

Clash of Ignorance” by Edward Said Critical Essay

Introduction

Modern world experiences an extreme globalization. The development of technologies and the improvement of business, education, and other services have led to the continuous intercourse between people of various cultures and religions. In 1993, Samuel Huntington introduced the article “Clash of Civilization” that immediately enjoyed great success and popularity.

However, many researchers criticized Huntington for his ideas. The most convincing rebuttal was represented by Edward W. Said, who provided a profound evidence that doubted Huntington’s ideas.

Short Summary

Edward W. Said’s “Clash of Ignorance” was published in 2001 on the website The Nation. The author discussed and criticized Huntington’s thoughts. Huntington introduced the theory that the post-Cold War world would face the next stage of the conflict — the cultural one. He assumed that this conflict would occur between the West and Islam.

According to Said, the article of Samuel Huntington was based more on personal assumptions rather than on clear evidence. Said argued that Huntington did not provide any exact proof of his words. He also wrote that Huntington just aggravated the situation by making such statements (Said 2001).

Critical Discussion

“Clash of Ignorance” should be regarded as a significant contribution to the field of International Relations. Edward Said employs a thoughtful approach to criticism and makes no vain assumptions. The author provides readers with the information that Huntington has divided the world into seven or eight major civilizations based on the so-called “civilization identity”.

Islam and the West represent two major civilizations (Said 2001). Edward Said writes that Huntington did not make any profound investigations. He used the book of Bernard Lewis “The Roots of Muslim Rage” and based all his concepts on it. Said is right that such a strict division is not correct. On the contrary, due to the processes of globalization, different civilizations are becoming closer to each other.

People from distant places become connected. Statistics shows that many Muslims live in the United States or Europe. It is a usual practice nowadays (*Islamic Extremism and the West* 2008). As Bulliet (2004) states, people do not live in the Middle Ages anymore. Large groups of Muslim people live in almost every country in the world.

Even more, numerous representatives can be found in all European countries, especially in America, Canada, and Europe. If people follow Huntington ideas, there will be the world of

conflicting clans. Nevertheless, the reality proves that the West and Islam can co-exist successfully. Said emphasizes the fact that Huntington does not consider the past as the important source of evidence.

Huntington chooses information that he prefers. Islam made a lot of scientific inventions, medical advances, and social and philosophical ideas, which were spread to Europe later. None of these details was taken into consideration by Huntington (*"The Clash of Ignorance" vs. "The Clash of Civilization"* 2009).

"The Clash of Ignorance" represents theory that refutes Huntington's one. According to this theory, the causes for conflicts between countries lie in such unreasonable statements. The power of word should not be underestimated. According to Baile (2011), words can separate and hurt.

"The Clash of Civilizations" was such a success that it resulted in long-lasting debates and changed the minds of many people. The theory of the clash of civilizations is a successful political myth. Bottici and Challand (2013) introduce interesting thought. According to their book, the title is the most catching in Huntington's work. He has chosen such a subject that provokes the imagination and makes people believe in it.

If somebody doubts that simple words can influence minds so much, he or she should remember about "Mein Kampf" and Nazi ideas that have been spread only through words and persuasion. Thus, Said believes that Huntington does harm by introducing such thought. Said writes that 'Huntington is an ideologist, someone who wants to make "civilizations" and "identities" into what they are not: shut down, sealed off entities.' (Said 2001, p. 1).

Edward Said argues that Huntington is not fair in his judgments. It is evident that he prefers the Western civilization. Huntington describes the West as the democratic culture, the primary benefits of which include freedom of enterprise, human rights, and processes of globalization. He also elevates a variety of political and economic structures that aim at making life in society better.

Bulliet (2004) also introduces the idea that Huntington is not adequate in his judgments. The primary controversy in his works deals with the issue of modernization. Samuel Huntington takes the notion of modernization as the most significant factor for dividing and classifying countries into several civilizations. Nevertheless, the author employs an old understanding of the "modernization".

The theory is that only the West is the most democratic culture, and no other can be even compared to it. Such a notion resembles widespread points of view after the World War II. The theorists of the 1960s assumed that the religion cannot occupy the first place in the developed society. The religion should be changed in such a way that it does not influence people so drastically anymore.

Despite this opinion, Islamic countries still express a sacred devotion to their religion. Religion is the driving force of their power and political activity as well. Consequently, religion is the primary

source of judgments for Huntington. Edward Said realizes that fact and understands that it is not a professional approach. This point of view has been supported by Baile.

He writes that religion is only one aspect of the civilization, but Huntington uses it as the key component of his description of the “collective identity”. Mohamed Wa Baile (2011) goes into details and discusses peculiar aspects of the Western and Islamic cultures that influence the development of the countries.

Edward Said criticizes Huntington’s approach of modernization. According to his “Clash of Civilizations”, Islam is not ready to be a part of the modern society due to its conservatism (Huntington 1993). Said dethrones this statement by proving that Muslims have become the part of the modern world. They often dress like Europeans.

Besides, the terrorist attack on 9/11 was possible because of the achievements of modernization. Terrible events of 9/11 were considered as the proof of Huntington’s ideas. However, Said argued that the attack was conducted by a small majority of extremists, and the whole Islamic culture should not be judged only because of this.

Conclusion

In my opinion, the intellectual merit of this works is significant. Such contemplations make people think differently, look at the same situation from another perspective. The truth is somewhere in between. All facts provided by the author support his thesis. Even more, Edward Said displayed a great mastery by writing such a sharp rebuttal only in three pages. “Clash of Ignorance” refutes Samuel Huntington’s ideas through a profound investigation and fair judgments.

Reference List

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[“The Clash of Ignorance” vs. “The Clash of Civilization”](#) 2009. Web.