Global Justice and The Imperial “We”:
Edward Said on Exilic Subjectivity

Abstract:
This paper argues for a reorientation toward global justice theory that starts by destabilizing the theorizing subject. I find the conceptual tools for this turn in the work of Edward Said and the paper first discusses Said’s notably absence from the political theory canon, an absence explained in part by theory’s late arrival to the study of imperialism relative to other field. It next takes up the simultaneously situated and imperial assumptions at work in liberal subjectivity and discusses the way these assumptions have severely constrained much of the global justice scholarship by limiting scholars’ ability to both confront the living legacy of empire and identify modes of resistance emerging from the global south. The paper then engages the problems and promises of Said’s notion of exile, focusing in particular on the way it uncouples global politics and international solidarity from the nation state while remaining attentive to the power of place. I conclude by suggesting that, in an era of rising xenophobia, white nationalism, and climate crisis, global justice scholarship ought to be looking long and hard at the relationship between imperialism and the liberal “we” and, instead, begin analyzing global problems from the unhoused and unstable position of exile.