CHAPTER FIVE

From Critique to Emancipation: Saidian Humanism and the Concept of Worldism

Edward Said is a remarkable instance of a thinker for whom fair critical consciousness is a kind of archaeological excavation of the buried, forgotten, repressed and denied truth. His main goal is to undo the dual relationship between power and knowledge, and to set free human thinking from the ideological convictions that hinder human coexistence and harmony. This chapter attempts to explore Said’s critical potential as a free intellectual who fairly breaks with his *filiative* bonds to *affiliative* world of human history as a whole.

It is worthwhile to note that Said’s critical gamut, extending from the literary notes in *Beginnings* and *The World, the Text and the Critic*, to theoretical rigors in *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* and political comments in *The Question of Palestine* and *The Politics of Dispossession* to the critical insights in *Reflections on Exile, Power, Politics and Culture* and *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, are methodologically and thematically interrelated and affiliated to his position as a committed intellectual. At the minimum, for instance, all the debates initiated by *Beginnings* are directly germane to *Orientalism* and subsequent works. The scholarly rigor, breadth and depth of knowledge, and intellectual responsibility enrich his work with the profound basis of “political morality” as a potential virtue that has “guided him in a career-long struggle to end conflict and further the effort to build civilizations whose cultures benefit from the coalescence of various peoples and their histories” (Bove 1). His contention is that only through justice and real interlocution between equals and dialogue
between cultures people can advance the construction of human coexistence, especially in this age of shared experiences and overlapping histories. Accordingly, he renounces the story of the victor and declares: “I am for dialogue between cultures and coexistence between people . . . I think real principle and real justice have to be implemented before there can be true dialogue” (“The Limits to Cooperation” 38). His work becomes a resource for imagining an alternative shape to cultural interaction and the formation of a culture capable of dialogue. Worldism becomes his synonymous word to humanism and cosmopolitan worldview. This conveys the spirit of his positive, inspirational commitment to a non-coercive, generous, integrally various worlds that “are premised upon letting go, upon not asserting a central authorizing identity . . . but a mode for thinking through or thinking with the integral variety of human cultural practices, generously, non-coercively, in a utopian cast, if by utopian we mean worldly, possible, attainable, knowable” (qtd. in Rose 9).

As it has been shown in the preceding chapters, Said is best known for his examination of representations of the “Orient” in the Western discourse -- representations that, he argues, legitimated colonial rule. While he takes a critical view of Orientalist representations, he identifies himself as a scholar in the tradition of humanism. This chapter extends this argument to examine Said’s complex relationship to humanism, and his attempt to articulate a new humanism based on his concept of “secular criticism.” It ends with an analysis of his late work, in which he affirms the need for a critical humanism in the face of the alienating effects of modernity and the resurgence of imperialism. Hence, understanding the reason why figures like Erich Auerbach, Ernst Curtius or Leo Spitzer come to represent a kind of paradigm for his own critical consciousness entails a particular relationship between cultural practice and political resistance. “Humanism,” he argues, “is about perspective . . . it is about transitions from
one realm, one area of human experience to another. It is about the practice of identities other than those given by the flag or the national war of the moment”. On this basis, “The deployment of an alternative identity,” he contends, “is what we do when we read and we connect parts of the text to other parts and when we go on to expand the area of attention to include widening circles of pertinence” (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 80). In consequence, the notion of interrelation is unequivocally at the very heart of the cultural practices of Saidian humanism. His “humanist resistance” emerges as an attempt to direct criticism at questioning the given values of any monolithic, exclusive sense of “ourselves” with the aim of bringing that “sense of multiple worlds and complex interacting traditions” into a value of human practice (76).

**Criticism as a Strategy of Emancipation**

Though it is, perhaps, methodologically difficult and challenging to interpret Said’s large, seemingly disparate body of writing because of his multifarious interests, ranging from intellectual history to current affairs, from philosophical to journalistic discourse, it is not difficult to discern a set of critical norms and theoretical values that govern his concept of criticism. It is important here to refer to a set of humanistic values whose function is to expose Said’s theoretical and critical values. The ordinary reader can detect a set of critical norms dispersed in his books such as Beginnings, The World the Text, and the Critic, Orientalism, Culture and Imperialism and Humanism and Democratic Criticism that reflect the intellectual maturity of his critical thinking and identify the consistency and interconnectedness in his critical pursuits.

The point here is to highlight his critical concepts and their clear relationship with his concept of humanism. His value system rests on establishing the theoretical and critical methods that help lay bare the specialization of text and its values. In the light of
this, *Orientalism* can be easily read as a foregrounding text of theoretical values that deconstruct the professionalization of Orientalists and replace it with humanistic perception of others as an enthusiastically alternative critical approach to truth and reality. His theoretical and critical conceptualization of culture and imperialism, therefore, explains the practical values that clarify the interdependent connection between those theoretical values and the necessary steps for using criticism as a strategy of humanistic value. In *Culture and Imperialism*, for instance, he displays universalist concept of culture, dispensing a set of values shared by all world cultures, which have cognitive force on the mind of the intellectual in a way that can convert his or her rigid perception and dogmatic beliefs that detach him or her from reaching the reality of his or her interpreted text. Subsequently, it is difficult to separate Said the cultural theorist from Said the literary critic.

In fact, Said neither follows a systematic critical theory nor adopts a given critical strategy for providing an objective criticism. Rather, he works out a new critical method based on contrapuntal reasoning that situates the text in its world so as to mirror its correlation to the outside reality and to restore the concealed historical experience implied in it, and thus enables the intellectual or the critic to reach an objective interpretation. Humanism for him is a matter of justice, equality and ideology-free practice. In her essay “The Resonance of the Arab-Islamic Heritage in the Works of Edward Said,” Freial Ghazoul remarks that Said develops a critical theory that links text to their social and circumstantial origins.

. . . He elaborates the relationship of the literary texts to the life of the author, as in *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* . . . , the scholarly text to colonial practices, as in *Orientalism* . . . , narrative to history, as in *Beginnings: Intention*
and Method... criticism to the sociopolitical scene, as in The World, the Text and the Critic... (159-60)

On this basis, Said renders the ideals of Renaissance and Enlightenment humanisms as both ethnocentric and totalitarian because they considered Europe and Europeans as the center of universal values and knowledge, granting Western culture the right to disseminate its values to other world cultures. Following this, he debunks the Eurocentric master-narrative and historicism of modernity and the weightless anti-humanist grand-narrative of postmodernism as both totalitarian and exclusionary. He contends that “[I]t is possible to be critical of humanism in the name of humanism” (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 10). This explains why he was very critical of Bloomian anti-intellectual and exclusionary narrow-minded neoliberal humanism that excluded and marked any endeavor outside the Western canon as something “unruly” and “disreputable”. He believes that the neoliberal and capitalist “New Humanism” gives way to “a surprisingly narrow-minded chauvinism” that heralds manufactured “homogeneity” in the face of salutary “heterogeneity” (21). According to Leela Gandhi, this sense of humanism, “instantiates and sets into motion a characteristically pedagogic and imperialist hierarchy between European adulthood and its childish colonised Other” (32). Instead of the gross Eurocentric Humanisms that celebrated Western universalist values, Said’s proposes an alternative humanist approach based on emancipatory principles and liberationist ideals. “By humanism,” he writes:

I mean first of all attempting to dissolve Blake’s mind-forg’d manacles... to use one’s mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding... humanism is sustained by a sense of community with other interpreters and
other societies and periods... there is no such a thing as an isolated humanist.

(Orientalism xvii)

Said’s deconstruction of the Orientalist discourse and epistemology is based on humanistic principles and is identified with a set of humanistic values. According to Yumna Siddiqi, Said “imagines the possibility of a kind of knowledge that traverses cultural difference and serves the end of liberation without being falsely universalist” (70). He understands humanism not as “withdrawal and exclusion” but “mak[ing] more things available to critical scrutiny as the product of human labor, human energies, for emancipation and enlightenment” (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 22). His concern is the practical aspects of knowledge, that is, in what way the humanistic thinking could be used to foreground the reality of any given text and how knowledge could resist oppression. His work on contemporary modes of humanism is instructive. In “Saidian Humanism,” Emily S. Apter observes that humanism for Said “provides futural parameters for defining secular criticism in a world increasingly governed by a sense of identitarian ethnic destiny and competing sacred tongues.” Apter goes on to suggest that “Said was clearly committed to the future of humanism, conceived as a world system that takes account of the vast traffic in inter-national learnedness” (44, 45). In this way, Said exposes that in the Western literary discourse, humanism and empire are revealed in mutual contract. His critical concern, therefore, is to preach that there are other humanisms that survive the compromise with imperialism and advocate the emancipatory ethics of coexistence.

It is worthwhile to note that Said’s concept of humanism cannot be separated from his view of criticism as a strategy of emancipation. In his essay “Secular Divination: Edward Said’s Humanism,” W. J. T. Mitchell points out, “humanism for Said was always a dialectical concept... Without humanism, criticism is nothing but empty quibbling and
opinion” (490-91). To develop it further, Said incorporated the term democratic to criticism in order to underscore the importance of being critical of the inhuman humanism as in the concept of “military humanism” and “imposed democracy” for ideological reasons. This sort of democracy is but a hollow term, too often used as a cover for imperialist adventures as in the U.S military intervention to bring democracy to Iraq. Democracy and equality cannot be introduced by force. There can never be a “humanism” that claims to introduce freedom through the abuses of sanctions and “inhumane and genocidal” effects (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 7). The language of democracy, of equality, of power sharing, of justice, of secular self-governance must not be co-opted by ideologues. It must be claimed and infused with practical meaning for human relationships. Democracy is, if it is anything, a place where power grows out of the resources made available by humanism and criticism. It is, as Mitchell puts it, “the space created by this convergence, the (relatively) noncoercive or at least nonviolent realm of the free play of ideas and imagination that is never perfectly realized, but always approached as the goal of discourse” (491, italic in origin). Therefore, democratic criticism, for Said, means not only the right to dissent, but the obligation to dissent, to break one’s silence and passivity, to “speak truth to power” without fear of censorship or violence.

Humanism, therefore, is what gives the critic something to say and criticism is what gives the humanist a motive, occasion, and obligation to say something. Said’s great enemies, then, are never merely political, but intellectual, cultural, and academic. In his Foreword to Humanism and Democratic Criticism, Akeel Bilgrami observes that criticism is “Said’s own life-long pursuit” because “it supplements self-knowledge . . . [to] the capacity to be self-critical” (xi, italics in origin). That is, if we do not attend to the knowledge of others or if we remove ourselves from the interests of other human beings,
we will isolate and create a calamitous world. Bilgrami argues that Said’s concept of criticism comprises two things: “it is philology, the history of words, the ‘reception’ of tradition, and, at the same time, it is a ‘resistance’ to that tradition and the repository of custom that words accumulate” (xii-xiii, italics in origin). For him, real humanism embraces the democratic, the open, the curious and the true spirit of liberation; and “it must find new strength in vigorous self-criticism and the scrutinizing of records of history . . . In a liberating humanism, history is not locked in place but is given room for growth, supporting revision” (Sheble 264). Hence, by virtue of conception, attitude, and methodology, Said repeatedly and explicitly argues that the “act of criticism is always literally tied to a set of social and historical circumstances” (“The Future of Criticism” 171). In short, what makes cultures and populations vibrant is exactly the mixture, the combinations with the new.

Thinking critically, for Said, is tantamount to thinking politically, and it is thus to be ready to act to a long-term and open-ended historical field. This profoundly makes entirely explicit the fact that critical thought is not merely interrogative or disintegrating thought, but a vitally daring thought, “committed to a human project of transformation, of self-alteration, of refiguring and reconceptualizing existing things that otherwise seem unmovable, unalterable” (Gourgouris 12). It is on this basis that Stathis Gourgouris locates Orientalism in the open-ended horizon of Said’s “secular criticism,” arguing that it is precisely such a project “essentially propelled by an analytical, disintegrating glance on historical and geographical structures embedded and institutionalized in dominant discourses and practices . . . [that] provides us with a brilliant armory for engaging the institutions and structures of our historical present” (12). Said’s argument, therefore, enables us to constitute a mode of interrogation about a whole slew of problems such as the politics of knowledge, the worldly reality of texts and discourses, the representation of
power, the production of truth and falsehood, the concrete force of the imagination, and the denial of the constitutive encounter with the other.

Significantly, Said makes cultural discourses the objects of secular criticism in order to achieve emancipatory goals. The world of criticism, thus, is rent by matters “having to do with ownership, authority, power, and the imposition of force” (*The World, the Text and the Critic* 48). Democratic, secular criticism is “worldly and in the world so long as it opposes monocriticism, a concept I understand as working in conjunction with ethnocentrism, which licenses a culture to cloak itself in the particular authority of certain values over others” (53). By doing so, Said deploys the discursive situation as a paradigm of investigation of the power relation between “self and the “Other.” The reciprocity between these two options produces his second aim -- to construe the worldliness of texts and of criticism as representative of historical contingency. Accordingly, criticism becomes a process that articulates “those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced by the textuality of texts,” given that “[t]exts are a system of forces institutionalized by the reigning culture at some human cost to its various components” (53).

To felicitate this idea, Said highlights a series of ethical and political aims that enable humanist criticism to proceed while maintaining an unyielding tension between what he calls the “national” and the “aesthetic”. This tension proves fruitful insofar as it is able to undermine all strategies linked to the semiotics of national political power that aim to consolidate public opinion by constructing tightly enclosed identities fuelled by radical contrasts. Working against these strategies that are encapsulated within the “national”, are narrative forms which foreground and expose power strategies linked to the assertion of a “mono-cultural” and “mono-linguistic” perspective. He writes: “As for making those connections that allow us to see part and whole, that is the main thing: what to connect
with, how, and how not?” (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 78). Said’s humanism connects criticism to worldly affairs by calling for re-activating the unhistorical and universal values which concern its own practical and ethical nature. Therefore, his humanism is something beyond the cognitive and epistemological compass that was linked merely to a process of cultural decoding. “[F]or the humanist,” he states, “the act of reading is the act therefore of first putting oneself in the position of the author, for whom writing is a series of decisions and choices expressed in words” (62).

In essence, Said’s critical approach is ethically reconciliatory. That is, he is against binary thought of “either with us or against us,” to quote George Bush’s infamous statement following September 11 attacks and Huntington’s “deplorably vulgar and reductive thesis of clash of civilizations” (8). Leslie G. Roman aptly remarks, “Said’s notions of situated cosmopolitanisms and secular humanisms ask how we as human beings and diverse and conflicting cultures in the context of huge disparities of power and wealth learn to identify . . . with others . . . through political involvement and action” (366). In effect, Said’s chief concern is the dissolution of the barriers between public and private, and his target is our capacity as human beings for determining and creating new forms of life.

This emancipatory value has been Said’s major concern and critical drive throughout his intellectual repertoire from Beginnings to his late works such as Humanism and Democratic Criticism and On the Late Style. In Edward Said at the Limits (2004), Mustapha Marrouchi argues that Said “has produced the most complex and demanding body of work of any postwar cultural critic [who] reanimates the dilemmas of the postcolonial experience -- the pathos of marginality and inner exile, the fear of
throwing oneself into a void, and the failure of the liberated “I” to remake its home elsewhere” (xiii).

What characterizes Said’s critical project is actually its insistence on the down-to-earth theorization and its conduciveness as an enterprise of a value-based system. His work still wakes us to the sights and sounds of the downtrodden and the afflicted, the poor and the dispossessed, and in doing so, wakes us to our vanity and our mortality, returning us to our shared humanity. In today’s cultural climate, his critical thought is still celebrated as a ground work of theorization and emancipation and as a cornerstone catalyst that aims to recast, redefine and revise the very notions of “modernity,” “mainstream,” “margins,” “difference,” “otherness”. His principle is that we are living in a world of earthy and shared human experiences. For this reason, he disavows the assumption that the “cultural realm and its expertise are institutionally divorced from their real connections with power” (The World, the Text and the Critic 2). He insists that texts are worldly “events” that “are nevertheless part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted” (4). In this case, the realities of power and authority as well as the resistances to these powers and authorities are the realities that “should be taken account of by criticism and the critical consciousness” (5). Therefore, he strives to liberate texts and cultures from the “man-forged manacles” that are enclosed within the whole notion of culture which operates within the “system of exclusion” and “self-fortification and self-confirmation by which culture achieves its hegemony over society and State is based on a constantly practiced differentiation of itself from what it believes to be not itself” (11, 12). Criticism for him is a strategy that disavows all forms of “discriminations as these, made between what is fitting for us and what is fitting for them . . . distinctions between ours and theirs, between proper and improper, European and non-European, higher and lower” (13-4). The job of
the critic is to examine the relationship of the power and authority in the making of the text. To do this, the critic has to have an analytical capacity, a dethatched position, and a voice out of place but very much of that place.

**Humanism as a Polyphonic Culture**

Said’s theoretical and critical project is characterized by its paradigmic trajectory as a far-reaching rupture in the critical thinking. It is purported to his belief that it is strictly impossible to identify a cultural model or epistemological paradigm against which the whole cultures, traditions and epistemes are to be described. Said sees a possibility for dialogue and also finds an actual world of co-existence without polarities and antagonism. He says: “despite the incredibly polarized, antagonistic and discordant world in which we live, there is always the possibility of another alternative type of social model”, an endeavor which is “neither a sentimental panacea nor a facile solution for every problem, but rather a practical utopia whose presence and practice in our riven world is sorely needed and, in all sorts of ways, intensely instructive” (qtd. in M. Said xiii). He takes Arab Andalusia as a trajectory model of social harmony, co-existence and multiculturalism. He looks at Andalusian experience as “an alternative model for coexistence between the three monotheisms, . . . it can at least signal the arrival of a new attitude whose example might soon provide us with many others, many salutary changes, many profound new interpretations of what is now only an appallingly polarized, completely inhuman conflict” (xiii-xiv).

This conceptual trajectory of cultural hybridity and social heterogeneity is revealed in his idea of imaginative geography as a spatial conceptual framework of the interrelated human histories and overlapping territories. His utilization of the spatial metaphor is designed to delineate the parameters of the concept of the dichotomy and to
introduce a more explicitly materialist dimension into it. He eschews the civilizational interface and cultural dialogue among peoples against their false and created dichotomies. He argues that “The boundary notion of East and West, the varying degrees of projected inferiority and strength, the range of work done, the kinds of characteristic features ascribed to the Orient: all these testify to a willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West, and lived through many centuries” (Orientalism 201). These geographical and cultural divisions of humanity into locales, regions, and sectors such as ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ are man-made creations that have been embedded as the “universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs’” (54). Said’s idea is a deconstruction of geography as “a strategy of identity construction which equates (spatial) distance with (cultural, ethnic, social) difference, associating the non-spatial characteristics of ‘self’ and ‘other’ with particular places”. According to Frank, “The ‘great divide’ between West and East as both geographical and cultural entities is just one example of this strategy – a strategy that works on the level of both the individual and the collective” (Frank 71, italics in origin). This deconstructive process of the geo-cultural categorization provides the possibility of a kind of knowledge that traverses cultural difference and serves the end of liberation without being falsely universalist.

Said’s critical intervention aims at developing an understanding of space and of the interplay geography and human knowledge in the light of his concept of humanism as a polyphonic culture. His commitment to humanist analysis is evident, not only in the way he characterizes the so-called discourse of Orientalism, but also in the contrapuntal methodology he proposes for reading. He favors a mode of interpretation that is attuned to the interplay of different voices, in what is a harmonious whole. In Culture and Imperialism, for example, he describes the concept of “the voyage in,” as “an especially
interesting variety of hybrid cultural work” (244). He explains: “although each cultural discourse unfolds according to different agendas, rhetorics, and images, they are in fact connected, if not always in perfect correspondence . . . like all cultural practices the imperialist experience is an intertwined and overlapping one” (276). Hence, by describing “the voyage in” as a form of dialogic relationship between the cultural discourse of the colonized and that of the metropole, he thinks again along humanist lines of an interactive and mutually transformative cultural engagement. For this reason, he applauds Fanon’s emancipatorily liberationist attitude and critically anti-imperialist stance against Eurocentric universalism, and orthodox nationalism. He acclaims him as a proponent of a new humanism who can see the interrelationship between humanism and liberation as a conscious emancipation of self, “‘not the closing of a door to communication’ but a never-ending process of ‘discovery and encouragement’ leading to true national self-liberation and to universalism” (274).

Said attributes to humanism a dynamic, secular, and critical quality that is based on an “[expanded] . . . understanding of human history to include all those Others constructed as dehumanized, demonized opponents by imperial knowledges and a will to rule” (“Humanism and Heroism” 291). Humanism for him “is disclosure; it is agency; . . . it is recovering . . . the topics of mind from the turbulent actualities of human life . . . submitting them painstakingly to the rational process of judgment and criticism” (290). In the 2003 preface to Orientalism, he expounds his humanistic appeal of the text as such: “My idea in Orientalism is to use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us. I have called what I try to do ‘humanism’” (xvii). His critical interpretations and subversion of the historicized Western norms can be approached through the notion of rhizomatics.
To highlight the polyphonic and humanistic value of emancipation, Said’s humanism takes the form of a rhizomatic flexibility, openness, movement, and potentiality as a horizontally expanding and overlapping system of values. This rhizomatic image can be contrasted with the Darwinian notion of human evolution which was associated with linearity, hierarchy, origins, racism, rigidity, and logocentrism. His work has extensively provided background and insight into the value of reconciliation through negotiation and critique. By destabilizing the notion of historical certainty and cultural superiority that presupposes Occident-Orient relationship, he opens up the horizon for new cultural and critical norms based on cultural variety and polyphonic community. This paradigmic destratification and deterritorialization of human culture and geography reinforces his non-identitarian criticism and democratic humanism and highlights the continuously extending rhizome of intertwining beliefs and values. It is to be noted that rhizome is a philosophical concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). It refers to what Deleuze calls an “image of thought” based on the botanical rhizome that apprehends multiplicities (6). It is used to describe theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation. As Deleuze and Guattari say, “maps can be traced and tracings can become maps . . . It is a question of method: the tracing should always be put back on the map” (13). Hence, the rhizome is not a representation. It does not trace an opposition, as well.

This persistence on demolishing the established hierarchies and the notion of mainstream culture marks one of Said’s most celebratory contributions to ethical criticism at large. Consequently, any critical endeavor today should take in its background framework the critical basis of Said. Researchers and scholars today have started looking in comparative literature not only at West–East but also at East–East and South–South
relations and analogies. The target of Said’s critical interventions is not critiquing the West as much as looking for a possible way of contact and interlocution between people and cultures regardless of their place and orientation. To do this, he first works on dismantling and deciphering the entire way of thinking which was based on the dichotomization of structure. By removing the socio-political, epistemological and psychological constructs and barriers that have been created, he clears the way for cultural dialogue and the perseverance of humanistic affinity, approachability and achievability.

As a doctrine of counterpoint, humanism is broadly used by Said as the interplay of diverse ideas and discrepant experiences. On this basis, criticism of his method can be debunked soon we come to understand his method as being inherently contrapuntal, comparative and secular. It is this specific form of negotiation, this trans-disciplinarity as a ceaseless movement of borrowing back and forth, and these scholarly attempts to cross the boundaries of nations and cultures that seem to have captivated him “to move beyond insularity and provincialism and to see several cultures and literatures together, contrapuntally . . . to get a perspective beyond one’s own nation, to see some sort of whole instead of the defensive little patch offered by one’s own culture, literature and history” (Culture and Imperialism 43). The Saidian dialectic, therefore, goes beyond identitarianism or the “liquidation of the particular.”

On the same track, Said’s insistence on the worldliness of the text and its situated reality highlights the importance of democratic criticism that upholds multiple meanings and interpretations of the text and, at the same time, renders its experience to its worlding circumference. According to Asha Varadharajan, the function of “Said’s intellectual labors” lies in “his insistence on worldliness,” and, like Adorno, he “privilege[s] a particular form of critical consciousness rather than the category of thought itself” (144-
15). Said repeatedly reminds us of the contours of the interfaced intellectual and geopolitical terrains, on which current contests are being fought, to describe, in his words, “intertwined and overlapping histories” of the metropolitan West and those cultures that were excluded by the legislative power of imperialism (*Culture and Imperialism* 18). This strategic foregrounding of geography-in-history formed the background of his earlier works. He incessantly tries to undermine the linearity and foundationalism -- essentialized identities and teleological horizons – and insists on the patterns of human interrelatedness, or what he called in *Beginnings* the multiplicity, correlation, and complementarity of socio-political forms. He espouses that “no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions” (*Culture and Imperialism* 52). This notion is further crystallized in his concept of “affiliation” that backs his critique of the Orientalist structured creation of a historic-geographical “Orient”. His aim is to interpretively activate and articulate the vast socio-cultural space in the West and non-West on which imperialism first extended and then consolidated.

Closely related to his analytical understanding of cultures as invariably hybrid and intertwined is a normative point concerning the irresponsibility and fallacy of rhetorics of blame in cultural studies. “Real intellectual analysis,” he writes, “forbids calling one side innocent, the other evil” (*Representations of the Intellectual* 119). As a result, “The construction of fictions like ‘East’ and ‘West,’” he argues, “were what my books attempted to combat . . . cultures are too intermingled, their contents and histories too interdependent and hybrid, for surgical separation into large and mostly ideological oppositions like Orient and Occident” (xi-xii). Therefore, amid a cacophony of voices that dissuade human coexistence and cultural dialogue among communities, Said’s writings offer an unwavering source of enlightenment that aid in the interpretation of current events. He argues for a convocation of multiple cultures and canons, emphasizing that we
should “think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant” because “all of them [are] coexisting and interacting with others” (Culture and Imperialism 32). What we have at hand then is a sober and sobering utterance and an exercised form of criticism that disambiguates and exposes ideologies. His project is amalgamation of critical ideas across discipline that composes a whole without erecting rigid fences between them. This critical orientation stems from the need for change and the desire to find an alternative to the polarized political, social, intellectual, and cultural orders.

The essence of Said’s concept of humanism is the dislocation of fixities and advocacy of multiple positioning so that any attempt at resolving polarities would in all probability be falling back into the arms of absolutist discourse. The emphasis on the simultaneity of conjunctions and disjunctions is the basis of his historical approach. The streak of postmodernism in him, therefore, cannot be denied. This streak of thought is more competent in his cultural relativist approach that he undertakes in bringing in the local with the global, the inside and the outside and particular and the universal, the textual element and its contextual realities, the center and the periphery, all in a simultaneous and equal presence. What ruminated in his critical proposition, therefore, is the erasure of the spatialized essentialism of “Same” and “Other” so as to imagine a fluid of hybridizing cultural intersections.

In the light of this, his critique of Orientalism as institutional and corporate system and imperialism as a theory of expansion has a liberating effect on human creation of non-coercive knowledge and space free from ideology. As Timothy Brennan observes, Said’s concept of secular criticism is an oppositional strand and function of criticism which has its root in countering a new theoretical frame that dominates the “mental landscape of imperial resurgence.” He remarks that “when Said invokes the concept of secular criticism, . . . He is thinking about the emergence of an oppressive theoretical”
system (562). He further illustrates, “objectively and programmatically, Said’s particular capacities for bridging the separate realms of the public and academic, the Eastern and Western, the belletristic and the sociological made him a crucial ally for ushering in a mode of criticism with . . . welcome consequences” (567-68). In the main, Said’s entire critical project and career is an attempt to combat the kind of naiveté, mystification and self-limitation.

At a broad level, the trajectory of Said’s career unfolds as protracted demythologization of the practical and theoretical rationality of modernism. He believes that knowledge produced by professional intellectuals is responsible for the creation of two myths – the cult of expert and the doctrine of essentialized identities, as in the case of the Orientalists who delivered “expert” wisdom about the “Orient” – its peoples, cultures, and histories. This positivistic expertise, according to Said, effectively helps construct, and is motivated by, identitarian idea: the West, Africanism, Islam, “our” race, the Arab nation, the Oriental mind, Americanism, whereby each of these and similar ideological illusions can ossify into a harsh, exclusionary, hierachist dogma. “The intellectual’s representations,” he argues, “are not meant primarily to fortify ego or celebrate status. . . [they] are the activity itself, dependent on a kind of consciousness that is skeptical, engaged, unremittingly devoted to rational investigations and moral judgment” (Representations of the Intellectual 20, italics in the origin). This activity and this consciousness together constitute his conception of criticism as critical consciousness and as a readiness to debate with knowledge, to wrestle with history, and to take non-complacent, counter side of power and authority. “This Saidian conception of criticism” Hussien maintains, “is not a nay saying exercise signaling cynicism or nihilism; on the contrary, it is saturated with moral indignation: profound suspicion coexists with
unlimited utopianism . . . achieved in the open-ended unfolding of historical time” (Edward Said 308).

As a committed humanist, Said was ardently critical of the apolitical formalism of humanistic criticism. The literary critic effectively participates in producing the culture of society, enforcing restrictions, confirming and strengthening the civil and political societal acts and fabrics of culture itself. The literary critic also participates in producing a “liberal consensus”. Said elucidates: “The formal, restricted analysis of literary-aesthetic works validates the culture, the culture validates the humanist, the humanist the critic, and the whole enterprise the State” (The World, the Text, and the Critic 175). In Culture and Imperialism, he pursues the same critique of culture defined as a “protective enclosure” for which the price of admission was to “check your politics at the door” (xiv). This self-declared sequel to Orientalism is structured around a critical “counterpoint”: between European novelistic discourse, whose “incorporative, quasi-encyclopaedic cultural form” had intimate ties with the “consolidated vision” of imperialism, and the decolonizing counter-narratives of “liberationist anti-imperialism” that he locates in the work of decolonizing historians and intellectuals (71, 278).

From what has been stated, it becomes obvious that the critic’s job is to “dissolve Blake’s mind-forg’d manacles” because “there is no such thing as an isolated humanist” (Orientalism xvii). The task of criticism should be more attuned to the “decentered energies and currents of our time” by “situating critique at the very heart of humanism” as a “form of democratic freedom and as a continuous practice of questioning and of accumulating knowledge that is open to the constituent historical realities” at the global reach (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 47). In essence, Saidian humanism develops
a logic of being-in-common, in which the task of interpretation is never to be confined to books, music, and art but also applied to life and to humanity itself.

Above all, Said conceives humanity as a collective, absorptive, embracing, heterogeneous, and infinitely open-ended process rather than a violent, fractured, binary structure. His humanism is administered by a retrospective history of his life as he repeatedly moves across the permeable boundary that separates the insider from the outsider, and inhabits these seemingly separate spaces simultaneously. His existential condition is reverberated with his concept of “contrapuntality” that embodies the effort to bring various interpretive voices into conjunction without harmonization, to emphasize the uniqueness of each voice in contrast with other voices, and to compensate for gaps in one interpretation or interpretive perspective by placing it in conjunction with another. Accordingly, he renounces arguments for ethnic or disciplinary centrism, narrow nationalism, and uncritical solidarity which lead to the pitfalls of various centrisms.

**Humanism as Areligious Concept**

One of the most characteristic features of Said’s humanism is its areligious trajectory. Although he admits the role of religion in creating a cult of enterprise that is socially dogmatic and culturally exclusionary, Said has never been anti-religious. His seemingly anti-religious self-conceptual concept of “secular criticism,” which deploys “the religious” only as a metaphor, expounds the relationship between his concept of “the secular” and “the religious” traditions. By “secular,” he means nothing more than “critical thought.”

It is tempting to establish the complexities of his intellectual relationship with four Christian critics -- Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, Jonathan Swift, and Giambattista Vico --
who to varying degrees are important to his own critical project. All the same, placing Said within a broad tradition of iconoclastic critique is not accurate, and the tension between iconoclastic severity and popular piety, between iconoclasm as an intellectual practice and the culture of ordinary and everyday life, especially religious traditions was not a referential target of Said’s secular criticism. Therefore, his distinction between “the religious” (a metaphor for uncritical thought) and “the secular” (a metaphor for critical thought) is central to the analysis of his thought. This distinction undergirds his effort to distinguish between “uncritical” given thought, and “oppositional” political commitments, between those commitments that legitimate and those that contest “hegemony.” This effort is based on a critical evaluation rather than reification of the abstract categories of “the religious” and “the secular” which presupposes that religious and secular traditions are discrete domains. Hence, the word “secular” cannot be mapped onto the religious-secular distinction.

This oppositional criticism is preoccupied with critical revaluation that has an abiding respect for the “circumstantial realities” of ordinary life, for the “worldliness” of religious traditions. This religion-secularism duality, which illustrates this distinction with an imaginative continuity of narrative, lies behind Said’s cultural criticism and his concept of responsibility. By insisting on being an oppositional critic, Bruce Robbins, Mufti and others assert that “the most crucial meaning of secular, in [Said’s] usage, is as an opposing term not to religion but to nationalism” (Robbins 26, italic in origin). Thus, when using the word “secular,” Said did not mean to take an oppositional stance vis-à-vis religion. Aamir Mufti has this to say:

At no point is secular used in his work in simple opposition to the religious per se . . . his concern has been with domination through the classification and management of cultures, and of human collectivities, into mutually distinct and
immutable entities, be they nations, properly speaking, or civilizations or
ethnicities -- not religions” (“Critical Secularism” 3, italics in origin).

In her comment on Said’s concept of “secular criticism”, Ferial J. Ghazoul
observes that “Said was thoroughly secular; his secularism was not anti-religious as much
as a-religious” (“Edward Said and Islam”32). His interest in Vico is indicative of his own
critical view of the concept as he separated the domain of the divine from the domain of
the human. In other words, he is interested in the human history as a man-made product
and not the history ordained by God, since man is the source as well as the target of
change, perception and articulation. It is futile, for him, to discuss God’s ways partly
because what can anyone say to someone who tells you God is on his side? Once you are
one of the elect, or once you are convinced that your people are the “chosen people” --
and chosen by no less than God Himself -- then there is no room for human intervention,
no place for human agency or endeavor. The priority for him is to put critical thought
before solidarity.

Said’s humanism is developed against the secular cliques, partisan loyalty,
sectarian politics and confessional identity. Said fought against blind adherence and
mystification -- be it for a secular creed or a religious dogma. Like a mujtahid par
excellence, he always strove for critical thinking and innovative interpretation. It is
important to acknowledge that following his footsteps, “a number of scholars and critics
. . . have sought to explore the role and function of religion in the dissemination of
colonial knowledge” (Anidjar 53). He shows his dissatisfaction with the religious
discourse and shuns any critical thought or movement that is imbued in terms of religion
or religious bargain. As W. J. T. Mitchell pointed out, “it is the domain of religion, which
Said so often characterizes in terms of fairly reductive stereotypes: dogmatic, fanatical,
irrational, intolerant, and obsessed with mystery, obfuscation, and human helplessness in
the presence of the inscrutable divine (or demonic) design” (494). Thus, he was quite unequivocal in battling against “this basically uncritical religiosity,” and in discerning “religion as the result of exhaustion, consolation, disappointment” (The World, the Text and the Critic 292, 291).

It is worthwhile to note that in none of his major texts do religious themes form a central concern. He frequently castigates religious dogma and what he considers unhealthy uses made of it. However, he does not seem averse to religion as such; nor does he denounce the mere presence of religion in human cultural life which expresses the need for certainty, group solidarity, and a sense of communal belonging. He makes an explicit distinction between politically motivated religious dogma, and religious ethos in general as a broad, enveloping, life-enhancing socio-cultural environment.

Interestingly, the word “secular” has commonly operated and thought of in a differential relation with, indeed, in opposition to the word religious, where it had served to mark that which is separated from the sacred or theological, that is, it is not possible to argue for any secular position without articulating some understanding of, precisely, religion. In Said’s humanist critical approach, however, the word secular is overwhelmingly used to denote a democratic, critical idea against the uncriticality of an orthodox hegemonic and insular thought. Talal Asad’s definition of the word is productively interesting. “In the anthropology of secularism,” he argues, the secular is “neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it . . . nor a simple break from it . . . [It is] a concept that brings together certain behaviors, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life. . . . the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ are not essentially fixed categories” (25). In Said’s view, it is the culture that imposes its hegemony through the distinctions between the religious and the secular, and between religion and politics.
Subsequently, by critiquing Orientalism as philologically playing God, Said extends worldly humanism to critical secularism as an alternative for rigid texuality, dogmatism and orthodoxy of the text. According to Emily S. Apter, Said’s critical secularism “seeks to countervail such binarisms by framing the venerable humanist concern ‘to connect the renewal of liberal disciplines with the subjective consciousness of such an undertaking’ within the broader context of colonial history, imperialism, and the critique of nationalism” (46-7). Said’s worldly humanism, therefore, tends to be a tradition that reshapes and restructures the evenly historical and godly theological events into a historical and worldly humanistic value. His critically secular vision becomes worldly liberating and too easily applied to unearth the political history of the text and its ideological co-text.

Significantly, Said deploys this earthly concept of criticism in his discussion of the question of Palestine. He attacks the Israeli’s notion of a Jewish state based on religious nationalism. “Religious enthusiasm,” he insists, “is perhaps the most dangerous of threats to the humanistic enterprise, since it is patently anti-secular and antidemocratic in nature” (*Humanism and Democratic Criticism* 51). Instead, he espouses a secular interpretation of its sacred geography as a cradle of humanity rather than a place of conflict. In “Nationalism, Human Rights, and Interpretation,” he discloses, “for the truth is that Jewish and Palestinian suffering exist in and belong to the same history . . . Palestine . . . is today the touchstone case for human rights” (435). He considers religious enthusiasm as an expression of the alienated capacities of the human imagination, a system of ideological deception and coercive authority.

Therefore, studying other peoples and cultures from a non-repressive and non-manipulative perspective is his secular, critical pursuit that whole-heartedly subscribes to human emancipation and progress. In *Edward Said: The Charisma of Criticism*, H. Aram
Veeser remarks, “‘Secular criticism’ was Said’s phrase for what he did” (23). “[D]ogmatism,” Veeser argues, “was inimical to Said’s greatest effects” (25). “I hate systems,” Said more than once declared. Therefore, his approach to reality and worldly affairs is based on “fair consciousness” and “worldliness” of human agency, and his critical interventions are moved by non-ideological non-theological secular interpretation of the socio-political and cultural reality. In the concluding paragraph of his article, “Religious Criticism,” in The World, the Text and the Critic, Said makes the following remarks:

The idea of the Orient . . . has functioned as an inhibition on what I have been calling secular criticism . . . To say of such grand ideas and their discourse that they have something in common with religious discourse is to say that each serves as an agent of closure, shutting off human investigation, criticism, and effort . . . religion therefore furnishes us with systems of authority and with canons of order whose regular effect is either to compel subservience or to gain adherents. (290)

The main purpose here is to draw attention to what Said considers to be a creeping process of theologization in criticism. He challenges the “ostentatiously otherworldly authority, which as consequence of its capacity to rouse powerful ‘collective passions,’ can . . . visit enormous violence on this world . . . as an arational . . . mechanism of socio-political regimentation and mobilization” (Hussein, Edward Said 291, italic in origin). Religious dogma, he contends, creates a hierarchy of an authoritative system which imposes its thought and ideology on the others. A religious dogma of this sort – atavistic, intolerant, imperialist, hierarchical – tends to ossify into a set of unchanging essentialized prescriptions and prohibitions that inhibit any exercise of secular attitude. This for Said is
the ultimate target of human emancipation of the shackles of political and self-serving ideologies.

In the Palestinian context, Said’s critique of the Zionist theo-political claim should be understood in the light of his intimate vision of reconciliatory, emancipator humanism. This vision has articulated over the years with remarkable consistency: a binational, secular, democratic polity in which all the citizens of the state regardless of their religious background, enjoy equal rights under the law. In his article “The One-State Solution” in the New York Times Magazine (1999), he states: “there can be no reconciliation unless both peoples, two communities of suffering, resolve that their existence is a secular fact, and that it has to be dealt with as such.”

Nevertheless, Said’s uncompromising secular thinking does not aim at the mere critique of religious or theological discourses or modes of cognition. Secular criticism entails that we must liberate the secular from the strict opposition to the religious and seeks instead, in the secular, another epistemological mode that points to whatever is open to contention and critique, interrogation and doubt in the real worldly domain of selves and others instead of the fantasy of otherworldly solutions. Therefore, in the context of national identity, he has always been careful not to conflate Zionism as an ethnonational ideology and Judaism as a religious sect. Accordingly, he distinguishes between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. In The Question of Palestine, he writes: “To write critically about Zionism in Palestine has therefore never meant, and does not mean now, being anti-Semitic; conversely, the struggle for Palestinian rights and self-determination does not mean support for . . . the antiquated and oppressive state structures of most of the Arab nations” (59). He also declares: “I am the last Jewish intellectual . . . the only true follower of Adorno . . . I am a Jewish-Palestinian” (‘My
Right of Return” 458). The point to be made about Said’s statement has to do with the second part of his announcement: “I am a Jewish-Palestinian”. The hyphenated identity, he proclaims collapses the structure of oppositional differences without, however, erasing difference itself: “Arab” or Palestinian no longer appears in opposition to “Jew”; neither Jew nor Palestinian vanishes into the other. It is this keeping-in-difference inseparability of the Jew and the Arab that Said emphasizes in his various writings about memory and the politics of memory in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Said’s thesis is comparably reconciliatory in contrast to some Arab radical nationalist thinkers such as Joseph Massad who argues that making the link between the Holocaust and the Nakba, is in truth submitting to “Israeli and Zionist propagandists” who cynically use the Holocaust to assert Israel’s right to exist, thus drawing attention away from the current suffering of Palestinians. While Massad never explicitly accuses Said for falling, like “many Palestinians and Arabs,” into this “Zionist ideological trap”, he reads Said’s words as reflecting not the critic’s own coherent and thought through opinion but an act of reconciliation that “attempts to navigate the ideological waters between Zionism’s insistence on linking the Jewish holocaust with the establishment of the Jewish state and the Palestinian and Arab popular insistence on rejecting the coupling, if not rejecting the reality of the Holocaust altogether” (63, 53, 65).

Remarkably, Said bases his argument on a more “fluid” humanistic understanding of history: “There is never a term or time period for suffering . . . you can’t say suffering begins here and ends there” (Culture and Resistance 180). He accompanies this observation with the following comment: “As an Arab in particular I find it important to comprehend [the Jewish tragedy] and collective experience in as much of its terrible concrete detail as one is capable: this act of comprehension guarantees one’s humanity and resolve that such a catastrophe should never be forgotten and never again recur”
(“Bases for Coexistence” 207). With these words, Said presents a politically charged ethical commitment that situates the “Self” in an ethical relationship to the “Other” based on one’s own self-identification.

Said principally does not separate ethics from politics regarding the treatment of the other with whom the self has an ethical relationship. His politics never empties ethics. Indeed, what he emphasizes is that the very condition of differentiation, separation, and antagonism that characterizes today’s relationship between Israeli Jews and Palestinians results in a paradoxical dynamic of codependency and mutual identification. He stresses: “the Jews are not a chosen people, but Jews and Arabs together . . . no Jew can ignore the Arab in general, nor can he immerse himself in his ancient tradition and lose the Palestinian Arab and what Zionism has done to him . . . Each is the other” (“Arabs and Jews” 3). In his essay, “A New ‘Copernican’ Revolution: Said’s Critique of Metaphysics and Theology,” Abdirahman Hussein demonstrates that Said has tried “to find ways of transforming the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis into a meaningful debate, advancing beyond mutual demonizations and recriminations, and, instead, envisioning the possibility of reconciliation between these two victimized communities on the basis of equality” (415).

Said’s secular notion of humanism entails that otherworldly ways are beyond the act of man, and therefore, beyond the act of criticism: “we can know things according to the way they were made” not ordained, constructed or marketed (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 11). This explains why his humanism articulates dense notions of identity, culture, and the secular in the face of all orthodoxies and dogmatisms. For instance, in the post-9/11 atmosphere of the USA, he observes that religious and false sentimentalist discourses further authorize popular currencies separating “us” from “them,” at the risk of repeating the residual formulas of earlier Orientalisms. He identifies
religious enthusiasm as the most troubling sign of threat to the humanistic enterprise. The problem with all forms of religious discourse, he argues, is that they are founded on a non-deconstructable ground of authority that “serves as an agent of closure, shutting off human investigation, criticism, and effort in deference to the authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the otherworldly” (The World, the Text and the Critic 290). Hence, Said denounces religious discourse because it galvanizes the concept of “belonging” via Manichean theologizing of the “Other” whereby religion becomes a stimulus of collective identity. It is against this cultural and critical drift that Said conceives his own project as secular criticism. According to Ranjan Ghosh, “To read Said is to feel responsible for our existence, and to become responsible to others; it is to work out our secular position within the ‘worldly’ discourses that we cannot do away with” (xxiii).

However, Said is by no means a secular thinker, which means that religious matters, broadly conceived, are important to his vision of things. Religious matters are important to his conception of cultural critique and to his image of the secular critic. Accordingly, secular history is the other of sacred history, and critical consciousness (or secular consciousness) is the other of theological and Manichaean consciousness. His notion of culture has affinities to the notion of sacred violence. He believes that has violence-producing effects. Said here is pointing to Arnold’s grappling with the ideas of Hebraism and Hellenism, as it has much to do with the nineteenth-century tradition of racial thinking of which those ideas are part. The idea of Semitic is often compared invidiously to Greek- and Roman-derived culture. This distinction between Indo-European language users and cultures and Semitic language users and cultures is deeply implicated in nineteenth-century racial thinking, the distinction between Aryan and Semite. According to William D. Hart, this distinction is “an instance of . . . the invidious
distinction between East and West . . . the important thing to ponder now are the fluid relations between Orientalism, racial thinking, and invidious religious distinctions” (23).

The task of the intellectual, therefore, is to resist the quasi-religious authority of culture and its authority. S/he must avoid the temptations represented by the two formidable and related powers that threaten to misdirect his/her critical attention: the first is the filiative bonds of religion, birth, nationality, or profession, the second is the affiliative system acquired by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation.

**Humanism as an Approach to Worldism**

The importance of Said’s humanism lies in its cosmopolitan outlook. Oppositional and polyphonic, arrilegious and secular, liberating and emancipatorily, and democratic and dialogic as it is, Said’s humanism contributes passionately to the concept of worldism as an all-embracing theory and praxis.

*Urban Dictionary* defines Worldism as “a bit of truth derived from worldly ways or wisdom. The attitude of caring and worrying about the world, or earth . . . to change it for the better, through people, environment, etc.” Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling describe Worldism as a “theoretical framework” that helps us “to imagine a future beyond colonial capitalist-patriarchy”. “Rooted in structural social relations of production,” they maintain, “Worldism acknowledges the existence of multiple worlds while registering, at the same time, their constant, mutual ‘reverberation’ and (re)construction . . . Worldism aims to allow negotiation across difference in the building of communities” (22).
Worldism then offers a solution that can serve the greatest good for the greatest number. Ordi Pigemj believes that worldism “wake[s] up from our personal and collective delusions to realize who we are, where we are going, and how we are living [thereby preventing further violence through reactionary] crusades to rid the world of evil” (qtd. in Agathangelou and Ling 22). This definition is akin to Mahatma Gandhi’s notion of “oceanic circle” whereby the “outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but give strength to all within and derive its strength from it” (158).

In its cosmopolitan attitude, worldliness, hybridity, and inclusiveness, Said’s worldism poses itself as amalgamation of humanist doctrines. His worldism is a down-to-earth theory and praxis that brings humanity into an ethical and humane global world without scoffing off one’s local image and experience. In this, the individual is affiliated to the entire world as he/she views the whole world as his/her own land. Trained as a comparativist, Said is armed with techniques and skills that allow him to bring together disparate facts, divorced situations and dissimilar traditions in order to find analogies, identities, harmonies, and not only showing differences, contrasts and paradoxes. According to Ghazoul, “It is this plurality within a somewhat listless, ever-changing oneness . . . reveal[ing] itself neither as ‘a melting pot’ nor as mosaic’” that produces Said’s multiple and polyphonic discourse – neither pragmatically postmodernist, nor “universal in concentrating on idealist essence, nor shallow cosmopolitan in covering up difference under a common veneer” (“The resonance of the Arab-Islamic Heritage”158).

Notably, Said’s worldism is formed out of his experience as an exiled intellectual who was aware of more than one culture. He was, therefore, able to ensure a panoptic vision of human experience. The exiled intellectual is free from “any links to an ancestral home land” because he “is released into a clarity of thought and public action” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, The Paradox 15). The “‘untidiness’ of exile,” therefore, has presented
Said with “a desituated posture that informed much of his criticism” (Iskandar and Rustom 5). This gives his worldism an import of a global endorsement as a lived doctrine.

The paradox of identity is a formulative element of his concept of worldism. His very name – “‘Edward,’ a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic family name Said”– seemed to him a metaphor for the paradoxically multiple identities and affiliations tugging in different directions (Out of Place 3). He contends that “every identity is . . . a construction, a composite of different histories, migrations, conquests, liberations, and so on. We can deal with these either as worlds at war, or as experiences to be reconciled” (“The Uses of Culture” 142). His preference for reconciliation is as much a way of coming to terms with himself as it is a public political choice. These multiple displacements and contradictions in his life fuel a sense of “being not quite right and out of place” and lead him to think of himself as “a cluster of flowing currents” rather than “a solid self” (Out of Place 295). He writes of this sense of not-quite-belonging as much as he writes of the complementarity of East and West approaching truth in its different aspects from different angles of vision. “This plurality of vision,” he affirms, “gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions” (“Reflections on Exile” 186).

Therefore, exile becomes for him a cosmopolitan trope because it awards him the sense of being at home in the world at large. It becomes an enabling potential of vision that offers a more plausible basis for universalist thinking. His condition of exile is intrinsically related to the “in-between” character of being an insider and an outsider. It was for him a way of being attached to a wider space of humanity, belonging to one common world of human geography and of possibly overcoming parochial narrow-mindedness and commitment to ethical worldism which takes common humanity as its goal. His universalism was a lived one. Responding to Huntington’s clash of civilizations
thesis, he writes: “the evidence of extraordinary diversity within each culture wreaks immediate havoc on any attempt to reduce the culture or civilization to a simple, unitary phenomenon?” (“The Uses of Culture” 140, italics in the origin). His sense of exile as a decentered self, capable of seeing the culture of the “other” from within and from outside at the same time, drove him to break new ground. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, he informs:

As an intellectual I present my concerns before an audience or constituency, but this is not just a matter of how I articulate them, but also of what I myself, as someone who is trying to advance the cause of freedom and justice, also represent . . . There is therefore this quite complicated mix between the private and the public worlds, my own history, values, writings and positions as they derive from my experiences, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, how these enter into the social world where people debate and make decisions about war and freedom and justice. (12)

Said’s worldism therefore is a practiced concept and approach that identifies his belonging and affiliation to the entire humanity. Viewed this way, being “out of place” is nothing but the historical experience and the social conditions of himself, paradoxically, living out of place and in every place. Emily S. Apter remarks: “the centrality of humanism in Said’s oeuvre . . . unfolds out of the ‘worlded’ humanism” (41). In his commitment to the concept of worldism as a common human value, Said praised Auerbach and Leo Spitzer for being “extraterritorial” critics who have made of the text “a locus of human effort, a ‘text-ile’ fertility gathering in cultural identity, disseminating human life everywhere in time and space” (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 250). In its worldist perspective, Said’s humanism rescues “the marginalized” from minority status, “as one from which to rethink and remake universalist (ethical, political, cultural) claims,
Thus displacing its assignation as the site of the local” (Mufti, “Auerbach in Istanbul” 244). In an interview with Jacqueline Rose, he confesses, “I’ve become very, very impatient with the idea of and the whole project of identity . . . that people should really focus on themselves and where they come from . . . What’s much more interesting is to try to reach out beyond identity to something else” (25). This concern to move “beyond identity” is duly the basis of his worldism.

Said’s move to a non-identity concern is grounded in his life as a nomadic intellectual. According to Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom, “If the Saidian exilic state were to ‘house’ anything, it would do so as a refuge for emancipatory action”. This sense of “nomadic” affinity as a sort of liberation and an alternative terrain of shifting contours runs through Said’s nomadic experience that “was theoretically unhoused, methodologically untidy, and spatially fluid [and] intrinsically veracious” (5). In fact, nomadism was a source of critical interrogation that spanned much of his oeuvre, from his critique of colonial discourses in Orientalism to his keynote address on the power politics of anthropological studies. In this case, the nomadism of Palestinian dispossession becomes methodological when it unsettles the political impasses produced by dubious peace initiatives he described in The Politics of Dispossession. Consequently, by deterritorializing the home, he “de-othered the other,” making ‘otherness’ obsolete . . . [he] described a deeply unrestful state, suggesting that in exile one never arrives at a destination, thereby rendering the nomadic ontological” (6). Through this worldist negotiable trajectory, Said expresses his hopes for the future of Palestine/Israel by endorsing a one-state solution.

To achieve his worldist goal, he eschews the nativist and closed nationalist ideologies that serve as an impetus of enclosure by “sacrificing context, manipulating experience, drawing borders, normalizing distinctions, and erecting fences between
‘civilizations,’ creating apartheid and interventionist politics” (8). This worldist perspective becomes a liberating condition from the sentimental attachments to and the apologetic worship of any form of ideology or belonging. This vision has prolifically encapsulated his persona as an intellectual of an unresolved intent on overcoming the appeal of purity, tidiness, and homogeneity.

Actually, Said’s concept of worldism is methodologically based on his contrapuntal reading of human text and experience. According to Peter Hallows, the contrapuntal reading of literature “is not only a good strategy for dealing with cultural difference” and for depicting the historical experience of others, but “it is also consistent with our hybrid nature . . . ‘Our truest reality’ . . . ‘is expressed in the way we cross over from one place to another. We are migrants and perhaps hybrid . . .” (59, italics in origin). Hence, by recognizing strategic method, Said proposes that the intellectual is able to present somewhat objective knowledge and eliminate any bias that would create a cultural, ontological or otherwise division and distinction among peoples and nations. This critical method is the transparent and unseen thread that links Said’s theoretical premises to his ethical praxis. It is the methodological instrument of his humanistic approach to the work of criticism. It is an act of reconciliation, equality, and interlocution as it is premised on an inter-cultural and outer-national approach he outlined in his “Travelling Theory”. Paul Gilroy opines, “Said’s affirmations of emancipation and enlightenment have not been compromised . . . [his] comparative historical analyses of political culture and cultural politics are globalised rather than totalized” (46).

Moreover, as a situatedly worldist concept, Said’s humanism is essentially anchored in his view of the act of representation as reductive, violent, dismembering and often disempowering way of the subject of representation because the façade of representation, he contends, contrasts with the process that produced it. Not only
representation is incapable of capturing the cumulative nature of the represented, but also
“no process of converting experience into expression could be free of contamination”
(Humanism and Democratic Criticism 49). A key goal of representation is to ready an
expression for the sole purpose of consumption. In his memoir, Said illustratively cites
his experience in colonial schools and how the disenfranchisement of the “other”
ocurred in representation by authoritative power centers.

From cultural relativist approach, Said’s worldism can be understood as a doctrine
of complementarity and simultaneity. It rejects communitarian views which hold that
cultural norms apply primarily within bounded groups comprising some subset of the
global population. This doctrine about culture and the self suggests that the identity or
well-being of individuals does not require membership in a determinate cultural group
whose boundaries are clear and whose stability and cohesion are assured. Indeed, for him
cultures are viewed not as discrete entities, but as systems of ideas, beliefs and practices
that are constantly in flux, modifying and being modified in their interaction with other
cultures. His doctrine, therefore, celebrates cultural miscegenation for its potential to
enhance the agency and freedom of human beings.

Said’s cultural relativism, therefore, celebrates dialogue as a social reality since
dialogue presupposes equality of the interlocutors. For this reason, he rejects sweeping
generalizations as a totalitarian and hegemonic method. According to Asha Varadharajan,
“the humane, ethical, tempered, and . . . civil accents that distinguish his elegant and
refined work are persistently in the service of a radical critique of violence committed
precisely in the name of ‘Western virtues, humanism, morality’” (113). It is within this
entirely worldly context, in fact, that the humanist’s work can no longer focus upon one’s
own, but must open itself up to others. “Humanism,” he strongly believes, “must excavate
the silences” (*Humanism and Democratic Criticism* 81). His humanistic worldview is worldly and situated. As he puts it, “Humanism is the achievement of form by human will and agency; it is neither system nor impersonal force like the market or the unconscious” (15). It follows that “the whole concept of national identity has to be revised” because we are living in a world that which “has become far more integrated and demographically mixed” (24).

The essence of humanism, for him, is to understand human history as a continuous process of self-understanding, and self realization, and to acknowledge that there are other cultures and other geniuses. What makes cultures and civilization interesting, he argues, is “not their essence of purity, but their combinations and diversity”. Subsequently, humanism is not a “way of consolidating and affirming what ‘we’ have always known and felt, but rather a means of questioning, upsetting, and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as a commodified, packed, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties” (28).

In addition, Said takes humanism as “protective or even defensive” against radical ethno- and religious nationalism, its “ideological ferocity and triumphalism” and its assured danger of “inflamed xenophobia.” He explains that this is the “reason why I have connected the humanities directly with the critical inquiry, rather than with . . . the mobilization of collective passions” (37). Thus, the intellectual’s task, according to Said, is to undo the epistemic ties between knowledge and power as a coercive relation of homogeneity and dominance.

Said’s critical secular humanism offers alternatives to both corporate and monolithic cultural practices and conceptions. This form of cosmopolitanism and secular humanism entails an abstract identification of global citizenship. In her essay “This
Earthly World: Edward Said: The Praxis of Secular Humanisms and Situated Cosmopolitanisms,” Leslie G. Roman argues that the import of Said’s work derives from inspirational notion of critical “secular humanism” or “relational genealogies of situated cosmopolitanism” (359). Said’s concept of “earthly world,” she argues, can be served “as an elegant and pithy introduction to a crucial dimension of his own work on critical humanism and cultural imperialism” (357). Said’s humanism espouses secular interpretation as a way of resisting the “fetishization of national identity” which dominates the world politics today. To this end, he committed himself courageously developing a critical praxis of secular humanism, schooled in opposing orthodoxies of nations, groups, and prevailing political ideologies.

Said’s vision of secular criticism and democratic humanism has been widely commended in critically examining some of the contingencies, complexities, and conjunctural global realities that create interdependencies and interconnections of living in a globalized world under conditions of asymmetrical power and wealth. This vision outlines a more relational, genealogical, situated, and critical view of identifications that welcomes dialogical ethical debate about issues rather than adheres to reified notions of cultural difference. The issue for Said across the corpus of his work on various themes emphasizes worldliness as praxis, being in and of the world in its specific forms of situated diversity and commonality. As a result, instead of seeking of “either/or” solutions, he has proposed an earthy world of situated cosmopolitanisms that rule out the racial, ethnic, religious and national distinctions and markers. With great eloquence, he reminds us that “the intellectual’s role is dialectically, and oppositionally to uncover and elucidate” such contests of power, and “to challenge and defeat both imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power wherever and whenever possible” (Humanism and Democratic Criticism 135). His message is that while resolved in our opposition to false
universalism and moral relativism, the praxis of secular humanisms and situated cosmopolitanisms still demand of all of us the recognition of humanity everywhere in the face of challenging grossly unequal, dangerous, and intolerable conditions.

The gloss of the problem of conflictual relations arises from misusing of knowledge. In order to produce an ideology-free community, he suggests, knowledge must be derived from non-coercive contact and methodological reflection since all writing about human society “rests on judgment and interpretation” (Covering Islam 162). Therefore, to avoid any ideological misconception and hostility to reading of cultures, traditions and labels such as “West” and “Islam,” “interpretation must be self-conscious in its method and its aim if it is to be vigilant and humane”. To achieve this, the close tie between knowledge and “conquest and domination” has to be “severed completely . . . For otherwise, we will not only face protracted tension and perhaps war, but we will offer . . . the prospect of many wars, unimaginable sufferings, and disastrous upheavals” (172-73).

The concepts of “filiation” and “affiliation constitute the two key-elements of Said’s worldism. Said deploys these two concept to describe the notion of place, which is most often defined in terms of a “nation”. Terms like “at home” or “in place” suggest for him certain “nuances, principally of reassurance, fitness, belonging, association”. he argues that “in the exaggerated boundary drawn between Europe and the Orient . . . the idea of a nation, of a national-cultural community as a sovereign entity and place set against other places, has its fullest realization” (The World, the Text and the Critic 8). He asserts that place-based perspective of belonging reinforces the view of culture as a “system of values saturating downward almost everything within its purview” which always “involved hierarchies”. This dialectic of “self-fortification and self-confirmation”, he states, “is based on a constantly practiced differentiation of self from
what it believes to be not itself. And this differentiation is frequently performed by setting the valorized culture over the Other” (9, 12). This view of culture as a carrier of aggressive sense of nation, home, community, and belonging is borne out by Macaulay’s 1935 Minute on Indian Education. He expounds that Macaulay’s was an “ethnocentric opinion with ascertainable results” whereby “superiority and power are lodged in a rhetoric of belonging, or being ‘at home,’ so to speak, and in a rhetoric of administration” (13). To his contention, this sense of culture enhances a racist and ethnocentric worldview which contradicts the concepts of equality, worldism and universal humanism.

Contrary to the Western humanisms, old and new, Saidian humanism signifies both universality and cultural commitment. It solicits a sense of balance to individual’s inevitable filiations of his/her culture and his/her wider affiliations of the entire world as it expands the individual’s sense of belonging to more than one culture without denying his or her cultural commitment. Consequently, the concept of worldliness is very essential to understand the underlying meaning of Said’s critical consciousness as a critical value that elucidates the importance of worldism and belonging. He explains the concept of filiation and affiliation in the following terms: “The filialtive scheme belongs to the realm of nature and of (life), whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society” (20). Subsequently, the intellectual, for Said, is no longer identified with his or her culture as his or her critical consciousness is constituted as a result of interaction with the outside world of his or her set of belongings and his or her thoughts of his or her culture. Accordingly, this affiliative mode “frees the critic from a narrow view of texts connected in a filiative relationship to other texts, with very little attention paid to the ‘world’ in which they come into being” (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, The Paradox of Identity 42).
Moreover, Said’s humanism has gone beyond the act of interpretation to the world of alterity and emancipation. According to Matthew Abraham, Said’s work moves us “toward a New Humanism, a humanism that is more than humanism. This sort of humanism recognizes . . . the embrace of human agency and alternative futures, and the human reconciliation made possible by that embrace” (6). To this end, he celebrates recuperation of the voices of the unheard, and carries the messages of progress and emancipation. “In our wish to make ourselves heard,” he writes, “we tend very often to forget that the world is a crowded place, and that if everyone were to insist on the radical purity or priority of one’s own voice, all we would have would be the awful din of unending strife, and a bloody political mess” (Culture and Imperialism xxi). Accordingly, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra which he launched in his final years proves a fitting legacy for an intellectual whose work illuminated our crisis-ridden world by embracing its contradictions and celebrating its complexities.
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