjectively, rather than objectively, based. *After the Last Sky* again carries out the challenge to the self-other binary that is implicit in the practice of autoethnography. In the above sequence of photos, as well as in other places in the book, Said invites the viewer to reexamine some of the commonly held assertions about Palestinian children "the 'population factor' – to be feared, and hence to be deported – or constitute special targets for death [...] because each one of them is a potential terrorist" (25). Children are widely represented in Mohr's photographs as both principal and secondary subjects. Most photographs represent portraits of smiling children – only the upper body or head of the subjects are visible and thus lack contextualizing features – they reflect typical innocent childhood and in many cases vulnerable childhood in contrast to the image of "potential terrorists".

Said's narrative emphasizes the analysis of the gaze,

and looking back or returning the gaze. The Palestinians are constantly subject to the gaze of others, and everything related to them is regularly being monitored. Even the photographer as ethnographer is given access into the occupied land by the colonizer, and also shares a disciplinary technology of vision and surveillance that seeks to control, contain, and mask the field of the other. Said says that the photographer is seen by Palestinians as "someone who came from, or acted at the direction of, those who put them where they so miserably are. There was the embarrassment of people uncertain why they were being looked at and recorded. Powerless to stop it" (14). Two photos adjoining this passage exemplify this state of powerlessness in front of the camera (13). The first is of a woman holding her baby; the second is of young man sitting on a chair. Though both are half-facing the camera, and are pretending to look at something else in the other direction, we sense their self-consciousness about being photographed. The man looks uncomfortable. The woman's body appears tense, wrapping her hands around her baby, trying to hold herself. In the theories of disciplinary power found in the in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison* (1975), Michel Foucault explains how the "quite coercion" and monitoring gaze associated with disciplinary forces have become pervasive throughout modern western cultures. Monitoring the gaze originally applied to carceral system becomes one of the most influential theories of viewing dynamics in the domain of visual analysis. Foucault explains the system of panopticon⁸ as a "machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing, in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (202). In the panoptic monitoring system "the codified power to punish turns into a disciplinary power to observe" (187, 224). These techniques of surveillance played an important role in the colonial rule.

Thus, *After the Last Sky* strongly emphasizes the importance of Palestinians looking back, reading themselves, and also analyzing the viewer or the reader. Said writes:

I would like to think, though, that such a book not only tells the reader about us, but in some way also reads the reader. I would like to think that we

are not just the people seen here or looked at in these photographs: We are looking at our observers [...] we are more than someone's object. We do more than stand passively in front of whoever, for whatever reason, has wanted to look at us. If you cannot finally see this about us, we will not allow ourselves to believe that the failure has been entirely ours. Not any more. (166)

Only few of Mohr's photos are oblique, catching people working in the fields, factories, workshops, clinics, laboratories, selling and buying in the markets, wondering in the streets, studying in schools, universities, etc. For the most part of photos, people look back. Shloss argues that many of Mohr's images are self-reflective", that is "they speak imagistically of the situation of their composition" (1995, 149). The common aspect of many of the images of Palestinian faces included in the book is Mohr's method of stripping out the background behind the subjects of his photographs of any objects, as if he is inviting the viewer to read intention in the gaze alone, independent of the background. The reader is invited into the consciousness behind their eyes, to unreservedly connect with the other. A direct eye contact also disrupts the authority and dominance of the photographer and, by extension, the viewer. Paula Amad argues that looking back at the camera "has the effect of unbalancing cinema's dominant gaze, typically described in antivisual critiques as a distanced, voyeuristic, clinical, controlling, invisible, Orientalizing, and dehumanizing deployment of vision" (2013, 53). According to her, "the returned gaze can be associated with subversion, defiance, or rebuke" (53). Foucault's rigid unidirectional theory of vision-as-power is challenged here. The return of the gaze is aimed at regaining some sense of agency for the anonymous masses caught in like "species of some sort" or the "opposite and unequal other" within the visual "exhibition".

A fascinating photograph which designates the theme of gazing back is the cover page. The photo was taken in 1967, a few days after the end of the Jun War. It shows an Israeli officer in the foreground. The furrowed brows and drawn face give the officer an anxious expression; his downcast eyes are lost in thought. While almost on a higher level behind the Israeli, safely contained behind

the window, a young Palestinian boy stares assertively back at the camera, and forcing his face and hand boldly against the glass of the window. This image symbolically demonstrates that there is still a possibility for reversing "see/being seen dyad". Ultimately, Said wants to mark this gaze back as a site of resistance and power; or a kind of disruption of the unidirectional model of power. It also reminds us that it is not only the viewer who gazes at the Palestinians in the photographs; they stare back at us as a reminder that they cannot be forgotten, or that their presence cannot be negated. Surely, this image comes much closer to describing the emphasis of *After the Last Sky* that the Palestinians "are the periphery, the image that will not go away" regardless of "every new effort to prove that we were never really there (41-2)".

Said's analysis is also projected onto his recognition of his position as an outsider/insider⁽⁹⁾ His involvement as both an insider/outsider, hangs actually about every "I" in the narrative. He employs the narrative technique of "double-vision". Most of Said's description of this method comes in the first section of the book:

Our intention was to show Palestinians through Palestinian eyes without minimizing the extent to which even to themselves they feel different, or 'other.' Many Palestinian friends who saw Jean Mohr's pictures thought that he saw us as no one else has. But we also felt that he saw us as we would have seen ourselves -- at once inside and outside our world. The same double vision informs my text. (6)

This is especially so in photographs of people looking at photographs as in the photo captioned: "Memories of Jerusalem: looking at pictures" (61). Two Palestinian ladies in their middle age look at a picture book. The image of the split-image, the subjects looking at themselves in the image of another photograph, is also an image of the consciousness splitting into subject and object. The viewer is aware of the medium of photography as a doubling method. Thus, the Palestinians are scrutinizing themselves, and reading themselves as well. This "double vision" is an indicative of the complex exilic consciousness. Said underlines "Identity, who we are, where we come from, what we are – is difficult to

maintain in exile [...] We are 'other,' and opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement and exodus. Silence and discretion veil the hurt, slow the body searches, soothe the sting of loss" (16-17). Wherever Palestinians live, they are outsiders, defined not by their perception of self, but by their otherness. For Said, having an exilic consciousness and a problematic relationship to a lost home helps to shape the entire critical disposition of an outsider. He also experiences himself as unstable "cluster of flowing currents". Rather than a fixed solid entity, such an attitude introduces us to a plurality of vision.

Said's liminal identity space and cross-cultural knowledge challenges insider-outsider distinctions. Said's narrative hovers between performing ethnographically, as an outsider observer, and acting autoethnographically as a cultural eyewitness and a constructor of a past to frame his subjectivity. In doing so, he creates another kind of aesthetic distance in order to gain more transparency of the image and force to his interpretive analysis of Mohr's photographs. While he consciously strives to reconstruct his relationship with the Palestinian community as a privileged ethnographer, he encounters his own marginalization by participating in the dominant American discourse that considers Palestinians as the other. His "double vision" is a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for presenting the representational exercise itself. This instability reflects his complex discursive positioning as an autoethnographer. Said writes:

As I wrote, I found myself switching pronouns, from 'we' to 'you' to 'they,' to designate Palestinians. As abrupt as these shifts are, I feel they reproduce the way 'we' experience ourselves, the way 'you' sense that others look at you, the way, in your solitude, you feel the distance between where 'you' are and where 'they' are. The multifaceted vision is essential to any representation of us. (6)

Said's in-between position and his multiple identities enable him to play the dual role of observer and informant. He occupies an anthropological border area in which constitutive distinctions between the familiar and the strange become blurred.

For demonstrating this insider-outsider dialectic, I will direct our attention to the second set of photographs in this book: "Interiors". The phrase "min al-dakhil", "from the interior", refers to territories and people still Palestinian despite the Israeli colonisation. In such a context, Mohr's photographs of refugee camps suggest that the experience of displacement affects every aspect of home, leaving not one corner of Palestinians' lives untouched (71). Mohr's photos also reflect an imbalanced world, showing the Israeli settlements with their "rude interventionary power" devastating the formerly understood meaning of home (72-73). The photos in this section reveal that familiarity of Palestinian villages and strangeness of Israeli settlements are merged together in the oddest way, adjoining and opposing at the same time.

Said focuses on the psychological meaning of "al-dakhil", which refers "to that region on the inside that is protected by both the wall of solidarity formed by members of the group, and the hostile enclosure created around by the more powerful" (52). Thus since the way into the interior or the interior itself is blocked by colonialization and displacement, Said explains that the challenge to create a private cultural realm is a recurring life pattern among Palestinians from different backgrounds. He explains that:

[t]his compulsion to repeat is evident in the interiors of Palestinian house of all classes [...] Wherever there are Palestinians, the same expectant intimacy, the same displays of affection and of objects [...] naturally they authenticate and clarify the fact that you are in a Palestinian home. But it is more than that. It is part of a larger pattern of repetition in which even I, supposedly liberated and secular, participate. We keep re-creating the interior – tables are set, living rooms furnished, knick –knacks arranged, photographs set forth –[...] Something is always slightly off, something always does not work. Pictures in Palestinian houses are always hung too high, and in what seem to be random places. Something is always missing by virtue of the excess. (58)

In this psychological analysis, Said applies Freud's concept "the repetition compulsion", which refers to the

individual's tendency to repeat unconsciously through their actions the past that is linked to traumatic experience (Wheatley-Crosbie 2006). Said argues that this pattern of repetition "inadvertently highlights and preserves the rift or break fundamental to our lives" (58). Said suggests here that the "rift" is the *nakba* (translated as the catastrophe) which refers to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and the compulsory, unpredicted dispossession of many Palestinians from their lands. Said explains that the Palestinian's profound sense of loss is indicated constantly by "this compulsion to repeat" practices of excess. He also notices that "the rift is usually expressed as a comic dislocation", such as "too many places at the table; too many pictures; too many objects; too much food" (60). Said discovers a less or more conscious fetishization of the lost land. The familiar objects in their unsuspecting abundance express the desire to ground belonging in something physical. It is normal to see familiar intimate objects representative of home. But it is the violent suggestion signified by the "the oddness of these excesses, and asymmetries, their constitutively anti-aesthetic effect" (61), that give the photos their edge and challenge the undertone of safety linked to domestic settings.

Eventually, interiors attract the attention of Jean Mohr's camera, but they are not easily understood by strangers. Mohr's relative outsider position means that he can never really know enough to be able to represent aspects of Palestinian culture the way they are experienced by the members of this culture. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize the critical aspect of the *After the Last Sky*, which presents legitimate and balancing perspective to Mohr's photographs. Said has been able to engage issues of identity, because they are intimately connected with his relevant personal experience of displacement from Palestine. Said's home in Jerusalem is occupied by Israelis. Return is not an option. For instance, in the case of his father who was born and raised in Jerusalem: "little of it remained with him except a fragmentary story or two, an odd coin or medal, one photograph of his father on horseback, and two small rugs" (14). It is clear here that Said has more advantageous position in understanding the emotive dimensions of behavior, and has intimate knowledge of his society and its daily routines, symbols, feelings of

empathy that are exceedingly difficult for outsiders to understand. He has been able to engage these issues of representation, while conventional outsider ethnographic writing (generally speaking) remain biased and fail to address the insider's perspective and particular cultural features and practices.

CONCLUSION

Said's idea of discourse in *After the Last Sky* is motivated by the loss of Palestine, and his commitment to writing as an emancipatory action. Said shows interest in the idea of narration as part of its commitment to close reading and revisionary interpretation; but that pedagogical perception is surpassed by the commitment of intellectual resistance. He brings the occupied lands and displaced people of Palestine to the fore, and he joins the quest for knowledge and justice in the face of silence, forgetfulness. In this context, western discourses are engaged dialogically, so that the terms of Palestinian identity and Palestinian cause are interrogated by Said's strategic counter narrative. Throughout the book, Said makes a number of signature moves that help to illustrate how his poetics, with its exploration (and challenge to) established notions of the unified self, culture, and

writing, engages with a critical term like "autoethnography". For one thing, the purity of the self or the "auto" is interrogated, not only by his insistence on collaborations with other Palestinian intertexts, and dialogue with Mohr's photos, as we have seen, but also in his exploration of subjectivity as a complex construction. He is actually aware that identity is always in process, always shifting; thus, Said defies being classified as "other" in any established/essentialized way. An ethnographic subjectivity, a self that understands itself as culturally established is essentially divided in the autoethnographic narrative as an outsider/insider who travels between different cultural borders, history and memory, experience and image. As the issues concerning complex identities are among the most subjective aspects of culture, they do not submit themselves easily to anthropological research techniques. Yet, *After the Last Sky* produces a subjective space that merges anthropologist and informant, subject and object of the gaze, under the sign of one identity. This paper suggests that there is no evident split between experience and representation, *After the Last Sky* carves ethnographic subjectivity as a form of writing, a performance of the self.

NOTES

- (1) The critiques of the old ways of representing other cultures provide anthropology new models of understanding which focus on the relationship between ethnographers and their subjects. Ethnography has recently been called upon to pay closer attention to its conditions of writing. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986) is a collection of essays which embrace the values of the reflexive turn by urging ethnographers to critically question themselves, their role, and the textual representation of their fieldwork. Glifford Greetz in his book *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in interpretive Anthropology* (1986) initiated what is currently considered as a trend of postmodern ethnography, in which the situatedness of anthropological knowledge, which had previously anticipated to the objective and remote observation in its examination of other cultures, is highlighted. This

has been important in erasing the pretense of objectivity and freedom from prejudice in the prevailing positivist research model, providing support for research methods that depend more on subjectivity. Stephen A. Taylor has claimed that eliminating the anthropological observer's aloofness from his or her observed and the recognition of their common affiliations and identifications will create a postmodern ethnography that supports the situatedness of knowledge over universal generalizations and abstractions. Paul Atkinson in *The Ethnographic Imagination* asks sociologists to be aware of the material inequalities that shape not just cultures but their study (Atkinson 1990, 1).

- (2) A postcolonial reconsideration of these cultural texts reveals, for instance, that the civilized realm of Austen's *Mansfield Park* is sustained by the distant slave plantation of Antigua. See Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, (pp, 95-116)
- (3) For Said, as explained in his *Culture and*

Imperialism, worldliness destabilizes restricted professionalism. In the Postcolonial field, although some would seek to categorize his writings into academic works such as *Orientalism*, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, *Culture and Imperialism*, and *Representations of the Intellectual* and political works such as *The Question of Palestine*, *Covering Islam*, *After the Last Sky*, *Blaming the Victims*, and *The Politics of Dispossession*, Said himself would vigorously refuse to accept such a splitting up, since it in one way reproduces exactly the kind of over-specialization which, according to him, ruin or distort intellectual work.

- (4) There are different means of thinking about autoethnography, both as a concept and practice. The concept raises important questions about who is speaking, for whom, and why. It also shows the interrelatedness between autobiography and ethnography and highlights the relationship among self, culture, and writing. As Ellis and Bochner observe, "Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto)" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740). Efforts to circumscribe what counts as autoethnography have provoked ongoing debates. Deborah Reed-Danahay argues that newly informed autoethnography:

reflects a changing conception of both the self and society in the late twentieth century [...] It synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question, and a postmodern autobiography, in which the notion of a coherent individual self has been similarly called into question. (1997, 2)

- (5) The representations of the "contact zones" have taken various shapes. One of the forms is an examination which, instead of adopting a marginal position itself, brings the margins into the centre by applying a deconstructive reading to the prevailing histories of the West. Studies like Edward Said's *Orientalism* similarly focus not on the external, opposing strengths of a marginal position, but on the internal inconsistencies within dominant Western forms of knowledge. This strategy brings the margins into the centre in order to examine the very structure which reflects the centre and margins as such.
- (6) Visual ethnographies utilize photographs and other visual content as central data components, which are typically generated by the researcher (Schwartz 1989; Banks 2007; Pink 2007).
- (7) The collaboration between Said and Mohr may reflect the ethics of postmodern ethnography which "foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer" (Taylor 1986, 126).
- (8) Panopticism refers to the system of panopticon which was a tower placed in a central position within the prison. From this tower, the guards would be able to observe every cell and the pensioners inside them, but it was designed in such a way that the pensioners would never know whether they were being observed or not. Prisoners would assume that they could be observed at any moment and would adjust their behavior accordingly.
- (9) The "insider/outsider" position and its relationship with the constitution of knowledge in contemporary cultural life is reflected in the work of the anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, the filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-Ha, and theorists like Teresa de Lauretis and Gayatri Spivak.

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الاولتو اثنوغرافية البصرية: اعادة بناء "الآخر" في *After The Last Sky* لادوارد سعيد

رياب طه الكساسبة *

ملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى قراءة وتحليل عمل إدوارد سعيد *After The Last Sky* كمثال على الاولتو اثنوغرافية البصرية (Visual autoethnography). حيث لجأ سعيد إلى الامكانيات النقدية الكامنة في الاولتو اثنوغرافي من أجل دراسة الصور الإثنوغرافية عن الشعب الفلسطيني - الصور المستخدمة لتوثيق أنماط من الثقافة الفلسطينية ، والتي كانت عادة تستخدم في خطاب "الآخر". استخدم سعيد الاولتو اثنوغرافي كخطاب مضاد يحاول توضيح تعقيدات الهوية الفلسطينية في الشتات. وكذلك من أجل تسليط الضوء على الثقافة الفلسطينية المهمشة في الخطاب الاعلامي الثقافي الغربي السائد من خلال اظهار تفاصيل وشهادات تاريخية حية ، كان من غير الممكن ان تلاحظ اذا قدمت بشكل فكري مجرد.

الكلمات الدالة: الاولتو اثنوغرافية البصرية، إدوارد سعيد، تصوير وإعادة بناء "الآخر".

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