Contents

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Behind the city! Understand? Behind!
Outside! Across the dam!
Life here is a place where it's impossible to live.
A Jewish quarter . . .

Thus is it not a hundred times better
to become an Eternal Jew?
Because for everyone who is not a swine,
a Jewish pogrom stews.

Life. It's alive only through renegades!
Through the Judases of the faiths!
Onto Solomon's islands!
To hell! To anywhere but

to life, which suffers only renegades, only
sheep for the executioner!
I trample the certificate permitting my right to live
with my feet!

I tread it down! For David's shield!
Into the compost of the bodies!
Isn't it intoxicating that a Yid
did not want to live?!

A ghetto of chosen gatherings! Dam and ditch.
Do not seek indulgence!
In this most Christian of worlds
poets are treated as Yids!

—Marina Tsvetaeva:
Poem of the End, part 12, stanzas 7–12.
Translated by Bronislava Volková

Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees. In the United States, academic, intellectual and aesthetic thought is what it is today because of refugees from fascism, communism, and other regimes given to the oppression and expulsion of dissidents.

And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement.

—Edward Said:
Reflections on Exile

It seems proper that those who create art in a civilization of quasi-barbarism, which has made so many homeless, should themselves be poets unhoused and wanderers across language. Eccentric, aloof, nostalgic, deliberately untimely . . .

—George Steiner

[I]t is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.

—Theodor Adorno

The person who finds his homeland sweet is a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.

—Hugh of St. Victor
(twelfth-century theologian)

Introduction

A General History of Concepts of Exile

Exile is a very complex concept: it is multifaceted and has numerous implications. I have written about it in a personal way[1] in the past and I have also taught a class at Indiana University on this topic drawing on the unusually rich and interesting Jewish (predominantly German-language) twentieth-century writing of Central Europe. Ideas developed during these classes have served as a starting point for the present study.

Exile has generated wonderful writing since times immemorial—Sappho, Dante, Comenius, Zola, Mann, Joyce, Beckett, Solzhenitsyn, Conrad, to name a few outstanding examples). Twentieth-century European literature, however, plays a special role in the exploration of exile, due to the displacement of vast numbers of people caused by the brutal totalitarian regimes that took over many countries for extended periods of time, the increasing ease of traveling great distances, and technological progress.

This study is primarily focused on the variety of meanings that the term "exile" can take on and the different angles from which it can be examined. It is a study that looks at the inner meanings of exile, the types of inner withdrawal due to a lack of acceptance

[1] See Bronislava Volková, "Exil vnitřní a vnější," *Listopad* (2004): 12–19; "Exile: Inside and Out," in *The Writer Uprooted: Contemporary Jewish Exile Literature*, ed. Alvin Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008), 161–176; "Psychological, Cultural, Historical and Spiritual Aspects of Exile," *Comenius, Journal of Euro-American Civilisation* 1, no. 2 (2014), 199–212; "Exil: psychologický, kulturně-historický, duchovní," *Český Dialog*, May 2015, http://www.cesky-dialog.net/clanek/6774-exil-psychologicky-kulturne-historicky-a-duchovni/.

by society of the intrinsic values of an individual, considering both the physical movement of a writer to another country and the background of such movement. Many kinds of authors from a number of different countries found themselves outcasts in exile, and their work (especially the protagonists in their writing) reflects this. Some of them committed suicide due to the harshness of their social situation and the impossibility of adapting to a new and foreign social environment. However, many contributed vastly different literary forms and created a large variety of thought patterns which all have a common thread.

The first part of the study deals with early twentieth-century issues and movement, while the second is focused on the Holocaust and beyond. I give the Jews a major role in this study for two reasons: 1) they had enormous cultural influence and were, in effect, the glue of Central European literature and thought; and 2) their long tradition of diasporic life and extraordinary persecution in the twentieth century arguably makes them the very embodiment of exile. Twentieth-century Europe was clearly characterized by the movement of nations due to the horrendously oppressive regimes which destroyed the natural life fiber of the existing societies—and the Jews became the first and most prominent victims of this phenomenon.

In the course of studying the issue of exile, the breadth of this concept and the multiple implications it takes on led me to identify what I call the *forms* of exile.

Exile, in the most basic sense, means to be away from one's home country, while either explicitly being refused permission to return or being threatened with imprisonment or death upon return. It is a type of punishment closely associated with solitude and isolation. Sometimes it involves a whole nation or large group, which makes up a so-called diaspora (a society within another nation, but away from its own); at other times it may simply concern individuals living in foreign environments.

Jews have been probably in the longest exile of this type (since 587 BCE; since 70 CE; after the rise of Islam in the seventh century; and again during the Crusades in the eleventh–thirteenth

centuries). They fled to Western Europe, but were expelled from many countries there, only to be readmitted on payment to the local powers or governments later. From the Middle Ages onwards, they settled in large numbers in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland at the invitation of Casimir the Great in 1343; but their general situation improved only after the French Revolution when they were granted human rights. Meanwhile, mob violence was perpetrated against them in many countries. Pogroms were frequent in Eastern and Central Europe and culminated in the Nazi Holocaust, or the Shoah, of the 1940s. Jews fared best on the whole in the Anglophone countries during this period, where they were able to achieve at times considerable status. However, a day after the State of Israel was recognized by the UN in 1948, the Arab-Israeli War began.

The theme of exile appears already in Greek tragedy. It is closely connected with ostracism (Greek: *ostrakismos*), which was a procedure in the city-state of Athens in which any citizen could be expelled for ten years. While in some instances clearly expressed popular anger at the citizen was the reason, ostracism was often used preemptively. It was employed as a way of neutralizing someone thought to be a threat to the state or a potential tyrant. In general, the most common form of ostracism is refusing to communicate with a person. This, too, can take many forms. Refused communication, a person is effectively ignored and excluded from a given community. Such is the fate of both internal and external exiles.

This refusal of communication is an essential part of being an exile. Exile in a general sense means that an individual is not simply physically displaced, but is avoided or ostracized, due to not fitting into the prevalent moral and social values of their society of origin. In both cases social exclusion is what follows. This exclusion, like marginalization, can affect a writer's particular themes, as well as their artistic decisions. Exile can result not just from being a member of a particular social or gender group, then, but also from adhering to certain aesthetics.

Internal exile is also a kind of withdrawal. The withdrawn author often depicts, with great acuity, the most significant, albeit hidden, diseases of society, as well as finding new perspectives. The author is often harshly criticized, sometimes forbidden to

publish altogether or, in less oppressive societies, simply ignored. This has an equally, if not more, detrimental effect. When writers are persecuted, they often become regarded as heros, someone with whom an oppressed nation can identify when it has no other recourse; and thus, paradoxically, such a writer may become central to the culture. In less oppressive regimes, however, the ostracized writer is left to his own devices and simply marginalized.

In her article on Shklovsky and Brodsky, Svetlana Boym, however, points out that exile can also be seen as a form of estrangement.[2] Leo Spitzer adds another shade of meaning to the word "exile," when he recalls his childhood and the society he was a part of when in exile in Bolivia—namely nostalgia mixed with critical memory, that is, looking at the past critically, yet with a certain longing at the same time. He also speaks of the layered identities of people combining their culture of origin with that of their new adopted home.[3]

Physical exile implies a veritable loss: of country, birthplace, language, support, and belonging, and in all cases an absence of an engaged and responsive community and thus most importantly a loss of meaning and communication. Meaning and communication can be recovered in many cases or recreated in roundabout ways, but a sense of natural bonds has forever been destroyed. These bonds, however, I believe, are replaced by a heightened capacity for transformation.

We find a radical lack of setting or strong depiction of place (of birth, life, or death) most pronouncedly in such writers as Peter Weiss, Nelly Sachs, and Paul Celan. I can strongly identify with this, as the same phenomenon is an element in my own poetry—it is situated most often nowhere and everywhere simultaneously. This interstitial quality makes such writing both more universal and more abstract.

2 Svetlana Boym, "Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky," in *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Durham: Duke UP, 1998), 241–262.

3 Leo Spitzer "Persistent Memory," in Rubin Suleiman, *Exile and Creativity*, 384.

Exile leads to unusual productivity and original insights, which are often not readily received by the addressees of such writing, who generally view exiles as outsiders and often are unable to relate to their way of thinking. Exiles, in turn, typically create their own community based on the commonality of exclusion or persecution, not on intrinsic and cohesive closeness and shared interests of a primary kind. Their communal structures are tentative and vulnerable, usually highly temporary and typically an acute sense of isolation and loneliness is common to exiled authors.

This absence of a cohesive community, nevertheless, brings another inner transformation within the writer's psyche: they see through the illusions of communities often built on the bases of certain ideologies, nationalities, customs, blood bonds, and so on. As Hatja Garloff observes when she considers the post-Holocaust existence of Jews, an irredeemable dispersion is the very foundation of a diasporic community.[4]

I would argue that this kind of definition of community implies in itself that a community as such is fundamentally based on the idea of the nation; however, the idea of nation is frequently very destructive and superficial too. Richard Königsberg notes the illusionary character of history and the perverse and absurd rights that nations assume.[5] That said, what exiles lack in their community of origin, they can redeem in their potential openness toward a universal one. This gives them a tremendous freedom and breadth in their understanding of the world.

Leo Spitzer remarks that "desperate feelings of possible doom over trifles" is common among Holocaust survivors.[6] Some feel they made a lucky choice which led to their survival, others, as described in Marianne Hirsch's paper, feel forever tied in their minds to the past of their parents' world. Such a person may feel they they have never

4 Hatja Garloff, *Words from Abroad*: *Trauma and Displacement in Postwar German Jewish Writers* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2005), 4.

5 See Richard Königsberg, *The Nations Have the Right to Kill* (New York: Library of Social Science, 2014).

6 Spitzer, "Persistent Memory," 384.

even experienced themselves, as their self was destroyed forever. This is a well-known characteristic of how the so-called "children of the Holocaust" perceive the world. Succumbing to desperate feelings over the trifles of daily life is a natural consequence of passing through experiences in life deemed as catastrophic trauma. They are a part of the post-traumatic psychological attitude.

Here, memory is also an act of mourning filled with rage and despair. This memory and distance from a world destroyed and unknowable persists in the second generation, so called children of the Holocaust. Hirsch calls this memory "postmemory," namely a memory formed not by recollection, but by imaginative investment and creation. "Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created."[7]

The children of exiled Holocaust survivors can never return "home," they remain forever marginal or exiled, as the cities to which they can return are no longer those in which their parents had lived as Jews before the genocide, but are instead the cities where the genocide happened and from which they and their memory have been expelled. The postwar generation thus lives in a void, an exile from identity, time, and space, orphaned from a world they never knew.

Having lived in Communist Czechoslovakia, I can testify that there is another layer to this condition of post-memory, namely the sense of a lost world in a more general meaning of that word, a nostalgia for a world forever destroyed to us and never to be recovered or repaired. A double void of inner exile is thus present in the children growing up within their family's country of origin with the stories they have heard from their parents, or grandparents, about what life was like before it was snatched away by a totalitarian power.

7 See Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives," in Rubin Suleiman, *Exile and Creativity*, 418–421.

Edward Said argues that

> [t]he exile exists in a median state. Neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another. Survival becomes the main imperative, and danger of getting too comfortable and secure constituting a threat that is constantly to be guarded against.[8]

The exiled person also always perceives things through comparison, from a double perspective, never in isolation (60). Furthermore, they often move away from centralizing authorities towards the margins, where they see things that are usually lost on people that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the comfortable (63).

Much literature concerning Central European territory, most notably interwar Czechoslovakia, has been devoted to German Jews, who had an important role as cultural mediators. They helped to bring important Czech writers and musicians into German cultural space via translations and popularizations. The best known was Max Brod, who was responsible for the world renown of Leoš Janáček, Jaromír Weinberger, Vítězslav Novák, Jaroslav Hašek, and Otto Pick, who in his turn brought attention to the brothers Čapek, František Langer, and Otakar Březina. Other writers belonging to the category of Czechoslovakian mediators between Czech and German culture are Franz Werfel, Egon Erwin Kisch, and Willy Haas, for instance. These writers had supranational loyalty; they were creators of high culture and lived in a hybrid space between Czech and German culture, typically in Prague, which used its own dialect (Prague German) of the German language. At the same time, post-WWI nationalism (in response to the end of Austrian suppression) and antisemitism were growing in the country;

8 Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 49.

and, of course, only a few decades later, Nazism swept through Europe.[9]

The question of identity is also intimately related to that of exile, given the fact that it has a close connection with the oppression of the individual by various social communities, growing bureaucratization, and globalization. As Adorno points out, "for many people it is already an impertinence to say I."[10] The individual is oppressed and displaced. This loss of individuality is brilliantly portrayed in the Czech American exile writer Egon Hostovský's work (see below). Exile becomes an act, a way to assert one's own identity against that of a group or nation.

David Kettler poses an interesting question on the limits of exile.[11] While he contends that the study of diaspora and identity are nowadays more important than ever, he adds that "[t]here are also the perceived homogenizing effects of globalization that seem to be rendering the political concept of exile irrelevant. How can one be in exile in such a world? Perhaps exile is no longer relevant?"[11] Twenty-first-century globalization does indeed appear to diminish the sense of exile, as it is much easier to belong to a less narrowly defined community (the idea of nation, for example, may lose its power), yet globalization brings with itself its own forms of oppression as it strips individuals of their identity. The typical person still thinks of their identity in national or even regional terms—in terms of customs, history, culinary culture, and so forth. These are rendered largely insignificant by globalization.

One can be exiled not only from a place one considers home, but also from a time that seemed meaningful. Such was the case for Johannes Urzidil, for instance, who was forced to emigrate from his native Bohemia which was subsequently permanently changed

9 See, for example, Hillel J. Kieval, "Choosing to Bridge: Revisiting the Phenomenon of Cultural Mediation," *Bohemia Band* 46 (2005): 15–27.

10 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (New York: Verso, 1978), 50.

11 David Kettler and Zvi Ben-Dor, "Introduction: The Limits of Exile," *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads* 3, no. 1 (2006): 1–9.

by WWII. Authors like Urzidil tend to create an imaginary home in their dreams and writing.

We shall now look in depth at the themes that twentieth-century Jewish writers, in their attempts to reflect on the condition of exile, address in their work—paying special attention to literary form. We shall focus in the main on authors who used German as their literary language and lived mainly in Eastern and Central Europe due to the fact that German was common among Jewish writers residing in these countries in the first half of the twentieth century. Those using Yiddish, Czech, Polish, Italian, and French will also be included. I analyze prose writers almost exclusively, as poets deserve their own study. Finally, it is important to note that the line of external exile we observe among the writers covered typically moves geographically and historically from the East to the West.

1. Exile as Expulsion and Wandering: Joseph Roth, Sholem Aleichem, Stefan Zweig

The first topic that offers itself in the time frame and geographical location that this study focuses on is the topic of expulsion and wandering, which was so significant in Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This subject was first brilliantly examined in Joseph Roth's *The Wandering Jews* (1927). "Wandering" is, so to speak, the most basic, literal, common, and seemingly innocent meaning or manifestation of exile—although in its link with "expulsion" it already intimates something much darker. Expulsion is forced or voluntary, but in both cases it is a drastic human predicament and is undertaken only under extreme duress.

Joseph Roth (b. 1894 in Brody, d. 1939 in Paris), hailing from Ukraine and making it first to Berlin (1925) and later to Paris (1933), became well known for his essays (collected in *The Wandering Jews*), which were written in German. He grew up in Brody, a small town near Lemberg in East Galicia, in the easternmost area of what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now Lviv (Ukraine). The town had a large Jewish population at the time. Roth went to school in Lemberg, which was controlled by the Polish aristocracy despite the fact that the population was mostly Ukrainian (Ruthenian). Roth then moved to Vienna and Berlin, where he worked as an extremely successful liberal journalist for prominent newspapers (*Neue Berliner Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Zeitung*); and after Hitler became chancellor in 1933 he settled in Paris where he continued to be very successful, but became a heavy drinker. He died prematurely in 1939 at the age of forty-four, collapsing after hearing the news that the playwright Ernst Toller, another fellow émigré, had hanged

himself in New York. Thus, his life, not only his writing, reflects the East-West wandering of Jews and its often tragic conclusion.

The mass emigration of the Galician peasantry that Roth describes in his work, though, had already occurred in the 1880s—to imperial Germany and later overseas to the United States, Canada, and Brazil. This great *economic* migration lasted until WWI. After the war, Galicia was a victim of hostilities between Ukrainians and Poles, later occupied by Hitler, and then decimated by the Soviet authorities. These events led to mass killings, massacres, and large-scale deportations to Siberia.

When the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismembered and the map of Eastern Europe redrawn along ethnic lines, the Jews became technically homeless, as there was no territory they could point to as ancestrally their own. The supranational imperial state had suited them, as they could blend in as one of many nations and feel legitimate, at home. The cataclysmic economic crisis of 1929 brought another severe blow. Some began to look to Palestine as a national home, others turned to the supranational creed of communism. Nostalgia for a lost past and anxiety about a homeless future are at the heart of the mature work of Joseph Roth.

In 1932, in the preface to *The Radetzky March* (1932), Roth wrote: "I loved this fatherland. It permitted me to be a patriot and a citizen of the world at the same time, and among all the Austrian peoples also a German. I loved the virtues and merits of this fatherland, and today, when it is dead and gone, I even love its flaws and weaknesses."[12] *The Radetzky March* is an elegy to the cosmopolitan world of Habsburg Austria, as seen by someone from an outlying imperial territory—a great German novel by a writer with barely a toehold in the German community of letters. While Roth indulged his nostalgia for his Austrian fatherland, his wife became mentally ill and was murdered by the Nazis when they invaded Austria.

Roth rejected both fascism and communism; he proclaimed himself a Catholic and involved himself in unsuccessful royalist politics. His ambivalence toward Western civilization led him

12 Joseph Roth, *The Radetzky March* (London: Granta, 2002).

increasingly to draw on the heritage of Eastern European storytelling. When asked by a friend why he drank so much, he replied, "Do you think you are going to escape? You too are going to be wiped out."

In his essays in *The Wandering Jews*, Roth masterfully depicts the experiences of expelled East European Jews—those who escaped the pogroms and misery in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and WWI, and who tried to carve out a life for themselves in one of the Central or Western European countries. Expulsion, for Roth, is a harsher version of exile. In his moving book, we learn how countries differed in their reluctant acceptance of these refugees and how difficult it was for the expelled to find anywhere to live. The book is written for Western readers who "feel they might have something to learn from the East and who have perhaps already sensed that great people and great ideas—great but also useful (to them)—have come from Galicia, Russia, Lithuania, and Romania," writes Roth in his introduction.[13]

According to Roth, the Jews have few choices, as they are desperately trying to simply survive:

> The Eastern Jew looks to the West with a longing that it really doesn't merit. To the Eastern Jew, the West signifies freedom, justice, civilization, and the possibility to work and develop his talents. The West exports engineers, automobiles, books, and poems to the East. It sends propaganda soaps and hygiene, useful and elevating things, all of them beguiling and come-hitherish to the East. To the Eastern Jew, Germany, for example, remains the land of Goethe and Schiller, of the German poets, with whom every keen Jewish youth is far more conversant than our own swastika's secondary school pupils.[14]

Roth anatomizes Jewish life in Berlin, Paris, Vienna, and America, and also provides an idealized portrayal of their life in the Soviet Union, where he believes antisemitism has been extinguished by communism. At the same time, he blames Western

13 Joseph Roth, *The Wandering Jews* (New York: Norton, 2001), 2.

14 Ibid., 5–6.