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What displacement in the poetry of ‘exilience’?

Three refugee poets from the Indian Ocean and Asia

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This article focuses on three poets (Salah Faik, Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen and Ahmatjan Osman) who have fled their countries and thus experienced the internal or external disorders caused by geographical displacement. Refugee poetry is usually read as a testimony of the suffering connected with remoteness, a commemoration of the abandoned homeland and a reflection on the effects of migration, on the one hand on the poet’s identity and on the other hand his relation to the world. The article argues, however, that what can be termed ‘the poetry of *exilience*’ — a word borrowed from Alexis Nouss — is not simply linked to the displacement of refugees, but rather to a new literary space where writing is itself an experience of displacement. In other words, it discusses the way in which such poetry transforms displacement of refugees that is geographical migration into an experience of exile that is mainly a kind of mystical migration. Typically, the poets analyzed here express not only the dislocation specific to refugee situation, but the serenity that can be gained through the experience of exile itself.

Keywords: Refugee studies; exile; displacement; Salah Faik; Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen; Ahmatjan Osman

One of the most famous scholars to have studied the exilic phenomenon is Edward Said who was exiled to New-York. In his “reflections on exile”, included in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2003), he notes at the outset that exile is an incurable wound which will be a leitmotif in his thought: “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but

terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (137).

Focusing on his experience of exile as a wound is a way of articulating his critical discourse with his direct experience. As he explained it, “to see a poet in exile – as opposed to reading the poetry of exile – is to see exile’s antinomies embodied and endured with a unique intensity” (138). Therefore, to avoid the pitfall of an ideological and caricatural reading of the exilic phenomenon, Edward Said strongly expresses the need for the critic to summon her/his direct experience to better understand it. He thus proposes to distinguish different categories of people:

Although it is true that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile, some distinctions can be made between exiles, refugees, expatriates and émigrés. Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider. Refugees, on the other hand, are a creation of the twentieth-century state. The word ‘refugee’ has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas ‘exile’ carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality. (144)

In Said’s words, I see a contradiction between the exile marked by an “unhealable wound” and the exile linked with a spiritual dimension. If, for example, we listen carefully to the contemporary poetry of three Arab poets, Salah Faik, Adeb Kamal Ad-Deen and Ahmatjan Osman, we can ask ourselves if the poetry of exile is only an illustration of the painful situation of the refugee to the point of being confused with the expression of

refugee poetry. Edward Said did not study the spiritual dimension of the exilic phenomenon and did not explore the link between this dimension and the lived experience. Yet the work of Giambattista Vico that Edward Said knew well, and which insists on the place of the physical and bodily experience in what Vico calls "the new science", could have led him to question the exilic phenomenon from the spiritual or metaphysical point of view both singular and universal. Now, these three Arab poets invite us to read their poems by exploring this subjective part, both personal and transcendental. A question arises from their poems: can poetry be truly a viaticum for refugee displacements? Just as Joseph Conrad's literary work has accompanied Edward Said's reflections as a kind of an intellectual viaticum¹, both useful and stimulating, can the poetry of these three poets serve as a spiritual viaticum to think the ins and outs of a forced displacement in a globalized world?

The literary treatment of the refugee's experience in terms of exile is the passage to a form of privileged enunciation, that is the transition from a social status through which the refugees are stigmatized and anonymous to an individual existence mainly based on self-recognition. Indeed, the poetry of the three poets has brought to light existential rather than spatial exile. Drawing on Liisa Malkki's analysis (1995), I will distinguish here refugee poetry that refers to a very meaningful label in the current institutional and administrative framework and poetry of exile that involves an art of existing and the possible recovery of the subject's sovereignty. These Arab poets have certainly political refugees status, but their poems mostly describe the exilic condition. Even if their political ideology is more or less expressed in their poetry, it fades in the very seizure of the poetic verb, as if their political action were incompatible with the ethical act of the poem. As Eleni Coundouriotis (2018) puts it, "can literary treatments of the refugee figure offer a radical critique of the law's construction of the refugee (...)"

For, if the term “refugee literature” refers to a form of writing that expresses dissension and dislocation, what is called “the poetry of exile” tends to a dissolatory language, one that seeks to reduce the hiatus of identity and the deeply isolated human condition. If refugee poetry expresses the pain of parting with the native country, the poetry of exile is concerned with a universal and continuous space where transnational moving identities can be created. Throughout their various journeys in exile, the poets often reach the status of “citizens of the world” without forgetting their origins with more or less nostalgia. Their poetic speech is the trace of what Alexis Nouss (2015) calls "a geographical palimpsest" (124)². My reflections here are thus based on two fundamental ideas formulated by Alexis Nouss. First, the migrant is primarily an exile. Secondly, the exilic condition gives rise to a multi-belonging dynamic that is not limited to the legal, political and socio-economic sphere — one that Alexis Nouss calls “exilience” (63). One of the main characteristics of exilience, that is the common core to any exilic experience, is the non-place determined by a structure of palimpsest – a superposition of places. I will focus here on this structure because it suggests an interesting way of thinking the delocalization of a paysage towards a metaphysical universe, as is the case of Carlo Levi’s exile commented by Alexis Nouss (108).

Three “geographical palimpsests”

I have chosen to study three poets who have fled their native countries and whose poems illustrate various geographical palimpsests. Their displacements create an inalienable free space and a kind of expansion that defies the feeling that their native countries are narrow lands where life is in danger. Two of them are Iraqi poets; Salah Faik (b.1945) and Adeb Kamal ad-Deen (b.1953), fled Iraq in 1974 and the 1990s respectively. Today, Salah Faik resides in the Philippines and Adeb Kamal ad-Deen has been an Australian citizen since 2005. Both fled the regime of Saddam Hussein, and both are political refugees. The

difference between them is that Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen is above all considered by Arab critics as a sufi poet interested in the science of letters (*hilm al-huruf or al-sîmiyâ*)³ rather than as a committed poet and an Iraqi refugee.

Indeed, Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen chooses never to explain in interviews or in his poems why he left Iraq. He went first to Jordan, where he lived for a while before moving to Sydney and Adelaide. But his true journey, one of a spiritual order, is the one he achieves through his poetry by focusing on the letter as the vehicle for the imagination. In an interview of November 3, 2017, published on the Ruya Foundation website, he said very clearly: “I am a letter, therefore I am a poet” and explained as follows: “The letter is my identity: spiritual, artistic, aesthetic, overt and secret. It appears in my poetry in a variety of images and in numberless forms” (2017). On the one hand, he differs from Salah Faik and Ahmatjan Osman in his silence on his political exile. On the other hand, he devotes his poetry to the search for a shareable space through the letter. From the dot to the letter, from the letter to the word and from the Koran to the poem, his poetry definitely reveals a symbolic palimpsest. Here the symbolic palimpsest means the new association of an alphabetic and poetic form (dot, letter, word, poem) with his personal perception of the world or, to put it another way, the reconciliation between the language of a new home, namely the otherland, and the painful feeling of dislocation. The whole of his poetic work involves a kind of cartography drawn as a palimpsest on which appear different levels of reality. The first level is the dot which is “a center or seat for the heart, the soul, the body and perception” (Ad-Deen 2017). Each element of external reality is observed and translated from within the inside, through the bodily experience, then superimposed onto a common representation of the world and finally mixed with his personal experience. In other words, the poetry of exile of Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen reveals that the exile is a paradigm of the human condition and therefore, as Edward Said puts it,

“a topos of human experience” (2003, 145). In this case, Ad-Deen’s personal experience of exile and his poetic response can be read as a survival guide to exile according to which the first refuge is, precisely, poetry.

The displacement of Salah Faik is very different because he is Kurdish, of Turkish origin. Born in Kirkuk, he took an active part in the Kurdish revolution of 1963, which aimed at the autonomy of the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. In 1964, he joined the literary group of Kirkuk (founded by Fâdhil al-'Azzâwî and animated by Anwar al-Ghassânî, Sargon Bulus, Mu'îd al-Râwî, al-Ab Yûsuf Sa'îd and Jân Dammu) and participated in its project to renew literary forms and, more generally, in the literary and cultural revolution. After his imprisonment and the harsh repression of communists in the 1970s, he fled Iraq in 1974 to take refuge in Syria. Two years later, he moved to Britain. In 1993, he decided to settle in the Philippines from which he rarely travels nowadays. Although these host countries have influenced his poetic creativity, Salah Faik remains true to his political commitments, his ethnic heritage and his childhood memories in Kirkuk. In his poems, European cities merge with the nostalgic evocation of Iraqi landscapes. This geographical palimpsest is thus reflected in the surrealist painting of these desolate landscapes, in ruins that are nevertheless populated and urban. From an exodus in the desert to a stroll in Stanford, the poet leaves a trace of his passage by staging his meetings with Gilgamesh, Hamlet and Oscar Wilde. In other words, Salah Faik’s poems evoke more clearly his refugee status.

The third poet, Ahmatjan Osman (b.1964), caught my attention because his displacement can be compared with Salah Faik’s situation: first in terms of their Turkish origin, then of the common history of a stateless people (Kurdish for Salah Faik and Uyghur for Ahmatjan Osman). Both actively fought for the independence of their regions and, after the policy of repression, fled their countries. Since 1949, when China

immediately sent the Chinese Liberation Army to dissolve the Republic of Eastern Turkestan, the Uyghurs have experienced three waves of migration to the west. The third wave began in the 1980s. At that time, some countries provided young Turkish-speakers from China with scholarships. In 1982, Ahmatjan Osman obtained a scholarship to study in Syria. In 1994, he fled his country to escape the censorship and repression of the Chinese government and settled in Damascus. Since 2004, he has been living in Canada. Surprisingly it should be noted that his recent election (2015) to the presidency of the exiled Government of East Turkistan does not make him a politically-committed poet. His poems, including the most recent written in Arabic and collected in his latest collection, *My Night Part / Hissati min al-layl* (Osman 2007), he lays claim to no particular political ideology. His poetry rather suggests a geographical palimpsest, comparable to that in the poems of Salah Faik, and a symbolic palimpsest that echoes the poetic experience of Adeb Kamal ad-Deen insofar as the Uyghur language becomes both a new homeland and a symbolic refuge.

It would therefore be inaccurate to speak here of refugee poetry, because on the one hand the three poets do not claim to write in such a genre, and on the other hand their poetry itself is resolutely intended to be an overcoming of this dislocated life situation implied by the term. Actually, these three poets are, rather, "refugees in poetry" — to use the title of a poetic evening organized by Hala Mohammad in June 2014 at the Institute of Islamic Cultures (Paris). Is this the sign of a preference for the category of the "exile" rather than that of the "refugee"? I rather think that for these three poets the condition of exile encompasses the refugee situation. That is why classifying their poems as refugee literature would detract attention from the creative side of their poetry and amount to a denial of what poetry can achieve beyond the mere function of testimony. What can the poetry of exile actually achieve? What is it for? How can it transform the

refugee's relationship with his environment? Is the exile of these three poets "some more benign variety" of exile, a category which Edward Said seems to suggest, when he compares James Joyce's exile with that of Yanko Goorall's?

To move in all dimensions of existence

As one reads these three very singular bodies of poetry, one has the strong feeling that the poetry of exile needs a true metaphysical or spiritual displacement to compensate for both geographical migrations and the feeling of precariousness and loss that accompanies them. Hence one's first impression — of a geographical palimpsest. As if, in the poems, the distant and the deep, or time and space, were united in one point.

Salah Faik's poetry stands for this original unity by making of his daily life the meeting point of all of his stories and dreams. Therefore, his poems are the result of several superimpositions of memories, dreams, fantasies, and moments stolen from everyday life upon various myths and legends as is the case in his poem "From Exodus" (2014, 185-213) where the poet gives ten scenes presented as paintings of everyday life with mythical scenery. For example, one of these scenes shows the poet hidden behind a sand dune in the desert and a group of Bedouins talking with Josef just thrown into the well by his brothers. Another scene shows "a gypsy / in a lodging house / [who] dances with a bear / as immigrants from nearby villages / shower them with coins and bread" (194). These images simultaneously reveal a world with fuzzy borders where imagination defies the notion of reality and a very precise scene where the poet's speech defies the notion of unreality. This poetic creation that is often compared with surrealist poetry is based on the memorable places and moments of the refugee's numerous journeys. In this poem about exodus, Faik describes ten scenes that take place in the desert, in the mountains, at a crossroads in Stanford, at the poet's house or in common places such as a lodging house,

a street or a coffee shop. The feeling of strangeness is the most evident link between all these ordinary moments and paradoxically balances the feeling of dislocation. This feeling of strangeness is generated by the fact that the poet is both alien to the scene by being an observer and included in the scene by being a hidden witness. Unlike the observer who is isolated and separated from the scene, the hidden witness has a key function in poetry. He is the link between all the levels of reality and therefore may express a universality. This universality of the subject becomes a way of exploring a much larger dimension of existence in which the subject, whatever his situation, necessarily experiences the feeling of exile.

Similarly, Adeb Kamal Ad-Deen's poems explore various stands (*mawâqif*) of being, the common point of which is precisely an exilic experience. In his presentation at a seminar at the College of Global Studies in 2013, Alexis Nouss argued that "the exilic experience, both condition and consciousness, deploys a unique and neglected heuristic potentiality in the face of these migratory realities because it accounts for singular spatialities and temporalities while generating a multi-belonging dynamic" of identity (Nouss 2013, See the page of the website). Adeb Kamal Ad-Deen's poem "Position of exile" / "Mawqif al-ghurba" (2012, 34–35) suggests that exile begins within the psyche, and is synonymous with alienation — defined as the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved. Then the feeling of exile moves to the heart, to the tongue, to the fingers and to the body. The poet makes exile a bodily sensation that increases consciousness of separation, as if the body were the starting point for spiritual migrations and inner displacements. From this point of view, anyone can feel exile in any dimension of her/his body, and thus understand the extent to which exile is the human condition *par excellence*.

More surprisingly, according to the Iraqi poet, the exilic condition of the human being holds the promise of salvation and of victory over oneself. In his poem, God speaks:

He said: the one who venerates me will be saved from exile.

The one who likes me will overcome exile.

For those who love me exile will be

a forgotten forgetfulness. (2012, 35)

Whether the exile is lived in the outer or inner worlds, in the past or in the moment, it reveals a dynamic of multi-affiliations that founds and strengthens our identity at the very moment when exile forces us to break with this dynamic. This is precisely what appears in the exilic phenomenon. But, according to the poem, this painful disruption can be healed through submission to God or, to put it differently, by displacement to a divine space where true identity is the union with God. The Sufi language and thought that underlie this poem explore similar ideas to those expressed in Osman's poetry.

For example, the Uyghur poet wonders in his poem “wahm al-bayâd” / “Illusion of Whiteness” (Osman 2015, 13–19) what to do with the world, without specifying if it is outside or inside, near or far, etc.:

Do we move

Between the origin and its opposition

So as to return to the abandoned beginning? (17)

“The abandoned beginning” refers to the state of union beyond which we can only experience separation and therefore the chaos, as well as all kind of conflicts. Thus, after

describing the world as a “chessboard”, he speaks to “the depth” and orders it not to wait anymore:

Do not wait more,

Go back, oh depth

I know you do not know how to stand on the chessboard. (15)

Nevertheless, whatever the difficulty of overcoming the feeling of dislocation and separation, the poet knows, as he puts it at the very beginning of his poem, that “humans incarnate the abyss in writing the end of glory on the chessboard of dissolution” (13). This probably means that to stand on the chessboard, the poet must experience the annihilation of his personality; he or she must abandon their superficial condition and his conflictual attachments. They must accept their condition of exile and be the starting point of their displacements. Moving from the chessboard to the palimpsest or from the superficial division of space (“the chessboard”) to the deep mixture of dimensions (“the chessboard of dissolution”), amounts to a transmigration — that is to say, the achievement of a liberating resolution through the dissolution offered by the body of poetic writing.

A “dissolutive” poetry

At the end of Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen’s poem “Mawqif al-gurba” / “Position of Exile”, the divine voice invites us to dissolution or, in Arabic, to *al-fana*. This ecstatic state is the dissolution of the ego in the pure divine presence, where separation does not exist, and conflicts dissolve. Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen, as much as Ahmatjan Osman, is clearly

influenced by the Sufi thought. The *fana'*, which can be most simply defined as extinction in God, is the supreme goal of the mystic who seeks to be extinguished in Him or to unite with Him. In another of Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen's poems, the poet invites us to feel that the true refuge is the one to be found in God. The divine voice rises again:

You know that there is no refuge
only in me
You know that my name
is what surviving,
and that everything is absolute extinction,
that my name is the Lord. (2012, 23)

In the poetry of Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen, the exilic condition is the condition of every man separated from God, wandering in the outside world in search of a true and peaceful refuge — namely a spiritual refuge. No doubt all types of human earthly refuge correspond to “the illusion of whiteness” to which Ahmatjan Osman's poem refers, an illusion that distances us from the peaceful and unlimited world rather than bringing us closer to it. Unlike the situation of the refugee, that of the exilic condition is not only a matter of place. Indeed, as evidenced by the example of the Uyghurs, one can also feel an alien in one's own country. Thus, the exilic condition is a matter of deep consciousness. It requires a dissolution of everything that limits us. The poetry of Ahmatjan Osman and Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen thus remarkably formulates an initial response to the refugee situation, which can be defined as a kind of poetic exploration in an immaterial world, or in the words of Ahmatjan Osman, a displacement to “the hinterland of ego”, which would be “a third possibility / beyond the dialectic of origins /

and oppositions?” (1988, 17). It goes without saying that this hinterland is vast and invisible. How can poetry be a way to access this?

One of the first Sufis, namely Abu Yazid al-Bistami (804-874), is known to have achieved union with God. He realized his spiritual goal through the experience of extinction. “Few mystics”, said Annemarie Schimmel (2004), “marked and intrigued their contemporaries and successive generations as much as this ascetic” (70). His enigmatic declarations or ecstatic remarks (*shath*) express paradoxes, as for example when a creature utters divine discourse. But paradoxes are paradoxical only from the point of view of dialectics and dualistic logic. If you want to understand them, you will need a lot of imagination, like that gained through drunkenness, but actually generated by an ecstatic state. Paradoxes are the evidence of a new manner of thinking and living. At least this is what Salah Faik’s narrative poem “Al-Bastami” suggests. It presents a dialogue between the poet and Al-Bastami himself who is the Sufi Abu Yazid al-Bistami. Al-Bastami knocked on the door to inform the poet what God had told him from heaven. Then he asked for hospitality for one night. This poem is just as confusing as the statements of Al-Bastami because, on the one hand, it presents this Sufi a mystic as being in direct relationship with God, and as one who has a very clear vision of paradise: “Your paradise is nothing but child's play,” he said to God. On the other hand, the poem presents him as a friend, who is sick and tired, and who takes “refuge” with the poet because he fears that God and his “ugly mummies” (2014, 408) will follow him. Here the dialectic of divine origin versus human creature or the opposition between the infinite and the finite, is expressed by the strong interaction between, on the one hand, daily life determined by fears and emotions, and, on the other hand, the intuition of paradise as a place unsoiled by ego. The wittiness of this poem shows that the difficult thing is not to access the intangible world, but to return to the physical world and create a new one. The figure of

the Sufi is like a third possibility which unites material and immaterial lives. But, in this poem, the Sufi seems to have failed, since he fears God.

In sum, the hinterland of ego can be suggested by reference to a historical figure such as a famous Sufi, as we have just seen, or to a real land like Uyghurland, as is the case in Osman's poetry. It is because they have really existed, or exist until now, that they really create a new space where unity is possible and perceptible through the marriage of thoughts, words and things. When poetry arrives at this kind of marriage, it becomes a "dissolatory" poetry insofar as the subject of the poem withdraws from the common language and dissolves the old structures of thought. As a result, he creates a subjective rhythm and language that is the very foundation of the poem. Dissolatory poetry is the poetry to which the subject of the poem gives form in a "forgotten state of forgetfulness".

It is in this sense that we can understand the title of one of Osman's poems, "Uyghurland, the Farthest Exile" (2015, 81–87). The poet wishes to forget not only the standard language (the Uyghur) but also the words of the birds "who pronounced the words of the Wandering Angel" (81). Forgetfulness gradually invades the poem and can be observed in the representation of Uyghurland, which becomes the land of all possible times, spaces and languages. It means that this paradoxical land is not just a poetic metaphor or utopia. It is simply a set of possibilities, only some of which are actualized by the poem. In short, Uyghurland is the name for "free freedom", as Rimbaud puts it (1972, 245). And this expression is interchangeable. But whatever the word to designate and represent the free freedom, the dynamics of freedom is what the poet speaks. At the beginning of the poem, Uyghurland refers to "the land of memory" (81), then to "the farthest exile" (81), which means here that Uyghurland is a distant memory. Further, it is compared to "a land of darkness" (81), then is said to designate "this extinguished land" (83) that the poet must leave "to shout freely with a vital voice, 'Uyghurland'" (83). At

this crucial moment of the poem, the meaning changes. This “extinguished land” is somehow dead. The poet questions himself: “What land could that be?” (83). The poet is motionless and observes his immediate environment, thus making a pause in his journey. Everything moves around him and he exiles himself in the poem:

Perhaps the immobile winds around you
O distant outliers
Were a fated certainty, a futility
In the depths of death and of being
Purely one’s self,
One’s pure self
Whatever space the great birds fly through
I wake beneath the wings
Of the famous ode
The place I am in, in
Silence, disturbed
I watch
Everything revolve around me
In darkness... (Osman 2015, 85)

In these lines, old structures of thought falter. The subject of the poem is as “disturbed” as the place. This word inscribed at the end of the line and isolated by a comma underlines the possible confusion between the subject and the place or their union. Thus, the ambiguous structure of the last five lines expresses what the poet suggests earlier when he writes:

[...] To stop
thinking of the ancient things I've heard
for the voices have shifted direction in me
so that am I indeed what the birds pronounced? (81)

And they pronounced “the words of the Wandering Angel”: “Uyghurland, the farthest exile!” In other words, the poet is himself the farthest exile. The “famous ode” seems to be a more reliable refuge than the “futility in the depths of death and of being purely one’s self”. The poem is the silent place where the poet wakes up and with which he merges. It is the evidence of non-separation. Therefore, the feeling of exile dissolves, since in this poetic dimension I am the other and the borders of identity melt away. So, we must keep in mind that dissolatory poetry creates a feeling of serenity and that sometimes, exceptionally, the subject of the poem comes out of the exilic condition. In this poetry, the world is as I think it and as I write it. That is why this poetry generates a powerful ability to change the exilic condition.

Beyond resignation

The “hinterland of ego” to which Bistami or birds would have had access is unknown and foreign to most humans. The three poets try to reach this land through poetic language and imagination. But their poems do not refer to an imagined community, as is the case with refugee literature that testifies to events lived collectively in a concrete and common space. They do not try to replace the host land with an imaginary land. The hinterland of ego is real. As paradoxically suggested in the poem of Salah Faik, access to the hinterland of ego, which would amount to a kind of return to origins, begins with a strong anchoring in everyday life with all its dangers, fears and resulting tensions. Basically, we could read

all these poems through the question raised by Ahmatjan Osman in his poem “Illusion of Whiteness”: “What do we do with this [visible and delusive] world?” To which I would add, to be more precise: what do we do with this world we undergo wherever we go without even realizing our own limitations? Is not this attitude of resignation the first gesture that reinforces our feeling of exile? This position is exactly the hostage’s position described in the French collection of Salah Faik’s poems (2011). The title chosen for this volume, namely *Hostages*, directly refers to a kind of failure and powerlessness. In the poem “Exile”, the exilic condition is expressed in conditional sentences: “If I found myself now in Kirkuk, I would visit the mausoleum of a saint” (Faik 2011, 57). This means that the exiled poet does not feel free to go where he wants and therefore is the hostage of another place, not to say of his own thoughts. But Salah Faik attempts to overcome the feeling of exile by translating the outer world into an inner language and thus changing his perception of the limited world. The task of his poetry is to transform refugee status into exilic condition, or resignation into acceptance, which amounts to another experience of displacement, a kind of mental shift. So, to what extent is poetry the key to this shift?

Salah Faik gives some answers to this question in lines he shared on his Facebook page, on June 22, 2017:

There, on the other side of the ocean or everywhere else, there is no place for exile. It is in you, the hills speak to one another through the hardened voices of sentinels, with high, extinguished torches. Behind their loopholes are the poets of the funeral orations. Nobody sees them or hears them. (My translation from Arabic)

Thus Salah Faik explores, more specifically, his own inner landscape as a first door that opens to unknown lands. “The other side of the ocean [like] everywhere else” is reachable by a mental displacement and a free use of language and thought. This experience of displacement is of an absolutely poetic and ethical order. To put it another way, it implies a certain way of creating and moving. Indeed, Salah Faik formulates the question posed by Ahmatjan Osman in terms of ethical responsibility: what do we do with ourselves? This is an essential question for those wanderers who feel banished and lost. In *Another Fire Befitting a City* ([1979] 2011), a collection of poems translated into English by friends and initially published in London, Faik bears witness to a chaotic daily life and decides to return to a vital element of existence — namely “the cell”, considered as the first and most vital space:

I return to the cells in order to listen to the rhythm

I return to the purity of the playground

I return to you

Seeing in your eyes the crawling of the last rains

(2011, 12)

The use of the personal pronoun referring to “you” can be understood as the unity of the self as much as its plurality. Poetry is thus a means of connecting and unifying the two sides (inner and outer) of the world. It is precisely this displacement of the gaze, these round trips from one reality to another that dissolve the exile’s feeling. The relationship to the other takes shape in everyday life movements and habits. This is why, for example, the poet invites God to eat with him and refuses to be a wise person instead of exiling

himself into the divine world and renouncing the secular world. Such renunciation is a way of opening up limited space to encompass the infinite, of accepting the limits of an ordinary situation through the eye of consciousness, but also of living fully the feeling of narrowness to inhabit the earth in pure consciousness. When the poet imagines the displacement of God accepting his invitation, he imagines a world whose first principle is holographic and according to which the parties are distinguished both by their uniqueness and by the same underlying principle. In short, God or the universe, or whatever the concept, is in us as much as we are in it or him. We must remember that the holographic principle is originally a scientific theory developed by two men: Karl Pribram, a neurophysiologist who claimed that the brain functions holographically (1991) and physicist David Bohm, who described the cosmos as a “holomovement”, the “explicate” projection of an “implicate” reality (2007, 178). This implies that the objective universe might not even exist. So, what good is it to resign oneself to the “abandoned country” if the objective universe is nothing but an explicate projection of an implicate reality?

Echoing this theory and Salah Faik’s poetry, Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen considers the desire to escape exile:

There is an error who grows
Another who multiplies
a third who gets older
a fourth who cries
and a fifth who flees from exile into exile
from tear to tear
from ashes into ashes (2017, my translation, text published on his website)

The mistake consists in believing that we are separated from each other and from the world and that time and space exist at all levels of reality. In fact, according to some beliefs, if you want to leave someone, you just have to go far away and not see her/him anymore. At first glance, this person is no longer in your life. However, he or she stays in your mind. Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen's poems represent the structure of space in terms of container and content. In short, distance would exist only from a superficial point of view that would ignore the fact that there are different containers for a unique content. Therefore, questions such as, Where to go?, or, Where to flee ? suppose an "elsewhere" that probably does not exist. This is reflected in the title of one of his poems: "Where to?" in which he notes:

The sail is in the middle of the ship.

The ship is in the middle of the sea.

The sea is in the middle of my heart.

(2012, published on his website)

According to these lines, the external world is in you as much as you are in it. And the relationship you have with this world inevitably depends on your subjective and inner experience of the different spaces you explore. Thus, another response formulated by the poetry of exile to the painful situation of refugee is to transform everyday life so that it is no longer the painful memory of our exilic condition, but instead the happy outcome of our limitations which are only the other side of the coin in an entanglement of worlds.

Poetry of exile as a “viaticum”

The feeling of exile is the evidence of various kinds of imprisonment and is the result of attachments to an ideology or to beliefs strongly inscribed in the body. As shown earlier in the poetic works of Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen, Ahmatjan Osman and Salah Faik, the poetry of exile bears witness to painful situations peculiar to refugee status, but goes further by suggesting other possibilities, notably a change of outlook and therefore of consciousness. The three poets sketch paths or perspectives that challenge traditional beliefs and thoughts. Most often, words remain deeply symbolic and hermetic as is the case in a great poem by Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen, “Mawqif al-sijn” (Prison Stand). In the final verses, God speaks to his slave:

Free yourself with My love

There is no freedom for you except with Me

There is no freedom for you except in the kingdom of wise persons

Who forgot all things except Me.

(2012, 78; my translation)

The condition of exile offers the opportunity to understand the world as we believe it is and to transform it as we want it to be. And as a literary category, the poetry of exilience, as I propose to name it, would give us the means to understand and to transform the world. It can be considered as a *viaticum* for everyone who wants to feel “free freedom” everywhere on Earth. The four lines cited above are hermetic if we believe that Ahmatjan Osman and Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen are suggesting that God is somewhere else and that only elects or initiates know how to join Him. This belief supposes the separation of worlds. But, as I have argued, the poetry of exile suggests the contrary. If the universe is

a hologram or uses the holographic principle, the work of these three poets is definitely one of its formulations. Indeed, if God is in us, then I am God and there is no freedom except with me. Therefore, the pronouns You and Me designate the same person and, more exactly, the same consciousness. Thus, while reading these lines, the reader focuses on the consciousness that reflects him. The poet could have certainly written “free yourself with Your love” but he would have then have needed to explain the nature of that love, which for him is not the task of poetry.

Poetry is not just a formative experience. Admittedly, it tries to give shape to pure presence, to that which can be grasped in the moment and which is constant. In this sense, it is an essential food in a “vain land”. But it is also the test of the imagination that is subjected to the slightest change of points of view. In this sense, the poetry of exile is an epic of the world always recommenced. It is a testimony of the unalterable presence and of the creation of freedom (felt in the alienation and alteration of the world). This is manifested by some recurring images in the poetry of these three poets: for example, to make God sit at one’s table or to make silence heard through the letters and the point or to make the harmony of voices heard in the human hubbub. What these poems have in common is neither content nor form, but the desire to articulate the hidden and the manifest. They offer us three ways to reconnect with the surrounding world and the inner world. Their work suggests that poetry in exile and the poetry of exile are, strictly speaking, a *viaticum* permitting one to cross various countries, as foreign and unknown as they can be. In short, this *viaticum* recommends that we observe and, while observing, to realize how much we create what we see and can create what we really want.

It is in this sense that I understand the final verses of Ahmatjan Osman’s poem “What Remains of the Night”, in which he celebrates poetic language:

Dear hypocrite reader, my friend!

By “what remains of the night”

I mean the desperate dream we possess

And the language spiders weave

And we, the black spiders, multitudes of Dumuzid

We tell the story of the world below

To the ones alive in death’s refusal

I write “we tell” to accuse all of us

Who take part in the injustice

Of killing the poet-singers

Our night becoming

For us what remains of the night

Troubled by the darkness

And our echoing tongues no longer

Filled by the moonlight

As our words once were

(2015, 161–163)

Is “What Remains of the Night” at the root of what Said calls “fundamentally a discontinuous state of being” (2003, 177) and what Alexis Nouss calls “exilience”? This “friend”, the “hypocrite reader”, is part of “our night” that engenders “the enigma of our world” that Patrick Chamoiseau mentioned in a recent manifesto signed by the poet and addressed to “the migrant brothers”. In the second article, Chamoiseau refers to this part of the night:

Poets declare that the indefinite universe holds the enigma of our world, that in this enigma lies the mystery of the living, that in this mystery throbs the poetry of men: no, nobody can be dispossessed of the other. (2016)

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¹ The Latin word *viaticum*, from *via* / the way, that meant any supply of provisions for traveling designates more recently “the Eucharist as given to a person near or in danger of death” (Oxford Dictionaries). In French criticism, the word “viatique” is still used in the expression “l’écriture viatique” which means “travel writing”. I propose the use of this Latin word to emphasize the specificity of the contemporary writing of the three poets mentioned in this paper. Their modes of writing are more or less influenced by the mystical journey of Sufism and therefore become a mean to explore the higher self, which is both the self and the other, and to express it in poetry. Their specific vision of the world embodied in a poetic language is not mentioned in the Western reflections on travel writing (Warwick Thompson 2012, Thouroude 2017, Blanton 2002 and Carl Thompson 2011) -- though stimulating and useful for any kind of traveler.

² Exile is generally thought from two places: the exile’s place and the abandoned homeland. But according to Alexis Nouss (2015, 109-133), the exile refers to a non-place which is the mode of habitation that superimposes the current place at the past one. This arrangement – a kind of bricolage, spatializes the exilience by inscribing a reality in a spatial order. This structure is similar to the palimpsest, that is a manuscript page from which the text has been scraped or washed, and becomes a way of describing the exilic experience.

³ According to Toufic Fahd (2018), “*ilm al-hurūf*, “the science of letters”, is a branch of *djāfr* [*q.v.*] which was originally concerned with onomatopoeia in the strict sense; but, among some esoteric sects, it became a sort of magical practice, to such an extent that Ibn Khaldūn (*Muḳaddima*, iii, 137-61, Fr. tr. 188-200, Rosenthal 171-82) gave it the name of *sīmiyā*’ (σημεία), which is usually reserved for white magic. It is based on the occult properties of the letters of the alphabet and of the divine and angelic names which they form.”