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What is This?
Pulling threads: Intimate systematicity in The Politics of Exile

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Abstract
The achievements of Elizabeth Dauphinee’s (2013) The Politics of Exile are highlighted by means of two juxtapositions. First, Dauphinee’s book invites a contrast to novels because it takes the form of a story. Specifically, Dauphinee’s portrait of the vilified ‘Serbs’ is compared with how the Taliban are treated in Khalid Hosseini’s The Kite Runner and Nadeem Aslam’s The Wasted Vigil. Second, The Politics of Exile is examined as it emerges from Dauphinee’s efforts to overcome the limits of her more academic work. The advantages of Dauphinee’s approach relative to our standard research are presented along five dimensions: the responsibility of closure, the purpose of narration, the transparency of the message, how the work is shown, and the role of generosity. This article critiques Dauphinee’s silence on the purpose of travel. It closes by suggesting what social theory can glean from The Politics of Exile. Social theorists can learn how to theorize more systematically, to weigh the relationship between the form and content in writing more judiciously, and to probe the deeper purposes of our intellectual life-work more fully.

Keywords
violence, identity, other, writing, travel, novels, healing, storytelling

Introduction: Threading the Taliban

In 1978, I was a graduate student in agricultural economics at Michigan State University. I was enrolled in a class with the department’s most prominent development expert, but I made my exit before each lecture’s end to be on time for Professor Ruth Hamilton’s course on global inequality. Professor Hamilton – a radical black professor in the Sociology Department – deployed a collaborative pedagogy that allowed students to follow their curiosity. Our small group selected Afghanistan as the case study. Each of us researched an aspect of what in those days was still a remote and seldom-mentioned buffer state. I agreed to examine Afghanistan’s foreign policy but shifted to an ethnographic analysis of alternative domestic social formations. My colleagues were not amused by my last-minute decision, but they forgave me because they fathomed my investment in the issues.
At a second graduate school, I moved towards dependency theory, world systems theory, and the history of economic thought. But, I never stopped considering Afghanistan. Pashtoons in particular fascinated me. When I was a child in Peshawar, a Pashtoon village was within shouting range of our brick house.

Afghanistan re-entered my life with the events of 11 September 2001. By then, I was an assistant professor whose workload 9/11 doubled. During the day, I taught my classes; at night, after the grounding routines of parenthood, I began to absorb book after book on Afghanistan. I imagined 9/11 revealed my calling: I would be the bridge between those whose state habitually bombed others and those who absorbed that bombing.

I gave two dozen talks between October and November of 2001. Then, abruptly, I ended it. The encounters produced nothing but frustration in me – regardless of whether the venue was a university, a high school, a church, or a colleague’s classroom. My hosts and my audience feigned engagement, but they were too busy sorting out their own messy reactions. I was baffled. I had rekindled my research on Afghanistan, developed some kind of proficiency in the literature, formulated a point of view, and overcome my fear of public speaking, only to find my audience could not hear me. Nor could I glean their real needs.

Did I mention that I have traveled to Kabul in the early 1970s? Twice. Both times as a high-school athlete. Those games and that travel became the source for my first autobiographical essay (Inayatullah, 2003). It was easily my most significant travel, though I had already seen much of the world at a young age. The Kabul trips defeated my elitist arrogance, instigated a newfound humility, and provided the antidote to my ‘westernstruckness’ (Al-Ahmed, 1982).

In 2004, during a sabbatical, I designed a course on Afghanistan. For a year, I worked diligently to make my reading list ‘state of the art’. But I found nothing that described the Taliban worldview. I emailed Professor Barnet Rubin at New York University. Rubin has written many books on Afghanistan and is considered a leading authority – along with Olivier Roy, Ahmed Rashid, and one of my former teachers, Nancy Hatch Dupree.

I mentioned to Professor Rubin that, outside a few paragraphs in Ahmed Rashid’s (2000) *Taliban* where he refers to them as ‘orphans’, I found nothing that treated the Taliban as a historical, anthropological, or sociological phenomenon. I told him I would be grateful if he could point me to the appropriate citations. He replied that what I sought did not exist. Indeed, he suggested that I embark on just such a study and that I should let him know if I found anything. I worried my course would have a gigantic hole at its very core. I was face to face with a confirmed absence.

Today, as far as I know, we still have nothing meaningful on the Taliban. But we do have some failed attempts. I want to briefly examine two novels that try to say something about the Taliban: Khaled Hosseini’s (2003) *The Kite Runner* and Nadeem Aslam’s (2009) *The Wasted Vigil*. I hope their failures will help us assess Elizabeth Dauphinee’s work.

**Two novels that fail**

Art makes for itself two claims. First, that it is the activity of pure imagination; secondly, that it somehow reveals the truth concerning the ultimate nature of the real world. (Collingwood, 1963: 87)

Early in *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini depicts the relationship between two similarly aged boys. Amir, the protagonist, and Hassan, the son of Amir’s father’s servant, have a brotherly rapport framed within a master–servant relationship. In an initial reading, I appreciated how Hosseini developed themes of trauma, memory, and denial. His portrait of Afghanistan coincided with my own short travels there during the 1970s and with my upbringing as a child in Peshawar. Indeed, I was excited
about using the novel in my course. Alas, the book fails exactly where I need it most to succeed – in describing the abhorred other, the Taliban.

To be fair, like the rest of us, Hosseini did not have access to archives, evidence, or narratives on the Taliban. In such cases, however, fiction writers have both a license and a responsibility to fill these gaps. Doing so is never a matter of making up things from thin air. Experience, empathic projection, inner travel, and research are the prerequisites to fictive creation. My favorite example is Babouk, the extraordinary slave narrative published in 1934 by Guy Endore, four years before C. L. R. James’ ([1938] 1989) historical treatment of similar materials in his seminal The Black Jacobins. Endore gives us the trajectory of a West African who is captured, enslaved, and brought to a sugar plantation in pre-revolutionary colonial Haiti. Babouk responds to slavery’s brutality by telling stories that incite revolutionary stirrings. Like Hosseini, Endore lacked ready sources, but he cultivated his imaginative facility by traveling to Haiti and by years of research (Gaspar and Trouillot, 1991: 191, 194.)

Hosseini, in my estimation, falls well short of demonstrating the courage and empathy necessary to provide the Taliban with a plausible sociology, a social psychology, or a political economy. He characterizes the Taliban not as a social configuration shaped by the complex interactions within a global political economy, but through a solitary character – Assef. Assef is the only Taliban character that receives more than a sentence from Hosseini. Even then, Assef emerges not from the rural madrassas within the overlapping boundaries of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but from Amir’s upper-class neighborhood. Further, Assef’s motives for joining the Taliban are not ideological, religious, or even monetary. Rather, he simply takes pleasure in inflicting violence. Indeed, Hosseini has Assef identify Hitler as his hero. In this way, he straightforwardly personifies the Taliban as sociopaths. Hosseini is silent on how and why the Taliban’s humanity took such a terrible turn. The Kite Runner denies the Taliban human attributes by severing them from the life threads of the planet.

Equating the Taliban with the Nazis is perhaps adequate for most Western readers. Unlike Endore, who fills gaps in knowledge and comments on ideological and historical distortions, Hosseini precisely calibrates his novel to exploit the Western reader’s demand for information on post-9/11 Afghanistan (Shaikh, 2011: 264).

The novel’s enormous success – 101 weeks on the bestseller list – depends on cultivating the reader’s desire for a positive outcome in Afghanistan. Hosseini delivers on his readers’ expectation by repeating the following phrase: ‘It is possible to be good again’ (Hosseini, 2003: 2, 192, 226, 310; see also Shaikh, 2011). The word ‘again’ requires that hope emerge from a prior tragedy. Hassan’s childhood serves as the vessel of that tragedy.

The teenage Assef rapes Hassan – a humiliation meant to show Hassan his place in the order of life. Amir is witness to the brutality, but freezes in fear. Amir’s shame in his cowardice moves him to terminate his relationship with Hassan. He tells his father his watch is missing and indicates Hassan as the thief. This insinuation results in Hassan’s father renouncing his lifelong service to Amir’s family. Hassan and his father return to their village to live out the rest of their lives. None of this weakens Hassan’s love and his sense of duty towards Amir – Hassan stands firm within all these disasters. Later in the book, we learn that Hassan has married, that he has a son, that Hassan and his wife are killed, and that a Taliban commander holds their son captive. That commander is Assef.

With the tragedy in place, Hosseini switches to redemption. Assef, of course, is irredeemable. But the adult Amir, now living in California, has a chance to undo the results of his childhood betrayal. Amir returns to Kabul, bests Assef, retrieves and adopts Hassan’s son, and they both return to the USA. This is how Amir becomes ‘good again’.
The move from tragedy to hope bypasses the complicity of Western readers by *subtracting* the history that implicates the readers’ lives. Hosseini ignores the Cold War competition with the USSR that turned Afghanistan into a *rentier* client state (Rubin, 2002); the USA goading the Soviets into invading Afghanistan (Adkin and Yousaf, 2001); the US support and training of the mujahideen, Osama bin Laden among them (Cooley, 2000); the pre-9/11 Western collaboration with the Taliban (Rashid, 2000); the disregard for how the infusion of weapons, drugs, and money would unravel the social fabric of Pakistan (Ali, 2009); and the obliviousness to women’s rights until they became a legitimating cover for the US invasion (Pratt, 2001, 2002).

Severing the West from its role in the destruction of Afghanistan allows Hosseini to depict the West in its favorite role – as the unsullied tutor of modernity: Amir and Hassan’s rescued son will fly in one direction to receive their lessons in California; US military and aid institutions will fly in the opposite direction so that all Afghans can be tutored in modernity. This is how *The Kite Runner* legitimates occupation.

Can we imagine an alternative? If Hosseini had Endore’s sense of responsibility and ambition, what might we expect of him? What questions might we ask him to consider? What might we want to know about the Taliban?

Plenty: (1) What are the origins of the Taliban’s ideas? Have we seen such ideas before? Where and when? What happened to these ideas in other places and times? How do these ideas compare to other doctrines in both Islam and other religions? (2) What kind of social and historical conditions produce a situation that allows the Taliban to emerge as a social movement? Are they a response to the Cold War? To modernity? To secularism? To other forms of Islam? (3) What kind of social institutions (or their absence) allow for a large number of the population in border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan to become the Taliban? For example, as I mentioned, Ahmed Rashid (2000) in his bestselling book *Taliban* suggests that they are orphans. Their biological parents could not keep them in the family and sent them to *madrassas* so that they would at least be fed. As such, they were not raised in a family setting. If so, what happened to the family and to cultural institutions? How were these orphans, in fact, raised? (4) Who funds the Taliban? How do they support their social movement? They were infamous for driving Suzuki pickup trucks. Who paid for these? (5) Which actors are complicit in nurturing the Taliban’s creation? The Soviets? The Pakistanis? The Saudis? The USA? The Afghans themselves? (6) Why were the Taliban so popular in Afghanistan (for a short period of time)? Did they behave similarly or differently from those they replaced (the mujahideen)? Did they ever do anything that benefited Afghans? If so, what? If not, how do we explain their emergence and sustained popularity? (7) What impulses are being satisfied by our dismissal of the Taliban as ‘evil’? When we treat the Taliban as a superficial phenomenon, do we help or hurt the Afghans, the Pakistanis, and ourselves?

The reader might wonder whether these questions do not constitute a rather full research agenda. Have I not already conceded that leading authorities on Afghanistan were defeated by these very questions? Why, then, would I impose them on a writer of fiction? I suspect we condescend to novelists if we imagine they write by bypassing the kind of research we require of social scientists. To write plausibly, they have to consider just such questions.² What remains to be assessed is whether they do it well or not.

To a degree, I can sympathize with Hosseini. Had he addressed these questions, his manuscript would have faced a diminished probability of becoming a bestseller and then a Hollywood film. He may not even have found a willing publisher. Evading these questions, however, leaves him with superficial and temporary success, and with a seductive but ultimately empty commodity.
As I read my assessment, I am struck not so much by what some might consider the harshness of my verdict. Rather, I notice my animus. I suspect I need it for two reasons. First, as I have suggested, I have my own investment in Afghanistan. But, second, my criticism of *The Kite Runner* allows me to foreground the following claim: *The Politics of Exile* could not have been written if Elizabeth Dauphinee had looked away from the vilified Serbs of the former Yugoslavia as Hosseini looked away from the Taliban. Before we get to Dauphinee’s work, however, I discuss a second novel that skirts the Taliban: Nadeem Aslam’s *The Wasted Vigil*.

Generosity to the antagonist is the principle (see Inayatullah, 2013) against which I have assessed *The Kite Runner* and by which I now assess *The Wasted Vigil*. Allow me a few words more on this principle: if we did not want a story with generosity towards those we call ‘enemy’, then we could settle for George W. Bush’s succinct interpretation of US foreign policy: We are good and civilized; they are evil or childish, uneducated, and backward. They are motivated to destroy us because they envy our goodness. This vision provides satisfactions but fails our deeper curiosity. What I want from a novel is for it to help me grasp the motivations and actions of those whom I cannot understand.

If *The Kite Runner* is akin to fast food, then *The Wasted Vigil* is a multi-course meal made from scratch and served over a long evening with dear friends. Nadeem Aslam’s ambition makes *The Wasted Vigil* among the most thoughtful books I have read on post-Soviet invasion Afghanistan, even if I prefer two non-fiction treatments, *Zinky Boys* (Aleksievich, 1992) and *An Unexpected Light* (Elliot, 1999). Still, these two are absent the one element that I think makes *The Wasted Vigil* worthwhile – an extended treatment of the Talibani mindset. Casa is an orphan who has trained with the Taliban and whose mind and heart Aslam probes with some care.

Another main character, Lara, is a Russian searching for her brother – a Soviet soldier who may have defected or who may be dead. Our current preoccupations, dominated as they are by the lone superpower, limit our focus to what happened just before and after 11 September 2001. Lara permits Aslam to include the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1988). Indeed, the addition of Marcus, a British character, allows Aslam to weave a still longer and thicker history. Moving forward to the present, David and James – CIA and US special forces agents – represent the USA. The long dialogues between various combinations of Lara, Marcus, David, and James are really the heart of the book.

In what I read as a methodological statement, Aslam (2009: 319) writes, ‘Pull a thread here and you’ll find that it’s attached to the rest of the world’. I am convinced that this idea – as much about threads and connections as it is about a thinker’s/writer’s generosity – explains why it took the author eight years to write this novel. Part of his preparation/research included book-length biographies of each of his main characters. He wanted their motivations to emerge from rich contexts. Such thoroughness permits him to drop a point and then to pick it up a hundred pages later – so intricately woven together are his threads. These back stories animate the characters and reveal their stakes in the tragic events that unfold.

So far, so good. But, here is the bad news: while the Pushtoons and the Taliban are given a voice, it is not a particularly generous one. Aslam gives the main characters – Marcus, Lara, David, and Zameen (respectively, a Britisher, a Russian, a USian, and a British/Afghan mix) – a multifaceted density. He also provides robustness for a second set of characters, but these are not as tightly spun: Qatrina, Dunia, and Casa (all Afghans). Lastly, two other characters are crucial to the story, but their attachment ‘to the rest of the world’ is barely evidenced. These are the Afghan ‘warlords’ Gul Rasool and Nabi Khan – leaders of their family/clan who have been enemies for more than 50 years and who serve as the shorthand for an irreducible ‘evil’.
In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini’s failure to place the Taliban makes of Assef a bed-rock, the narrative’s dead-end. So also here, Aslam’s inability to provide Gul Rasool and Nabi Khan a meaningful and generous story turns them into caricatures. Their lives are bed-rocked, dead-ended, and not ‘attached to the rest of the world’.3

I find other problems with the novel. Aslam viscerally presents the violence perpetrated by Afghans through concrete details. In contrast, he delivers the Soviet and US violence via airplane bombings – conveyed with large, sweeping brushstrokes. These do not move the reader in the same manner as the Afghans’ face-to-face killings. Further, the novel is bereft of adult Afghans. Wisdom flows from Marcus and sometimes from Lara but never from Afghans. In this way, Aslam quietly tells us more about how he regards his fellow South Asians than do his erudite forays into the history, poetry, and culture of these lands. Still, these might be minor issues given the vast ambition of his tableau.

The central problem is Aslam’s unwillingness or inability, ultimately, to act on his methodological insight – that characters must be ‘attached to the rest of the world’. When we pull on Gul Rasool and Nabi Khan, their threads are disconnected from culture and history. Given the years Aslam spent on the writing and his attention to the depth of his characters, we can well wonder why Gul Rasool and Nabi Khan are thread-ended.

If generosity to antagonists is a principle by which we can evaluate a novel and a worldview, then at one end of the continuum we have Bush’s version of the world – a view that is simple and sharp-edged but vapid. The message here is ‘we are of this world, and they are not’. Further towards the pole of generosity but still too close to Bush’s view is Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*. Here, we have a generosity to some Afghans, but not to the Taliban – the other of the other. Closer to the pole of generosity is Aslam’s novel, in which the effort to reach the most vilified other is made, but found wanting.

Have I set the bar too high? Perhaps. And yet, with little difficulty, I can compose a list of novels in which no threads are cut, in which all are connected to each other and the fuller world. I would offer Isabel Allende’s (1985) *House of Spirits* as a prime example.

The novel is set in Chile prior to 11 September 1973 – that is, prior to the US-supported coup that overthrows Salvadore Allende and divides Chilean society from then on. The antagonist is the patriarch Esteban Trueba, who is given a full biography and a complex psychology. Isabel Allende never pulls her punches as she describes how Trueba destroys the lives of the peasants he treats as no more than slaves and servants. And, yet, we come to know Trueba well: we are allowed to empathize with his arrogance, with the manner of his self-deception, with the power he feels as he squeezes out the lives of other human beings, and with how he justifies his beliefs. Indeed, Trueba often erupts into Allende’s novel to tell the story in his own voice – so great is Allende’s desire to give equal time to the man she is trying to un-knot. Of course, these interruptions are a device of Allende’s art. Yet, one senses that Allende submits to the Trueba-within-her, allowing his voice its own tone, pitch, and rhythm. I think of this as full generosity to the antagonist. It is not the only standard, but without this quality fiction falls short of its greater purpose.

Troubles in earlier work

Dauphinee herself has not always been successful in portraying the other with the kind of compassion that provides a richly meaningful narrative. She states she writes from love and sometimes from guilt (Dauphinee, 2010: 808). Her ‘Living, Dying, Surviving II’ (Dauphinee, 2006) is written primarily from the mood of guilt. Dauphinee juxtaposes her experience with that of one Manuel Bravo as each copes with the British immigration bureaucracy. Her relatively smooth move to the UK for an academic position occurs just as Manuel Bravo and his teenage son are refused entry and threatened with deportation to Angola. The Independent reports Manuel Bravo hung himself after the refusal. According to the same newspaper, Bravo had studied the law and knew that his death would provide his son with an extended stay in the UK – at least until he turned 18.

Bravo’s actions overwhelm Dauphinee. His death enters her sense of responsibility, and she wonders what she can do. She answers:

mourning is all there is left to do – the mourning of and for Manuel Bravo, the grief of his son, the grief of his priest, the grief of those whose names I do not know and will never know, the grief that I felt when I saw the paper as I was leaving the Job Centre in Rusholme. This stark juxtaposition – not complex, not difficult, not even particularly academic – is lodged in my throat like a needle: the accident of birth in a world absurdly rent. (Dauphinee, 2006: 235)

Her words are motivated by guilt over an ‘accident of birth’ – a guilt that I suspect overlaps little with love. Dauphinee has no opportunity to write from love since she and Bravo are produced on opposite sides of the lottery; since she knows Manuel Bravo only from across the walls placed by immigration officers; and since she experiences him merely from the dimensions of a newspaper. She cannot talk to him, cannot hear his questions, cannot be surprised by his story, and cannot consider his concrete needs. She speaks for him abstractly, poignantly rendering her guilt but conveying little about Manuel Bravo. She also does not convey much about herself. We know she is fraught, insomniac, and saturated with guilt. But we do not know why she is unable to forget the lottery of birth, a forgetting necessary, as she knows, to maintain daily routines in an unjust world. Nor do we know why Manuel Bravo hangs himself. The newspaper account tells us that his intention is to spare his son deportation to Angola. But why is that a fate worse than being a fatherless son left in limbo? As readers, we are eager for the particularities of this account – the story of Manuel Bravo’s motives and the story of Dauphinee’s need to assimilate Bravo into her guilt. Between Elizabeth Dauphinee and Manuel Bravo, we cannot tell who is the antagonist and who the protagonist but, given the thinness of the sketch, it hardly seems to matter.

We get much more from Dauphinee’s (2007) first book, The Ethics of Researching War. In 1999, after two years of studying the wars of secession in the former Yugoslavia, Dauphinee found an opportunity to visit the region, specifically Bosnia and Serbia during the NATO bombing. She arrived in Bosnia eager to pursue themes typical in her discipline: the implementation of democracy, the strengthening of civil society, the decreasing of corruption, and refugee return. Most of the 1990s literature on Bosnia assumed that the core problems emerged from the Serb-allocated territory of Bosnia, thus casting the Serbs as villains. Armed with her research, language skills, and local contacts, she believed she was better placed than most researchers to experience the ‘more authentic “truth” of Bosnia’ (Dauphinee, 2007: 20). However, she was unprepared for how her travels would change everything. After several trips, she uncovers an arrogance in her assumptions. She wonders if her research is a kind of violence perpetrated against the fullness of life there. There and everywhere.
She begins that book by invoking the name of a Bosnian Serb: ‘I am building my career on the loss of a man named Stojan Sokolović (and on the loss of many millions of others, who may or may not resemble him)’ (Dauphinee, 2007: 1). The book pivots, that is, on the encounter between the researcher and the researched, between the self and the other. Prior to the encounter, Dauphinee could not imagine herself as the ‘injurious one’ (Dauphinee, 2007: 8). But Stojan Sokolović, a presumed war criminal, questions her expertise, disables her usual tools, and undermines her sense of order. In his presence, she finds herself unable to defend either her profession or herself.

Remarkably, instead of walking away, Dauphinee opens herself to the encounter with Stojan Sokolović. So far, she has not revealed the motives of this encounter, nor has she sketched its context. Nevertheless, I suspect that only because she lingers on his challenges can she listen to him. She hears his disquieting questions: ‘What do you know about Bosnia? Why did you come, and what did you think you would find?’ (Dauphinee, 2007: 1–2). She hears his accusations:

you have not asked yourself about the violence the committer of violence has done to himself, and you have not bothered to theorize that. You have not watched as he sleeps to see if he cries out, or if he weeps, and you have no gauge with which to look behind his eyes. Your scales are failed chimera (Dauphinee, 2007: 1).

And, she accepts his challenge:

If you would have heard our wailing – killer and killed alike – you would say something other than what you are saying at your seminars and conferences. I don’t know what it would be, but I would know that it would not be the same (Dauphinee, 2007: 1–2).

She investigates our field’s ethics – and finds us lacking. She concludes her first book with this forceful indictment: Stojan Sokolović may be guilty of war crimes, but his guilt overlaps with our own:

we are bound to answer for the crimes of the Other as they were our own. We are obligated to answer for them not because we are personally responsible for their commission in particular times and places and against particular Others, but because there is no possibility of ever claiming that we are incapable of ever committing, and because we do commit them, or they are committed in our names, in other times and places, against Others (Dauphinee, 2007: 131).

Her uncovering of their mutual guilt allows her to condemn our war research:

Thus all the work we undertake to denounce and punish the perpetrator – from war to juridical proceeding, to incarceration, to execution, to field-work conclusions that reify and immobilize, to writing and publishing, and narrating events in ways that insulate us from the disease of the Other’s violence – only underwrites our own desperate attempt to evade that which would implicate us in the commission of violence; namely, that violence is the normative condition within which we operate, and that all of our claims to the contrary are their own, further violence (Dauphinee, 2007: 130).

We are all born into tragedy and into violence, but we deny this birthright in the name of a false innocence that inevitably drives intellectual projects towards a more tangible material violence. As I suggested, the publication of The Kite Runner, for example, helps legitimate Afghanistan’s
occupation. Would that Dauphinee had traveled to Afghanistan to illuminate our overlapping guilt with the Taliban.

Dauphinee comes to reject those barely hidden judgments she so easily produced upon her arrival in Bosnia, all the while recognizing that her overlap with Stojan Sokolović does not erase their differences – not the contours of their dissimilar lives, not the particulars of their violence, and not the specifics of their guilt.

I find Dauphinee’s arguments compelling and persuasive – as, I believe, would most careful readers. So, why was she compelled to write a second book on the same topic?

Presented as a scholarly argument, *The Ethics of Researching War* contains an unscalable obstacle: it reaches only those few who are ready to hear. For the rest of us, the academic tone automatically activates our standard protective measures. She pronounces us guilty, simultaneously guilty, with an ostensible war criminal. She knows we cannot accept this. How can we, armed only with keyboards, share a simultaneous guilt with a sniper shooting at civilians? Is this not an overwrought and hyperbolic comparison? Dauphinee anticipates our response and aims to undo our defenses. How? Via a change in form. She moves to a form that transcends the usual academic venture but that readers cannot reject as the ideographic portraits of ‘mere’ fiction.

Sometimes the appropriate form enables what the writer must say. Take, for example, three of my favorite books: Amitav Ghosh’s (1993) *In an Antique Land*, which reads alternatively like a travelogue, a history, a critical theoretical analysis, and a love story; Sven Lindqvist’s (1996) *Exterminate the Brutes*, which is a travelogue, an examination of the novels and theories present when Josef Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness*, an autobiography, and an interpretation of dreams; or Catherine Taylor’s (2012) book on South Africa, *Apart*, which presents autobiography, poetry, archival documents, travelogue, and critical theory. No one, I believe, could miss the theoretical interventions these books produce. But, because of their form, most publishers would consider them inappropriate for release in the field of international relations. Dauphinee’s book, therefore, may be seen as a protest against the homogeneity of forms in our field. This worry, however, is only part of her concern. More so, Dauphinee needed to break the shackles of the argumentative form. As she says, ‘I could not find an academic language to say the things I wanted to say’ (Dauphinee, 2010: 813). She needed to vindicate and redeem her words in the eyes of the other, in Stojan Soloković’s eyes.

**The politics of exile**

Thought in its concrete form is not indifferent to its own choice of language. It realizes that an unsuitable linguistic form affects its own inmost being (Collingwood, 1963: 253).

Having speculated about her motivations, let me now turn to how Dauphinee achieves her goals. Elsewhere, I compare scientific and novelistic writing along a number of criteria: responsibility towards closure, purpose of narration, transparency of the message, how the work is shown, and the role of generosity (see Inayatullah, 2013). I claim that, relative to social science, literature’s political message is suggestive rather than argumentative, and accordingly literature gives the responsibility of closing on an interpretation to the reader rather than the writer; literature highlights a narrative process over a definitive argumentative logic; literature explains complex life processes and deep meanings through characterization, mood, and the interaction of its characters rather than by reference to abstract social forces; and literature is often characterized by a generosity towards otherness and difference rather than by an exclusionary focus. Of course, these differences are not as stark as I present them and are instead matters of degree. Nevertheless, I assess *The
Politics of Exile using these five contrasts in order to show how Dauphinee reaches for an intimate systematicity that enriches our understanding of both science and the world.

Responsibility towards closure

As we read argumentative forms, we raise our defenses. We know we enter the engagement with fixed roles: the author will present a forceful argument that we readers will do our best to suspect, resist, and expose. In contrast, successful fiction produces multiple interpretations within and among its readers. Like literature, The Politics of Exile relaxes our defenses. We turn the pages to find out what happens to these characters, and we submerge ourselves in an alternative but recognizable world.

Purpose of narration

Dauphinee’s first book, The Ethics of Researching War, is vivified by her ethical sensibility and shaped by a poetic sensibility. Still, its quotations from honored theorists, its footnotes, and a full bibliography make it recognizable as a scholarly endeavor produced within the field of international relations. Most important, as I have shown above, it states a case and defends a claim, thus situating itself within the form of standard social theory. The Politics of Exile, in contrast, shifts to a fuller engagement, one that does not bar emotional and aesthetic dimensions. Specifically, the attention to tastes, smells, sights, textures, and sounds expands the setting from a logical to an embodied space. Love, faith, and trust take their place as constitutive of characters’ lives. In addition, Dauphinee’s chapters shift points of view, a technique that permits exploring multiple interpretations. Her narrative presents a systematic depth of articulation by means of the rhythmic unfolding of the story; by its jumps; by its reveals and conceals; by its movement from setting, to dialogue, to establishing back stories for characters; and by its linguistic and material ethnographic touches. The care devoted to how phrases are turned, the effort to produce humor, pathos, and wonder point to Dauphinee’s craft. As aesthetic aims come to the fore, the responsibility of stating a case and defending a claim are deferred, almost infinitely. Or, perhaps we might say that she dims the sheen of argumentative threads so they blend in with the fuller tapestry.

Transparency of the message

The Politics of Exile does not resolve questions on war, war crimes, and justice. Instead, Dauphinee follows tragedies into their depths. Her characters are tainted by violence: Stojan has killed; Milan is a murder’s accomplice; and the priest Petar is an accessory to a killing. Worst of all, the professor has fallen in love with a man whom she subconsciously recognizes as precisely the war criminal her research and her judgment would otherwise prosecute. Characters are whole enough to be loved: Stojan by the professor, Milan by Jalena, the old Petar by the new Petar of faithful convictions, and the professor by Stojan. Each strives for redemption in others. Only ‘The Ivan’ is reducible to ‘evil’ – as the text recognizes. The complex humanity Dauphinee provides her characters gives the reader no respite from grief, angst, and tension; neither the characters nor the readers can claim a place from which to be ‘good again’. Having checked all exits, Dauphinee bars easy escapes, thus forcing us into deeper interpretations and conversations.
How the work is shown

*The Politics of Exile* reveals ethical ambiguities through the feelings, thoughts, gestures, words, and actions of specific characters. These actions occur within a finely textured social, cultural, and historical setting, rather than as a part of abstract social forces. This does not mean that ideals, ideology, and social structures are absent. On the contrary, characters carry commitments (explicit and implicit) to nationalism, religion, socialism, capitalism, modernity, progress, development, freedom, and equality. But, these commitments are not spoken of as forces; they are not reified. Reification facilitates our forgetting, as Anthony Giddens (1984: 337) puts it, that ‘structures exist only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action’. This forgetting has one profound effect: it allows us to ignore, and therefore to distance ourselves from, our complicity in oppression.

*The Politics of Exile* prohibits such severing and such distancing. Instead, every character acts both to reproduce and to change structures (see Giddens, 1976: 102, 128). This immediate double embeddedness of each character is what Stojan understands and what the professor initially fails to grasp. As her presumptive judgments place Stojan on trial, he recognizes the professor’s projection of authority as protection for her imagined innocence. He is able to see through her because he understands that he himself is both innocent and guilty – as well as neither. Slowly, he weaves her into conversations that move her to recognize the fuller context of his actions in the war – a context that provides recognizable motives embedded within culture, history, and the momentum of events.

Pull the threads and questions appear – even for the questioner. Questions about why she travels to Bosnia, what she gains from the war (publications, tenure, a career), and whether she has violated something by claiming to speak authoritatively about this or any war. Pulling these threads brings us to the professor’s complicity in the wars around the breakup of the former Yugoslavia.

The role of generosity

In our usual mode of presentation, generosity to the other is rare, and when present is a prelude to the other’s destruction or assimilation. In *The Politics of Exile*, Dauphinee is generous to nearly all characters and to their points of view. The sole exception (discussed below) is ‘The Ivan’. Even those that perpetrate gross injustices are given plausible motivations. Further, these motivations are shown to emerge from the life experiences of characters. Treating characters in this manner calls, above all else, for appreciating in the other’s point of view a core grain of truth that must not be ignored, transformed, or assimilated.

By integrating these aspects of literature, Dauphinee expands our sense of what social science might accomplish. Nevertheless, *The Politics of Exile* does not make wholly original claims. Indeed, a simultaneous reading of Dauphinee’s two books will reveal that the implicit claims made in *The Politics of Exile* have already been made explicit in *The Ethics of Researching War*.

Why is the repetition necessary? Why do we not remember the argument from its first articulation? Why do we work so hard to forget our overlap with others, so that what appears is our innocence and their guilt, and sometimes our guilt and their innocence, but never their overlap? Why do we strain to forget our simultaneous overlap but different embedding in violence, war, and even genocide? Why do we ignore our complicity? Dauphinee comes face to face with the frustration emerging from these questions, as we can see in this passage:

The war had made everyone a liar, thought Milan bitterly. The war had made it so that one could not distinguish at all between what was true and what false, between victims and perpetrators, or between perpetrators and perpetrators, or victims and victims. They had all been in some measure perpetrators and
victims simultaneously, and this was the measure of that war – one could not insert a cigarette paper in between the skins of the killers and the killed, so close were they, and so inextricable from one another. (Dauphinee, 2013: 147)

Others have written on the extended network of complicity in war. Dauphinee herself has said similar things in prior work. Why do we not learn this? How can we make it stick? Not by repeating the argument. Not even by making the argument more forceful, cleverer, more anticipatory of reader defenses, or more packed with evidence. How then?

By changing the form. Change the form so readers feel, think, and experience the overlap fictively. Change the form and tell a story that makes the professor herself a student of the book’s pedagogy. Dauphinee makes herself an example of the arrogant professional judge who very slowly and reluctantly begins to dance around her own silences.

The transition is not smooth – this is crucial. The metamorphosis from arrogant judge to complicit participant happens through a fraught learning experience. We must feel how moving away from her academic pornography threatens her career. And not just her career: Stojan undoes the central ordering principles of her life by exploding her investments. Her scholarly judgments are alien to Stojan’s complex and messy experience. He exposes her ignorance of the war’s fuller context. The emptiness of the professor’s manuscript (an expression of her empty life) produces a competent scholar but a counterfeit human. The professor discovers that scholars are not heroic, that she cannot be good.

Petar the priest fully embraces the tragic sensibility. Near the end of the book, he reminds us that we all live within the trauma of guilt and tragedy. If faith is to have any practical consequence, then love means loving the already fallen. It is within this tragic sensibility that characters move to redeem themselves: Milan and Stojan via confessions that pour out of them without their control; Petar by ministering to the fallen; and the professor because she admits that her life is potentially empty, meaningless, lonely, and without the clean boundaries that separate the amateur from the professional, the innocent from the guilty, the living and the dead.

Travel and lack

Eventually, the ambulance and police arrive. They ask her a lot of questions and keep looking at us. She tells them that we helped her after she was beaten and raped by three black men in a Monte Carlo. One of the men, she tells the police, was her boyfriend. She refuses to say his name to the police. Gunn looks at me and drops his head. Without saying anything, we know that whatever is in the boys in that car, has to also be in us. (Laymon, 2012)

Similar to Gul Rasool and Nabi Khan in *The Wasted Vigil*, ‘The Ivan’ remains an unconnected thread. But there is a difference. Whereas in both *The Kite Runner* and *The Wasted Vigil*, ignoring the Taliban is fatal to our understanding the fuller context, Dauphinee places the abhorred ‘Serb’ firmly at the center. Indeed, she populates the story with a variety of Serbs – the peace-loving Luka, his dread-anticipating partner Jalena, the wise father Sokolovic, the obsequious Milan, the idealist Petar, etc. ‘The Ivan’, then, is not a lone thread meant to represent the guilty collectivity. Rather, the xenophobia and self-loathing of ‘The Ivan’ are part of the collective tapestry of the vilified ‘Serbs’.

I return to the question Stojan asks the professor: ‘Why did you come?’ Dauphinee avoids this question. That she does so over a number of books and articles suggests something systematic is at work. We can excavate this silence by inverting Stojan’s question so that it becomes these: Why did you leave home? Why is your work not about troubles in your own land? What is it about your
home – New Jersey – that you are unable to face? The professor responds to Stojan, ‘I left because I wanted something, and I could not find it in New Jersey’ (Dauphinee, 2013: 128). And, she confesses to the reader, ‘I had wanted to leave all my life’ (Dauphinee, 2013: 128). Stojan asks whether she would go home if she found that unnamed thing. Her response is enigmatic but also diagnostic: ‘I haven’t thought about going home in a very long time. Sometimes the paths that lead back to places get blocked’ (Dauphinee, 2013: 128). Having recognized her block, Dauphinee speaks as much as she can:

I could see the face of my mother, whose Moroccan heritage I discovered only after her death. I thought of the low, fast moving clouds over the ocean on the day that she died. I thought of the terrible hollowness in my heart, the terminal loneliness that accompanied me afterward as I left again. (Dauphinee, 2013: 128)

Even with this confession, we do not know what the professor and Dauphinee search for, what she cannot find in New Jersey, and why she looks for it elsewhere. But, the above passage suggests that her quest for knowledge is also a search for self-healing. She seeks out something that will fill the ‘terrible hollowness’ and cure her ‘terminal loneliness’. One travels to the other to know and to heal.

Her travel away from New Jersey (and her mother) is meant to produce a return to New Jersey – a return to intimacy, but from a broader and more encompassing distance than if she had never left New Jersey at all. Through her interaction with Stojan, the professor generates an intimate awareness. And, by writing through these characters, Dauphinee builds a bridge to herself via the world at large. She constructs a systematic wholeness, an intimate systematicity.

Conclusion

In closing, I wish to suggest there is much social science can learn from The Politics of Exile. Specifically: we can glean how to theorize more systematically by making sure no threads are dead-ended and even the vilest humans are parts of our story. We can become aware of our writing forms and ask ourselves how much of our content is delivered by the form (see White, 1987). And, we can concern ourselves with the deeper purposes of our intellectual life-work, becoming aware that, whether we like it or not, our desires center our work. Dauphinee generates threads of knowledge that weave intimacy as a means to healing – an ambition that distinguishes her work. We, too, can aim for this ambition, since it is already at work within us. We need not write novels to do so. An awareness of how the desire to heal guides our work might suffice.

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Notes

1. Sometimes, however, historical gaps and distortions are not accidental but an active and systematic creation of a particular worldview (Gaspar and Trouillot, 1991: 185; Trouillot, 1997; Wald, 1992).
2. Of course, as one reviewer pointed out, fiction writers must also tend to the internal aesthetic needs of storytelling. Even if most novelists treat such needs as primary, nevertheless, their inattention to the social scientific aspects of their craft can be telling and damaging.

3. Aslam, to his credit, tries to give their deadly feuding a context, but his strained effort seems an afterthought.

References


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