

# Fundamentalist Elites and the Politics of Identity

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A decisive part of the lasting horror spread by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 is due to the fear that at its roots we might find a worldwide social movement articulating its protest against a world economy felt to be deeply unjust. The fear that poor people take what they claim theirs regularly serves as an argument for the increase of Western development aid.

For example, during Germany's 2002 federal electoral campaign religious charitable trusts issued an appeal that 0.7% of Germany's gross national product should be spent for development aid, implying a trade-off between the latter and potential threats to the West. US-President George W. Bush has argued in exactly the same way—as have Bishop Desmond Tutu, Elie Wiesel and the Dalai Lama. Tutu believes that poverty is the primary reason for terror, while Bush explains that »We fight poverty because hope is the answer to terror«, and both Wiesel and the Dalai Lama assert that education is the means to eliminate terrorism. However, these well-meaning considerations may rest on a serious fallacy. Fundamentalist elites might feel even more provoked and motivated to terrorist attacks by a higher commitment to aid on the part of Western welfare-states: if, that is, these elites regard Western involvement as both authoritarian capitalistic imperialism and a hegemony of decadent consumerism. After all, fundamentalist terrorists demand widespread economic prosperity in their native regions only rhetorically, while in reality they defend their so-called cultural identity at all costs, including especially socio-economic disadvantages for large sections of the population. Thus there is a danger that intensified development aid, justified as a means of combating terrorism, may only lead to even greater disappointment and a subsequent slackening of aid efforts in the face of imminent terrorist attacks.

The assumption that fundamentalist activities correlate significantly to the existence of social elites is supported by empirical data. With regard to al-Qaeda it is well-known that Ayman al-Zawahiri, the influential Egyptian chief-ideologue behind bin Laden, was born into a prosperous and well-educated family of physicians residing in the wealthy Cairo suburb Maadi. Al-Zawahiri finished his studies in Cairo in 1974 and worked as a surgeon in the Egyptian armed forces before moving to Afghanistan in 1980, where he worked for the Red Crescent in Peshawar. In 1985 he met bin Laden in Djeddah, and the two

became accomplices.<sup>1</sup> A study carried out by the Pakistani, Nasra Hassan, between 1996 and 1999 examined nearly 250 instructors and relatives of suicide bombers as well as those suicide bombers who failed in their attempts. It shows that by and large the suicide bombers are men between the ages of 18 and 38, socially well integrated and neither poor nor uneducated.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a survey by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) conducted in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip found that the approval of violence against Israeli targets including suicide bombings is greater the higher the standard of living and the level of education.<sup>3</sup> A UN report covering 40 countries published in December 2002 established that the general approval of al-Qaeda amongst function elites is significantly higher than the societal average, and a full 2002 Gallup survey within almost every relevant Muslim country showed that the approval of the sentence: »Tolerance is one of the three most important values that are to be imparted to children in the course of their upbringing,« decreases as the level of education increases.<sup>4</sup> Hence *Jihādists*<sup>5</sup> by no means act out of despair or hopelessness, on the contrary.

Contrary to the assumptions quoted above, it is, then, rather, a *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that is to be expected, *cum grano salis*: educational and poverty relief programmes may not reduce the threat of terrorism, indeed they could be counterproductive with regard to its prevention. This suggests an understanding of fundamentalism in terms of particular patterns of cultural critique and of the politics of identity pursued by social elites. These patterns have, as will be outlined below, comparable nature in both Orient and Occident.

### Occidentalism—a career between self-definition and outside description

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 were greeted with approval in only a few of the so-called underdeveloped countries, and such approval as came forward was conditioned not by social but by political and socio-cultural factors. This is indicated by its absence from the non-Arab parts of Africa, the »poor

<sup>1</sup>L. Wright, *Der Mann hinter Bin Laden. Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri aus Ägypten—eine islamistische Karriere*, in: *Lettre International* 59 (iv/2002), 28-44.

<sup>2</sup>S. Atran, *Genesis of Suicide Terrorism*, in: *Science* 299 (07. March 2003), 1534-1539-1537.

<sup>3</sup>A.B. Krueger/J. Maleckova, *Education, Poverty, Political Violence and Terrorism. Is There a Causal Connection?*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge/MA: Working Paper 9074, July 2002, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w9074> [accessed: 26.03.2003].

<sup>4</sup>The Gallup Organization. *Gallup Poll of the Islamic World 2002. Subscriber Report*, 21: Iran: 73:55, Lebanon: 77:61, Jordan: 78:65, Morocco: 80:69, Turkey: 88:82, Saudi-Arabia: 68:63; the only exception is Kuwait (72:70), the ratio is equal in Pakistan (60:60).

<sup>5</sup>For the term cf. N.N. Ayubi, *Political Islam. Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London/New York 1991, 142.

man< of the globe. Moreover, as we now know, the attacks were planned and carried out by individuals who were anything but underprivileged people who had previously been excluded from the merits of modernisation and recently rapidly acquired the technical knowledge and practical skills needed for their crimes in the West. On the contrary, they came from polyglot elites, whose socialisation, as in the case of those hijackers based in Hamburg, bore all the marks of modernity. As beneficiaries of Western educational systems or indeed, in the case of Osama bin Laden himself, of the Western economy and its international financial markets, these elites pursue a *selective modernisation*, that is, they put modern achievements to work for anti-modernist goals.

This elitist project of an anti-modernist fundamentalism which rejects such values of civilization as freedom, tolerance, rationalism, pluralism, and the individual pursuit of happiness and castigates the Western lifestyle as decadent moral decline refers to a retrograde notion of Islam and defines itself according to it.<sup>6</sup> If modernity is understood as the *legitimation of continual change* and as the specific character of occidental developments compared with other forms of social change,<sup>7</sup> the interpretative problem of fundamentalist elites becomes apparent: as a reaction to the experience of such cultural and social change, they find themselves recommending even more cultural change. That is, under conditions of permanent socio-cultural change and unconstrained cultural overlap induced by a globalized Western modernity, the fundamentalist strategy of isolationist regression implies not a stopping of transformation processes altogether but, at best, a renewed orientation of them. The paradoxical project of fundamentalism—opposition to secularisation while being caused by secularisation<sup>8</sup>—means that it is only suited to such societies as have already been seized by modernization, even if that modernization is limited to imported military machinery and an imposed form of regime as was the case in Afghanistan. If to this extent fundamentalism is »not a rudimentary traditionalism of the pre-modern era but a novel reaction accompanying modernity itself«<sup>9</sup>, then its essence cannot be explained as primarily a religious phenomenon, but rather as a *political strategy*.

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<sup>6</sup>It is well known that the name of bin Laden's terror network al-Qaeda means foundation or base. As in the case of the term totalitarianism that goes back to Mussolini, the term fundamentalist can be used both as affirmative self-description and pejorative outside perspective. us-American Protestants published a periodical entitled *The Fundamentals. A Testimony to the Truth* from 1909 to 1912, before they founded the World's Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919 and thereby had coined the term. The similarity to the al-Qaeda-semantics is obvious.

<sup>7</sup>F.-X. Kaufmann, *Religion und Modernität. Sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, Tübingen 1989, 35.

<sup>8</sup>N. Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt/M. 2000, 295.

<sup>9</sup>M.Th. Greven, *Die politische Gesellschaft. Kontingenz und Deziision als Probleme des Regierens und der Demokratie*, Opladen 1999, 132.

Alluding to the *Orientalism* diagnosed by Edward W. Said, this phenomenon has been described as *Occidentalism*: opposing urbanity, a bourgeois way of life, rationality, and feminism,<sup>10</sup> a phenomenon not at all limited to Islamist movements but in fact wide spread throughout the West. Ideological formulas, such as the rejection of urbanity, contrast sharply with the urban provenance of fundamentalist elites and serve power-strategic purposes, especially the attraction of large sections of the population.<sup>11</sup> Typically, this occurs in the context of opposition movements: as a rule fundamentalist elites are revolutionary counter-elites, or to be precise *niche-elites*,<sup>12</sup> whose seizure of political power is motivated above all by their desire to maintain a moral order beneficial to their own, often economic, interests. Elitist fundamentalism of any religious character also remains a »typical intellectual's attitude«. <sup>13</sup>

The Occidentalism hypothesis is particularly important because it is not only an analytic perspective from the outside but also an affirmative self-description. Hassan Hanafi (born 1935), the inventor of the ›Islamic left‹ who earned his doctoral degree in France and today holds a professorship at Cairo University, uses the term *Occidentalism* as an affirmative self-descriptive concept intended to counterbalance the tendency of westernization in the Third World.<sup>14</sup> Although Hanafi's version of this concept is little elaborated and not militant, it is clear, at the same time, that the bias of such a decolonialization concept is culturist, rather than economic or political. The concept includes both diagnosis and remedy: it can be observed that that cultural critique can clearly serve as ferment for fundamentalist ideologies in the sense of an Occidental politics of identity which is at home both in Orient and Occident.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup>I. Buruma/A. Margalit, *Occidentalism*, in: *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XLIX, No. 1, 17 January 2002, 4-7. For the term »Occidentalisme« cf. already Abdallah Laroui, *Islam et modernité*, Paris 1987, 162 ff. For the debate on Orientalism cf. Georg Stauth, *Islam und westlicher Rationalismus. Der Beitrag des Orientalismus zur Entstehung der Soziologie*, Frankfurt/M. 1993.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Buruma/Margalit, *op. cit.* (n. 10), 4.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. E. Sivan, *The Enclave Culture*, in: M.E. Marty/R.S. Appleby (eds.): *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, (The Fundamentalism Project, Vol. 5), Chicago/London 1995, 11-68, 17.

<sup>13</sup>N. Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt/M. 1997, 807. Ayubi, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 158f. shows empirically that the middle classes and intellectuals, not traders, peasants, and the industrial proletariat form the socio-economic basis of militant, political Islam in all of the Arab countries apart from Syria.

<sup>14</sup>H. Hanafi, *Islam in the Modern World*, Vol. I, Religion, Ideology and Development, Vol. II, Tradition, Revolution and Culture, Cairo 1995.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. G. Stauth, *Religiöser Fundamentalismus zwischen Orient und Okzident. Religiöse Identitätspolitik und ihr Verhältnis zur Demokratie*, in: D. Loch/W. Heitmeyer (Hg.), *Schattenseiten der Globalisierung. Rechtsradikalismus, Rechtspopulismus und separatistischer Regionalismus in westlichen Demokratien*, Frankfurt/M. 2001, 140-166.

## The Road to Mecca—Leopold Weiss alias Muhammed Asad

Muhammed Asad is a telling example.<sup>16</sup> Asad was born in Vienna in 1900 under the name of Leopold Weiss. As son of a Jewish lawyer and a banker's daughter, according to his own statement, he enjoyed a happy youth. After the First World War, he dropped out of university where he had been studying art history and philosophy, and increasingly found himself confronted with the then widespread cultural pessimism. In his autobiography he confesses: »I wanted to find by myself an approach to the spiritual order of things which, I knew, must exist but which I could not yet discern.«<sup>17</sup> He does not attribute these difficulties to himself but rather views his own »vagueness« as »the vagueness of an entire generation.«<sup>18</sup> Clearly influenced by Spengler and Nietzsche, he laments that »the opening decades of the twentieth century stood in the sign of a spiritual vacuum.«<sup>19</sup> »All the ethical valuations to which Europe has been accustomed for so many centuries had become amorphous under the terrible impact of what had happened between 1914 and 1918.«<sup>20</sup> Their place, he said, was taken by materialistic wellbeing:

The average European—whether democrat or communist, manual worker or intellectual—seemed to know only one positive faith: the worship of material progress, the belief that there could be no other goal in life than to make that very life continually easier or, as the current expression went, ›independent of nature‹. The temples of that faith were the gigantic factories, cinemas, chemical laboratories, dance-halls, hydroelectric works; and its priests were the bankers, engineers, politicians, film stars, statisticians, captains of industry, record airmen, and commissars. Ethical frustration was evident in the all-round lack of agreement about the meaning of Good and Evil and in the submission of all social and economic issues to the rule of ›expediency‹—that painted lady of the streets, willing to give herself to anybody, at any time, whenever she is invoked (...).<sup>21</sup>

With regard to their origin, and also their powerfully eloquent and polemical consistency, these thoughts could easily have derived from the so-called Conservative Revolution, one of the hallmarks of which was the fear of uncertainty.<sup>22</sup> Asad, however, turned not to the political right but to Islam, where he found

<sup>16</sup>I am indebted to Sidonia Blättler for drawing my attention to Asad. For Asad cf. M. Kramer, *The Road from Mecca. Muhammad Asad (born Leopold Weiss)*, in: M. Kramer (ed.), *The Jewish Discovery of Islam. Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis*, Tel Aviv 1999, 225-247; G. Windhager, *Leopold Weiss alias Muhammad Asad. Von Galizien nach Arabien 1900-1927*, Wien u.a. 2003.

<sup>17</sup>M. Asad, *The Road To Mecca*, Lahore 21982, 57.

<sup>18</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>19</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>21</sup>Op. cit., 70.

<sup>22</sup>St. Breuer, *Anatomie der Konservativen Revolution*, Darmstadt 1993, 44 f.

»an emotional lightness of approach to all questions of life—a supreme common sense of feeling, if one might call it so«. <sup>23</sup> For Asad this led »not only to the spiritual perfection of the individual but also to the creation of such social conditions as might be conducive to the spiritual development of all, so that all might live in fullness«. <sup>24</sup>

A liberal and secular understanding of religion rooted in the Enlightenment tradition was thereby precluded, and Asad consistently felt himself called to join the »Jihad«, as he confesses in the chapter of his memoirs which bears that title. Portraying his battle against the Italian occupation of the Cyrenaica in the north-east of Libya in 1931, he engages with the question of why he had voluntarily put his life at risk, stressing that his conversion to Islam generated in him

a desire to pursue it among like-minded people—and not only to pursue it in a personal sense but also to work for its social fruition within the community of my choice. To me, Islam was a way and not an end—and the desperate guerillas of Umar al-Mukhtar were fighting with their lifeblood for the freedom to tread that way, just as the Companions of the Prophet had done thirteen centuries ago. To be of help to them in their hard and bitter struggle, however uncertain the outcome, was as personally necessary to me as to pray (...). <sup>25</sup>

Asad's journey from the profoundly European cultural *fin de siècle* pessimism of the interwar period to political Islam seems to be symptomatic of the elitist project of a religiously fundamentalist cultural critique and politics of identity, which draws on Occidental concepts of the enemy.

### The occidental ethic and the spirit of crusade: Sayyid Qutb

A far more influential exponent of such way of thinking, however, is the Egyptian fundamentalist Sayyid Qutb. Qutb was born into an Egyptian middle class family in 1906. After completing his university studies he joined the Ministry of Education and initially worked as teacher and literary critic. As a critical opposition columnist he displayed western, liberal, skeptical, existentialist attitudes and discovered the now famous Nagib Mahfus. After a stay in the USA between 1948 and 1950 Qutb became an Islamist ideologue and joined the Muslim Brotherhood, a militant underground movement founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, which was mainly made up of members of the urban lower middle class. <sup>26</sup> On account of his increasingly radical works, Qutb was impris-

<sup>23</sup> Asad, op.cit. (n. 17), 100.

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit., 128.

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., 327.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ayubi, op. cit. (n. 5), 81; 218; A. Al-Azmeh, *Die Islamisierung des Islam. Imaginäre Welten einer politischen Theologie*, Frankfurt/M./New York 1996, 132; R.P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, New York/Oxford 1993.

oned for many years by the Nasser-regime and severely tortured before, in 1966, he was sentenced to death, executed and became an Islamist martyr. Qutb's influence on the whole breadth of the militant Islamist movement, including al-Qaeda, can hardly be overestimated. Both bin Laden's chief ideologue al-Zawahiri (mentioned above) and bin Laden himself are strongly influenced by Qutb. Bin Laden studied at Djeddah University, where he came into contact with the Muslim Brotherhood and particularly fell under the spell of Abdullah Azzam and Sayyid Qutb's brother Muhammad.<sup>27</sup>

The decadence motif only too familiar from European cultural critique is—now recontextualized in fundamentalist terms—of central importance for Qutb's Occidentalist ideology. A key notion is the shifting concept of *jahiliyyah*, used to denote *barbarism, ignorance, decay, and moral degeneracy*. Related to it is the differentiation between *external imperialism* and *internal imperialism*: Whereas *external imperialism* refers to violent and armed occupation, *internal imperialism* denotes a conscious or unconscious collaboration caused by indifference or betrayal as a result of despondency, passivity, and moral degeneracy, a *jahiliyyah* of the colonialized themselves. If the decadence of the Muslim society is partly held responsible for colonialism, in the sense that its moral weakness has made heteronomy possible in the first place, then this is a stereotype of cultural critique well known since the time of Machiavelli. Qutb simply adds the differentiation between active and passive decadence, according to which Oriental civilizations have suffered passive decadence over the last couple of centuries whereas the apparently successful Occident was subject to active decadence, i.e. an especially lasting decline of values. Qutb goes back to antiquity and presents the Roman Empire as sowing the seeds of Western decadence and arrogance which have persisted since:

The idea upon which the Roman Empire was based was suppression by force and the exploitation of other nations for the sole benefit of the motherland, and to provide a good life for the elite. (...) The famous ›Roman justice‹ was justice for the Romans alone. (...) The Romans in reality knew no religion. Their traditional gods were but pale copies of the Greek myths, indistinct figures whose existence was unimportant and whose worship was a matter only of social custom. They were never permitted to interfere in the affairs of real life. (...) Such was the soil in which modern Western civilization grew.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup>P.L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc. Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden*, London 2001, 56.

<sup>28</sup>W.E. Shepard, *Sayyid Qutb and Islamic Activism. A Translation and Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam*, Leiden etc. 1996, 292f. Hassan Hanafi, a critical, but intensive reader Qutb's, also still sees the Pax Romana at the heart of the European consciousness, cf. H. Hanafi, *Development from without—Development from within*, <http://www.dse.de/ef/cultures/hanafi.htm> [accessed 05.06.2003], 2.



Qutb subsequently quotes another well known theme from the Western conservative cultural critique, the castigation of materialistic greed in occidental industrial societies:

The ordinary European, whether democrat or fascist or bolshevik, worker or intellectual, knows only one positive religion and that is the worship of material progress (...). The temples of this religion are the large factories, the cinemas, the chemical laboratories, the dance halls and the electrical power plants, while its priests are the bankers, the engineers, the movie stars, the leaders of industry and the heroes of aviation.<sup>29</sup>

The dependence of this passage on the quotation from Asad cited above is striking. Qutb was familiar with Asad's pamphlet *Islam at the Crossroads*, which he had read in its Arabic translation.<sup>30</sup> However, whereas Asad regards materialism as the consequence of moral erosion, Qutb expounds the problem of moral degeneracy as the result of excessive materialistic individualism, which he blames for licentiousness and discord, moral irresponsibility, degeneration, social chaos, the humiliation of women, and the weakening and destruction of the family. Symptomatic of this view is a passage from Qutb's influential *Milestones* which led to his accusation and subsequent conviction of high treason:

If (...) ›free sexual promiscuity‹ and illegitimate generation become the foundation stone of the society with mutual relations of man and woman erected on carnal desires, sexual hunger and animal provocation, shunning the family responsibilities according to natural attitudes and the principle of division of work, woman preoccupying herself [sic!] with adornment, embellishment, attractiveness and enchantment, forsaking and relinquishing the basic charge of upbringing and protecting the new generation and preferring to serve as hostess in a hotel, passenger-vessel or an aeroplane of her own accord or under the call of society, thus directing her creative energies and capabilities towards material benefits and amassing material comforts instead of producing human beings (...)—when things come to such a pass then it should be deemed a harbinger of civilizational decay and decline. This state of affairs is termed Jahili in the Islamic terminology.<sup>31</sup>

Even though prudery and anti-feminism are distinctive in those maxims and the specifically Islamist notion of *jahiliyya* is enforced, the similarity to stereotypes of Western cultural critique is striking. When Qutb denies that the industrially, economically, and scientifically advanced societies are truly civilized, then his view corresponds to the confrontation of supposedly ›true‹ (German) culture with ›mere‹ (Western) civilization. From here the road leads to the extremism of the European 20th century, such as social Darwinism (which Qutb adapted

<sup>29</sup>Shepard, op. cit. (n. 28), 294.

<sup>30</sup>M. Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads*, Lahore 1955. Kramer, op. cit. (n. 16), 235.

<sup>31</sup>S. Qutb Shaheed [Qutb, Sayyid], *Milestones*, Karachi 1981, 180. Cf. also S. Qutb, *The Ideological Bankruptcy of Europe and the Future Prospects of Islam*, in: *The Voice of Islam. A Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Promotion of True Human Progress*, Vol. XII, Karachi 1963, 5-16.65-77.85.



from the French fascist Alexis Carrel<sup>32</sup>), an open rejection of democracy as one form of polytheism, and aggressive anti-Zionism, which was conveyed to Qutb by Werner Sombart's polemic *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* and the *Protokolle der Weisen von Zion*.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover there are immediate parallels between Qutb's Islamic fundamentalism and Protestant fundamentalist movements in the USA. Qutb might well be thought to be quoting the leading New York fundamentalist John Roach Straton, so similar are his remarks to those of Straton in 1920:

The most sinister and menacing figure of our modern life is the cigarette smoking, cocktail drinking, pug dog nursing, half-dressed, painted woman, who frequents the theaters, giggles at the cabarets, gambles in our drawing-rooms or sits around our hotels, with her dress cut ›C‹ in front and ›V‹ behind! She is a living invitation to lust, and a walking advertisement of the fact that many of our modern women have lowered their standards of life!<sup>34</sup>

For Qutb this state of affairs not only justifies the declaration of Jihad, but is its original motive and legitimation. Against decadence it is essential »to establish the Sovereignty and Authority of God an earth, to establish the true system revealed by God for addressing the human life; to exterminate all the Satanic forces and their ways of life, to abolish the lordship of man over other human beings«, which he believed »reasons and factors (...) enough to declare Jihad«. <sup>35</sup>

Qutb consistently advocates an uncompromising Manichaeism, not only evoking the *clash of civilization* (Huntington) *avant la lettre* but, so to speak, existentializing it:

European and American Crusaderist imperialism cannot leave out of its account the fact that the Islamic spirit is a bulwark resisting the spread of imperialism (...). Those who reckon that Jewish financial influence in the United States and elsewhere is what leads Westerners in this direction (...) and those who reckon that the struggle between the Eastern and Western blocs is the effective factor—all of these neglect a real element in the matter which must be added to all these others. This is the Crusader spirit that all Westerners carry in their blood and that lies hidden deep in their minds, to which is added imperialism's fear of the Islamic spirit (...).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup>Vgl. Al-Azmeh, op. cit. (n. 26), 136 ff.; Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, London 1990, 142ff.

<sup>33</sup>Vgl. Choueiri, op. cit. (n. 32), 112.119.

<sup>34</sup>Rev. J.R. Straton (Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, NY City), *The Menace of Immorality in Church and State. Messages of Wrath and Judgment*. New York 1920, 49.

<sup>35</sup>Qutb, *Milestones*, op. cit. (n. 31), 133f.

<sup>36</sup>Shepard, op. cit. (n. 28), 286f.

His main concern is thus *intellectual* and *spiritual colonialism* since, according to his *jahiliyya* theory, *internal imperialism* is a decisive factor for Islamic inferiority. He consistently propagates a cultural battle against any *westoxication*,<sup>37</sup> and along with that also, explicitly and particularly, against Western development aid and the UNESCO:

The ›free world‹ fights us, apart from time to time, not with tanks and rifles. Rather it fights us with tongues and pens, with charitable organizations in important educational centers, in form of the UNESCO (...). It fights us with those societies and organizations that are brought into being, founded and supported and which dominate the sensitive centers of our country.<sup>38</sup>

In as much as Qutb ascribes central importance to this cultural battle, he declares any co-operation and any cultural exchange that aims at promoting understanding to be categorically unwelcome. Not only is the West denied any good intentions at all and accused of acting with purely imperialistic deliberation, but Qutb also rejects any intercultural contact in principle, regardless of the West's intentions, since he considers it to be the cause of the *passive decadence* of the Orient.

### The political challenge of the transcendental idealist

This completes the picture with regard to the scepticism towards the usefulness of poverty relief programmes and campaigns against illiteracy as means of combating fundamentalism and terrorism which has been expressed at the beginning of this article. It also explains why fundamentalism as the project of an elite politicizes and agitates at all costs, even and especially the cost of socio-economic disadvantages for large sections of society.<sup>39</sup>

This raises a number of questions which are both current and practical questions. How great is the real ›risk of infection‹ by an elitist fundamentalism opposed to decadence for the bulk of the population in underdeveloped countries? What are the prospects of such elites of initiating a *social movement* as has occurred in Algeria and Iran? Under what conditions will a culturalist construction of identity that accepts a stagnation of prosperity be able to

<sup>37</sup>For the term cf. Ayubi, op. cit. (n. 5), 150.

<sup>38</sup>Sayyid Qutb, *Dirāsāt Islāmiyah*, Beirut/Kairo <sup>5</sup>1982 [1402], 161. Mitchell, op. cit. (n. 26), 50 connects this with the burning of English-language books in Egypt in November 1946.

<sup>39</sup>For example, in Algeria the Armée Islamique du Salut (AIS), known as Movement Islamique Armé (MIA) before 1994 and the armed wing of the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS), wages its war against ›westernization‹ and also against women not wearing veils, girls eager to be educated, teachers, journalists, development aid workers, tourists, and the average Algerian citizen by signaling through the bombing of public spaces that visits to coffee houses, reading newspapers, watching television etc. are anti-Islamic transgressions deserving death. By comparison, the improvement of the conditions of life, e.g. fighting the high percentage of illiteracy, has to take second place.

exercise such fascination that the project of an intellectual elite moves out of socially marginalization and becomes »the sharpest weapon to be used in any mass movement«?<sup>40</sup> How can an elitist cultural critique, which is hostile towards Western consumption, be socially and politically marginalized so that its anti-Western polemic is prevented from having a mass impact? After all, even the majority of Muslims would prefer »Disneyworld to paradise if in doubt«. <sup>41</sup> And finally, how can the destructive ways of reception of Occidental thought that still await careful study be changed constructively?

One possibility of interpretation could lie in the connection of de-modernization and social mobility described by Peter L. Berger. When members of the upper middle class break free from their careers, positions become available for successors, which is the reason why elitist anti-modernism accelerates the social mobility of members of the lower classes who are typically less prone to act on impulses of de-modernization.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, one should not entertain any illusions about the nature of fundamentalist terrorism, i.e. *Jihadism*, regarding which a quote by Heinrich Heine sounds almost prophetic:

There will come upon the scene armed Fichteans whose fanaticism of will is to be restrained neither by fear nor by self-interest; for they live in the spirit; they defy matter like those early Christians who could be subdued neither by bodily torments nor by bodily delights. Yea, in a time of social revolution these transcendental idealists will prove even more pertinacious than the early Christians; for the latter endured earthly martyrdom in the hope of attaining celestial blessedness, whilst the transcendental idealist looks on martyrdom itself as a vain show, and is invulnerable within the entrenchment of his own thought.<sup>43</sup>

Heine's allusion to Fichte refers to his *Addresses to the German Nation*, in which he propagates the idea, well known since Machiavelli, that moral revival is a pre-condition for state-based national self-assertion against foreign domination. This is a notion that is very attractive to the Islamic fundamentalists of today, as can be seen from the lasting effect of Qutb's work.<sup>44</sup> Qutb thinks the political challenge of the »transcendental idealist« is to stop the *entrenchment of his own thought*, so that the *fanaticism of the will* can override

<sup>40</sup>Hanafi, *Islam in the Modern World*, op. cit. (n. 14), Vol. II, 19.

<sup>41</sup>M. Lüders, »Wir hungern nach dem Tod«. Woher kommt die Gewalt im Dschihad-Islam? Zürich 2001, 43.

<sup>42</sup>P.L. Berger/B. Berger/H. Kellner, *The Homeless Mind. Modernization and Consciousness*, New York 1973, 219f.

<sup>43</sup>H. Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany. A Fragment*, transl. by J. Snodgrass, Albany 1986, 159.

<sup>44</sup>It is no coincidence that Hassan Hanafi too considers Fichte an important mentor of the Islamic liberation movement. Consistently he even presented a paper entitled *The Structure and Development of Fichte's Philosophy: 1810-1814 as a Model* at the conference of the International J.-G. Fichte-Association that took place from October 14-18, 2003 in Munich.

the survival instinct and the striving for prosperity. This cannot be achieved by socio-economic means or by taking military action, but must instead begin with the different ways of reception of occidentalist critique of culture and decadence. It is therefore clear that the notorious speech by President Bush given aboard the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln on 1 May 2003, in which he declared that the Americans stand for freedom anywhere in the world, could achieve nothing. To start with, the very meaning of the term freedom as used by Bush categorically ignores the counterpart of that freedom, freedom from the sometimes dire consequences of globalization. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, outside the West an understanding of freedom is gaining general acceptance which takes its maxim from, of all things, the chorus of the Kris Kristofferson song *Me and Bobby McGee* made famous by Janis Joplin: »Freedom is just another word for ›nothing left to lose‹«.