Abstract

Edward Said is known to many readers mainly as the author of *Orientalism*. He is often judged and evaluated on this basis. He is regarded as an Occidentalist and anti-Western scholar by some and celebrated by others as a true defender of East, Arab-Muslim, in particular. Indeed, these views are both invalid and incomplete. Such views do not do justice to Said’s repertoire. In order to understand Said’s concept of Occident-Orient dichotomy in his work, we need to focus on his oeuvre, from *Beginning* to *Orientalism*, through *Culture and Imperialism*, *The Question of Palestine*, to *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. Accordingly, the thesis is patterned to examine the development of Said’s thought – from critique in its formative stage into dialogism and emancipation in its maturity.

Located within the framework of cultural relativist approach, the present study is a discursive exploration of the Middle East conflict in the light of Said’s concept of Occident-Orient dichotomy, its consequences for the study of the Middle East and its influence on the critical and cultural activity of the Arab intelligentsia. It explores, from an Arab perspective, the debate as it has progressed and investigates some of its implications.

This study develops a critical reading based on a developmental and consequential analysis of Said’s thought. It assesses and evaluates his treatment of the concept of dichotomy as consisting of three parts. First, the disestablishing process which describes Said’s questioning of the existing common assumptions and theories prevalent in the field of East-West studies; second is the deconstructing process which includes reading historical experiences and cultural formulations or “fabrications”, analyzing and comparing them so as to find out reconciliatory elements; and third is his injection of alternatives. Founded on the idea of cultural relativism, however, the study reads Said’s work in two different ways: on one hand, as a test-case of what effective intellectual activity can be and, on the other, as a response to the dangers of dichotomous, binary thinking.

The thesis consists of six main chapters besides an introduction and a conclusion. The Introduction outlines the general trajectories and avenues of the thesis. The First Chapter offers a purview of Edward Said’s intellectual and critical range. The Second Chapter discusses, particularly from a Western intellectual perspective, the philosophical and cultural history of perception of the concept of Occident-Orient dichotomy. The Third Chapter elucidates the role played by Said’s theoretical and critical values in highlighting the methodological misconceptions applied by the Orientalists/colonialists. The Fourth Chapter takes up the question of Palestine as a case in point in the course of the devastating colonial legacy and Orientalist enterprise. The Fifth Chapter discusses Said’s humanistic approach to human calamities and dichotomous thinking. The Sixth Chapter traces Said’s contribution to the making of Arab secular criticism that came to be voiced in the global circles. The thesis ends with the Conclusion, summing up the argument and suggests areas for further investigation and analysis.