

## CONTEXTUALIZING THE CONCEPT OF EXILE AND THE OTHER: THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN EDWARD SAID'S OUT OF PLACE

SÜRGÜN KAVRAMI VE ÖTEKİ BAĞLAMINDA EDWARD W. SAID'İN  
YERSİZ YURTSUZ İSİMLİ ESERİNDE KİMLİK KARMASASI

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**Abstract:** The autobiographical work, *Out of Place*, sheds light on the identity crisis by presenting sections from the author's life. The East and West conflict experienced by Edward W. Said is a crisis of cultural identity caused by the problem of not belonging as being 'the other'. The fundamental differences in the perspective of the two communities on life determine the extent of this conflict. This identity crisis of being 'the other', which has deepened the sense of rootlessness and uncertainty in cultural memory, prompted Edward W. Said to write his autobiography. Said, in his work, successfully presented the crisis of identity and the sense of (un)belonging that he aroused because of both the effect of the displacement he experienced due to the conditions of the period and the effect of living in Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt as an Arab-Christian American citizen with a British name and living in America as an Arab since his childhood. The subject of this study is the identity crisis that Edward W. Said experienced as result of his birth in Arab lands as a child of a Christian family and then leaving his country and immigrating to the West due to the political conditions of the period and eventually his becoming 'the other' in wherever he stayed. It is the main purpose of this study to determine whether Said's exile life and his identity problem as being 'the other' influenced the author's personality and work; if any, what kind of effect it has. The author's identity problem of being the other and his perspective against this problem will be examined by doing context analysis with direct quotations from the work. Furthermore, in this study, autobiographical work of Said, who is stuck between the "clash of civilizations" seeking an answer to the question "Who am I?", will be analyzed by using the positivist method focusing on the concept of immigration, exile and othering throughout his work *Out of Place*. This article aims to explore the relationship between life and work of Edward Said, considering the literary work is a product created depending on the life story of the author himself.

**Keywords:** 'the other', exile, immigration, identity crisis, lack of belonging.

**Özet:** Edward W. Said'in Hristiyan bir ailenin çocuğu olarak Arap topraklarında dünyaya gelmesinin, ve ardından dönemin siyasal koşulları yüzünden ülkesini terk edip Batı'ya göç etmesi sonucunda yaşadığı 'ötekileştirme' ve bunun sonucunda ortaya çıkan kimlik krizi bu çalışmanın konusunu oluşturur. *Yersiz Yurtsuz* adlı otobiyografik eser, yazarın yaşamından kesitler sunarak yaşanan bu 'öteki' olma durumuna ve bundan doğan kimlik bunalımına ışık tutmaktadır. Edward W. Said'in yaşadığı doğu-batı çatışması, ait olamama probleminin neden olduğu kültürel bir kimlik krizidir. İki toplumun yaşama bakış açısındaki temel farklılıklar, bu çatışmanın boyutunu belirler. Kültürel bellekte köksüzlük ve belirsizlik hissini gittikçe derinleştiren bu ötekilik ve kimlik krizi, Edward Said'i bu otobiyografiyi yazmaya yönlendirmiştir. Said, eserinde gerek dönemin şartlarından ötürü yaşadığı yer değiştirmelerin etkisiyle gerekse aynı anda hem İngiliz isme sahip olup Arap kökenli Hristiyan Amerikan vatandaşı olarak Filistin, Lübnan, ve Mısır'da hem de bir Arap olarak Amerika'da yaşamının, küçüklüğünden bu yana onda bıraktığı etkinin sonucu olarak kendisinde uyandırdığı kimlik bunalımını ve aidiyetsizlik hissini eserinde başarılı bir şekilde işlemiştir. Said'in yaşadığı sürgün hayatının, kimlik sorununun ve ötekileştirilmenin, yazarın kişilik ve eseri üzerinde bir etkisi olup olmadığını, eğer varsa; ne tür bir etkisi olduğunu tespit etmek bu çalışmanın asıl amacıdır. Yazarın kimlik problemi ve bu soruna karşı bakış açısı içerik çözümlemesi yöntemiyle ve eserden doğrudan alıntılarla incelenecektir. Ayrıca, çalışma, göç ve sürgün kavramına değinecek ve çatışan kültürlerin arasında sıkışıp kalmış ve bu durumdan ötürü "ben kimim?" sorusuna cevap arayan Said' in *Yersiz Yurtsuz* adlı otobiyografik eserini pozitivist yöntem kullanarak analiz edecektir. Bu yöntemde, edebi eserin bizzat yazarın hayat hikayesine bağlı olarak ortaya konan bir ürün olduğu düşünülerek hayat-eser ilişkisini keşfetme amacı güdülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** 'Öteki', sürgün, göç, kimlik bunalımı, aidiyetsizlik.

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### Introduction

Identity, in its most basic definition, is the defining features that distinguish an individual or group from others. This concept exists in communication with cultural components, traditions, and environment. In the formation of an exile and self-stuck between conflicting

cultures, the individual constantly asks who or what she/he is and failing to provide logical answers to these questions, there appears a kind of conflict within herself/himself, resulting in so called the concept of identity crisis.

When we take this identity crisis away from individualism and treat it as a social problem, it is clearly observed that this problem manifests itself in conflict environments where radical social changes continue or in distressed atmospheres where different cultural groups have to live together. In this context, the subject of this study is the identity crisis experienced by Edward W. Said, one of the well-known writers, comparatist, and intellectuals of the twentieth century, who was born as a child of a Christian family in Arab land and then left his country and immigrated to the West due to the political conditions of the period. For this reason, the autobiographical work *Out of Place (Yersiz Yurtsuz)* sheds light on this identity crisis by presenting sections from the author's life. It is the main purpose of this study to determine whether Said's exile life and identity problem influenced the author's personality and work; if any, what kind of effect it has. The author's identity problem and his perspective against this problem will be examined by doing context analysis with direct quotations from the work.

As Angin mentions in literary texts of the modern world created by the narrator there are numerous traces which comes from the author's own personal experiences.<sup>1</sup> In his autobiographical work, the author clearly reveals the ambiguities he experiences between the two identities and that he is trying to develop a sense of belonging to the society he is in, to adapt, in short, to find out who he is. In this study, autobiographical work of Said, who is stuck between the "clash of civilizations" seeking an answer to the question "Who am I?", will be analyzed by using the positivist method focusing on the concept of immigration, exile and othering throughout his work *Out of Place*. This article aims to explore the relationship between life and work of Edward Said, considering the literary work is a product created depending on the life story of the author himself. The focus of the positivist method of investigation is the author's life story, the period he lives in, the environment and the effects of these factors on the work.

Migration and exile are simply defined as physical mobility in the form of displacement from one place to another. Paul Allatson and Jo McCormack define exile as the prohibition and expulsion of people and groups, who are generally perceived as threats by the state or the regime, in order to prevent their efforts to change the government.<sup>2</sup>

The "other," on the other hand, as Güven Kilicarslan states, "is someone or something that is perceived by the group as not belonging or as being different in some fundamental way or ways. The other, for example, may be someone who of a different race, nationality, sexual orientation, origin, religion, social class, etc."<sup>3</sup> She mentions that "this difference results in individuals being part of either "us" or "them." However, being part of the dichotomy of "us" or "them" often renders the latter inferior because they lack qualities such as the identity that the former (i.e., "the self" or "us") possesses."<sup>4</sup>

It can be said that migration is a process caused by many other factors and variables in addition to socio-economic reasons, and this process naturally also has different cultural consequences. These cultural results focus on the concepts of identity and belonging. The individual forced to migrate has to adapt to the new society s/he enters, but this is not an easy process. Immigrants who have adaptation problems cannot adopt the new environment they live in and have a sociocultural integration problem.

The individual who has to leave homeland for differing reasons, might try to protect the cultural values gained so as not to disappear in the newly attended culture. On the other hand, in an effort to adapt to the new culture, an individual is unwittingly dragged into an identity crisis and a problem of belonging. The individual is neither herself/himself nor the other anymore, s/he is an exile with a hybrid identity and an inclusion issue.

It is generally forgotten that someone who "immigrated to a foreign country" first immigrated from his own country. This is not an ordinary detail, the immigrant is really two people, and he sees himself that way. It belongs to two different societies and does not have the same status in both societies. For example, someone with a diploma who succumbs to a low-level job in the city he is exiled may be a respected person in his homeland. A Moroccan worker who speaks timidly, always looking down on the northern construction sites, can turn into a storyteller with self-confident movements, speaking loudly and softly, when he returns to his relatives with pride.<sup>5</sup>

Edward Said summarizes the situation of exile and the identity crisis as follows in his book:

There is a widespread but completely false assumption that being in exile means being completely disconnected, isolated, desperate from where we were born. If only this simple distinction were true, because then we would have the comfort of knowing that what we left behind is in a way unthinkable and in no way reversible. The truth is that for most exiles the difficulty is not just being forced to live away from the nest; [...] That is why the exile is in a state of coexistence, can neither merge with its new environment, nor be completely detached from the old, neither their attachment nor the detachment is nostalgic and emotional at one level, a skilled imitator on another level, or someone who has been secretly ostracized on another level.<sup>6</sup>

It can be said that the exile, which disrupts the normal course of the individual's life and drives the displaced person away from the life and society of the place where they live influences time, space, and language issues. Geographical change and departure from homeland trigger the language problem causing a deep jolt to the individual's ego. As a result, the phenomena of "homeland" come to the fore in exile literature. These experiences cause the exiled person to question the concepts of nation, homeland, language, geographical boundary, and self, but the trauma of being uprooted remains constant and traces of these oppositions are seen in the works of the exiled people.

The east-west conflict experienced by Edward Said is a crisis of cultural identity caused by the problem of not belonging. The fundamental differences in the perspective of the two communities on life determine the extent and duration of this conflict. The identity crisis, which deepened the sense of rootlessness and uncertainty within the cultural memory, led Edward Said to write his autobiography.

Edward W. Said, of Palestinian origin, was born on November 1, 1935, to a Christian family in Jerusalem, which was under British occupation at that time. His father, an American citizen, names Said the eighth king of England Edward. Due to the fact that English is spoken at home, Said tends to speak English instead of Arabic.

In 1948, due to the political events of the period, he immigrated to Egypt with his family temporarily and started to study at Victoria College, a colonial school, where speaking a language other than English is prohibited in Cairo. But in 1951, he was removed from this school, where he felt like the "other", for disciplinary reasons and sent to America by his father for education.

Said gets the opportunity to travel around the world in Massachusetts; however, he cannot adopt the places he travels or his school of study. Said, who started to think more independently and liberally by meeting people from different cultures in the American school, which has much more flexible rules than Victoria College, graduated from Princeton University in 1957, and completed his education in 1964 by completing his master's and doctorate at Harvard University.

Having succeeded in attracting attention with his academic achievements, Said began teaching at Columbia University in New York in 1963. He succeeded in becoming an assistant in 1965, associate professor in 1968 and professor in 1970.

In 1967, with the effect of the Arab Israeli War and the Vietnam War, he participated in the Palestinian Nationalism operation. This movement caused Said's backlash and criticized him for being anti-Jewish in the United States.

Said, who served as the Palestinian representative in the Palestinian Parliament for 14 years, started to write his autobiographical work *Out of Place*, which consists of his childhood and youth, after he fell ill with leukemia at the end of the 90's. He passed away on September 25, 2003, in New York after a long and difficult treatment period.

Said, in his autobiographical work *Out of Place*, deals with the identity crisis he experienced as a result of the influence of identities which are stuck between the conflicting East-West cultures, having a British name and being an American citizen of Arab origin, living in Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt as an Arab in America. This crisis of identity, which does not feel a sense of belonging to the societies in which he lives, leads him to write this autobiographical work which consists of ten parts, and Said qualifies this work as "the tally of a landless, largely lost or forgotten World."<sup>7</sup>

The first thing that drives Said to this identity crisis is his name and surname written on his identity card. Drawing attention to the contradiction between the Arabic surname "Said" and the British name "Edward", he expresses how these two contrasts put him in a difficult position as the following:

That is why it took me about fifty years to get used to the foolish English name "Edward", whose Arabness is indisputably attached to the surname Said, or rather, to become less strange. ... Over the years, depending on the situation at the time, I chose to roll "Edward" in my mouth and emphasize "Said" or vice versa. In some, I was bringing these two in a row so quickly that neither one nor the other was understood.<sup>8</sup>

He states that the confusion experienced by the people he just met at Said's name-surname discrepancy was an intolerable situation for him.

Said continues to clearly emphasize that his identity crisis is not only name and language centered in the following parts of his work. According to him, it is not normal for his family to come from different origins, he even sees this as a disadvantage for him and complains that having multiple origins increases his ambiguous sense of identity. Having a troubled school life, Said is sent by his father to the very strict Jazeera Preparatory School to be disciplined. However, in this environment, Said's identity crisis increases, and he feels himself as the other:

I did not have any contact with British children outside of school; an invisible wall hid them behind another world whose doors were closed to me. Although I remember that one of them spoke specifically about "home", in my eyes home meant "them", and "home" in the deepest sense of the word was a place where I was left out. ... Some of the GPS students thought we were Egyptian, but we (especially me) had something "wrong", "disgusting", and I couldn't quite understand what it was.

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As a result of both family and school pressure, Said cannot escape punishment by assuming an increasingly uneasy character.

In the fourth part of the book, Said criticizes his family emphasizing that the cultural complexity he experienced is reflected in his identity development. Said criticizes his family on this matter. Speaking of his memories in the photographs, Said, despite all the uncertainty of his family and their lives, complains about how unnatural and factitious they are and that they ignore the uncertainties and difficulties. He expresses his disappointment with the fake family photographs and thinks that his family is nothing but Arabs trying to pretend to be Europeans:

That smile on everyone's face, the unrealistically joyful, even almost robust images of my mother (I remember her as a slimmer, sader person) made it clear how artificial we were: A family determined to pretend to be European, which you cannot certainly attribute to Egypt and Arab lands. If it wasn't a camel, a gardener, a palm tree, a pyramid, or a fez driver who momentarily entered the focus of the camera, steadily focused on the children and various relatives.<sup>10</sup>

In the fifth chapter of his book, Said talks about the memories of the American High School in Cairo, which he started in the autumn of 1946. Seeing that he is very different from the other students in this school triggers his identity conflict. In the school, where there is a cosmopolitan student group, everyone is prohibited from speaking their mother tongue, and this prevents Said from having a certain language affiliation. In addition to the difficulties he has with American students, the reprimands of his teacher named Miss Clark and the whole process of adaptation cause Said to question his identity repeatedly.

Increasingly I hated this identity, and ironically, I had no choice but to this. I had become such a dangerous person that I was inevitably sent to Miss Willis, an elderly Midwestern in her own right, gray-haired who seemed more inconclusive than angry with my bad progress.<sup>11</sup>

Later in the work, Said talks about another incident that hurts the development of identity as much as Miss Clark. In early July 1948, he sailed to New York to treat his father. During part of their time here, Said is decided to be sent by his family to Maranacook camp in Maine, and the day after this decision, he finds himself in the camp.

Said states that he got into a difficult situation and learned his lesson once again because of his identity which he describes as "foreign, insecure and transitory" of an incident that is not important in the camp. In an incident with someone named Murray, Said says he can't get used to American food, so he is seen and humiliated by Murray while eating one of the sausages left over from dinner because of hunger. Stunned, Said repeatedly apologizes to Murray at the threat of sending him back home from the camp, and begins begging him not to be returned, fearing the treatment he will be subjected to by his family. This incident, which left a very negative effect on Said, causes him to hate his ambiguous identity and confronts him with the fact that wherever he goes in the world, he will not be able to escape from this feeling of homelessness and find peace anywhere:

I felt like I was a wholly foreign disgrace to the world that Miss Clark and Murray wanted to kick me out of. My nationality, my background, my true origins, and what I have done in the past were all at the heart of my problem. No matter what school I went to, which group I entered, whatever situation I fell into, I could not find a suitable way to banish these ghosts from the past that haunted me.<sup>12</sup>

The author reflects the events in his life chronologically from the seventh part of the work to the reader, and he expresses how this feeling of unbelonging has been effective in the formation of his identity since childhood, and that he has not been able to get rid of this effect throughout his life; that the reasons for the identities he creates and the identity conflicts he experiences in order to have a sense of belonging have been migrating since his childhood as follows:

The sub-themes that were decisive in my story are the emergence of a second self that has long voluntarily concealed itself beneath the social characteristics that I often craft and use and that belongs to the self that I sometimes refer to as "Edward", which my parents tried to construct as well as the increasing number of migrations have disrupted my life since my childhood.<sup>13</sup>

However, Said also emphasizes that the drift he has experienced since his childhood, although painful, has become an indispensable part of his life:

As I know nothing more painful than being dragged from country to country, city to city, house to house, language to language, environment to environment, nothing else could summarize my life better than this nomadism, which for some reason I could not do without it.<sup>14</sup>

Complaining about this life of exile, the feeling of homelessness and identity ambiguity that he lived from the very beginning of his work, Said, while finishing his autobiography, confesses to his reader that, despite all the incompatibilities he has experienced throughout his life, he now accepts "not being exactly what it should be, preferring to be out of place (rootless)."<sup>15</sup>

As it is clearly stated, Edward Said, as an individual who was born in Arab lands and had to migrate due to the conditions of the period, openly conveys the identity ambiguity he experienced in his autobiographical work.

The self is the sum of the positive or negative responses that an individual develops with the effect of the events around him, his own characteristics, abilities, value judgments, wishes and ideals. In this context, self-development is a social phenomenon that is largely determined by the environment. Because the individual perceives his self by seeing himself with other people's eyes and the result he deduced from their reactions, attitudes, and behaviors towards him. These, in turn, are interpreted by the individual through self-perception and form the core of the self-concept and a system of values.<sup>16</sup>

While Geçtan says that "when the clarity of reference points which guides his behaviors is disrupted, his perception of identity becomes blurred", he emphasizes that a person who is displaced from his homeland, who is detached from his own culture, will experience an identity crisis and will not realize his existence at the conscious level.<sup>17</sup> This is the reason why Edward Said was dragged from place to place throughout his life, unable to root out, unable to feel belonging, unable to find his identity and experience an identity crisis. Based on the experiences conveyed by the author, it can be said that the reasons for Said's identity conflict are language, religion, foreign-centered education, having to leave the country and having different origins.

His surname, which does not match the author's first name at birth, is the first conflict in his life. Besides the name problem, another situation that is equally difficult for Said is the language problem. The author expresses his situation in "The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile (*Kış Ruhü*)" as follows:

Even worse, my native language, Arabic, and English, my school language, were inextricably intertwined: I never knew which was my first language, and although I was dreaming in both, I did not feel fully at home in either. Whenever I say an English sentence, its Arabic echoes inside me and vice versa.<sup>18</sup>

Said emphasizes that when speaking both languages, he does not feel fully at home and that he cannot fully embrace both languages. In addition to the language conflict the author is experiencing, he also has a conflict of religion. Being born as a Christian in Arab lands, which are mostly Muslims, creates a great uncertainty in terms of Said's identity.

One of the reasons for Said's identity ambiguity is his family roots. When the family background of the author is examined, it is seen that there is no unity due to the family members' coming from different cultures and a strong bond cannot be established between the family members. Human beings always want to be attached to one and belong somewhere. This belonging first begins with the family, then continues with the society, the nation, and the homeland. The fact that Said calls his life "the tally of a lost or forgotten world" is a clear proof that he sees this identity ambiguity as a difficult and exhausting situation.

## Conclusion

In this study, as being born in Arabian lands as a child of a Christian family and later immigrated to the West, what kind of identity crisis Said has was determined with quotations from his own works. The difficulties he had to face as an Eastern individual living in the West were emphasized and it was seen that these problems greatly influenced the author's concept of identity.

The author clearly stated in his work the ambiguities he lived between the two identities and that he was trying to develop a sense of belonging to the society he was in, to adapt, in short, to find out who he was. In the study, the concept of immigration and exile was emphasized, and after giving brief information about the life of the author who was stuck between the conflicting cultures and was looking for his identity because of this situation, his autobiographical work called *Out of Place* was examined using a positivist method.

In his work, Edward W. Said has successfully expressed the crisis of identity and the feeling of belonging as a result of the influence he had on him since he was young. This is the consequence of his mixed identity which consists of an individual living in Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt as a Christian American citizen of Arab origin with a British name and living in America as an Arab.



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<sup>1</sup> Zeynep Angın, "Le Horla ve Beyaz Kale'de Horla İkiz Öteki" in *Gölgenin Edebiyattaki İz Düşümleri* ed. Fesun Koşmak, Zeynep Angın, Veysel Lidar, Arzu Yetim (İstanbul: Kriter Yayınları, 2020), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Allatson & Jo McCormack, "Introduction" in *Exile Cultures, Misplaced Identities* ed. Paul Allatson & Jo McCormack (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Zehra Güven Kilicarslan, The Concept of "Otherness" in *The Book of Dede Korkut and The Lais of Marie de France*, "SSSJ, 2021, Vol:7, Issue:76; p. 209.

<sup>4</sup> Zehra Güven Kilicarslan, The Concept of "Otherness" in *The Book Of Dede Korkut and The Lais of Marie de France*, "SSSJ, 2021, Vol:7, Issue:76; p. 209.

<sup>5</sup> Amin Maalouf, *Çivisi Çıkılmış Dünya, Uygarlıklarımız Tükendiğinde*. Trans. by Orçun Türkay, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2009), p. 179.

<sup>6</sup> Edward W. Said, *Entelektüel*. Trans. By Tuncay Birkan (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2013), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Edward W. Said, *Out of Place*, Vintage, 2000, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 290.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 389.

<sup>16</sup> Uçar, G. "Barbara Frischmth'un Eserlerinde Amy'den Mela'ya Kadar Uzanan Kadının Benlik Serüveni" Ed. Ali Gültekin T.C Osmangazi Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bölümü 1. Uluslararası Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Kongresi Eskişehir: ESOGÜ Yayınları, 2005, p. 286.

<sup>17</sup> Engin Geçtan, *Zamane* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2010), p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> Edward. W. Said, *Dünyalar Arasında*. Translated by Tuncay Birkan in *Kış Ruhu: Edward W. Said'den Seçme Yazılar*, (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2016), p. 16.

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