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Book Reviews

Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity
Michael J. Thompson (ed.)
Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2003, vi + 188pp.
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In the haste to come to terms with, and in many cases, to capitalize on, the speed at which developments in 'East'–'West' relations are moving, much of Western academia has become sloppy: too often relying on hyperbole and polemics, as opposed to the more nuanced and measured research that the subject requires. In so far as *Islam and the West: Critical Perspectives on Modernity* seeks to overcome the 'methodological narrowness' and other inadequacies of this body of work, which has aptly been described by As 'ad AbuKhalil as belonging to the 'Islam industry',[1] it is a commendable project. Unfortunately, the majority of essays (with the only real exceptions being those written by Halperin and Vahdat) fail to offer real alternatives to the analyses produced by this 'industry,' and often themselves fall back on a 'more simplistic analysis where complexity is needed' (p. 4).

The book commences with an article, written by Haroun Er-Rashid, based on the oft-repeated thesis that the anger towards the West that one witnesses in the Muslim world today is a result of increasing Western hegemony that effectively exploits, impoverishes and alienates the rest of the world. According to Er-Rashid 'The problem, as the Muslims see it, lies in the overwhelming economic and military power of the West, specifically of the United States, which is used to economically exploit and culturally subvert the Muslim cultures, and also other nonwestern cultures. The West's hegemonic interests only lead to distrust and continuing clash' (p. 16).

Langman and Morris develop a similar argument in their essay, 'The Roots of Terror', which borrows from Franz Fanon's ideas on the cathartic nature of violence to explain Islamist terrorism today. Whereas the anti-colonial fighters of Fanon's time confronted a clear and tangible enemy, today, the enemies of the Muslim world are no longer 'colonial powers, but globalization, borderless markets, and regulatory agencies, decoupled from nation-states that, as a form of neocolonialization, control investments, local government policies, and raw material prices' (p. 66).

In another materialist argument, which recycles the old Marxist theory regarding the causal relationship between poverty and religion, Wadood Hamad argues that 'it is counterproductive, if not ignorant, not to recognize the cycle of despair and submission that drives the populace of various parts of

the region (e.g. Arabian peninsula or the Indian subcontinent) to espouse varying manifestations of the religious doctrine' (p. 117).

What is disappointing about these essays is not that their theories fail to offer some insight into the relationship between Islam, the West and modernity, although I tend to agree with Roxanne Euben that while overly functionalist and/or materialist analyses 'say much about political, social, and economic conditions in the Middle East, some about the alienation that can accompany certain structural changes,' they say considerably less about the particular appeal of political Islam itself 'as opposed to any other system of ideas' (Euben, 1999, p. 31). The real problem is that they add nothing new to the discussion, as these arguments have been circulating within the discipline for several years now (e.g. Ahmed and Donnan, 1994; Barber, 1995; Murden, 2002).

Michael Thompson develops a somewhat more nuanced approach to the subject in his essay, 'Islam, Modernity, and the Dialectic of Dogmatism,' in which he argues that rational humanism, the 'prerequisite' for the establishment of Enlightenment thought in a particular society, has actually existed at different times throughout the history of the Muslim world, beginning with the 'falasifa' movement in the 12th century (p. 35). Although Thompson's approach proves more innovative than the functionalist/materialist theses, the search to discover and highlight instances of 'modernity' within the intellectual and political thought of the Muslim world, both past and present, itself is not an entirely new endeavour (see for example, Al-Azmeh, 1996; Eisenstadt 2000; Halliday, 2000).

The essay written by Omer Caha is little more than a polemical diatribe against what he describes as the anti-modern/anti-democratic advocates of political Islam. The overall gist of this essay bears an uncomfortable resemblance to that of Alexis de Tocqueville's 'Second Letter on Algeria', which at least has the partial excuse of having been written during the French colonial period. Taking into consideration the period in which it was written, it is perhaps no surprise that de Tocqueville's letter, which has been bizarrely printed in this collection without any effort on the part of the editor to contextualize it *vis-à-vis* the book's stated goals, clearly shows the role dichotomous thinking, which delineates the difference between the 'civilized' us and the 'barbarous' other, played in justifying the colonial enterprise.

The refreshing essays of Sandra Halperin and Farzin Vahdat prove most successful in achieving one of the central aims of the book, to apply 'thicker methods of analysis' to their work. In her essay 'Europe in the Mirror of the Contemporary Middle East: Aspects of Modern European History Reconsidered', Halperin attempts to deconstruct the tautological structure of the modernity narrative via what Sayyid (1997, p. 151) has referred to as the

'provincialization' of Europe, whereby the exceptionalism of Europe's transition to modernity is called into question.

Vahdat's essay is also an attempt to deconstruct the generally accepted thesis that contrasts European 'modernity' to Middle Eastern/Arab 'tradition', although on a more theoretical level. Vahdat advocates the use of critical theory, in which 'one of the most complex and nuanced analyses of modernity is to be found,' in the attempt to achieve greater levels of democracy in the Middle East. Not only are critical theorists armed with the tools to expose the manipulative and hegemonic aspects of modernity as it has affected the Middle East but they are also capable of developing a strategy to 'reinsert the subject of modernity, whether in its atomistic incarnation in liberalism, or as the collectivist and historic configuration (of the Middle East) in a larger universality' (pp. 134–135).

The essays written by Vahdat and Halperin add to an important and growing, though still marginal, body of work that seeks to engage in a new dialogue — one based on 'thicker' analysis, where the role power has and continues to play both in the 'real' and academic worlds is recognized, and where no country's history and development is seen as more 'exceptional' than another. While several of the articles in *Islam and the West* have succeeded in overcoming the 'methodological narrowness' that characterizes the 'Islam industry', the book, as a whole, falls short of presenting a coherent and cogent alternative to what already exists. The concluding essay, 'To Cope, Must Islam 'westernize'?', is indicative of the overall shortcomings of the book; although it poses interesting questions, it fails to move beyond the stagnant debates that have only led to increased polarization between 'Islam' and the 'West.'

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Notes

[1] According to As 'ad AbuKhalil (2004), the 'Islam industry' is 'a popular and political culture that encourages the production of books, articles and movies that deal with Islam and the Middle East. This production is closely tied (through financing and through ideological affinity) with the prevalent trends about Islam in the United States' (p 130).

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Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership

Roger M. Smith

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This book offers a refreshing, exploratory approach to the conceptualization and evaluation of political community. Smith's premise is that political scientists have not paid adequate attention to how political memberships and identities are generated. To help correct this, he articulates a highly variable and encompassing concept of 'political people'. These political peoples can be associated with anything from a nation-state making strong and comprehensive claims to citizens' allegiance, to campaigning organizations with highly specific goals and more limited ideological demands on members. Between these extremes lies a panoply of 'peoples' committed to stateless nations, cities, religious sects, intentional communities, and so on. For Smith what these diverse modes of political belonging have in common is that they are constituted through 'stories of peoplehood', which cultivate feelings of collective worth and trust among members. He argues that such stories are necessary for political life, not diversionary fabrications, thus the final pages become concerned with their normative assessment.

These stories must cultivate trust and worth both among co-members and between leaders and followers, for whom they will have divergent meanings, and they cannot remain at odds with reality for too long. Smith defines three main types of 'stories', focusing on the third. 'Economic stories' promise material security and prosperity, attesting to leaders' abilities to deliver the goods. 'Political power' stories argue that the power and self-determination of the people will be enhanced by a particular mode of political constitution and/or allegiance to those who rule. 'Ethically constitutive stories' define a people