# HUMAN ARCHITECTURE Insured after localings of Roll

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## Go West Young Turk: Personal Encounters with Kemalism<sup>1</sup>

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"My patient is suffering from an inferiority complex. His psychic structure is in danger of disintegration. What has to be done is to save him from this and, little by little, to rid him of this unconscious desire."—Frantz Fanon

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

"He always has his eyes on Europe, and always dreams of escaping there ... We are like strangers to ourselves." — Ale Ahmad

## I. PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

As I write these words upon my return from a visit to Istanbul, I remember so clearly, at the age of seven, my father informing my family and me of the news that

1.I'd like to thank John Till, Hilary Jones, Liza Burr, Adrienne Christiansen, and Kara Witt for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

we would be leaving Jordan to live in the United States. Immediately I started to envision my future life. I imagined myself dressed in white sneakers and white socks, white shorts, and a white shirt. I imagined a sparkling new bicycle, and my family and I living in a big house with a green yard and lots of trees. I remind you that I was seven years old, but I understood, although unaware of the origins of this dream, that I was about to be transformed-color, accent, and all—into the image that I had just begun to see on my next-door neighbor's television set. Excited by the news, all I knew was that I, along with my family, was moving West.

Indeed, I had already begun practicing my new self before I even landed in New Jersey, frantically trying to learn my first English words and putting on clothes that I believed would best fit my new-found identity. Dressed in this new clothing, and with the few English words I had learned, I looked into a mirror and tried to act "like an American." In New Jersey I continued down this path in full force, trying to remove my "Arabness" in every conceivable way, even at the expense of keeping my family distant from my friends. When the phone rang when I was suspecting a call, for instance, I would run in a frantic effort to get to the phone before my father or mother, because I feared that they would pick it up first and, with their "thick Arab accents," demonstrate to my friends and others how Arab we really were. I would plead with each of my parents to speak more like an "American.'

Even my school lunch bag was a point of contention between my mother and me, because I would request that she leave out any food looking Middle Eastern. I found creative ways to make myself feel and look white-American, especially through music and partying. Loading my car with the best hi-fi stereo equipment available, courtesy of *Samman's Electronics*, I would pack my car with friends and jam down the streets of

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Jersey to the powerful rhythms of great rock and roll bands like Led Zeppelin, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Pink Floyd. The music I heard in my home, like Umm Kulthum and Farid al-Atrash, never made it into my car. Of that I made sure.

It was not until I entered college that I began rethinking this warped "assimilation" route, my research becoming the vehicle through which I would make sense of it all. At first my search was unsystematic and confusing. I did not yet have the right questions or tools to penetrate this unconscious desire to repress my Arabness. At times, I turned to a crude form of multicultural identity politics. But that felt awkward and unreal, like a museum representation of natives dressed in colorful clothing chanting to tunes that seemed distant and unreal to my life—in many ways replicating the Orientalist representations that made me want to shed my "Arabness" in the first place.

Thankfully that project quickly faded away, and in its place I began pursuing more serious intellectual pursuits. I began reading people like Immanuel Wallerstein and Edward Said, who were arguing that the *world* is in fact politically, economically, and culturally stratified, with race constituting the very epicenter of the stratification. Racism and underdevelopment, Orientalism and its residual "Other," the "West" and the "rest," the rise of Europe and the decline of southern civilizations were, I was beginning to learn, all a product of modernity, of a "specific manifestation of a basic process by which our historical system has been organized: a process of keeping people out while keeping people in" (Wallerstein, 1991: 83). According to Said, this is a system held together by power. The lens through which we have access to it is racially tainted, leading to an interpretation of a world where the "West" possesses some unique trait that legitimates its rise above the "rest," rendering the Arab, the Turk, and the Muslim racially or culturally inferior, unable to match those refined qualities that are believed to be the sole patrimony of the West.

Through these penetrating analyses, I began to link my desire to assimilate into America along with the highly stratified global system that it constructs, in which some sectors of the world population are seen as superior while others are deemed inferior, with the whole organized around an axial division of labor that inserts people into a complex set of unequal relations. This construct forms the foundation. I believe, of a world-system that shapes, forms, and destroys our very identities. It unfortunately has dire psychological consequences for a majority of this world's population, engendering in many of them an inferiority complex similar to the one I experienced as a young child.

Now, at the age of forty, standing in Istanbul, it seemed that the dreams of my early years were returning in full force, a déjà vu of a sort, but this time it was not me at the center of this dream moving West but a nation and its elites, symbolized by Kemal Ataturk in his tuxedo, gazing out over Istanbul and pounding his nationalist message into the minds of the populace and announcing to the Turks: you must transform yourself into the image of the West, for it is a fact that "uncivilized people are doomed to be trodden under the feet of civilized people" (Ataturk cited in Mango, 2002: 438). In the same way that I quickly appropriated a strategy of removing my imagined Arabness in order to travel West, we now see Turkish elites, including many of Turkey's brightest intellectuals, struggling with all their might to pull on the rope that hangs between an imagined East and West, using every muscle and bone in their bodies to pull in the "Occident"—with the belief that by doing so they can finally "develop," modernize Turkey, and join the "civilized" West.

The *déjà vu* that I experienced on this trip was deep, and the parallels between

my own biography and the psyche of the Turkish nation were stunning. As was the case with me, "what the people wore, how they lived, what kind of music they listened to, and even what they ate" (Kasaba, 1997: 25) sounded like pages taken straight from my own diary, all in the effort 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).

Modernizing the nation's cuisine, moreover, fit into this schema as well. In the same way that I was determined to rid my lunch bag of all its Middle Eastern contents, one of Turkey's earliest cookbooks, from the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, declared that "because of the changes in lifestyles, the old dishes were no longer satisfactory, and that the '[Turks] need to adopt a new cuisine from the West that goes better with our new conditions'" (cited in Kasaba, 1997: 25). Even the music, similar to my purging Arabic tunes from my hi-tech car audio in favor of Western sounds, had to be "updated," as this remark by Meral Ozbek makes clear:

Any Turkish music that did not fit into the officially sanctioned categories of Turkish art music, Turkish folk music, Turkish light (pop) music, or polyphonic (Western) music was assumed to be Arabesk music and therefore subject to censorship

... Turkish classical and folk musicians condemned Arabesk for polluting the 'pure' traditions with Arab influences. (Ozbeck, 1997: 225)

The identity crisis of this nation was a personal reminder for me of the devastating effects this racialized discourse inflicts on individual minds. Experiencing it first-hand in Turkey reminded me of my own family photo album, with the eyes of siblings besieged by an inferiority complex so deep that you can see it, if you look carefully enough, in their faces. It is a destructive discourse that compelled my beloved family, and Kemalists alike, "to assert their Western identity by denying and repressing the oriental within themselves" (Sayyid, 1997: 68).

But fortunately with the maturing of the nation (as with my own realization upon entering college), these representations have never gone completely uncontested. State-driven modernization has proved to be an ambiguous enterprise against which popular protests are continually emerging. So we should be cautious to also see how Kemalist discourses are ambiguously digested by the larger forces of society, in the marketplace, mosques, universities, villages, the streets, and on the body. This is another face of modernity: that even in a world where "all that is solid melts into air," modernity is never a uniform, singular experience (Bozdogan et al., 1997). Rather, it is always in a moment of crisis and contradiction, offering spaces of resistance and harnessing the creative impulses of a population under great stress. In other words, while it may have worked for an elite sector of Turkish society, the Kemalist project has otherwise been unsuccessful. As I walked the streets of Istanbul, it was appar-

<sup>1.</sup>On Islam and popular culture in Turkey, see the fine selection of essays in Kandiyoti and Saktanber (2002).

ent to me that the "Middle East" is alive and well°there in the bazaars, in the restaurants, in people's homes, in the musical sounds, in the architecture ... despite all efforts to erase it.

Since I am most concerned with the nationalist elites, however, my analysis will be focused largely on the destructive side of modernity, where all that is solid does in fact melt into air, leaving people, as described beautifully by Ale Ahmad, in a state of *Westoxification*:

I speak of "Occidentosis" [Gharbzadegi] as of tuberculosis. But perhaps it more closely resembles an infestation of weevils. Have you seen how they attack wheat? From inside. The bran remains intact, but it is just a shell, like a cocoon left behind on a tree. At any rate, I am speaking of a disease: an accident from without, spreading in an environment rendered susceptible to it. (Ale Ahmad quoted in Ali Mirsepassi, 2000: 105)

Admittedly this is not the first time I have seen or experienced a nation constantly constructing itself in the image of the West. The few times that I've visited Israel have shown to me, all too clearly, a people murderously imagining themselves as European, part of Western civilization, and on the move to remove all that is eastern, Oriental. Arab. Palestinian, and Sephardic from the state of the "new Jew"—and, as in the Turkish case, always at the expense of the "Other." I have even seen this in my "home" country of Jordan, where King Hussein continually commissioned architects and urban planners to produce an Amman that looks and feels like Washington, D.C. But unlike the Turkish and Israeli

My research can be described as a comparative-historical analysis of what I define as three modes of identities found in the Middle East: Occidentalizing, Modernizing, and *Orientalizing* nationalist identities. My main concern is this overlapping question: How did Palestinians and Arabs come to be seen as distinct from the Jews, Greeks, and Turks of this once symbiotic civilization, all presumed to be in need of separate national "homes" (i.e., the containers called nationstates)? Here I focus on the impacts that modernity has had on the identities of this world. For in the process of becoming separate peoples, Arabs, Jews, Turks, and Greeks are being pulled and tugged away from one another by powerful cultural and political forces in Europe and elsewhere (Keyder 1987; Fatma Gocek 2002).

cases, Jordanian nationalists have a more schizophrenic personality, sometimes placing the king on a camel and dressing him in "traditional" Bedouin clothing—at times he is eating a "traditional Jordanian meal" (mansef) with his hands while simultaneously undermining and destroying Bedouin communities!<sup>2</sup> All this, I have to add, even as the Jordanian elites are dressing themselves "up" to look more European than James Bond. Representations of a major political figure participating in "old world" traditions would be, to say the least, hard to find in Turkey, with the possible exception of a few marginal images that the new government has been permitting in the past few years. Here, as in the Israeli case, anything that is suggestive of the Orient is something to be removed—skin, bones, and all—unless, of course, it advances the tourist industry in which the "primitive" Arab is given a license to entertain "modern" Turks and Western guests for a night of tea and belly dancing, with a camel at times included in the package.

<sup>1.</sup>On Zionism's effort to purify the "new Jew" from any "Oriental" affiliations, see Segev (1998: 155-194), Shohat (1988), and Said (1992).

<sup>2.</sup> For a similar analysis of Jordanian nationalism, see the excellent book of Joseph Massad (2001).

The case of Palestine/Israel today is an area that I have been extensively researching. My visit to Istanbul in the summer of 2004 provided me with the means to extend this research with a comparative analysis of Turkish nationalism. 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." Such a trip also allowed me to meditate a little about my life as an Arab-American, linking my own biography with that of Kemal Ataturk, in the effort to explore a process that I call Occidentalizing identities.

## II. TURKEY'S RADICAL MAKEOVER: MODERNIZATION DISCOURSE AND THE RACIALIZATION OF THE SELF

"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." —Ataturk

"The national bourgeoisie ... has totally assimilated colonialist thought in its most corrupt form [and] takes over from the Europeans and establishes in the continent a racial philosophy which is extremely harmful ... By its laziness and will to imitation, it promotes the ingrafting and stiffening of racism which was characteristic of the colonial era."—Fanon

As a child, I remember a teacher of mine informing me quite candidly that "we here in America bathe every day." Rather than being insulted by such a remark, I took it as sincere advice that I needed to wash myself everyday and be "clean" like my American classmates. Likewise Kemal Ataturk, upon hearing Europeans ridicule Turkey as a backward "Oriental despotic regime," went on a shopping spree and bought himself a completely new wardrobe. In this section, I would like to provide an analysis of how such an inferiority complex consolidated itself in the mind of Kemal Ataturk, a leading figure in Turkish nationalism.

The most ironic legacy for many liberation movements of the twentieth century was that the colonized, although by no means all of them, accepted the colonizer's discourse of European supremacy by identifying modern Western society as the permodel of progress, and counterposing themselves, the "other," as primitive, traditional, underdeveloped, non-European, non-modern, and as therefore in need of a modernizing state led by an elite cadre of men. This has been, indeed, a fundamental element of what would become known as the modernization project.

In the process of constructing the self as "other," many of us who were infected by this inferiority complex created for ourselves the task of remaking ourselves in the image of those more powerful. We sketched a detailed account of what we imagined to be "the West" and adopted it as our own "culture." In the same way as I collected an array of habits that I believed represented

<sup>1.</sup> This is intended as a metaphor and not a statement of an actual occurrence. The thought came to me when I was reading about an incident that had occurred while Ataturk was delivering a speech. He stopped abruptly in the middle of his talk, pointed at a man in the crowd, and denounced him in front of all 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)

America through clothing and cuisine, 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. It was as if the nationalist saw eye to eye with the colonizer and then some. The colonized felt outsmarted and defeated by the victors of the modern world, and believed that his own nation was primitive, backward, and underdeveloped. 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 stepby-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, 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.

In the same way, I attempted to trade in my Arabness for what I was made to believe was a superior being, the Westerner. Writ large, the nationalist elites demanded a change in the character of the nation so that it could be recreated to fit the paradigmatic figure of the modern, superior West. By carefully overhauling the nation's history, tradition, and culture, and by making the nation less "primitive" and more "modern" (Said, 1978), these nationalist elites believed they were en route to creating their own modern civilization in the image of the West. It was an idea that promised to make "underdeveloped, primitive, and traditional" societies into ones which resembled the "progressive" civilization of the West.

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. He had to become Khaldoun the child, looking into the mirror and transforming himself into a new self, undressing the inferior other self and replacing it with something that felt more white and Western/ American. 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.<sup>1</sup>

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).

It was to this discourse that Kemal Ataturk responded favorably. By claiming the "modern" as his own preferred subject matter, Ataturk sought to remove from the nation's body all those behaviors, cultural traits, and systems of thought that he perceived as forming the stumbling block to producing a new Turkey. Just as I felt that I had to remove from my lunch bag anything that looked Middle Eastern, Ataturk focused his mind on eradicating Islamic and Middle Eastern elements from the Turkish nation, as the following remark makes clear:

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. In this way, Kemal Ataturk and other Turkish nationalists attempted radically to transform the Turk by contrasting the future modern nation of Turkey with that of the past Turkish-Muslim self. As time went by and this construct started to produce a Turkey that envisioned itself as a trans-

<sup>1.</sup> 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.

formed being, some Turks would counterpoise themselves to the Arabs, Iranians, and so on, a theme that I heard over and over again during my visit to Istanbul. This self-transformation, therefore, helped to define for generations what the "new Turk" was made of, everything that "they" were not:

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 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). How often I tried to do the same, to remove everything from my body that looked, smelled, or sounded like "home." Indeed, one of the few times I actually allowed myself to "dress up" as an Arab was during Halloween.

Notice the central role that modernization discourse plays here. Associated with the concentration on cultural factors is a tendency to treat so-called problems of development as primarily the result of cultural and social elements that act as barriers to modernization, characteristics that could nonetheless be changed in a short period of time. Modernization theory assumes that a society's capacity for development is retarded by certain archaic features of a cultural system that induces individuals to act in a traditionalist manner. These types of traditional, irrational characteristics must be eradicated. For Kemal Ataturk, they were a form of social disease that incapacitated Turkey, negating any possibility of progress and development. Along with other Turkish nationalists, he reinvented, and in many ways exaggerated the racist constructs of the colonizer. It was a crudeyes even racist—discourse that he engaged in.

With all that said, it is important to remind the reader that not everyone responded in the same way as Ataturk and I did, and that many, just as I eventually did, awoke from this colonialist nightmare. Kemalism was only one form of response to the challenge of the West. While Kemal Ataturk and other Turkish nationalists were busy Occidentalizing the self, remaking the public sphere (the state, science, and commerce), and purging the inner sphere (family, gender, dress, culinary practices, etc.), other nationalists in the region opted for different approaches. As I mentioned earlier, even as Turkish officials were actively transforming the "inner life" of the nation, choosing to shed any "Muslim" traditions, other nationalist elites, like the Hashemites, could not decide which direction to take. These Jordanian nationalists moved "West" one moment and "East" the next, sometimes putting on traditional Bedouin clothing and participating in traditional ceremonies, at other times acting like Kemalists.

But today throughout the Middle East, as in many other locations in the world, you can also find another emerging trend. Many have opted completely out of any Kemalist project, preferring to take what I call the *Orientalization* route in order to Islamize the self from head to toe. 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.

All of these projects in the end require a disciplinary and repressive apparatus, which only the modern world can manufacture. Neither the Ottomans nor the Mamlukes 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.

Few theorists of nationalism and national identity have compared these forms of response to Western hegemony. Indeed, my long-term research objective will be to compare Israel, Turkey, and Greece (examples of "Occidentalizing" nationalisms) with Jordan and Syria (examples of "modernizing" nationalisms), and both of those in turn with post-revolutionary Iranian and

Islamist trajectories (examples of "Orientalizing" movements). Such comparisons will help us to distinguish between different kinds of nationalism and other social movements, some traveling West, "others" traveling East, and others still vacillating.

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