Occidentalizing and Orientalizing the Self in the Middle East

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"We shall adopt hats along with all other works of Western civilization." —Kemal Ataturk

"Only Islam in all the branches of our life, in the home, in the school, in medicine, in engineering, in how to deal with others, can realize the potential of the Muslim. Islam means science and development. It means all the best manners in your life and, above all, values." —Sayyid Qutb

I. CONSTRUCTING THE SELF

There has been a growing body of literature which asserts, following Edward Said's lead, that the idea of the "other has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (Said, 1979: 5). Edward Said's contribution provides a major development in our understanding the formation of cultural identities. With the publication of *Orientalism* (1979), the idea that there exists a social body, an identity that is fixed around some unified "skin" or border—uncontaminated by its relation to an "Other"—became increasingly a proposition hard to defend. Said here recognizes that this is a manifestation of a general process, one by which a set of people seeks "to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is closer to it and what is far away" (1979: 55).[1] James Carrier similarly understands identities as a form of a dialogical, relational process which form *"an instance of a larger process of self-definition through opposition with the alien"* (James Carier, 1995: 3). The "West" came to consolidate its self-identity by juxtaposing an imagined "us" against the "Orient." In the process of constructing the "other," the West has made for itself the task of sketching a detailed account of what makes "us" unique, different, and most importantly "modern." Such a discourse served the colonizer in asserting his or her "Western" identity, to forge a history which places Europe at the center of world history and, most significantly, an identity which makes it possible to demonstrate the unique development of the Occident as compared to the remaining mass of humanity. It is a form of self-discovery, of constituting one's own identity in opposition to its negated other.

What I would like to do in this paper is to invert Said's focus on how the "other" was constructed and made real to the more perplexing issue of how these constructs were received by its referent "other." That is, how precisely does

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1. Said goes on to say that "space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here" (1979, p.55).

the "oriental" negotiate the constructs produced by the Orientalist discourse? The irony of this form of analysis is that it demonstrates that as the world becomes more permeated with the transnational flow of goods, culture, and military bases from the West, the people of the periphery look "inward" and create a space for themselves by producing what they believe represents their authentic culture. In this sense the actual dynamics of a given locational identity rely on, and are shaped by, activities and forces that are global. But as we shall see below there are multiple ways the "Oriental" produces his or her identity.

Thus the focus of this essay will largely be concerned with how the Orient produces its self when confronted by the Orientalist social construction of "its culture." The binaries produced by Orientalist discourse, I believe, travel into the Orient and have crystallized only recently as taken for granted *nationalized* order of things. The Belly Dancer, the Harem, and the Turban came literally marching out of European texts, museums, and films only to find a "home" in the "Orient."[1] Even things that seem to be trivial, like the tuxedo, or more serious institutional practices, like "modern" governance and urban planning as well as Cartesian natural and social sciences, are all invention of a highly complex and globally integrated modern world-system. But in all cases the decision to make one or more of these items part of a nationalized "cultural heritage" is a politically contested and negotiated phenomenon, one which we may call the "invention of traditions."[2] The process in which this occurs is the subject matter of this paper.

Thus while we are beginning to see the blossoming of a number of studies that permit the "voices of the natives," by and large the majority of the research continues to be largely concerned with how the "West" produced its self through the negation of its exterior other. What I'd like to do is explore how the Orient produces its self through the binaries constructed by the Western gaze. The example I shall use is that of the Middle East, where the "Arab-Islamic world" reproduced the binaries given to it by the "West" in multiple ways, sometimes complicitly accepting the binaries as objective cultural realities while at other times resisting these same assigned constructs. Islamists and Arab nationalists were satisfied as being "different from the West" while Zionists and Kemalists vigorously refused to accept the Oriental label by removing their imagined identity from the Orient and becoming part of "Western" civilization. The argument presented here is that the identities produced in response to the hegemonic power of the global north have come in largely three forms: Modernizing (Arab Nationalism), Occidentalizing (Zionism and Kemalism), and Orientalizing (Islamist Movements).

Although the Middle East will be the specific case study that I will use to illustrate these three discursive responses to colonialism, the analysis may be of use for other regions of the global south. Here I am specifically using the examples of Zionism, Kemalism, Arab nationalism, and Islamists to discuss the three identity formations that I call Occidentalizing, Modernizing, and Orientalizing identities. One of the basic questions these nationalists attempted to answer is, "What are the essential characteristics needed for an 'our culture' to modernize like the West?" Only the Islamists, as we will see, completely discarded this question, instead preferring to ask a radically different set of questions where the "West" was removed as the defining criteria of "progress." Therefore the type of questions and answers articulated, as we will shortly discover, depend on who is responding.

Here I'd like to take Partha Chatterjee's (1986, 1993) influential analysis of Indian nationalism and apply it to specific Arab nationalists movements. According to Chatterjee for these Indian nationalists the world is divided into two domains, "the material and the spiritual." The material, he continues, "is the domain of the 'outside,' of the economy and of government, of science and technology, a domain where the West has proved its superiority" and the Indian nation must now adopt as its own. "The spiritual," on the other hand, "is the 'inner' domain, bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity" (Partha Chatterjee, 1993: 6). According to these postcolonial constructions, this "inner sphere" must never be polluted and must be maintained in a state of purity at all costs. But I'd like to complicate his analysis by demonstrating that there are in fact two distinct responses to colonialist discourse that elite nationalists have negotiated and produced. In this essay I will introduce two movements that differ dramatically from the Indian case Chatterjee describes:

1) *Occidentalizing Nationalism of Kemalism and Zionism*: The first response we will cover are identities that "travel" West in their effort to completely *Occidentalize* the self. This is the path Kemalists, Zionists, and the Pahlavi regime of Iran prefer: Here both the public (exterior) and the private (interior) spheres are viewed by Zionists, Turkish nationalists, and pre-revolutionary Iranian nationalists to be in need of major changes, to be transformed and remade in the image of the West. According to this Occidentalizing paradigm, the nation needs to be radically de-Orientalized

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1. See the new work of Lisa Pollard (2005), especially the chapter, "Inside Egypt: The Harem, the Hovel, and the Western Construction of an Egyptian National Landscape," pages 48—72.

2. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* Cambridge University Press (1992).

and/or de-Islamized. In other words, all "Oriental-like" qualities must be purged and replaced with a new—more improved—"Occidental-like" culture. According to these nationalists, transforming the exterior of the nation without also overhauling the interior, oriental/Islamic characteristics of the nation is doomed to fail. Nowhere was this more apparent than when it came to "liberating women." These Occidentalizing nationalists used the discourse of "modernizing the woman" and "the progress of woman" as status displays of *"how European and civilized we've become."* This is slightly different than the gendered discourse used by Arab nationalists and radically different from that used by the Islamists. For the former, "modernizing the woman" was also used as a status display, but this time to demonstrate *"how well our religion and traditional culture can accommodate itself to the modern world."* The Islamists decided to negate the language of progress altogether and refused to use such discourse as a status display. In stark contrast to the other two modernizing movements, Islamists understood the discourse of "modernizing the women" as a symbol of a lost authenticity, of *"how far we've been corrupted."*

2) *Orientalizing Nationalism of Islamist Movements*: The second type of response, also not explored by Chatterjee, is the most recent of the two. These identities travel East in what I call the *Orientalization* path of Islamic militants. Here both the private and public spheres are defined as the interior, so that for these religious militants neither sphere may fall prey to Westernization/Occidentalization. This is the path Sayyid Qutb, Ayatollah Khomeini, Ali Shariati, and Osama bin Laden prefer. It's a form of identity that directly challenges the Kemalist, Zionist, Pahlavi, and Arab nationalist forms by suggesting that the nation needs to be cleansed completely from the toxins of Westernization and secularization. Rather than Occidentalizing the nation's identity, it advocates instead a process of Islamization or what I call Orientalization. Here both the private and the public spheres are completely collapsed and are "cleansed" of any Western contamination. Thus no distinction between private and public is needed, for Islam is a total unity of life, so they say. Everything from governance and science to the minutest everyday practices of childrearing and the body needs to be Islamized.

II. Occidentalizing and Modernizing the Self: Zionism and Kemalism, Or the "West" as Exterior and Interior

"We are in the Orient only geographically."—David Ben-Gurion

Kemalist and early Zionist discourses can be summarily paraphrased in the following way: *To join the modern and developed world, it's not enough to enact five-year industrial projects. No, we must change our Jewish and Turkish self first. To become like the West, we must undress our self of all those Oriental and antiquated practices. These religious/ cultural practices are the causes of our backwardness.*

In my reading of the literature on the formation of Zionism and Turkish nationalism, I'm struck by the similarities in the biographies of the "founding fathers" of these movements. Both Theodor Herzl and Kemal Ataturk in their adult life came to be obsessed with assimilating into European culture. They both found their "cultural heritage" to be lacking, too Oriental, and not up to par with the new challenges of the modern European world. Indeed, they agreed with their most racist and anti-Semitic opponents: The Jew and the Turk were of an inferior culture when compared to other Western nations. But while they agreed that their respective cultures were of a lower type, both Herzl and Ataturk understood this as a transitional moment in history, waiting for the spirit of progress to be injected into the social body by an enlightened "indigenous" state. For Herzl, the Jew can be made in the image of the European if only the Jew had access to a state of his own. Similarly, Ataturk believed that with a healthy dose of European adaptations, the Turk can remove those antiquated traditions that the Turks have acquired in their contact with the Muslim and Arab world and march forward in history to join in the riches and progress of Europe. Indeed, the underlying similarities that these two fascinating political figures share is that they were responding to European racist constructs of the Jew and Turk.

Theodor Herzel: Becoming Occidental While Relocating to the Orient

Zionism as practiced by its best known proponents—who were responding to a European anti-Semitic conception of the Jew as outside of Europe belonging to an Oriental race—was strategically positioned to resolve the outsider status of the Jew, to transform the Jew from an Oriental other to a respectable and civilized inhabitant of "Western civilization." In the case of every Zionist leader, the objective was to search for ways by which the Jew could look and feel European, shed his Oriental skin, and receive an entrance ticket into European civilization. Indeed it was the concept

of the Jew as outsider that the early Zionists aimed to change. The consequences of this cannot be overestimated, for the process of defining themselves out of the Orient and into the Occident had repercussions for the perception not only of European Jews but also of Eastern Jews (Segev 1998; Shohat 1988) and the now very orientalized Arabs (Said, 1992). Zionists thus took it upon themselves to embrace and adopt the Western racist discourse about the "Oriental other" by strategically placing the Jew and his interests as European.

This assimilation can be clearly observed in Zionism's best known personality, Theodor Herzl. Indeed, his life work seems to have been marked by an obsession to resolve the otherness of the Jew, to find a new mode of assimilation that would bring Jews self-respect and honor in the eyes of Gentiles (Kornberg, 1984: 160). The resolution of this Jewish dilemma came to him in the notion of the Jewish state. To remake the Jew on a Gentile model, and finally to solve the "Jewish Question," Herzl proposed the notion of a separate and independent Jewish state. He blamed the fact that Jews had been despised and entangled in a web of Oriental-like characteristics on their statelessness (Herzl, 1988 [1896]). The rejection of Jews by Europe was thus viewed as a natural consequence of the failure of the Jews to develop their own society, to empower themselves through the vehicle of the state. In order to negate this European rejection and to solve this Jewish dilemma, Herzl viewed it as essential to create a state in which Jews could finally pull themselves out of an Oriental-like existence.

For Herzl, the central objective of creating a future state was not only to emancipate the Jews from the grip of the ghetto, pogroms, and other forms of persecution, but also to create and fashion a new Jew on the model of a European. Only then could the Jew be finally recognized as the equal of his European colleagues. After the election of 1895 in Vienna, for instance, Herzl declared: "In the election the majority of non-Jewish citizens—no, all of them—declare that they do not recognize us as Austro-Germans ... All right, we shall move away; but over there, too, we shall only be Austrians" (Herzl cited in Kornberg, 178). This inverted logic made much sense to Herzl, for it captured his desire to be accepted by his beloved Germans. As a contemporary biographer of Herzl explains, "Only by evacuating Europe would Herzl come to be recognized as an Austro-German. Concurrently, only by leaving would Jewish bitterness toward their European homelands dissipate and turn once more into love" (Kornberg, 178). Departing from Europe, therefore, was Herzl's way not of renouncing Europe and claiming his difference from the German and European self, but rather of identifying as a European in order to eliminate once and for all the distinction between Jew and Gentile. Kornberg's remarks on Herzl are telling in this respect: "Even spit and polish 'Aryans' now admired Jews" (p. 179). The new Jewish state, as Herzl envisioned it, would not make a decisive break with Europe. On the contrary, its establishment would bring Jews respect and would initiate a new era of "forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation" between Gentile and Jew.

Herzl clearly indicated that he wanted to transport the very idea of Europe to the Levant, where along with football and cricket, "I shall transport over there genuine Viennese cafes. With these small expedients I ensure the desirable illusion of the old environment."[1] In his *Jewish State* he expands on this point by reassuring his readers that living in an Oriental sector of the world does not mean that "we" have to give up "our" European habits, customs, and comforts:

> Dull brains might ... imagine that this exodus would be from civilized regions into the desert. That is not the case. It will be carried out in the midst of civilization. We shall not revert to a lower stage, we shall rise to a higher one. We shall not dwell in mud huts; we shall build new more beautiful and more modern houses. (Herzl, 1988 [1896]: 82)

A discussion with his German Jewish friend Richard Beer-Hofmann shows how fully he envisioned his new Jewish state to be a European transplant: "We will have a university and an opera [in the Jewish state] and you will attend the opera in your swallow-tailed coat with a white gardenia in your button-hole" (citation in Kornberg, 1993: 179).

Notice the systematic way in which Herzl projects the Jew into the European, civilized, modern construct and always at the expense of the "Oriental" other, a strategy that we see in the very similar case of the Irish immigrants upon entering the U.S. in the nineteenth-century when, as Ignatiev reminds us, they constructed themselves in opposition to the black slaves in an assimilationist project "to enter the white race . . ." (Ignatiev, 1995: 2). Herzl and the movement that has come to be known through his work as Zionism clearly positioned the Jew as a member of the Occident and sharing no qualities with the Oriental and thinking of himself and his interests as European.[2] By fusing the Jew with

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1. Citation from Geoffrey Wheatcroft (1996: 85).
2. This idea comes from David Roediger's excellent work (1991): "White labour does not just receive and resist racist ideas but embraces, adopts and, at times, murderously acts upon those ideas. The problem is not just that the white working class is at critical junctures manipulated into racism, but that it comes to think of itself and its interests as white" (p. 12).

the German/European/Western/civilized amalgam, Zionism established a precedent that would help cement its newly acclaimed Occidental status. In this way, the state of Israel would come to be seen as a floating space in an ocean of barbarism, one that was somehow geographically located in the Orient while remaining in Europe. Although embedded physically in the hard, tough soil of the East, its *Geist* was somehow oblivious of this environment, belonging instead to "Western Civilization." Ben Gurion's statement that "the State of Israel is a part of the Middle East only in geography" recalls the image, described by G.H. Jansen, "of the hydroponically-reared plant, its roots floating in a chemical solution, not embedded in the earth" (G.H. Jansen, 1971: 219).[1] The problem, however, is that Israel is on earth, just not in the Orient according to Zionists like Herzl.

Kemal Ataturk: Islam As An Obstacle to Producing the New Turk

> *"The civilized world is far ahead of us. We have no choice but to catch up ... It is futile to resist the thunderous advance of civilization, for it has no pity on those who are ignorant or rebellious ... Our thinking and mentality will have to become civilized. And we will be proud of this civilization. Take a look at the entire Turkish and Islamic world ... we have to move forward."*—Kemal Ataturk

Turkish nationalists used strategies similar to those of their Zionist counterparts by also choosing the path of pulling away from the "Orient" in their effort to join "Western civilization." Resat Kasaba captures this tendency well: "What the people wore, how they lived, what kind of music they listened to, and even what they ate" (Kasaba, 1997: 25) all formed the basis for a nationalist project to transform the "Oriental" self into a modern, civilized, and "Occidentalized" self. For these Kemalist leaders, "formal elements of change, such as the outward appearance of people, the cleanliness of the streets ... became synonymous with modernization and consumed an inordinate amount of their time and energy" (Kasaba, 1997: 25). As Bryan Turner also observed, "The mimetic quality of Turkish secularization had to be carried out in detail at the personal level, in terms of dress, writing and habit" (Bryan Turner cited in Sayyid, 1997: 68). Kemalists even made a "fuss about introducing ballroom dancing, replacing traditional Turkish music with opera, and so on" (Sayyid, 1997: 68). It is a destructive discourse that compelled Kemalists "to assert their Western identity by denying and repressing the oriental within themselves" (*ibid*: 68).

These Kemalists accepted the colonizer's discourse of European supremacy by identifying modern Western society as the perfect model of progress, and by counterposing themselves, the "other," traditional, underdeveloped, non-modern, and as therefore in need of a modernizing state led by an elite cadre of men. Take for instance the now famous speech Ataturk gave to his new found assembly in the mid 1920s. While giving his six day talk he stopped abruptly in the middle of his presentation, pointed at a man in the crowd, and denounced him in front of all in attendance for the type of dress he was wearing: "He has a fez on his head, and a green turban round the fez, a traditional waistcoat on his back, and on top of it a jacket like mine. I can't see what's below. Now I ask you, would a civilized man wear such peculiar clothes and invite people's laughter?" (Ataturk cited in Mango, 435)

Ataturk, through the ideology of modernization, instituted national changes with the intention of producing the new Turkish and Occidentalized self. What is interesting is that the discourse Ataturk used and adopted as his own was in fact first invented by the colonizer. The colonizer indeed invented the discourse of modernization as a way of asserting his own identity and forging a vision of history that placed Europe at the center of the world. This colonialist discourse made it possible to explain the superior position of the Occident as compared to the remaining mass of humanity, all in the name of rationalizing the rise of the West (Blaut, 1993). Many nationalist/anti-colonialist movements would take this same discourse and use it against their own people (Fanon, 1968: 148-205).

But there is one outstanding difference between the colonized and the colonizer: In the decolonizing world, the post-colonized pursued the colonizer's Orientalist and racist discourse, reinventing his ideology in innovative and destructive ways. He continued using the same binary dichotomies of "developed" and "underdeveloped," "modern" and "primitive." But what the colonized did was to take the colonizer's discourse one step further. He *exaggerated* the colonizer's version of reality by including an additional step in the modern/non-modern dichotomy: *The "Other," the self was not inherently born to remain underdeveloped or primitive.* Rather, with a little help from the new vanguardist state, the primitive, backward self could aspire to become modern by following the criteria established by the West. Success could be his if he followed a step-by-step guide to modernity. Thus what essentially changed hands from the colonizer to the colonized was that the latter believed he could rule and administer "his own people" more efficiently,

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1.Indeed, David Ben Gurion wrote an article for the French paper *Le Monde* in 1958 entitled, "Israel, Etat Occidental."

and could provide a more disciplined regime of governance with the capacity to produce a more productive and civilized nation than what the colonizer had previously offered.

Thus a new, nationalist project emerged in the twentieth century. It no longer required either differentiating the modern from the non-modern only, or simply establishing and celebrating the uniqueness of the Occident. Rather, the nationalist had to do something very different. *He had to become an activist, one who attempted to make the non-modern perform to the capacity achieved by his Western counterpart.* What the nation needed to demonstrate to the European world was that it, too, could be like the West: dynamic, productive, secular, civilized, and rational. This was indeed perceived to be a new era in the life of the nation, an era in which "static" and "unchanging" traditions would finally come to an end. For the colonized, such a project would have seemed ludicrous before the twentieth-century, when the question of remaking "ourselves" in "their" image was subdued by the reality of direct colonialism. The spreading of liberal ideals to include non-Western peoples could only have become a reality with the success of national liberation movements in taking state power.

The role of the developmental state was thus seen as an instrument of change that had the capacity to turn the new nations from passive to active agents of modernity. It was at this time, after World War II, that articles and books with titles like "The Modernization of Man," "The Impulse to Modernization," "The Modernization of Religious Beliefs," *Modernization of the Arab World, Modernizing the Middle East,* and *Becoming More Civilized* began pouring out.[1]

Ataturk was already there years before any of these books hit the bookstores, announcing in a speech in 1925 that what "the country needs was to train waiters to provide table service in a manner suited to civilized people" (Ataturk cited in Mango, 479). To get to that highest stage of modernity, Ataturk spoke out strongly against what he believed to be Islam's sanction against certain forms of artistic and scientific expression that he viewed as essential to his modernization project: "A nation which does not make pictures, a nation which does not make statues, a nation which does not practice science, such a nation, one must admit, has no place on the highroad of civilization" (Ataturk cited in Mango, 371). Decades before Daniel Lerner published *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958), Ataturk preached what would eventually become dogma: To develop and modernize, reforming the state and economy, was not enough; the nation must also transform its interior self by creating new cultural practices that were up to par with the West. His insistence on such cultural reforms was loud and clear: "We will become civilized ... We will march forward." At times he even used metaphors that sounded as if they were pulled, ironically, straight from Quranic texts: "Civilization is a fearful fire which consumes those who ignore it" (Ataturk cited in Mango, 2002: 434). Instead, he proclaims a total transformation is needed for real change:

> In the face of knowledge, science, and of the whole extent of radiant civilization, I cannot accept the presence in Turkey's civilized community of people primitive enough to seek material and spiritual benefits in the guidance of sheikhs. The Turkish republic cannot be a country of sheikhs, dervishes and disciples. The best, the truest order is the order of civilization." (Ataturk cited in Mango, 435)

Ataturk envisioned himself removing those elements that he perceived to be dangerous to the production of a healthy "modern" and "civilized" Turkish nation:

> Alas, the Western lands have become the daysprings of knowledge. Nothing remains of the fame of Rum and Arab, of Egypt. The time is the time of progress, the world is a world of science. Is the survival of societies compatible with ignorance? (Ataturk cited in Kasaba, 26)

Like his colonialist predecessors, Ataturk shared the idea that people of the non-Western world were of a different cultural type than that of the West. But Ataturk passionately believed that *these differences could be overcome*, that the Turkish nation, with the proper mindset of visionary modernizers, could transcend its present condition and be remade in the image of the West. To that end, he would search for those characteristics that are peculiar to modern Western societies and transplant them into Turkey, just as a gardener would select his favorite plants from a neighboring garden and replant them in his own backyard. Only through this radical makeover would Turkey overcome its archaic predicament. Ataturk believed that he could literally pluck those irritating Islamic roots out of the soil of Turkey just as a landscaper plucks weeds out of a well-manicured lawn. "The fez sat on the heads of our nation," he complained, "as

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1. For an example of this trend in thinking, see Leonard W. Doob (1960), *Becoming More Civilized: A Psychological Exploration,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

an emblem of ignorance, negligence, and fanaticism and hatred of progress and civilization" (Ataturk cited in Kasaba, 25). It too, along with many other Islamic and Oriental characteristics, must be removed from the new Turkey forever, for it is only by this route that "our thinking and our mentality will ... become civilized" (cited in Kasaba, 27).

III. ORIENTALIZING THE SELF

"What a shame! Those Muslims, who emulate the orientalists, pass on as the high brow intellectuals and masters of Islamic thought, while at the same time they are produced according to the models provided by Zionists and crudsaders." —Sayyid Qutb

The West as Diseased: The Qur'an as the Measure of Progress

If Zionists and Kemalists preferred to remove the Orient in constructing an Occidentalized national identity, Islamists aggressively moved in the very opposite direction, removing the Occident in constructing an Orientalized identity. In this section we will explore the biography of one of the most significant Islamist intellectuals, the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906—1966), to see how this change took root. Born in the rural town of Musha in 1906 in the Asyut Province some two hundred miles south of Cairo (John Calvert and William Shepard 2004: xiv), Qutb would witness firsthand "the failures of both Egyptian liberal and socialist regimes—in later years from behind the bars of Nasser's prisons" (Roxanne Euben 1989: 56) where he would be executed in Cairo in 1966 on the accusation that he plotted to assassinate the Egyptian President, Gamal 'abd al-Nasser, in 1964. In these seven decades of his life, he was transformed from a fairly secular and successful literary figure to a radical Islamists. It is largely his later career that we are interested in here, for it is his writings of 1949 and after that he would be most known for. His intellectual influence on the Islamist movement, as Samir Amin noted, remains unparalleled: "The recordings of Ayatollah Khomeini, the long educational talks that the Arab television stations, from Morocco to the Gulf, offer their viewers, the religious education propagated by the militants, the endless range of books and pamphlets shelved in the bookshops under the Islamiyat label, have added nothing to the master's thinking." (Samir Amin, 1990: 177).

As we will discover, Sayyid Qutb viewed Kemalism, Zionism, and Arab nationalism with much disdain, all of which represented to him a very serious and dangerous assault on the Muslim world.[1] Indeed, he labels them all as in a state of *jahiliyya*, a Quranic term used to describe pre-Islamic pagan societies in "the age of ignorance." For Qutb, as is the case for Islamists generally, Kemalism, Zionism, and Arab nationalism, far from representing human progress, have lowered 'mankind' to a beast-like existence. Instead of Islam being the obstacle to progress, he turns the Kemalist and Arab Nationalist logic on its head by arguing the contrary:

From the point of view of 'human' progress, [*jahili*] societies are not civilized but are backward ... Only Islamic values and morals, and Islamic teachings and safeguards, are worthy of mankind. These provide a permanent and true measure of human progress. Islam is the real civilization and Islamic society a truly civilized community. (Qutb 1990: 84)

The *Jahili* regimes of the Kemalist and Nasserite variety "have dissociated themselves completely from the religion of God." They have rejected Him "totally, and they do not refer, in matters of their legislation, economy, socialization, ethics, and mores, to the book of God" (Qutb cited in Abu-Rabi 1996: 214).

While Kemalists and Arab nationalists rationalized Westernization as an important step in the direction of modernizing the nation, Sayyid Qutb provided a different reading of such discourses. As Abu-Rabi paraphrases Sayyid Qutb's understanding of modernizing discourses, "the white man exploits us to the fullest, and any mention of modernization by the colonizer and his numerous 'intellectual slaves' is a travesty of justice" (Abu-Rabi 1996: 134). Far from moving humanity forward, such projects have brought us to the brink of disaster:

Mankind today is on the brink of a precipice, not because of the danger of complete annihilation which is

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1.Abu Rabi argues that for Sayyid Qutb, "the complete secularization and Westernization of Turkey at the hand of Ataturk is just the beginning of the battle to attack Islamic symbols all over the Muslim world" (Abu-Rabi 1996: 143).

hanging over its head—this being just a symptom and not the real disease—but because humanity is devoid of those vital values for its healthy development and real progress. (Qutb, 1990: 5)

The only system that can possibly create meaningful progress is the *din* of Islam, for "Islam is the only system that possesses these values and this way of life" (Qutb 1990: 6).

He is especially repulsed by elites who purport to represent the Muslim world and talk of "reforming" Islam to meet the requirements of the modern world:

We find some people who, when talking about Islam, present it to the people as if it were a culprit in need of defense against its accusers. Among their defenses, one goes like this: "It is said that modern systems have done such and such, while Islam did not do anything comparable. But listen! It did all this some fourteen hundred years before modern civilizations!" Woe to those who resort to such a defense! Shame on them! Indeed, Islam does not take its justifications from the *jahili* system and its evil derivatives. And these "civilizations," which have dazzled many and have broken their spirits, are nothing but a *jahili* system at heart, and this system is erroneous, hollow, and worthless in comparison with Islam. (Qutb 1990: 117-118)

Indeed, the call for a return to a rightly guided Islamic way of life offers 'mankind' a superior life than that offered by Arab nationalists and Kemalists. For Islam

has come to change *jahiliyyah*, not to continue it, to elevate mankind from its depravity, and not to bless its manifestations masked under the euphemism of "civilization" ... We reject all [*jahili* systems], as indeed they are retrogressive and in opposition to the direction toward which Islam is leading. (Qutb 1990: 118)

To borrow and emulate such Western—*jahili*—models "without thought or assessment," Qutb continues, is understood by animals like "monkeys who emulate everything they see" (Qutb cited in Haddad, 1983: 71-2).

The historical remnants of Western colonialism and Western penetration, for Qutb, have outlived direct colonialism in so far that "the West still maintains collaborationist agencies in the colonies in Asia and Africa, and has created new conditions in the so-called independent states in order to replace Islam with secular creeds and doctrines which negate the Unseen on the basis of its scientificity." The postcolonial regimes found throughout the Muslim world have joined hands with the West in developing a "morality so that [postcolonial society] becomes like that of animals" (Qutb cited in Abu-Rabi 1996: 206).

We can already see major differences here between Sayyid Qutb and modernizers like that of Kemal Ataturk. This becomes especially clear when we look at how these two different projects measured and evaluated "progressive change." As we discussed earlier with Kemal Ataturk, the standard was clearly the West with the Qur'an and Islam viewed as an obstacle to be overcome in the development of "civilization." Indeed, when the issue of Islam and the Qur'an were discussed at all, they were evaluated critically in light of "modern times." In other words, Kemalists and Arab nationalists applied their construct of the West to evaluate critically the Qur'an, with the latter usually viewed as best left to the private arena. This was especially the case for modernizers like Sayyid Jamal al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, who used the West as a measuring rod to evaluate the Qur'an, searching the Holy Book to look for anything in it that they can demonstrate that "we Arabs and Muslims have traditions and a past civilization that can be useful (admittedly with some slight revisions to our culture and religion) in our efforts to modernize like you—the modern West."

Sayyid Qutb and other Islamists, on the other hand, applied the Qur'an *to deconstruct the West*. Here, the measurement of progress is not based on a standard produced by the West, but one which is judged by the Qur'an itself. The major question for Islamists is: "Have these Arab, Turkish, Iranian and, for that matter, the imperialist states of the Western world lived up to the standards provided by Allah?" This is a fundamentally different question than that asked by the Occidentalizing and Modernizing elites. For while the latter leaves the West as the standard for measuring progress, Sayyid Qutb transforms the debate in such a manner that the Qur'an becomes the judge of all things good and just. Thus while Islamic liberals and Kemalists ask "Can the Qur'an meet the challenge of the *West*?" Sayyid Qutb and other Islamists prefer to ask whether or not the West and their Muslim collaborators can meet the challenge of the *Qur'an*. Thus for Qutb the standard of progress was the Qur'an with the West viewed as an obstacle to be overcome in the development of 'mankind.' As Ali Mirsepassi has argued in his *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization* (2000: 94), "The most striking factor behind the rise and popularity of Islamic politics was that it articulated

an alternative discourse to overcome Western-centric projects of modernization." It is the Qur'an instead of "Western sources of knowledge [that] becomes the criterion" (Abu-Rabi 1996: 167).

Challenging Western-centric assumptions can be viewed as a strategic move by Qutb to dismantle the logic in what he believed to be remnants of the colonial era, what he identifies as cultural colonialism. According to him, the colonization of the mind is much more dangerous than economic and political colonialism. The latter can be easily removed by force. It is the colonization of the soul, mind, and body that poses the most serious threat to the existence of the Muslim world—indeed, humanity as a whole. Colonialism, even after its withdrawal from Muslim lands, has penetrated into the very heart and fabric of postcolonial Muslim societies. Nowhere is this more apparent for Qutb than the defeatist mentality he finds in Muslim intellectuals in charge of "reforming" the educational system:

> In our schools and colleges, we study, in a specific manner, distorted Islamic history and blown-up European history. This error is not unintentional; it is rather a reflection of a hidden desire on the side of imperialism that does not want us to be proud of our history. Instead, it wants us to consider Europe as the only prime mover of human history. Once we have given up on our past showing appreciation of the European role in history and giving allegiance to the White Man, our control by imperialism would be made easy. (Qutb cited in Abu-Rabi 1996: 206)

But this questioning of Eurocentrism came late in Sayyid Qutb's life. As Ibrahim Abu-Rabi has argued, in the early phase of his work Sayyid Qutb "considered Islam and the Arabic language as foreign to the Egyptian mentality" (1996: 93). Indeed, in his earlier writings Qutb shared some of these Eurocentric ideas. According to Abu-Rabi, Qutb early in his career as a literary critic goes so far as to argue "that the state should control and direct the religious education of the Azhar for the achievement of national goals, and that the Azhar should be barred from proliferating the types of ideas that are incompatible with the demands of the modern age" (1996: 103). He even critically comments on the practitioners of folk religion, ridiculing the practices of a shaikh he knew in his childhood village who "rarely takes a shower" (Abu-Rabi 1996: 99). In his last publication, *Milestones*, he reflected critically on his earlier assumptions:

> Until then, I had not rid myself completely of the cultural influences that had affected my thinking in spite of my Islamic attitude and inclination. The sources of these influences were foreign—alien to my Islamic consciousness—yet these influences had clouded my intuition and concepts. The Western concept of civilization was my criterion, and it prevented me from seeing clearly. (Qutb 1990: 80)

This shortly would all change with his life-changing trip to the United States. If there is one life-altering event in his life that we could point to as Qutb's moment of "conversion" to an Islamist vision, it would have to be his trip to the United States in the early 1950s, where he stayed at a college in Denver, Colorado. During his time there he was surprised at the number of churches (Malice Ruthven 2002: 79) and how often Americans attended them: "Nobody goes to churches as often as Americans do." But he was disappointed to learn that Church attendance did not necessarily signal piety, for "no one is as distant as they are from the spiritual aspects of religion." The example he provides is a posting of a church event he found in a college dormitory, advertising an *entertainment* function: "Sunday October I, 6:00 PM Light Dinner; Magic Show; Puzzles; Contests; Entertainment." Even more shocking to Qutb is what he observed after deciding to attend the event: "The dancing intensified ... The hall swarmed with legs ... Arms circled arms, lips met lips, chests met chests, and the atmosphere was full of love." The most disturbing moment for Qutb was when he witnessed the pastor dim the lights to create a "romantic dreamy effect" with music in the background playing the famous song "Baby, Its Cold Outside" (Qutb cited in Malice Ruthven 2002: 79-80). After this visit to the United States and upon his return to Egypt, Qutb later said "I was born in 1951" (cited in Euben 1999: 58).

It was after this experience in the heart of the Occident that Qutb saw clearly, in his mind, the magnitude of the tragedy the "West" had brought to the world. From there it was a short exercise to conclude, as he did, that the West had no basis for judging Islam. In so far that the West persistently points to Islam as the cause for the lack of economic, scientific, and technological development of much of the Muslim world Qutb, shortly after his experience in the U.S., now feels moved more than at any time in his life to forcefully respond to this unjustified accusation. Instead of accepting the West as victorious over the Muslim world, as do the Kemalists and many Arab modernizers and reformers, he goes on the offensive and aggressively launches an attack on this Eurocentric way of thinking:

> Look at this capitalism with its monopolies. Its usury, and so many other injustices in it. Behold this individual

freedom, devoid of human sympathy and responsibility for relatives except under the force of law; this materialistic attitude which deadens the spirit; this behavior, like animals, which you call 'free mixing of the sexes'; this vulgarity which you call 'emancipation of women'; these unfair and cumbersome laws of marriage and divorce, which are contrary to the demands of practical life; and this evil and fanatic racial discrimination. (Qutb 1990: 120)

He is ridiculing those Muslims he accuses of being struck by *Westitis*, and wants to invite them to see that if they looked at Islam objectively, removed their colonized stained lenses, what they would find in Islam is a *din* "with its logic, beauty, humanity, and happiness, which reaches the horizons to which man strives but does not attain." Unlike what you find in Occidentalized ways of living, Islam provides "a practical way of life and its solutions are based on the foundation of the wholesome nature of man." But unfortunately cultural colonialism has seeped so far into the conscience of many Muslim elites that they are beyond his reach. Indeed, these Occidentalized elites "are defeated before this filth in which *jahiliyyah* is steeped, even to the extent that they search for resemblances to Islam among this rubbish heap of the West" (Qutb 1990: 120).

It is at this point in his life that he begins to use the language of disease that becomes a staple of Islamist discourse in the 1970s and after.[1] He claims "It is essential for mankind to have new leadership!" for the West is now on the decline "not because Western culture has become poor materially or because its economic and military power has become weak," but rather because "it has lost those life-giving values that enabled it to be the leader of mankind" (Qutb 1990: 5-6).

The Removal of the Occident and the Islamization of the Self

So what needs to be done to change this sad state of affairs? The confidence and exuberance to which Qutb addresses this question is at this point in his life as solid as it could possibly become. He argues, in a discursively compelling way, that "we need not rationalize Islam to [those infected by Westitis], nor appease their desires and distorted concepts." Instead, Muslims need to put behind them defeatist mentalities of this sort and respond to the West and Westernizing Muslim elites by confidently informing them that "the ignorance in which you are living makes you impure, and Allah wants to purify you; the life you are living makes you impure, and Allah wants to cleanse you; the life you are living is low, and Allah wants to uplift you; and the condition you are in, is troublesome, depressing, and base, and Allah wants to give you ease, mercy, and goodness." Remove this disease from your midst and allow Islam to enter your life and "change your concepts, your modes of living, and your values," and understand that it is Islam that "will raise you to another life so that you will look upon the life you are now living with disgust [and allow Islam to] introduce you to values so sublime that you will look upon all other values in the world with disdain."

It is the insertion of this colonial mentality into the Muslim World and its eradication that the Islamist movement must address, for "Holy war against colonialism today necessitates the emancipation of the conscience of nations from spiritual and intellectual colonialism, and the destruction of those systems that drug out the senses." The Islamist movement must be "cautious of any tongue, pen, society, and group that conclude a truce with those colonialist camps which are bound by common interests and principles." (Qutb cited in Abu-Rabi 1990: 133).

His usage of the term *jahili* is used to illustrate how far these Westernizing regimes of the Muslim world have strayed from the Islamic path. Indeed, he seems to indicate that the contemporary situation of Muslims is of even graver circumstances than the original *jahili* society of the seventh century:

We are today immersed in *Jahiliyya* like that of early Islam, but perhaps deeper, darker. Everything around us expresses *jahiliyya*: people's ideas, their beliefs, habits, traditions, culture, art, literature, rules and laws. Even all that we have come to consider Islamic culture, Islamic sources, philosophy and thought are *jahili* constructs. This is why Islamic values have not taken root in our souls, why the Islamic worldview remains obscured in our minds. Why no generation has arisen among us equal to the caliber of the first Islamic generation. (Sayyid Qutb cited in Euben, 1999: 57)

1.Ayatollah Khomeini, for instance, as did Ali Shariati and Al-e Ahmed before him, used the concept of "Westitis" to describe this process: *"We have located the site of 'social sickness' on the bodies of our women, and our only solution is the eradication of 'Westitis' and the implementation of a 'code of modesty.' Proper veiling is a kind of social vaccination, vaccination of the Muslim man and woman, vaccination of our pure and virtuous sisters. One cannot say that there should be no microbes in the world, that there should be no diseases ... What shall we do against diseases? We must preserve ourselves. We must quarantine ourselves."*

This *jahili* contamination includes "philosophy, history, psychology (except the experimental branch), ethics, comparative religion, sociology (except statistics)," in so far that they all contain within them an "implicit or explicit enmity to the general religious understanding of life and in a specific way to the Islamic worldview" (Qutb cited in Yvonne Haddad, 1983: 85).

Qutb wants to be clear that there is no such thing as "an adaptation of Islam to modern social needs of life." This accommodationist position infuriated him terribly because it reduced Islam to the margins of modern life, allowing *jahili* ideologies to dress themselves in Islamic attire while in fact destroying the foundations of a just religion. "Islam never said to people that it would not touch their modes of living, their concepts, and their values except perhaps slightly." Nor did it "propose similarities with their system or manners to humor them, as some do today when they present Islam to the people under the names of 'Islamic Democracy' or 'Islamic Socialism.'" And it surely is unacceptable to claim that "current economic or political or legal systems in the world need not be changed except a little to be acceptable Islamically" (Qutb 1990: 116).

Notice here that Qutb is asking for a complete eradication of "foreign" influences and the re-implementation of the Islamic order. The need to remove the disease of the Occident with a healthy dose of Islam, however, does not come easy. For Qutb, "we, who are the callers to Islam" need to first "provide a certain style of thinking or paradigm of thought, purified from all the *jahili* styles and ways of thinking that are current in the world and have poisoned our culture by depriving us of our own mind." In this effort to reintroduce the righteous and just *din,* those who are called to Islam must be cautious not to allow their enemies, or themselves for that matter, to "try to change this *din* in a way alien to its nature and borrowed from the ways of the predominant *jahiliyyah.*" If the latter occurs "we will deprive [our *din*] of its ordained function for humanity, and we will deprive ourselves of the opportunity to remove the yoke of the popular *jahili* ways that dominate our minds" (Qutb 1990: 34). Islam is a self-sufficient system that needs to emulate no other model. It "is intended to penetrate into the veins and arteries of a society and to form a concrete organized movement designed to transform it into a vibrant dynamic community" (Sayyid Qutb, 1990: 32).

Like many Islamists that will come after him, Sayyid Qutb vehemently opposes the idea of removing Islam from the public arena. For him, to allow it to dwell only in the private sphere is a sure way to assure the success of the enemies of Islam, creating the framework for the complete negation of God's sovereignty and the enslavement of men to other men. "Islam is a unity that is indivisible," he proclaims, and "any one who divides it into two sections is outside this unity, in other words, he is outside this religion" (Qutb cited in Haddad, 1983: 76):

> There is no ruler save God, no legislator, no organizer of human life and of human relationships to the world, to living things or human beings save God. From him alone is received all guidance and legislation, all systems of life, norms governing relationships and the measure of values." (Qutb cited in Haddad, 1983: 77)

The so-called Modernizers, with their well-intentioned "reforms," who strenuously exert themselves "to confine Islam to the emotional and ritual circles, and to bar it from participating in the activity of life," are working against Islam's "complete predominance over every human secular activity, a pre-eminence it earns by the virtue of its nature and function" (Qutb cited in Abu-Rabi 1996: 143). Islam was introduced to the world "in order to change the reality of humanity as a whole." The idea that it should be hidden-away in some dark corner and removed from the public square is a sure way to turn this *din* from an active agent of 'mankind' to one that belongs to theory only, to ornamentalize it as though it is just another display in some sophisticated museum. These self-proclaimed Modernizers of the religion "who attempt to alter this vision either under the name of renewal, reform or progress, or under the guise of eradicating the remnants of the Medieval age or under any other slogan are our real enemies. They are the enemies of humankind" (Qutb cited in Haddad, 1983: 75).

For Qutb it is essential that sovereignty is returned to its rightful owner. The total Islamization of society, where Islam is free to roam the streets, the schools, the courts, indeed every place at all times, is the goal of the Islamic movement. As he stated so clearly, "To declare God's sovereignty means: the comprehensive revolution against human governance in all its perceptions, forms, systems and conditions and the total defiance against every condition on earth in which humans are sovereign." All systems ruled by human-made institutions, "in which the source of power is human ... making some the masters of others with disregard to God," are all *jahili* systems. All of this is the unjust "extraction of God's usurped sovereignty and its restoration to Him" (Qutb cited in Haddad, 1983: 81).

Sayyid Qutb here is speaking directly to Kemalists and Arab Modernizers. "All of these nationalistic and chauvinistic ideologies that have appeared in modern times," he argues, "have also lost their vitality" for they are "all man-made theories" and have now "proved to be failures" (Qutb 1990: 6). As usual, his message is clear and crisp: "In the

world there is only one party of Allah; all others are parties of Satan and rebellion ... For human life, there is only one true system, and that is Islam. All other systems are *jahiliyyah*" (Qutb 1990: 101-2).

IV. CONCLUSION

"I have begun with the assumption that the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, *just as the Occident itself is not just* there *either ... such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made."*—Edward Said

After completing our analysis of Theodor Herzl, Kemal Ataturk, and Sayyid Qutb, it is apparent that while Herzl's and Ataturk's strategy of "modernizing" their subjects is in stark contrast to Sayyid Qutb's, one characteristic they all share in common is their obsession with the Occident/Orient divide. The biographies of all three figures attest to the power and success of Orientalism, where with just a quick glimpse of their works it becomes apparent that the binaries Orientalism created between "the West" and "the East" have been the accepted, even naturalized, way of talking about civilizations, nations, cultures, and religions. Where they differ is what they want their respective movement to do about their location in the "Orient." As we discussed, Ataturk, Herzl, and Qutb all agreed that the Turk, the Jew and the Muslim were of the "Orient." But whereas Qutb was determined to purify the Muslim world from the toxins of the West (to maintain the purity of the Orient), Herzl and Ataturk did everything possible to remove the toxins of the East (to let go of their "Orientalness" and recreate themselves as Occidental).

Notice that in either case both worked within the given constraints provided to them by the system of Orientalism. Indeed, the method they used to assert their own identity had already been narrated long before their appearance on the scene in the twentieth-century. What Herzl, Ataturk, and Qutb did was simply to take the constructions provided by the Orientalist system and tugged on one or the other side, recreating the images of what they now understood as their authentic self. The only difference is which side you tugged on. For Herzl and Ataturk you used every muscle in your body to tug your "nation" *out of the Orient* while for Qutb, with the help of the Almighty, everything possible was done to *pull the Umma back towards Medina and Mecca*. One side desiring to remove the Orient while the other forcibly and violently cleansing Islam from the toxins of the Occident. Yet, in some mysterious way "the West" remained solidly in place in all cases.

Furthermore, all of these projects in the end require a disciplinary and repressive apparatus, which only the modern world can manufacture. Neither the Ottomans, the Qajars, the Mamlukes, nor any other premodern entity, had a political or ideological apparatus strong enough to nationalize the "minds" of the populace. Their tributary systems simply did not have the capacity to penetrate the living rooms, the bedrooms, and the kitchens of their subjects. That form of "discursive power" would have to wait until the flowering of modernity, with its tentacles (print media, television, corporate advertising) reaching every nook and cranny of society. In all three cases, if permitted to hold state power, humanity, far from being liberated, will, we can be assured, have yet another disciplinary regime to deal with.

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