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ISSN: 1481-4374

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On Edward Said, Scholar and Public Intellectual

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Abstract

In her paper, "On Edward Said, Scholar and Public Intellectual," F. Elizabeth Dahab pays tribute to Edward Said, 1935-2003. Dahab discusses selected aspects of Said's trajectories as a scholar and Palestinian-American activist including aspects of Said's numerous activities and work as a musician, an ardent political polemicist, a music critic, a Columbia University professor of comparative literature, a humanist, President of the Modern Language Association of America, and an exiled Palestinian as evident in the vast corpus of this eminent scholar's publications over the course of almost four decades (twenty-four books and hundreds of articles and interviews). Said's work elicited debate and controversy while his activities as a public intellectual who lead a life of thought "in-between" the difficult and multiple borders of the historic battle fields of the Middle East won him a great number of supporters and enemies alike. Said's life and work prove exemplary for all who believe in integrity in thought and practice.

Recommended Citation

Dahab, F. Elizabeth. "On Edward Said, Scholar and Public Intellectual." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 5.4 (2003): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1197>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

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Edward Said, however, is much more than an author. He stands out as perhaps the last public intellectual of our time. We do not have public intellectuals of this caliber anymore, maybe with an exception of Noam Chomsky. Edward Said is fascinating on a number of fronts. As I listen to multiple lectures and interviews with Edward Said online, I admire him for his ability to produce counter narratives in order to oppose those who outnumber and overpower him hugely, namely the Zionist narratives and the state of Israel. I admire his ability to look beyond the immediate and recognise the cultural behind the material.