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## Caught Between Two Worlds: Bakhtin's Dialogism in the Exile Experience

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Locked in a Classical paradigm, monological thinking found in most contemporary research denies the possibility of contradicting ideas existing simultaneously. Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical ontology, however, supplies a new polylogical perspective with which to view language. When Bakhtin's dialogism is used to revisit the discourse of international exiles who have come to the United States of America, a more complex and sophisticated understanding of their lives and experiences emerges. Their contradictions, simultaneities, and conflicts are recognized, not as psychological flaws or illogical thinking, but as manifestations of the centripetal/centrifugal forces at work in their lives. Furthermore, a dialogical analysis of exile discourse has engendered the identification of four recurring dialectical motifs previously unrecognized by monological analysis.

*The Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden  
Genesis 3 (on the first exile)*

'Our era,' argues Edward Said, is the 'age of the refugee, the displaced person, the exile' (Christopher 1995: 31). Of these three, one finds refugees and displaced persons pulled from their homeland by 'natural disaster or a general, *impersonal* threat such as war or famine' (Tabori 1972: 23). Exiles, however, who are pushed from their homeland on *personal* grounds, are 'compelled to leave their country on account of well-founded fears of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion.'<sup>1</sup> Moreover, exiles cannot return to their homeland as long as the causes persist that drove them away. Herein lies the difference, assert Grinberg and Grinberg, between exiles and migrants or expatriates: 'for the exile, departure is imposed and return impossible' (1989: 157). Finally, although their banishment may last a lifetime, exiles must always consider their plight temporary, 'hoping to return to their fatherland when circumstances permit—but unable or unwilling to do so as long as the factors that made them exiles persist' (Tabori 1972: 27). Lenin has aptly described such individuals as 'people who vote with their feet' (Tabori 1972: 23).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the United States served as a port of solace for many such voters. German, Nigerian, South Vietnamese, Cuban,

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Russian, Salvadorean, Iranian, South African, Chinese, and Chilean exiles, to name only a few, have all been compelled to flee from totalitarian persecution to the shores of the United States of America.

Given exiles' international ubiquity, rhetorical/literary research on their writings is surprisingly limited. In the past decade, however, there has been a growing number of social-scientific researchers devoting increased time and attention to their emotional and cognitive state. Much of this work focuses on the exiles' experience as they attempt to forge a new life in their new home (Broe and Ingram 1989; Brooke-Rose 1996; Dash 1992; Davaran 1996; Glad 1993; Grinberg and Grinberg 1989; Israel 1997; Moeller 1983; Morris 1996; Naficy 1993; Oriiz 1997; Partnoy 1988), and to a lesser extent, on the exiles' conception of their 'homeland,' 'identity,' and 'return' (Warner 1994; Kibreab 1999; Zetter 1999). While these works serve a valuable role in illuminating the emotional struggles of displaced persons, they also share two common problems. First, these works rely on traditional, monological thinking to interpret the discourse produced by exiles. And second, these works have either ignored or have been unable to supply a satisfactory interpretation of the prevalence of contradictions, simultaneities, and dialectic tensions found in the writings of exiles.

This project, therefore, revisits the writings of exiles through a different, *dialogical*, lens and offers an alternative explanation for the dualisms and contradictions found in their discourse. From the analysis of the writings (letters, poems, prose, fiction, diaries, etc.) of international exiles who have come to the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, I will argue that such discourse can best be understood through Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical theory. Bakhtin's polylogical philosophy of language and human action supplies language scholars with an alternative perspective that accounts for the simultaneous and contradicting presence of the centrifugal and centripetal forces inherent in the communication experience.

In what follows, I will define monological limitations, highlight key elements in Bakhtin's dialogical theory, explain how his dialogical philosophy of language serves as an alternative to traditional, monological discourse analysis, and reinterpret the discourse of exiles as they struggle to answer four recurring questions that appear in the majority of their writings: 1) What is their emotional and psychological state? 2) How do they socially identify themselves? 3) What are their sentiments towards their countries? 4) How do they conceive of their future?

### **Monological Thinking**

'Monological thinking' is a Bakhtinian term for Classical logic and its bivalent foundation. By bivalence I am referring to the law of 'traditional (or Classical) logic that every proposition is either true or false; that is, there are just two values a proposition may take—and only one proposition that can be right' (Blackburn 1994: 45). While this law has been challenged by a select group of

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logicians (deviant, fussy, intuitionistic, antirealism, many-valued-system, and modal-system philosophers<sup>3</sup>) during the twentieth century, most scholars outside the field of logic, 'including almost all of science,' have been guided by this classical paradigm with its either/or dualistic assumptions (Morgan 1998: 822).

According to Baxter, monologism, also referred to by Bakhtinian thinkers as 'non-dialogical thinking,' is characterized by 'a bias toward unitariness,' unidimensional theorizing, and a lack of dialogical consideration. It leads the interpreter to think in either/or propositions, leaving no logically viable way to consider simultaneities, contradictions, or the 'middle ground.' Such thinking, asserts Baxter, creates 'false unities' in research, and ignores the inherent dialogical tension found in the human experience (1994: 25-26).<sup>4</sup>

In the corpus of exile research, monological thinking is most problematically manifested in the analysis of exile discourse. Exile researchers, from linguistics and philosophy to literary critics and sociology, have been unable to supply a satisfactory explanation for the overwhelming presence of contradictions, simultaneities, and dialectical tensions found in exile writings as they struggle for social identification.

### Traditional Analysis of Exile Literature

Hewitt reminds us, 'To have a social identity is to identify with some set of people with whom one feels an affinity, in whose company one feels comfortable, and whose ideas and beliefs are similar to one's own.' One feels, Hewitt continues, 'real and whole as a person in relation to this community' (1991: 126-127). Kibreab, more specifically, sees 'the identity people gain from their association with a particular place is an indispensable instrument to a fulfilling life' (1999: 385). Consequently, when exiles are forced from the people and places that have previously given them definition, they struggle for their 'wholeness' and 'fulfilment.' They are located between two worlds, precariously balanced between feeling both loyal and unfaithful, love and hate, and fear and security. Because of this disjunctiveness, exile discourse has a schizophrenic quality, unable to commit to any firm conclusion about their lives, identity, or future.

It is quite common, for example, to find exiles like the Central-American professor now living in the US, who writes that he has 'both resisted and accepted the new culture, idealized the old one and its objects as much as [he] idealized what [he] hoped the new objects could give [him].' He continues to say that, over time, 'the changeable combination of internal and external factors has produced contradictions' in his sense of self (Grinberg and Grinberg 1989: 162).

Such 'bifurcated' statements have been traditionally analysed from one of four flawed, monological perspectives. The *psychoanalytic perspective* views exiles who produce such statements as 'unstable' or 'unbalanced' (Grinberg and Grinberg 1989: 161-165). Monologically, one cannot break the rule of

non-contradiction or think dualistically about self-identity without being viewed as either illogical, abnormal, or both. The *pro-centripetal* perspective discounts the centrifugal forces (the drive for uniqueness) while privileging the centripetal aspects (the drive for stability) of the discourse. Antithetically, the *pro-centrifugal* perspective discounts the centripetal forces (the drive for stability) while privileging the centrifugal aspects (the drive for uniqueness) of the discourse. Finally, the *pendulum-model* perspective recognizes the dualisms in the discourse, but conceives of it in either/or propositions. Like a swinging pendulum, the exile is seen as vacillating from position 'A' to position 'B' back to position 'A.'<sup>5</sup>

The obvious shortcomings of these four perspectives stem from their monological/nondialogic approach to the analysis of discourse. They are unable to address what W. E. B. DuBois has called the 'two-ness' of the individual in a strange land—being of 'two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals' (Early 1993: xvii–xviii). In the end, each approach creates 'false unities' at the expense of the exile's true experience and wholeness.

As an alternative theoretical lens, the Russian philosopher of language Bakhtin developed a polylogical system of thought that allows the two voices of the exile to be heard and understood on its own terms.

#### **Bakhtin and Dialogism**

Many argue that being exiled forever changes one's thinking and perception; the experience permeates the human soul so deeply that everything becomes imbued by its shadow (Glad 1993; Tabori 1972; Spalek and Bell 1982). This transformation can be seen in the writings of James Baldwin, Albert Camus, Joseph Conrad, Fyodor Dostoevsky, W. E. B. DuBois, Eldridge Cleaver, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and the Dalai Lama. This claim is also true of the work of Bakhtin, who was exiled to Kazakhstan in 1929 by Stalin for 'connections with intellectual groups and the underground church' (Holquist 1990: 9).

After Bakhtin's return from exile in 1934, he began asking fundamental questions of existence. He concluded that the very foundation of reality is created through the binary opposition of push–pull forces found in our natural and social worlds—an idea whose impetus, one may speculate, can be traced to the dialogical pressures of his Kazakhstan exile. The clash between Bakhtin's push–pull powers is enacted at many different levels, 'as in the interplay between electromagnetic, chemical, and thermodynamic forces in the physical cosmos, the human body, and the universe of subatomic particles.' But these forces, asserted Bakhtin, are most importantly at work in the world of social relations, between individuals or cultures (Bakhtin 1981: 272). Such a relationship may be constituted as essentially a 'dialogue,' a metaphor which Bakhtin used to describe all life, as well as his theory—*dialogism* (1981: 271–274).

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Specifically, dialogism may be conceived of as a 'ceaseless struggle between  
*centrifugal* forces, which strive to keep things various, separate, apart, different  
 from each other, and *centripetal* forces, which strive to keep things together,  
 unified, same.' Centrifugal forces compel 'movement, becoming, ... they long  
 for change and new life [away from home].' Centripetal forces 'urge stasis,  
 resist becoming and desire the seamless quiet' and stability of home (Clark and  
 Holquist 1984: 7). Bakhtin, in his essay, 'Discourse in the Novel,' elaborates on  
 these forces:

Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their  
 uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification,  
 the uninterrupted process of decentralization and disunification go forward.  
 Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal  
 as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The process of centralization and  
 decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance (1981:  
 272).

Because of this centrifugal/centripetal binary foundation, dialogic theory can  
 be positioned within the Superstructuralist tradition, Harland's term for any  
 theory that is a derivation of Structuralism (1987). 'Like Structuralism,  
 dialogism organizes the structure of the social experience through the analytic  
 unit of the binary opposition' (Baxter 1994: 36). What separates Bakhtin from  
 traditional Structuralists, however, is that his dualistic forces operate  
 simultaneously with each other. For him, the world is not logically divided  
 into exclusive either/or categories, but exists in a state of simultaneity. Holquist  
 and Clark argue that for Bakhtin, 'simultaneity dealt with ratios of same and  
 different in space and time' (Holquist 1990: 19). He has thus reconceptualized  
 the interaction of binary oppositions that have been conceived by traditional,  
 monological thinkers to be mutually exclusive.

Additionally, dialogism differs from post-Saussurian linguistics, with its  
 'essentially mechanistic or mentalist impulse, in that dialogism is more organic  
 and transactional.' Bakhtin emphasizes 'performance, history, actuality, and  
 openness of dialogue, as opposed to the closed dialectic of Structuralism's  
 binary oppositions' (Clark and Holquist 1984: 7). Baxter concurs, writing that  
 'to think dialogically is to focus on the centripetal-centrifugal dynamic, not on  
 the static, monologic unities of one form or another' (1994: 36). Thus,  
 Bakhtin's dialogism rejects the post-seventeenth-century European paradigm,  
 i.e. Rationalism and Empiricism, that demands neat formulations of isolated  
 and static categories to be deemed valid or scientific.

### Dialogism and Exile Discourse

While Bakhtin's theory has been used to analyse the novel (Patterson 1985;  
 Wellek 1985), interpersonal relationships (Baxter 1988, 1992, 1994; Rawlins  
 1989), feminism (Berrong 1985) and culture (Hirschkop and Shepherd 1989),  
 his ideas become especially illuminating when used as a lens to analyse the ways

in which international exiles attempt to negotiate and define themselves in their new land. His conception of the push-pull forces of nature and society mirror the tug-of-war descriptions found so pervasively in exile discourse—the centripetal forces of home and stability vs. the centrifugal forces of away and uniqueness.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, therefore, the contradicting discourse of exile literature may be reconceived as an ongoing dialogue between the exile's centrifugal voice that sees the possibilities of starting over in a new land, no matter how ambiguous and uncertain it may be, and the centripetal voice that desires the sameness and stability of the old land, no matter how tyrannical or oppressive it may have been.

As a tool for discourse analysis, Bakhtin's dialogical approach also remedies the shortcomings of past research. Exiles are not forced to choose a country (old vs. new) to love or hate in order to be considered rational, balanced, developed, or logical. In fact, it is highly probable that they may simultaneously both 'love and hate' their 'new and old' countries. Furthermore, unlike the pro-centrifugal/pro-centripetal approaches that discount half of the exile's dialogic voice, or the pendulum model that negates the possibility of simultaneous contradictions, Bakhtin's Superstructuralist conception allows binary oppositions to be simultaneously present and transactionally at play. Indeed, such interplay is expected, accepted, and welcomed. Most importantly, this approach allows exiles to be heard and understood on their own terms—not manipulated to fit a monological template.

### The Exile Dialogue

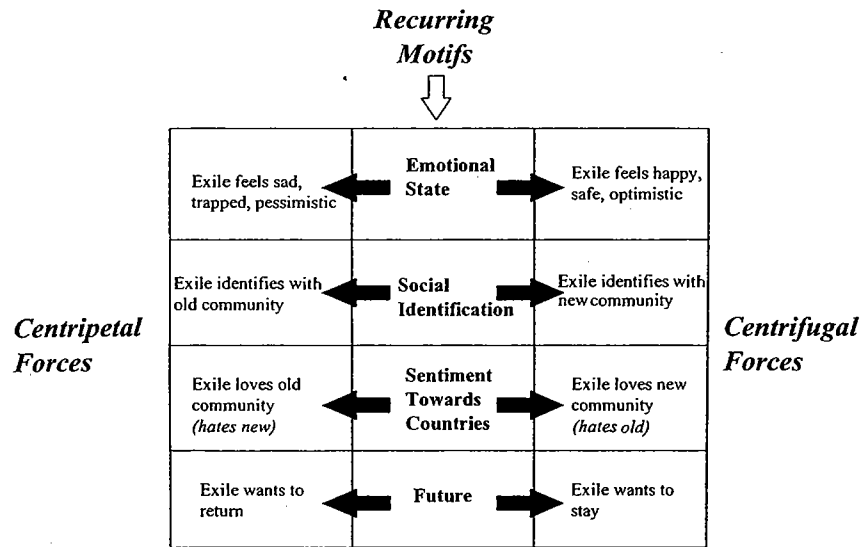
The discourse produced by international exiles living in America in the second half of the twentieth century is characterized by two unique features. First, as discussed above, a dialogical tension between the centripetal and the centrifugal forces is present as exiles attempt to redefine themselves in a new land. Second, four recurring motifs dominate their writings (see Figure 1). They are the struggle to define their a) emotional and psychological state, b) social identity, c) sentiments towards their countries, and d) future. In what follows, I examine the dialogical tensions found in these recurring motifs.

#### *The Struggle to Define Emotional/Psychological State*

The traumatic nature of being cast out of one's country forces fundamental inquiries into one's emotional disposition (Hewitt 1991: 126). As a result, exiles are more compelled to discuss their psychological state than all other topics. And true to Bakhtin's conception, their self-analysis is imbued with dialogical tension. This tension finds its most eloquent expression through the exile's use of metaphors, many of which place the individual in between centripetal/centrifugal forces, unable to find solace in one stable position.

Figure 1

## The Four Dialogical Motifs and Their Accompanying Tensions



Esquivel, an exile from Guatemala, describes her emotional state through the Christian metaphor of Jesus' life, death, and rebirth. Unlike the Jesus story, however, she is unable to find complete resolution. Instead, she simultaneously weeps and sings for her two countries:

They left behind only that which they thought useless. They took away everything except the spirit which they are incapable of seeing. So I have experienced all of it. From the scandal of the cross to the joyous surprise of Mary Magdalene. Sometimes weeping. Sometimes singing (1988: 197).

For Naficy, an Iranian exile living in Los Angeles, this dialogical tension finds expression through the metaphor of time. Naficy writes of a recurring dream in which, lost and disoriented, he asks faceless men the time. In response, he receives two contradicting reports from his fellow citizens. He asks, 'Is someone playing with me? Have I gone mad?' He answers that 'In exile, life synchronically dissolves' (1993: xii). Even something as stable and absolute as time becomes fragmented. Naficy is unable to find a single, monologic response to describe his cognitive state. He is forced to live in between time, emotionally unsynchronized with his old and new worlds.

For Anders, the struggle to describe his emotional state is expressed through a metaphor of puberty. Like the child who is caught between childhood and adulthood, Anders is emotionally caught between his old and new worlds:

The expression 'old boy' suddenly sounded meaningful... Because we occupied the *chambres garnies* of a temporary existence, because we regarded our weekdays

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as a mere intermezzo, because we arranged our life as only an antecedent to the day after tomorrow . . . We engaged in a totally invalid life, in a condition that, on the basis of its similarity to the lifestyle of adolescents, could be labeled 'puberty' (1967: 76-77).

This ambivalent simultaneity has also been expressed metaphorically by exiles as an absence of weight, floating between two worlds, e.g. like many protagonists found in the exile and post-exile writings of Joseph Roth, Robert Musil, and Thomas Mann. Klaus Mann, for instance, 'hovers continually above and around various groups to which, in spite of all attempts, he cannot unconditionally attach himself' (Paucker 1982: 85). In *Der Wendepunkt* he calls this hovering in empty space the typical fate of an 'intellectual between two World Wars' (p. 380). Some, however, describe their emotional state in even grimmer terms. In Hermann Broch's trilogy, *Die Schlafwandler*, the romanticist Pasenow and the realist Hegenau both feel they emotionally live in the 'chasm' of nothingness surrounded by a 'dead region of silence' (Paucker 1982: 83). Neither able to walk with other humans on *terra firma* nor able to walk with the angels in the heavens, they find themselves emotionally trapped and polylogically divided.

Finally, Brutus finds utility in the mind/body opposition in describing his emotional 'two-ness.' Brutus claims that as an exile, his *head* creates a stability that allows him to be 'calm,' 'absorbed in planning,' and 'courteous to servility' in America. But behind his 'quiet eyes,' in the 'chambers of his *heart*,' he is filled with 'cries and sirens' for South Africa (1985: 35). In identifying the visceral with the centrifugal forces and the cerebral with the centripetal forces, he creates a disjointed self-portrait lacking continuity and wholeness, similar to the metaphoric images selected by Esquivel, Naficy, and Anders.

While these exiles escaped different political exigencies, they are united by their shared struggle to define their psychological state. This task is most frequently, and eloquently, accomplished through metaphors that empower the authors to move away from single, monological descriptions of feelings, e.g. happy, sad, depressed, and towards more complex, dialogical descriptions of emotions. As Richards argued, a metaphor is a 'semi-surreptitious method by which a greater variety of elements can be wrought into the fabric of the experience.' Metaphors become especially useful, as the above cited exiles have shown, when the 'wholeness of an experience' cannot be described. In such cases, Richards asserted, metaphors can 'supply an excuse by which what is needed may be smuggled in' (1925: 240-241).

#### *The Struggle to Define Social Identity*

A second motif that dominates exile writing is that of social identity. Fundamental to human existence, asserts Stone, is the process of defining one's self within the larger social structure. When a person has identity, 'he is situated, that is cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgment of

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his participation or membership in social relations.' Of these social relations,  
the most fundamental is one's national identification (Hewitt 1991: 126). For  
exiles, however, participation and membership in their nation is impossible.  
Consequently, exiles must redefine their social 'self' within a new social/  
nationalistic context. Lam, a South Vietnamese exile, has constructed an  
identity that has been bifurcated by the centripetal/centrifugal pressures of his  
experience. He no longer can define himself in monologic terms as he did  
before the war. He is now 'reborn' with two, albeit unequal, hearts:

Sometimes I go to a Vietnamese restaurant in San Francisco's Tenderloin district.  
I sit and stare at two wooden clocks hanging on the wall. The left one is carved in  
a shape of the voluptuous S: The map of Vietnam. The one on the right is hewed  
in the shape of a deformed tooth: the map of America. Ticktock, ticktock. They  
run at different times. Ticktock, ticktock. I was born a Vietnamese. Ticktock,  
ticktock. I am reborn an American. Ticktock, ticktock. I am of one soul.  
Ticktock, ticktock. Two hearts (1990: 724).

Others who have felt similar identity vacillation have turned to the use of  
cultural artifacts from their past as centripetal anchors. These artifacts serve to  
stabilize their pre-exiled identity by deadening the 'push' from their new  
community and accentuating the 'pull' from their old community. For Ortiz,  
an exile from Castro's Cuba, a stable social identity is facilitated via coffee. In  
Cuba, 'Coffee performed a kind of nationally defining work ... the capacity to  
enjoy a thick, too-sweet *tasita de café cubano* marked your Cubanity like no  
other capacity for pleasure could' (1997: 65). For Perez-Firmat, music serves a  
similar role. Like coffee, music in Miami helps 'promote the continuance of  
Cuban culture outside Cuba' while preserving a nostalgic social identity in a  
new land (Ortiz 1997: 73).

Others have found utility in their native language to buffer the uneasy  
dualism between past and present, home and away. For Moushegh Ishkhan,  
'The Armenian language is the home and haven where the wanderer can own  
roof and wall and nourishment.' It is available for 'every Armenian to find  
when he's lost in the wilderness of his future, or his past' (Ishkhan 1985: 148).  
But as Ishkhan, Ortiz, and Perez-Firmat testify, their efforts to regain the  
simple, monological identity of their past is always haunted by the centrifugal  
'present.' For while one may find a temporary hiatus from the push-pull  
tensions of social identity (drinking coffee, listening to music, or speaking a  
native language), such times are ephemeral, if not illusory. The exile is  
ultimately forced back into the dialogical world of the present.

The exiles that appear to be most at peace with their newly crafted social  
identities are those that have become bicultural. This process, asserts  
Christopher, is not the same as assimilating, 'which is to leave behind one's  
culture of origin.' Indeed, to retain the definition of an exile, one must not  
'leave behind,' or surrender hope for reconciliation with the culture of origin  
(1995: 30). Mukherjee refers to the process of biculturality as 'transnational  
cultural fusion,' a concept that suggests the ability to negotiate the centripetal/

centrifugal forces equitably, greatly reducing emotional or cognitive dissonance (Christopher 1995: 30).

An eloquent example of cultural fusion is found in Hayslip's autobiographical *Child of War, Woman of Peace* (1993). As her narrative opens, she calls her initial efforts at cultural melding 'crazy' and monocultural Americans 'normal.' This 'immigrant consciousness,' as Christopher terms it, is soon replaced by a dialogical conception of identity. Her confusion is transformed into clarity through the understanding and negotiation of the centripetal/centrifugal forces inherent in her life. Hayslip's attitude towards religion, for instance, 'embraces religious tolerance, and a sort of syncretic stance' in which she sees value in all religious ideas (Christopher 1995: 83). For Hayslip there are no inconsistencies or contradictions in having a Buddhist altar in her home and participating in a Bible study with her husband's church. As she writes, 'I felt these changes made me a better person—a woman with two cultures instead of one' (Hayslip 1993: 134).

As Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society* has so convincingly argued, our notions of 'self' are not developed before birth, but are created through the process of symbolic interaction. This created 'self' remains dynamic throughout our lives, changing and adapting as individuals encounter new challenges, people, and situations (1934: 135–144). In certain extreme cases, however, this construct is challenged so fundamentally, either by psychological or environmental changes, that individuals find themselves in an *identity crisis* (1934: 144). For Lam, Rieff, Ortiz, Perez-Firmat, Ishkhan, and Hayslip, the crisis has engendered a variety of stratagems. Some, like Lam, vacillate between their two identities; others, like Rieff and Ortiz, find identity anchors in artifacts; and still others, like Hayslip, negotiate an identity hybrid through the centripetal/centrifugal tensions of their experience. While some of these approaches seem to reduce more cognitive dissonance and produce longer lasting effects than others, they are all intensely personal and, at times, painful efforts to restore peace to an identity caught in crisis between two worlds.

### *The Struggle to Define Sentiments*

A third motif that exiles feel compelled to address is their sentiments, loyalties, and emotions towards their old and new countries. Traditional monological analysis of exile writings posits a one-dimensional interpretation of this struggle, viewing them as *either* hating *or* loving their country of origin, *or* hating *or* loving their new country. Grinberg and Grinberg, for example, see exiles simply rejecting the new and idealizing the old:

Exiles reject everything the new country has to offer—anything that is different from their own customs, language, work and culture. Thus, instead of seeing the new country as their salvation, exiles see it as the cause of all their troubles while idealizing their original country with never-ending nostalgia (1989: 158).

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If, however, exile discourse is analysed through a dialogical perspective, a much more complex and accurate interpretation of the narrative emerges in which exiles are simultaneously accepting *and* critical of *both* their old *and* new cultures. Far from 'rejecting everything' from the new country and 'idealizing' everything from their old, most exiles struggle in the centripetal/centrifugal force field of battling sentiments.

In a prime example of this dialogical complexity, Nkosi, a South African exile, expresses hate and love, rejection and acceptance, and pride and embarrassment for both his new and old communities. Nkosi recalls that his 'immediate reaction was to flinch from this strange cold place' and to sheath his 'body more securely within his warm African skin.' Simultaneously, he also felt an 'insane, childish cry which demanded of this land that it should enfold him, love him more dearly than all the others, as though he deserved special attention.' But this love would have to be unrequited, for Nkosi could not love it back, believing that his new country expected 'every visitor from smaller countries to pay homage to all its gadgetry.' It became important to him to 'refuse to oblige,' ironically remaining loyal to the country that exiled him (1994: 298). Eventually Nkosi learned to live within the centripetal/centrifugal force field, not by ignoring its existence or by choosing sides, but through a synthesis. He now conceives of himself as a Mulatto child, produced by a white, American mother and a black, African father—loving and needing both, even with all their flaws, to be whole (1994: 298).

Adorno, figurehead of the Frankfurt School of Critical and Social Theory, also found himself torn over his sentiments and loyalties to the United States. In the forward to *Prisms*, Adorno expressed the 'gratitude that he cherishes for the United States'—the country which enabled him to 'survive an era of persecution' and to which he 'has ever since felt himself deeply bound' (1992: 8). More familiar to us, of course, is another less overtly grateful Adorno. As a Neo-Marxist who pontificated on the corrupting influence of Capitalism and the evils of a 'popular' culture that placated its masses, Adorno railed against an array of American ills from 'jazz to Hollywood movies and from suburban tract housing to Americans' use of nicknames and their propensity to smile' (Israel 1997: 85–86). Thus, Adorno's dialogical tension emerges over his intellectual commitment to reform a bourgeois culture, and the fact that this same culture has enabled him to stay alive and critique its corruption. There is also, however, a third, less-known Adorno that emerges, one that understands the futility of conceiving of 'home' in monologic terms. These reflections are 'informed by the belief that the only home truly available [in exile], though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing.' Adorno writes, 'The house is past,' the wars, death camps, and 'the immanent development of technology had long decided' its demise. With grave irony, he concludes 'it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home' (Said 1994: 147). Thus, instead of having two worlds like Nkosi, the dialogical tensions of being exiled leave Adorno with none.

Other exiles from the Nazi tyranny have also felt a sense of emotional consternation over their simultaneous love and hate for both cultures.

Grunwald and his fellow exiles from Austria would often 'sentimentalize their homelands and denigrate America' on one day, only to contradict their sentiments about their two homes the next. In particular, Grunwald believed that a special type of dialogical tug-of-war took place for wealthy Jews who had been forced to give up wealth and position for survival. Often using humour as a strategy of dealing with their transformed lives, Grunwald and friends would ritually tell the joke of two tiny dachshunds: 'Ah,' one said to the other, 'you should have seen me back in Berlin. There I was a St. Bernard.' This humorous transaction was always concluded with 'Yea, but it is better to be a live dachshund than a dead St. Bernard' (1995: 334).

Not all exiles, however, were able to use humour to cope with the centripetal/centrifugal pressures. Some of the saddest cases were those who forced themselves to forget their past. Hannah Arendt recalls the hardest time of her exile:

We were told to forget; and we forgot quicker than anybody ever could imagine. In a friendly way we were reminded that the new country would become a new home; and after four weeks in America, we pretended to be Americans. The more optimistic among us would even add that their whole former life had been passed in a kind of unconscious exile and only their new country now taught them what a home really looks like (1994: 111).

In order to forget more efficiently, Arendt recalls, she and her fellow exiles 'avoided any allusion to concentration or internment camps.' Even among themselves, they did not 'speak about this past'; but alone, her suppressed ghosts would visit, haunting her dreams and thoughts. 'I imagine,' she writes, 'that at least nightly we think of our dead or we remember the poems we once loved' (1994: 111–112). After years of anguish, however, Arendt came to accept life's essential dialogue. To have pretended otherwise, she believes, only produced guilt and sorrow that haunted her soul long after her physical exile had ended.

Unfortunately, most exiles never obtain the epiphany of their own two-ness that Arendt and Nkosi have. The monological template for 'reasonable and sane thinking' instead guides many either to choose sides, like Grunwald, or, like Adorno, to choose nothing. To remain locked in a bivalent mindset eliminates the possibility of solace without sacrificing one of the two homes. Balance can only be restored by *either* remaining loyal *or* assimilating.

### *The Struggle to Define the Future*

The final motif that emerges in the discourse of exiles is that of their future and the idea of their 'return'—the event that would *ideally* mark the end of the push-pull existence that has haunted their lives since their expulsion. Many, however, fear that in their absence the home left behind has transmogrified into an unrecognizable form. Consequently the centripetal force that has served as a

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polarized anchor during their exile has lost its contemporary significance,  
 leaving in its wake only a nostalgia for a place and time that no longer exists.

One finds this fear of loosing the centripetal pull in the letters of Thomas  
 Mann. Confiding in Herman Hesse (who remained in Germany), Mann  
 wondered whether he would ever see 'his' Germany again.

I fear—if fear is the right word—that this process is going to go on and on, and  
 that when the waters recede Europe will have changed beyond recognition, so that  
 one will hardly be able to speak of going home, even if it is physically possible  
 (1995: 227).

Other times one finds Mann far more dialogically ambivalent about his future  
 in both Germany and America. In a telling joke that illustrates this  
 tergiversation, Mann tells of two exiles who are crossing the Atlantic in  
 opposite directions. As their ships pass, the men simultaneously shout: 'Are  
 you crazy?' (Grunwald 1995: 334–335).

Other exiles have abandoned the idea that the 'return' will mark an end  
 to their struggle. Isaac Bashevis Singer, for example, believes he was  
 condemned to a future of a lone stranger, caught between his old and new  
 worlds, in the centripetal/centrifugal force field without end. In his book,  
*Exile and Love*, Singer writes of the solipsism that invaded his notions of his  
 'future.'

I lay there in the darkness. I was overcome by a fatigue that most probably comes  
 with old age. I had cut off whatever roots I had with Poland, yet I knew that I  
 would remain a stranger here to my last day. I tried to imagine myself in Hitler's  
 Dachau, or in a labor camp in Siberia. *Nothing was left for me in the future* (1995:  
 225–227).

Not all exiles are so pessimistic about their return. For some the trek home is  
 viewed as a redemptive event that will put an end to the centripetal/centrifugal  
 tug-of-war of forced exile. Vien Linh's return to South Vietnam, for instance, is  
 conceived of as a reunion of both his and Vietnam's battling halves.

Born somewhere, scattered out to the four winds,  
 a hundred children will speak a hundred tongues.  
 Tomorrow, if we all should go back home,  
 let's hope we'll speak the common speech of tears (Bouvard 1985: xiii).

Similarly Ortiz reports that the conception of the 'return' to many Cuban exiles  
 is imbued with redemptive powers. But unlike Linh's 'future,' Ortiz's view of a  
 post-Castro Cuba is less optimistic. Many Cubans, he writes, find themselves in  
 a 'helplessly idealized addiction to the redemptive promise of return.' In this  
 'fictional' conception, the dialogical struggles of 'home' and 'away,' that have  
 marked their existence since their escape, are resolved. Their splintered lives in  
 America are made whole again in the 'dream' of Cuba. But as Ortiz goes on to  
 report, many of these same people realize the faith in this redemptive promise is  
 'becoming increasingly embarrassing, something to hide but certainly not to  
 abandon, yet' (1997: 63).

The 'return' to a pre-exiled state, however, is not always conceived as the 'ideal' situation for all exiles. For some, being exiled has become full-time work with great benefits. Alegria sees some of his fellow Chilean exiles, especially the intellectual elite, becoming what he has titled 'professional exiles' (1994: 195). And while they ambivalently claim they wait for the day they return to their centripetal home, their return also means the loss of their deified status in their centrifugal home. 'The intellectual grows in his profession, opposing and fighting the system, but also using it to gain respectability.' As long as the intellectual remains exiled, there will always be other non-exiled intellectuals to 'celebrate, admire, and reward' his/her bravery and heroism (Alegria 1994: 195). Returning, therefore, would mark the end of privilege. Living in perpetual exile ironically becomes the ideal future.

And still to others, the future does not signal an end to their dialogical struggle, but a continuation of the centripetal/centrifugal forces that have given their lives meaning. Lam (1995) tells of one friend, once a boat person, who called from the east coast to tell him that he has 'gained a second address, a second home, a second country.' Another friend suggests that 'normalization marks a new phase in the Vietnam diaspora—a reverse exodus.' The ocean, he notes enthusiastically, 'once swallowed up Vietnamese lives. Now it's a familiar carpet under his jumbo jet's wings.' Finally a third friend who plans to open a law office in Vietnam, tells Lam that the American proverb, 'you can never go home again,' is no longer true. 'I see my future as going back and forth' he says (pp. 2-3).

From the traditional monological perspective, the 'return' becomes the simple solution to the exile's plight. In contrast, Bakhtin's lens illuminates the dialogical complexities that are truly entailed in 'going home again.' For some, the future is grim, believing that what awaits them is a macabre void. Others anticipate a nostalgic reunion, enabling them to return to a simpler time before their banishment. Some even see the return as cathartic, healing the personal and social wounds of the past. But to truly think dialogically about one's future means to realize that the past will always inform the future, that one's two communities will always converse in the memory of experience, and that the centripetal/centrifugal forces will continue to shape the exiles' reality no matter where they call home.

#### **Implications and Recommendations**

If this research has any pragmatic application, it is hoped that the many exiles who suffer from depression and guilt over abandoning the motherland, having succumbed to historical, political and economic pressures, or considering assimilation or biculturalism in their new land, will find solace and peace in knowing that their cognitive struggles are products of linguistic structures found in all cultures, not signs of emotional instability or irrational thinking.

For this polylogical perspective to be disseminated and implemented, however, relief organizations must be willing to devote some of their focus to

the emotional trauma of the exiles they serve. For while an increasing number of organizations exist<sup>6</sup> whose goals are to 1) facilitate the physical return of exiles to their homeland, 2) help the newly arriving exiles find housing and employment in their new land, and/or 3) apply political and legal pressure on behalf of exiles, very few of these organizations devote any time or energy to the psychological state of exiles.

Consequently, it is hoped that exile scholars, practitioners, and support groups within such organizations will create programmes aimed not just at relieving the immediate 'material' and 'political' exigencies faced by exiles, but also at helping exiles adjust to the new psychological conflicts and contradictions in their lives. Most importantly, however, these programmes should aim at facilitating the negotiation of the exile's centripetal/centrifugal forces, not at eliminating the bifurcations inherent in their lives (even if it were possible). For as Bakhtin reminds us, 'two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence' (Patterson 1985: 4). To deny this conception in the name of modernist logic only produces dissonance and guilt in the people who most need support.

Finally, it is hoped that future researchers will continue probing the dialogical questions raised in this analysis. Since this project has analysed only a very select group of people (international exiles that came to the United States during the second half of the twentieth century) and documents (published writings), many questions are left unexplored. I am left wondering, for example 1) Whether the discourse of exiles who have found homes in countries other than the United States is also imbued with the four dialogic tensions of emotions, identity, sentiments, and future? 2) Whether the discourse of refugees (and other displaced persons not examined in this study) is also marked by the same contradictions and conflicts found in the writings of exiles? 3) Whether Bakhtin's dialogic concept of human motives is more punctuated in some cultures than in others (e.g. Eurocentric cultures vs. Afrocentric or Asiancentric cultures)? 4) Are Bakhtin's dialogical tensions manifested in other areas of the exile, refugee, or migrant's life (family, labour, religion, political, etc.)? To be able to answer these and similar questions would ultimately aid in a more sophisticated understanding of the exile's cognitive processes and the creation and design of programmes for people 'caught between two worlds.'

### **Conclusion**

Traditional monological analysis forces a simplistic template that creates 'false unities' on all that it surveys. Locked in a Classical paradigm, monological thinking denies the possibility of contradicting ideas existing simultaneously. Bakhtin's dialogical ontology, however, supplies researchers a new polylogical perspective with which to view language. Like traditional Structuralism, this polylogical perspective organizes the structure of our social experience through the 'analytic unit of the binary opposition' (Baxter 1994: 36), finding that

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behind local variations in surface phenomena 'there are constant laws of abstract structure' (Blackburn 1994: 365). But, unlike Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Lacan's conceptions, Bakhtin's philosophy of language 'ironically positions dialogic thinking as counterpoint to Structuralism. To think dialogically is to focus on the centripetal-centrifugal dynamic, not on static, monologic unities of one form or another' (Baxter 1994: 36).

When Bakhtin's dialogism is used to revisit the discourse of exiles, a more complex and sophisticated understanding of their lives and experiences emerges. Their contradictions, simultaneities, and conflicts are recognized, not as psychological flaws or illogical thinking, but as manifestations of the centripetal/centrifugal forces at work in their lives. Furthermore, a dialogical analysis has engendered the identification of four recurring dialectical motifs previously unrecognized by monological analysis (the struggle to define their psychological state, social identity, sentiments, and future). For as Harland reminds us, systems of thought 'produce their own kind of blindness along with their own kind of visibility' in analysing discourse (1987: 103-104).

This study also supports the Structuralist claim that beneath cultural and temporal differences exists a constant and universal foundation that unites all humans in their use of language. Regardless of the political situation surrounding their expulsion, their idiosyncratic personality differences, the cultural norms and rules governing appropriate interaction, or ideological variations, Asian, European, South American, African, and Central American exiles all wrestled with the same dialogical tensions detailed by Bakhtin. And while the exiles discussed in this work may have dealt with these tensions in ways that were culturally or contextually bound (silence vs. self-disclosure, individualism vs. collectivism, high context vs. low context, reliance on materialism vs. reliance on spirituality, etc.), they all were nonetheless led by their common experience to address the same four, recurring binary dilemmas.

Like exiles, Bakhtin reminds us that we are all caught in an endless tug-of-war between the centripetal and centrifugal forces in our lives. Whether in our interpersonal relationships, struggling to balance our sense of independence while maintaining intimacy, or positioned in our larger sovereignty, wrestling to balance our selfish drives with our selfless concerns for others, life is an ongoing dialogue with ourselves. This binary struggle, however, seems more acutely punctuated in the lives of exiles. By the very nature of being exiled, the centripetal and centrifugal forces that many non-exiled citizens ignore (either out of ignorance, the lack of self-awareness, or the need for cognitive balance) are accentuated so dramatically that many exiles feel compelled to address them. It is suggested, therefore, that we begin to listen to exiles' stories through a new theoretical frame that allows them to be heard and understood on their own terms.

1. This definition was first posited by the Geneva Convention in 1951. The *Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and Exiles* further

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To revisit the discourse of exiles, a more understanding of their lives and experiences, their necessities, and conflicts are recognized, and thinking, but as manifestations of the struggle in their lives. Furthermore, a dialogical interaction of four recurring dialectical motifs in cultural analysis (the struggle to define their identities, and future). For as Harland and I discuss their own kind of blindness along with the discourse (1987: 103–104).

The structuralist claim that beneath cultural and linguistic and universal foundation that unites all people. Regardless of the political situation, the idiosyncratic personality differences, the need for appropriate interaction, or ideological differences between American, African, and Central American cultures, the logical tensions detailed by Bakhtin. And I think we may have dealt with these tensions in a culturally bound (silence vs. self-disclosure, high context vs. low context, reliance on oral tradition, etc.), they all were nonetheless led by the same four, recurring binary dilemmas. That we are all caught in an endless tug-of-war between centrifugal forces in our lives. Whether in our struggle to balance our sense of independence and autonomy, or in our larger sovereignty, wrestling with our selfless concerns for others, life is an endless binary struggle, however, seems more complex. By the very nature of being exiled, the fact that many non-exiled citizens ignore (either out of indifference, or the need for cognitive balance) and that many exiles feel compelled to address the issue, we begin to listen to exiles' stories through their voices to be heard and understood on their

reiterated its content in 1967. Since its conception, this definition has been widely accepted by international consensus.

2. I have selected written, English discourse produced by exiles who came to the United States of America in the second half of the twentieth century for analysis. While this decision helps maintain a level of consistency in the research, it also eliminates important voices from the discussion. Most problematically, it excludes exiles who do not write in English, who are outside academe (where most 'exile narratives' are published, disseminated, and critiqued), and who have chosen other countries to live in.
3. While these logical approaches vary in their assertions, they are all rejections of the classical true/false dichotomy, including the laws of identity, noncontradiction, and excluded middle (Haack 1996: 65).
4. Throughout the last 3,000 years in the development of the Western intellectual tradition, this monological paradigm has imposed three dominant laws of logic on most contemporary thinking:
  - 1) The law of identity holds that a concept has some unchangeable essence at its core which allows a concept to have identity (expressed as 'A = A'). Ergo, all things can be reduced to, and defined as, only one correct identity (Blackburn 1994: 185). Thus, an exile born in Germany is a German—not an American.
  - 2) The law of noncontradiction holds that something cannot be both A and not A. This law is correlative to the law of identity—for one concept to have identity with another, it cannot, at the same time, be something contradictory to the concept (Gill 1994: 152). If one can derive a contradiction from a set of premises, then at least one of them is false. 'Classically, if one conjunct *p* is true, then the other not-*p* is false, and vice versa, so they cannot be true together' (Blackburn 1994: 264). Thus, an exile cannot be both a German and not a German.
  - 3) The law of the excluded middle holds that a concept must be one thing or not that thing—no middle ground existing. This is expressed as 'everything is either A or not A' (Gill 1994: 152). It excludes middle cases such as propositions being half correct or more or less right (Blackburn 1994: 129). Thus, an individual is either an exile, or not an exile; he/she is either happy, or not happy.
5. Examples of the *psychoanalytic* model can be found in the works of Grinberg and Grinberg 1989; Hayslip 1993; Partnoy 1988. Examples of the *pro-centripetal* model can be found in the works of Brooke-Rose 1996: 291; Broe and Ingram 1989; Dash 1992; Patterson 1995. Examples of the *pro-centrifugal* model can be found in the work of Grunwald 1995. Examples of the *pendulum* model can be found in the works of Bouvard 1985; Davaran 1996; Esquivel 1982; Lam 1990; Simpson 1995.
6. E.g., Refugees International, Student Action for Refugees, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Migration and Refugee Services of the United States Catholic Conference, Project on Internal Displacement, International Organization for Migration, European Council on Refugees and Exiles, Centre for Migration Law, American Refugee Committee, The Central American Refugee Centre, to name only a few.

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