

## BOOK REVIEWS

### GENERAL

DISTELRATH, GÜNTHER and PETER KLEINEN, Editors. *Fundamentalismus versus Wissenschaft? Zur Identität des Orients in östlichen und westlichen Diskursen*. Edition Asien 1. Bonn: Bier'sche Verlagsanstalt, 2002. viii + 211 pages. ISBN 3-936366-00-4.

The volume under review is a collection of nine articles (seven in German, two in English), which are united by a concern to deconstruct the opposition between (Western) scholarship and (Eastern) fundamentalism by reviewing and modifying Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism." The various ways in which the authors proceed can be summarized into three main strategies: to point out the interdependency of "scientific" discourses on the "Orient" and their "fundamentalist" responses, redefined in this volume as discourses of self-assertion (*Selbstbehauptung*); to deconstruct the alleged neutrality, rigor, and universal applicability of Western science; and to demonstrate the modernity, rationality, and hybridity of Eastern discourses of self-assertion. The volume is divided into three sections. Part One consists of theoretical articles that are not focused on any specific region. The contributions in Part Two center on past and present developments of political Islam in the Arab world and South Asia. Part Three is more heterogeneous, including chapters on East Asia (Japan, China) and Turkey.

In the first chapter, Günther Distelrath pinpoints the idea of "quasi-laws" applicable to social phenomena as the main cause of negative, backward images of the Orient in the social sciences from Adam Smith to Parsons and to modernization theory. The author explains that what should have been methodologies, like Popper's "methodological individualism," was turned into laws, or ontologies. This, again, resulted in reinforcing Orientalism in the social sciences, namely, by characterizing the inhabitants of modern Western societies as ontologically individualist, and individuals from non-Western contexts as lacking individualism. Following Toynbee's concept of "challenge and response," the author examines the emergence of hybrid systems of knowledge under conditions of oppression and marginalization. These "responses" are characterized either by an appropriation of the aggressive universalism of Western social science, now turned on the Western oppressors, or by an adoption of Western constructions of Eastern societies. Some of these "auto-Orientalisms" were, again, taken up by Western social scientists as empirical proof of the original assumptions. In order to avoid such distortions, Distelrath envisages "a symmetrically comparative social science" inspired by the critical rationalism of Imre Lakatos and the pragmatism of Gernot Böhme, both of which he values for their emphasis on a constant re-examination of the theoretical apparatus. With regard to disciplines concerned with non-Western cultures and societies, the author postulates the necessity of self-reflexivity and the construction of models that are, at the same time, universalistic (i.e., allowing comparison) and reflective of the respective life world.

The article by Harumi Befu echoes the preceding chapter in many ways. It starts out with a critical review of globalization theory from Wallerstein to Appadurai, shown to be

basically Western-centric, and puts forth an alternative, multi-centered approach to globalization. The author focuses on notions like “relativization of globalizing Western values” and “particularization of the universal.” Such expressions are designed to suggest the participation of non-Western cultures in the process of globalization, but actually betray a belief in the superiority and universality of Western values and of concepts like rationality and progress, which globalization theory inherited from modernization theory and, in the last instance, from nineteenth-century theories of cultural evolution. The approach suggested by Befu includes civilizations, nation-states, and ethnic groups as potential centers of globalization and reassesses the Western experience as one case among others. Despite his critique of universalism, Befu is not a cultural relativist but envisages a “broader, relativistic truth” and an “understanding of globalization as a generalized social and cultural process” (36).

Justin Stagl discusses and, as a result, dismisses the concepts of ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism, which the two preceding chapters implicitly operate with. Taking recourse to Graham Sumner, Stagl explains ethnocentrism as an expedient and meaningful group strategy of survival. Sumner’s concept and its recent derivative Eurocentrism are, however, flawed by two premises: first, by the assumption that the groups in question are unmistakably different and clearly distinguishable and, second, by the construct of a “non-participant observer.” Moreover, these concepts are disqualified by their often polemic and emotional usage, intended not only to question hegemonies but also to censure any attempt to establish universal rules and obligations. Stagl reviews discourses that evolved before the term Eurocentrism was created (Fanon, Sartre) but implied the same epistemological and moral indictment, criticizing Western Oriental studies for their “universalism” and “colonialism.” Analysing discourses of indigenous intellectuals as well as Western self-accusations, Stagl criticizes both for their equating authenticity with descent, their unacknowledged self-interest as ethnographers, and their “ethnocentric” self-righteousness. To defeat ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, both at once, Stagl postulates the necessity to reject the notion of clearly distinguishable groups and, instead, to acknowledge the historical fact that groups have always interacted and influenced each other, and to recognize the predisposition of humankind to universalism.

In the first chapter of Part Two, Gregor Stauth attempts to theorize “de-limitation” (*Entgrenzung*) of Islam as a topic of socio-anthropological research in local Muslim communities. “De-limitation” is defined to include transgression of the social order, change of value system and lifestyle, and expansion of the social and geographical horizons in an age of globalization. Rather than direct reactions to modern Western influences, Stauth is concerned with the relationship between the Islamic scriptures and local cultures, between “centers” and “peripheries.” The author’s objective is to deconstruct the opposition between these traditions and actors, an opposition that has been maintained by mainstream Western socio-anthropology. He introduces the idea of “mutual symbolic hegemonization,” allowing him to conceptualize, e.g., the recourse to local traditions in modern Islamism. Stauth’s approach to “de-limitation” also includes a focus on what he calls “lateral” or “alien” strands of discourse as motors of change, discourses connected to the mass media and to developing consumer society. Contrary to common perceptions of contemporary Islam, his emphasis is on processes of diversification, decentralization, and hybridization.

Renate Kreile discusses meanings and change of the gender order in historical and present-day societies of the Near East, and analyses examples of Islamist women’s movements. She asserts that such discourses are determined by the asymmetries of capitalist world society but, at the same time, rejects “reverse-Orientalist” reconfirmations of categories

like “colonizer vs. colonized” and “Orient vs. Occident” as well as monolithic and essentialist views of gender in Islamic culture. Kreile’s recapitulation of the “fight for the women” in international, i.e., colonialist as well as in class contexts, demonstrates that control of female sexuality has symbolized authenticity throughout the modern history of Muslim society. In the recent crisis of the state and the patriarchal family and kinship system, resulting from rapid social change in the countries of the Near East, Islamist movements offer themselves as supra-families guaranteeing all men control over all women. Women, on the other hand, are attracted to Islamist ideas because these reassure them of their own moral superiority (over “depraved” Western women and, not least, over their own parents), and of their belonging to a Muslim community of women transcending the boundaries of nation and class. Nevertheless, Islamist women have started to confront patriarchal oppression and to open up new ways for women to participate in society. Kreile emphasizes that, although in some contexts a new hybrid feminist consciousness is emerging, most of these movements aim to create an “authentic,” Islamist alternative to “corrupt” Western gender relations, on the basis of reinterpretations of the Islamic scriptures.

The third chapter on Islam, by Bettina Robotka, endeavors to deconstruct the received opposition of “fundamentalism vs. modernity” by analyzing the work of Indo-Pakistani scholar S. A. A. Maududi who, for his influence on “revivalist” movements and his apparent attempt to conserve anti-modern political and social structures, has been called the “father” of fundamentalism. Robotka shows that Maududi’s vision of Islam as an independent and superior system of values and rules was based on the acceptance of science and technology as the condition of progress, which he deemed necessary for Muslim society, and that he criticized the traditional leaders of Islam for failing to realize these necessities. Justification of violence, commonly associated with fundamentalism, is also absent in the work of Maududi, who asserted that armament and war are evidence of the hatred and egocentrism ruling in Western societies. He advocated freedom of opinion for men and women alike, and entrusted the Muslim State with abolishing the “rule of humans over humans.” Human rulers, who can be either men or women, are merely to execute the will of God. Robotka doubts whether Maududi’s rejection of secularism suffices to label his ideas anti-modern. At the same time, she shows the “anti-modern” elements of Maududi’s thought to be epitomized by the demand for absolute obedience of the individual to the laws and commands of God, thereby rendering her own argument somewhat contradictory.

In the first chapter of Part Three, Klaus Vollmer reviews the existing literature on Japanese “discourses on Japan” (*Nihonron*), dividing these studies into two categories. One he terms the “great tradition,” which takes an anthropological or sociological approach and is often Marxist-inspired, treating *Nihonron* as an instrument of power and as an expression of cultural nationalism and economic hegemony. In contrast, the “little tradition” of *Nihonron* interpretation is philosophical and comparative in outlook and emphasizes the relational element of *Nihonron* as discourses of self-assertion, or “reverse Orientalisms,” which have the potential to criticize and modify received, “universal” theories. Vollmer focuses his discussion on the “great tradition,” which he accuses of an a-historical and undifferentiated approach to its subject. He questions the usefulness of attempts to refute the claims of *Nihonron* on an empirical level, namely, by producing contrary evidence. As an alternative, he suggests approaching *Nihonron* themes like homogeneity, group orientation, and harmony, not as sociological facts but as values or norms, and examining the ways in which these function in society and acquire meaning for the individual. Ultimately, Vollmer argues in favor of reading *Nihonron* as a narrative form of representation differing from the sociological tradition in its rhetoric and worldview. He closes with a contemplation on the fictionality of facts and the reality of fiction.

Andrea Riemenschmitter discusses political and intellectual expressions of auto-Orientalism in present-day China, which she explains to constitute a corollary to Occidentalism (i.e., extolment of the Occident), and an influential trope in intellectual reactions to encounters with the West, since the early 1920s. Riemenschmitter focuses on three different aspects of Chinese Orientalism, which she terms “antagonist,” “hybrid,” and “excessive.” The first type is represented by exhortations of the “passive,” “backward” Chinese people, viewed to have been spoilt by circumstances of history from Confucianism to Mao. Peculiarly, this kind of auto-Orientalism can be found on the side of post-Mao Party ideologues as well as in intellectual counter-discourses, a paradox that accounts for the present crises of representation and reception of this “antagonist” type of Orientalism. In contrast, young Hong Kong artists are shown to refer to Orientalist themes in a “hybrid” mode, transcending the East-West axiology and postulating an intermediary space where an open process of negotiation of interests, values, and identities takes place. The third kind of Orientalism is represented by a recent work of novelist Mo Yan, which transfers excessive cruelties of feudal or mythical rulers into modern society and examines the psychology of collaboration with such excesses. Mo’s novel points to the Western-derived belief in progress as a strong motive to collaborate and thus asserts the interdependency of Oriental atrocities with Occidental ideologies, a reflexive quality that Riemenschmitter misses in Orientalisms of the “antagonist” type.

Selcuk Esenbel undertakes a historical comparison of modern national identities in the Ottoman Empire/Turkey and Japan, which represent a “third,” “non-colonial” route of modern identity formation between the experiences of the West and of the formerly colonized world. His focus is on intellectuals and other privileged members of the two societies, whose modern experience he theorizes as a double tension: between the rational and the emotive (Elias), on the one hand, and between Western civilization and inherited beliefs and customs, on the other. While the concept of “double tension” remains somewhat abstract, Esenbel succeeds in showing that what he terms the “modern individual” of these societies was the product of a “hybrid bi-cultural environment” characterized by strong national self-confidence that accepted partial Westernization without the fear of being overwhelmed. The author views this kind of bi-cultural nationalism as a favorable condition for the development of democracy and civil society. Consequently, he is somewhat pessimistic about the future of democracy in Turkey, where a bi-cultural process of national identity formation has been ruled out by recent government bans on cultural phenomena associated with Islamism.

The chapters of this book represent an inspiring assortment of topics and approaches around the theme of “Orientalism,” some of them complementing each other, some of them related to each other by way of a fruitful tension. What is lacking is a more detailed introduction that might have helped the reader to trace these connections and tensions and to relocate the individual issues and theorems in the larger context of theories and debates, and might have clarified basic concepts like “auto-Orientalism,” “reverse Orientalism,” and “universalism.”

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