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Book Reviews

Formation of the "Colonized" Archetype in a Postcolonial World:
A Psychological Analysis of Occidentosis

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Abstract: Intellectuals like Jalal Ale Ahmad, Frantz Fanon, and Edward Said have initiated a decolonial wave of thought by describing the injustices of colonialism. Ale Ahmad calls for a return to an authentic Islamic core, while Fanon seems to break from the past, focusing on liberation instead of authenticity. Both authors analyze the remnants of the colonial condition in a postcolonial context. They describe almost identical underlying psychological phenomena, namely, the contrasting superiority and inferiority. Al-e Ahmad's *Occidentosis* (1962) evokes admiration and plagues his people; Fanon's 'zone of nonbeing' confronts minorities with racism; and Said's *Orientalism* dehumanizes the Orient. The colonizer presupposes their own superiority, juxtaposing the colonized who internalizes 'inferiority.' According to Ale Ahmad, the rise of Occidentosis is multifaceted and encourages a psycho-social lens. Since understanding the psychological impacts of colonialism in postcolonial contexts is crucial for decolonization, we embark on the challenge to thoroughly analyze *Occidentosis* — Ale Ahmad's understanding of colonialism and postcolonial normative approach — utilizing social-psychological theories. These include: The "Social Comparison Theory;" the "Social Identity Approach;" the "System Justification theory" (SJT); and the "Identity Shift Effect." These theories shed light on the psychological aspects of Occidentosis. First, the self-perpetuation of unequal social hierarchies viz. colonizer contra colonized. Second, the social categorization and comparison of the colonized vis-à-vis the colonizer. Third, outgroup favoritism, i.e., the colonized viewing the colonizer favorably, maintaining the status quo. Finally, the conflicts between drives for ego and group justification versus system justification. These identity shifts and motivation, which seemingly resemble the colonizer, create occidentotics. To our knowledge, the examination of Ale Ahmad's

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occidentosis through a social-psychological lens has not been adequately articulated before in the literature. Thus, we postulate that situating the defining role of colonialism in creating outgroup favoritism is crucial to decolonial efforts in a postcolonial context.

Keywords: Occidentosis, outgroup favoritism, postcolonial context, identity shift, social comparison

Introduction

Prolific intellectuals like Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said have initiated a decolonial wave of thought by describing the injustices of colonialism. On the one hand, their methods, approaches, and solutions vis-à-vis colonialism are different. Al-e Ahmad seems to call for a return to a form of core authenticity and Islamic nationalism, in contrast to Fanon's almost complete break from the past and focus on liberation, rather than on authenticity and truth. On the other hand, the parallels they draw seem similar. With their respective books: *Occidentosis*, *Black Skin White Masks* and *Orientalism,* the aforementioned three authors demonstrate the remnants of the colonial condition, even in a postcolonial context. They describe an almost identical underlying psychological phenomenon, namely, the contrasting dichotomy of superiority and inferiority. Al-e Ahmad's Occidentosis evokes admiration and plagues his people; Fanon's "zone of nonbeing" confronts racial minorities with a world that does not recognize their equal humanity; and Said's Orientalism dehumanizes the Orient. In these three cases, the colonizer projects and presupposes a fictitious image of their own superiority, juxtaposing this with the inferiority of the colonized. This leads the colonized to naively internalize this supposed inferiority, and perpetuated inequality. This in turn begs the question, what are the processes through occidentotic archetype or personality arises? As Al-e Ahmad suggests throughout his book, the issue is multifaceted and can be approached from various angles, including politico-economic, psycho-social, cultural, historical, educational, etc. He also assigns the task of elaborating analyses to the reader after he himself paved the road.[2] Thus, we accept Al-e Ahmad's call to further understand the problem and offer some suggestions to further embellish the brilliant sketch he provides. Afterall, understanding the psychological impacts of colonialism and its remnants in the postcolonial context are crucial for decolonization efforts. As argued by Al-e Ahmad, the psychological aspect (which contains parts of identity and groups relations) is one variable of the whole equation, which ought to be construed and examined with all its components. In this chapter, Al-e Ahmad's book is analyzed in its entirety. We pinpoint his understanding of colonialism, alongside his normative approach favoring postcolonialism. In addition, we employ social psychological

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[2] Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis, A Plague from the West*, trans. R. Campbell (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1984), 14, 27.

approaches to uncover the underlying psychological meanings and implications of Al-e Ahmad's works as well as to understand the psychology, of the colonized on the individual and subsequently group levels. These theories include: The "Social Comparison Theory"; the "Social Identity Approach" (includes both Social Identity Theory and self-categorization theory); and the "System Justification theory" (SJT) and the "Identity Shift Effect." The aforementioned theories respectively shed light on some psychological aspects of Al-e Ahmad's Occidentosis. Firstly, the self-perpetuation and persistence of social hierarchies of inequality between the colonizer and the colonized. Secondly, the social categorization, comparison, and identification of the colonized vis-à-vis the colonizer (outgroup) and the ingroup. Thirdly, outgroup favoritism, i.e., the attitudes that result in the colonized holding favorable opinions of the colonizer, thus maintaining the status quo. Lastly, the internal and external conflicts between the drives for ego and group justification versus system justification, which results in ambivalent attitudes and shifts in the identity of the colonized. It can also result in a motivation to resemble the perceived higher status colonizer and thus create the occidentotic. The examination of Al-e Ahmad's occidentosis through a social-psychological lens, has, to our knowledge, not been adequately articulated before. What is crucial to decolonial efforts in a postcolonial context is situating the defining role of colonialism in creating outgroup favoritism. This strand of thought results in an identity shift as well as the creation of the occidentotic.

Al-e Ahmad on Colonialism: Occidentosis

Throughout his seminal book *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, Al-e Ahmad deftly navigates the constructs constituting the tripartite chain.[3] He presents a unique understanding of colonialism, decolonialism and postcolonialism. Before clarifying his distinct position, we would like to discuss how colonialism is situated in the literature, and how generally it is understood. Colonialism could be understood as powerful nations exercising their power over less fortunate nations, in pursuit of political and economic control. It often results in exploitation, the destruction of culture and traditions, and leads to psycho-social instability. This phenomenon is not new, as it could be traced back to the third millennium B.C.[4] Nevertheless, the modern understanding of colonialism is often associated with the European conquest and the settlement of the Americas, beginning in the late fifteenth century. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the technological developments associated with it as well as the dominant "ideology" of capitalism in the sixteenth century, mass transportation of people across oceans became possible, which gave ground for the emergence of modern European colonialism and imperialism. In addition to the aforementioned reading of colonialism, there is also the Marxist approach of

[3] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*.
[4] Branislav Andelkovic, *"*Hegemony for Beginners: Egyptian activity in the southern levant during second half of the fourth millennium BC," *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 7, no 3. (2012): 789-808.

understanding colonialism as simultaneously a cause–effect of capitalism, describing colonialism as a historical stage in relation to capitalism. Thus, colonialism is often associated with modernity and capitalism.[5]

The term "Gharbzadegi"[6] – originally coined by Ahmad Fardid[7] – was chosen by Al-e Ahmad to describe colonialism.[8] Al-e Ahmad argues that Westoxification does not apply exclusively to Iran, but he rather predominantly uses it in reference to a contradiction within the Iranian society, viz. as a spell of sorts, whereby Iran was plagued with the disease of the West, while simultaneously being infatuated with it.[9] For Al-e Ahmad, this dependence upon the West and intoxication blinded the Iranians to the dangers that are often associated with the advent of Western influence. These include secularism and the devaluation of religion; materialism on the back of capitalist tendencies; as well as the Weberian disenchantment[10] and the Durkheimian anomie.[11] This subsequently resulted in weakened ties with the indigenous-authentic Islamic tradition, culture, and history in Iran.[12] In his account of Western colonialism, Al-e Ahmad emphasizes one factor, situating it at the center of discussion.[13] For him "the machine," or rather the inability of Iran to produce the machine, instead of having to rely upon Western imports, suffices to demonstrate the problem at hand:

> If we define occidentosis as the aggregate of events in the life, culture, civilization, and mode of thought of a people having no supporting tradition, no historical continuity, no gradient of transformation, but having only what the machine brings them, it is clear that we are such a people.[14]

In line with his Marxist tendencies, Al-e Ahmad, associates occidentosis with an epoch that could be characterized by economic and political subordination to Europe and America. In this epoch, Iran was in stagnancy due to the lack of understanding of

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[5] Mary Gilmartin, "Colonialism/Imperialism," in *Key Concepts in Political Geography*, ed. C. Gllaher, C. Dahlman, M. Gilmartin, A. Mountz, and P. Shirlow (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 101-113; Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell 2016), 15-25.

[6] Persian for Occidentosis or Westoxification.

[7] Iranian philosopher.

[8] Mohamed Targhi, "Review of Iranian intellectuals and the west: the tormented triumph of nativism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 4 (2000): 565-571.

[9] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 15.

10 Lack of meaning and loss of personal connection with oneself in everyday life, resulting from the overly rationalized modern society.

[11] Occurs during times of crises and normlessness, when individuals feel disconnected from society and the external world.

[12] Al-e Ahmad, *Occodentosis,* 58-59, 72.

[13] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 64-68.

[14] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 34.

sciences and technology, which rendered Iranian society as only a consumer of "the machine."[15] In turn, the conditions of the country impacted the lifeworld[16] of the Iranian commoner. The human being – a creature of experience and neuroplasticity[17] – is deeply impacted by conditions of his life world. The danger of colonialism, and in this case its iteration of occidentosis, is particularly dangerous with its capability to directly and indirectly effect the daily lives and experiences of the people in the host country. Hence, it propagates through all strata of the Iranian society, making occidentotics out of "peasants,"[18] officials, clergy, and intellectuals alike.[19]

The usefulness of the term "Occidentosis" is immense. In addition to describing the 'colonial disease' in Iran, it also aids Al-e Ahmad in setting the scope for his book, i.e., Western colonialism exclusively. The term was also later adopted by Ali Shariati.[20] Here, it is important to note that the meaning of the term, popularized by Al-e Ahmad, differs from the original intent of the term that was in reference to Greek philosophy.

In this context, it is important to reframe and redefine colonialism in what could be considered a non-disciplinary approach. According to our reading and understanding, it is somehow problematic to exactly situate colonialism exclusively to an epoch characterized by capitalism. On the other hand, it is also problematic to consider it as trans-historical – not in the sense of eternality – but rather as not being restricted to only a specific historical epoch. This is to say that colonialism does not stand only as a category, but is also a subset; an iteration. Based on the aforementioned, one questions what differentiates colonialism from expansionism and imperialism, and how to account for colonialism in a rigorous manner? Although the terms imperialism and colonialism are often used interchangeably,[21] the concept of colonialism is often ascribed to any form of dependence on a foreign hegemonic nation, regardless of the colony or settlement elements.[22] As for colonialism and expansionism, it seems that although the quality or phenomenon are similar, the rate,

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[15] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 29-34, 45.

[16] Lifeworld is "the non-theoretical world, i.e., all what seems to be normal, usual, and daily." Thus, we may describe the lifeworld "as direct experience of one's own world (*Unmittelbarkeit der Lebenserfahrung*) and 'theoretical world' (based upon a priori categories of experiencing) as the rational objective perception of the world. Both should be 'reduced' within the process of 'experience' (*Erkenntnis*) in order to reach the pure consciousness of being." Joseph Alagha, "Theoretical Perspectives on Media and Modernity," *Global journal of Human-Social Sciences: A Arts & Humanities – Psychology* 17, no. 6 (2017): 33.

[17] In simple terms, the brain's capability to grow and evolve in response to life experiences.

[18] We use the term peasant in line with how Al-e Ahmad treats the ordinary person in his writing.

[19] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 13-14, 59, 90.

[20] One of the ideologues of the Iranian Revolution.

[21] The distinction between imperialism and colonialism has been extensively discussed in the literature. Nevertheless, many authors, including Al-e Ahmad, seldom define the terms and clarify these distinctions.

[22] Young, *Postcolonialism*.

scale, and methods differ. Thus, colonialism can be considered as a form or subset of expansionism. In other words, the seeming confusion about whether precapitalist forms of expansion that fit a definition of colonialism could be considered in essence the same as modern-day colonialism is a contested issue of consideration. Different authors have different assessments of what takes precedence: scale, rate or means.[23] To refrain from any further theoretical discussion, we propose a fluid and flexible definition of colonialism, which incorporates all three phenomena: expansionism, imperialism, and colonialism. It also encapsulates instances of colonial domination, both pre and post capitalism. Also, Al-e Ahmad seems to rely on an all-encompassing flexible definition, while simultaneously emphasizing a specific epoch of European colonialism.

Normative Approach: Decolonial and Postcolonial

In his descriptive work, Al-e Ahmad mostly relies on an historical approach. As for his normative work, he seems to alternate between decolonial and postcolonial suggestions, with the postcolonial eventually taking precedence. A decolonial approach involves the rejection and undermining of an established hegemonic political rule by any foreign occupation that entails the subservience of the indigenous people.[24] A postcolonial approach encompasses an interdisciplinary method that considers the material and epistemological realities of postcoloniality,[25] seeking to combat the hegemonic dominance of colonialist and imperialist systems, while simultaneously acknowledging the transformations and realities of the nation and people emerging from the colonial context.[26] Both approaches are oriented towards the sovereignty and autonomy of the nation, emphasizing critique and intervention from the stance of the victim, but not the perpetrators. Thus, decolonialism is the effort to walk back and reverse the impact and legacies of colonialism and its forces. While postcolonialism is the reconciliation of the indigenous with the "modern," while maintaining a balance between authenticity and development.[27] In both efforts, understanding and analyzing the product left behind by colonialism is a crucial first step.

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[23] It is worth mentioning that, in order to circumvent this issue, some authors have made a distinction using the term "modern colonialism" in reference to colonialism in the late 15th century onwards. This seems sound, as it maintains that the nature or essence (underlying concept) of colonialism remains the same regardless of the era.

[24] Jan. C Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A Short Story* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017): 1-2.

[25] Viz. the material, politico-economic, and cultural conditions that determine the reality of the context in which the post-colonial nations have to operate. Young, *Postcolonialism*, 57.

[26] Young, *Postcolonialism*, 57-58

[27] Joseph Alagha, "Ali Shariati: Liberation Theology, Social Justice, and Humanism," *Islamic Perspective: Journal of the Islamic Studies and Humanities* 28 (2022): 55.

Al-e Ahmad's "Occidentosis" seems similar to Edward Said's "Orientalism" and Fanon's 'zone of non-being.' While Al-e Ahmad narrows the scope of occidentosis to predominantly Iran, Said broadens the mandate to the Orient as a whole. For Said, Orientalism was a three-headed dragon: simultaneously an academic tradition, a worldview, and a political tool for subjugation. The essence of this triad centered around the presumption of inherent Western superiority and Oriental inferiority. [28] This bears a striking resemblance to Fanon's analysis of racial inequalities. Fanon's "zone of non-being" confronts the person of color with a world that rejects them. It is an existential condition whereby the inferiority of the black person is presumed, and it is characterized by a sense of alienation, disconnection, invisibility, oppression, and marginalization. [29] To further compare Fanon, Al-e Ahmad, and Said, the parallelism in their thought seems conspicuous. In their theoretical approach, colonialism is understood as a total project leaving nothing unchanged; with Marxist undertones to each of their approaches. Fanon and Said gave special consideration to language and its role in epistemology – ranging from its use of representation and misrepresentation of the Orient, colonialism and participating in the culture and world of the colonizer, and even resistance. On the other hand, Al-e Ahmad does not emphasize language; rather, he mentions it only *en passant*.[30]

Like Fanon, Al-e Ahmad, highlights the theme of adopting aspects from the colonial culture in conformity. In Fanon's account, the black man learns perfect French diction in the hope of some sort of liberation, i.e., he attempts to wear a "white mask" to sideline the insecurity of his own blackness, informed by the white gaze.[31] Both Fanon and Al-e Ahmad describe a process of association via the formation of intimate relationships. Al-e Ahmad describes Iranians from underprivileged backgrounds, endeavoring to study in Europe and marry Europeans to sever their indigenous ties, in a desire of achieving upwards socio-economic mobility.[32]While Fanon explicates interracial sexual desire, motivated by the envy of whiteness and an attempt to come in proximity to it, with undertones of perceived purity and wealth.[33] Nevertheless, in both cases, the colonized do not anticipate the reality of their inherent inferiority in the eyes of the colonizer. In an attempt to sidestep the uphill battle, they fall into the abyss condemning themselves to being a "special phenomenon," rejected

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[28] Said Edward, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978).

[29] Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* [*Black Skin, White Masks*], trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1952), 10.

[30] Frantz, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 17-40; Fanon Frantz. *L'an V de la révolution algérienne* [*A Dying Colonialism*] (Cambridge: Grove books, 1959), 10, 15, 36, 69-98, 112; Fanon Frantz, *Les Damnés de la Terre* [*The Wretched of the Earth*], trans. Constance Farrington (Cambridge: Gove Press, 1963), 188-189, 221-225; Said, *Orientalism*, 21, 130.

[31] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*. In this regard, Fanon was inspired by the French existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre.

[32] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 120.

[33] The white man perceived as the Segway to material wealth by the white woman; the white woman perceived as a symbol of purity by the black man (Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, chapters 2 and 3).

by the Westerner and alienated from one's own kind and self. This seems consistent with the Orientalist trend and interest in taking from the East, viewing it and its people as mere exoticism to be enjoyed in a study report.

This aforementioned problem – of internalized inferiority and determination to compensate for one's "inherent" inferiority – is a central theme and precedent to Al-e Ahmad's normative prescription. By conforming and appealing to the sensitivities of the colonizer, the colonized is attempting to reclaim his humanity in a convoluted manner. In Fanonian or Hegelian terms, this could be rendered as "starving for recognition."[34] Both Fanon and Al-e Ahmad vehemently oppose this prerogative of the colonizer to monopolize humanity. Thus, both subsequently reject this idea of a need for recognition of the colonized person's humanity. Al-e Ahmad's presentation of the occidentotic, the derivative of occidentosis, ought to be understood in light of this overcompensation for the occidentotic's inborn complex. In his reading, Al-e Ahmad seems to have a semblance of the Nietzschean inspiration of the occidentotic, whereby S/he is creature and creator.[35] Al-e Ahmad seems to alternate between these considerations of deterministic conditions and free will to combat them. The former can be inferred through parts of his work where he seems to sympathize with the ordinary Iranian, acknowledging that S/he is not to blame.[36] This, along with the structure, which is dominated by the colonial powers, is far overpowering to the agency of the individual. On the other hand, Al-e Ahmad's pessimism underlies a tone of optimism, namely, that the spell of occidentosis can possibly be alleviated. This can be inferred from his writing, especially his suggestions coaxing the Iranian nation to combat colonialism, rather than submitting to it.[37] Thus, he calls for a "transvaluation"[38] of hegemonic Western standards and values that are enforced, and reinforced, by colonialism. Most likely, this runs against Nietzschean thinking in spirit, as he advocated for a complete overhaul and break with the past.

Like Fanon, Al-e Ahmad emphasizes revolution and ideas of claiming liberation. Each one has his own reading and approach, emphasizing some elements, while ignoring others. For Fanon, postcolonialism is an embrace of the new; revolution should be radical and absolute. It is a break with the past; rather than being construed as a return to a different iteration of the past.[39] In this respect, there is a slight contradiction in Fanon's thoughts. In his analyses, he considers a return to

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[34] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 58-59, 63. Fanon is likely to have been inspired by Hegel in emphasizing recognition as the black person's self-undermining desire.

[35] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. T. Common (New York: The Modern Library, 1883); Friedrich Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. H. Zimmen (New York: The Modern Library, 1886).

[36] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 64, 92-93.

[37] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 78, 131.

[38] A heuristic reference to Nietzsche's re-evaluation and reversal of existing moral values. Both refer to Western values, although in completely different senses. See Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* and Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil.*

[39] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*; Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre.*

"olden" African ways of living as a mirage and an illusion; a path with little to, or no merit. However, in his analysis of Algeria, he views it closer to Al-e Ahmad's reading; whereby he does not reject the Islamic tradition, fearing its social practice going into a seclusion, thus becoming regressive and rejecting modernity as a whole. Rather, he construes its revolutionary utility for resistance and liberation, recognizing its potential for compatibility in a postcolonial setting.[40] On the other hand, Al-e Ahmad proposes a postcolonial approach that involves a return to the authentic roots. For him, revolution involved the compatibility of traditional values with nativist and/or local tradition, as well as harmonizing authenticity with modernity and technological advancement. As a fulcrum, he holds Islamism and nationalism as important values not to be dispensed with, as he views these as essential tools to combat Western orientalist aspirations and colonial ambitions. However, this return to the past ought not to be misunderstood as a simple return to Islam; rather, a meticulous arrangement of the life world that prevents self-alienation and subservience to foreign forces. Like Fanon, Al-e Ahmad questions identity formation and understands that a complete rejection of modernity is detrimental, both on the practical and theoretical levels. Unlike Fanon's call for embracing one's blackness rather than seeking recognition, in line with his historical approach, Al-e Ahmad seems to place more emphasis on certain external factors. In this respect, Al-e Ahmad places the machine at the center of this process. For him, it is an important benchmark for Iran to move towards being a producer of the machine, rather than being an exclusive consumer. According to him, this is a symbolic and pragmatic signal for transformation within Iran, without which there is no progress. In this respect, Al-e Ahmad writes, "For two hundred years we have resembled the crow mimicking the partridge (always supposing that the west is a partridge, and we are a crow). So long as we remain consumers, so long as we have not built the machine, we remain occidentotic."[41] Al-e Ahmad's insight on the psychology of the decolonial approach vis-à-vis the machine is important. He aptly identifies an element of fear, whereby the decolonial fears Western influence in their indigenous domain, thus considering any trace of it potentially destructive. This fear of "mechanosis"[42] is in line with anticipation of cultural destruction on the back of the machine. Al-e Ahmad emphasizes the importance of considering the machine. The fear of potential mechanosis should not result in willful stagnancy. Indigeneity without progress is regression, progress without respect for indigeneity and authenticity amounts to colonialism. And so, the call for the importance of a postcolonial approach – rather than a complete break from the West – can be repeatedly seen through his work.

This is the crux of Al-e Ahmad's argument, and it is central to understanding his approach. The machine is the culmination of various factors – including socio-politico-economic factors – that must align for the process of machine production to

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[40] Fanon, *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*.
[41] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 31.
[42] Similar to occidentosis, with the machine invading common Iranian society and ravaging the life world in the process.

succeed. Al-e Ahmad is not naïve, as he understands that the process is reliant on stringent external factors. According to him, a balance of authenticity and modernization is crucial for Iran to prosper. Thus, his postcolonial normative approach is a combination of analyzing extrinsic ideal necessities, while, at the same time, emphasizing intrinsic potential possibilities.

A Social Psychological Approach

Assessment Methodology:

To fully understand occidentosis and work towards a prescription, it is necessary to understand its psychological consequences. As far as our assessment, it is important to systematically analyze the archetype, or personality formation of "the colonized" or "the occidentotic." In Jungian psychology, archetype refers to the contents of the collective unconscious.[43] We use the term "archetype" denotatively, as the term "personality" has different connotative meanings. Likewise, Al-e Ahmad's account of Occidentosis seems to lack a significant number of indicators and information. To further emphasize, it is important to consider the question, how can one analyze personality formation and development? Firstly, personality is seldomly studied on the group or population level, as it is difficult to specifically pinpoint certain traits. Thus, there is a necessity to overgeneralize and sacrifice precision at the expense of expression. As Smedslund[44] puts it, there is an unbridgeable gap in psychology between odds at the group level, on the one hand, and odds for specific individuals, on the other.[45] Thus, when analyzing the occidentotic, we place emphasis on the individual level. In this respect, the difficulty lies in the multiplicity of occidentotic identities. This is true both on the general level and specific level. On the general level, in the sense that all individuals are unique,[46] and any form of generalization, or projection from one individual to another, would compromise much relevant content and reality in translation. On the specific level, in the sense that Al-e Ahmad provides accounts of different occidentotic groups, from commoners, to intellectuals, and even leaders.[47] Secondly, personality development involves a multidimensional approach that accounts for as many aspects of life as possible. It usually analyzes the development of characteristics over long periods of time, distinguishing them from

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[43] Collective unconscious is a deeper layer of the unconscious, which is universal and has modes and contents of behavior generally the same everywhere and in all individuals. C.G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3-4.

[44] Known as the Socrates of modern psychology (Personal recollection).

[45] Jan Smedslund, "Why Psychology Cannot be an Empirical Science" *Integrative Psychological Behavioral Science* 50 (2016): 194.

[46] This is due to the diversity in genetics, socio-politico-economic circumstances, geography, environment, etc.

[47] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 13-14, 59, 90.

temporary fluctuations.[48] Personality development can be of different magnitudes and is a continuous process. This is to say, that personality formation starts from the childhood, and continues throughout the lifespan of the individual; with temperament being significant. Here, there is an emphasis on subjectivity – with contextual factors and experiences being central. [49] Thus, family and childhood experiences are accounted for in personality development analysis, including attachment styles, parenting styles and family dynamics; as well as cultural and socio-economic background.[50] Indeed, the most popular model of personality is considered to be the big five personality model,[51] which is part of the trait theory of personality. It is worth noting that there are other theories of personality, including the psychoanalytic model, evolutionary, socio-cognitive and so on.

To some extent, Fanon anticipated Al-e Ahmad's call for clarification on the psychological front with a partly psychoanalytic approach. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon challenges from multiple angles the problems of colonialism, racism, and internalized racism. Fanon draws upon the phenomenological experiences of the black man – ranging from existential reflection, to language, sexuality, power, and oppression – in order to challenge and understand certain notions about the processes of colonial oppression, thus subsequently construing personality development. [52] This can be seen through his critique of Octave

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[48] Cornelia Wrzus, "Processes of personality development: An update of the TESSERA framework," in *The Handbook of Personality Dynamics and Processes,* ed. J. F. Raauthmann (Elsevier, 2021), 101-123.

[49] Avshalom Caspi and Brent W. Roberts, "Personality development across the life course: The argument for change and continuity," *Psychological Inquiry* (2001); Brent. W. Roberts, Daniel Wood, and Avshalom Caspi, "The Development of personality traits in adulthood," in *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*, ed. O.P. John, R.W. Robins, and L.A. Pervin (2010): 375-398; Vlada Bilohur, "Formation and development of personality established by change and growth," *Humanities bulletin of Zaporizhzhe State Engineering Academy* (2019); Hang Yuzhan, Christopher Soto, Billy Lee, et al., "Social expectations and abilities to meet them as possible mechanisms of youth personality development," *Journal of Personality* 91, no. 3 (2023).

[50] Thomas J. Schofield, Rand D. Conger, M. Brent Donnelan, et al. "Parent personality and positive parenting as predictors of positive adolescent personality development over time," *Merill-Palmer Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2012): 255-283; Tomas Deckers, Armin Falk, Fabian Kosse and Hannah Schildberg-Horisch, "How does socio-economic status shape a child's personality?" *Institute for the study of labor* (2015); Yanshu Sun and Jeffry Wilkinson, "Parenting style, personality traits, and interpersonal relationships: A model of prediction of internet addiction," *International journal of communication* (2018); Jürgen Fuchshuber, Michaella Hiebler-Ragger, Adelheid Kresse, et al. "The influence of attachment styles and personality organization on emotional functioning after childhood trauma," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 10 (2019).

[51] The five-factor model of personality, or the big five, includes a group of personality traits: conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and extraversion.

[52] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 83-108.

Mannoni.[53] Mannoni's descriptions and attributions are worth considering, as he seems to describe a specific subset of issues and experiences relating to both the colonizer and the colonized. He tends to discuss these psychological factors on the individual level, while clarifying the importance of non-psychological factors. On the one hand, according to Mannoni, the colonizer suffers from a sort of inferiority complex. By consequence, S/he desires to be respected and dominant over the colonized – which is by default the inferior one in this paradigm. On the other hand, the colonized suffers from a dependency issue, whereby S/he harbors internalized contempt for the colonizer.[54] Fanon takes issue with Mannoni by contending that Mannoni missed the crux of the problem. For Fanon, Mannoni fundamentally misunderstood colonialism, attributing it to a dual misinterpretation from the stance of both the colonizer and the colonized. This takes colonization out of the equation for understanding the resulting psychology. In this equation, the inferiority is the antecedent of colonialism. Fanon rejects this proposal. This is in line with Al-e Ahmad's reading, whereby colonialism is the root of perceived subservice, and is not its derivative. There is another issue at stake, with Mannoni's metaphor of Prospero and Caliban being a parallel to the colonizer and the colonized. Prospero is regarded as a patriarchal figure endeavoring to civilize the primitive Caliban. This is problematic as it validates the treachery of the colonizer. The more coherent interpretation is pointed out by Said and Al-e Ahmad, whereby the colonizer dehumanizes the colonized to exact "brutality." Thus, both Fanon and Al-e Ahmad view this as a complete misrepresentation that betrays the essence of the topic.

In our analysis, we refrain from drawing too heavily upon the psychoanalytic method. As far as our assessment, in this specific case of analyzing the colonized or occidentotic personality, ideally something similar to the following neo-socioanalytic model ought to be utilized.[55]

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[53] Mannoni is a French Psychoanalyst who is renowned for *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, which deals with the psychology of the colonizer and the colonized.

[54] Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. P. Powesland (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1993).

[55] Brent. W. Roberts and Lauren B. Nickel, "Personality development across the life course: A neo-Socioanalytic perspective," in *Handbook of Personality theory and research*, ed. O.P. John and R.W. Robins (Guilford Press, 2021), 260.

III. DEVELOPMENT
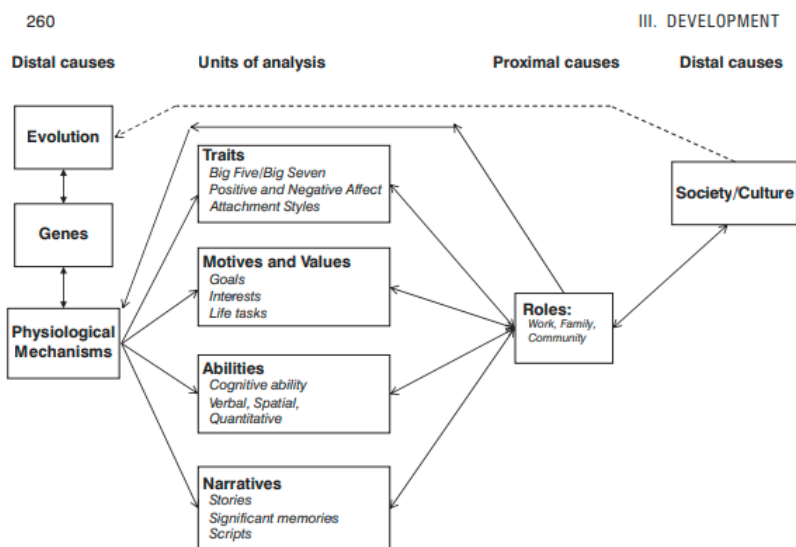
FIGURE 11.1. The revised neo-socioanalytic model of personality.

For the purposes of our analysis, we contextually modify this model, as there is an unavailability of quantifiable data on the subject of study. Nevertheless, through Al-e Ahmad's extensive portrayals of Iranian society and people, many aforementioned factors relating to occidentosis seem challenging to infer. In this respect, we propose some suggestive theoretical lines of reasoning, which emphasize a social-psychological approach. As this analysis is from a direct inference of material provided by Al-e Ahmad, it predominantly applies to the Iranian context of his time.

Contributing Causes for Occidentosis

Al-e Ahmad throughout his book provides certain causes for occidentosis. The intelligentsia and Iranian leadership play a central role here, including the clergy. For Al-e Ahmad, the intellectual class is central to the spread of Occidentosis.[56] This process occurs either through foreign education, pursuit of personal interests, or apathy. Similarly, there is a distrust of the government by the people, as according to Al-e Ahmad, the leadership is incompetent at best, and more realistically hungry for power.[57] There is also the problem of the media and local publications, which are

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[56] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 90.
[57] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 71, 74.

plagued by occidentosis and subsequently propagate it.[58] This seems similar to Fanon's descriptions of the media in the second chapter of *A Dying Colonialism* (1959). Both Fanon and Al-e Ahmad describe the media being used for colonial purposes, advocating for reversing this utility into an agent of resistance. Al-e Ahmad proposes this to be a potential function of the Iranian clergy.[59] Unfortunately, in his account, the clergy are rather regressive and stagnant; instead of being proactive and initiative. Al-e Ahmad does not shy away from discussing external factors and their subsequent consequences. He discusses urbanization on the back of the machine, emphasizing the relative deprivation created in rural areas. Thus, the villager is driven out of his locality into the city by the trickling effect of Western industrialization and colonial forces. Two notable qualities of life reasons include unemployment created by the machine, and lack of safety due to villages not being properly protected.[60] Finally, he describes the problems in the Persian educational system. Al-e Ahmad points out to the emphasis on Western-centric education. He finds the lack of Persian literature and humanities, and an overemphasis on theoretical sciences to be problematic. He again points out to the corrupt Orientalist and occidentotic tendencies among the educators and professors.[61]

Theoretical framework

In order to understand the underlying psychological processes contributing to the formation of the occidentotic personality, it is important to consider Festinger's "Social Comparison Theory." The theory posits that individuals use comparison as a mirror to the self, striving to self-evaluate and define. This can also be understood in Turner's terms as an attempt at self-categorization.[62] Comparison can be both upward and downward, and can be inferred without direct contact with others, i.e., through different media. For Festinger, there is a tendency for upwards comparison for the sake of improvement and self-enhancement. There is also a tendency for uniformity vis-à-vis a particular group on the level of specific opinions or ability considered important. Thus, in this cause, there is a possibility and pressure for conforming to the desired values, or opinions of the specific group. Here one of the major motivations for social comparison, aligns with Tajfel and Turner's "Social Identity

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[58] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 46, 57.
[59] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 59.
[60] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 56-60.
[61] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 80-81, 112.
[62] Leon Festinger, "A theory of social comparison processes." *Human Relations* (1954): 117-140; John Turner and Penelope Oakes, "The significance of the social identity concept for social psychology with reference to individualism, interactionism and social influence," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 25, no. 3 (1986): 237-252; Kevin. P. McinTyre and Donna Eisenstadt, "Social Comparison as a self-regulatory measuring stick," *Self and Identity* (2011): 137-151.

Theory" (SIT), whereby the individual seeks positive self-distinctiveness.[63] On the interpersonal-intergroup[64] continuum proposed by SIT, there is further discussion of positive distinctiveness strategies. The one most relevant to this analysis is individual mobility, whereby individuals pursue mobility emphasizing their personal benefit over group benefit.[65] On the other hand, "System Justification Theory" (SJT) also makes use of distinctiveness principles similar to SIT. SJT posits that in addition to ego-justification, there is also desire for positive ingroup distinctiveness, group justification[66] and system justification, namely, positive outlook vis-à-vis the social structures they exist under. This can often lead to passivity, rather than stride for change; or alternatively it can also lead to outgroup favoritism,[67] which is more prevalent in disadvantaged group members.[68] This can also be traced to Festinger's cognitive dissonance, whereby the individual is naturally inclined to have cognitive consistency for there to be positive self-distinctiveness.[69] Here, the external pressures alongside with the internal pressures, can result in Treynor's "identity shift effect." The intrinsic and extrinsic conflicts disrupt the state of harmony and homeostasis. Thus, the process of conflict and subsequent resolution, result in the emergence of a new identity or framework.[70] This can manifest itself in different forms, including

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[63] Internal drive to have positive self-esteem or self-concept. Henry Tajfel and John. C. Turner ,"An integrative theory of intergroup conflict," in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup relations,* ed. W.G. Austin and S. Worchel (Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33-47; Hebry Tajfel and John. C. Turner, "The social identity theory of intergroup behavior," in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations,* ed. S. Worchel and W.G. Austin (Burnham Inc Pub, 1986), 7-24.

[64] A spectrum of behavior from full interpersonal to full intergroup. On the complete interpersonal end, behavior is a result of individual traits and personal relationships. While on the complete intergroup end, behavior results from membership in social group or category.

[65] Alexander S. Haslam, *Psychology in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 38.

[66] This respectively means positive self-distinctiveness and positive ingroup distinctiveness.

[67] A phenomenon where the individual views membership of his or her ingroup as a signal of lower class, while perceiving membership of another group as a symbol of higher status.

[68] John. T. Jost and Mahzarin R. Banaji, "The role of stereotyping in system justification and the production of false consciousness," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 33, no. 1(1994): 1-27; J.T. Jost, "Outgroup favoritism and the theory of system justification: A paradigm for investigating the effects of socioeconomic success on stereotype content," in *Cognitive Social Psychology: The Princeton Symposium on the Legacy and Future of Social Cognition*," ed. G. B. Moskowitz (Psychology Press 2001), 89-102; John. T. Jost and Mahzarin. R. Banaji, "A Decade of System Justification theory: Accumulated Evidence of Conscious and Unconscious Bolstering of the status quo," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6 (2004): 881-919.

[69] Leon Festinger, *The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).

[70] Wendy Trayner, *Towards a general theory of social psychology: understanding human cruelty, human misery, and, perhaps, a remedy: A Theory of the Socialization Process.* (Euphoria Press, 2009).

conformity – and in the case of the occidentotic – Fanonian cultural cringe[71] and outgroup favoritism.[72]

Application and Formation of the "Colonized" Archetype: Occidentosis in the City

With the theoretical framework laid out, it is necessary to apply it to Al-e Ahmad's accounts and descriptions. The first thing to consider is the average young Persian commoner of the time. According to Al-e Ahmad, the environment in which S/he lived was one characterized by stagnancy. In international relations, a key concept to understand is international anarchy, whereby there is no *de jure* ruling force on the international level. Subsequently, the hegemonic forces rule and control by default. The problem with stagnancy and lack of competitiveness is being prone to the control of hegemonic powers. This is on the back of economic and political domination, which allow for exploitation of the weaker nation on every level. The impacts are undeniable on the life world of the individual, in this case in the Iranian milieu. Some of the problems that follow are urbanization, unemployment, and subsequently, decrease in the quality of life. Here, there are at least considerable probabilities for discontent and dissatisfaction on the part of the Iranian commoner, culminating in a spectrum of thoughts. Two prominent thoughts to consider would be: "how can I survive?" and "how can I live a decent life and work towards a better future." It is important here to mention that the context discussed is the mid-twentieth century in Iran, whereby technologies like the internet were not available to allow for a wide range of inquiry for advice. The way to decide which course of action to take is determined by consulting the people around oneself – viz. family and immediate surrounding individuals – or by observing and trying to understand the path taken by people whom individuals want to emulate. Thus, in this context, we propose that his or her natural tendency for comparison plays a significant role. This is likely to be, as stated previously, an upwards comparison. The question shifts to who or what is the object of this comparison? One idea to consider would be the rich and the bourgeois of higher status in the Iranian milieu. The problem with this comparison is the inheritance of wealth, an outlet unavailable for the average proletariat. On the other hand, there is a far more interesting attainable object of admiration, namely the educated. In this respect, the object of comparison could be intellectuals, government officials, and professional syndicates, such as doctors, lawyers and engineers. This is not to disregard alternative options of business and commerce, as the possibilities there are more diverse. Nevertheless, on the whole, these result in similar lines of thought and outcomes. Regardless, by Al-e Ahmad's account, medicine is one of the few fields where being educated in Iran gives the student a certain edge.[73] However,

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[71] The concept is coined and attributed to A.A. Phillips. Fanon describes a process of colonialism whereby the colonized devalues his or her own culture in favor of the culture of the colonizer.

[72] Fanon, 1952, *Peau noire, masques blancs.*

[73] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 115.

as stated by Al-e Ahmad, for academic and official positions (with the exception of religious officials), the road involves foreign education, and the support of occidentotic powers.[74] In Pursuit of education and, or, better quality of life, the first step is to head to the city.[75] After getting to the city and securing at least the bare minimum of nutrition, the concerns continue. By demands of social identity, one needs to think of ways to fit in and accustom oneself as a part of the environment. One way to do this is appearance, whereby there is a need for grooming, and dressing well.[76] Another element to consider, that Al-e Ahmad does not mention, but is present in the work of fanon, is language. There is a tendency to conform to the way of life surrounding oneself, in this case to the inhabitants of the city. This is further true especially in light of their relatively better living standards and perceived higher status in line with social comparison theory. Thus, often the villager tries to adopt the suburban "posh" manner of expression. Also, the process often entails shifts in thought and identity, more in line with the thought of the perceived salient ingroup. Here, by Al-e Ahmad's account, the occidentosis seems more prevalent in the city. Therefore, the occidentotic attitude can be considered more prevalent as well. This can potentially lead to disdain or apathy towards what one considered previously important, namely, traditions, nationalistic or nativistic concepts, etc... This can also result in contempt for their previous identity, person, and ingroup by association. The logic being, that when one held dear certain customs, and was a certain person, with a certain social and personal identity, S/he was living in poor conditions. Thus, there can be an association between poverty/ lack of control of one's destiny, and the identity/ customs of a certain group. Similarly, the opposite is also salient, whereby there would be an association between the occidentotic, individualist, "modern" life/thought of the city, and better living conditions. This can be problematic, as these associations are often short sighted and dominated by the moment. In addition, it is important to consider the next step after securing a basic living standard and getting acclimated to the city. The point of discussion here is leisure. The city although provides certain benefits, is also disenchanting. A place where life moves fast and everyone strives for success, chasing a dream of wealth and status. Notwithstanding, in the rat race,[77] apart from certain exceptions, the main benefactors are the wealthy few elites, as dictated by the capitalist system. However, in the process, most hopeful individuals lose meaning and values once considered significant. Similar to a casino where the odds favor the house, the way to compensate for the long-term misleading promises being sold, is by providing short term gratification, such as gambling, prostitution and substance abuse. [78] By replacing religious institutions with institutions of leisure (which do not need to be mutually exclusive), there is a radical

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[74] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 90.

[75] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 57, 66.

[76] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 66.

[77] A term associated with modern society, whereby individuals compete for money and power (in most part to no avail).

[78] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 67.

shift induced into the life of the common Iranian, whereby S/he loses a crutch relied upon since childhood.[79] This again often leads to dissatisfaction, desperation, and a range of mental health problems, subsequently creating a need for unhealthy or "self-destructive" coping mechanisms. Thus, in our assessment, isolation from family/community, loss of meaning and purpose, in addition to fictitious dreams of glory and wealth, is the three-headed dragon of prevailing occidentosis in the city.

In addition to comparison and categorization vis-à-vis higher status individuals in their environment, there is also projections of the media. Whether it is through radio, books, or cinema, the common Iranian has much to contend with on the level of depictions. This can be further inferred through Al-e Ahmad's account of foreign celebrities and media being prominent in Iran, sometimes overshadowing Iranian accomplishments. [80] Western media has particularly been vicious when depicting foreign nations of the East. Using various tactics, from straw-manning and "othering," to primitivizing. A prominent example can be considered Hollywood, and its depictions of the Arabs. With a sample size close to 1,000 films throughout a century, Shaheen presents an undeniable pattern of vilifying Arabs and Muslims. Whether it is painting the easterner as a greedy, primitive terroristic man, or a serpentine, lustful, and tempting woman, there is a tendency to miss-portray and degrade the Easterner. Similar tendencies also apply vis-à-vis Islam, as Islam is essentialized to the east rather than being portrayed as a global religion, with depictions of religious fanaticism. [81] To keep it short, this has undeniable subconscious impact on comparison, categorization, and self-esteem. This is further true, considering the depiction of the Westerner as the protagonist who defeats the inferior or threatening easterner.[82] Thus, here there is another entity playing the role of a mirror to the self, viz. the perceived Westerner. One notable possibility here as a result of the comparison, is categorizing the self and the ingroup as second rate vis-à-vis the perceived higher status outgroup. This internalized and perceived inferiority is another line that evokes questions, while subsequently answering these. This is in line with the positive distinctiveness hypothesis of SIT, which motivates the following question at hand: how to attain higher status, and improve both quality of life and self-esteem? A likely answer in light is resembling the westerner. This is in essence outgroup favoritism. In addition, the negative association, and subsequent perception of the ingroup, can potentially lead the emphasis shift far left in the interpersonal-intergroup continuum. In this context, there is a likelihood for a tendency to rely upon individual mobility tactics. This underlies a perception of possible mobility and group permeability, which can manifest itself in different ways. One consequence could be the abandonment of cultural and traditional values, in an attempt to cut associations with the perceived lower status ingroup. Another

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[79] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 67-68.
[80] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 67.
[81] Shaheen, Jack. G. *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies A People* (Olive Branch Press, 2014).
[82] Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*.

consequence could be, as Al-e Ahmad points out, marrying foreigners, primarily motivated by individual social mobility. This is also in line with Ego and Group Justification. If the Western milieu is painted consistently as significantly better than the Eastern milieu, there will be a temptation to the Easterner to resemble the Westerner. The depiction of the occidentotic milieu thriving on the back of exploitation – coupled with the indigenous milieu being ravaged on every level by the occidentotic power – could be the straw that breaks the camel's back. In other words, the colonial forces warp the perception of the colonized, while simultaneously destroying their life world, and presenting a "better" alternative. Thus, the incentives are often too strong for the Iranian to favor the outgroup and justify the system. This is as the alternatives are apathy, rejection and stagnancy, or rejection and an overwhelmingly uphill endeavor.

Another issue is the derivatives of occidentosis vis-à-vis the Iranian individual, and his or her upbringing. In the aforementioned lines of thought, the underlying commonality is a rejection of the indigenous ingroup, traditions, and culture, in favor of the Western ones. The problem here is the contradiction between this newly found or induced attitude, and the subsequent actions, in relation to the upbringing of the common Iranian. The common Iranian whose life is built upon the pillars of family, community, indigenous traditions, cultural values, religion, and nationalism. This can be added to and is in line with Al-e Ahmad's contradictions within the logic of machine consumption, especially in creating certain psychological consequences while demanding other ones.[83] The transition from embracing the above, to rejecting many of its elements, is likely to cause some form of disruption within the psyche of the Iranian, resulting in cognitive dissonance. In Freudian terms, the simultaneous demands and thus, clashes of the id and the superego are difficult to harmonize. Perhaps, a more tangible example would be the substantial difficulty of maintaining a healthy psyche in light of simultaneously conducting prayers at the religious institution in the morning, and inhaling coke in "places of leisure" at night. In addition to the guilt of betraying one's religious values, there is also the guilt of self-service vis-à-vis nationalism. Here, in our estimation, there is a likelihood for a radical shift within the psyche and thought of the individual as a result of disrupted homeostasis. The internal psychological inconsistency, i.e., internal conflict, in addition to the pressure to pursue a certain path in order to secure the material conditions necessary to survive and thrive in the city, i.e., external conflict, can result in an identity shift. This can be, to some degree, considered a defense mechanism, as it is an attempt to discard the possibility of both self-rejection and social rejection. In our assessment, this culminates in the emergence of the occidentotic archetype or personality. The machine, and by extension occidentosis, seem to demand this conformity.[84] Here, it is also notable to mention that there are potential alternatives to our lines of reasoning, although as inferred from Al-e Ahmad's accounts, these are

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[83] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 66-76.
[84] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 124-126.

less likely. An example can be the rejection of colonial power's classification in favor of a self-definition against the multi-level colonial suggestions. In this respect, one thing to consider would be the utilization of rhetorical resistance on part of the oppressed commoner.[85]

On Education

There are also other contributing factors necessary to mention in order to present a fuller picture. One that is regularly highlighted by Al-e Ahmad is education. This can be considered a mischaracterization in Al-e Ahmad's work, whereby he seems to consider education with any foreign influences to be occidentotic, and subsequently untrustworthy. [86] This attitude seems surprising, especially considering his postcolonial approach vis-à-vis the machine. Here, Al-e Ahmad captures the notion that education cannot be value-free or completely neutral; but is almost always value-laden. His suspicion of Western education passively inducing colonial ideas, in line with colonial benefits, is not far off the mark. This leads to "justifiable cynicism" on the part of Al-e Ahmad, who aptly points out the watering-down of Iranian culture and literature being taught in the Western dominated educational system.[87] The problem here is overgeneralizing and vilifying any foreign influence in education. This is also likely why Al-e Ahmad, in his accounts of the missionaries, does not mention their positive contributions to education in Africa. One example can be of the first higher education center in Sierra Leone, in 1827, which contributed to creating nationalist leadership, and was founded before the schools of colonial governments.[88] Regardless, Al-e Ahmad seems to put everything in the same boat. Another notable point and parallel between Al-e Ahmad and Fanon is the understanding of declared goals vis-à-vis actual goals. This can be inferred through their accounts of women's liberation hurled by the West as a declared goal. Both fail to mention the pragmatic benefits of this liberation; however, their analysis is on the mark as pertaining to the actual goal of colonization. Fanon further explicates the issue in his chapter entitled; "Algeria Unveiled," as he points out to the significance of women's role in subjugation and resistance. A common Western tactic used to ravage the Algerian culture and milieu was the unveiling of Algerian women, the pillars of Algerian society.[89] In the same breath, education entailed a similar declared goal of "civilizing" the "primitive" Persian. In line with the previous case, part of the actual goal was a malevolent attempt at furthering occidentosis. However, the condemnation of Western-influenced higher education, without further scrutiny and

[85] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).
[86] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 112-121.
[87] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 113.
[88] Dana. L. Robert, "Shifting Southward: Global Christianity Since 1945." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, ed. T.J. Hastings, Sage (2000): 51.
[89] Fanon, *L'an V de la révolution algérienne.*

consideration, is similarly questionable. It is part of the educational institution's role to propagate and teach the culture of the land and its people. This includes traditions of all epochs of the country's history – including literature and the classics produced by the people of the land – as well as the processes through which these have contributed to creating the present. It is also important to establish a link between educational institutions and the family, with the educational institutions imparting and disseminate some of the values and ethics of the people of the land. In other words, the educational institution also has a normative function, in addition to its descriptive one. However, this does not prohibit the questioning of any of the aforementioned traditions, values, and norms. This is where the "problems" often arise. It is important to understand that education and knowledge do not appear in a vacuum or from thin air. Rather. they are the result of processes of compiled labor and thought, accumulated over decades and centuries. This is to say, the ways of thinking of students will inevitably be impacted by education. This may include changes in religious attitudes and moral values. This is natural in successful education, which does not occur only in educational institutions, but is also a function of the family and environment. As far as our assessment, the rejection of this proposition seems mutually exclusive with foregoing education and all the benefits that successful education provides. The crux of the argument is the problematic nature of deliberate attempts of educational institutions to enforce certain ways of thinking, to the exception of others, on the student. This stands regardless of the attitude being enforced, and any form of ideology it falls under. The student has the right to an education that provokes thought, encourages exploration, and broadens horizons. The educator and the educational system are devised, in such a way, so as to challenge the student and aid the processes of development and growth, rather than forcing ideas upon the student. The core tenant of education is the freedom of thought. In other words, Al-e Ahmad's seemingly "absolutist" claim seems to be untenable. Higher education that has Western influence is not fundamentally occidentotic; rather, it can possibly be used for colonial purposes. This does not justify the notion, seemingly stemming from frustration, that any educational institution influenced by an opposing group is inherently colonial. Not all educational systems devised by the outgroup are necessarily an attempt at "brainwashing" the youth. This is questionable as Al-e Ahmad states that traditional educators – in some of these educational institutions – have neither been effective nor have they kept up with the times. He adds that the graduates of some Iranian institutions, have been outperformed by Iranian graduates from foreign countries. Again, Al-e Ahmad regards this to be an indirect influence of colonialism, which leads to problems in infrastructure, funding, and which culminates in stagnancy.[90]

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[90] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 112-117.

On the Intellectual and the Commoner

To further demonstrate another problem, there is the case of the Iranian Occidentotic Intellectual and Official. In light of the processes described through social psychology, one potential outcome is the emergence of the occidentotic intellectual or official. This returnee from the West is usually educated in a specialty and is characterized by material success and status. However, by Al-e Ahmad's account, the occidentotic intellectual does little to benefit his community, rather further contributing to its demise by spreading Occidentosis.[91] This assessment is reasonable; however, Al-e Ahmad seems to sideline an important factor of continuity, which brings into question his consistency. The issue at hand is the question of structure and agency. In some parts of his work, Al-e Ahmad seems to emphasize human agency, particularly in treating the intellectual and holding him accountable. This seems inconsistent with his previously mentioned depiction of the common Iranian, whereby he emphasizes structure at the expanse of agency.[92] He seems to overlook the possibility that the common Iranian from the village could be the younger version of the returnee occidentotic intellectual or specialist. To further understand, one needs to consider Al-e Ahmad's outlook, and subsequently his hope of the ideal in writing his book:

> If one can maintain a role for our educational system, it is to disclose outstanding personalities who, in the midst of this social disorder (arising from the crisis of occidentosis), can lead this caravan somewhere. The aim of our educational system, such as it is, must not and cannot be to conventionalize, to uniformize, to homogenize people so they will all put up with the existing situation and come to terms with it. Especially for us, who live in this age of transformation and crisis and are undergoing this period of social transition, it is only with the help of self-sacrificing, self-surpassing, and principled people (who in the usage of pop psychology are termed antisocial, rigid, and unbalanced) that the weight of this transformation and crisis may be borne and that the social disorder described in this work may be remedied.[93]

By all means, this seems to be written with a noble intent, which is seminal in Iranian culture. The problem is in its seemingly unrealistic idealism, which demands too much of the Iranian student. In this respect, some important questions arise; why should a bright young mind sacrifice and endeavor, choosing a more difficult path as opposed to the path of least resistance? This question is further amplified in light of

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[91] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 90.
[92] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 92.
[93] Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis,* 131.

Iranian stagnancy, and the western malevolent entity being effective in contributing to this stagnancy, while simultaneously presenting substantially better and more tempting alternatives. In Al-e Ahmad's paradigm, it is the tradition, indigenous values, and nationalist unity that would be the decisive factor. This can also be inferred as the crux of Al-e Ahmad's disfavor of Western influence in Iranian education. Regardless, the problem is the material needs of the individual superseding Al-e Ahmad's seemingly idealistic expectations. This, in line with our social psychological theoretical lines, make it more likely that the Iranian commoner is the future occidentotic intellectual. Subsequently, Al-e Ahmad's judgement of the potential future self of the common Iranian crumbles upon insistence to de-emphasize the agency of the common Iranian. Alternatives give rise to other problematic questions relating to power. Idealistic notions aside, what is the difference between the common Iranian, and his future self? A simple answer is socio-economic status, and subsequently, more control of his or her life. Regardless of how individuals turn out, they are a product of their environment and structure, with their agency at play to navigate the external. The problem is Al-e Ahmad's emphasis of agency when analyzing an individual of higher socio-economic status and control, while subsequently de-emphasizing agency, when analyzing the exact same person with lower socio-economic status and power. This almost seems as Al-e Ahmad advocating for Nietzschean slave morality. The assessment that the same individual is not to be blamed when S/he is helpless and oppressed – but becomes part of the problem when S/he takes control and makes something of their life – seems to be dubious. This is to say, that in the context of nationalism, Al-e Ahmad's concerns are perfectly well placed. However, in a humano-centric worldview, this reading of the Iranian intellectual, viz. the future of what can be considered the common Iranian, seems to be harsh. It is important to emphasize that the fundamental and core culprits are the colonial forces. Thus, by this assessment, it is important to reframe this inconsistency in Al-e Ahmad's line of argumentation. The Iranian commoner cannot be expected to remain in a state where S/he has no control over their life. In other words, as far as our assessment in concerned, no one, including Al-e Ahmad, has the grounds to lay blame on the Persian who pursuits the path of least resistance for their and their family's wellbeing. This is again not an attempt at justifying occidentosis of any kind, but rather, an attempt to understand the psyche of the Iranian in navigating the uncertainties of the time. It is a call to acknowledge that the individual, which is a temporary entity supplied with limited time, is stuck between a rock and a hard place. The vicious cycle is certainly difficult to break, with the colonial power inducing a pandemic, while simultaneously providing a seemingly affective vaccine. In our assessment, understanding the psyche of the individual, and what S/he most likely perceives to be what is best for them, is crucial in a rigorous analysis of occidentosis. In addition, assessing the seemingly uncomfortable and incompatible contradiction – between the needs of the individual and the nation vis-à-vis occidentosis – is crucial for reclaiming indigeneity and authenticity, as opposed to the so-called decolonization efforts. It seems that normative suggestions that stand a chance of making contributions to a solution are the ones that are pragmatic and of realist orientation, as opposed to idealistic prayers. In this pursuit, the prevailing realities of internalized inferiority – with subsequent openness and tendency to

outgroup favoritism, and individualistic orientation – are central parts of the multivariant equation.

Conclusion

With occidentosis' invasion of the Iran, erudite intellectuals like Al-e Ahmad, provided challenges to colonialism, describing the 'ravaged' life world of the Iranian milieu. Like Fanon and Said, Al-e Ahmad presents nuanced readings of colonialism, decolonialism and postcolonialism. Colonialism has been around as long as time, with its modern interpretation associated with 15th century modernity and capitalism. It is an iteration of expansionism, with a flexible interpretation of it seeming appropriate, with the divide between the pre-capitalist and post-capitalist eras. Al-e Ahmad's historical approach underlies his normative approach; as he considers both the decolonial and postcolonial, favoring the latter. Decolonialism cuts ties with the West, while postcolonialism maintains them, emphasizing indigenous authenticity. Al-e Ahmad's "Occidentosis" runs parallel to Said's "Orientalism" and Fanon's "zone of nonbeing." The colonized is deemed inferior; subsequently, being dehumanized and oppressed. Unlike Fanon and Said, Al-e Ahmad only briefly mentions language; but similar to Fanon, he highlights conformity to colonial culture. He also discusses severing tactics from one's indigenous culture through attachment to a foreigner by marriage, for example. Thus, emphasis is put on internalized inferiority and the need for compensation and recognition. This culminates in a call for revolution and an endeavor for liberation, with Islam and nationalism as central pillars, as opposed to Fanon's complete break from the past.

In line with Al-e Ahmad's call for a psychological approach to the analysis of occidentosis, we employ social psychological theories to understand the formation of the "Occidentotic" archetype. Unlike Fanon's psychoanalytic approach in response to Mannoni's mischaracterizations, we rely on lines of reasoning inferred through the work of Al-e Ahmad. We put emphasis on the individual, with an attempt to draw a general picture, with potential alternatives. As disciplinary approaches are difficult to apply due to lacking data, the analysis can be considered non disciplinary. Al-e Ahmad identifies the intellectuals, officials, clergy stagnancy, and media as prominent agents in the spread of occidentosis. Urbanization follows, resulting in unemployment and poor living standards. By his nature to compare and self-categorize, the commoner heads to the city for education and social mobility. After securing bread and butter, grooming and wealth become the prerequisite for individual mobility. Added to the equation, conformity to the distorted image of self, and group, echoed by the colonial media, outgroup favoritism and system justification arise. The resulting failure in the pursuit of glory, and material well-being, leads to meaninglessness and unhealthy coping mechanisms, which oppose the values S/he has been brought up upon. The resulting cognitive dissonance creates the internal conflict, which when paired with external material pressures, bring upon an identity shift. In other words, this can be described as the emergence of the occidentotic personality. It is worth noting that these lines of reasoning are not exclusive, as subjectivity is in play, which allows potential alternatives.

Additionally, Al-e Ahmad has many bones of contention against the educational system in Iran, which he finds ridden by the bad influences of Western modernity, resulting in the relative failure of some local educational institutions. Al-e Ahmad mischaracterizes the Iranian intellectual and official, categorizing them as completely different from the common Iranian, and laying blame upon them for being occidentotic. Simultaneously, he understands the commoner as blameless. This is problematic as it paves leeway for Nietzschean slave morality, sidelining the possibility that the commoner of yesterday becomes the occidentotic of today, in pursuit of a better life. This misunderstanding is excusable under the pressure of the conditions of the time. It is an overambitious endeavor to propose a theory that slices through the multilayered scheme of colonial forces that aims at undermining indigenous life and promoting Western-centric ideals about the good life. And so, construing the psychological process of occidentosis realistically – with its subjectivity and material conditions – remains crucial for any further prescription.

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Ali Shariati and the Foundations of Islamic Socialism: Muhammad, Capitalism, and the Post-Metaphysical Socialist Alternative

Dustin J. Byrd[1]

Abstract: This essay seeks to clarify the political-economic foundations of the Islamic tradition, demonstrating that at its core, modern capitalism is incompatible with spirit and letter of Islam, the Sunnah of Muhammad, and basic Islamic moral and economic concepts such as *ribā* (usury), and theological concepts such as *Tawḥīd* (Oneness of God). Using the Hegelian notion of *Aufheben* (determinate negation), especially in the way Jürgen Habermas uses it as a means to "translate" religious semantics and semiotics into post-metaphysical reasoning, the article argues that socialism itself must be Islamized, as a means to escaping the iron cage of Western capitalism in the Muslim world. An exemplar of such a translation, the article argues, is Ali Shariati.

Introduction

The globalization of neo-liberal capitalism not only spread industrialization, consumerism, and a necrophilic-consumerist way-of-being-in-the-world, but it also internationalized the angst that Karl Marx once thought was the sole property of the industrial workers in the West. Just as the European proletariat gained consciousness of its exploitation at the hands of its ruling class, so too have industrial workers in the shops and factories of the "Restern" (non-Western) world begun to identify their exploitation and long for its removal. As it stands, neo-liberalism does not

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discriminate against from whom it extracts surplus value, as long as that surplus value continues to accumulate within the hands of the elite few. The reality of global neo-liberal exploitation has led many people in the Restern world to look for a way out of such exploitation: the socialist alternative, wherein surplus value will be returned back to those who produce it. However, the wholesale adoption of socialism as it is so expressed within the Western world causes many problems in Restern societies, as such forms of Western socialism are accompanied by Western forms of secularity, Western biases, cultural norms, and assumptions about human nature, attitudes towards religion, that are incongruent with the polyphony of Restern values, principles, and traditions. Because of this, alternative forms of socialism, that consider the cultural and social norms of Restern societies, need to be invented.

One particular Restern form of socialism that stands out as an exemplar in the latter half of the 20th century was devised by Ali Shariati – the Shi'i scholar and revolutionary, whose crossover works invigorated an ossified Shi'i Islam with *Klassenbewusstsein* (class consciousness) while retaining the authenticity of its foundational sources. In bringing Islam and revolutionary class struggle together, through a "determinate negation" (*Aufheben*) of both, Shariati produced not only a form of Islamic socialism but also a method by which other Restern societies can determinately negate Western socialism and thus create forms of socialism that are more congruent with their native traditions, culture, religion, etc.

In this essay, I will examine the primary sources of Islam in order to demonstrate that socialism as a political-economic system is not only compatible with Islam, but best reflects the foundational values of Islam, especially the theological category of *Tawḥīd* (oneness of God), whereas capitalism, because it is inherently polytheistic, is fundamentally irreconcilable with Islam. Second, I will demonstrate that Ali Shariati's political philosophy, informed by Karl Marx and other Left-wing socialists, understood the incompatibility of capitalism with Islam, and thus synthesized an Islamic form of socialism by determinately negating those aspects of historical Islam that made it affirmative of the capitalist status quo. Last, I will address the possibility of forging Restern forms of socialism that are rooted within a religious tradition, especially Islam, and the possible difficulties with such a project. With the help of the critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, I will argue that Islamic socialism must, in the present time, be determinately negated via a process of "translation" into post-metaphysical language, so as to avoid constructing future theocracies, which are often predisposed to privileging certain segments of the demos above others. Ultimately, the move towards indigenous forms of socialism are attempts to (1) rescue indigenous societies cultural authenticity from its disintegration at the hands of neo-liberal globalization, and (2) to reclaim the surplus value of the Restern workers, so that it may be reinvested within the Restern society for the benefit of the Restern society, as opposed to being extracted and accumulated among the Western ruling classes.

Der Geist des Kapitalismus

According to Karl Marx, the Bourgeoisie has achieved innumerable cultural and civilizational accomplishments. Since it removed the feudal lords and the aristocracy from their august positions, it has created a world that reflects its values: economic

rationalism, industrialism, efficiency, and standardization. It has created an innumerable amount of goods and services, which have benefited much of mankind; it has broken open the barriers between peoples and in the process established global markets for international trade; it has invented and produced communication systems that allow people from opposite sides of the planet to talk with each other instantaneously; it has created the modern cities made of concrete, glass, and steal; it has produced cyberspace, wherein mankind can both live its physical existence but also a connected existence within a virtual realm; the bourgeois society has brought mankind to the outer reaches of our solar system with satellites, telescopes, and planetary probes. Even now, there is talk of colonizing the moon and other planets in the not too distant future. By harnessing the power of instrumental reason, there seems to be no limits to what the bourgeois societies can do.[2] Yet, according to Marx, despite all the rational advances that bourgeois societies have accomplished, it has not yet been able to overcome what it inherited from the feudal society, its fundamental class antagonism.[3] In other words, with the removal of the feudal lords, the revolutionary bourgeoisie created another form of "freedom for the few," but not "freedom for all" as they promised. Like the feudal lords before them, their existence as the new ruling class is dependent on the subjugation and exploitation of the masses. However, instead of serfs, tied to the feudal lords' land, the industrialized bourgeoisie "employed" workers – the proletariat – those who sold their labor in exchange for a wage. In the 20th and 21st century, the proletarianization of the masses took place on a global scale, and thus wealth extraction too was globalized. Additionally, the world was made the consumers of the good produced by the bourgeois system of exchange.

In Marxist theory, at the heart of this exchange of labor-for-wage agreement, lies the *Essence of Capitalism* (*der Geist des Kapitalismus*): surplus value extraction. With this in mind, capitalism can be defined as the "private accumulation of collective surplus value," wherein the "surplus" wealth created by the labor of the workers is appropriated by the owners of the means of production. In other words, the working class produces a "net product which can be sold for more than they receive as wages."[4] Since wages are an objectified form of labor, the extraction of wealth created by the worker – leaving only a small fraction of that wealth to the worker in the form of a wage – is theft in Marx's analysis. While it may be legal in bourgeois society, it is not just, as it deprives those who create the wealth for the excessive benefit of the other who didn't create the wealth.

For Marx, those who did not labor to produce wealth should not be able to appropriate it above and beyond their own labor, for to do so robs the workers of the

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[2] Admittedly, these accomplishments often are accompanied by the generous backing of the state, both in resources and funding.

[3] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto,* translated by Martin Milligan (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 209-210.

[4] Tom Bottomore et al. "Surplus Value," in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 472.

fruits of their work. In capitalism, the greater the distance between the wage and the total amount of objectified labor produced by workers, the greater the "profits." The greater the profits, the greater the achievements created by the bourgeoisie, but also the greater the impoverishment created amongst the toiling classes, who are only paid enough to maintain their minimum physical existence and are therefore always on the verge of collapse. [5] Because workers must conform to this "reified" social arrangement in order to sustain themselves, the masses remain wholly dependent upon their "superiors" for their basic needs. Flourishing, for them, is out of the question, as it would mean a greater appropriation of their own collective surplus value and thus the diminishment of the ruling classes' profits. For Marx, knowledge of this exploitative arrangement leads to *Klassenbewusstsein* (class consciousness), and inevitably to hostilities between those who produce surplus value and those who appropriate it: the working proletariat and the owning bourgeoisie.[6]

In this analysis, two things are of moral concern: first, that the essential nature of capitalism is exploitative, as it benefits the few at the expense of the many, even though the many produce the means of existence for the few. Second, that this social arrangement leaves the masses completely at the mercy of a ruling class, who by definition is parasitic. The working masses are unable to achieve any meaningful actualization of their full "human nature" (*Gattungswesen*) since their material existence is determined by their masters, not by their own autonomy, will, and industriousness. Since this class arrangement is also a matter of social morality, it falls within the general concerns of the Abrahamic religions, as they, unlike their pagan predecessors, are sources of moral codes, and are expressly concerned with the plight and predicament of those who have found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy. As it is a matter of Abrahamic religion, it is a matter of Islam; and as a matter of Islam, it is a matter of Muhammad the Prophet of Islam.

Muhammad and the Spirit of Capitalism

The Qurʾān is unquestionably the most authoritative source of Islam. Although there are many "juridical disagreements" (*ikhtilāf*) on the meanings of its many *ayat* (verses), the book itself takes second place to no other source among the believers. Being the *kalām Allah*, or "speech of God," it is ultimately the final say on where an action falls within the *al-aḥkām al-khamsa* (five categories) of permissibility and impermissibility. According to *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), all actions belong within one of five categories: *Farḍ* (or *wājib*) (obligatory), *mustaḥabb* (recommended), *muḥab* (neutral), *Makrūh* (disapproved), or *ḥarām* (prohibited).

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[5] Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1-30.

[6] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1978), 603-617.

With the use of *'aql* (reason), *qiyās* (analytical reasoning), and *ijmā'* (juristic consensus), legal scholars in Islam, both among the Sunni and Shi'i, attempt to use the authoritative source to determine that which is *ḥalāl* (permissible) and that which is *ḥarām*; that which is allowable via both the Qurʾān and Sunnah and that which is not. There has been an *ijmā'* concerning the issue of "excessive profit taking" (*ribā*) in all major *maḏāhib* (schools of law) that stems from particular verses in the Qurʾān, including *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, verses 275-276, which reads:

> Those who devour usury shall not rise except as one rises who is
> felled by the touch of Satan. That is because they say, "Buying and
> selling are simply like usury," although God has permitted buying
> and selling and forbidden usury. One who, after receiving counsel
> from his Lord, desists shall have what is past and his affair goes to
> God. And as for those who go back, they are the inhabitants of the
> Fire, abiding therein. God blights usury and causes acts of charity
> to grow. And God loves not any sinful ingrate. Truly those who
> believe, perform righteous deeds, maintain the prayer, and give the
> alms shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come
> upon them, nor shall they grieve. O you who believe! Reverence
> God, and leave what remains of usury, if you are believers.[7]

It becomes clear from this Qurʾānic passage that *ribā* has been deemed *ḥarām* in all its forms. Yet, some scholars argue that the Qurʾān's prohibition against *ribā'* only includes two major forms: the paying of interest on loans (*ribā al-nasīʾah*, or "growth through deferment") and the disparity between things traded (*ribā al-faḍl*, or "growth through surplus").[8] These two categories are congruent with pre-modern trading and loan practices and are still relevant for contemporary individual business dealings. However, as they are traditionally understood among the *fuqahā* (jurists), that is within the context of Muhammad's Arabia and pre-modern Muslim world, they shed little light on today's most-pressing issue: the hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism and its global extraction of surplus value from billions of works. Unlike the localized trading of the bazaars and *sūqs* (markets) during Muhammad's life, neo-liberal capitalism is an economic system that not only governs individual transactions, but governs the global economy, government policy, international trade agreements, tax shelters, and international affairs, including war and peace, and has no religious nor secular morality by which it is governed – only the force of law, which is most often feckless in its oversight if not allied with the forces of neo-liberalism. While it undoubtedly produces vast amounts of wealth for some, such neo-liberal political economics inflicts *ḍarar fāḥish* (exorbitant harm) upon millions of others, as it is a form of *iḥtikār* (profiteering) via the "hoarding of wealth" for the benefit of the few.

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[7] al-Qurʾān 2:275-278, 2015: 119. One can also find the discussion of ribā in the Qurʾān in 3:130, 4:161, 30:39, as well as Muhammad's "Farewell Speech."
[8] See Seyyed Hossein Nasr's comments on al-Qurʾān 2:275-281 (al-Qurʾān, 2015:119-121).

What many within the secular social science fail to see is that neo-liberal capitalism is a comprehensive worldview as well as an economic system that is rooted in a secularized polytheism; it is an extreme apotheosis of greed, wealth, status, and power. [9] As such, the legal aspects of Islam that one would assume would be concerned with the exploitative nature of neo-liberalism may not necessarily be the most affective or even applicable. In other words, traditional Islamic laws against *ribā* may not be enough to stem the tide of neo-liberalism, as it not only disregards religious morality, it has many other ways of extracting immense amounts of wealth from the masses other than through loan interests and disparity in things traded. This situation calls for a philosophical category by which neo-liberalism can be combated in the Muslim World. I argue that such defensive resources can be found in Muhammad's sunnah, as his struggle against market-based polytheism of Mecca serves as a better example for the struggle against modern neo-liberal polytheism. Since polytheism is inherently a theological matter, such defensive resources can also be located in Islamic theology, especially the concept of *Tawḥīd* (absolute monotheism). Why?

The traditional concerns of ribā laws - *ribā al-nasī'ah* and *ribā al-faḍl* (deferment and surplus) – pertain either to services (loans with interest) or circulation (disparity in trade), but generally do not speak to ribā as a problem of industrial production and ownership of the means of production. However, if the two traditional forms of ribā are concerned with the immorality of certain forms of profit (profit that is gained through unjust dealings), then certainly profits accumulated for the few through the legalized extraction of surplus value of the many, should likewise fall within the purview of ribā laws, as it too is morally questionable. Additionally, as surplus value extraction is a constituent matter of modern capitalism, and not simple trade within the traditional economic ethos (ala Weber), which was normative during Muhammad's life, it is also a matter that calls out for both *qiyās* (analytic reasoning) and *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) among the *fuqahā*, lest the instrumental reason of capitalism and its relentless drive for an ever-greater accumulation of wealth undermine the communicative spirit of Islam, and therefore the ability of Muslims to resist being forcefully integrated into the domination of globalized neo-liberalism.

Thus, in order to assess the proper relationship between Islam and neo-liberal capitalism, it is important to undermine the capitalist ideology that says Muhammad's religion is reconcilable with the spirit of capitalism. In order to do that, we must turn to the *sīrah* (prophetic biography) of Muhammad himself.

When discussing whether or not capitalism is justifiable within the Islamic tradition, many capitalists, both Muslim and non-Muslim, point to Muhammad's pre-Islamic occupation as a trader and caravaneer as evidence of capitalism's

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[9] Dustin J. Byrd, *A Critique of Ayn Rand's Philosophy of Religion: The Gospel According to John Galt* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 169-184.

reconcilability with Islam.[10] It is argued that Muhammad was a businessman, and that as a businessman he engaged in a life of commerce, the buying and selling of goods in order to produce the maximum amount of profit. In fact, it is often cited that he traveled great distances from Mecca to Palestine and Syria in order to make the best business deals, for those were the markets wherein the commodities he was selling were most in demand. The pursuit of profit drove Muhammad, the "honest businessman" known as "al-Amin." (the trustworthy), to spend much of his professional life on the road, away from his family.[11] Indeed, some biographers point to Muhammad's business acumen as a compelling reason why Khadija, his first wife, was attractive to him.[12] However, being a successful caravaneer is not the same as being a successful capitalist; they are not synonymous as the motivational factor behind such an economic life may be differentiated.

When looking closely at the *sīrah* of Muhammad, we see that the claim that Muhammad engaged in "capitalism," or "proto-capitalism," completely collapses. First, the motivation for capitalism is to accumulate as much surplus value as possible in the form of profits, whereas the motivation for "traditional economics," ala Weber, is the accumulation of capital wherein one can maintain and reproduce one's material existence. In other words, profit for profit's sake is the goal of capitalism, and this goal motivates the capitalist to accumulate wealth beyond his needs. Maintaining one's material existence, i.e., satisfying the physical needs of humanity, without the expectation of luxury and extravagance, is the goal of traditional economics. Neither in his pre-Islamic years, nor after he turned towards a formal religious life, can we find Muhammad engaged in anything that can be remotely confused with a life dedicated to the maximization of profits.

Even if we examine Muhammad's early life as a businessman, and for the sake of argument accept the idea that he pursued profit, it is clear that he was not very successful in the accumulation of collective surplus value, for even before his life as a religious leader, he did not live a wealthy lifestyle. Although Khadija was a woman

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[10] For a very contrived attempt to reconcile Islam and capitalism, see the former banker Benedikt Koehler's 2014 book, *Early Islam and the Birth of Capitalism.* Lanham, MA: Lexington Books. Koehler argues that capitalism had its roots not in the Reformation as Weber thinks, or even in Europe as Marx demonstrates, but rather with Islam. Koehler has numerous overlaps with Maxime Rodinson's 2007 book *Islam and Capitalism.* Berkeley, CA: Saqi Books. Neither book deals with capitalism as a theological problem and thus neither get to capitalism and Islam's fundamental antagonisms.

[11] Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life based on the Earliest Sources* (London: Inner Traditions, 2006), 33-36.

[12] Juan Cole, *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace amid the Clash of Empires* (New York: Nation Books, 2018), 28.

According to Ibn Isḥaq, Khadija's professed love for Muhammad didn't specifically include his business acumen. Khadija is reported to have said: "Son of mine uncle, I love thee for they kinship with me, and for that that thou art ever in the center, not being a partisan amongst the people for this or for that; and I love thee for thy trustworthiness and for the beauty of thy character and the truth of thy speech" (as quoted in Lings, 2006: 35).

of means, those means were in relation to a patriarchal market-society, wherein a "woman of means" simply meant "not poor," i.e., her material needs were satiated through her modest income. In whatever way she accumulated her wealth, either through inheritance, through being a widow, or through business acumen, she may have achieved a comfortable existence, wherein her and Muhammad did not live as precariat on the margins of Arabian society. Even in owning the "means of production," i.e., the caravans, such caravans still did not generate enough surplus value for her and Muhammad to live beyond the existence of working people. At best, they had primitive capital accumulation, which allowed them to pay themselves from the wealth produced by the caravan without extracting and absorbing the majority of the surplus value from those who worked for them.

One of the most important goals of capitalism is the accumulation of wealth to the point where wealth begets wealth, and the owner of the wealth no longer has to labor in order to produce the means of their survival. This was never the case for Muhammad as it may have been for Khadija before her marriage to Muhammad. Khadija may have received "dead labor" through the form of a monetary inheritance, but Muhammad generated his own wealth through his own labor.

As stated before, what is clear from the sīrah is that Muhammad engaged in what Weber calls "economic traditionalism," wherein the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) is divided between work time, which is seen simply as a means of survival, and non-work time: family time, devotional time, social time, etc. This "frame of mind" (*Gesinnung*) stands in opposition to capitalism in two ways: early capitalism sanctified all time as being sacred; even the businessman was engaged in perpetual devotion when he engaged in business, simply because being a businessman was re-conceptualized in the Protestant Reformation as a religious "calling" (*Beruf*). Again, Muhammad engaged in devotional practices whilst working, but there is no sign that labor itself was conceived to be an act of devotion akin to *ṣalāh* (prayer), *zakāh* (alms giving), *hajj* (pilgrimage), etc. There remains a clear distinction between these two realms of human activity. Second, and more importantly, capitalism is the accumulation of collective surplus value crystallized in the form of profit. In other words, amassing the greatest amount of profit is the ultimate object of capitalism; it is its goal in-and-of-itself. This is completely alien to the "traditional economic ethic" as Weber lays it out. Work stops when the requisite wealth needed to reproduce and/or sustain one's existence is acquired. In other words, when the necessary amount of wealth is obtained to fulfill the needs, labor stops, despite the fact that more profit could be generated if more time was devoted to such labor. Profit, in the traditional economic ethic, is a means-to-an-end, not an end in-and-of-itself as it is in capitalism. Therefore, the satiation of needs via wealth acquired through labor determines the length and nature of the labor itself.

Again, there is nothing in the *sīrah* to suggest that Muhammad labored beyond what was necessary to fulfill his and his family's financial needs. The fact that he and his family lived in a simple mud-brick home and slept on straw, amidst a market society of wealth, wherein much of that wealth came via market exchange, the same type of business Muhammad was in, points in the direction that he embraced a traditional economic ethos, not one that is reconcilable to the spirit of capitalism, and certainly not one reconcilable to neo-liberal capitalism, wherein the "spirit of the

market" infects all matters within the lifeworld. As Muhammad's biographer writes, "He did not despise wealth, nor did he seek any vain ideals. He only had a fine sense of proportion. He realized that wealth was not an end in itself. It was means to a higher end" (Salahi, 1995: 39). In other words, when it came towards wealth, Muhammad possessed *wasaṭiyyah* (moderation and balance); neither living in self-imposed poverty, nor was he engaged in *ẓulm* (oppression) through the "unlawful possession" (*qabḍ al-fāsid*) of other people's surplus value.

In order to demonstrate that capitalism itself is beyond reconcilability with Islam, this anti-capitalist Islamic argument must be taken even further. It must be taken into the realm of theology, as the theological message of Islam, radical monotheism (*Tawḥīd*), is the core message of Islam.

The False God of Capitalism

It's one thing to demonstrate that Muhammad did not engage in anything that is akin to capitalism, including its surplus value extraction. It is another thing to argue that Muhammad fought against the idolatry of the market, i.e., the apotheosis of greed, wealth, status, and power, but that is precisely what he did. Centered around the foundational concept of *Tawḥīd*, the oneness of God, Muhammad set Islam against all forms of idolatry (*Shirk*). On the phenomenal level, this simply means the false deification (*Deificatio*) of that which is not Divine, i.e., the act of believing the created is the creator, the temporal as atemporal, the finite with the infinite. On the noumenal level, it is the false-absolutization of that which is less-than-absolute. To push the theology into the social realm, it is the making of anything other than the divine the ultimate concern of the life. In this latter sense, shirk is not only the phenomenal carving of idols from wood and stone and worshiping them, or the worship of a human, animal, or totem, but also a matter of the noumenal and mundane; any value, principle, or ideal that – including the desire to accumulate wealth, status, and power – is also shirk, albeit translated into de-anthropomorphized gods. This form of shirk animates the private accumulation of collective surplus value, as it sets up the goal of existence as being the maximum acquisition of wealth, with money being the false-absolute. In this sense, Islam comes to agree with Pope Francis, who wrote in his *Evangelii Gaudium*, in the section called "No to the New Idolatry of Money," that:

> We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lack a truly human purpose… we calmly accept its [money's] dominion over ourselves and our societies… In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever

> is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests
> of a *deified market,* which become the only rule.[13]

In his writings on the deification of the market and the idolatry of money, Pope Francis expresses the same prophetic Geist that Muhammad embodied living within the idolatrous market-based paganism of Mecca.[14] Yet, it is the Pope of Rome who expressed the *Islamic* critique of *Tawḥīd* more forcefully than any public figure within the traditional *ulamāʾ* (Islamic scholars) or among the leaders of Muslim-majority countries. It is the Pope who recently invigorated a religious-based *Klassenbewusstsein* (class consciousness) amidst the prevailing conditions of neo-liberalism, as opposed to those whose who follow Muhammad. The deification of the market, in an attempt to maximize profits for the few at the expense of the many, is a move behind Tawḥīd, and as such capitalism cannot be reconciled with Islam, as it violates – and stands in perpetual opposition to – Islam's most basic and constitutional tenet: the oneness of the divine and the command to submit only to that divine. While this analysis does not originate in the Islamic laws against ribā (per se), it does proceed from the basic tenets of Islamic *Kalām* (theology). As such, the critique of capitalism, as the false apotheosis of money and the deification of the market, must be taken seriously by Islamic scholars, especially the *mutakallimūn* (theologians), or risk being "dominated" by false idols of money, capital, greed, and other forms of shirk, that have become normative as neo-liberalism continues to colonize the global lifeworld.

I argue that any attempt to make Muhammad a "free-market-friendly" religious figure, one that can be reconciled with the neo-liberal capitalism of today, which unjustly extracts trillions of dollars from those who labor to create such wealth, fundamentally distorts the record of Muhammad's economic life, as it unjustly adjusts his trading acumen to capitalism's accumulation of wealth as a way-of-being-in-the-world, a worldview that Muhammad not only rejected, but fought against in Arabia.[15] Indeed, in this vision of a pro-capitalist Islam, Muhammad himself is ideologically functionalized; he becomes a sanctifying tool for the justification of an Islam that is compromised by the spirit (*Geist*) of shirk – the greed and exploitation that animates capitalism – and thus remains uncritical of the harm (*mafsadah*) capitalism inevitably causes among the world's population, including Muslims. When Muslim capitalists

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[13] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)* (Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013), 29.

[14] Byrd, *The Gospel of John Galt*, 169-184.

[15] For the record, I do not think Juan Cole's book on Muhammad distorts the history of Muhammad in this way. Rather, he does, like so many other biographers, make a point to say that Muhammad's business success was one of the things that attracted Khadija to him, and so it may have been. However, this shouldn't be used as evidence that Muhammad or Khadija would have justified the level of wealth extraction typical of modern neo-liberal capitalism, for one can be gifted with business acumen and excel in commerce without being dedicated to the maximization of profits as an absolute goal of life.

engage in the furthering of this ideologically disfigured image of Muhammad, they become the most effective *Träger* (social carrier) of a form of Islam open for surplus value extraction, and therefore an Islam not only forgiving of exploitation, but furthering it.[16] Ultimately, this capitalized-Islam is a utilitarian adaptation of a prophetic religion for the benefit of economic neo-liberalism, and functionalized as a mean to legitimate the neo-liberalization of the *dār al-Islām*.

Normative Foundations

It may be the case from a secular perspective that the two sources for this understanding of Muhammad's economic life are untrustworthy to the outside observer. The Qurʾān, after all, is considered to be "divine revelation" (*waḥy*), which the Enlightenment, especially since Kant's demonstration of the inaccessibility of the thing-in-itself, the secular sciences cannot account for. The sīrah, or "sacred biography" of Muhammad, could merely be hagiography, an ideal rendering of an otherwise very human life, thus making his prejudice against unjust profits sacred and beyond reproach. Nevertheless, for the Muslim believer, these two sources are sacred and God-given, and therefore normative and sources of "imitation" (*taqlīd*). They are part of a sacred infrastructure that determines the life of the believers. Without them there is no Islam, and without Islam there are no Muslims.

 Regardless of whether their claims can be objectively verified to the satisfaction of secular social sciences, these two religious sources constitute the moral foundation of the religious tradition, and therefore govern whether or not something can be found to be reconcilable with Islam. From the perspective of Muhammad's *sunnah* (way), found in the *Ḥadīth* and *sīrah*, and the Qurʾān, an economic system that is based in exploitation and the relentless pursuit of profit, as a complete and total way-of-being-in-the-world (*homo economicus*), cannot be reconciled with the prophetic values of justice and equality, as the goals of each are mutually exclusive. Indeed, Muhammad himself rejected the market-society of Mecca and its pagan gods for a society rooted in *Tawḥīd* (radical monotheism), which included the dethroning of the market as a moral-political way-of-being-in-the-world in favor of economic traditionalism, which does not take profit making as an end-in-itself, but rather views money simply as a means to an end: the establishment and reproduction of the just society.

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[16] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Stephen Kalberg (Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2002), 11, 18, 27.
For Max Weber, every influential idea that bears the capacity to define civilizational norms must have an influential "carrier" group. In the case of Islam and capitalism, it is the successful Muslim capitalist that is able to legitimate a pro-free market form of Islam to the Muslim world, despite the evidence that Islam began in protest against certain market features that are constitutional to capitalism.

Ali Shariati's Religion versus Religion: The Theological Basis for Alternative Political-Economics

The Iranian revolutionary intellectual, Ali Shariati, understood the theological nature of the capitalist enterprise better than any other contemporary Islamic thinker. His critique of capitalism, *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxification), imperialism, and class domination, harkens back to Muhammad's struggle against Meccan paganism.[17] It is rooted in what he saw as the binary opposition between two theological concepts: *Tawḥīd* (monotheism) and *Shirk* (polytheism). In the two lectures that constitute his book, *Religion versus Religion,* Shariati lays out the thesis that Abrahamic monotheism has *not* been opposed by irreligion – or atheism – throughout its history but rather has been opposed by another form of religion: polytheism – the religion of multiple gods.[18] However, what's most important to Shariati is not that there is a purely theological contestation between monotheism and polytheism, but rather that that this contestation takes place within history, amidst people. In other words, the realm of the noumenal is expressed positively within the realm of the phenomenal. As in Muhammad's 7th century Arabia, the theological antagonism becomes a "worldly" struggle between the theory and praxis of Tawḥīd and the theory and praxis of Shirk, both of which export their own values and interests into the historical process, and thus shape societies.

Shariati rejects the common idea that the Islamic term "*kuffār*" designates the "godless"; rather, he argues that kuffār corresponds to the *mušrikūn* – those who engage in *Shirk* (polytheism), and who worship idols of their false-gods.[19] The apotheosis of the temporal is the determining essence of idolatry, which, Shariati reminds his readers, is condemned by the Qurʾān's (37:95) rhetorical question: "Do you worship that which you carve."[20] Shariati takes this condemnation as a "general principle," by which he will interrogate the polytheistic nature of modern capitalism, imperialism, and class domination.[21] This is important because Shariati believes that polytheism was not annihilated by the advent of monotheism, rather it "moved forward, throughout history, side by side and step by step, exactly parallel with the religion of monotheism and it continues to move forward with it."[22] As such, we can argue that in the modern secular society, polytheism took on a secular form. It no longer "carved" its deities out of wood and stone per se, but rather it molded its deities out of the building-blocks of capitalism: greed, wealth, power, and status. What remains congruent from older and more explicit forms of polytheism is that idols are

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[17] For more on *Gharbzadegi,* see Jalal Al-i Ahmad's *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West,* trans. R. Campbell. Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1984.
[18] Ali Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion,* trans. by Laleh Bakhtiar (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 2003), 19-41.
[19] Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion,* 24-25, 45.
[20] Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed), *The Study Quran* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 1093.
[21] Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion,* 25.
[22] Ibid.

still worshipped; they are still the utmost concern for the polytheists, and therefore in contradistinction to monotheism. For Shariati, polytheism is essential to the reproduction and reification of the capitalist-imperialist status quo, which is determined by the domination of the *mala'* (wealthy aristocrats) and *mutrif* (insatiate rulers) over the wretched and abased masses.[23] Capitalism's apotheosis of false gods is its essence. Polytheism, being its animating spirit, as well as the spirit of sycophantic imperialism, justifies, legitimatizes, and sanctifies a world that is structured by class hierarchy, class domination, and the perpetual debasement of those who produce the surplus value through which the mala' and mutrif continue their privileged existence. "The roots of this [polytheistic] religion," Shariati says, "are economic. Its roots are in the ownership of a minority over the abased majority. It is this very factor of economics and the seeking of superiority which requires a religion in order to preserve and legitimate itself and eternalize its way of life."[24] Here, Shariati comes to agree with Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel, and Karl Marx, all of whom claimed that religion – in its ideologically distorted form – produces narcosis: an opium induced stupor which allows the exploited to cope with their exploitation and wretchedness, as it makes their existence meaningful and bearable without even challenging the status quo.[25] Yet for Shariati, the narcotic religion is specifically polytheistic, as opposed to true monotheism. Nevertheless, this narcotic religion is *affirmative* religion, as it attempts to affirm and thus preserve the world-as-it-is. This affirmative nature is what Marx and other critics saw as the essence of "Bourgeois" religion – a religion that cements the status quo through an "appeal to nature" (Reification) or as a "divine decree" (*al-qaḍāʾ wa l-qadar*).[26]

Yet for Shariati, affirmative religion is only half of the dialectic of religion, as it is only one tendency within the struggle of religion vs. religion. There is another form of religion that does not pursue social statics but rather demands social dynamics: The religion of Tawḥīd.

In *Religion versus Religion*, Shariati highlights the concept of Tawḥīd for a couple of reasons: (1) it is the theological essence of Islam and the antithesis of

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[23] Ibid., 34-35, 40.

[24] Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion,* 34.

[25] Ibid., 35, 49. In his second lecture in *Religion versus Religion*, Shariati says, "we must say that those who say that religion was a factor to justify the social and economic domination of the minority over the majority are correct. It is true that this religion in the age of feudalism religiously legitimated the status quo, the enslavement and ownership of slaves. In the society of the age of feudalism, in every form, in every age, in every class, in every shape, when economics ruled in a society, religion was to justify the status quo by misusing the religious beliefs which are based in the primordial nature of people." (Shariati, 2003: 49-50).

[26] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1978), 35-36; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc, 1978), 54; Max Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926-1931 & 1950-1969* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 58-59, 163.

polytheism, and (2) the tawḥīdic way-of-being-in-the-world is in stark contrast to the dominance of shirk within modern neo-liberal political-economics, including Western imperialism. Having first expressed itself with the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic prophets, the radical emancipatory nature of "divine oneness" translates into the social-political and economic realm as the demand to abandon and/or destroy the idols – that which was "carved" by the hands of man. Just as the idols of wood and stone were destroyed for the unseen, eternal, and wholly-other divine, so too much the modern idols associated with the false-apotheosis of greed, wealth, power, and status, be destroyed. In place of the polytheistic society, Shariati does not call for atheistic dictatorship of the proletariat, as many of his fellow anti-capitalists do, but rather he attempts to determinately negate (*Aufheben*) Western agnostic/atheistic socialism for an alternative Islamic form of socialism rooted in and defined by Tawḥīd.

Just as Marx followed Feuerbach down the road of dethroning religion before the transformation of society, so too does Shariati wish to attempt to dethrone what he sees as affirmative religion while in the process of transforming society, in his case Pahlavi Iran.[27] However, unlike Marx, Shariati *determinately negates* religion, wherein the revolutionary and emancipatory potentials within religion, especially within its prophetic core, are allowed to migrate (sublate) into a newer and thus more prophetic and critical form of religion – one closer the primordial Islam of Muhammad and his Islamic city: Medina.[28] This is different than Feuerbach and Marx's *abstract negation* of religion, wherein the entire phenomenon of religion had to disappear – both the good and the bad elements had to be sacrificed for a future secular-humanistic emancipation. For Shariati, emancipatory religion should be preserved, augmented, and fulfilled (*dialektikḗ*). He argues that the critical role of the prophets has to migrate into the realm of the contemporary *prophetic*, especially with intellectuals, who not being prophets, nevertheless can embody certain aspects of the prophets' mission. He writes,

> Our mission is to continue the mission of the divinely-appointed prophets who were the rightful prophets, who had arisen from the fabric of the people, who were *ummi* and who confront the pseudo-priests who were attached, affiliated to and dependent upon the rich aristocrats and people who live in ease and luxury, who confronted the self-appointed prophets who were, without exception, from among the aristocrats or the feudalists or who acted on behalf of the princes.[29]

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[27] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity,* trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 1-32; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," 53-54.

[28] G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic.* Trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1993), 54; Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion*, 49.

[29] Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion*, 60.

If Shariati is going to advocate for an Islamic way-of-being-in-the-world steered on the basis of Tawḥīd, we must identify what social, political, and economic export this theological concept has. After that is made clear, we can ask how Tawḥīd can be translated into post-metaphysical language so that it may migrate into the modern secular world, which is currently at the disposal of neo-liberal hegemony?

For Shariati, Islam is a religion that protests the unjust status quo, not a religion that affirms the status quo, with the understanding that any societal configuration will continue to be less than utopia.[30] Thus, its prophetic core serves as the grand inquisitor to all dysgenic social tendencies, i.e., class hierarchy, racial hierarchy, socio-economic and political oppression, etc., and the polytheistic religion that legitimate such tendencies. Harkening back to the sunnah of the Prophet, it is clear that the adoption of Tawḥīd goes beyond the theological; it reformulates the lifeworld in such a way that the believer turns away from the polytheistic world-as-it-is and embraces an ethos determined by the monotheistic world-as-it-should-be, just as Muhammad turned from being merely troubled by the polytheistic world-as-it-is in the pre-Islamic times, to being monotheistically *contra mundum*, against-the-world-as-it-is, when his prophethood began. Believers who embrace such an ethos do not turn to asceticism and retreat from the world, but rather remain deeply connected to the social realm while simultaneously enrooting themselves in the prophetic tradition. Thus, it is a critical engagement with the world while remaining committed to a vision of the world that is rooted in a other-than-worldly ideal, so that the ideals of the other-than-worldly can serve as critical benchmarks for the really existing societies, with the understanding that such societies may never reach the ideal, but nevertheless strive for the ideal.

If capitalism is steered over the principles of greed, wealth, status, and power, and promotes necrophilic consumerism as a totalizing way-of-being, and at its heart lies the unjust extraction of surplus value, then it cannot be reconciled with the concept of Tawḥīd and monotheism's social expression as the just and equal society, which was first exemplified, according to Ali Shariati, in Muhammad's Medina. Regardless of the pro-capitalist Muslims' argument, Muhammad's Medina was not capitalist, although it did engage in market exchange. However, the relentless pursuit of profit, which was exemplified by the polytheistic Mecca, was wholly absent in Medina amongst the Muslims. Therefore, Shariati's philosophy stresses that capitalism and Islam (in its non-compromised prophetic form), are mutually exclusive, and as such, capitalism cannot thrive within the Muslim community without compromising Islam itself.

We live today in mostly secular countries that are guided by capitalist-market values. Democratic values, even in the oldest of democracies, are often

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[30] I define the term "utopia" as the "sum of all oughts," understanding that the term etymologically points to the fact that such a "sum of all oughts" does not exist and cannot be achieved. As such, utopia serves an ideal type, and as an ideal type it serves as a superlative-template through which all non-ideality can be critiqued.

eclipsed by the needs of the market and its chief beneficiaries. If Muslims are going to be able to address such capitalist societies on the basis of Tawḥīd, without falling into the fundamentalist temptation, then Islamic values and theology must be secularized. The theological concept of Tawḥīd, and the social exports it delivers, must be translated into a wholly different form of social organization, i.e., one that is congruent with the prophetic nature of Islam and Tawḥīd and yet appropriate for the modern world and its post-metaphysical thought. Without such a translation, Muslims will only be talking to Muslims, and that already assumes Muslims speak the language of Islam.

Translating Tawḥīd into Secular Socialism

Outside of a small minority, the idea of returning to a theocratic form of government is not appealing in much of the world, including the West and the Muslim world. Libraries are filled with books documenting the long and bloody history of theocratic rule. When religion is explicitly invoked as the ruling ideology it tends to (1) either corrupt religion with the trappings of power, or (2) corrupt the state with a sense of divine entitlement, and thus become unresponsive to their population. Either way, in the modern world, the notion of theocracy has grown ugly, as it conjures up visions of utopians gone wrong, with their religious police, barbaric capital punishment, obscurantist authoritarianism, and repression of individual autonomy. The latest theocracy, the short-lived "caliphate" of ISIS (Daesh) comes to mind as being especially egregious in its embodiment of all thing despotic.[31] This causes quite a problem for thinkers like Ali Shariati, who see in tawḥīdic religion the very basis for a just and equal society, one that produces the greatest amount of happiness and well-being for the greatest amount of people, with strong protections for minorities, the balance of autonomy and solidarity, eschatological motivation for moral behavior, and a strong sense of identity, mission, and meaning. Shariati is well aware of the dysgenic tendencies within theocracies, as he documents many of them in his *Religion vs. Religion*, but he also sees the other side of the dialectic: the prophetic and emancipatory side of religion. How then can Shariati's "Islamic utopianism" be brought into fruition within a world that remains deeply suspicious of theocracy, even within countries that are highly religious?

Just as Shariati attempts to determinately negate the Shi'ism of his day, negating the affirmative side of the traditional 'ulamāʾ, whose political "quietism" during the Iranian revolution gave tacit support to the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi Shah, and simultaneously elevating and fulfilling its revolutionary side, so too must his Islamic utopianism be translated via determinate negation into a secular political philosophy, one that preserves the basis for the Islamic society via post-

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[31] ISIS, or *Daesh*, is an acronym for *al-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī 'l-ʿIrāq wa al-Shām* (The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).

metaphysical language.[32] He must allow certain semantic and semiotic materials to migrate from the depth of the Islamic tradition into language that renders such material accessible to the "universal discourse community," i.e., all members of a given society regardless of their religious affiliation. This is needed because when social legislation is put forward on the basis of religious revelation or tradition (Qurʾān, Sunnah, Ḥadīth, stories of the *ahl-bayt* (family) and *al-ṣaḥābah* (companions)), such legislation does not penetrate into the consciousness of those outside of the particular religious community. In this case, since the language that expresses such materials is explicitly Islamic, it cannot be made their own by people outside of the Islamic faith community (ummah), since such particular language belongs exclusively to the closed semantic universe of Islam.[33] When this gap isn't bridged, it creates unjust social hierarchies associated with the establishment of "parallel societies" (*Parallelgesellschaften*). On the one hand, part of society assents to social legislation because they recognize *as their own* the basis for such legislation. On the other hand, another part of society cannot assent to such legislation because such legislation is sourced *outside of themselves* or outside of their constitutional and/or sacred documents. If such social legislation can be translated into post-metaphysical language, i.e., language that does not refer to a particular religious source, group, or identity, for its legitimation, then such religious-inspired yet secular legislation can be offered into the universal discourse community, wherein all members of the nation, including its minorities, can engage in a robust dialogue, discourse, and debate via autonomous reason, through which the legislation can find universal or near-universal consent. Members of the Islamic community can see the lineage of Islam within the secularized social legislation, while members outside of the Muslim community can see that it is not only respectful of their secular concerns, because it does not appeal explicitly to Islam for legitimation, but also that they can consent to it without trepidation, for it too can find legitimation for the legislation within their own faith (or non-faith) resources since it is articulated in post-metaphysical language.

However, another burden must be made clear: the majority identity, i.e., religious community, non-religious community, ethnic group, etc., must abandon the right of exclusivity and embrace and ethic of inclusivity via democratic discourse, in order for post-metaphysical language to remain the vehicle for democratic contestation. In other words, the majority has to be open for amendments by the minority that might not be reconcilable with explicit religious doctrines. Within post-metaphysical language, the authority of doctrine cannot eclipse the authority of the people or its constitution. Rather, the authority of doctrine governs the particular

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[32] Byrd, *A Critique of Ayn Rand Philosophy of Religion*, 92-98; Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking II.* Trans. Ciaran Cronin (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017), 210-226.

[33] Jürgen. Habermas, *An Awareness of What is Missing.* Trans. Ciaran Cronin (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 20-21.

religious community, as it is there that the people willingly submit to such particular authority. Within the post-metaphysical realm, authority remains within the demos and the constitution, and thus within democratic consent in conjunction with constitutional norms and ideals.

The Moral-Practical: From Islam to Secular Socialism

What kind of elements of religion could be rendered into post-metaphysical language? From the perspective of Jürgen Habermas, those aspects of religion that are most translatable are what he calls the "moral-practical" aspects of religion, as opposed to the expressive arts, eschatology, ritual, etc.[34] The moral-practical covers moral/ethical issues such as charity, brotherhood, equality, and other ideals that animate social justice praxis. For example, in Islam, Muslims believe in monogenesis: the origins of all humanity from a single pair of male and female, Adam and Eve. Regardless of whether this claim is scientifically verifiable, the sacred idea of monogenesis can be translated into post-metaphysical language via the ideal of "equality" – as all descend from the same primordial parents and thus all equal as siblings. Grounded in that religious ideal, it can be translated into the secular equal rights for all citizens. Although the idea began deep within a religious mythos (sacred story), its migration into post-metaphysical language provided the foundation for equal political rights that all members of the polis can assent to regardless of their religious, ethnic, traditional affiliations.

Another pertinent example can be found in Islamic charity. *Zakāh*, the Islamic injunction that the Muslims must provide a portion of their excess wealth to the poor, needy, and fellow believers (or citizens), can be translated into the post-metaphysical language of the socialis welfare state, wherein the state fulfils the requirements of zakāh via a strong social network so that members of the community do not need to rely of individual charity (*ṣadaqah*), but rather have the secular state fulfilling those requirements of zakāh on behalf of the Muslim community through their taxes.

Lastly, Islam's prohibition on ribā can be translated into social legislation that allows for robust commerce but not the unjust exploitation of workers through excessive surplus value extraction. The Islamic sense of justice, fairness, and equality, does not permit one segment of mankind to unjustly live off the labor of others. Rather, like socialism, it demands that economic relations between fellow citizens be based on fairness, and the free exchange of "equal" goods. The exchange of small wages for exorbitant amounts of surplus value is not justice in Islam, and therefore would not translate into Islam-inspired post-metaphysical language. Rather, Meccan polytheism, which Muhammad rebelled against, translated into post-metaphysical

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[34] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 1, Reason and the Rationalization of Society.* Trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 240.

language is expressed quite literally in the neo-liberal market society, wherein the gods of the Arabian desert are translated into the gods of capital: greed, wealth, status, and power. In such Islamic-translated-socialist language, the injunction against excessive profit taking translates into a well-regulated economy, wherein surplus value extraction is limited, or the condition of which are agreed upon by the affected members of the surplus value extraction, i.e., co-determination. A system that benefits only the owners is alien to Islam, and therefore could not translated into post-metaphysical language and stay true to its Islamic genealogy. To remain congruent to Shariati's view of Islamic socialism, any secular translation must not further class exploitation but rather diminishment such class antagonisms for the benefit of all.

Through this dialectical method of translation, a secular state can be founded upon the religious ideals, values, and principles that Shariati believed were the foundation of a utopian-like state. As such, I argue that Ali Shariati's Islamic utopianism can be articulated within language devoid of religious legitimation, whereupon it can find a home within the modern secular nations simply as a socialist state. It would not be a theocracy, but rather an Islamically-inspired secular-democratic form of government, as long as the Islamic values that were secularized could remain constitutional via democratic consent. As such, as we've demonstrated throughout this essay, such a secular society, rooted in Islam and Muhammad's own religious praxis, could not be a capitalist society, for its essential feature – the unjust extraction of surplus value – would not be reconcilable with the secularized-Islamic nature of the state. This determinate negation of religion, by which the moral-practical elements of religion migrate from their explicit religious semantic and semiotic materials into post-metaphysical language, can serve as the template for all Restern societies to a form of democratic-socialism without (1) abandoning their traditional identity, and (2) without succumbing to the extreme wealth extraction by globalized neo-liberalism. Just as Shariati's Islamic utopianism was a defensive measure against imperialism and internal colonization via a monarchical ruling class, so too would Restern societies adoption of democratic socialism through the translation of their own native resources be a defensive measure against neo-liberal colonization.

Conclusion

In this essay, we demonstrated the following: (1) that Islam and capitalism are not compatible, despite the fact that Muhammad himself was a man of commerce in his pre-Prophethood days. By referencing Islam's foundational resources, especially the Qur'ān, the sīrah, and the Sunnah as our guide, we have also shown that Islam's objection to capitalism is a matter not just of morality and law, but of theology: capitalism's inherent polytheism (*Shirk*) is irreconcilable with Islam's absolute monotheism (*Tawḥīd*). Since there is no reconciling Tawḥīd and Shirk on the theological level, there is not reconciling them at the level of political economy. Additionally, we demonstrated that Ali Shariati, one of Shi'i Islam's greatest intellectual of the 20th century, understood most clearly the dialectical nature of all religion: it is often internally divided against itself in the form of affirmative religion and negative religion. We showed that within his own political philosophy, Shariati wished to *determinately negate* (*Aufheben*) Shi'i Islam so that its revolutionary and

emancipatory elements would be rescued from its affirmative form and thus serve as the basis of a new Islamic society. Lastly, we demonstrated that such an explicitly religious political-economics system would be anachronistic within the increasingly secular modern societies, even in the heart of the Muslim world. Therefore, we put forward the possibility of translating such an Islamic socialism via the non-destructive form of determinate negation into a post-metaphysical form of socialism, so that the Islamic genealogy of Islam's social teachings may continue to animate a secular form of political economy. While such a program remains merely aspirational at this point, it serves as a possible alternative to the Restern world's capitulation to globalized neo-liberal capitalism and its polytheistic Geist.

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Political Disengagement in the Lebanese Population:
Exploring the Relationship Between Learned Helplessness, Locus of Control, and Political Efficacy

Sarah Al Haber, Hanine Hout, Rita Merhej[1]

Abstract: Decades of continuous adversities in Lebanon (internal hostilities and armed conflicts, economic crisis, political turmoil and insecurity, wars) as well as the experience of multiple parliamentary elections that failed to lead to change and reform, have contributed to a reduced level of political engagement among the Lebanese. This paper analyses three correlates of political engagement in Lebanese people: learned helplessness, locus of control, and perceived political efficacy, based on scores of 142 Lebanese participants, aged 21 years and above, residing in Lebanon, on the Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS), the Internal Control Index (ICI), and the Perceived Political Self-Efficacy Scale (P-PSES). The overall findings showed that participants had low learned helplessness and high internal locus of control. As expected, participants with higher learned helplessness, and those with lower internal locus of control had lower perceived internal political efficacy, but no significant relations were noted between learned helplessness, locus of control and perceived external political efficacy. These findings highlight the particularities of Lebanese resilience (internal resources, creativity, entrepreneurial initiatives) in coping with the recurrent adversities of the country, implying that the problem of political disengagement (poor voter turnout on parliamentary and municipality elections) among Lebanese people lies within their disbelief that the political system is prone to change through the impact of collective action. This paper raises the important question of whether the Lebanese people's level of active political engagement,

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namely voting, will change as a function of the reform-oriented political system in the new era of governance in Lebanon.[2]

Keywords: Lebanon, political engagement, voting, political efficacy, locus of control, learned helplessness.

Introduction

Lebanon has endured dire consequences from years of conflict, war, political instability, and lack of constructive policies and safety regulations, all of which have impacted the Lebanese people's physical and mental health.[3] The 15-year civil war (1975- 1990), the 2006 Israeli invasion, and the massive influx of around 1.5 million Syrian refugees due to the Syrian crisis (2011 – 2018), among other events have contributed to creating widespread corruption, a dysfunctional public sector, and an economy dipping into unprecedented financial crisis. As a result, the Lebanese Pound lost 90% of its value, and access to basic services (medicine, electricity, fuel, etc.) is almost impossible.[4] A popular uprising erupted on October 17, 2019, demanding a new government, civil rights, and accountability for corruption, creating hope for the Lebanese people. However, the uprising was met with repressive measures from the Lebanese military and security forces, exhausting the population's power. Furthermore, the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic for social distancing led to the closure of many businesses; thus, the unemployment rate increased, and around a third of the population was under the poverty line.[5] These crises were further complicated by the 4th of August Beirut port explosion in 2020, which killed at least 200 people, injured more than 6500, and displaced 300,000 people. The explosion was a collective traumatic experience for the Lebanese people since the civil war.[6] These national crises have been associated with a high prevalence of mental disorders among the Lebanese population.[7]

When repeated exposure to traumatic events (war, armed conflict, economic crises, etc.) is coupled with failed attempts at trying to create change (e.g. marches or street politics, asking for policy changes, revolution, voting for change in elections, etc.), this is bound to lead to disbelief in any possibility for change. In Lebanon, after

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[3] Samar Al Hajj, Colleen Pawliuk, Jennifer Smith, Alex Zheng, and Ian Pike, "History of Injury in a Developing Country: A Scoping Review of Injury Literature in Lebanon," *Journal of Public Health* 43, no. 1 (2020): 24–44.
[4] Natali Farran, "Mental Health in Lebanon: Tomorrow's Silent Epidemic," *Mental Health and Prevention* 24 (2021).
[5] Tania Bosqui, "The Need to Shift to a Contextualized and Collective Mental Health Paradigm: Learning from Crisis-Hit Lebanon," *Global Mental Health* 7 (2020): e26, 1–4.
[6] Sarah S. Sharanek, *Learned Helplessness and Hopelessness Following the Beirut Blast* (Lebanese American University, 2020).
[7] Bosqui, "The Need to Shift to a Contextualized and Collective Mental Health Paradigm."

having experienced repeated failures in reform attempts, people have been led to feel a sense of uncontrollability and disaffection.[8] In the literature, this is referred to as learned helplessness.[9] Learned helplessness in social actors implies acceptance of the legitimacy of power over them; however, the acceptance of power does not preclude resistance; resistance can take different forms, some of which are not necessarily associated with conflict.[10] In the Lebanese context, we conceptualize such resistance as resilience, in line with the literature that contends that resilience and resistance can assist and support one another and that resilience strategies would lead to resistance (and vice versa).[11] In the Lebanese context, resilience is seen as part of a societal response to challenges involving a high level of uncertainty and risk.

In contrast to learned helplessness, perceived self-efficacy "determines how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences." [12] In the political context, an individual's intrinsic predispositions (learned helplessness versus self-efficacy) and the extrinsic political environment influence their political behavior, political interest, and community engagement.[13] The research on intrinsic dispositions (learned helplessness or self-efficacy), and their relationship to political engagement shows that individuals who experience low levels of self-efficacy are less likely to engage in political activism,[14] and high levels of learned helplessness are associated with increased political apathy, though learned helplessness was not found to be the strongest predictor of political apathy.[15]

A person's self-efficacy is linked to their belief about the extent to which they can control what happens to them; when a person feels that the unfolding of events in their life is outside their control (chance, luck, fate or powerful others), then

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[8] Christina Elizabeth Farhart, *Look Who Is Disaffected Now: Political Causes and Consequences of Learned Helplessness in the U.S.* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2017), University of Minnesota ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

[9] Atasi Mohanty, Rabindra Kumar Pradhan, and Lalatendu Kesari Jena, "Learned Helplessness and Socialization: A Reflective Analysis," *Psychology* 6 (2015): 885-895.

[10] Jack M. Barbalet, "Power and Resistance," *The British Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 4 (1985): 531–548.

[11] Philippe Bourbeau and Caitlin Ryan, "Resilience, Resistance, Infrapolitics and Enmeshment," *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 1 (2018): 221–39.

[12] Albert Bandura, "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioural Change," *Psychological Review* 84, no. 2 (1977): 191–215, 194.

[13] Mahmoud A. El Homssi, Alaaeldin A. Ali, and Amal Kurdi, "Factors Influencing Political Participation in Lebanon: The Mediating Role of Perceived Congruence," *BAU Journal - Society, Culture and Human Behavior* 4, no. 2 (2023): Article 7.

[14] John T. Jost, Christopher M. Federico, and Jaime L. Napier, "Political Ideology: Its Structure, Functions, and Elective Affinities," *Annual Review of Psychology* 60 (2009): 307–337; Mariana Prats and Axel Meunier, "Political efficacy and participation: An empirical analysis in European countries," OECD Working Papers on Public Governance No. 46.

[15] Daryl Loh Wei Meng and Eliza Berezina, "The Role of Personality and Self-Motivation in Political (Dis)Engagement," *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia* 24, no. 1 (2020): 87–98.

that person is said to have an external locus of control (LOC), as opposed to the person with an internal LOC who believes that the unfolding of life events depends on their abilities and behaviors. Research has shown that an external LOC is associated with higher levels of anxiety and psychological distress, while internal LOC is associated with healthier lifestyle as well as perseverance in the face of adversity.[16]

Recent research has yielded inconsistent findings with respect to the relationship between the three variables: learned helplessness, locus of control and political engagement. Kafkovà and colleagues showed that people with an internal or an external LOC showed similar levels of political engagement.[17] Other studies showed no direct relationship between learned helplessness and LOC in terms of political engagement.[18] Interestingly, a cross-cultural study comparing political engagement in Eastern Asian (Japan, Korea and Taiwan) and Western countries (USA, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Germany) found that in countries where political collective activity is inhibited (due to cultural values favoring social harmony over collective action) such as Korea, Japan and Taiwan, internal locus of control was positively correlated with collective action (signing a petition, joining in boycotts, attending peaceful demonstrations, joining strikes, etc.), and was the one key difference between the two cultures, predicting more participation in collective action among East Asians than among Westerners.[19] Such a finding is in line with Van Zomeren's conclusion that a proper cultural psychology of collective action is needed to better understand when collective action is more or less likely to occur in any particular country.[20] Van Zomeren's four core motivations behind collective

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[16] Holly S. Ryon and Marci E.J. Gleason, "The Role of Locus of Control in Daily Life," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (2013): 121–131; Thomas W.H. Ng, Kelly L. Sorensen, and Lillian T. Eby, "Locus of Control at Work: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* 27, no. 8 (2006): 1057–1087; Hielke Buddelmeyer and Nattavudh Powdthavee, "Can Having Internal Locus of Control Insure Against Negative Shocks? Psychological Evidence from Panel Data," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 122 (2016): 88–109.

[17] Marcela Petrová Kafková, Lucie Vidovićová, and Petr Wija, "Older Adults and Civic Engagement in Rural Areas of the Czech Republic," *European Countryside* 10, no. 2 (2018): 247–262.

[18] Samar Al Hajj, Colleen Pawliuk, Jennifer Smith, Alex Zheng, and Ian Pike, "History of Injury in a Developing Country: A Scoping Review of Injury Literature in Lebanon," *Journal of Public Health* 43, no. 1 (2020): 24–44; Natali Farran, "Mental Health in Lebanon: Tomorrow's Silent Epidemic," *Mental Health and Prevention* 24 (2021); Daryl Loh Wei Meng and Eliza Berezina, "The Role of Personality and Self-Motivation in Political (Dis)Engagement," *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia* 24, no. 1 (2020): 87–98.

[19] Ai Fukuzawa and Kazunori Inamasu, "Relationship Between the Internal Locus of Control and Collective Action: A Comparison of East Asian and Western Countries," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 23, no. 3 (2020): 349–359.

[20] Martjin van Zomeren, "Toward a Cultural Psychology of Collective Action: Just How 'Core' Are the Core Motivations for Collective Action?" *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 13 (2019): e15.

action (the individuals' group identification, their group-based anger, their group efficacy beliefs, and their moral convictions) are context-sensitive in that they do not always predict individuals' collective action for anyone in any collective action context.

Rationale

The relationship between the three variables (learned helplessness, political self-efficacy and locus of control) and political engagement in Lebanese people is analyzed in the present article. Findings of data obtained a year ago are interpreted in light of the new political breakthrough in the Lebanese political and socio-economic scene: The election of a new President for the Republic in January 2025, and, one month later, the formation of a new executive Cabinet. This new country leadership reflects national aspirations for a functioning state, free from violence and corruption. Success in the tasks of the new leadership is not determined by a changing of the guard alone. What is needed today is transparent and people-centric reform and reconstruction, and the Lebanese people need to heal from their past vulnerabilities and regain trust in their government.[21] Success of the new leadership relies, to a great part, on the extent to which the Lebanese people are willing and motivated to rally behind their leadership in this journey to re-write Lebanon's history.

In 2022, Lebanon held its post-October 2019 "revolution" parliamentary elections; these elections were viewed by many as an opportunity that might bring an end to the ongoing economic and financial crises, ease the political deadlock, and bring new faces to Parliament. A study by Abed and colleagues predicting voting behavior of the Lebanese at the eve of the 2022 elections revealed that 54% of the Lebanese said they were willing to vote, compared to more than 75% in the 2018 elections; the reduced number of potential voters is possibly due to an overwhelming feeling of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and hopelessness "where they no longer believe that any change is possible from within the system."[22] This translates as a national feeling of learned helplessness and a sense of political inefficacy and disengagement both at the individual and the collective levels. The actual 2022 elections turnout reached 49.19%, with a minimal drop of 0.47% from the 2018 elections turnout, indicating relatively stable turnout rates. The figures also show that only 13.59% of the Lebanese people voted for *Change* candidates; however, it is noted that the change vote increased by 600% from 2018 to the 2022 parliamentary elections.[23] Interestingly, the 2022 elections highlighted the increased mobilization

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[21] Fadi Nicholas Nassar, "The Way Forward in Lebanon," *Middle East Institute*, January 28, 2025.

[22] Dana Abed, Rihab Sawaya, and Nadim Tabbal, *Analyzing Voter Turnout and Behavior in Lebanon* (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2022), 19.

[23] Ibrahim Jouhari, *2022 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections: Analysis of Change Movement Voting Trends* (Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, May 2023).

from Lebanese citizens abroad for political change, and the importance of the expatriates' vote, and anti-establishment, change candidates and parties performed much better with the diaspora than with in-country voters.[24] In 2026, elections of a new parliament will take place. Many questions are raised today: Will the voter turnout of 2022 repeat itself in 2026? Or will the Lebanese people feel more politically active and engaged to participate in the process of change that is heralded by the new country leadership? Or will people's vulnerabilities (defined here as 'learned helplessness') vis à vis the historical systemic lack of change and reform in Lebanon hinder their political involvement and engagement in the new tasks ahead?

Today, the Lebanese people's engagement is an urgent necessity for Lebanon's recovery.[25] Few months after the national optimism that hailed the new leadership in Lebanon as a break from the dysfunctional status quo, municipal elections were finally held in May 2025. Contrary to what was expected, according to official figures released by the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, voter turnout was low in key urban areas, and lower than in previous elections for other regions, hinting at citizens' disengagement.[26] The lesson is clear: Without the clear and organized engagement of the people, political work remains fragile and unsustainable.[27] Participation in the municipality elections is not just about local governance; it is about national recovery and resilience.[28]

Since voting is a form of political activism and engagement, the analysis in the present paper may offer important insight as to the importance of people's agency in creating the desired political change. If the Lebanese people are to regain their sense of ownership in the country's recovery, then it is important for today's government to establish a more transparent, participatory culture of governance. And participatory governance cannot be established if the people are not motivated for it.

The objective of this article is to understand and analyze the correlates of political engagement (sense of political self-efficacy as well as active political behavior) in the Lebanese population with learned helplessness and locus of control. As Lebanon enters today a new phase heralding the long-overdue path of reform, these findings could bear a high significance.

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[24] Georgia Dagher, *How Did the Lebanese Diaspora Vote in the 2022 Parliamentary Elections?* (Beirut: Arab Reform Initiative, 2024).
[25] Khalil Gebara, "Empowering Lebanon's Municipalities Amid Crisis," *Arab Reform Initiative*, September 11, 2025.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Soha Mneimneh, "Beirut's Wake-Up Call: What Political Action Is Needed After the 2025 Municipal Elections," *Arab Reform Initiative*, July 24, 2025.
[28] Khalil Gebara, "Empowering Lebanon's Municipalities Amid Crisis," *Arab Reform Initiative*, September 11, 2025.

The Background Study

The present article is based on the findings of an exploratory correlational study that we conducted a year ago to gather preliminary data on the relationship between political efficacy and engagement among Lebanese people and the variables of learned helplessness and internal locus of control. Our study used a structured survey with closed-ended questions to explore the following research questions: (1) Are Lebanese people today experiencing learned helplessness? (2) Do Lebanese people have an internal or an external perceived political self-efficacy? (3) Is there a relationship between their levels of learned helplessness and their sense of political efficacy, whether internal or external? And (4) how does their locus of control relate to their sense of political efficacy?

A cross-sectional survey design was employed, and convenience and snowball sampling were used to reach a sample size of 400 participants on social media platforms. Participants had to be of Lebanese nationality, aged 21 years (official age of voting in Lebanon) and above, and residing in Lebanon for the past 4 years. However, this sample size was not reached due to time constraints and the fact that certain sub-groups (older generations and people with low SES) may have not had access to online platforms. The final number of participants was 142, matching the inclusion criteria (see Table 1 for Demographic Information). The survey consisted of one demographic sheet, followed by four scales measuring (a) the degree of learned helplessness, as per the Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS) developed by Quinless and Nelson, (b) perceived internal political self-efficacy, as per Caprara et al.'s Perceived Political Self-Efficacy scale (PPSE), (c) perceived external political self-efficacy, as per two items drawn from the European Social Survey (ESS) and adapted to match the Lebanese context ("*How much would you say the political system in Lebanon allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?*" and "*How much would you say that the political system in Lebanon allows people like you to influence politics*?"), and (d) internal locus of control, as per Duttweiler's Internal Control Index (ICI).[29]

All forms and scales were provided in the Arabic and English versions, and both versions were piloted with a total of 10 participants divided equally between the translated Arabic version and the original English version. All four scales had acceptable internal consistency (see Table 2 for coefficients of internal consistency for all scales). The study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics

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[29] Frances W. Quinless and Mary Anne McDermott Nelson, "Development of a Measure of Learned Helplessness," *Nursing Research* 37, no. 1 (1988): 11–15; Gian Vittorio Caprara, Michele Vecchione, Cristina Capanna, and Minou Mebane, "Perceived Political Self-Efficacy: Theory, Assessment, and Applications," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 39 (2009): 1002–1020; European Social Survey (ESS), https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/about-ess; Patricia C. Duttweiler, "The Internal Control Index: A Newly Developed Measure of Locus of Control," *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 44, no. 2 (1984): 209–21.

Committee of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Haigazian University.[30] (MH.06.23).

Table 1

Sociodemographic Distribution of Participants

		N	%
Language Version	English	103	72.5%
	Arabic	39	27.5%
	Female	99	69.7%
Gender	Male	39	27.5%
	Prefer not to say	3	2.1%
	Less than a High School	1	0.7%
Education	Diploma	6	4.2%
	High School (HS)	52	36.6%
	Bachelor's Degree	76	53.5%
	Master's Degree	7	4.9%
	PhD		
Work Status	Students	17	12%
	Unemployed	14	9.9%
	Self Employed	24	16.9%
	Part-time employment	70	49.3%
	Full time employment	16	11.3%
	Retired	1	0.7%
Marital Status	Single	103	72.5%
	Married	36	25.4%
	Divorced	3	2.1%
Political Affiliation	No political affiliation	8	5.3%
	Apolitical	1	0.7%
	Feminist Leftist	1	0.7%
	Independent/pro-reformist	1	0.7%
	Lebanese	1	0.7%
	Left Liberal	1	0.7%
	Liberal Socialist	1	0.7%
	Republican	1	0.7%
	Other (non-specified)	1	0.7%

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[30] Haigazian University is an institution of higher education located in Beirut, Lebanon.

Table 2

Reliability Coefficients of the Scales

Scale	Cronbach's α	N of Items
Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS)	.66	20
Internal Control Index (ICI)	.84	28
Perceived Internal Political Self-Efficacy Scale (P-PSES internal)	.84	10
Perceived External Political Self-Efficacy Scale (P-PSES external)	.75	2

In response to our first research question, the study revealed that on average, participants reported low levels of learned helplessness, below the midpoint score of 60 ($M = 56.19$, $SD = 7.67$), and high levels of internal locus of control, above the midpoint score of 84 ($M = 104.52$, $SD = 13.36$). In response to our second research question, the data revealed low levels of perceived political self-efficacy, both internal and external: For both scales of perceived political self-efficacy where the midpoint score is 3, low levels of perceived internal political self-efficacy were noted ($M = 1.91$, $SD = 0.71$), and low levels of perceived external political self-efficacy were noted ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 0.60$). (See Table 3).

Table 3

Scale Descriptives

Scales	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
LH	142	32.00	77.00	56.19	7.67
LOC (internal)	142	66.00	130.00	104.52	13.36
PPSE (internal)	142	1.00	4.30	1.91	0.71
PPSE (external)	139	1.00	4.00	1.46	0.60
Valid N (listwise)	139				

 LH: Learned Helplessness; LOC: Locus of Control; PPSE: Perceived Political Self-Efficacy

Spearman's rho correlation test was used to study the correlations between learned helplessness and internal perceived political self-efficacy, and revealed a significant, negative, and small to medium correlation ($r_s = -.20$, $p = .008$). As such, in response to our third research question inquiring on the relationship between levels of learned helplessness and sense of political efficacy (internal or external), the results revealed, as expected, that the higher the learned helplessness, the lower the perceived internal political self-efficacy among the Lebanese population. However, there was no relation between learned helplessness and perceived external political efficacy ($r_s = -.12$, $p = .082$), implying that levels of learned helplessness among Lebanese people do not predict their perceived external political self-efficacy.

In response to our fourth research question inquiring on the relationship between locus of control and sense of political efficacy, Spearman's rho correlation test revealed a significant, positive, and small to medium correlation between internal locus of control and perceived internal political self-efficacy ($r_s = .14$, $p = .047$). As such, and as expected, participants who had higher levels of internal locus of control are more likely to have higher levels of perceived internal political self-efficacy. However, there was no significant correlation between internal locus of control and perceived external political self-efficacy ($r_s = .06$, $p = .260$). As such, participants who had higher levels of internal locus of control were not likely to have higher levels of perceived external political self-efficacy (see Table 4 for a summary of all correlations between variables).

Table 4

Spearman's Rho Correlations Between Variables

	Perceived Internal Political Self-Efficacy	Perceived External Political Self-Efficacy
Learned Helplessness	-.20**	-.12
Internal Locus of Control	.14*	-.06

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Interpretation of Findings:

A Cultural Perspective on Learned Helplessness

As van Zomeren had observed, political engagement cannot be understood without its cultural dimension; for example, it is believed that education significantly impacts the extent to which the individual is interested in politics and has a good

understanding of politics.[31] In their study surveying approximately 16,500 individuals aged 26 and above across 39 countries, Le and Nguyen explored whether the effects of educational attainment can translate into changes in political participatory acts, and found little evidence.[32] Specifically, more educated individuals are not necessarily more likely to participate in voting. Similarly, in our study, while the repeated experiences of failures to produce change are bound to lead to a sense of uncontrollability and disaffection, our findings showed unexpected low levels of learned helplessness and high locus of control among Lebanese participants. A cultural dimension is needed to interpret such a finding.[33]

The generally low levels of learned helplessness reported in our data may be explained through the lens of the famed *Lebanese resilience*, as an explanation for the people's ability to cope in times of crisis. Berthier analyses such a resilience by delineating two of its characteristics, namely (1) the sense of communal solidarity usually rooted in familial, religious and social networks (for example, Lebanese rely more on money sent to them by their kin abroad to cover for their health care costs, educational needs or housing fees than on governmental aid), and (2) horizontality of support provision (for example, anonymous donors and discreet benefactors who make sure their donations do not demean their recipients), which is in sharp contrast with the more institutionalized, top-down channels of redistribution that are usually rooted in highly unequal patron-client relationships.[34] What has been coined as Lebanese resilience, Berthier says, is but a set of down-to-earth tactics deployed by the Lebanese to make ends meet in the face of adversities. Sulleyman writes that adversity has sparked innovative solutions, with local businesses and Lebanese entrepreneurs finding ways to adapt and support the community.[35]

Although the concept of resilience is widely (and proudly) embraced in Lebanese society, both at home and abroad, as a synonym for the people's capacity to endure frequent crises, it entails many paradoxes within the Lebanese culture between security and insecurity, fear and hope, war and truce, all of which harbor a collective trauma that has been enduring for years. It's as if the Lebanese people have remained in a perpetual state of resilience.[36] Obeid writes that the persistent stoic narrative of resilience in Lebanese discourse is but a refrain to inspire hope for the

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[31] Martijn van Zomeren, "Toward a Cultural Psychology of Collective Action: Just How 'Core' Are the Core Motivations for Collective Action?" *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 13 (2019): e15.

[32] Kien Le and My Nguyen, "Education and Political Engagement," *International Journal of Educational Development* 85 (2021).

[33] Farhart, *Look Who Is Disaffected Now.*

[34] Rosalie Berthier, "The Fabric of Lebanese Resilience," March 19, 2018.

[35] Cora Sulleyman, "Navigating Crisis with Resilience and Unity in Lebanon," September 24, 2024, https://www.thediplomaticaffairs.com/2024/09/24/navigating-crisis-with-resilience-and-unity-in-lebanon/

[36] Sinem Cengis, "Notes from Beirut: Lebanese Resilience Being Tested to Its Limits," *Arab News*, February 9, 2024.

Lebanese, yet at the same time serves to absolve the corrupt state; it frames the Lebanese struggles as character-building experiences rather than governance failures.[37] When hardship and suffering are framed as an opportunity for growth, those who break down are blamed for failing the national myth of Lebanese resilience. Obeid goes on to say that the deeply rooted Lebanese belief that adversity gives rise to strength understandably springs from hope in better times. Admitting that one's suffering is meaningless (as in learned helplessness) resigns one to nihilistic self-destructive thinking.[38] The low levels of learned helplessness reported in our sample can be explained through this frame: Endurance, suffering, and bouncing back have become national values, while admitting one's anguish and pain counters such a nationally embraced narrative.

The above average levels of internal locus of control reported by our sample are to be framed within the same perspective as for the low levels of learned helplessness: Lebanese people have cultivated, over years and years of experiencing varying adversities, a sense of control over the situation, reinforced by the national myth of the Lebanese resilience. Such a sense of control has been seen by many as an expression of resistance.

The construct of Distress Tolerance (DT) refers to one's perceived capacity to endure and cope with uncomfortable or negative emotional states. Low levels of DT have been associated with both poorer quality of life and reduced life satisfaction and significantly predicted the use of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies (including rumination and substance use) as well as unhelpful self-regulation strategies (including binge eating or non-suicidal self-injury).[39] Our discussion of the Lebanese resilience falls in line with this construct; Lebanese people seem to have created their own distress tolerance strategies for handling ongoing adversities of all kinds.

We tend to agree with the view that the act of resistance by its very nature demands resilience to ensure its continuity. "Seen in this light, resilience becomes a crucial vector for explaining why some resistance movements manage to persevere despite heavy hurdles and setbacks, and while others do not."[40] Resilience demands willpower, resourcefulness, and creativity, and Lebanese people have managed to develop a variety of creative ways to counter all adversities. Thus, even in their attempt at maintaining the status quo in the face of adversities and shocks, Lebanese people are manifesting a political move and thus cannot be qualified as politically passive. Lebanese communities developing strategies to adjust to difficulties are

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[37] Peter Obeid, "Growth or Guilt: Unearthing the Hidden Costs of Romanticizing Lebanese Resilience," *Al-Rawiya*, August 5, 2024.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ruby J. Brown, Amy L. Burton, and Maree J. Abbott, "The Relationship between Distress Tolerance and Symptoms of Depression: Validation of the Distress Tolerance Scale (DTS) and Short-Form (DTS-SF)," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 78 (2022): 2609–2630.

[40] Philippe Bourbeau and Caitlin Ryan, "Resilience, Resistance, Infrapolitics and Enmeshment," *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 1 (2018): 221–39, 228.

potential sites of resistance to the systemic inequalities and injustices that have triggered the development of these strategies. Lebanese youth, in particular, despite challenges like high unemployment and political instability, have demonstrated an entrepreneurial spirit. They created opportunities in spite of the limited resources, and, in spite of the disappointing overall parliamentary and municipality elections results (as discussed above), they were motivated to challenge traditional political dominance by participating in elections and supporting independent candidates.[41]

A Cultural Perspective on Locus of Control (LOC)

Consistent with the literature, we found a significant, positive, and small to medium correlation between internal locus of control and perceived internal political self-efficacy, indicating that participants who had higher levels of internal locus of control were more likely to have higher levels of internal political self-efficacy. Sofi found a positive correlation between political activism and an internal locus of control. As such, the belief in one's capacity to effect change (LOC) predicts one's level of political engagement and activism.[42]

In Lebanon, the relationship between internal LOC and internal political self-efficacy is mostly expressed in the work of civil society organizations (CSOs). CSOs excel in meeting societal needs and empowering citizens and are perceived as being more beneficial in providing services in comparison to government agencies.[43] These CSOs represent significant elements of the country's changing socio-political scene and may play an important role in consolidating an internal locus of control among the educated millennials and digitally savvy individuals in Lebanon, who were born after the trauma of the Lebanese Civil War, thus fostering internal political self-efficacy and reinforcing their political engagement.[44]

Historically, women in Lebanon have been second-class citizens, side-lined and prevented from active political participation due to the archaic patriarchal system known as political familism. In recent years however, women have started playing critical roles in advocating for peace, justice for women, women's rights, and actively participating in movements such as the October 2019 uprising.[45] In 2018, Lebanon held its elections under a proportional representation electoral framework, marking a

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[41] May El Masri, "Shaping the Future with Lebanese Youth," *Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom*, December 8, 2024.

[42] Ava M. Sofi, *The Effect of Optimism and Locus of Control on the Relationship Between Activism and Well-Being* (Master's thesis, Örebro University, 2021).

[43] Khaldoun Abou Assi, *Lebanese Civil Society: A Long History of Achievements Facing Decisive Challenges Ahead of an Uncertain Future* (Civicus Civil Society Index Report for the Republic of Lebanon, 2006).

[44] Elias Hamad, *The State of Civil Society in Lebanon: A Pilot Mapping Study* (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021).

[45] Abir Chebaro, *Missing: Vital Voices of Lebanese Women in Politics* (Beirut: The Arab Institute for Women, 2023).

shift away from the previous majoritarian system. This change was perceived as advantageous, potentially motivating anti-establishment figures and increasing female candidacy. [46] Consequently, this gives a sense of hope and a better understanding to the role women play within the socio-political framework of Lebanon.

As for perceived external political self-efficacy (defined, in our study, as the belief that the political system is prone to change through the impact of individual and collective action), our study revealed no significant correlation between internal locus of control and perceived external political self-efficacy. This finding reflects the general mistrust of the Lebanese population towards the Lebanese government, regardless of their internal locus of control. Despite their high internal LOC, Lebanese people do not perceive the Lebanese government as capable of creating change. This mistrust can be due to seeing no palpable changes as a result of the various change-oriented initiatives by the people (the 2019 uprising, the election of new non-confessional parliamentarians) against the background of rampant corruption in the country. Figures from the Arab Barometer – Wave VIII (2024) illustrate this mistrust: Among the 16 countries covered by the Arab Barometer, Lebanese citizens are the least trustful of their government (76% of Lebanese citizens say they have no trust at all); they also have the lowest amount of trust in their legal system (13 percent), parliament (nine percent), and prime minister (eight percent).[47]

However, the reader is reminded that the data for our study was collected a year and a half ago, that is before the election of the new President and the formation of the new executive Cabinet, a new era of governance in Lebanon, breaking from the past of petty machinations and partisan politics and putting the country on a path toward reform, reconciliation, and the restoration of national and international trust in Lebanon's leadership and institutions.[48]

A Cultural Perspective on Political Efficacy and Engagement

In line with existing research, our study showed that the higher the learned helplessness among the Lebanese people, the lower their perceived political self-efficacy. Political efficacy may be internal (the belief that change is done through personal participation with one's capabilities and resources), or external (the belief that the political system is prone to change through the impact of individual and

[46] Georgia Dagher, *Women's Participation and Representation in Lebanese Politics: Electoral Performance, Challenges, and the Road Ahead* (Beirut: The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies, 2021).
[47] Arab Barometer, *Arab Barometer – Wave VIII Lebanon Report* (September 2024).
[48] Patricia Karam, "Out with the Old, In with the New: Is There a New Hope for Lebanon?" *Arab Center,* Washington D.C., February 6, 2025.

collective action).[49] It is important to note that in countries where dissenting political voices are stifled, and political expression and engagement are deterred, the concept of political efficacy takes on a different meaning and yields different implications that are not within the scope of our study.

Lebanese people are politically engaged, if we are to use Verba and colleagues' description of political engagement: They are interested in national, regional and international politics, they take part in and enjoy, rather than avoid, political discussion every day or nearly every day, they are sensitive to political cues, and they are highly exposed to the media (television, newspapers, or social media).[50] Research on interest in politics among university students shows it to be associated with an optimistic worldview and the belief that engagement can lead to change. On the other hand, apathy is associated with a pessimistic worldview and the belief that engagement will not lead to change.[51]

However, Verba and colleagues' definition of political engagement also includes political efficacy, or the person's sense that they can have an impact on politics. Any political engagement which does not include a sense of efficacy cannot qualify as active political participation: In the Lebanese scene, discussing politics, watching the news, posting blogs, and sharing political messages via social networks, are all done within the confines of lobbying and not within people's understanding of an authentic, active citizenship role. [52] Their voting behavior, whether in parliamentary or municipality elections, does not reflect political engagement. While the association between low learned helplessness and high internal locus of control makes sense, its practical implication on the Lebanese voting scene (low voter turnout and poor political activity) does not. There lies the paradox: For a people characterized with low learned helplessness and high locus of control, high political active engagement (vote likelihood, vote confidence, turnout) is expected. Thus, our findings are inconsistent with the available literature and necessitate a culturally-sensitive interpretation.[53]

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[49] Gian Vittorio Caprara, Michele Vecchione, Cristina Capanna, and Minou Mebane, "Perceived Political Self-Efficacy: Theory, Assessment, and Applications," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 39 (2009): 1002–1020.

[50] Sydney Verba, Nancy Burns, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Knowing and Caring About Politics: Gender and Political Engagement," *The Journal of Politics* 59, no. 4 (1997): 1051–1072.

[51] Ayesha Sarfaraz, Shehla Ahmed, Ayesha Khalid, and Asir Ajmal, "Reasons for Political Interest and Apathy among University Students: A Qualitative Study," *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 10, no. 1 (2012): 61–67.

[52] Jan W. van Deth, "A Conceptual Map of Political Participation," *Acta Politica* 49, no. 3 (2014): 349–367.

[53] Farhart, *Look Who Is Disaffected Now*; Daryl Loh Wei Meng and Eliza Berezina, "The Role of Personality and Self-Motivation in Political (Dis)Engagement," *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia* 24, no. 1 (2020): 87–98.

Interestingly, Lebanese citizens living abroad may be more qualified as politically engaged than Lebanese people residing in Lebanon: Dagher notes that, in comparison to the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections, the 2022 elections saw increased mobilization from Lebanese citizens abroad (constituting 6% of the electorate), with turnout rates higher than those among Lebanese residents, and that anti-establishment candidates and parties performed much better with the diaspora than with in-country voters.[54] The increased mobilization of diaspora voters indicates higher political engagement, calling for political change in their homeland, away from the confessional and familial constraints imposed by culturally reinforced local political forces (including threats and vote buying).

Discussion

In our discussion of the Lebanese resilience, we have to be cautious not to fall into the resilience narrative which "expects from a population rendered increasingly precarious and disposable to 'just get up' and move on from the continuous hardship imposed on it", because resilience, while considered by many as a form of self-empowerment, may contribute to reproducing the adversities by reinforcing the very order that is responsible for such adversities.[55]

Indeed, moving beyond the narrative of the stoic resilience of the Lebanese people (as reflected in our study by the low scores on learned helplessness and the high scores on locus of control), there is a bitter reality: the poor and non-citizenship-oriented voting turnout in recent parliamentary (2022) and municipality (2025) elections. This reality needs to be thoroughly assessed and understood in terms of the reality of the active political engagement of Lebanese people.

As per the participants' scores on the scales, our results showed that Lebanese resilience (now operationally defined as low learned helplessness and high locus of control) was associated with high internal perceived political efficiency. In the scale being used (Perceived Political Self-Efficacy Scale), internal political efficiency is conceptualized within Bandura's social cognitive theory and is focused on beliefs or judgments people hold about their capacities to take an agentic role in political life (for example, promoting ones' own opinions about people and programs, monitoring one's own political representatives, and mobilizing resources in support of one's own party or movement, etc.).[56] As for external political efficiency, it is

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[54] Georgia Dagher, *How Did the Lebanese Diaspora Vote in the 2022 Parliamentary Elections?* (Beirut: Arab Reform Initiative, 2024).

[55] Alina Achenbach, "Resisting Resilience, Fanonian Revolutionary Psychiatry and the Politics of Exhaustion – Notes after the Beirut Port Explosion," in *Frantz Fanon in the Middle East*, ed. The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) (2024), 16–22, 17.

[56] Michele Vecchione, Gian Vittorio Caprara, Maria Giovanna Caprara, Guido Alessandri, Carmen Tabarnero, and José Luis González-Castro, "The Perceived Political Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form (PPSE-S): A Validation Study in Three Mediterranean Countries," *Cross-Cultural Research* 48, no. 4 (2014): 368–384.

defined as people's feeling of having a say in what government does, and their belief about system responsiveness to their demands.[57]

Our study revealed a significant, negative, and small to medium correlation between learned helplessness and perceived internal political self-efficacy, indicating that participants with higher levels of learned helplessness were more likely to have lower levels of internal perceived political efficacy. This finding is consistent with the study by Geiger and colleagues which explained that feelings of helplessness, or the belief that one cannot create change through action, are negatively associated with political and civic engagement.[58] Such a finding is expected in the Lebanese population whereby the repeated and cumulative experience of adverse events has instilled a sense of helplessness in reaction to the absence of change, or improvement, or any sign of reform. Experiencing multiple rounds of parliamentary elections which did not lead to the desired outcomes in terms of social change and economic reforms has led the Lebanese to feel powerless and depleted, and to a large extent, passively acceptant of their condition.[59]

Hay and colleagues introduced the construct of Tolerance of Uncontrollability which posits that some people seem to show higher levels of tolerance towards their sense of helplessness (uncontrollability) than others.[60] Although this model was not tested in our study, it does provide some insight in line with our earlier discussion of Lebanese resilience. The model proposes that people with high levels of learned helplessness may experience less discomfort with the sense of helplessness because there is already a consensus that the world operates on an external locus of control.[61] In our study, the absence of correlation between learned helplessness and locus of control on one hand and perceived external political self-efficacy on the other hand may be partly explained by Hay and colleagues' model: Learned helplessness and locus of control did not correlate with the way Lebanese people perceive their sense of external political efficacy. The absence of correlation may be explained by a certain level of tolerance of uncontrollability that Lebanese people have accumulated over the years. Indeed, in the absence of a perceived control

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[57] Mariana Prats and Axel Meunier, *Political Efficacy and Participation: An Empirical Analysis in European Countries*, OECD Working Papers on Public Governance No. 46.

[58] Nathaniel Geiger, Janet K. Swim, Karen Gasper, John Fraser, and Kate Flinner, "How Do I Feel When I Think About Taking Action? Hope and Boredom, Not Anxiety and Helplessness, Predict Intentions to Take Climate Action," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 76 (2021): 101649.

[59] Yasmin El Harati, *Resilience or Learned Helplessness? The Case of Lebanese Adults Stripped of Their Right to Health, Education, and Adequate Standards of Living* (Master's thesis, University of Ljubljana, 2023).

[60] Aleena Hay, Abigail L. Barthel, Danielle M. Moskow, and Stefan G. Hofmann, "Defining and Measuring Tolerance of Uncontrollability," *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 46, no. 2 (2021): 259–272.

[61] Ibid.

over external events, people start utilizing strategies that serve to reinforce their inner sense of control over their own lives.

Another explanation of the absence of correlation between learned helplessness and locus of control on one hand and perceived external political self-efficacy on the other hand may be rooted in the quality of the scale that was used to measure external political self-efficacy. The scale that we constructed, consisting of 2 items drawn for the European Social Survey (ESS), may have poorly formulated or not culturally sensitive questions. This may have resulted in participants either arbitrarily assigning their answers or not answering at all, thus affecting the overall findings. Moreover, another reason for the non-significance of findings may be the long absence of a representative government that has led the Lebanese people to not just distrust the government, but also to detach themselves from it and rely on private initiatives to cater to their needs. Indeed, the problem of corruption in Lebanon has led the Lebanese, over the years, to distrust their political leaders and may be the primary reason behind the disheartened political engagement of the Lebanese.[62]

Conclusion

This article raises an important question for political analysts: Will the Lebanese people's level of active political engagement, namely voting, change as a function of the new political developments that Lebanon is witnessing today?

In sum, our study showed that (1) overall, Lebanese people do not feel helpless, (2) overall, Lebanese people feel they are in control of their life events, (3) overall, Lebanese people have a low sense of internal and external political efficacy, (4) the less the feeling of helplessness, the more the feeling of internal political efficacy, and (5) the more the feeling of being in control of one's life events, the more the feeling of internal political efficacy. In parallel, our study showed that (6) feelings of learned helplessness did not correlate with the feeling of external political efficacy (the belief that the political system is prone to change through the impact of individual and collective action), and (7) feelings of control over one's life events did not correlate with the feeling of external political efficacy. The last two findings, in addition to finding (3) reflect the general mistrust of the Lebanese population towards the Lebanese government, regardless of their feelings of helplessness or their internal locus of control.

The bitter reality of low voter turnout in parliamentary elections should not be repeating itself in 2026. Our study reveals a clear pattern, as is obvious from the findings (1) through (7): Lebanese people do not feel helpless (low learned helplessness), they feel they have the internal resources to control adversities (high

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[62] Hannes Baumann, "Social Protest and the Political Economy of Sectarianism in Lebanon," *Global Discourse* 6, no. 4 (2016): 634–649; Karim Merhej, *Breaking the Curse of Corruption in Lebanon* (Chatham House, The Royal Institution of International Affairs, 2021); Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

internal locus of control), and they believe that change may happen through their personal capabilities, resources and participation (internal political efficacy). Moreover, our findings revealed no relation between the above and external political efficacy, meaning that Lebanese people are able to resist adversities and are motivated to promote change, in spite of their mistrust in governmental agency, and that, most importantly, what may seem at first glance as political disengagement (low voter turnout) is not really a disengagement.

To further clarify, our study implies that the problem of political disengagement among Lebanese people does not seem to lie within the Lebanese people. Our findings show that Lebanese people have what it takes to move forward on the path of reform and change; the problem lies in their disbelief that the political system is prone to change through the impact of collective action (perceived external political efficacy). Depending on their perception of the system's capacity to address their needs, this action might involve increased involvement in conventional political channels, or efforts to criticize and disrupt the system.

An important contribution of our study lies in the conceptualization of the concept of resilience, and specifically Lebanese resilience. Our study has shown that what has been hailed as the Lebanese resilience is not some hollow slogan: There is indeed something transformational about Lebanese resilience, implying not just bouncing back but also bouncing forward. Examples of bouncing forward include the active engagement of Lebanese people in the CSOs, the increased female participation in politics, the entrepreneurial creative initiatives by Lebanese youth in spite of unemployment, etc.

Thus, with the participants in our study scoring generally low on learned helplessness and high on internal locus of control, we are dealing here with quite a unique profile of resilience for a population that has been experiencing continuous adversities for decades and decades.

Limitations and Future Research

The study upon which our article is based has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, because of its exploratory nature, this study cannot assume causality between the variables at stake: Does political disengagement cause learned helplessness among the Lebanese? Is the high internal locus of control over one's private life among Lebanese a result of their political disengagement from a corrupt system of governance? Such questions cannot be answered with the research design that we used. The answers to these questions are very important, especially in light of the new developments in the Lebanese political scene, and the call is for a stronger research design with a bigger, more representative sample of the Lebanese population.

A second limitation has to do with the quality of the sample of the study: It consisted mainly of individuals with higher education, females, and individuals in their late twenties (see Table 1). One may, for example, wonder what the data would look like had there been a larger male representation, considering the well-documented higher level of engagement of men in politics, especially in a country like Lebanon, where female representation in the political arena is extremely low.

A third limitation of the study is our reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce sources of bias and error. Self-reported data are susceptible to recall and social desirability biases, potentially affecting the accuracy and completeness of the information provided by participants.

A further limitation has to do with the scales used in our study: These have not been fully validated in the Lebanese population. Such validation is essential to confirm the suitability of these instruments in the Lebanese context. For example, the instrument measuring learned helplessness is based on the Western definition of learned helplessness, while our study has clearly delineated a different conceptualization of learned helplessness, more in line with a form of resilience in the face of adversities. Similarly, the notion of locus of control as measured by the instrument we used is based on a Western conceptualization of control that does not capture the nuances of the Lebanese concept of control, nuances stemming from a more collectivistic understanding of one's control over life events. A third example is the measurement of perceived external political self-efficacy. The scale that was constructed for our study may not have adequately captured the concept of external political efficacy in relation to the Lebanese political context. Thus, future research should consider using different scales for measuring the variables of interest.

Since this was an exploratory study, it is recommended to complement the findings obtained from correlational analyses of scale data with interviews with a small number of people or focus groups with targeted discussions. Data transpiring from interviews and focus groups can be much more revealing than numerical data obtained from different scales.

Lastly, in the demographic questionnaire, we believe that the question on *political affiliation* was not properly worded or that the options that were provided were not well crafted; 88.7% of the sample did not answer that question. There is much ambiguity in terms of how to interpret this missing data: It could be explained as either non-affiliated (therefore not politically engaged) or preferring not to reveal one's affiliation for various considerations. Such ambiguity has affected the interpretation of the overall pattern of relationships between the variables. More precise data on participants' political affiliation could have further enriched the findings and provided more accurate insights into the political engagement of the Lebanese. Future studies should account for political affiliation as a core, not ad-hoc, variable to further understand the complexities of the Lebanese context.

A replication of the present study is recommended to be conducted on the eve of the Lebanese parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in May 2026, using a bigger and more representative sample of the Lebanese population. Such a replication is necessary to capture the political mindset and sense of agency of the Lebanese people experiencing this new chapter in Lebanese politics which is heralding the long-awaited economic, political and judicial reforms.

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Misanthropic Feminism:
How and Why the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Sexually Discriminates Against Men in Uncorroborated Rape Cases where the Complainant Claims that they were Voluntarily Intoxicated

Michael Naughton[1]

Abstract: In four parts, this article is framed through the lens of an alleged innocent victim of a false allegation and wrongful conviction for a rape he says he did not commit. First, it will show how the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in England and Wales currently acts contrary to the Code for Crown Prosecutors (CCP), as well as a raft of international human rights and equality laws, when it discriminates against men in uncorroborated rape cases when the complainant says that she voluntarily intoxicated. [2] Second, it will critique the existing CPS guidance on rape and intoxication to show how it is also biased against men accused of rape by a complainant claiming to be voluntarily intoxicated. Third, it will conceptualize the competing discourses that have emerged in response to the low conviction rate, "Increased Convictions for Rape Discourse" (ICRD) and "False Allegations Discourse" (FAD), which compete for how the low conviction rate for alleged rapes should be interpreted. Finally, it will provide an explanation for why the CPS acts in the way it does through the development of additional new concepts. This includes "misanthropia," to explain a germ that has infected the criminal justice system in terms an inherent bias against men in response to uncorroborated allegations of rape.

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[2] It is acknowledged that men can also make allegations of rape but restrict this analysis to allegations of rape by women, which make up the overwhelming number of allegations by sex.

It also includes "misanthropic feminism," which is conceived to act against the interests of both women and men; against all of humanity in its 'success' of law and policy reforms with the aim of making it easier to convict men accused of rape who may not have committed the alleged offence. The central argument and general conclusion are straightforward: Unless and until the existing CPS guidance on rape and intoxication is reformed, the wrongful convictions that flow from uncorroborated allegations of rape where the complainant was voluntarily intoxicated that are currently being enabled by the CPS will continue unabated.

Keywords: *Crown Prosecution Service (CPS); Rape allegations; Misanthropic feminism; Misanthropia; Human Rights*

Introduction

As part of my work with Empowering the Innocent (ETI),[3] I am working with "John," not his real name, who was convicted of rape but claims that he is an innocent victim of a false allegation and wrongful conviction and imprisonment. My work thus far on John's case has included writing about his challenges with probation due to his claim of innocence.[4] It includes writing a letter of complaint to his probation officers in response to his risk level being increased due to his refusal to acknowledge his responsibility for an alleged crime that he says did not occur and he did not commit. And, it includes a successful complaint to the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) for rejecting his second application on the grounds that they failed to understand his application; what he was asking the CCRC to investigate, thus its rejection was inappropriate and unjustified.[5] For those unfamiliar, the CCRC is the statutory public body tasked with reviewing alleged miscarriages of justice and returning cases back to the appeal courts if it is deemed there is a "real possibility" that the conviction will be overturned.[6] At the time of writing, the CCRC issued

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[3] In my role as Founder and Director of Empowering the Innocent (ETI), set up to raise awareness of, and give voice to, alleged innocent victims of false allegations and wrongful convictions / imprisonment. See "Home." *Empowering the Innocent.* Accessed 15 October 2025.

[4] Michael Naughton, "How the Intransigence of the Probation System Can Exacerbate the Harm Caused to Innocent Victims of False Allegations and Wrongful Convictions." *FACTnews* 14, no. 2 (Autumn 2024): 38–39.

[5] I also attended a two hour meeting with John and the Case Review Manager (CRM) dealing with the CCRC's third review of his alleged miscarriage of justice at the CCRC offices in Birmingham to ensure that he had an appropriate grasp his claim of false allegation and wrongful conviction and imprisonment and a clear understanding of what John was asking the CCRC to do in his applications.

[6] The "real possibility test" is contained in the Criminal Appeal Act, 1995, s. 35 (England and Wales): para 13. I have written much about how the CCRC's 'real possibility test' can, and does, fail innocent applicants. See, for instance, Michael Naughton "Theorising miscarriages of justice: How and why the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) acts to prevent

another Statement of Reasons (SoR) outlining why it has, yet again, rejected the third review of his alleged miscarriage of justice, which I will also assist in challenging. Although, the CCRC do not see anything legally untoward in his conviction, he, his Mum, friends and supporters refuse to accept that he is a rapist. This article will develop why I agree with their stance.

John and his complainant worked together and became very good friends. John told me that they had met outside of working hours for coffee, and she had complained to him on the night that they slept together that "she hardly saw her partner these days." Crucially, John told me that the allegation was made only with the encouragement of, or pressure from, her partner, which the complainant herself testified at trial, who was upset and angry when his girlfriend returned home in the morning after she had spent the night with John and he discovered that she had cheated on him. John told me that his complainant's partner was his *de facto* complainant and that his evidence in the trial is "etched into his brain." He said his words were: "She didn't want to press charges as she said he was a friend. She was screaming at me not to. I had to push and push and push her to comply."

A legal loophole, contained in a CPS guideline relating to rape allegations where the complainant was voluntarily intoxicated that treats women and men differently was utilized, or, rather, weaponized, to convict John of rape. John and the complainant had both been drinking alcohol on the night that they had sex and whilst a voluntarily intoxicated man, correctly, must take full responsibility for his actions, women are deemed to be unable to consent to sex if they are, likewise, voluntarily incapacitated. This means that men who sleep with women who have been drinking alcohol are vulnerable to the possibility of allegations of rape if the women regrets sleeping with the man sometime afterwards[7] or has some other an ulterior motive to claim that she was raped,[8] such as in the case of John where it is claimed that the complainant was pressured to support her boyfriend's wish for him to be accused of rape when he discovered her infidelity.

Against this background, the remainder of this article will be in four parts. First, it will show how the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in England and Wales currently acts contrary to the Code for Crown Prosecutors (CCP), as well as a raft of

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wrongful convictions from coming to public attention and what might be done in response," *Islamic Perspective*.28 (2022); Michael Naughton "The Criminal Cases Review Commission: Innocence versus safety and the integrity of the criminal justice system," *The Criminal Law Quarterly*, 58 (2012); Michael Naughton (Editor) *The Criminal Cases Review Commission: Hope for the Innocent?* Palgrave Macmillan. 2009; Michael Naughton "Wrongful Convictions and Innocence Projects in the UK: Help, Hope and Education," *Web Journal of Current Legal Issues*, 3 (2006).

[7] Samuel Demarchi, Frederik Tomas, and Laurent Fanton, "False Rape Allegation and Regret: A Theoretical Model Based on Cognitive Dissonance," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 50, no. 5 (2021): 2067–2083.

[8] Andre De Zutter, Robert Horselenberg, and Peter van Koppen, "Motives for Filing a False Allegation of Rape," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 47 (2018): 457–464.

international human rights and equality laws, when it discriminates against men in uncorroborated rape cases when the complainant says that she voluntarily intoxicated. [9] Second, it will critique the existing CPS guidance on rape and intoxication to show how it is also biased against men accused of rape by a complainant claiming to be voluntarily intoxicated. Third, it will conceptualize the competing discourses that have emerged in response to the low conviction rate, "Increased Convictions for Rape Discourse" (ICRD) and "False Allegations Discourse" (FAD), which compete for how the low conviction rate for alleged rapes should be interpreted. Finally, it will provide an explanation for why the CPS acts in the way it does through the development of additional new concepts. This includes "misanthropia," to explain a germ that has infected the criminal justice system in terms an inherent bias against men in response to uncorroborated allegations of rape. It also includes "misanthropic feminism," which is conceived to act against the interests of both women and men; against all of humanity in its 'success' of law and policy reforms with the aim of making it easier to convict men accused of rape who may not have committed the alleged offence. The central argument and general conclusion are straightforward: Unless and until the existing CPS guidance on rape and intoxication is reformed, the wrongful convictions that flow from uncorroborated allegations of rape where the complainant was voluntarily intoxicated that are currently being enabled by the CPS will continue unabated.

The Crown Prosecution Service and the Code for Crown Prosecutors

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is the body tasked with the prosecution of alleged criminal offences that have been investigated by the police and other investigative organizations in England and Wales.[10] It is governed by the Code for Crown Prosecutors (CCP) to ensure that its: "Casework decisions [are] taken fairly, impartially and with integrity [to] help to secure justice for victims, witnesses, suspects, defendants and the public."[11]

There are additional principles contained in the CCP that prosecutors must abide by in every case to further ensure this underpinning or overarching stated aim or value.[12] The specific general principles that will be evaluated in this article on how the CPS deal with rape allegations when the complainant was voluntarily intoxicated are:

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[9] It is acknowledged that men can also make allegations of rape but restrict this analysis to allegations of rape by women, which make up the overwhelming number of allegations by sex.

[10] Crown Prosecution Service, "About Us," accessed 14 October 2025.

[11] Crown Prosecution Service, "The Code for Crown Prosecutors, 2.5" accessed 14 October 2025,

[12] Ibid., 2.6.

> '2.7 When making decisions, prosecutors must be fair and objective. They must not let any personal views about the ethnic or national origin, gender, disability, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation or gender identity of the suspect, defendant, victim or any witness influence their decisions. Neither must they be motivated by political considerations. Prosecutors must always act in the interests of justice and not solely for the purpose of obtaining a conviction.'[13]

> '2.8 Prosecutors must be even-handed in their approach to every case, and have a duty to protect the rights of suspects and defendants, while providing the best possible service to victims.'[14]

> '2.10 Prosecutors must apply the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights, in accordance with the Human Rights Act 1998, at each stage of a case.'[15]

It is argued that the CPS failed on each of these imperatives of the CCP in John's case. In breach of 2.7 of the CCP, the CPS failed to act in the interests of justice in John's case, with justice understood in the straightforward sense that criminal trials should not convict those who did not commit a criminal offence or an act that should not be labelled a criminal offence if human rights and equality laws are abided by. Instead, the CPS treated John's and his complainant's voluntary intoxication differently, on the basis that she is a woman and he is a man, and, precisely, for the purpose of obtaining a conviction, or "getting the numbers" of convictions of (alleged) rapists up.[16]

Moreover, whether individual prosecutors are, or are not, motivated, personally, by sex discrimination when they treat women and men differently in rape allegations when the complainant was voluntarily intoxicated, they work within a system that is structured along lines of sex discrimination in such cases, which they fail to question and also fail to problematize as contrary to 2.5 of the CCP.[17] That is to say, when prosecutors comply with the requirements of legislation that discriminates in terms of sex to treat voluntarily intoxicated women and men differently for the purposes of taking such rape allegations to trial, they further undermine any notion that CPS "casework decisions are taken fairly, impartially and

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[13] Ibid., 2.7.
[14] Ibid., 2.8.
[15] Ibid., 2.10.
[16] See Vera Baird, "The Distressing Truth Is That If You Are Raped in Britain Today, Your Chances of Seeing Justice Are Slim," *Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales Annual Report* 2021–22, accessed 14 October 2025; also, Yvette Cooper, "Preventing Crime and Delivering Justice," *Hansard* 714 (11 May 2022).
[17] Crown Prosecution Service, "The Code for Crown Prosecutors," 2.5.

with integrity to help to secure justice for victims, witnesses, suspects, defendants and the public," as per 2.5 of the CCP.[18]

The prosecution in John's case was also in breach of 2.8 of the CCP,[19] failing to be even-handed in its approach, seeing the complainant as the "victim" from the outset, rather than as a possible perpetrator of a false allegation that has been enabled by criminal legislation and CPS policies for ideological purposes (discussed further below). Contrary to 2.5 of the CCP, the prosecutors in John's case sided with his complainant at the expense of a more appropriate consideration of obtaining justice for John and the general public from the standpoint of the presumption of innocence, which is supposed to be the guiding principle in dealing with alleged criminal offences.[20] If a presumption of innocence approach had been adopted, the CPS would also have scrutinized the allegation and the legislation on the law of rape and voluntary intoxication from the perspective of it governing code of conduct and its international and domestic human rights and equality obligations.

Indeed, prosecutors also acted in clear breach of 2.10 of the CCP[21] in John's case by failing to comply with international and domestic human rights and equality laws that require that defendants in criminal trials are not treated differently in terms of sex, or any other protected characteristic, to ensure that they receive a fair trial. This includes the following articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),[22] which speak directly about the principle of equality before the law:

> 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.'[23]

> 'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.'[24]

> 'All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.'[25]

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[18] Ibid., 2.5.
[19] Ibid., 2.8.
[20] Michael Naughton, "How the Presumption of Innocence Renders the Innocent Vulnerable to Wrongful Conviction," *Irish Journal of Legal Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011): 40–54.
[21] Crown Prosecution Service, "The Code for Crown Prosecutors," 2.10.
[22] Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948).
[23] Ibid., Article 1.
[24] Ibid., Article 2.
[25] Ibid., Article 7.

It is acknowledged that the UDHR is not legally binding in the UK, yet all signatory States, including the UK, have, nonetheless, a continuing duty, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights set out in the UDHR for everyone without discrimination.

Moreover, the CPS is also required to treat citizens equally under domestic human rights and equality legislation, which is legally binding. This includes the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA),[26] which makes the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)[27] enforceable in UK courts. Of most significance to the discussion here, Article 14 of the HRA prohibits sex discrimination of the kind deployed by the CPS in treating his complainants' claim of voluntary intoxication differently to his:

> 'The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.'[28]

This argument is strengthened further with reference to the Equality Act 2010,[29] which also requires public authorities in Great Britain (Wales, Scotland and England), including the CPS, not to discriminate against the protected characteristics of citizens, with sex listed as a core protected characteristic under s.4.[30]

Rape Allegations and Intoxication

Instructions on how the CPS deals, specifically, with rape allegations where a complainant claims to have been voluntarily intoxicated at the time that sex occurred are contained in Chapter 6 of the CCP.[31] Framed in the concept of 'consent' under the terms of the Sexual Offences Act (SOA) 2003,[32] of specific interest to this analysis is s.74 of the SOA 2003, which provides the statutory definition of 'consent' as follows: "a person consents if he (sic) agrees by choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice."[33]

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[26] Human Rights Act 1998, c. 42 (U.K.).
[27] European Convention on Human Rights 1950.
[28] Human Rights Act 1998, Article 14.
[29] Equality Act 2010, c. 15. (U.K.).
[30] Ibid., s. 4.
[31] Crown Prosecution Service, "The Code for Crown Prosecutors, Chapter 6."
[32] Sexual Offences Act 2003, c. 42 (U.K.).
[33] Ibid., s. 74.

In considering whether rape complainants consented, the CCP tells prosecutors to consider the definition of consent under s.74 of the SOA 2003 in two stages:

- 'Whether a complainant had the capacity (that is the age and understanding) to make a choice about whether or not to take part in the sexual activity at the time in question.
- Whether he or she was in a position to make that choice freely, and was not constrained in any way.'[34]

The CCP then states that "assuming that the complainant had both the freedom and capacity to consent, the crucial question is whether the complainant agrees to the activity by choice."[35] It is under these terms that prosecutors seek to prove the absence of consent to obtain convictions in alleged rape cases. This is evident in the use of "guilty," which is a legal term that can only be determined by a jury in alleged rape cases, in Chapter 6 of the CCP, which instructs prosecutors on the interpretation of s.74 of the SOA 2003 as follows:

'…a person (A) is guilty of an offence if (s)he:

- Acts intentionally;
- (B) does not consent to the act;
- And (A) does not reasonably believe that B consents.'[36]

There is no question in the case of John that he and the complainant acted intentionally. There was no allegation of coercion or the use of force of any kind by his complainant. That his complainant's consent was premeditated also seems to be evidenced by such facts as she had told friends earlier on the evening who asked her if she wanted to share a taxi home at the end of the evening that she was going to spend the night with John. Providing further additional support to John's claim that he believed that sex with his complainant was consensual is a text message from the complainant on the morning after they had sex as she was walking to her car. It read: "I hope I havnt got a parking ticket LOL" (sic), with "LOL" an abbreviation for 'Laugh Out Loud." And a neighbor in a flat directly below John's also said on the day of the alleged rape to the police and to both John and another neighbor that he only heard "pleasurable moaning noises" from the flat above and did not hear anything that he thought could amount to rape.[37]

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[34] Crown Prosecution Service, "The Code for Crown Prosecutors, Chapter 6."
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] This neighbor also sent a statement by email to the police a fortnight later that the CCRC has conceded was favorable to John's defense. John and I are currently exploring why this potential

This leaves the question of whether John's belief that his complainant's consent to sex was reasonable. For the CCP, the test of reasonable belief is a subjective test with an objective element, and the best way of dealing with this issue for prosecutors according to the CCP is to ask two questions:

- 'Did the suspect genuinely believe the complainant consented? This relates to his or her personal capacity to evaluate consent (the subjective element of the test).
- If so, did the suspect reasonably believe it? It will be for the jury to decide if his or her belief was reasonable (the objective element).'[38]

In this context, and the facts of the case detailed above, it also seems unproblematic that John had a reasonable belief that his complainant consented to sex. Indeed, the whole case against John hinges only on an after-the-fact determination that his complainant could not consent to sex due to being intoxicated, despite her intoxication being voluntary. There was no consideration at all of whether John's state of voluntary intoxication affected his freedom and capacity to choose to have sex. It is here that the CPS is shown to have treated John and his complainant differently along lines of sex discrimination, treating John's complainant's claim of voluntary intoxication differently to his acceptance that he was voluntarily intoxicated, too.

Finally, for this part of the article, it is unproblematic that the CCP instructs prosecutors that "a complainant does not consent if they are incapacitated through drink."[39] To be sure, nothing in this article is intended to detract from the rule that sex with an incapacitated woman should always be seen as rape, whether the causation of the incapacitation is voluntary or involuntary.[40] A troubling aspect of the CCP's direction to prosecutors on intoxication and consent, however, is that it only partially cites the leading case of R v Bree,[41] and does so in a way that consolidates the notion that even voluntarily intoxicated complainants can never consent.

More specifically, Chapter 6 of the CCP directs prosecutors to interpret even voluntarily intoxicated complainants as unable to consent citing paragraph 34 of R v Bree as follows:

'A complainant does not need to be unconscious through drink to lose their capacity to consent. Capacity to consent may evaporate

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witness for John's defense refused to be a defense witness at his trial and why John and his defense team only found this out during the trial.

[38] Crown Prosecution Service, "The Code for Crown Prosecutors, Chapter 6."

[39] Ibid.

[40] "Incapacitation" is understood here as the cognitive and/or physical inability to make informed, rational choices and/or decisions. If someone is asleep or unconscious they are incapacitated.

[41] *R v Bree* [2007] EWCA Crim 804, paragraph 34.

before a complainant becomes unconscious. A prosecutor must consider the complainant's state of mind at the time of the alleged assault.'[42]

This omits a crucial part of paragraph 34 of R v Bree which foresees a scenario where a voluntarily intoxicated complainant remains capable of consent, even where they have consumed substantial quantities of alcohol.[43] This is why it is vital to consider R v Bree paragraph 34 in full in order to get a better understanding of how problematic the existing direction to prosecutors contained in Chapter 6 of the CCP is with only its partial reference. A full reading of paragraph 34 of R v Bree also highlights how decisions to prosecute cases like that of John, which are based on a narrow interpretation and application, serve to deny alleged rape suspects or defendants a fair trial. Paragraph 34 of R v Bree in full is:

> 'In our judgment, the proper construction of section 74 of the 2003 Act, as applied to the problem now under discussion, leads to clear conclusions. If, through drink (or for any other reason) the complainant has temporarily lost her capacity to choose whether to have intercourse on the relevant occasion, she is not consenting, and subject to questions about the defendant's state of mind, if intercourse takes place, this would be rape. However, where the complainant has voluntarily consumed even substantial quantities of alcohol, but nevertheless remains capable of choosing whether or not to have intercourse, and in drink agrees to do so, this would not be rape. We should perhaps underline that, as a matter of practical reality, capacity to consent may evaporate well before a complainant becomes unconscious. Whether this is so or not, however, is fact specific, or more accurately, depends on the actual state of mind of the individuals involved on the particular occasion.'[44]

Read in full, then, and in the context of John's complainant's actions before (telling friends that she was going to spend the night with John), during (the complainant did not claim that she did not consent to sex and a neighbor said that he did not hear anything that indicated rape either) and after sexual intercourse (jovial text message on the way to her car and allegation only made because her boyfriend did not want to accept that his girlfriend cheated on him), the decision to prosecute John for alleged rape seems perverse in the extreme. A fairer interpretation of the facts indicates that

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[42] Crown Prosecution Service, "The Code for Crown Prosecutors, Chapter 6."
[43] *R v Bree*, paragraph 34.
[44] Ibid.

John's complainant had sufficient capacity to freely choose to consent to sex and John's belief that his complainant consented was eminently reasonable.[45]

The Competing Discourses on Uncorroborated Allegations of Rape

There were 71,227 alleged rapes recorded by the police in England and Wales 2024, of which there were 1,923 prosecutions.[46] CPS data shows that the conviction rate in 2023/24 was 53%.[47] In 2024, then, there were 69,304 allegations of rape where the CPS did not bring a prosecution and 1,019 alleged rapes where the jury found the accused not guilty, giving a total of 70,323 alleged rapes where the person accused was neither prosecuted nor convicted at trial.

This data is concerning, both in terms of the possible number of rapes that are not being brought to justice and in terms of the possible number of false allegations of rape being made, too. As noted by the House of Lords report, *Rape: Levels of prosecutions*, interpreting the official statistics concerning rape allegations is complex: "Increased numbers of rape recorded by the police may indicate an increase in the incidence of rape but may also indicate more people are reporting it."[48]

Put crudely in the extreme: Is the criminal justice system failing almost 99% of rape victims or are almost 99% or rape allegations to be seen as false? It is in response to this conundrum that two opposing sides or discourses have emerged. I term the opposing discourses on uncorroborated rape allegations, which hinge only on an allegation of rape and no other evidence, so called "A said, B said" cases,[49] "Increased Convictions for Rape Discourse" (ICRD) versus "False Allegations

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[45] For completeness, it is important for me to acknowledge here that Chapter 6 of the CCP contains additional direction to prosectors relating to rape allegations and intoxication, none of which formed part of this analysis as it is of no relevance to the facts of the rape allegations against John, nor his conviction. This includes the following statement: "Evidence of a lack of recollection of events cannot itself be determinative of issues of consent and capacity," which was not a feature of the allegations or prosecution against John. It also included reference to the following three cases, which had no relevance on the allegation against John, nor the prosecution cases against him: 1. Reference to R v Hysa, which relates to "a provable lie told by the defendant regarding whether sexual intercourse took place"; 2. Reference to R v Khamki, which revolved around a person unknown to the complainant raping her whilst she was in a drunken sleep; and, 3. R v Tambedou, where the Court of Appeal determined that the complainant's lack of memory was not sufficient for the judge to remove the case from the jury.

[46] Rape Crisis England and Wales. "How Many People Are Raped, Sexually Assaulted and Sexually Abused?" Accessed 14 October 2025.

[47] Crown Prosecution Service, "CPS Data Summary: Quarter 4 2023–2024," accessed 14 October 2025.

[48] *House of Lords Library*, "Rape: Levels of Prosecutions," accessed 14 October 2025.

[49] I use "A said, B said" rather than the usual "she said, he said" to denote that the complainant making a rape allegation may be a woman or a man, although the person accused is always a man as only men can commit rape under the SOA 2003.

Discourse" (FAD), a concept that I also used when considering the competing discourses on uncorroborated allegations of child sexual abuse.[50]

On one hand, ICRD tends to work on the simplistic and problematic basis that all rape allegations are truthful, failing to consider the reality of false allegations of rape.[51] On the other hand, FAD tends to work on the equally problematic basis that those who claim to be innocent victims of false allegations of rape must always be treated as though they might be innocent, which in reality means treating alleged victims of false allegations as though they are innocent.[52]

A problematic feature shared by both ICRD and FAD, then, is that each camp relies on the decisions of the criminal justice system to provide evidence, or its truth, if you will, of the correctness and/or justness of their opposing discursive positions. ICRD sees the low prosecution and conviction rate for rape allegations as evidence of "the effective decriminalization of rape."[53] Alternatively, FAD sees the low prosecution and conviction rate for rape allegations as *prima facie* evidence that an overwhelming number of rape allegations are false.[54]

Yet, the decisions of police officers, prosecutors and/or juries do not provide truth in the sense that ICRD and FAD claim in support of their critiques, which is, precisely, what fuels the competing discourses against one another when those accused of rape are not prosecuted or convicted at trial. That the criminal justice system fails both genuine victims of rape, when perpetrators of rape are not prosecuted or acquitted at trial,[55] and genuine victims of false allegations, too, when

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[50] Michael Naughton, "Rethinking the Competing Discourses on Uncorroborated Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse," *British Journal of Criminology* 59, no. 2 (2019): 461–480; Michael Naughton, "A Freudian Analysis of the Competing Groups on Uncorroborated Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse," in *Sigmund Freud as a Critical Social Theorist: Psychoanalysis and the Neurotic in Contemporary Society*, ed. D. J. Byrd and S. J. Miri (Leiden: Brill, 2024), chapter 16.

[51] See, for instance, Centre for Women's Justice, "Home," accessed 14 October 2025; End Violence Against Women Coalition, "Home," accessed 14 October 2025; Rape Crisis England and Wales, "How Many People Are Raped, Sexually Assaulted and Sexually Abused?" accessed 14 October 2025; Imkaan, "About Us," accessed 15 October 2025.

[52] See, for instance, False Allegations Support Organisation, "Home," accessed 15 October 2025; Facing Allegations in Contexts of Trust, "Home," accessed 15 October 2025; Accused.Me, "Home," accessed 15 October 2025.

[53] Centre for Women's Justice, End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW), Imkaan, and Rape Crisis England and Wales. *The Decriminalisation of Rape: Why the Justice System Is Failing Rape Survivors and What Needs to Change.* 2025, accessed 14 October 2025, page 1.

[54] Patrick Graham, "Patriarchy – and Why I Argue That People Should Question Its Assumed Existence," *False Allegations Watch (FAW),* 20 October 2023.

[55] Syal, Rajeev, and Alexandra Topping. "Rape Victims 'Systematically Failed' in England and Wales, Report Finds." *The Guardian,* 25 February 2022.

innocent victims are falsely accused of rape [56] or are wrongly convicted and imprisoned, is something that neither discourse seems to be able or willing to see.

Because my research and wider activities[57] center on claims of innocence by alleged victims of false allegations and/or wrongful convictions and/or imprisonment, my own position on rape allegations is to consider each claim of false allegation of rape on a case by case basis and adopt an "interactional belief" perspective, which recognizes and includes both the extensive forms of harm and injustice to genuine victims of rape as well as to genuine victims of false allegations of rape, too.[58] An interactional belief approach so constructed neither believes nor disbelieves a claim of false allegation of rape, or any other alleged crime for that matter. Rather, it recognizes the limitations and failings of the criminal justice system and its agents in terms of providing the truth in its investigations (police), decisions to prosecute (CPS) and determinations (juries) in relation to alleged rape cases in an attempt to get to the truth or otherwise of such allegations, rather than seeking to build legal cases that might satisfy a criminal prosecution and/or conviction. Such a stance, to take all claims of false allegation of rape seriously and to be open to the possibility that they may be true or false, is radically different from either ICRD or FAD. It is not a *belief* in a claim of false allegation of rape *per se*, but, rather, a provisional or guiding standpoint that recognizes the limitations of the criminal justice system from which to begin an investigation, whereby claims of innocence by alleged victims of false allegations of rape are subjected to rigorous interrogation in the interests of more holistic avenues to truth and justice. Crucially, I discontinue my work on cases if or when it is discovered that an alleged innocent victim of a false allegation of rape, as is the focus of this article, is not innocent.[59]

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[56] De Zutter, Horselenberg, and van Koppen, "Motives for Filing a False Allegation."; David Lisak, Lori Gardinier, Sarah C. Nicksa, and Ashley M. Cote, "False Allegations of Sexual Assault: An Analysis of Ten Years of Reported Cases," *Violence Against Women* 16, no. 12 (2010): 1318–1334.

[57] Whether with Innocence Network UK (INUK) (see Innocence Network UK. 2025. "Home." *Innocence Network UK.* Accessed 15 October 2025, the University of Bristol Innocence Project (see Steven Morris, 2005. "Students to the Rescue." *The Guardian,* June 14, 2005) or Empowering the Innocent and its subprojects (see Empowering the Innocent**.** 2025. "Home." *Empowering the Innocent.* Accessed 15 October 2025.).

[58] See Michael Naughton, "Rethinking the Competing Discourses on Uncorroborated Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse," *The British Journal of Criminology* 59, no. 2, 2019: 461–480; Jacqualine Wheatcroft and Sandra Walklate. "Thinking Differently About 'False Allegations' in Cases of Rape: The Search for Truth." *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology* 3 (2014): 239–248.

[59] See Michael Naughton, "Confronting an Uncomfortable Truth: Not All Alleged Victims of False Accusations Will Be Innocent!" *FACTion,* 2007: 8–12. This is also the stance of the organizations that I have established to research or assist alleged innocent victims of false allegations and/or wrongful convictions, see Empowering the Innocent, "Disclaimer and Victims Statement," accessed 15 October 2025.

Misanthropia

"Misanthropia" can be defined as the hatred of all people, of all humanity. This concept is developed here to frame how the competing discourses on rape allegations should each be seen as intrinsically misanthropic when they fail to acknowledge the ways in which they can, and do, cause and exacerbate collateral forms of harm to the womenfolk and menfolk of their perceived opponents. In their fight for justice for the alleged victim at the center of rape allegations (either the mainly woman complainant (ICRD) or the man being accused (FAD)) their hatred towards their constructed opponent blinds them to the extent that neither discourse shows even a miniscule of humanity to its opposing camp. This sees forms of ICRD showing no regard, whatsoever, for the pain and harm caused and/or exacerbated to the womenfolk of men who say they have been falsely accused and/or wrongly convicted of rape, depicting them, for example, as women who will "never accept a man's guilt" and/or part of "a rapist rights group."[60] On the other hand, FAD is equally oblivious to forms of pain and harm caused to the menfolk of women who say that they have been raped,[61] which, for example, can, effectively, dismisses their daughters, sisters or mothers as women as "attention seekers."[62] who "deserved to be raped."[63]

Contra this, my position has always been that women and men should best be seen from the perspective of a shared humanity with common interests, albeit with differing and competing power relations depending on the situation and the perspective that it is evaluated from. And it is from the perspective of this shared humanity and common interests that women and men should refuse to be divided warring factions and take sides in response to rape allegations, or any other issue for that matter, which are uncorroborated by additional forms of evidence other than the complainant's allegation.[64]

It is true that in certain situations, men can have the upper hand in the existing power relationships between the sexes, for example, pay equality, as in the Ford factory in Dagenham case from 1968 when 187 female sewing machinists went on strike. The women refused to work because they were being paid 15% less than their male colleagues, despite carrying out the same tasks.[65] It is equally true that in other situations women can be in the superior position, for example in child custody

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[60] Colan Lamont, "Victim Shock after Twisted Scots 'Rapists' Rights Group' Targets Brave Survivors Calling Them Attention Seekers." *The Scottish Sun,* 7 August 2025.

[61] For a fathers account of the rape of his daughter see Charlie Norris "A Father's Surprising Response to His Daughter's Rape," *Voice Male,* 8 October 2018, accessed 15 October 2025.

[62] Lamont, "Victim Shock after Twisted Scots 'Rapists' Rights Group.'"

[63] Stuart MacDonald "Every Day Trolls Tell Me I Deserved to Be Raped." *The Scottish Sun,* 12 May 2025.

[64] It is problematic that such cases are tried by the CPS at all (developed further below).

[65] The publicity caused by the strike led to equal pay legislation being introduced two years later, which, in turn, resulted in the Equal Pay Act, 1975. See Nicola Kenny, "The Women Who Forged the Way for Equal Pay." *BBC Archive,* 17 September 2024.

cases where in the overwhelming majority of cases in the UK the mother is awarded sole or main day-to-day custody of their child(ren) following a divorce. In terms of official statistics, for the three-year period between 2021 and 2013 87% of 'parents with care' (i.e., those granted sole or main day-to-day custody) were female, whilst 89% of non-resident parents were male.[66]

But whomever may appear to be in the position of power, the most important consideration is that we, women and men, do not live in separate vacuums or spheres but, rather, in a rich and vibrant web of complex and dynamic interrelationships and co-dependencies. As such, any form of oppression, prejudice or discrimination against either women or men based on sexism will impact both sexes in a multitude of detrimental and harmful ways. To continue with the same examples, if women are paid less than men for the same work, then the household that contains sons and brothers and husbands will also be poorer; financially detrimentally affected. This is why men and women should campaign together for pay equality and refuse to be played off against one another. It is also why women and men should campaign together for fathers to be given equal contact with their children, unless there are good reasons for not doing so, who will be both boys and girls, following relationship break-ups or divorces, to say nothing of the male and female grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins, and so on, on both sides of the relationship who are affected, too. As this relates in a general sense to false allegations of any alleged sexual offence and the wrongful convictions that flow from them, the, mainly, men[67] who are accused are the menfolk, sons, husbands, fathers, bothers, friends, and so on, of womenfolk: mothers, wives, daughters, sisters and girlfriends, and so on. In the specific case of John, he is supported by his mother and a number of female relatives and friends who are also affected by the rape allegation and his conviction for rape[68] in a range of damaging ways, too.

It is in this sense that forms of institutional sexism, which may look like they act in the interests of either, rather than both, women or men, are better seen in terms of what I term here as a *misanthropic continuum*, with misogyny at one extreme and misandry at the other. This allows for both women and men to be conceived as either misandrists or misogynists acting against the shared humanity and common interests of women and men. Moreover, this more holistic humanity approach also permits the conceptualization of both women and men working together in union for liberation from all forms of oppression, inequality, injustice, discrimination and prejudice that are caused by sexism, whether the target or victim is a woman or a man. And this way of conceiving power and sexism also has implications for how the so-called patriarchy is conceived and resisted. Such an approach, for instance, highlights the

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[66] Woodfines Solicitors, "The Grounds for Full Custody of a Child in the UK," accessed 14 October 2025.

[67] According to the Office for National Statistics (2021) '94% of survivors of rape or attempted rape are women'.

[68] Which is the not the same as being a rapist. See Michael Naughton, "The Parable of the 'Rapist Footballer.'" *False Allegations Watch (FAW),* March 8, 2023.

limitations of Sylvia Walby's[69] seminal construction of the concept "patriarchy" as: "a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women."[70]

To be sure, the forms of sexism that have structured our, women and men's, socialization, shaping the way that we think, feel and act, then, needs to be seen more widely than Walby's narrow conception, which is, itself, divisive in pitching women against men and their womenfolk in such a simplistic and problematic way. Crucially, the governing system that is commonly called patriarchy, which is more appropriately to be seen as institutionalized forms of sexism,[71] must be extended to incorporate the social structures and practices which divide, dominate and oppress all people, all humanity, whether women or men. We need to recognize that women and men opposing one another is, precisely, what fuels the so called "culture war" between forms of feminism at the misandrist end of the misanthropic continuum that I constructed above and men's rights groups towards the misogynist end. And, until such time as there is a true and genuine equality for all humanity, women and men must strive together to achieve the end goal of eradicating all forms of institutionalized sexism. Indeed, as hooks also noted:

> '…the problem is sexism..[a]nd that clarity helps us remember that all of us, female and male, have been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action. As a consequence, females can be just as sexist as men…[a]nd it would be naive and wrongminded for feminist thinkers to see the movement as simplistically being for women against men…To end…institutionalized sexism…we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action.'[72]

Misanthropic Feminism

Despite the misanthropic nature of both ICRD and FAD, however, it is ICRD which is particularly problematic to the analysis here. Indeed, the battles between ICRD and FAD are played out on a micro or interpersonal level in individual cases where an uncorroborated rape allegation has been made and the man accused claims that he did not rape the complainant. Though problematic from a shared humanity perspective, it is understandable in such cases that family members and friends of the complainant and the accused will believe their family member or friend whom they love and rally in support of them. On a more macro level, however, it is ICRD that has had the upper

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[69] Sylvia Walby, "Theorising Patriarchy," *Sociology* 23, no. 2 (1989): 213–234.
[70] Ibid., 220.
[71] bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 3.
[72] Ibid., 15.

hand in the public domain in its conflicts with FAD for at least the last 40 years or so, with the result that the current criminal justice system can be conceived to be infected with the germ of misanthropia in the area of rape allegations,[73] which works against the interests of all people, women, men and children, who are governed by the existing regime.

As noted above, despite the claim to represent the interests of women against men, organizations that together make up ICRD, which include Centre for Women's Justice, End Violence against Women Coalition, Imkaan and Rape Crisis England and Wales, for instance, are intrinsically and inherently misanthropic. I, therefore, term the forms of ICRD that flow from such organizations with the aim of achieving reforms of the criminal justice system to make it easier to convict men accused of rape as *misanthropic feminism*. Misanthropic feminism thus conceived comprises both women and men combatants who see men, all men, as a generalized enemy to be defeated and punished, whether innocent or an actual sexual criminal offender it matters not. As will already be clear, in so doing, the resultant criminal justice system produces forms of harm that impact on innocent men and their womenfolk, too, when false allegations are made, which is counterproductive to the stated aims of any variant of feminism.

A notorious example of what I would term extreme or overt misanthropic feminist discourse was contained in a number of posts on Twitter (now X) by Meghan Joyce Tozer, either on her own account or under the name of Emily Lindin, a name she also used when she set up The Unslut Project[74] as a columnist for *Teen Vogue*. They read:

> 'If some innocent men's reputations have to take a hit in the process of undoing the patriarchy, that is a price I am absolutely willing to pay.'[75]

> 'I'm actually not at all concerned about innocent men losing their jobs over false sexual assault/harassment allegations.'[76]

The argument for why such social media posts from a feminist stance are misanthropic should by now be clear. As for the first post, Ms. Tozer as an individual woman will not pay the direct price if an innocent man is falsely accused or wrongly convicted. But she may feel differently if she saw herself from the standpoint of relationships of shared humanity and common interests and it were a male family

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[73] This also applies to alleged sexual offences, generally, which should become clear, but I will restrict the analysis in the body of the article to rape allegations, which is its specific focus.
[74] The Unslut Project, "Home," accessed 14 October 2025.
[75] Cited in Caitlin Flanagan, "The Conversation #MeToo Needs to Have." *The Atlantic,* 29 January 2018.
[76] Cited in Coalition to End Domestic Violence. "False Allegations: New Feminist Tactic to 'Topple the Patriarchy'?" Accessed 14 October 2025.

member or friend who was being accused of a sexual crime that he did not commit and the womenfolk in her family and wider circle of friends were also affected.

The second post is equally problematic on the same reasoning. When innocent men lose their jobs when false rape allegations are made all of their family members are affected, and likely permanently so as men falsely accused find it difficult, if not impossible, to recover their ruined careers and reputations.[77] It is for such reasons, and in the context of such a high volume of allegations of rape that are neither charged nor convicted that FAD, correctly, highlights that the allegation can be, and often is, the punishment in itself, which may well be the driving motivation for making false allegations.[78]

However, it is not only extreme or overt forms of misanthropic feminist discourse that are problematic when considering rape allegations and the criminal justice system. Indeed, any and all voices from a feminist standpoint, whether voiced by women and/or men, that call for, or support, the removal of safeguards against wrongful convictions "to get the number of rape convictions up"[79] can also be conceived as misanthropic, too. Such reforms include s. 32(1) of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994,[80] which abolished the longstanding requirement on judges to issue a warning to juries when summing up the "dangers" of convicting defendants charged with sexual offences on the uncorroborated testimony of alleged victims. And they include the SOA 2003,[81] which removed the requirement for corroboration in alleged rape trials and is the basis upon which the CPS decide whether to proceed to trial in alleged rape cases.

I have argued elsewhere that such reforms have diminished the presumption of innocence,[82] or inverted it entirely in the case of the SOA 2003 by transferring the burden of proof from the prosecution onto those accused of rape and requiring them to prove something which is almost impossible to prove – that they had a reasonable belief that consent to sex was given by a complainant who is saying, without any additional corroborative evidence, that they did not give such consent.[83] This is compounded by further misanthropic changes to the criminal justice system over the last decade or so which also strive to make it easier to convict alleged rapists. This

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[77] See, for example, Holly Evans, and Bryony Gooch. 2025. "'I Lost My Life': Man Wrongly Jailed for Five Years Demands Fair Compensation Scheme." *The Independent*, May 16, 2025; also Helen Pidd, "Eleanor Williams Jailed for Eight and a Half Years after Rape and Trafficking Lies," *The Guardian*, March 14, 2023.

[78] See De Zutter, Horselenberg, and van Koppen, "Motives for Filing a False Allegation."

[79] Baird, "The Distressing Truth Is That If You Are Raped."; Cooper, "Preventing Crime and Delivering Justice."

[80] *Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994*, c. 33 (UK).

[81] *Sexual Offences Act 2003*, c. 42 (UK).

[82] Michael Naughton, "False Allegations Watch (FAW)." *University of Bristol Law School Blog,* 31 October 2022.

[83] Michael Naughton, "Rape Allegations and the Inversion of the Presumption of Innocence." *University of Bristol Law School Blog,* 26 June 2023.

includes the instruction that police officers "believe the victim," i.e., the woman making the allegation who may well be making a false allegation against a man who is the actual victim,[84] and to not look for evidence to undermine allegations of rape.[85] It is this context that the CPS decision to prosecute John, and men like him, must be located and understood.

Conclusion

This article has shown the CPS to be currently working contrary to all aspects of its remit when it sexually discriminates against men like John by treating his voluntary intoxication and that of his complainant differently. In so doing, it is failing to comply with its own code, the CCP, and it is in beach of international and domestic human rights and equality laws. It also showed that the CPS functions in the way that it does, precisely, for the overall ideological purposes of ICRD, i.e., to increase the number of convictions of men who are accused of rape. This, hopefully, will strengthen John's attempts to challenge his alleged wrongful conviction by showing that he is a victim of sex discrimination and, therefore, an unlawful prosecution. It, simultaneously, highlights the need and for a raft of law and policy reforms to the criminal justice system to restore the presumption of innocence and ensure that women and men are treated equally before the law. This includes the CPS guidelines on how it deals with rape allegations and voluntary intoxication. It includes the police stage of the process with its "believe the victim" mantra, which permits uncorroborated allegations to be admissible forms of evidence capable of obtaining convictions when the reality is that only the complainant and the accused will ever know if the allegation is truthful or not. The reform of the "believe the victim" policy would also prevent cases like John's, where allegations are uncorroborated by additional forms of evidence, even reaching the CPS stage. And it includes legislation such as the SOA 2003, which governs how the CPS interprets "consent" in alleged rape cases, and which transfers the burden of proof from the prosecution to a man accused of rape. The CCRC has also been shown to be a creature of law that is unable to assist innocent victims of laws and guidelines that are not in line with required human rights and equality standards. It has on three occasions, so far, determined that John's conviction is "safe in law," which is not the same as saying that it is safe according to human rights and equality laws.

   We live in a society that is increasingly divided: you are either on this side or that side; in or out; one of us or one of them; a comrade or an enemy.[86] No where

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[84] Michael Naughton, "What If the Police and Prosecution Were Told to 'Believe All Victims of False Allegations'?" *University of Bristol Law School Blog,* 22 January 2024.

[85] BBC News, "Abuse Victims Should Be 'Believed,' Says College of Policing," 22 March 2016.

[86] Michael Naughton, "A Freudian Analysis of the Competing Groups on Uncorroborated Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse." In *Sigmund Freud as a Critical Social Theorist:*

is this more apparent than in relation to the emotive issue of rape allegations. Despite most allegations being uncorroborated by evidence other than the complainant's claim that they were raped, a clear indicator of the "success" of misandrist, and therefore, misanthropic forms of feminism and ICRD discourses is that most of us, nonetheless, seem to choose a side, even though we do not know if the allegation is truthful and the real victim is an innocent man being falsely accused. And, once we have chosen our side, we will fight to the death against our perceived enemy and never concede that there is something in what our opponent is saying: those who claim that they were raped may or may not be truthful and those who say that they were falsely accused of rape may or may not be truthful, too.

It has been shown, however that the divide and conflicts between ICRD and FAD over rape allegations is an intrinsically misanthropic enterprise, which harms us all. Justice is not about choosing a preferred side in response to uncorroborated allegations of rape, which can, and does, cause and exacerbate forms of harm and injustice to both women and men. Nor is it about creating a system that takes a politically preferred side of one sex (women) against the other (men), which in reality works against all of us, whether we are women or men. The existing criminal justice system, then, is misanthropic and self-defeating in relation to rape allegations, whatever its precise intentions.

It has also been shown that ICRD has been the dominant discourse on rape allegations over the last 40 years or so to the extent that the criminal justice system now is infected with misanthropia, containing laws and policies that have diminished the presumption of innocence or inverted it entirely. And it is not difficult to understand why. Who could be against convicting more rapists being convicted? Not I. But the way to go about it is crucial to maintaining justice for all citizens in the interests of our shared humanity. This dictates that the criminal justice system should not be ideologically manipulated in the name of convicting more rapists to the extent that it increases the risk and reality of convicting innocent victims of false allegations, no matter how laudable the argument for law and policy reforms may seem.

A clear insight into the misanthropic ideology driving the criminal justice system to treat women and men differently in the area of rape allegations is provided in a consideration of how it deals with alleged criminal offences concerning women other than rape and other sexual offences that come under the SOA 2003. A straightforward example is when a woman who has been drinking alcohol drives a car. That she was voluntarily intoxicated is not an acceptable excuse or a defense against criminal prosecution or conviction for such an offence, and nor should it be. The same is true if a voluntarily intoxicated women commits a robbery, a burglary or an assault. She is fully responsible for her actions, as any and every other citizen is and should be, irrespective of sex, religious belief, ethnicity, age, and so on.

Yet, in the area of sex, women are treated as though they are not responsible for their actions when they are voluntarily intoxicated; that they are in need of protection, from themselves as much as from a man, any man, all men, who is/are perceived as not to be trusted to not take advantage of her vulnerable situation and rape her. This is as insulting to men as it is patronizing to women in a way that a shared humanity approach should see it being contested by both women and men working in union for the sexes to be treated equally before the law. To be sure, so long as women are seen as vulnerable and in need of differential treatment, equality between the sexes will remain a mere pipedream, which women should protest against whether or not it serves them in the power relations between the sexes or they think it does. A shared humanity approach would also speak against the extent to which uncorroborated allegations of rape have been weaponized for nefarious purposes.[87] This is not only misanthropic when the womenfolk of the falsely accused and the menfolk of alleged rape victims are considered, it is contrary to any notion of equality between women and men and should be challenged by women and men working together on this basis, too.

It is helpful here to consider what the lawyer for Kevin Spacey said to the jury before he was acquitted for nine alleged sexual offences, one of which was rape, that were claimed to have occurred between 2001 and 2023: "It's not a crime to like sex…and it's not a crime to have sex…and it's not a crime to have casual sex."[88]

No matter how unfathomable and/or unconscionable it might be for some, casual sex is a common feature of British society. The British Sex Survey, for instance, which is conducted every 10 years, reported in 2018 that almost 50% of those surveyed claimed to have had a one-night stand, with 20% of the survey saying that they had sex with someone whose name they did not know. It also found that the internet has transformed the ease and availability with which young people have casual sex, with almost 30% of 25-34-year-olds reporting that they have had a one-night stand with someone they met online.[89]

In terms of how voluntary intoxication can combine, problematically, with Britain's casual sex culture, the UK Public Accounts Committee reported in 2023, for instance, that the Government was not taking the "appalling harms from alcohol seriously enough." Although it did not mention the appalling harms to innocent men falsely accused of rape by voluntarily intoxicated women who, for whatever reason, change their minds when they have sobered up, it estimated that 10 million people in England alone regularly exceeded the safe drinking guidelines, including 1.7 million

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[87] Michael Naughton, "False Allegations Watch (FAW)." University of Bristol Law School Blog, 31 October 2022; Naughton, "Rape Allegations and the Inversion of the Presumption of Innocence." Naughton, "The Parable of the 'Rapist Footballer.'"

[88] Cited in BBC News, "Kevin Spacey Trial: Actor Was 'Tried by Social Media,' Court Hears," 20 July 2023.

[89] BBC News, "How I Feel About Casual Sex," 6 December 2018.

who drink at higher risk and around 600,000 who are entirely dependent on alcohol.[90] Crucially, the key effects of alcohol intoxication include inappropriate behavior, unstable moods, poor judgment and problems with attention or memory.[91] And, such problems do not require the voluntary consumption of large quantities of alcohol, with the National Health Service (NHS) guidance on alcohol consumption stating that just two 250ml glasses of wine, or 6 units of alcohol, "begins to affect the part of your brain associated with judgement and decision making, causing you to be more reckless and uninhibited."[92]

This is not to endorse either a casual sex or alcohol misuse culture but, rather, to provide the context which renders John's prosecution even more questionable from the standpoint of prevailing public morals and mores. That John and his complainant had casual sex when they were both voluntarily intoxicated is not something that either of them ever denied. And, as has been shown, before, during and after they had sex there is no evidence to suggest that John's belief that his complainant consented to sex was unreasonable. Yet, the very fact that she was intoxicated, even though she was voluntarily so, when they had sex was enough for him to be convicted and given an eight-and-a-half-year custodial sentence, even though the pressure for the report to the police came from her now ex-boyfriend.

Individualizing John's prosecution and conviction might look like it is a victory for ICRD, for women against men in the war against rape. Viewed from the perspective of our shared humanity and common interests, however, it can be conceived as intrinsically divisive and misanthropic. It potentially fails us all when the menfolk of John's complainant are also considered who are, themselves, vulnerable to such allegations and prosecutions under the existing arrangements in a contemporary culture where casual sex and alcohol misuse are so prevalent, which will have a harmful impact on their womenfolk, too.

As things stand, possibly with good intentions on the part of some of those who have supported the reforms of the criminal justice system that make it easier to convict men accused of rape irrespective of whether they committed rape, our society has been hoodwinked into creating a false allegations charter that none of us, whether women or men, can escape from unless we come to our senses and see the harm and damage being caused to our shared humanity, interrelationships and common interests. Only, then, will we, women and men working together, be in a position to make the necessary changes to the law and operations of the criminal justice system so that uncorroborated allegations of rape and other sexual offences are not sufficient on their own to obtain criminal charges and convictions and false allegations when they are made are discouraged by appropriate penalties and sanctions.

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[90] UK Parliament, "Government Not Taking 'Appalling' Harms from Alcohol Seriously Enough," *Public Accounts Committee News,* 2023.
[91] Mayo Clinic, "Alcohol Use Disorder," accessed 14 October 2025.
[92] National Health Service, "Risks: Alcohol Misuse," accessed 14 October 2025.

Finally, the antidote to misanthropy is "philanthropy," which in its original Greek meaning meant the love of humanity, and which contemporary definitions conceive as revolving around goodwill to fellow members of the human race or employing active efforts to promote human welfare and wellbeing. In a society where excessive alcohol consumption and casual sex, even with complete strangers, is an increasing feature of contemporary social life, is there not a more appropriate way to conceive and deal with sexual misadventures where voluntary intoxication is a feature or might it, perhaps, be safer if we outlawed alcohol and sex altogether?

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The Alleged Emancipatory Potentials of Postmodern/Poststructuralist Thought Examined in Homi Bhabha's Perspective on Migrant "Hybrid" Identity

Azam Rezaei[1]

Abstract: Several prominent postcolonial theorists have conceptualized forms of agency and resistance predominantly through poststructuralist frameworks. Among the most salient poststructuralist tropes they employ is the notion of "hybrid" identity, particularly articulated within diasporic contexts. These scholars argue that the experience of displacement from one's homeland and immersion in an alien cultural environment engenders a hybrid identity that destabilizes the binary oppositions of self/other and other dichotomies that have historically underpinned various colonial regimes. Consequently, the concept of hybrid identity challenges essentialist and fixed notions of identity, positioning itself as a powerful mechanism for subverting nationalist and racist ideologies. Nonetheless, a critical question persists: can this theory, which is rooted primarily in abstract, poststructuralist linguistic paradigms, serve as a robust foundation for anti-colonial resistance? This study seeks to address this inquiry through a comprehensive analysis of Homi Bhabha's conceptualization of hybrid identity and the extent of its alignment with the grim realities of migration – such as economic hardship, social exclusion, and the intersecting effects of gender, race, and class—that complicate the formation of hybrid identities. This analysis is conducted on both a theoretical level, assessing hybrid identity theory from multiple perspectives, and a sociological level, illustrating some of the lived experiences of migrants.

Key Words: Poststructuralism, Homi Bhabha, Hybridity, Migrant, Agency, Resistance

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Introduction: The Significance of Migratory Experiences and the "Hybrid" Identity in Postcolonial Studies

There exists a pronounced fascination with and valorization of migration and diasporic modes of existence in the works of key postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, Edward W. Said, and Paul Gilroy. This affirmative stance towards the 'transnational' condition stems from its perceived disruptive, anti-essentialist potential to challenge the essentialist and Manichean frameworks underpinning European colonial modernity. As Mura contends, postmodernist discourses centered on concepts like "transnational citizenship," "diaspora communities," "hybridity," "liminality," and "mestiza" serve to deconstruct hierarchical binaries, such as center/periphery and colonizer/colonized, and foster the emergence of "anti-foundationalist" and "anti-dichotomous subjectivities" that resist colonial epistemologies.[2] The postmodern discourse, by conceptualizing identity in the post-World War II era as fragmented, intersecting, and fluid, which is constantly subject to revision, challenges entrenched and politicized notions of national or racial purity and supremacy. It transcends traditional colonial binaries such as white-black, West-East, and domestic-foreign, destabilizing the dichotomous frameworks that underpinned colonial power structures.

It is in this sense that migrants assume the role of "emblematic figures" in postcolonial literary studies as they represent a detachment from established foundations and conventional frameworks for understanding identity.[3] Postcolonial critics argue that this detachment, coupled with the emergence of a "hybrid" identity, positions migrants as powerful agents of transformation and resistance against the host culture's hegemonic claims to purity, self-containment, and the aspiration to forge a unified, homogeneous national body governed centrally. Simultaneously, migration offers an escape from the homogenizing nationalist discourses of the country of origin. It is these dual liberatory potentials that draw postcolonial theorists' attention to migrants as uniquely situated subjects endowed with a heightened awareness of the contingency and relativity of cultural norms and identities.

The present study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of Homi Bhabha's poststructuralist theories concerning migrant "hybrid" identity, aiming to address key questions: To what extent do Bhabha's optimistic claims about the anti-colonial and liberatory potential of hybrid identities align with the harsh realities faced by migrants? Can his abstract theoretical constructs be effectively translated into tangible political praxis? More fundamentally, how justified is the hope placed in the emancipatory promises of the poststructuralist movement, as advocated by Bhabha and other postcolonial thinkers?

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[2] Andrea Mura, *The Symbolic Scenarios of Islamism: A Study in Islamic Political Thought* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 84-85.
[3] Andrew Smith, "Migrancy, hybridity and postcolonial literary studies," in *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 249.

Homi Bhabha: "Hybridity," "Unhomeliness" and "The Third Space"

Bhabha's reflections on migration and diaspora are primarily articulated in his seminal book, *The Location of Culture* (1994), and his essay "Culture's In-Between" (1996). In these works, he positions the migrant as occupying the "signifying position of the minority that resists totalization," drawing heavily on poststructuralist theories of language and representation.[4] For Bhabha, the migrant's "borderline existence" challenges binary oppositions by inhabiting an "in-between" space that produces hybridity—a difference within that unsettles fixed identities.[5] He illustrates this with literary examples where the migrant's "double vision," shaped by transnational experience, offers a unique perspective that transcends singular cultural viewpoints, revealing the creative and political potential embedded in hybrid identities.[6]

Bhabha, in "Culture's In-Between," contends that when dominant and subordinate cultures interact under conditions of unequal power, such as in colonial or diasporic contexts, the resulting "hybrid identity" opens a space for negotiation that is neither assimilation nor collaboration but rather enables the emergence of an "interstitial" agency that resists binary oppositions and hegemonic narratives. This hybrid space allows marginalized groups to challenge and subvert dominant power structures, creating new forms of expression and identity that disrupt essentialist notions of belonging.[7] However, while Bhabha acknowledges the persistence of power imbalances, he does not fully address whether these hybrid agencies can meaningfully redress deeper structural inequalities, particularly those rooted in economic domination, leaving open the question of hybridity's capacity to effect substantive socio-political change.

Bhabha contends that "hybrid agencies" do not aim to reverse existing binary oppositions or assert cultural supremacy; rather, they operate within a dialectic that rejects such antagonism. Instead of seeking sovereignty, these agencies use the partial cultures from which they emerge to make new narratives of community and historic memory, articulating the "minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole."[8] This approach opens spaces for negotiation without adopting a confrontational stance toward dominant cultures, enabling minority voices to assert themselves through complex cultural translation and dialogue. Such hybrid spaces disrupt fixed identities and hegemonic power by fostering ambivalence and multiplicity, allowing marginalized groups to negotiate identity and meaning within a "third space" that transcends binary oppositions.

Bhabha argues that hybrid discourses possess the power to "intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity" that impose a hegemonic "normality" on

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[4] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 162.
[5] Ibid.*,* 13.
[6] Ibid., 5.
[7] Homi K. Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. S. Hall and P. Du Gay (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 58.
[8] Ibid.

uneven development and marginalized histories, nations, and communities.[9] These hybrid discourses expose the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within modernity's rationalizations, revealing its contradictions and exclusions. He introduces the concept of "contra-modernity" or "cultures otherwise than modernity," which, while contingent on modernity, may resist, disrupt, or exist in tension with its oppressive and assimilationist mechanisms.[10] However, Bhabha does not view these cultures as fundamentally opposed to modernity; rather, through their cultural hybridity and "borderline conditions," they "translate" and "re-inscribe the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity."[11]

Bhabha's argument that migrants deploy their cultural hybridity and their borderline conditions to "translate," and, therefore, reconfigure the social imaginaries of both the metropolis and modernity can seem idealistic given migrants' subaltern, underprivileged status and the power imbalances they face. Critics often view this as a poststructuralist abstraction that overlooks migrants' material hardships and systemic oppression. Many migrants' experience alienation, forced assimilation, and limited agency, which complicate or even undermine their capacity to resist hegemonic power. Hence, one can conclude that Bhabha's argument applies more as a conceptual framework highlighting potential sites of resistance within dominant systems rather than a direct description of migrants' material power to overturn oppressive modernity. It illuminates how cultural meaning is contested even in unequal power relations but must be supplemented by attention to structural inequalities to fully grasp migrants' lived experiences.

Bhabha's concept of "cultural translation" is central to his poststructuralist understanding of hybrid identity formation. When migrants from formerly colonized countries move to the metropoles that once oppressed them, they neither fully assimilate nor simply preserve their original heritage. Instead, they engage in a process of "re-inscribing, re-interpreting, and expanding" contested cultural spaces, which Bhabha terms "cultural translation."[12] This process involves negotiating and transforming dominant Western discourses to create new meanings that reflect migrants' unique experiences. Thus, Bhabha characterizes postcolonial migration not merely as a transitional phase but as a "translational" phenomenon, where migrants actively rewrite and challenge hegemonic narratives, opening a "third space" for cultural innovation and resistance beyond fixed identities and stereotypes.[13]

Bhabha's "translational" view about migrant identity relies heavily on Lacan's poststructuralist concept of the symbolic order – a system of signs through which identity and meaning are constructed. When migrants enter the diaspora, they confront a new symbolic order that they must "translate" into their native cultural framework. This process of "cultural translation" combines elements of both home

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[9] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 171.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 6.
[12] Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 174.
[13] Ibid., 224.

and host cultures, producing a "hybrid culture" and, consequently, a "hybrid identity" that inhabits an "in-between" space beyond fixed binaries. This aligns with Lacan's idea that identity is formed through navigating chains of signifiers within the symbolic order, where meaning is always deferred and contingent.

Bhabha finds the means to the achievement of effective resistance without being locked in essentialist, absolutist notions of identity, history, and culture through "unhomeliness" which is, in his opinion, "the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations." [14] Unhomeliness itself results from the migration and displacement of people. In displacement, the boundaries between home and the wider world become blurred, and the private and public spheres merge in unsettling ways, creating a fragmented and disorienting experience. [15] In these conditions, where distinctions between private and public, past and present, and the individual psyche and social context become unclear, a sense of "in-between-ness" or hybridity emerges. This hybridity challenges the conventional binary divisions that typically separate different areas of social experience. [16]

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha illustrates how hybridity functions as a form of agency by recounting a specific incident in his chapter "Signs Taken for Wonders." He describes an event during a Christian missionary effort in India, where an Indian catechist discovers around five hundred people reading the Bible in Hindi. When asked where they obtained the Bible, the group claims that an angel delivered it to them, and they value it as a divine gift. The catechist explains that the angel was actually a missionary and that the book represents the religion of the European colonizers. The people express skepticism, arguing that it could not be the colonizers' book because the colonizers engage in practices they find culturally repugnant, such as eating meat, and therefore God's word would not come from them. They view the arrival of the Bible as a miracle but resist further conversion demands, such as baptism, politely excusing themselves when urged to fully adopt Christian identity. Bhabha interprets this event as an example of "interruptive and interventionist enunciation," [17] where the acceptance of the Bible does not entail the complete identity transformation expected by missionaries.

Bhabha further explains the role of mimicry in this hybrid resistance: the colonized imitate the colonizer's symbols but infuse them with their own meanings, which destabilizes colonial authority through mockery and subversion. This "paranoid threat" from hybridity disrupts the binary oppositions of self/other and inside/outside. [18] The natives' questioning of English authority exposes the hybridity inherent in colonial power and inserts their own insurgent challenges within the colonial discourse. By demanding an Indianized Gospel and resisting baptism, they effectively use hybridity to frustrate the colonial conversion project. Bhabha views

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[14] Ibid., 9.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 13.
[17] Ibid., 107.
[18] Ibid., 116.

the fact that none of these people fully convert as evidence of the missionary failure, since they adopt a hybrid identity that respects the Bible but resists colonial domination. This act of hybrid negotiation creates a new colonial space where cultural authority is contested and redefined under the watchful eye of power, producing "partial" knowledges and positionalities that challenge colonial hegemony. [19]

It should be noted that while Bhabha's model and his explanation of hybridity as a form of resistance appear theoretically coherent and persuasive, the primary reason the natives resist the missionaries in this context is their strong commitment to Buddhism. This issue will be explored more thoroughly in the section addressing critiques of Bhabha's theory.

Bhabha's concept of the "third space" is intimately connected to the migrant's "in-between" position. He argues that when dominant culture enforces a hegemonic, normalizing discourse, hybridity creates a "third space of enunciation" that disrupts this authority. This intervening space challenges the idea of culture as a fixed, unified identity rooted in an original past and national tradition. Instead, the third space reveals culture's meanings and symbols as fluid and unstable.[20] Bhabha is optimistic about the creative potential of this "split-space of enunciation," suggesting it can lead to an international culture founded not on superficial multiculturalism or mere *diversity*, but on the articulation of cultural *hybridity*. [21] He critiques liberalism's tendency to frame cultural diversity as a matter of plural choices, arguing that immigrant communities' "newness" and "untranslatability" expose the limitations of such views. [22] Rather than relying on cultural relativism or pluralism, Bhabha proposes hybridity as the solution to cultural incommensurability. He emphasizes that it is the "inter," the space of translation and negotiation, the "in-between," that carries the true meaning of culture.[23]

It is in respect of this view of culture, the fact that it is formed and is always in the process of being formed in "the in-between," that the position of the migrant is especially indicative in Bhabha's perspective. He regards migration, diaspora, displacement, and relocation as transnational modes of cultural transformation that expose how culture is constructed and tradition invented.[24] Bhabha argues that the Western metropole must confront its postcolonial history through the influx of postwar migrants and refugees, whose stories become an indigenous or native narrative embedded within the national identity.[25] This movement of people and cultures effectively challenges essentialist and absolutist ideas of nation, culture, race, and ethnicity, as immigrants carry their home cultures and traditions into Western

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[19] Ibid., 119.
[20] Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 37.
[21] Ibid., 38, original emphasis.
[22] Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," 54.
[23] Bhabha, *Location of Culture,* 38.
[24] Ibid.*,*172.
[25] Ibid., 6.

metropoles, implanting them, if not entirely, then at least partially, and thereby destabilizing fixed cultural and national boundaries.

Overall, the concepts Bhabha employs to explain the formation of hybrid identity are closely interconnected: "unhomeliness," resulting from migration and displacement, gives rise to a "third space of enunciation" that exists between the home and host cultures. This 'in-between' state enables migrants to move beyond narrow, linear self-perceptions, ultimately leading to the development of hybrid identities that can effectively function as forms of resistance. Bhabha is notably optimistic about the anti-colonial potential of hybrid identity. Drawing on poststructuralist thought, he argues that such identities expose the relativity and instability of cultural norms and forms, thereby undermining oppressive discourses rooted in essentialism, nationalism, and racism. This optimism, however, has drawn significant criticism. Many critics contend that Bhabha's focus on hybridity overlooks the harsh socio-economic realities and systemic inequalities that migrants face, reducing resistance to a primarily cultural or symbolic level. Consequently, some accuse him of inadvertently aligning with neo-colonial global capitalism by emphasizing cultural negotiation while neglecting material conditions of exploitation and power. These critics argue that his deconstructive approach, though theoretically compelling, may understate the ongoing structural violence and economic domination embedded in postcolonial contexts.

Major Critiques of Bhabha as an Advocate of "Hybridity"

Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity has been influential in postcolonial studies, offering a nuanced understanding of identity formation as fluid, negotiated, and resistant to essentialist categories. However, his celebration of hybridity has attracted significant criticism from multiple angles. In what follows, I will outline some of these critical perspectives.

Abstraction and Accessibility

Bhabha's theories are often described as highly abstract and difficult to access, making them challenging to apply to concrete political action or real-world scenarios. This opacity can limit their practical utility for activists and policymakers who seek tangible strategies for addressing postcolonial inequalities. Marxist critics, in particular, reject poststructuralist notions such as "hybridity," "ambivalence," and "contingency" as ineffective tools for political activism, contending that these concepts remain confined to discourse theory and textual analysis, thereby circumventing engagement with tangible material struggles. As Syrotinski succinctly observes, "deconstruction's obsession with the textual, to the exclusion of the

material, is conclusive proof of its inability to engage with 'actual' politics."[26] This critique highlights how deconstruction, with its focus on language and discourse, tends to sideline concrete material conditions and political struggles, thereby limiting its efficacy as a tool for direct political engagement.

Neglect of Power Imbalances

Closely linked to concerns about abstraction and inaccessibility is the critique that Bhabha's focus on hybridity risks overlooking the entrenched power imbalances and structural inequalities that persist in colonial and postcolonial contexts. While hybridity is celebrated for its emphasis on cultural mixing and transformation, critics argue that this focus can inadvertently romanticize or obscure the violence, asymmetry, and antagonism that characterize these encounters. For example, Aijaz Ahmad, a prominent Marxist literary theorist, challenges the uncritical embrace of "hybridity," especially in light of the economic and social decline afflicting many postcolonial regions such as Africa. Ahmad highlights that Bhabha's celebration of hybridity as a site of agency in the era of globalization fails to critically address the realities of neo-colonial global capitalism, which perpetuates the suffering of countless migrants and displaced persons struggling merely for "conditions of bare survival."[27] According to Ahmad, the notion of hybridity is more applicable to the "migrant *intellectual*"[28] — an elite figure living and working in Western metropolises — endowed with authority and agency not equally shared by those residing in formerly colonized national cultures or by less privileged migrants in the West. This critique underscores that thinkers like Bhabha, who belong to the elite strata of the postcolonial world and often inhabit positions akin to those of the global North's elite, tend to overlook the distinctly race-, class-, and gender-specific dimensions of immigrant experience, thereby ignoring the material inequalities and differentiated lived realities faced by the majority of migrants and marginalized groups.[29]

A concrete illustration of this neglect is found in the historical patterns of Indian emigration since the 1960s, as detailed by Krishnaswamy. Until recently, women constituted only a small proportion of Indian immigrants and often lived in conditions of dependency, exploitation, or abuse. Moreover, Indian migration reveals stark class divisions: while the United States and Britain attract mainly middle-class professionals, the Persian Gulf countries draw predominantly working-class migrants

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[26] Michael Syrotinski, *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial at the Limits of Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool
 University Press, 2007), 31.
[27] Aijaz Ahmad, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," *Race and Class* 3, no. 36 (1995): 12.
[28] Ibid., original emphasis.
[29] Revathi Krishnaswamy, "Mythologies of Migrancy: Postcolonialism, Postmodernism and the Politics of (Dis)location," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 1, no. 26 (1995): 132.

who frequently endure exploitative labor conditions, sometimes akin to indentured servitude. These gendered and class-based disparities complicate any simplistic celebration of migrancy, highlighting the need to account for the complex, often grim, lived experiences that Bhabha's theory tends to overlook.[30] As critics such as Ella Shohat argue, it is crucial to recognize the varied forms hybridity can take – from forced assimilation and internalized self-rejection to creative transcendence – and to situate these experiences within specific historical, social, and geopolitical contexts.[31] Without such attention to particularity, the theory of hybridity may inadvertently obscure the real challenges faced by migrants and fail to offer meaningful strategies for resistance or social transformation.

In a similar vein, Terry Eagleton highlights the disconnect between actual postcolonial movements and the theoretical frameworks developed within academia. He argues that postcolonialism's focus on difference, hybridity, and multiplicity constitutes a severely impoverished political ethic when compared to "the affirmation of human solidarity and reciprocity." Additionally, Eagleton criticizes postcolonial theory for focusing more on cultural identity issues rather than addressing critical economic forces, showing greater interest in marginalized identities than in the dynamics of global financial institutions and markets.[32] His perspective aligns with earlier critiques by emphasizing that postcolonial theory often remains confined to cultural analysis, insufficiently engaging with the material and economic struggles central to postcolonial realities.

Essentialism and Boundedness

Furthermore, Bhabha's theory is critiqued for relying on the very essentialist binaries it seeks to disrupt. In order to argue for the subversive power of hybridity, Bhabha must first posit the existence of fixed, bounded cultural identities. This reliance on essentialist categories undermines the anti-essentialist thrust of his argument, as hybridity becomes meaningful only in opposition to these constructed boundaries. Spivak, one of the foundational figures in postcolonial theory, critiques Bhabha's conceptualization of hybridity by arguing that its uncritical celebration among his followers can unintentionally reinforce the notion of cultural "purity" through inversion.[33] Similarly, Talal Asad explicitly critiques the concept of cultural hybridity by stating that to speak of cultural syncretism or hybrids necessarily presupposes a conceptual distinction between preexisting, "pure" cultures.[34] These critiques

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ella Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial,'" in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia (London: Routledge, 1996), 328.

[32] Terry Eagleton, "Postcolonialism and 'Postcolonialism,'" *Interventions* 1, no. 1 (1998): 26.

[33] Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 65.

[34] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press,1993), 263.

highlight that hybridity, when examined theoretically, presupposes that separate cultural systems once existed independently and are only now converging due to global migration. Consequently, Bhabha's and other theorists' efforts to employ hybridity as a deconstructionist tool to dismantle essentialist identity categories remain compromised by underlying essentialist assumptions about cultural identities and lived experiences. In other words, rather than fully dissolving essentialist categories, hybridity often rearticulates them in new forms, highlighting the difficulty of escaping entrenched binaries in cultural theory.

Together, these critiques call for a more nuanced engagement with hybridity – one that acknowledges its productive insights while critically examining the foundational assumptions that shape its conceptual framework.

Identity Confusion and Destruction

The theoretical tension, mentioned above, cascades into practical consequences. Critics argue that by framing identity as unstable and hybrid, Bhabha's model risks alienating marginalized communities that rely on stable selfhood for collective empowerment. For diasporic or marginalized communities, the constant negotiation and ambiguity of hybridity may feel less like liberation, or a source of agency, and more like a loss of stable selfhood and an erasure of cultural anchors, exacerbating feelings of dislocation rather than resolving them.

For example, Asad critiques Bhabha's view that doubt and confusion help form new social identities detached from fixed pasts or singular presents, arguing instead that a stable social life and identity cannot be sustained amid constant uncertainty. He emphasizes the need for identities to be grounded in concrete historical and social realities, a dimension he finds lacking in Bhabha's approach.[35] Similarly, Aijaz Ahmad challenges Bhabha's claim that individual agency emerges primarily through 'displacement,' arguing instead that agency is rooted in "given historical locations,"[36] underscoring the importance of grounded socio-historical contexts over abstract notions of flux and hybridity.

Taken together, these critiques illuminate a central challenge for postcolonial theory: how to balance the recognition of identity's fluid, hybrid nature with the human need for stable, grounded social identities. This tension highlights a significant gap between theoretical abstraction and lived experience: while hybridity emphasizes openness and transformation, it can inadvertently obscure the emotional and social need for a stable sense of self. Addressing this complexity requires a nuanced understanding of how hybridity operates in real-world contexts, especially where power imbalances shape cultural exchanges.

This theoretical tension is vividly illustrated in a study of second- and third-generation Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, which reveals a pervasive sense of

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[35] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 264-5, original emphasis.
[36] Ahmad, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," 16.

estrangement from both Dutch and Turkish societies. For example, Mehmet, a 55-year-old second-generation immigrant, states that individuals are perceived as foreigners in both countries, lacking a local connection. Similarly, Eda, a 25-year-old third-generation immigrant, describes this condition as existing "in between" two identities. The conductors of this research argue that this intermediary status often results in a diminished capacity for agency, as hybridity can undermine individuals' confidence in navigating social relationships and pursuing their objectives.[37] As Wagner observes, "the migrant hybrid" often feels a lack of belonging, never fully at home in either culture and/or not recognized as entirely native. This results in mixed feelings of both familiarity and foreignness. The absence of complete affiliation, the sense of not being fully understood, frequent shifts in perspective, and the distancing effects of adaptation pressures can lead such migrants to experience internal conflicts, anxiety, and instability.[38]

Together, these insights highlight the complex psychological and social challenges faced by migrants. Their experiences underscore the need for greater recognition of the nuanced realities of hybrid identities, as well as supportive frameworks that affirm belonging and foster agency within multicultural contexts.

The Illusion of Inclusive Hybridity

While hybridity in postcolonial theory is often praised for its potential to dismantle rigid cultural boundaries and promote inclusion, some critics argue that its practical application places disproportionate demands on marginalized groups to negotiate identity while leaving dominant cultures largely unchanged. This phenomenon, often termed "asymmetrical hybridity," reflects a one-sided process where subaltern groups adapt and blend cultural elements, but dominant groups appropriate only "safe" or superficial forms of hybridity—such as food, music, or art—without addressing deeper structural inequalities or institutional exclusions. Rather than transforming power relations, hybridity can thus mask ongoing hierarchies and assimilationist pressures.

A concrete example of this asymmetrical hybridity can be observed in the experiences of immigrant ethnic minorities in the United States, as discussed by Melissa F. Weiner and Bedelia N. Richards. Second-generation immigrants often adopt American cultural practices and language while maintaining strong ties to their parents' homeland traditions, creating hybrid identities. However, this hybridity is asymmetrical because it unfolds within a context of racialization and social exclusion that limits their full acceptance into mainstream society. These individuals are often

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[37] Per Bauhn and Fatma Fulya Tepe, "Hybridity and Agency: Some Theoretical and Empirical Observations," *Migration Letters* 13, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 354–55.

[38] Consuela Wagner, "Migration and the Creation of Hybrid Identity: Chances and Challenges," in *Proceedings of Harvard Square Symposium: The Phenomenon of Migration*, August 22–23, 2016, Research Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, Örebro, Sweden, 245.

perceived as perpetual outsiders – never fully "American" in the eyes of the dominant culture – while simultaneously risking alienation within their ethnic communities if they adopt too many American traits. This results in hybrid identities shaped by unequal power relations, where cultural blending is less a balanced fusion and more a negotiation of belonging across two unequal social spaces. Thus, the lived reality of diasporic identity formation exemplifies asymmetrical hybridity as a condition marked by imbalance in social acceptance and cultural authority, reinforcing rather than dissolving existing inequalities.[39]

Similarly, Asad critiques Homi Bhabha's notion of hybrid identities by suggesting that these cultural fusions do not threaten those invested in maintaining the status quo. Instead, he contends, hybrid forms are often absorbed into urban consumer capitalism, where they become commodified products rather than catalysts for social change. As he contends, in contemporary Britain, for example, cultural hybridity and syncretism are often welcomed as part of the country's rich cultural tapestry, showcased in festivals, restaurants, and media. However, this acceptance rarely challenges the underlying power structures or addresses systemic issues such as racial inequality, economic disparity, or political marginalization.[40] Instead, hybridity is often co-opted by liberal multiculturalism, which highlights cultural diversity as an enriching aspect of national heritage without unsettling existing hierarchies.[41]

Neglecting Religion's Role in Hybrid Agency and Resistance

Homi Bhabha's use of a religious setting to illustrate how hybrid identities form and act as agents of resistance has been critically examined for failing to acknowledge religious commitments as a significant, if not primary, source of resistance among Indians opposing missionary efforts to convert them to Christianity. Critics like Susan Abraham challenge Bhabha's emphasis on cultural identity as the basis of agency, arguing instead that religious devotion plays a central role in the resistance depicted. Abraham points out that although Bhabha, as a cultural theorist, tends to distance his analysis from religious and theological aspects, he nonetheless develops hybrid postcolonial strategies related to religion, an area that has been largely overlooked by scholars discussing his work.[42] This critique reflects a broader concern within postcolonial studies regarding the insufficient attention given to religion as a key marker of identity and resistance.

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[39] Melissa F. Weiner and Bedelia N. Richards, "Bridging the Theoretical Gap: The Diasporized Hybrid in Sociological Theory," in *Hybrid Identities: Theoretical and Empirical Examinations*, eds. Keri E. Iyall Smith and Patricia Leavy (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 112–114.
[40] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 265-266.
[41] See Abdul R. Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd, eds. *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8.
[42] Susan Abraham, *Identity, Ethics, and Nonviolence in Postcolonial Theory: A Rahnerian Theological* Assessment (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 53-4.

Epistemic Violence and Neocolonial Implications

Some critics highlight the epistemic violence embedded in hybridity discourse, arguing that it can inadvertently reinforce neo-colonial power dynamics by promoting a form of cultural universalism that aligns with global capitalism. The valorization of hybridity may thus marginalize certain groups, privileging those with the social mobility to navigate and benefit from cross-cultural exchanges, while ignoring those who remain structurally oppressed. This critique is elaborated by Marxist scholar Arif Dirlik, who warns that postcolonialism's preoccupation with cultural identity tends to marginalize political economy, potentially aligning it with the very structures of economic power it purports to critique.[43]

In the same vein, Kraidy describes hybridity as "the cultural logic of globalization," emphasizing that it does not signify a move beyond hegemonic structures or the dissolution of inequality.[44] He argues that hybridity remains deeply entangled with existing power structures and often functions to legitimize neoliberal globalization and the global spread of American culture. Specifically, Kraidy highlights that in U.S. journalistic discourse, hybrid cultural elements appear within frameworks that uphold established hierarchies. Ethnic media typically act as cultural interpreters and advocates for minority communities, while mainstream outlets frame stories in ways that can essentialize cultures and obscure systemic inequalities. Collaborative efforts between these media reveal how immigrant and minority narratives are adapted for broader audiences, exposing tensions in cultural nuance and editorial approaches. These dynamics illustrate that hybridity in U.S. journalism reflects and perpetuates ongoing power imbalances rather than challenging them.[45]

Some other theorists emphasize how hybrid cultural products operate within commodity-producing capitalist systems that rely on the illusion of novelty to drive market consumption.[46] In this framework, cultural hybridity becomes a label under which cultural expressions are detached from their original local and socio-political contexts, transformed into marketable commodities stripped of their deeper meanings, and reduced to exchange value alone. This process often results in dominant groups economically and culturally benefiting from these commodified forms, while the originating communities remain marginalized. For example, the commercialization of cultural forms such as reggae or Afrobeat frequently involves detaching these musical expressions from their socio-political roots, enabling their incorporation into global markets in ways that obscure their original significance and perpetuate inequalities. As Werbner highlights in her critique of cultural hybridity's

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[43] Arif Dirlik, "Placing Edward Said: Space Time and the Travelling Theorist," in *Horizons in Post-Colonial Studies: Edward Said and the Post-Colonial*, eds. Bill Ashcroft & Hossein Kadhim (Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2001), 8-9.

[44] Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005), 99.

[45] Ibid., 99-100.

[46] Smith, "Migrancy, hybridity and postcolonial literary studies," 253.

limits, such commercialization exemplifies how hybrid cultural forms can be co-opted by dominant power structures rather than serving as tools of empowerment.[47]

The above analysis focuses on how global capital economy reduces a culture's traditions and value-laden cultural works to mere commodities, subordinating marginalized cultures under the guise of globalization. This dynamic extends into the humanities, as Young observes, where non-Western intellectuals and postcolonial thought are assimilated into Western academic paradigms, thereby marginalizing alternative epistemologies and value systems.[48] This assimilation becomes all the more suspicious as one finds that, as Dirlik brilliantly argues, postcoloniality is structured to evade a critical understanding of the contemporary crisis, simultaneously obscuring the fact that postcolonial intellectuals emerge from a global capitalist system in which they function less as victims and more as beneficiaries.[49] Put differently, the concept of "hybridity" as a theoretical framework is predominantly formulated by middle-class, First-World intellectuals of Third-World descent, whose transnational mobility frequently corresponds with upward social mobility.

As Femi Osofisan, the Nigerian writer, contends, a significant correlation exists between the postmodern, hybrid literary style adopted by certain postcolonial intellectuals and their integration into the very systems they ostensibly oppose. This dynamic is most apparent when considering that many such authors live in exile, either outside their native continent or in countries other than their birthplace. Their works are primarily published by publishing houses situated in the capitalist hubs of Europe and North America. This involuntary displacement positions them as alienated expatriates, while the geographic location of their publishers ensures their readership is largely foreign. These dual factors profoundly shape their stylistic decisions, producing a fragmented, postmodern prose marked by dissonance and delirium, aligning with contemporary Western literary norms –a connection further underscored by their receipt of prestigious literary awards. Furthermore, their literary output tends to avoid explicit historical and ideological frameworks, reflecting a tendency toward detachment from and abandonment of the sociopolitical realities affecting their communities of origin.[50]

In sum, the analyses of Dirlik and Osofisan invite a critical reflection on the interplay between exile, market forces, literary style, and political commitment in postcolonial writing. They urge readers and scholars to reflect on how these elements

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[47] Pnina Werbner, "The Limits of Cultural Hybridity: On Ritual Monsters, Poetic License and Contested Postcolonial Purifications," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7, no. 1 (2001): 133–52.

[48] Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 338.

[49] Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* 2, no. 20 (1994): 353.

[50] Femi Osofisan, "Warriors of a Failed Utopia: West African Writers Since the '70s," *African Studies Bulletin*, no. 61 (1996), 11-36.

influence both the aesthetic form and the sociopolitical role of postcolonial writing within the context of globalization.

A More Foundational Critique of Hybridity

The criticisms discussed above imply that migrant postcolonial thinkers, through their extensive use of poststructuralist frameworks to theorize hybrid identities and forms of resistance, may unintentionally—and, according to some critics, even intentionally—end up reinforcing the very hegemonic systems that aim to strip the non-West of agency, rootedness, and loyalty to their cultural values. In this context, it is unsurprising that Homi Bhabha, deeply influenced by Western poststructuralists such as Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault, largely overlooks religious commitments as a locus of Indian resistance. Instead, he attributes such resistance to abstract and elusive concepts like "ambivalence," "hybridity," "mimicry," "mockery," "sly civility," and "paranoid threat" – terms that, while central to his theory, often remain vague and insufficiently grounded in the lived realities of migrants' identities.

This conflation of postmodernism and postcolonialism, as Quayson observes, is "somehow to disempower the postcolonial – which is concerned with pressing economic, political, and cultural inequalities."[51] Because, as he continues, although postmodernism appears to challenge dominant hegemonic discourses, it is ultimately embedded within the hierarchical structures of Western thought and tends to be apolitical, thus falling short of advancing broader emancipatory goals. In a similar vein, the notion of "hybridity," when grounded solely in poststructuralist arguments – as exemplified by Bhabha – proves to be politically limited and insufficient in bringing about tangible improvements in the lived realities of migrants.

With all this in mind, it seems that a more rigorous critical examination of the structural limitations embedded within hybrid, diasporic models of identity and resistance must foreground their epistemological contingency upon postmodern frameworks that animate postcolonial studies. This analytical approach is exemplified in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000), which identifies Homi Bhabha's theories as a key illustration of the discursive convergence between postmodern and postcolonial thought. Bhabha's poststructuralist emphasis on deconstructing binary oppositions, as a necessary condition for subaltern agency, is problematized by Hardt and Negri, who argue that it inadvertently reinforces emerging forms of global sovereignty they term "Empire."[52]

Hardt and Negri theorize "Empire" as a postmodern paradigm of diffuse, networked power that transcends the dialectical subject/other dynamics of classical imperialism. While colonial hegemony depended on fixed and rigid classifications of

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[51] Ato Quayson, "Postcolonialism and Postmodernism," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies.* eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 87.
[52] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 161.

difference, Empire employs fluid, hybrid identities as instruments of governance and control. Hence, postcolonial theorists who champion hybridity as a political strategy to subvert binaries and essentialism of modern sovereignty have been strategically outwitted by contemporary power structures, particularly those shaped by corporate capitalism and global markets. [53] This critique underscores how postmodern epistemology's rejection of totalizing narratives, while challenging Eurocentric modernity, risks complicity with emergent hegemonic formations that exploit cultural indeterminacy.

Hardt and Negri focus their analysis on the postmodern paradigm of power, highlighting how the notion of "hybridity" corresponds with this framework. Nonetheless, some critics challenge the foundational assumptions of the postmodern episteme—such as value-neutrality, relativism, and the decentering of the classical autonomous "individual" —arguing that acknowledging a hybrid, diasporic model of identity and resistance within this episteme undermines its overall validity. This is because, within this epistemology, the individual is redefined as a "subject" shaped by socio-cultural discourses, linguistic frameworks, and signifying practices, rather than as an independent agent.

The reduction of the individual to a mere cultural construct in postmodern epistemology prompted Edward Said, the very father of postcolonial studies, to criticize French theory for inflicting a "severe if not crippling defeat" on traditional humanism through structuralism and post-structuralism, both of which "professed the death of man-the-author and asserted the preeminence of anti-humanist systems."[54] Said acknowledges that he was among the first critics to engage with French theory but stresses that he remained unaffected by its ideological antihumanism. Furthermore, Said expresses skepticism toward postmodernism's dismissive attitude to what Jean-Francois Lyotard famously called the grand narratives of enlightenment and emancipation. Contrarily, he argues that people worldwide continue to be inspired by ideals of justice and equality, and he believes that the humanistic ideals of liberty and learning still motivate many disadvantaged individuals to resist unjust wars and military occupations and to oppose despotism and tyranny.[55] In this statement, Said affirms both human agency and the enduring significance of the grand narratives of justice, equality, liberty, and learning, thereby rejecting the anti-humanist trend of poststructuralism.

While Said does not explicitly theorize "hybridity," his use of the term is rooted in a humanist tradition. Rather than adopting the postmodern focus on value-neutrality and relativism to dismantle entrenched binary oppositions, he highlights humanity's ability to create bonds of sympathy and compassion across racial and cultural divides and to embrace "identities other than those given by the flag."[56] Such

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[53] Ibid., 138.
[54] Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 9.
[55] Ibid., 10.
[56] Ibid., 80.

notions of human agency and humanistic ideals are notably scarce in Bhabha's discourse. Not only this, as explored throughout this paper, his arguments adopt a homogenizing and universalizing tone that overlooks the particularities of migration and its diverse forms, simplifying colonial dynamics to merely a linguistic exchange.

Conclusion

A nuanced examination of Bhabha's theories on migrant "hybrid" identity reveals a profound gap between his poststructuralist optimism and the complex realities of migration. His celebration of hybridity's anti-colonial promise, grounded in abstract, poststructuralist arguments, often overlooks the profound political and economic forces that shape and constrain the migrant experience. As several critics have observed, this theoretical detachment is not merely an oversight but may, in fact, signal an inadvertent alignment with the very imperial structures Bhabha seeks to challenge. By privileging relativity, decentered subjectivity, and the play of discourse over material conditions, post-structurally-informed postcolonialism risks reducing the migrant to a textual construct – one whose struggles are rendered in the language of difference but whose lived hardships remain unaddressed. Hence, when postcolonial studies rely solely on postmodern/poststructuralist foundations, it falls short of enacting substantive change, ultimately leaving the structural inequities faced by migrants untouched.

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I Am Crippled: Revisiting Semilingualism in the Postcolonial State

Ghada Zakaria[1]

Abstract: This paper revisits the concept of semilingualism as a deliberately engineered byproduct of epistemic colonization. Building on Foucault's insight that "the past is not behind us but within us," I argue that colonialism persists as a mode of governance through which knowledge and language are weaponized to subjugate populations. Semilingualism, originally theorized to critique monoglot policies, is redefined here as a structural condition that reflects the logic of plunder embedded in the postcolonial state. Through a critical engagement, I explore how indirect rule, digital colonialism, and linguistic imperialism coalesce to produce a society of "linguistic cripples," disconnected from both conceptual thought and speech. The postcolonial subject is rendered epistemically dependent, while language becomes a mechanism of punishment, coercion, and control. Ultimately, this paper argues that the postcolonial state itself is semilingual; crippled in its epistemic foundations and sustained by a pedagogy that alienates, disintegrates, and exploits.

Colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the reality around; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one's environment. It starts with a deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualization, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a larger social scale, it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies. – Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

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If, as Foucault proposes, the past is not behind us but within us,[2] then colonialism cannot be understood as a concluded historical episode. Rather, it is a mode of governance and control that resurfaces under new guises. Kendall and Wickham write that to use the Foucauldian manner in history is to see how the present is just as strange as the past, rendering "the history of the present."[3] Thus, tackling the complex discourse of colonialism as a continuing series of events further accentuates the pushing force of violence behind contemporary issues of society. Doing so complicates the relationship between the politico-economic dimensions of the postcolonial state and the lived experiences of its subjects.

Here, I engage with Carporaso and Levine's definition of politics that embodies three constituents: the "norms and informal understandings" that make up the public, the government, and authority relations.[4] This is to argue that despite the authors' claim that none of these constituents is essentially political, power politicizes the state and the government as nested tools within a larger structure of domination. Thus, the true sovereign is not the state, precisely the postcolonial state, but the regime that determines who may govern, what knowledge is legitimate, and how justice is to be administered. This places the authors' question of "how does one draw the boundary between the political and nonpolitical if power is always present?"[5] into the discourse of violence and exploitation.

It is at this moment that the relationship between knowledge and power is fundamental. To Foucault, knowledge is power.[6] It is knowledge that makes power possible and vice versa. This relationship highlights violence and exploitation, or to Foucault, punishment and coercion. He says,

> The agent of punishment must exercise a total power, which no third party can disturb; the individual to be corrected must be entirely enveloped in the power that is being exercised over him… this technique of punishment must have its own functioning, its own rules, its own techniques, its own knowledge.[7]

In this context, Foucault coins the term "bio-power" to refer to how power is misused to achieve "the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations."[8] This elucidates

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[2] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, [1975] 1995), 31.

[3] Gavin Kendall and Gary M. Wickham, *Using Foucault's Methods* (London: Sage, 1998), 4-5.

[4] James A. Caporaso and David P. Levine, *Theories of Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 20.

[5] Ibid., 220.

[6] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* 27.

[7] Ibid., 129.

[8] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 140.

how knowledge production not only disseminates ideologies but also operates as a mechanism of empowerment and control. Epistemic colonization can thus be understood as an extension of Foucault's thought, wherein total alienation is pursued through the apparatuses of education to subjugate populations. This form of biopolitical control underscores the centrality of language in enabling systems of subjugation that re-establish the masters of the earth through plunder and obedience.[9]

Obedience is the name of the game. In this game, language acts not only as a reflective tool of power but also as a mechanism for shaping individuals' behaviors and decisions. This is important to understand in approaching the concept of semilingualism. Theorized by Hansegård (1960) to critique Sweden's monoglot policies, semilingualism depicts a state of mind that may exhibit conversational fluency in two languages or more while lacking complex conceptual thinking or verbal thought in all adopted languages.[10] Here, I argue that if one is incapable of engaging in sophisticated conceptual thought in either language, then intrinsic conversational competence in neither can be achieved. Semilingualism is thus a deliberately engineered byproduct of epistemic colonization that facilitates violence and exploitation in contemporary society, producing "linguistic cripples,"[11] who "cannot think for themselves"; in need of "tutelage,"[12] and are shaped by "verbal delirium."[13]

Building on Foucault's insight that the past is not behind us but within us, epistemic colonization is the principal mechanism through which colonial alienation is both perpetuated and deepened. Rather than viewing past colonial violence as a discrete event, a Foucauldian genealogy reveals how contemporary discourses, curricula, and technology are reproduced by the same logic of domination, embedding colonial structures within the very fabric of the postcolonial state.

Foucault's analyses of punishment and coercion, biopower, and the inseparability of knowledge and power further illuminate how this alienation operates at the level of subjectivity. In fact, postcolonial regimes deploy educational practices that teach not only foreign languages but also the hierarchies of value that underwrite them. Through these practices, speakers internalize a tacit language hierarchy where

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[9] Anthony Bogues, public lecture at the Imagined New – Volume III Workshop, Sharjah, UAE, April 7–9, 2025. Bogues argues that capitalism is a force that is no longer sought after to build hegemony but to establish a system where plunder and obedience define the masters of the earth. This system creates death worlds and disposable people. And thus, for a new history of freedom and man to begin, one must disobey.

[10] Fusa Katada, "A Unipolar Concentration of English and the Multilingual-Semilingual Paradox," *International Association for Development of the Information Society* (2019).

[11] David Karlander and Linus Salö, "The Origin of Semilingualism: Nils-Erik Hansegård and the Cult of the Mother Tongue," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 27, no. 5 (2023): 506–25.

[12] Mahmood Mamdani, "Is African Studies to Be Turned into a New Home for Bantu Education at UCT?," *Social Dynamics* 24, no. 2 (2008): 63–75.

[13] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 8–9.

Western tongues become synonymous with reason, progress, and authority, while local languages with backwardness.[14] As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o vividly describes, this bifurcation produces "a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies,"[15] in which minds and communities are severed from their linguistic roots.

It is within this context that semilingualism emerges not as an individual deficiency,[16] but as a deliberate construction of colonial power. By rendering local languages inferior and Western languages superior, the semilingual condition disciplines subjects into accepting a fractured linguistic reality and undermining communal solidarity and collective agency. In so doing, I affirm that semilingualism becomes a structural phenomenon: a tool of neocolonial agendas designed to disintegrate societies from within, ensuring that postcolonial subjects remain epistemically dependent on and politically subservient to the colonizer.

The Indirect Rule State

The British ruled us for 43 years. When they left, there were two trained engineers and 12 doctors. This is the country we inherited.[17] — Julius Nyerere

It is the indirect rule state that harbored the "African soil puppet governments manipulated from afar." [18] This, according to Mamdani, is the "essence of governance."[19] After the colonial state packed its bags and left, it was only right to begin phase two of domination: the define and rule conquest.[20] This included two game plans: first is conquering the mass and second is shaping the difference.[21] Although colonial officials ostensibly celebrated cultural, religious, and ethnic pluralism, they in fact reengineered customs, codifying "customary law," empowering compliant chiefs, and sanctioning Indigenous courts to serve imperial interests. [22] By deploying anthropological and ethnographic classifications, they froze fluid social identities, institutionalized hierarchies, and enshrined divisions in law that endured long after the so-called independence.

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[14] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 18.

[15] Ibid., 103.

[16] Karlander and Salö, "Origin of Semilingualism," 507.

[17] Ikaweba Bunting, "The Heart of Africa: Interview With Nyerere On Anti-Colonialism," in *Sites of Memory, Julius Nyerere and the Liberation Struggle of South Africa,* ed. Haroub Othman (Zan- zibar international film festival, 2007), 68.

[18] Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (London: Heinemann, 1963), xvii.

[19] Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2: "It is under indirect rule colonialism that the definition and management of difference was developed as the essence of governance."

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 3.

Through this reconfiguration of norms, colonial power crippled the minds of its subjects, redefining what was considered legitimate, traditional, and authoritative. Mamdani testifies that defining and managing the difference in society is "the holy cow" of modernity, and the "native" is constructed by depriving him of agency, confining him to a primitive locale, and casting him as inherently inferior.[23] Ultimately, the indirect rule conquered the mass by infiltrating and restructuring the foundations of society itself—or according to Caporaso and Levine, the "norms and informal understandings"[24] that make up the public.

Education, in this sense, is fundamentally organized around a "means-ends framework."[25] Going back to the French colonies, the colonizer cherry-picked Africans who were deemed to fit the colonial ideal and granted them access to higher education. These individuals, referred to as *évolués*, formed a colonized elite who were often relegated to subaltern clerical positions and constrained within limited, unequal roles in society despite the rhetoric of freedom and advancement promised by colonial education.[26] Eventually, disillusioned by the colonial system's unfulfilled promises, the *évolués* began to challenge the façade of semi-emancipation and articulate their own vision of liberation.[27] The *évolués* thus shifted from being symbolic tokens of colonial benevolence to critical agents in dismantling the colonial order, navigating a fraught legacy in the struggle to redefine postcolonial African nations.

However, within the means-ends framework, the colonizer still was able to utilize the *évolués* as the means that are adapted to the ends to achieve efficiency. According to Carporaso and Levine, the means-ends framework demands "adapting to the way things are." It thus was crucial for education systems to disassociate the now neo-colonized of the language of critical thought, formal education, and conceptualization from the everyday speech of home and community.[28] This resulted in efficiently maintaining the colonial system.

Against this backdrop, it is untenable for Caporaso and Levine to dismiss Schumpeter's (1942) insight that so-called inefficiencies are often intrinsic to an efficient system whose monopolistic structures are deemed necessary for economic development. In fact, the colonizer continually adapted to changing circumstances, maintaining the same "means" and ultimate "ends" even as methods shifted and

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[23] Ibid., 2-3
[24] Caporaso and Levine, *Theories of Political Economy*, 20.
[25] Caporaso and Levine describe the means-ends framework as a logic of economizing within constraints, where action is framed around the efficient allocation of limited resources rather than transformative change. It assumes that individuals seek to maximize outcomes using existing means, reinforcing adaptation over development. See James A. Caporaso and David P. Levine, *Theories of Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 22.
[26] Pedro Monaville, *Students of the World: Global 1968 and Decolonization in the Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 11–12.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 103.

thereby entrenching a social stratification in which monopoly served as the organizing principle of governance.

This marks the rise of the "new brutalism in academia."[29] Giroux powerfully illustrates how neoliberalism, despite its rhetoric of market freedom and competition, ultimately consolidates power in the hands of a few, achieving a monopoly not only over education but over the very imagination of what education means. [30] Neoliberalism thus transforms universities from public goods into privatized corporate entities, where knowledge is no longer valued for its civic or democratic potential but for its exchange value in the market.

This shift results in a monopoly of ideology where market logic becomes the only permissible framework. In fact, neoliberal policies eliminate diverse ways of knowing by standardizing curricula, eroding the humanities, and silencing dissent.[31] Corporate donors dictate content, administrators outnumber educators, and students are reduced to human capital.[32] This model does not only echo Mamdani's define and rule conquest, but also highlights how education becomes a mechanism for producing obedient laborers, not engaged citizens.[33]

Here, I argue that neoliberalism represents the apex of a system that constructs monopolies rooted in punishment and coercion, in line with a Foucauldian understanding, and that is reinforced by market rationality. It systematically hollows out public institutions until they serve only the interests of capital. This project is designed to extinguish democratic agency, suppress critical thought and, most importantly, stifle the radical imagination capable of resistance. As such, it functions as a 'Eurocentric epistemic canon'[34] aimed at the core of society, intent on its complete disintegration.

The Digital State

Who wouldn't want computers for poor black students?... Can the countries of the Global South shape their own digital destiny?[35] — Michael Kwet

It all begins in the classroom. Within the ongoing dynamic of relying on the West to define and deliver societal progress, the colonizer secures yet another achievement in

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[29] Henry A. Giroux, "Neoliberalism's War Against Higher Education and the Role of Public Intellectuals," in *The Future of University Education* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 185–206.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] See notes 9, 10, and 11 above.
[34] Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University: New Directions," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 29–45.
[35] Michael Kwet, "Digital Colonialism: US Empire and the New Imperialism in the Global South," *Race & Class* 60, no. 4 (2019): 3–26.

the architecture of domination: Big Data surveillance embedded within education systems.[36] Big Tech corporations invest vast, often unimaginable, sums in collecting and mining user data. As technology remains monopolized by the Global North and as these corporations function as political entities, data is disproportionately extracted from users in the Global South.[37] It is here that "preexisting patterns of exclusion and inequality" are not only reproduced but also deepened. [38]

Kwet argues that the Global North's dominance over technology fosters a new form of corporate colonization: digital colonialism. He describes this "twenty-first century form of colonization" as a process whereby foreign powers, primarily led by the US, implant technology systems in the Global South designed to serve their own interests.[39] This dynamic perpetuates economic and cultural domination while enforcing privatized modes of governance.[40]

Because colonial conquest traditionally involves the dispossession of valuable resources from indigenous peoples and the control of infrastructure by colonial powers,[41] tech imperialism emerges as its contemporary extension. Within the regime of total surveillance, subjects are not merely tracked and monitored but they are systematically altered. Through calculated manipulation of the content to which individuals are exposed, digital platforms extract value while simultaneously reshaping users to fulfill predefined roles within the data economy. The perceived autonomy of choosing when and how to engage with the digital space remains an illusion; what appears as voluntary participation conceals deeper structures of control. In this schema, the individual is rendered a commodified entity, instrumentalized or discarded according to shifting market imperatives.

This constitutes the initial phase of enslavement, which corresponds to Patterson's notion of social death. Patterson offers a framework that underscores how such social severance affects not only personal identity but also communal structures, emphasizing that social death transcends mere physical demise. In Patterson's view, slaves experience a unique form of social death, wherein they are rendered socially invisible and unable to participate in their societies as full members. He refers to this as a process of social negation; a deliberate erasure of social personhood. [42] Correspondingly, the mechanisms through which slaveholding societies desocialized and depersonalized the enslaved are replicated in the digital sphere, where subjects are stripped of agency and reduced to data profiles. I contend that just as the enslaved were cast as "nonbeings," permanently situated within the condition of social death,

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Solon Barocas and Andrew D. Selbst, "Big Data's Disparate Impact," *California Law Review* 104 (2016): 671.

[39] Kwet, "Digital Colonialism," 7.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Orlando Patterson, "Authority, Alienation, and Social Death," in *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 38.

the digital subject is similarly positioned as an "unborn being" whose existence is defined by exploitability within the logistics of digital capitalism. Consequently, establishing the necropolitical notion of 'subjugation of life to the power of death.'[43]

In this necropolitical sphere, life becomes subject to the arbitrary decisions of power, relegating certain populations to a status akin to the living dead as a function of state control. Mbembe asserts that necropower instrumentalizes human life for some populations while managing the material destruction of other populations.[44] It can be seen that death is not merely a biological end but a nuanced form of governance that influences the very fabric of existence and identity. In the current political economy, digital infrastructures extend colonial logic: certain users are rendered invisible or "living dead" by design. Thus, social media and governance algorithms in practice decide which identities and stories are seen and which are erased, echoing colonial hierarchies of life and death.

The digital sphere functions as a new battleground, where imperialist projects are advanced under the banner of connectivity and inclusion. Kwet argues that education serves as the ultimate breeding ground for Big Tech imperialism: product placement in schools allows corporations to capture emerging markets and tighten their stranglehold on technology, brands, business models, and ideologies throughout the Global South.[45]

Having already established the means–ends framework, the digital space only intensifies existing societal issues, and thus access to technology does not guarantee sovereignty or freedom of speech. In reality, platforms regulate these freedoms through monitoring certain keywords or types of speech, and they can censor content or ban users altogether.[46] These platforms can also restrict the right to associate with others in pursuit of social, political, economic, cultural, and religious goals. [47] Such censorship and control have been notably exercised against Palestinians.[48]

Within this dynamic, language remains a weapon. Arabic content is often deleted or censored, while English content dominates—even in the reporting of a genocide. This raises a critical question: why would a country like the United States, which plays a significant role in supporting the genocide in Palestine (e.g., through billions in annual military aid to Israel),[49] allow uncensored videos of bombings to circulate only when the content is in English? Viewed through this lens, language

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[43] Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, "Necrocapitalism," *Organization Studies* 29, no. 12 (2008): 1541–1563.

[44] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

[45] Kwet, "Digital Colonialism," 8.

[46] Kwet, "Digital Colonialism"; Magdy, Mubarak, and Salminen, "Who Should Set the Standards?"

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Congressional Research Service, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel* (RL33222; Congressional Research Service, 2022).

imperialism manifests in multiple forms with neocolonial agendas continually adapting to achieve their desired "ends."

The Semilingual State

> *"Just as one has the right to smoke oneself to death,*
> *one should have the right to linguistic suicide."[50]* — Nils-Erik Hansegård

Kant's (1785) principle that humans are not means but ends emphasizes the moral imperative to respect individuals as rational agents capable of self-governance. This ethical framework offers a profound lens through which to examine the colonial mindset, wherein the colonized are rendered disposable and morality is fundamentally suspended. A similar concern is echoed in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's critique of the neocolonial condition, which he presents *a posteriori* as a vivid account of how language functions as a stranglehold on the native consciousness.[51]

The established eminence of English as a global lingua franca (ELF), as argued by Katada, is both politically and digitally empowered.[52] ELF's reach has been systematically constructed through supranational policy networks that echo Hansegård's concerns about state-funded education enforcing linguistic cohesion. Active investment in English-medium education, standardized testing regimes, and media infrastructures projects a form of "soft power" that aligns closely with the digital colonization of communication platforms manifested in Facebook's default English interfaces and the prioritization of English-language content within search engine algorithms.[53]

At the heart of this dynamic lies an interaction between science and politics.[54] According to Rodney, a society's capacity for economic development depends on both its mastery of scientific concepts and the translation of that mastery into appropriate technologies.[55] Colonial administrations deliberately restricted scientific education to a narrow elite, ensuring that technological expertise remained tethered to metropolitan centers of power.[56] In today's digital age, multinational tech firms shape the future of innovation by standardizing access to code repositories, software documentation, and developer forum exclusively in English. As a result, young developers are more likely to grow into contributors within English-dominant ecosystems, reinforcing the centrality of English in global tech development.[57]

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[50] Quoted material, translated by Karlander and Salö, 293.
[51] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 11.
[52] Katada, "A Unipolar Concentration of English."
[53] Kwet; Magdy, Mubarak, and Salminen.
[54] Karlander and Salö, "The Origin of Semilingualism," 289.
[55] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1972), 3.
[56] Monaville, *Students of the World,* 17.
[57] Kwet, "Digital Colonialism."

Clearly, under tech imperialism, the colonizer understands that language is a tool of subordination, and thus becoming a linguistic master is central in sustaining and executing that power. Phillipson's theory of linguicidal imperialism shows that English is not merely another foreign language imposed for communication, but a vehicle for cultural domination that undermines indigenous knowledge systems.[58] Once the colonizer achieves linguistic mastery, they secure the levers of technological innovation, academic publishing, and global policymaking. These are precisely areas in which non-English languages are rarely represented on an equal footing.

Informed by Macedo's insights, the role of language in shaping consciousness is not just a matter of technical competence; it is about critical literacy, the ability to "read the world" and act upon it.[59] A theory like semilingualism functions precisely to deny such literacy to minoritized peoples. It discourages them from viewing their speech as meaningful, their culture as legitimate, or their resistance as morally valid. This is why semilingualism, at its core, is a political tool: it constructs power asymmetries and naturalizes them under the guise of scientific objectivity.

Yet despite the clear mechanisms by which ELF serves imperial and neocolonial interests, the discourse on semilingualism remains frustratingly under-empiricized. Cummins (2000) notes that measuring terminal proficiency in two languages requires longitudinal cohort studies, which are rare. Consequently, much of the literature defaults to lamenting the absence of data rather than producing it, reiterating that a "semilingual state of mind is hard to come by"[60] without demonstrating its prevalence.

Contrary to these reservations, the contemporary digital culture offers abundant anecdotal evidence that youth in many formerly colonized societies are living and voicing a semilingual existence. On TikTok, hashtags like #BilingualProblems and #byelingual serve to depict semilingualism, amassing hundreds of millions of views with short videos vividly capturing the semilingual experience and expressing frustration at being "fluent in neither" language. As one TikTok meme poignantly expresses, *"Pulling the 'English is not my first language' card knowing full well my first language is equally messed up,"* there is a growing recognition among digital youth of the compounded linguistic alienation experienced by speakers of marginalized languages, although the term semilingualism itself remains largely unused.

These digital footprints of linguistic insecurity point to a systemic crisis: the postcolonial state itself is semilingual. When neither indigenous languages nor the global lingua franca can serve as fully functional vehicles for thought, knowledge production splinters. Educational curricula become a patchwork of half-mastered

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[58] Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[59] Donaldo P. Macedo, "Literacy for Stupidification: The Pedagogy of Big Lies," *Harvard Educational Review* 63, no. 2 (1993): 16.
[60] Katada, "A Unipolar Concentration of English."

textbooks, public discourse is confined to social media soundbites, and critical pedagogy is stymied by language barriers on both sides. This is what Macedo calls "the pedagogy of big lies."[61]

To Macedo, the systemic exclusion of critical dialogue around ethics, race, class, and ideology forms the backbone of a pedagogy designed not to liberate but to deceive.[62] This is a pedagogy that rewards uncritical allegiance to the status quo and punishes those who question it. At the core of such a system is language – not only the languages we speak, but the ideological uses to which language is put. Language, in this view, is not merely a medium of communication; it is central to how people perceive themselves in relation to the world.[63]

It is no surprise, then, that language becomes a crucial battleground in the production and reproduction of inequality. This is especially evident in the theory of semilingualism. Hansegård, writing in mid-20th-century Sweden, coined semilingualism to describe a condition in which a person loses mastery over both their mother tongue and the imposed dominant language. But he was not merely describing a technical linguistic failure.

Hansegård understood semilingualism as the result of systemic language erosion, born from the rupture between inner language and outer language. The former being a process of internalization of the language of thought, memory, and identity, and the latter being a reflection of one's mental and spiritual dispositions. To Hansegård, inner and outer languages constitute an isomorphic relationship.[64] When these two are no longer in harmony, the subject is thus left voiceless, crippled, unable to think deeply or express themselves coherently in any language. This is not a deficit of intelligence or effort. It is a symptom of structural violence.

The consequences of this rupture are not merely academic. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, reflecting on the legacy of colonial education, describes how children were punished for speaking their native languages and rewarded for mastering the colonizer's tongue. Over time, this creates individuals whose minds are trained in languages that alienate them from their histories, while their bodies remain situated in cultures they are taught to reject. Hansegård's analysis gives this metaphor a linguistic foundation: semilingualism is what happens when inner and outer languages are violently severed.

This condition is most visible in postcolonial education systems across the Global South, where foreign languages are institutionalized as the medium of instruction. The rationale is often economic or developmental, but the effect is epistemic dislocation. Students are taught not only in a foreign language, but also through its assumptions, values, and hierarchies. Colonial and postcolonial regimes govern not just through physical force but by shaping consciousness, disciplining

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[61] Donaldo Macedo, "Literacy for Stupidification: The Pedagogy of Big Lies," 12.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 4.
[64] Karlander and Salö, "The Origin of Semilingualism," 517.

bodies, and molding subjects who internalize linguistic hierarchies. [65] In this arrangement, Western languages become synonymous with modernity and truth, while indigenous languages are rendered emotional, irrational, or obsolete.

As Sajed (2024) and others have argued, the global knowledge system continues to operate through structures of epistemic colonization, wherein the languages, histories, and thought traditions of the Global South are rendered inferior, incomplete, or semantically opaque unless mediated through dominant epistemes. Within this structure, semilingualism is not a disorder – it is a design. It is a deliberate outcome of assimilationist policies, violent pedagogies, and the suppression of cultural continuity. Hansegård observed that semilingual individuals often retain only the outer shell of a language: they may be able to speak, write, or read at a functional level, yet remain cut off from language as a vehicle for inner life, imagination, and critical thought. The danger, then, is not silence but hollow speech; the production of subjects who can speak but say nothing; who possess words but lack a voice.[66]

The backlash against semilingualism has been vigorous and sustained. Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa's concept of the "white listening subject" is especially relevant here. It refers to the way language is heard, judged, and policed through the ears of dominant society.[67] A multilingual speaker may use complex linguistic strategies, but if their speech doesn't conform to white normative expectations, they are deemed deficient. This expands the critique of semilingualism beyond linguistics into the realm of racial capitalism, where language becomes another axis of accumulation and exclusion. Overall, scholars argue that what is called semilingualism is often a failure to hear, not a failure to speak; a misrecognition rooted in racism, not linguistic reality.

This critique is crucial, but so is a correction. In affirming Hansegård's theory, I do not dismiss the richness or validity of hybrid, creole, or code-switching linguistic practices. I do not refer to those whose multilingual speech, though nonstandard, performs complex cultural, political, and interpersonal work. To call these forms semilingual is to erase their ingenuity and historical resilience. Enslaved and colonized peoples have long developed linguistic bricolage to resist erasure and communicate across regimes of domination. My use of semilingualism, then, does not pathologize hybridity. Rather, I refer to those individuals who, as a result of systemic violence, find themselves crippled in all their languages, unable to articulate inner life in any register. This is not a linguistic mix; it is linguistic paralysis.

Hansegård's case study of the Tornedalian Finns in Sweden reveals how this happens. Generations of children were denied education in Finnish and yet never fully integrated into Swedish linguistic culture. The result was not bilingualism but

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[65] See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*; Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*.

[66] Karlander and Salö, "The Origin of Semilingualism," 518.

[67] Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa, "Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education," *Harvard Educational Review* 85, no. 2 (2015): 149–171.

linguistic disinheritance: students unable to fully communicate in either tongue, alienated from both cultural spheres. Hansegård described this not as mere interference or code-switching, but as a loss of semantic depth, where neither language allowed for complex thought or self-understanding. In fact, Hansegård was determined to help the people of Tornedalen recognize their own position of subjugation. [68]

This dynamic is not confined to the Nordic context. Across the postcolonial world, semilingualism is reproduced through global neoliberal language policies, which reduce language to marketable fluency. English has become the gatekeeper of science, business, and international discourse, yet most students encounter it in narrow and instrumental forms. Meanwhile, their native languages are excluded from formal education and devalued as impractical. The outcome is a population fluent in shallow registers of multiple languages but alienated from the cultural and conceptual worlds that give language meaning.

Revisiting Hansegård thus allows us to see semilingualism not as a racist label but as a diagnosis of structural dispossession. It affirms the lived reality of millions who struggle to articulate their thoughts in any language, not because they lack intellect, but because the linguistic frameworks that would enable thought has been dismantled.

This is not a call to return to Hansegård's original ideological frame. Rather, it is a critical reclamation of his insight: that language loss is not only a cultural tragedy, but a political weapon. Semilingualism, properly understood, is the epistemic residue of colonization. It produces subjects who can be educated but not empowered, vocal but not political, socialized but not sovereign.

Overcoming semilingualism, then, is not just about promoting multilingual education. It is about restoring the capacity to think, feel, and act within one's own linguistic and epistemic world. It requires confronting the hierarchies embedded in global language systems and recognizing that linguistic repair is a form of decolonization.

This affirmation means reclaiming the theory for anti-colonial critique, recognizing the condition of semilingualism as evidence not of defect, but of dispossession. It challenges scholars and educators to go beyond celebrating multilingualism as diversity and to ask: What languages are being used to think? To dream? To dissent? And which languages are being hollowed out and reduced to form without content or speech without soul?

If knowledge is, as Foucault would argue, a vehicle of power and truth, then semilingualism is a sign that truth itself has been colonized. Reversing this condition requires more than pedagogical reform. It demands a decolonization of subjectivity, a return to the ancestral tongues not merely as heritage, but as living epistemes capable of resisting global systems of alienation. This is a task that begins with

[68] Salö and Karlander, "Semilingualism," 293.

listening to the silences imposed by linguistic fragmentation and ends with the restoration of voice, memory, and agency.

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Book Reviews

The Nazi and the Psychiatrist: Herman Göring, Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, and a Fatal Meeting of Minds at the End of WWII, by Jack El-Hai. New York: Public Affairs, 2013, 281pp., $21.99 (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-61039-463-5

The 2013 book, *The Nazi and the Psychiatrist: Herman Göring, Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, and the Fatal meeting of Minds at the end of WWII*, by Jack El-Hai, served as the basis for the 2025 Hollywood blockbuster movie, *Nuremberg* (Directed by James Vanderbilt)*,* a depiction of the Nazi Nuremberg Trials that centers around its most significant defendant, Reichsmarschall Herman Göring – Hitler's Supreme Commander of the Luftwaffe and second-in-command in the Nazi state. A perennial topic of discussion among scholars of law, especially the law of armed conflict, El-Hai's book chronicles the work of Dr. Douglas M. Kelly, the first of three psychiatrists who worked closely with the Nuremberg defendants. Dr. Kelley was tasked by the U.S. Army to determine whether the accused were competent to stand trial. With the intention of publishing his own book on the subject, his attention soon drifted to identifying what he assumed existed: the "Nazi Mind." Such a mind, he and others believed, would consist of shared psychological characteristics common among all the defendants. Using a battery of psychological tests and hours of interviews, Dr. Kelley asked what psychological conditions would predispose Germans to abandon their mental autonomy, the moral norms of Christian civilization, and their sense of shared humanity, for a charismatic leader hellbent on global conquest and the total annihilation of all real and/or perceived enemies via the cruelest mechanistic means? How widespread is the Nazi mind among the German population? What drove millions of Germans, the inheritors of the legacy of Goethe, Bach, Beethoven, and Martin Luther, to blindly submit their wills to the Führer, Adolf Hitler? What Jack El-Hai chronicles in his book is the process by which Dr. Kelley discovers the most disturbing conclusion that could be found: The problem isn't a German problem. There is no "Nazi mind" limited to Germany and Germans. These men on trial, all highly neurotic in their own ways, were "ordinary men" living in extraordinary times, bombarded with propaganda that spoke to their psychological needs, thus converting them to a nationalist cause, and motivating them to engage in the most destructive deeds ever imagined in pursuit of that cause. There was no secret matrix of psychological conditions that – as if by fate – preconditioned these Germans to become what they were: the architects of the greatest slaughter known to humanity.

They were not born with a "Nazi mind," and the Nazi mind was not German. Those shared characteristics that in composite could be designated as the "Nazi mind" was the creation of Adolf Hitler and other prominent Nazis, many of whom, such as Alfred Rosenberg, were on trial at Nuremberg. The poisonous Nazi ideology was injected into an already troubled German society, thus taking advantage of its preexisting social biases, especially its long history of anti-Semitism. The Nazi ideology fanned the flames of hatred against so-called "Jewish" Bolshevism and American style "Jewish" capitalism, all the while promising a new *Judenrein* (Jew-free) palingenetic Germany, one flushed with newly conquered lands to Germanize (*Lebensraum*) and newly conquered peoples to exploit, i.e., the Slavs.

What disturbed Dr. Kelley the most about his findings was its universal implications: if highly educated Germans, the intellectual apex of Europe, within a democratic society (the Weimar Republic) could succumb to Nazism – the German form of fascism, so could anyone else succumb to their own forms of fascism. Although Gustav M. Gilbert, the third of the three psychiatrists to examine the Nuremberg defendant disagreed with Dr. Kelley, believing something of a "Nazi mind" did indeed exist particular to Germany, for Dr. Kelley, all societies, especially Western democratic societies, were prone to murderous ideologies, not just Germany. In other words, they were all prone to fascist movements, and most disturbingly: *we are all potential fascists*, capable of doing the most heinous of deeds given the right conditions. As Jack El-Hai chronicles, this revelation so disturbed Dr. Kelley that upon his return to the U.S., he not only wrote his book, *22 Cells in Nuremberg,* which was eventually released in 1947, he frequently gave public lectures on the dangers of America succumbing to its own fascist impulses. While many took comfort in the thought that "it could never happen here," Dr. Kelley was not convinced of such an optimistic (or blind) claim. For him, it was more than likely that some form of American fascism could – and would – arise, the evidence of which he already saw in America's persistent problem of White Supremacy, which vehemently rejected the very idea of racial equality akin to the Nazis. Kelley was not only alive to witness the 1939 German American Bund fascist rally at Madison Square Gardens, but he was also alive to witness the 1955 brutal lynching of Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi – the heinous murder of a fourteen-year-old Black boy, whose battered face made the front pages of newspapers around the world, including in the Soviet Union. Most disturbingly, Kelley recognized the same kind of burning hatred, racism, xenophobia, resentment, destructiveness, and authoritarianism festering in American society that he witnessed in the men populating the 22 cells in Nuremberg. He and others, such as Theodor W. Adorno et al in their book *Authoritarian Personality* (1950), and later Hannah Arendt in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963)*,* warned America about the latent rightwing authoritarianism residing just below the surface of American democracy. We Americans chose not to listen to the disturbing reality that confronted us. Rather, American society retreated into the comfort of our own mythology – the myth that America is always a force for good in the world, and that at no point could a politically induced collective mass psychosis take over our democratic country. We so often claimed that we are the Jesus' "city on the hill" (Matthew 5:14) shining radiantly for all the world to emulate. As such, we deceived ourselves into thinking that the "Nazis mind" we despised was merely a German problem, not an American

one. We did not realize that if a Nazi mind exists, it is created by a society open to fascism, ready for fascism, and desirous of fascism, and America is not immune from such.

Jack El-Hai's book, *The Nazi and the Psychiatrist*, and the subsequent movie *Nuremberg* struck a chord in America, an America that is currently grappling with its own *Daseinkampf* – an inner struggle between the creative, emancipatory, and revolutionary dayside of America's Volksgeist, with its emphasis on the liberal values of *freedom, justice, and equality*, as well as the dignity of all humanity, against the destructive authoritarian nightside of the same *Volksgeist*, which embraces racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and class domination. Jack El-Hai's book and the film *Nuremberg* speak to our present condition, wherein the fascist elements in American society have been elevated, brought to the foreground of American politics, and utilized by the rightwing authoritarian populist Donald Trump, in his relentless pursuit of self-aggrandizement, self-enrichment, and self-deification. While Donald Trump is no Hitler – he has no political ideology that guides his actions but is rather led by his own peculiar collection of neuroses – he has nevertheless functionalized America's fascist impulses to further his personal aims. In light of this, we should remember that Dr. Kelley's fear was not that Germany created Hitler – as all societies are capable of creating their Hitler equivalents – but rather that the Nazis *are in us*, all of us, and all it takes is the right kind of fascist spark to ignite that all-consuming lake of fire.

In his second presidential term, we have witnessed Trump's own MAGA form of *Gleichschaltung* (synchronization of society and the will of the Führer), wherein he broke the will-to-resist of law firms, universities, news agencies, and his own Republican party. By implication of Dr. Kelley's findings, a society that is fascist proof will not fall for the demagoguery of the fascist leader; such a demagogue's rantings will fall on deaf ears, as the psychological realities of such a society will not align with the grievances articulated by the demagogue. He will, therefore, have no one to lead. Yet, in a society primed for fascism, saturated with historical, cultural, economic, and demographic grievances, even a bizarre game show host like Trump, a thoroughly unserious man with severely limited intellectual capabilities, can be the spark that ignites the fire. One need not have a creative genius at the helm of such a movement, any mildly effective Machiavellian will do.

While the debate about the Nazi mind has once again been ignited by Jack El-Hai's book and the new film, *Nuremberg*, as scholars are again debating whether such a Nazi mind is a fixed character type or a politically induced mass psychosis than any society and/or individual can fall prey to, it is necessary for society to ask bitter questions about the collective psychology of the West, especially America. If Kelley is right, and there is a latent Nazi within all of us, we must guard against those who would provoke that repressed impulse, for psychoanalysis teaches us that what is repressed longs for expression; it is best not to give such impulses an opportunity to become manifest.

At this moment, it is unclear what will ultimately happen to America's own fascist tendencies. Will the American Republic suffer the same fate as the Weimar Republic, and fall to the rising tide of fascistic authoritarianism? Will power continue to consolidate in the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government, leading to one-party

rule or even one-man rule? We don't know, but what we do know is that if such were to happen, it would be because we allowed it to happen. We were warned, repeatedly. Our future hangs on the fate of our current Daseinkampf. We must either take seriously Kelley's warning about ourselves, and emphatically embrace the dayside of our Volksgeist, or we follow the Nazis into historic catastrophe with our destructive nightside, the result of which, *at best*, would be another Nuremberg Trial after the catastrophe.

Warnings aside, this book is best read in conjunction with two other books: Gustav M. Gilbert's *Nuremberg Diary* (1947)*,* and Leon Goldensohn's *Nuremberg Interviews: An American Psychiatrist's Conversations with the Defendants and Witnesses,* which was posthumously published in 2004*.* Together, these three books represent the sum total of psychiatric analyses of those who worked directly with the Nuremberg defendants. Jack El-Hai's book does adequate job discussing the differences of opinions – and antagonisms – between these and later psychiatrists' analyses of the Nazi defendants, as there were – and continue to be – major difference between them. Ultimately, Jack El-Hai's book has made an important contribution to the understanding of fascism from a psychological perspective (or at least the history of such psychological perspectives) as well as bringing to the foreground the dangers we once again face in Western societies with the growth and normalization of the far-right and other fascist groups, parties, and individuals.

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Sayyid Qutb's Radical Islamism and the Comparative Political Theology, by Dragos Stoica, Lanham • Boulder • New York • London, Lexington Books (Rowman & Littlefield), 2025, X + 368 pp., £104 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-66696-683-1

On April 9, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), a German Lutheran pastor, neo-orthodox theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident, who was a key founding member of the Confessing Church, was hanged during the collapse of the Nazi regime. He had been arrested in April 1943 by the Gestapo and imprisoned at Tegel Prison for one and a half years, being later transferred to Flossenbürg concentration camp. Bonhoeffer was accused of being associated with the July 20th plot to assassinate Hitler and was tried along with other accused plotters, including former members of the *Abwehr* (the German Military Intelligence Office). His writings on Christianity's role in the secular world have become widely influential, especially his 1937 book *The Cost of Discipleship* (*Nachfolge*, literally *Succession/Following*), often described as a modern classic. Apart from his theological writings, Bonhoeffer was known for his staunch resistance to the Nazi dictatorship, including vocal opposition to its euthanasia programme and genocidal persecution of Jews, and has been since considered as a martyr.

Born in the same year as Bonhoeffer, the Egyptian Sayyid Ibrahim Husayn Shadhili Qutb (1906–1966), was a political theorist, revolutionary, and a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood. On 23 July, 1952, the Egyptian monarchy was overthrown in a *coup d'état* mounted by a group of soldiers who styled themselves the Free Officers, formally led by General Muhammad Najib (Naguib) (1901–1984), but it soon became apparent that Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir (Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser) (1918–1970) was the driving force behind the group. Although the coup was widely popular, the Free Officers lacked any organized political base of their own, turning, therefore, to the Muslim Brotherhood, with whom some of their members had already been in contact, for the effective mobilization of popular support. There thus ensued a period of collaboration between the Muslim Brotherhood and the new regime. Sayyid Qutb was prominent among the members and associates of the Brotherhood who collaborated with the Free Officers. He was appointed cultural advisor to the Revolutionary Council, established by the Free Officers, and was the only civilian to attend its meetings. Before long, however, differences arose between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military rulers of Egypt, and on January 12, 1954, the Revolutionary Council decreed the dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood,

and Sayyid Qutb entered jail for the first time. He was released in March and rearrested in December 1954. He was ill at the time of his arrest, but this did not prevent his jailers from torturing him, in accordance with the still-observed norms of Egyptian "justice."

In December 1964, Sayyid Qutb was released from jail, and in the meantime, a slim volume entitled *Ma'alim fi'l-Tariq* (*Milestones*) had been published and met with instant success; during the first six months of 1965, it went through five further editions. It consisted of some of the letters Sayyid Qutb had sent from prison and key sections of *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (*In the Shade of the Qur'an*). On August 5, 1965, Qutb was rearrested and condemned to death on May 17, 1966, for planning to overthrow the government and for plotting the assassination of Nasser, who was repeatedly depicted in Western political circles and the media as an "Arab Adolf Hitler" and accused of leading a strain of Arab nationalism close to Nazism.

After his death, Qutb was considered by his admirers as a "witness" (*shahīd*, شهيد), the Arabic equivalent for the Greek *martyr* (μάρτυς), but following the events of September 11, 2001, Qutb was dubbed as the "father of Islamic terrorism" by the usual experts and think-tanks working directly or indirectly with the US Administration in its "War on Terror" – if you work there, then what you say must be true...

Some years ago, in a footnote in an article on Sayyid Qutb, I wrote that it would be interesting to compare his political theory with the political theology of Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), and even with the political thought of Johannes Baptist Metz (1928-2019) and other Catholic activists belonging to the liberation theology movement.[1]

The book under review does not do that, but it does a very important intellectual endeavour. Originating in a doctoral dissertation for the Department of Religions and Cultures at Concordia University in Montréal (Canada), *Sayyid Qutb's Radical Islamism and The Comparative Political Theology*, divided into seven parts (five chapters plus an Introduction and a Conclusion) argues that Sayyid Qutb's radical critique of secular modernity, seen as a product of a great theft of sovereignty that usurps the monopoly of God over the entire world of creation – as God asks in the *Qur'an* to the precarnate gathering of souls before Him, "am I not your Lord?" (*alastu bi-rabbikum?*, verse no. 172 of the *Al-A'raf* Surah) – is not idiosyncratic or incoherent but a quintessential expression and an extreme type of a specific tradition of political theology that until now has been exclusively the province of the Western thought.

Dragos Stoica claims that Sayyid Qutb's political theology of *Hakimiyyah* (God's Sovereignty) is better understood by integrating it in a wider context of the antimodern political theology. Thus, throughout this book, the author compares Qutb's critique of modernity with the Indian-Pakistani Islamist thinker Abu al-Aʿla Mawdudi (1903–1979), the Spanish Catholic counter-revolutionary political

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[1] Carimo Mohomed, "'The Parting of the Ways': A Qutbian Approach to International Relations". In Abdelkader, Deina, Nassef Manabilang Adiong, and Raffaele Mauriello (eds.). *Islam and International Relations: Contributions to Theory and Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, footnote 11, p. 181.

theologian Juan Donoso Cortés (1809–1853), as well as the Protestant political theologians Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and Rousas J. Rushdoony (1916–2001).

By recasting Sayyid Qutb as an essential Muslim political theologian of God's Sovereignty placed within a larger, cross-cultural paradigm, this book contributes as well to the necessary process of decolonization of political theology. As Stoica asserts, beyond such convenient oversimplifications falling under the category "Qutb the philosopher of Islamic terror," Sayyid Qutb has been for decades a distinct and important topic in the fields of political theory, Middle East studies, and, to a lesser extent, Islamic Studies. His work is now the focus of an ever-growing corpus of scholarship employing a plurality of theoretical frameworks and engaging virtually every field of the social sciences: from biographical to comparative and from critical to apologetical; from psychology and literary theory to Islamic studies and sociology (p. 2).

Apart from the typos, there are some assertions that are a little bit confusing: the author considers that the central proposition of the study is that Qutb is the first Islamist political theologian to focus overwhelmingly on God's Sovereignty (*Hakimiyyah*) (p. 6), when in fact the first one to do that was Mawdudi, as the author acknowledges when dealing with him in chapter 2; it is also asserted that despite his mother's deeply religious convictions, Qutb, at her insistence, attended the *madrasah* (modern elementary school) and not the *kuttab* (the Qur'anic school) (p. 18), but both are "Islamic" schools in the traditional sense, the latter elementary and the former for higher education; finally, it is implied that Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), founder and head of the Muslim Brotherhood, was from a previous generation (p. 18), when in fact Qutb was five days older.

These, and other, incongruities can be corrected in a future revised and, who knows, enlarged edition, which could compare Qutb with other thinkers from different religious traditions and with a stress on the liberationist aspects of his thought: most of the time the allegiance to God can be much more liberating than the allegiance (euphemism for "coercion") to human-made institutions – as Seneca (4 BC-65 AD) would say, *Deo parere libertas est* (obedience to God is freedom).

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