Critique of Postmodern Ethics of Alterity versus Embodied (Muslim) Others: Incompatibility, Diversion, or Convergence

Ziad Al-Mwajeh

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CRITIQUE OF POSTMODERN ETHICS OF ALTERITY VERSUS EMBODIED
(MUSLIM) OTHERS:
INCOMPATIBILITY, DIVERSION, OR CONVERGENCE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Doctor of Philosophy

Ziad Al-Mwajeh
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
August 2005
We hereby approve the dissertation of

Ziad Al-Mwajeh

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

__________________________________
Michael Vella, Ph. D
Professor of English, Advisor

__________________________________
Martha Bower, Ph. D
Professor of English

__________________________________
Malcolm Hayward, Ph. D
Professor of English, Emeritus

ACCEPTED

__________________________________
Michele S. Schwietz, M.A.
Assistant Dean for Research
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
In this dissertation, I investigated postmodern alterity, constructivism, and agency through addressing their translatable and implications. In Chapter One, I critiqued postmodern main concepts of alterity and constructivism, showing that these terms can be vague and counterproductive unless they are attenuated with political socio-cultural realities. In Chapter Two, through analyzing modern texts, I explored claims that Western epistemology/ontology reduces the other to the Same. Although superstructural assumptions contribute to self-other imbalances, they cannot account for the myriad cross-cultural transactions unless they contextualize and historicize self-other transactions.

Chapter Three investigates controversial postmodern texts. As there are no pure postmodern texts, the texts I analyzed both embody and resist the deconstruction of history and identity. Postmodern thought cross-fertilizes with other adjacent disciplines and minority perspectives, but it cannot subsume or explain complex self-other relations without attending to power relations in their traditional sense, too.

Taking the study to another level, Chapter Four exposes the disparity between postmodern utopian thought and political-discursive “grim” realities. Postmodernism has a limited utility. Thus it should be supplemented with minority, Critical Discourses
Analysis, and historicized approaches. Attending to concrete Others really tests any ethical system, particularly postmodern ethics of alterity. Moreover, postmodern ethics oddly co-exist with hegemonic antagonizing self-other relations that deploy humanistic and altruistic rhetoric. Political realities do not allow pre-ontological encounters or infinite obligations to the face of the Other.

In Chapter Five (Conclusion), I attend to the discursive strictures imposed by both modernist and postmodernist thought upon the exploration of the dynamics of cross-cultural relations. Attentive rigorous analyses may help distinguish among true and fake cross-cultural differences. Furthermore, teachers and students need to map the scenes and understand the depth of the assault launched against human agency through subtle media simulacrum and sideshows. To essentialize Islam and the West as incompatible may be a very subtle ruse that diverts attention away from real imperial/capitalistic and hegemonic causes of conflicts. Furthermore, Muslims are part of world order and they share with other citizens of the globe similar concerns: they are part of the solution rather than merely part of the problem.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: POSTMODERN POLEMICS: ALTERITY AND
CONSTRUCTIVIST HYPOTHESES

Research suggests a (semi-) consensus that “postmodernism” defies comprehensive or satisfactory definition. Theorists and critics have been debating postmodernism as a concept or cultural movement. They debate its meaning, significance, political/ethical implication, and more important, its very existence. Ironically enough, theorists acknowledge that one way to define postmodernism is to concede to its being indefinable. Postmodernism refuses fixity by espousing daunting paradoxes. In fact, postmodernism retains many skeptical stances toward norms, closures, authorities, and definitions. Hence, postmodernism is generally, sometimes loosely, associated with the tenets of anti-foundationalism, constructivism, undecidability and alterity, or with a number of key concepts such as hybridity, multiculturalism, fragmentation, pastiche, commodification, and even identity politics. However, theorists very often disagree on the meaning and consequences of the above tenets and concepts.  

The controversies surrounding postmodernism may detract attention from other urgent questions concerning postmodernism’s ethico-political potential and implications for real life situations. Thus, the translatability of postmodern ethics into lived realities—its transformative power—has intrigued me into this study. As a non-Western researcher in a Western context, where I am allied with the alterity that postmodern ethics sets out to salvage, I have ambivalent reactions to this thought, usually oscillating between optimistic and skeptical stances. On the one hand, Derrida’s, Lyotard’s and Levinas’s
postmodernism promises justice and harmony by supposedly unveiling and correcting (Enlightenment) modernist mistakes, those particularly attributed to modernist epistemology that privileges identity over difference. Deconstructing modernist logocentrism (egoism) and counteracting modernist reductive and hegemonic tendencies, postmodernists foreground alterity. Yet postmodern tenets of anti-foundationalism and relativism are very difficult to uphold, particularly the weak party in Self-Other relations. In contrast, for a mainstream subject, speaking from a position of power, deconstructing identity and history does not undermine its power; rather the ability to deconstruct may be a sign of power that is so sure of its hold that it can afford to “play” and subvert itself. But for colonized or marginalized others such acts undermine what they seek to salvage and establish: identity, legitimacy, and voice.

However, alterity-oriented postmodernists cannot be limited to the above characterizations. They are not merely engaging deconstruction as a game or because of their secure position on the grid of power relations. Most of the time, they engage serious issues in their search for a more just and democratic existence with the usually underprivileged others. Such a search is real in the sense of tangible transformation in the University institution, literary canons, curricula and many other alterity-sensitive practices. This search intersects with social and civil movements. However, the focus on alterity betrays the persistence of idealistic modernist residuals. Aiming at creating a more just world in terms of alterity ethics is commendable, but the nobility of such an objective should not prevent us from subjecting it to scrutiny to expose its latent idealisms and maybe shortcomings. I think that alterity-oriented postmodernism retains utopian undertones in many ways, particularly in Karl Mannheim’s sense. Utopian
thinking for Mannheim is any thinking that opposes current ideological structures and offers better alternatives (Ideology and Utopia). Vincent Geoghegan sums Mannheim’s argument that “ideology and utopia” are both “incongruent with social reality” pointing out its dialectical Hegelian and Marxist un-theorized assumptions (“Ideology and Utopia” 123). I think that in one sense, postmodern thought seeks to reestablish self-other relations on more just and ethical terms than those of available modernist ones by contesting the usually-presented-as-universal-and-neutral mainstream values in order to opens new grounds for dialogical and difference-friendly alternatives.

However, alterity-oriented postmodernism can be described as idealistic in a Platonic sense. Plato’s “Myth of the Cave” enacts a dialectical ascension or progress toward an ideal republic governed by reason. Plato’s world of matter is preceded and to some extent controlled by the world of ideas, or by the Logos. Postmodern alterity seems to submit to the Platonic idea-matter dialectics. Thus, the postmodernists critique metaphysical, linguistic, or symbolic superstructural systems as if fixing the idea translates into fixing praxis. One implicit assumption is that knowledge translates into ethics. In other words, it seems that postmodernists do not only consider man ‘good,’ but also assume that the moment one is enlightened about the good, he/she will automatically choose it by virtue of its being good. I am not particularly opposed to such idealism. On the contrary, the problem with such idealism is that it underestimates political and economic contexts, pressures, motivations, and even the desire for power regardless of the consequences, sometimes. Postmodern thought does not problematize the passage from metaphysics or the moment of knowledge into action. It seems that the moment we know that our metaphysical or epistemological foundations are other-unfriendly
automatically translates into abandoning those ways in favor of more just arrangements such as alterity ethics. Thus, postmodernists retain Platonic residues whenever they assume that self-other enduring conflicts are primarily caused by ideational or metaphysical systems. They, too, become idealists whenever they do not problematize the assumption that the world of ideas precedes the world of matter—almost in a causal manner—or whenever they assume their automatic translatability as if fixing the philosophical or epistemological system would automatically fix the institutions and practices that stem from them.³

In other words, postmodern thinking remains ‘abstract’ and ‘idealized’ by assuming that correcting metaphysical wrongs will guarantee a better world in the realm of matter, or that the realm of matter can be corrected at the realm of ideas. Moreover, we usually equate utopian thinking with wishful, yet “impractical,” proposals. Sometimes, however, postmodernism suggests a dystopia, whenever it is associated with the loss of a community based on justice and satisfaction.⁴ Such loss is usually attributed to different factors such as technological, capitalist-consumerist developments (Jameson; Baudrillard; Guy Debord). Conservative critics also voice their dissatisfaction with any ‘identity-politics’ postmodernism that compromises academic protocols and research methods by replacing them with personal, experiential, racial, gendered, and any other minority-distinctive constituency. That is, it is no longer a question of whether what one says submits to academic and logical standards of conviction and verification as much as it is a matter of “who” says it that makes the difference (Jeffery Wallen’s Closed Encounters highlights such issues). Even minority and non-conservative critics such as Rey Chow sound uneasy toward making race, gender, and sexual orientation a priori authoritative
positions. In *Ethics after Idealism*, she shows that the desire to do justice to minority voices can be abused by both parties, mainstream and minority subjects. I think what she is uneasy about is postmodern performativity. Minority and mainstream, although they have valuable and referential descriptive values, can be performed and played out. In academia, being a female or coming from a previously colonized region invests the person with powers and rights, sometimes at the expense of critical and academic norms.

Notwithstanding the above repercussions, postmodernism deconstructs Plato’s subject-knower/object-known dialectics responsible for the birth of Western epistemology that privileges the rational male subject over the irrational, or less rational, (female, natural, or minority) object. The rational subject gains centrality and degree over the object of knowledge. The knowledge he produces, or discovers, is consequently neutral, and thus, universalizable: the Western Metaphysical subject-position acquires a universal status and becomes foundational in the sense of unquestioned given postulate. Postmodernists critique the blindness of such propositions, particularly as they evolve into a mainstream trend in the enlightened modern age of science. They show that subjects are always implicated in power relations; they are context-bound, and thus the knowledge they produce cannot be neutral, nor can it represent transcendental truths. Rather, according to Foucault, knowledge and language themselves constitute and operate in terms of power relations, if not the epitome of power relations, dividing the world into knowers and objects of knowledge, agents and objects, masters and slaves, and males and females. Still, critiquing modernist foundations crumbles at the threshold of lived situations because the postmodern subject and its Other are almost uprooted players or mere linguistic signs. According to the *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, an “idealized (or ideal)
agent is a perfect agent: one who possesses admirable traits to a degree possessed by a few people or no actual human agents,” while an abstract agent is not “fully individualized,” nor does such an agent correspond to some “traits possessed by actual” human beings (594).

However, I also think that key postmodernism tenets of radical alterity, incommensurability and undecidability cannot be easily thematized in writing, nor can they be realized in praxis. They are aporiatic. The only way to explicate their meanings and possibilities is through using modernist vocabulary they initially oppose and deconstruct. Sometimes, thematizing these aporiatic concepts, one lapses into cryptic and even incantational figurative language, a practice that exposes the practical limitation and limited accessibility of such cherished concepts (or non-concepts). As a result, their translation into, or coextension with, lived realities become basically hypothetical, too. Consequently, the abstract and idealized postmodern concepts verge on, and intersect with, mystic, (sometimes Biblical) allusions and traditions, a situation that problematizes their political value and descriptive power in the realm of action. For example, in Levinasian thought, knowing the other is incompatible with preserving its alterity. All representational endeavors reduce, or fail to capture, what they supposedly represent not only due to imperfect linguistic mediums, but also due to the fact that representation itself is a logocentric institution. It represents the other or the object from the perspective of the Same, usually a priori reducing its uniqueness or sublimity to the known, quantifiable and predictable. To curb such modernist reductive practices, Levinas’s alterity escapes all modernist categories as it is an Other not in a relational or quantifiable way. Rather, it is an Other in the sense of eliding comprehension and representation. Such Other resembles
Levinas’s (Biblical) conception of God as absolute Alterity where our epistemological categories or mind cannot contain or represent Him. More important, the ethics of alterity usually soars above urgent concrete issues that involve politically and economically charged self-other transactions. Levinas’s other is ‘disembodied,’ not in Dr. Laing’s sense (e.g. The Divided Self). Rather, Levinas’s alterity cannot be substantiated. Defining or embodying the other violates its alterity and sublimity. Hence, any grand appeal such ethics may initially spark becomes questionable when juxtaposed to our existing realities and the factors that regulate self/other different modes of relations.

Statement of the Problem, Limitations of the Study and Methods

In this study, I attempt to dislodge postmodern ethics from its speculative and elitist tendencies through turning to self-other ethical relations in various literary, discursive and political situations. I focus on bridging the gaps between theory and practice in order to expose the rifts and blind spots in postmodern ethics of alterity. I think that the demands that ‘alterity’ as a generalized abstract term exert differ from those raised by placed and temporalized others. For example, there is an urgent need to know how well Levinas’s concept of ‘absolute alterity’ or Derrida’s concept of ‘undecidability’ fares in political situations. In other words, to argue for prioritizing alterity as a new ethical turn is not the same as to motivate and effect such prioritization. While I agree that Levinas’s “infinite obligation to the other” sounds uplifting, realizing/effecting such a formula is a different story. Theoretically speaking, alterity is embraceable, but in lived
realities, others fall on a spectrum of difference (sometimes opposition) from self according to various criteria. Actually, there is a general tendency to posit self and others in terms of difference and opposition, when in fact these are relative and operational terms. Polarizing self and other risks ossifying them into rigid negatively defining entities at the expense of their interdependence and mutual constitution. The terms other and self do not only designate metaphysical figures or linguistic relations, they also describe ontological realities. The metaphor of the ‘embrace’ may in it turn conceal a whole repertoire of idealism, philanthropy, and logocentrism/humanism. Worse, sometimes Levinasian ethics seems so good to be true or realizable, at least if taken literally. For the demand to meet the other on a neutral ground, pre-ontologically, looks more like an aesthetic ideal/condition that cannot be achieved as we always meet the other in context with our conceptions, motivations and values. Blaming Western Metaphysics, or ontology, for the imbalanced self-other relations somehow brackets subject’s role and agency in the self-other various equations.7

Moreover, we may indulge alterity ethics in closed and limited contexts that favor our train of thought and take that for a sufficient action. We may embrace the other or theorize about embracing and preserving alterity as ethics per se, but we may still live according to dialectical ‘alterity-blind’ institutions and practices. In such cases, we are either, consciously or subconsciously, acknowledging and maintaining theory/practice divisions, or we know that acting ethically toward the other entails more than theorizing about what form the most ethical relation should take. Acting ethically demands sharing power and taking risks. More problematically, the theoretical formulas may not function
in the first place as the roots of ‘unethical’ self-other relations cannot be automatically corrected by theoretically replacing modernist self-centered by alterity-centered ethics.

Furthermore, most of the writings about postmodernism—engage strenuous debates and often deploy elitist jargon, a practice that limits their accessibility and descriptive value. Very often philosophical and theoretical elitist debates alienate larger audiences and may even thrive at the expense of addressing concrete self-other transactions. To a certain degree, these debates are inflated and divorced from the stakes involved in political self-other lived transactions. Once one crosses the threshold of speculating about self-other relations into considering them in light of indispensable concrete constituencies of race, gender, nationality, power grid, and other variables, cherished postmodern key terms—such as undecidability, alterity, and non-judgmentalism—become anomalous. Hard lived realities demand resolutions and involve recalcitrant stakes. To solely dwell on the linguistic/discursive as the origin of self/other imbalance is to overlook the complex and intricate relations among discourses and actions. To put it differently, there has to be some mutual trafficking between metaphysics and lived realities, but one cannot be reduced to the other in any straight predictable manner. Nor are their relations reducible to cause-effect ones where Western Metaphysics’ privileging the subject and reducing the other/object is the causer, while racism, sexism, and colonial exploitation are the effects. This does not deny that there exists a ‘cause-effect’ relation between thought and lived realities, however.

Alterity-centered postmodernism shows how modernist epistemology has failed to establish self-other relations as basically ethical by relegating the other to the status of a hierarchically inferior object or difference. But the downside to such critique is the
transformation of the modernist individual/self into postmodernist subject. The postmodernist subject may not be more than a node or a surface/cite constructed by linguistic, economic and media systems. Thus, the ethical turn toward alterity loses its halo when one considers the diminutive role played by human agency and intentionality. Emphasizing the negative side of constructivism—being constructed by external or upper systems—postmodernism glosses over the subjects’ other various roles in sustaining and continuing, sometimes disrupting, dominant epistemological, economic and political systems. In other words, modernist subjects are primarily products of metaphysically pre-ordained itineraries sidestepping other senses such as being a subject by initiating and performing actions by choice. If subject primarily means subjected to, the ethics, responsibility and obligations, all become paradoxical.

Furthermore, Levinas’s dictum to pre-ontologically encounter alterity makes sense; he thinks that the ethical should, or actually does, precede the ontological. But practically, such divisions may be divisions of convenience rather than of actuality as if the political and ethical belonged to different modes of living. I think that we do not need to submit to modernist disciplinary divisions of convenience nor do we need to separate the ethical from the political or from the ontological. I believe that ethics is not a formula or a prescription we choose to apply or we choose to leave behind. Ethics is intrinsic to action. Levinas’s move, however, has to be contextualized. It is his desire to remove self-other relations from under modernist epistemological reductions and pragmatic/utilitarian arrangements that he wants to go back to a pure self-other encounter—before self-other dialectics. He wants to encounter the other before reductive logic moves in. Yet such a move ends in an impasse. Leaping back into the pre-ontological stems from Levinas’s
ontological or epistemological consciousness. The irony is that one just cannot exit the ontological and still use its structures and vocabularies. Still, Levinas’s ethical dictum exposes the working of unconscious ethnocentrism or conscious bias in our self-other relations, systems and existence, unless we always foreground alterity. Consequently, alterity ethics is both a meta-ethical argument, or for some it constitutes a ‘moral principle,’ or a basic revelation about our human conditions: We are always in relation to—indebted to—the other. We may choose to elide such a realization, but we cannot change it.

Moreover, some critics, particularly minority-perspective ones, detect patronizingly custodial—mandatory—undertones in postmodern ethical and political postures toward the others. They feel that postmodernism mainly unconsciously re-institutes recalcitrant ethnocentric self-other divides. Postmodernism seems to exempt itself from its very basic assumption that everything is implicated in power relations. Paradoxically, contesting cherished concepts of truth, objectivity, and neutrality, postmodernism still poses as if it were beyond being logocentric or ethnocentric and hence exempt from power relations. Postmodernism also poses as a custodial and caretaker of the other despite the fact that it critiques modernist humanistic and philanthropic claims. More specifically, postmodern deconstruction of the Self, history and Truth seems to extend to all cultures whose metaphysics may not be similarly reductive of the Other. Ironically, it seems that postmodernism reiterates modernism’s assumption of neutrality and teleological universality—this time in the name of deconstructing and exposing them in the name of ethics and alterity. These are complex arguments that cannot be answered in any straightforward manner as the situation depends on one’s
conception of modernism and postmodernism—both are complex multiple and contested terms and cultural phenomena.

Moreover, there is no clear blueprint for such ethics to achieve rough, let alone smooth, translation into realities. The modernist unbalanced self/other relationship boomerangs into another unbalanced emphasis on radical alterity. When modernist thought is found guilty of prioritizing the self by subordinating, reducing, or objectifying alterity, postmodernism’s alterity creates its own set of problems: (absolute) alterity cannot be captured or represented rendering it incommunicable; it exceeds our already existing categories. (Actually, Levinas’s concept of alterity guards against turning alterity into an object of knowledge or a mental concept; to objectify and conceptualize the other, for him, elides the ethical). However, postmodern ethics may draw negative reactions from minority critics who desire to make their case and communicate their grievance, stances, and consolidate community. As such, postmodern ethics becomes basically cautionary. Somehow our obligation to absolute alterity verges on the extreme of zero degree or stasis ethics as it is more of a response to an inaccessible, generalized and almost vacuous abstraction, rather than an encounter between concrete embodied groups or cultures.

It is absolutely beautiful to imagine ourselves infinitely and unconditionally responsive to, and responsible for alterity, but does this really happen beyond the hypothetical premises? How attainable is such ethics of alterity? Can we really encounter the other in a pre-social—pre-ontological—setting? Can a modernist subject transcend his/her ethnocentrism, or anthropomorphism? We are caught between two unpalatable options: we either know the other by reducing him/her, or meet him/her in a neutral zone
suspending the possibility of knowing him/her. One either relates to the other according to power relations, or relates to an 'other' before the concept of relation moves in. As the first option reduces knowledge to violation/reduction, the latter excludes the possibility of ‘knowing.’ This impasse casts ample doubt on the tenability of absolute/radical alterity.

Studies rarely address such gaps between postmodern theorizations and lived realities; nor do they question whether they are attributable to difference in genre—theory versus praxis—or indicative of the persistence of modernist residues in postmodernist thought. In other words, it seems that postmodernism, at least for some critics, does not only fall into a whole tradition of utopian thinking, but more problematically, it also reenacts/reinstitutes modernist alterity-reductive tactics through idealizing, homogenizing, distorting, or even demonizing otherness by never attending to its political, economic, or cultural demands. According to such evaluations, postmodernism facilitates and coexists with consumerism, capitalistic and imperial/global hegemony because the cut-off subject of postmodernism is susceptible to mediatization, cooptation, and commodification.

Theoretically speaking, the demystified (post) modernist subject can follow one of two itineraries: one is either humbled and reinitiated into alterity ethics, or one loses his/her animus and so may easily succumb to the worst scenario of cultural or state constructivism. In other words, constructivism usually translates into being constructed, eclipsing the other sense of being a constructing agent. For example, State interpellation loses its specific sense of the State/dominant ideology hailing and manipulating the public to an overwhelming general sense where various cultural systems and codes engulf
us, leaving little, if any room, for change. If subjects prematurely or un-problematically accept the thesis of watertight constructivism, they may be writing their role as participants and responsible agents out. It is also feared that if subjects lose consensus and common identities, their chance at resisting oppression, or state control, dwindles. Subjects faced with daunting constructivism may lapse into enclosed feel-good nature-friendly, or anti-consumerist, lifestyles instead of taking an active role in modifying and protecting the public sphere.

However, attending to the above-mentioned polemical issues limits my ability to generalize my ideas without a keen sense of slashed self-divided terms. To some extent, the above issues account for the scope and intensity of the debate surrounding postmodernism that I have to select a limited number of theoretical and literary texts by way of sampling rather than full representation. I will focus on Mark Twain’s The Innocents Abroad, Toni Morrison’s Beloved, Sam Shepard’s States of Shock, Donald Folz’s Into a Dying Sun and Abdul-Karim Nasif’s وجوهان لعنقاء واحده (Two Faces of One Phoenix) and other contemporary fiction about the Gulf Wars from both American/Western and Arabic sides. These texts belong to different periods and modes. They, however, have some common denominators. Namely, they focus on various manifestations of self-other transactions or cross-cultural relations. Specifically, these texts shed light on the difficulties that postmodern ethics of alterity runs into as to its thematization in fiction or practice in real lived situations. Innocents presents an example of modernist oriental self-other constitution: it both helps explain dominant modernist alterity-reductive mechanisms and particularly shed light on American-Arabic-Islamic relations at a specific time in history as embodied entities rather than philosophical
concepts or mere linguistic signs. *Beloved* as having an ambivalent problematic relationship with postmodern thought illuminates the limitations of alterity-friendly postmodern ideas as the turn toward embodied self-other relations reveals very highly complex realities that are context-bound. Some postmodern tenets may be considered as mainly figurative rather than potentially thematizable and practicable as *Beloved* helps show. *States of Shock* focuses on Jameson’s and Baudrillard’s concept of postmodernism as related to consumerism, capitalism, and simulation. Instead of embracing and appreciating difference, *States* reveals many unsettling developments in self-other relations that capitalize on differences and divisions to maintain hegemony over the other. Instead of postmodern alterity, one perceives the loss of the real, particularly the loss of the reality and pain of the other through many processes of mediatization and de-realization. *Into a Dying* takes some leaps into the Other, but unfortunately abandons them to reaffirm self-righteousness and negate the very Other in whose name it fights. Political, economic, and cultural realities complicate any self-other encounters exposing postmodern alterity ethics as idealistic and wishful or as de-politicized politics.

However, self-other relations are more flexible and less challenging in fictional universes of discourse than in lived realities. The theoretical, the literary, and the concrete political discourses have different relations to reality—they are also part of reality—and hence, they shed light on one another and expose the limitations and stakes involved in each. The texts as well as the terms I use will be explicated as needed in a timely manner; I use them for their convenience and indispensability. I look for common denominators in such texts and genres; namely, I focus on how they deal with the problem of alterity—the question of others.
This study does not focus on postmodern architecture, music, visual arts, or aesthetics per se. I mainly focus on the most prominent postmodern theorizations such as these of Lyotard, Jameson, Derrida, and Baudrillard to mention some. I also utilize samples of mainly contemporary literary, media and political discourses in order to juxtapose them to postmodernist theorizations in terms of how they address the question of the other. I also sample out a selection of postcolonial, ecological, feminist, and conservative theorizations and discourses that directly address postmodern ethics/politics.

Such a study obviously has other types of limitations. For instance, concretizing postmodernist flamboyant otherness meshes one into hazed sensitive zones where there is room for misinterpretation. The subtleties and niceties that the ethical discourse creates also limit me. I cannot do justice to the ever expanding ethical debates, let alone those hair-splitting speculative ethical distinctions found in pure ethical studies. Because of time and scope strictures, I cannot do justice to all the studies that deal with postmodern ethics in particular and ethics in general. To better handle these thorny issues, I review the literature on postmodern ethics/politics, and define/contextualize alterity, constructivism and agency. It is in light of how the alterity and constructivist hypotheses interact with one another that postmodern alleged ethical breakthrough can be scrutinized and assessed. Taking these two problematics together as they subsume many other concerns helps initiate a much needed and more holistic approach to postmodern thought.\(^8\)

Throughout this study, I utilize deconstructive and discourse analysis insights. Deconstructive reading strategies help expose logocentric and subsuming instances in (post-)modern Western thought toward its others, but it does not finish the job for various
reasons. For one thing, deconstructive thought remains abstract with limited descriptive and analytical power. Despite its radicalism sometimes it simply seems to be stating the obvious about human discourse and action: human relations and institutions embody logocentric power relations that favor those who identify with the Same. Deconstructive strategies can backfire if they highlight the constructed condition of subjects, yet ignore their potential to resist, critique and change constructing forces. It is here that (critical) discourse analysis is needed. Critical discourse analysis attends to contexts and details. It does not take the idea of power relations for granted as originary and integral to all systems. Rather, it shows that our discursive practices and our lived realities are connected and sometimes function similarly. Our discursive practices and political-economical realities result from both unconscious assumptions and intentional decisions. Thus, critical discourse analysis retains recuperative potentials. Discourse analysis as a philosophy and interpretation strategy does not invest discursive practices with a complete constructivist power over subjects. Subjects are subjects of discourse practices in two ways: they both do discourse and are subjected to the discourse of others. Discourse cannot be reduced to mere power relations. (We as discursive creatures also attempt to understand, relate, justify, communicate and even resist through discourse). Discourse, however, helps consolidate, justify, and further secure power differentials.
The literature that I have reviewed raises questions similar to mine, but most of the time does not sufficiently focus on the juncture between theory and practice. Usually, theory and praxis are assumed to be automatically coextensive. I have not come by a single study that entirely tackles postmodern alterity’s ethical and practical potentials and consequences in correlation with systemic social constructivism. Sometimes, these terms loom there under-theorized and under-contextualized so that their use becomes counterproductive. However, the number of studies that bridge the gaps between theory and practice when it comes to postmodern tenets of alterity, undecidability, or constructivism is rising. Most of these studies deal with Levinasian and Derridean thought. There are, however, some gaps left unattended to; my study attempts to contextualize and fill in such gaps as much as possible.

In general, the literature I have reviewed testifies to the prevalence of two camps—albeit these are gradations of stances rather than absolute blocks—that address postmodernism. The first camp accuses postmodernism and its ethics/politics of being predominantly nominal and paradoxical. The second camp holds that postmodernism inaugurates a new cultural and ethical turn toward alterity as a truer form of social justice. Accordingly, the postmodern marks a new form of politics, new realities, and complicates all traditional systems of meaning and institutions. Postmodernism is not only a means to reformulate and reform our present ethical/political crises and contortions; rather, it looks more like politics and ethics incarnated. That is, postmodernism carves new means for achieving self/other harmony and ethical
obligation, or postmodernity itself is an ethical condition to be sought and maintained. Dominic Strinati questions the “tendency to assume that postmodernism has become widespread in modern societies regardless of the need to demonstrate whether this has happened in deed” (“The Big Nothing” 5). He asks an empirical question about whether postmodernism can be seen in lived realities, charging that theorists overindulge defining postmodernism at the expense of more urgent practical issues (“The Big Nothing” 5).

In a polemical introduction to Zeitgeist in Babel Ingeborg Hoesterey attests to the confusion and controversy surrounding postmodernism; he singles out two opposing evaluations of the movement, though: critics tend to brand postmodern thought as either “positive” or “negative” (ix). He admits that there is a lot of miscommunication and Babel among the critics that they seem to be speaking about different postmodernisms. Linda Hutcheon describes postmodernism as “straddling, or perhaps more accurately, sitting on the fence,” between different camps and interpretations (“Postmodern Problematic” 2). In her more popular work, A Poetics of Postmodernism, Hutcheon disagrees with Fredrick Jameson’s characterization of postmodernism literary works in terms of depthlessness and pastiche. Instead, she argues that postmodern fiction is “historiographic metafiction” that recuperates and rewrites history. 9

Jean-François Lyotard, obviously a member of Hoesterey’s first interpretive community, depicts a mainly liberating alterity-oriented postmodernism. In The Postmodern Condition, Lyotard argues that technological/informational advances, the changing role of the university, failure of meta-narratives such as Marxism and liberal humanism have created what he calls a postmodern condition. Lyotard, however, singles out “incredulity” toward meta-narratives as the most important characteristic of
These master narratives have supposedly lost their legitimating functions by failing to fulfill their promise and by their being exposed to coincide with the political interests of people in power, usually associated with white/Western, heterosexual, and middle-class/Bourgeois males. Influenced by poststructuralist and deconstructionist insights, Lyotard interprets the decline of master narratives positively. As a consequence of metanarratives’ losing their hegemonic grip, non-mainstream/non-canonized micronarratives resurface and become legitimate players. Accordingly, alterity, differences, or marginal voices somehow flourish, albeit by default. Some theorists would also argue that the turn toward alterity has resulted from the modernist social, political and environmental crises, wars and scandals.

In The Différend, Lyotard develops Wittengstien’s concept of language games into ‘phrase regimes.’ Every phrase regime is autonomous and different from other phrase regimes. For example, the scientific as a phrase regime cannot explain and should not subsume the narrative phrase regime. Whenever any phrase regime subsumes or judges another according to its own rules, a ‘différend’ is generated. Lyotard argues that a “différend takes place between two parties when the ‘settlement’ of the conflict that opposes them is made in the idiom while the injury from which the other suffers does not signify in that idiom” (23-4). Implicitly, a différend becomes associated with the wronged and excluded party. By extension, the presence of a différend suggests the presence of an absence, signaling communicational rifts and silenced wronged parties. Analogously, the ascendancy of the scientific metanarrative over the literary one corresponds to the ascendancy of certain groups and suppression of others. Ideally, these regimes should coexist in a state of “paralogy” instead of hierarchy. Any move to the contrary violates
alterity and wrongs heterogeneity. For Lyotard, this condition of incommensurability and ‘différend-free’ existence is tantamount to a new form of localized non-centric justice against modernist/mainstream master narratives that homogenize and hierarchize differences.

Throughout my study, I have noticed that Lyotard’s linguistic model has been used by other critics to characterize inter-group and inter-cultural relations. Cultural critics have appropriated his concepts to the study of oppression and exclusion intra and inter-culturally. I think his argument about how a différend is created at the level of phrase regimes can provide ample insight into how the mainstream discourse undermines its others. (The assumption is that discourse and cultural institutions function similarly—a problematic assumption, though). Even when attempting to assimilate others, or redress their wrongs, mainstream metanarratives perpetrate and create différends blindly through extending their criteria and values to others. As long as this is the case, no real dialogue between the mainstream and the minority phrase regimes materializes, regardless of their coming together. For if we follow Lyotard’s argument, the minority phrase regime has to use and submit to the mainstream’s phrase regime, a regime that does not, or cannot, process the other’s phrase without assimilating or transforming it. Another impasse is created. Another vicious circle operates.

Theoretically speaking, Lyotard’s phrase regimes are incommensurable, but such incommensurability cannot be maintained in lived situations. Incommensurability is a double-edged concept, too. On the one hand, it categorically eliminates master-slave or any exploitive and inequitable relations. On the other, it problematizes the prospects of communication and dialogue. Somehow, it overlooks the fact that phrase regimes, groups
and cultures are always in friction or dialogue. Besides, self-other différends do not singularly pertain to commensurating the incommensurable, but rather, they involve political stakes where discursive parties may knowingly suppress the phrase regime of others and impose theirs instead. Lyotard’s incommensurability becomes a theoretical utopian strain that crumbles in lived situations. For if two phrase regimes are incommensurable, this may mean that they cannot communicate their imbalanced relations. Autonomous incommensurable phrase regimes have to exist separately lest their interaction generates différends. Both options are practically problematical and anachronistic. For phrase regimes are always in relation regardless of whether this relation is just or unjust. Lyotard’s theory remains insightful and helpful in spite of its impasses. It sheds ample light on political and legal discourses that perpetrate injustice in the name of performing, or actualizing, it. I will explain this in more detail in chapters Three and Four.

Unlike Lyotard, Fredrick Jameson equates postmodernism with the advanced “capitalist logic.” Advanced capitalism constitutes a “cultural dominant,” that infiltrates all aspects of culture—low and high. The globalization of advanced capitalism effaces “the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture” (“Postmodernism” 63). Accordingly, the prospect of opposition is a priori co-opted since it is, after all, a product of the very system it opposes. Probably, it is the very late capitalist system that promotes and entices those opposing voices as they seem to help rather than tackle, or discredit, it. Jameson, however, assigns capitalistic market hegemony so powerful a role that its effects verge on a neo-determinism. Consequently, human agency is jeopardized: it seems that all—mainstream subjects and
their others/victims—are leveled, somehow victimized (or de-victimized) by the late capitalistic logic on the same scale and degree. While one can find a place for marginality and alterity in Lyotard’s postmodernism, Jameson categorically does not perceive of postmodernism in these terms. Jameson’s postmodernism does not inaugurate an ethically driven cultural turn: difference, ethnic diversity, and multi-culturalism may become buzzwords in a commodifying consumerist economy, though.

Still, Lyotard and Jameson intersect when it comes to the legitimating crisis. For Lyotard, metanarratives have lost their legitimating function by failing to deliver on their promise. They have been exposed as rooted in power relations, particularly representing the viewpoint of a certain class, gender, and race, rather than corresponding to universal Truths about Man and Nature. In contrast, Jameson and to a sharper extent Zygmunt Bauman attribute the legitimation crisis to Capital and State alliance’s outgrowing the need for legitimation. Strongly established and secured, capitalism (both on the State and Multinational Corporate levels) does not need any dissemination or legitimation help. Having colonized all aspects of culture to the extent of invisibility, capitalism does not need the institutions that used to help propagate it as universal and humanistic—invisibility being the perfect form of power according to Foucault. Crossing old boundaries, parodying canonical literary works and dominance of pop culture do not necessarily entail the carving of new freedoms or the breaking of old strictures. Jameson and Lyotard obviously are tied to Marxists critiques although Lyotard considers Marxism to be among the metanarratives that have been weakened while Jameson still argues that the economic controls and moves all.
In his turn, Jean Baudrillard sees the postmodern in terms of a fatalistic (irreversible) loss of the principle of the real to that of simulation. In spite of his resort to hyperbole and eschatology, Baudrillard demonstrates how the media in its subservient relation to a capitalist-driven State and thrust toward simulation threaten to replace representational systems with simulacrums. He writes, “All Western faith . . . become[s] engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange”. . . (Simulacra 5). Unlike Derrida who deems representation illusory and reductive, Baudrillard sees representation as a hub against manipulation and simulation. Representation depends on the dialectics of the real and the image, the false and the true, the object and its image. Once we do without such poles, implosion takes place, robbing us of the possibility of distinction and critique. Baudrillard’s argument is insightful when we consider simulation in light of Capital, State and Media. Their partnership threatens to shrink the public sphere, neutralize opposition and hence disseminate global market (and cultural) hegemony. Ironically, Baudrillard argues that capitalism “can only function behind a moral superstructure and whoever revives this public morality (through indignation, denunciation, etc.) works spontaneously for the order of capital” (Simulacra14). Capitalism becomes a closed self-sustaining system; therefore, our engaging it on moral or rational bases can only help foster its hegemonic reach or enclosures. To quote,

It is ‘enlightened’ thought that seeks to control it [capital] by imposing rules on it. And all the recrimination that replaces revolutionary thought today comes back to incriminate capital for not following the rules of the
game. ‘Power is unjust, its justice is a class justice, capital exploits us, etc.’—as if capital were linked by a contract to the society it rules. It is the Left that holds out the *mirror of equivalence* to capital hoping that it will comply, comply with the phantasmagoria of the social contract and fulfill its obligations to the whole society (by the same token, no need for revolution: it suffices that capital accommodates itself to the rational formula of exchange). . . . Capital, in fact, was never linked by a contract to the society it dominates. It is sorcery of social relations, it is a *challenge to society*, and it must be responded to as such. It is not a scandal to be denounced according to moral or economic rationality, but a challenge to take up according to symbolic law. (15; emphasis in original)

Like Lyotard’s and Jameson’s, Baudrillard’s theory of simulation does not specifically address alterity. More problematically, concepts of difference and similarity become vacuous or anachronistic if we accept his premise of the loss of the real. Instead of Lyotard’s thesis of the demise of meta-narratives resulting intentionally or unintentionally in a resurgence of differences, Baudrillard’s theory of simulation offers very little hope for a new form of justice based on foregrounding alterity. Instead of “real” difference, we may get signs of difference. Meanwhile, human agency is dealt almost fatal blows here. Baudrillard’s version constitutes an ominous development where there are bound to be victims whose suffering and cause may not be recognizable/presentable as these are continuously mediatized and transformed into simulacra. Baudrillard’s book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* develops these junctures.
Lyotard’s, Jameson’s and Baudrillard’s theorizations have provoked massive critiques undergoing numerous adaptations and mutations. For instance, Christopher Norris scathingly questions the tenability and consequences of Lyotard’s justice as a state of incommensurability. He argues that Lyotard’s justice in terms of “respecting the speech-act or narrative différend” of others would enable, for example, “a Holocaust skeptic” who may deny the Holocaust as long as he/she permits others to argue to the contrary according to their own criteria (Truth 19). According to Norris, Lyotard’s incommensurability hypothesis translates into a debilitating relativism of “everything goes” (25). Norris maintains that:

If everything is ultimately constructed in discourse. . . we could only be deluded in thinking that any particular discourse (for instance, that of feminism) had a better claim to justice or truth than the others currently on offer. . . Post-structuralism works to undermine the very bases of critical or oppositional thought. That is to say, it takes the nominalist view that ‘opposition’ is itself just a product of discursive differentials. . . (Truth 25-6)

The above critiques are frequently echoed in leftist, feminist, postcolonial, ecological, and even conservative perspectives. For example, Terry Eagleton’s Postmodern Illusions reiterates Norris’s charges of relativism, nominalist and textualism. Eagleton warns against ‘critique for critique’s sake’ that ends up reifying the different, or the exotic, by way of fad or academic fashion. He objects to postmodernist predisposition to consistently “demonize” superstructures, and “angelize” difference or any system’s others. He complains that:
Some, one might predict, would assume that the dominant system was entirely negative — that nothing within this seamlessly non-contradictory whole could by definition be of value — and turn from it in dismay to idealize some numinous other. . . . One might forecast an enormous upsurge of interest in the alien, deviant, exotic, unincorporable. (7; emphasis in original)

I think Eagleton resists postmodern dichotoms of “bad” systems versus “good” others/victims. Such polarization occludes investigating more nuanced individuals-systems interactions; it also predisposes one into polarizing bad systems against desirable difference, a gesture that blurs the boundary between critical thinking and pre-judgment. If one a priori incriminates power systems or the Same and valorizes otherness, the whole critical caveat may eventually lose its critical edge and become another ideology. The others are generally valorized in such dualistic thinking. Embracing them becomes the only viable option.

In “Is There a Postmodern Sociology?” Zygmunt Bauman explains postmodern legitimation crisis differently. Actually, it is not a legitimation crisis as much as it is the decreasing need for legitimation: “It is indifference on the part of political power which makes freedom of intellectual work possible” (192). To paraphrase, the national State—or Multinational Corporate State—no longer needs the intellectuals’ legislative help to weave and disseminate metanarratives. Furthermore, Bauman raises a question very often raised by feminist and other minority critics about the “coincidence” of de-legitimation, on the one hand, and the proliferating calls for multicultural diversity, on the other. The interest in diversity, minority perspectives, and alterity may not be a genuine cultural turn
as much as a side effect of the legitimation crisis or a market trend. Meili Steele, too, succinctly highlights the “performative paradoxes” that haunt current theoretical discourses, particularly postmodernist trends. He highlights the gaps between discursively devising “elaborate schemes for examining the marginalization and oppression” of non-mainstream others, on the one hand, and empowering them in real lived situations, on the other (Critical 1).

Similarly, minority-perspective critics and activists engage postmodern theorizations differently and cautiously. For example, postmodern thought intersects with feminist, postcolonial and ecological discourses in its search for a more ‘just’ and ethical relationship with others. Notwithstanding, feminist, postcolonial, ecocritical and other ‘oppositional’ perspectives contest modernist sexist, imperial, or anti-nature institutions and implications. Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard expose/deconstruct how the metaphysics of presence inevitably institutes the marginal and exclude the different so that it can consolidate self-identity. With a swift—sometimes-rough—leap, linguistic exclusion and social ostracism become coextensive. The marginalized and excluded on the levels of metaphysics or discourse correspond to, or match, the marginalized and excluded from mainstream power in social practices and institutions. In “White Mythology,” Derrida talks about deconstructive work as an ethical constructive toil. It detects and marks textual lacunae. Then, it reinstalls the other as a fair and just act of reading and as a fair practice. That is, it reverses the working of blind metaphysics or power relations. In this sense, postmodernist thought intersects with minority concerns, although some minority critics have distanced themselves from such relation due to postmodern suspicious sources and performative paradoxes.
Minority critics contend the death of the author, death of man, or end of history arguments such as Francis Fukuyama’s thesis of the end of history. They cannot afford to deconstruct their own history, or decenter identity. Rather, they seek to consolidate and salvage their traditions to counteract their being marginalized long before the rise of postmodern vocabulary. For example, in *Framing the Margins*, Phillip Brian Harper argues that the postmodern conditions of fragmentation, disorientation and confusion have always been experienced by minority subjects. bell hooks concurs with Brian yet she charges that postmodernism invokes others on the level of discourse, yet elides them on the level of praxis (“Postmodern Blackness” 421). However, to be truly a ‘politics of difference,’ postmodernism has to abandon its elitist jargon and “incorporate the voices of displaced, marginalized, exploited and oppressed black people,” instead of appropriating their causes. Besides, “radical postmodernist thinking” will not make a difference unless it translates its rhetoric into action (423). She rightfully cautions against postmodernist double-edged anti-essentialist stance lest it neutralizes and divides resistance. Still, if understood rightly, postmodern anti-essentialism can become productive:

Employing a critique of essentialism allows African-Americans to acknowledge the way in which class mobility has altered collective black experience so that racism does not necessarily have the same impact on our lives. Such a critique allows us to affirm multiple black identities, varied black experience. . . . Contemporary African-American resistance struggle must be rooted in a process of decolonization that continually opposes re-inscribing notions of “authentic” black identity. This critique
should not entail dismissing oppressed and exploited peoples’ efforts to regain control over their own destiny and leave unfair arrangements. Nor should it deny that in certain circumstances this experience affords us a privileged critical location from which we speak. This is not a re-inscription of modernist master narratives of authority that privilege some voices by denying voice to others. ("Postmodern Blackness” 425)\(^{12}\)

I think hooks differentiates between identity marked through real/shared constituencies of gender, color, race, or sexual orientation, and identity as negatively constituted by the mainstream other through unrepresentative stereotypes about black people’s inferiority. I agree with hooks’ and other minority perspectives in their caution toward postmodernism as such. I think, however, that the issues are more complicated than just postmodern engaging the social, political, and economic on concrete levels. Most critiques mounted against postmodernism seem to accept problematic postmodern premises such as that it is really a politics of difference or that incommensurability or undecidability are possible.

Judith Butler, too, struggles with postmodern (anti-essential) constructivism. She critiques postmodern constructivism when it verges on categorically ‘neutralizing’ human agency. She attempts to achieve a negotiable position between modernist autonomous individuals/agents and postmodernist constructed/determined—agent-less—subjects: “To claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency” ("Contingent Foundations” 164). Some studies do not make the distinctions Butler is making. They may eventually conflate constructivism and determinism to the demise of
agency. However, for some Cultural Studies critics such as Stuart Hall, the demise of the modernist subject merits celebration because of its leveling effect. All subjects are decentered and fragmented; the modernist subject is no longer the center of the world and no longer a whole. Subjects are merely linguistic constructs. Such statements supposedly demystify and level subject: minority or mainstream. 

Nevertheless, Ewa Ziarek rejects to submit to an either modernist or postmodernist view of the subject. She argues that the autonomous detached modernist individual/self does not stand testing. Simply speaking, our birth, upbringing, growing and living cannot happen, if it weren’t for the others. I think that autonomy as a concept needs to be moderated and contextualized. For example, at the time of the Renaissance, autonomy replaces the medieval and church-controlled concept of man as insignificant by and for him/herself. As a libertarian concept it opposes annexing the individual to the State, the church or any forms of dictatorships.

It becomes a negative term if it conceptualizes man as separate and disconnected from other subjects and creatures. It retains narcissistic and unhealthy social and psychological undertones if it means that we are nuclear entities not bound to communal values. Of course, the communitarian-libertarian debates come to mind. Communitarians expose the shortsightedness of individualism and autonomy as such. In addition, ecological, ecofeminist, and even postmodernist perspectives promote and describe the subject as connected, positioned, and always ethically obligated to its others—be they humans or non-humans. Similarly, the postmodernist death of the subject argument (subjects are no more than a web of relations, a depthless sign) presents an impoverished/reductive and usually misunderstood alternative. Subjects act and in turn
are acted upon. Hence, ethics is a “contested terrain” that “does not transcend power relations but intervenes and enables their transformation” (Ziarek 15).

I also think that human agency is a contested terrain. It is not an inalienable pre-given privilege, nor is it a mere product of culture or economic-political systems. Human agency does not have to submit to either the modernist ideal of the autonomous free agent or the postmodern hailed and constructed subject or web/surface. More important, I think human agency falls on a spectrum somewhere between the two models. However, it seems that human agency more than anytime ever is subjected to an unprecedented onslaught due the resurgence of imperial globalization, capitalist consumerism and mediatization. I am not talking about physical coercion—although this is still possible. Rather, I am talking about the complexification of political and social action as well as the loss of immediacy. For example, State control can be perfected to the extent of being present in absence. Postmodern subjects’ may act freely and make their own decisions when in fact they may be hailed by forces that channel, distort or minimize human agency. In general, the public sphere shrinks and almost everything is filtered through the State, State-owned, or State-friendly, media. Such a scenario challenges any straightforward discussion of agency not because there is no truth or because all truths are positioned and implicated in power relations, but rather, in Baudrillard’s terms, because we may no longer have the means to make such distinctions any more (Gramsci; Baudrillard; Debord). 15

Similarly, postcolonial critics contest the deconstruction of history and suspension of judgment. For instance, in her Introduction to Past the Last Post, Helen Tiffin holds that the ‘post-’ in postmodernism does not correlate with that in postcolonialism, arguing
that deconstructing history may yet be another Western hegemonic tactic. She argues that:

Post-modernism is then projected onto these margins as normative, as a neo-universalism to which “marginal” cultures may aspire, and from which certain of their more forward-looking products might be appropriated and “authorised.” In its association with post-structuralism, post-modernism thus acts, as Barbara Christian has noted, as a way of depriving the formerly colonised of “voice,” of, specifically, any theoretical authority, and locking post-colonial texts which it does appropriate firmly within the European episteme. Post-modernism as a mode is thus exported from Europe to the formerly colonised, and the local “character” it acquires there frequently replicates and reflects contemporary cultural hegemonies. . . . While the disappearance of “grand narratives” and the ‘crisis of representation’ characterise the Euro-American post-modernist mood, such expressions of “break-down” and “crisis” instead signal promise and decolonisation potential within post-colonial discourse. (viii-x)

Obviously, the above passage manifests that postmodern discourse is double-edged when it comes to post-colonial people or their discourse. On the one hand, postmodernism is a modern world problem; it should not generalize its sense of ennui to other cultures or to what is called Third World. On the other hand, the self-revision and weakening of Western grand narratives can open the way for postcolonials to push in their perspectives and free themselves from colonial epistemes. Stephen Slemon concurs with Tiffin that
post-modernism is a Western issue. Slemon argues that Western culture can indulge post-modern skeptical and deconstructive gestures simply because of its powerful position and assimilative capacities. The following passage makes the point:

Western culture is coming to understand that . . . the ‘armed version’ of modernism is colonialism itself, and that modernism’s most heroically self-privileging figurative strategies—its ‘fragmentation of textual unity,’ its ‘play of contradictory genres,’ its anti-normative aestheticising impulse (Frow 117)—would have been unthinkable had it not been for the assimilative power of Empire to appropriate the cultural work of a heterogeneous world ‘out there’ and to reproduce it for its own social and discursive ends. (“Modernism’s Last Post”1)

Likewise, in “Post, Post and Post,” Annamaria Carusi maintains that undecidability or parody of the past have “no place in a context of real political urgency” (101). For previously colonized people, the past is “called upon, not as a parody, but in deadly earnest” (101).

Therefore, post-modernism doubly binds postcolonial critics; its libertarian side beckons, while its subsuming and hegemonic posture repels. For it does not exclusively critique Western modernism. Rather, it generalizes and extends its deconstruction of modernist foundations to those of other cultures—cultures that have not passed through the same historical experience and may have different metaphysics. In this sense, postmodernism, itself a critique of logocentrism and ethnocentrism, becomes ethnocentric if its insights have to be generalized to other cultures. Postmodernism anti-
universalism is itself universalized. The deconstruction of Western Metaphysics is the
deconstruction of the metaphysics of all other cultures.

To explain, Anne McClintock, too, objects to the fallacy of the “post-” in
postcolonial and postmodernist theories. She writes,

The word ‘post’ . . . reduces the cultures of peoples beyond colonialism to

*prepositional* time . . . . The world’s multitudinous cultures are marked,
not positively by what distinguishes them, but by a subordinate,

retrospective relation to linear, European time. . . . Historically voided
categories such as ‘the other’, ‘the signifier’, ‘the signified’, ‘the subject’,
‘the phallus’, ‘the postcolonial’, while having academic clout and

professional marketability, run the risk of telescoping crucial geo-political
distinctions into invisibility. (293) 16

Exactly, the above-passage exposes the persistence of dualistic cultural hierarchies: the

colonizers occupy the center; the colonized languish on the periphery. Using colonial rule

and supposedly its ‘post-’as the only historical marker of other nations’ history is

Eurocentric.

Ziauddin Sardar concurs with the above-mentioned views of Carusi and

McClintock. In Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures, he asks, “Why should the

fatigue of the west, of calls for the end of the real, for replacing the real with simulacra,

for dislodging all truth claims, be the fuel to burn Islam?”(16). He argues that

postmodernism does not really result in “plurality.” Instead, it enacts a “frightening

hegemony of revisionism to create an illusion of inclusion while further marginalizing the

reality of the non-west and confounding its aspirations” (16). Alternatively, he promotes
a “multi-civilizational” world based on the worlds’ major Eastern and Western civilizations. Such a world protects civilizational differences. Sardar also argues that it is the West that resists such a future since its “primal fear is the fear of real difference” (16). Sardar mounts provocative critiques of the west’s discourse on difference. He views postmodernism in terms of its relation to mainstream imperial culture, economical exploitation and media appropriation, of others. To some extent, postmodernism as a secular thought excludes, or cannot accept, Islam. 17

Akbar S. Ahmed’s Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise does not reject or accept ‘postmodernism.’ It basically argues that postmodernism can hold a promise or forebode a predicament for Islam depending on how Westerners and Muslims handle themselves. The book also modifies the tendencies to polarize Islam and the West as incompatible. Akbar contextualizes the double-edged reception of the West in general, and postmodernism as a western philosophy, in particular. The West-East mutual distrust is steeped in historical conflicts, mutual stereotyping and media distortions. For example, Akbar maintains that many people in the Muslim world believe that the West mainly plans to control and deconstruct/demolish Islamic societies and values through cultural and economic hegemony. He also discusses how the western media has been launching intensifying assaults on Muslim image and identity forcing Muslims into reactionary measures to protect and reaffirm their Islamic identity. Although Ahmed deplores the persistence of mutual stereotyping of “monolithic” West against “monolithic” Islam, he unawares reinstitutes the Subject/object dichotomy of modern dialectics. In his book, the West plays the role of the subject or active agent that initiates the stereotyping through its media, cultural or military invasion, while the East (here Islam) per force is relegated to a
reactionary defensive role. This logic has some truth in it, but it also risks characterizing Muslims as insecure and unable to deal with outside currents. This may unintentionally configure/essentialize the West as progressive and the East as regressive/waning. I utilize the insights of these two scholars to contextualize and better explain Western-Islamic thorny conflicts. These writers, too, represent differences within Islamic communities as to their self-critique and attitudes toward the West. I have my reservations about both of them, though.

In “Secular Criticism,” Edward Said critiques the turn of literary theory from a “bold interventionary” movement into “the labyrinth of ‘textuality’” (606). In sum, Said rejects the postmodernist one-sided annexation of the subject to culture. For him, the individual occupies a “nodal” position where he/she is aware of his/her situation. Without such a conception, “criticism” won’t be possible (613). Furthermore, he objects to the way Derrida, for example, disseminates power in terms of systemic differentials. He instead sees power in terms of those who wield and those who are subjected to it. I think that a human being at a certain time and place plays various roles where he/she acts and is “acted upon.” Said’s argument is a commonsensical one. I also agree with Said in his conception of the individual as a site of possibilities although I think that human agency, more than any time ever, is subjected to State and market influences to variable yet worrying measures. Meili Steele articulates critiques similar to those Said levels against critical theory in general and poststructuralist theory in particular. “Derrida does not think that power is in the control of a particular class . . . rather, power is differentially articulated by signs” (Critical Confrontations 54). Steele also contends that Derrida’s “différance” is thus a totalizing claim about language; that is, it takes other philosophical
vocabularies such as ‘dialogue’ and ‘understanding’ as so seriously misguided that they cannot be recuperated: “Derrida’s linguistic philosophy becomes a kind of ontological terrorism that makes all other views of language incommensurate with his”(55).

Similarly, eco-critics, ecofeminists and environmentalists echo concerns similar to those of minority critics with regard to human agency and constructivism. For instance, Mick Smith differentiates between “epistemological” and “ontological” constructivism, when he writes,

> If we choose to emphasize the import of social systems and practices on our phenomenal apprehension of ‘nature,’ then we seem to be making an epistemological claim. But, if we go further and emphasize the absolute inaccessibility of the noumenal, of a socially *unmediated* “nature,” then this claim easily slips into an apparently ontological one. (“To Speak of Trees” 365)\(^\text{18}\)

Karen J. Warren proposes “situated universalism” as a middle ground between modernist (Kantian) universalism of reason and postmodernist (Lyotardian-Derridean) local relativism. Situated universalism modifies “the view that the universality of ethical principles is given in terms of some transcendental, abstract principles arrived at through reason alone, which captures some ‘essence’ of right and wrong conduct that is binding on all people in all historical time periods under all socioeconomic conditions” (Ecofeminist 114). Instead, she argues, “ethics is and should be about what imperfect human beings living in particular socioeconomic contexts can and should do, given those contexts” (Ecofeminist 14). Warren promotes embodied ethics where there can be
consensus that originates from the context and reality of the situation rather than from applying already abstracted ethical rules of conduct such as Kant’s “moral imperatives.”

Chaia Heller in *Ecology of Everyday Life* critiques deep ecologists’ conception of nature in that it converges with postmodernism’s inaccessible alterity. Postmodernist deep ecologists idealize, romanticize, or completely remove nature from the domain of human knowledge. Heller eschews polarizing environmental concerns into east/west or north/south. She states that, “Due to the global nature of advanced capitalism, there is a bit of the North in the South and a bit of the South in the North” (2). In other words, the debates about whether nature has an essence/alterity or is a human construct usually divert attention from really significant issues that need urgent attention. The debate over nature should not lose sight of consumerism and the unscrupulous search for raw materials as basically the problem rather than metaphysical subtleties: “Constructing an unmediated category of ‘humanity’, these writers [deep ecologists] hold an abstract ‘human’ responsible for the destruction of nature” (19).

* * *

Obviously, postmodernism presents one with different challenges on theoretical and practical levels. While postmodern thought has ethical and political potential—provided it is supplanted with more concrete approaches such as those of minority critics—postmodernism is not a ‘magical wand,’ nor is it merely a mental luxury characterized with scholastic obscurity. The rise for such new territories in academic and social domains signals a serious search for answers to current ethical and environmental
crises. The “postmodern” impulse is symbolic of a persistent human search for better and more ethical existence. As I have said in the beginning of the chapter, postmodernism is not a fixed or uniform entity. In fact, the school of thought is evolving through critiques from within and without.

The Alterity Hypothesis

Alterity is a key tenet in postmodern thought. It is a difficult, ambiguous and multifaceted concept. For example, most books and articles that have alterity in their titles use the term in ordinary and special senses (Levinas; Schiff; Nealon; Burggraeve; Pheby; Critchley). Basically, alterity is used interchangeably with the Other. “‘Alterity’ is often used interchangeably in poststructuralist discourse with ‘other’ to refer to people who are excluded from positions of power, and are often victimized within a predominantly liberal humanist view of the subject” (Rutledge Companion 181). Or it denotes a specialized philosophical concept, mostly in the Levinasian sense. Debra A. Jacobs’ definition merits quotation: “Alterity is a moral stance vis-à-vis the other. It is openness to the other, a respect for differences par excellence” (“Alterity and the Environment” 614).

However, the other, others, and sometimes otherness have a more concrete ring to them and are usually used to refer to specific groups according to the constituencies of nationality, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. In other words, these terms are relational and context-bound, whereas alterity as a philosophical concept seems to be a state achievable beyond these dichotomies when used in Levinasian sense: Levinasian alterity stands for the inaccessible, unpresentable, or sublime in any system. Alterity also
denotes more than the state of being different or non-self. Its resurfacing as a central theoretical-ethical tenet has many contexts and implications. For instance, Michel Saloff-Coste and Carine Dartiguepeyrou assert that:

The emergence of the principle of alterity would surely not have such a theatrical effect if we had not been raised over the last century under the barbarity of the Same . . . . This encounter with the Other is at the heart of post-modern existential philosophy. (Horizons of the Future ch. 3)

The logic in the above passage can be tricky. It highlights the gloomy side of modernity/modernism as empowering the principle of Same over that of difference, despite its liberal and humanistic foundations or rhetorics. Paradoxically, alterity as intact and freed from the prerogative of the Same is a contradictory, if not an impossible utopian, objective. I think that the modernist ideal of self’s autonomy is transferred to the Other; the other, previously objectified, becomes autonomous alterity. The very terms intact and free are modernist; they make sense in relation to their opposites or lacks. We are back to modernist comparative and contrastive hierachizing logic. Postmodern alterity intersects with Heidegger’s concept of “letting-be” as an ethical axiom guarding against logocentric reductionism. Heidegger’s “letting-be” cautions against ethnocentric blindness and insensitivity toward the other. The Kantian concept of the sublime also comes to mind. However, alterity as a term is mostly attributed to Levinas’s writing. Seeking to reestablish Self-Other encounters as primarily ethical, Levinas introduces the concept of alterity as both the Other and as an inescapable ethical stance toward the alterity of the Other. In the Encyclopedia of Postmodernism, Jeffrey Kosky rightly
distinguishes between mainly “two important ways of rethinking the problem of alterity” in postmodernism:

First, certain postmodern thinkers have articulated a notion of alterity in which the other is not the opposite or negation of the self, but is wholly or absolutely other. On such a reading, the alterity of the other is not defined by its relation to the self. Rather, the alterity of the other is articulated as such. It is different without being opposed. The early work of Emmanuel Levinas, aspects of the thought of Gilles Deleuze, certain feminist and ethnic thinkers, and some theologians, wrote important works in which such a notion of alterity figures significantly. Second, another school of postmodern thinkers has conceived alterity as a lack within the whole. Indebted to Freudian notions of the unconscious and the repressed as well as to Heideggerian notions of forgetfulness or the oblivion of Being, this notion of alterity holds that the other is present only as absent from the whole or the same. . . . The alterity of the other is that which must be excluded from or controlled by the totality if the self-identity of the same is to be realized. . . . The other is thus integral to the identity of the same at the same time as it is different from it. (9) The first use does not limit alterity to difference according to self-other relation. It just is.

It falls beyond modernist vocabulary and ontology. The second concept—Freudian, Lacanian and Derridean—is also problematic: alterity is the excluded or the suppressed in any system, an exclusion that allows wholeness or totality to form.
Another way to characterize the problematic is to invoke the essentialist versus the anti-essentialist (constructivist) paradigms. Others have been essentialized as others due to epistemological and ontological premises that prioritize the Self/Subject over its Other/Object. For example, white and black, male and female, and east and west have been viewed dialectically and hierarchically. The fact that the second party of the dyad has been relegated to a secondary and inferior status is not natural although it was made to look so. Postmodernism opposes such essentialist categories and exposes their roots in power relations like in the case of Foucault or linguistic hegemony like in the case of Derrida.

Alterity theories, the Levinasian or Derridean versions, no matter how insightful and “radical” they may appear, retain latent modernist/occidental residues they supposedly oppose and undo. Namely, they revolve around new-old controversies such as the debate between essentialism (Platonic idealism) and existentialism and free will. Many critics have voiced their concern that post-modern anti-essentialist (constructivist) thought may turn into a nihilistic self-defeating one. If the postmodern subject is constructed through and through or if the postmodern subject is a mere sign in a differential linguistic or cultural system, human agency either disappears or becomes a product of the very systems that produce the subject. Jacob Schiff, in “Different Strokes: Mapping the Terrain of Alterity,” recasts the problematic succinctly. In the following passage, he distinguishes between two forms of alterity with constitutive and organizing effects:

The ontological dimension of alterity points to its status as an unavoidable characteristic of social and political life. The constitutive
aspects of the ontological dimension of alterity are revealed in the sense that alterity is a fact about the world—we live among particular kinds of others. The organizing aspect of the ontological dimension of alterity is revealed in the sense in which the fact of alterity conditions our existence as human beings.

The epistemological dimension of alterity, on the other hand, refers to the possibilities for and the limits of knowledge about ourselves and about the others amongst whom we live. This dimension also has organizing and constitutive aspects. The organizing aspect directs our attention to the fact that our knowledge of others and ourselves shapes the way we relate to them. From this perspective, self and other are objects of knowledge: we know ourselves and others to be particular kinds of agents, and act accordingly on the basis of this knowledge. (4)

Schiff does not see the epistemological as a relation between the self as knower and the other as an object of knowledge. He also does not present self-others relations in dialectical terms. Both self and other constitute and organize one another; they both are subjects and objects of knowledge. I think that Schiff’s argument is very important in that it recognizes the mutual constitution of self-other. Usually, there is a tendency to grant the self/same or modernist subject an agentive role at the expense of, sometimes in opposition to, the less powerful objectified other. While I think that such arrangements exist, self-other relations are not limited to them. More important, such tendencies tend to overlook historical specifics and contextual variables. To consistently relegate the self-other relations in terms of master/slave, or victimizer and victim is reductive, too.
In “The Ethics of the Other,” Robert L. Mazinger sheds more light on the concept of alterity as “that which exceeds the rationality of the system . . . language and thought” (26). He states the following about Levinas’s alterity:

Levinas wants to show that the human ethical relation of the other is prior to one’s ontological relation to oneself . . . or to the totality of things which we call the world . . . as he opposes the tradition of the unity of Being that exists in Western philosophy. . . . Levinas’s interpersonal face-to-face ethical relationship between an individual and the other describes the movement of alterity, an ethical notion which is the mystery of otherness that transcends the thought of Dasein. . . . This movement toward the Infinite, Levinas argues, prioritizes ethics before ontology.

(82-4)

The “ethical” would not exist or arise if it weren’t for existence of others. Levinas wants to restore this primordial sense of ethics against the modernist one that casts the self-other encounter in terms of subject/object dialectics. This is why I think he wants to move prior to modernist ontology that elides this primordial recognition. I think the problem is not merely knowing and not knowing the other as much as it is eliding or holding our ethical obligations to the alterity of the other.

More problematically, Jameson and Baudrillard see postmodernism in negative terms. For them, (post)-modernism marks a continuation and intensification of capitalist/imperialist practices, variably jeopardizing all human subjects, be they mainstream or non-mainstream. The focus on otherness is nothing more than a seasonal/simulacral fad in tangent with consumerist commodifying practices. Concepts
such as diversity, multiculturalism, hybridity, marginality, minority, post-coloniality, and ethnicity—all contested sites—have become highly-valued and circulated due to the global and advanced commodifying capitalistic side-effects where others enjoy a seasonable value in an exchange system—others can become both commodities and consumers par excellence. In market logic “difference sells.” Jeffrey T. Nealon deftly surmises:

These days, it seems that everyone loves “the other.” University professors and corporate CEOs alike proclaim the importance of diversity; even Arby’s fast-food restaurant reminds us that “Different is Good.” Of course, once one specifies what “the other” means within a particular context (once a specific other or difference is named by a discourse), a flurry of anxious criticism ensues. (Alterity Politics 1)

Implicitly, Nealon is pointing to a state of fissure between concern for otherness on a rhetorical level, and the uncertainty about, if not intentional evasion, of concrete others on the level of lived realities. While an abstract floating otherness may get a unanimous vote, it is doubtful that the state of unison will hold when dealing with others in real lived situations. For example, an ethical model based on prioritizing alterity cannot be used in thorny political or territorial conflicts, especially if every party believes they are in the right. Of course, according to Levinas and Derrida we would not have been there—that is, in a state of conflict—had we maintained alterity ethics in the first place. This is a circuitous logic that cannot be proven or refuted as we are already in the ontological. However, this generalization should not undermine the fact that many critics and
organizations are seriously questioning modernist aporias and shortcomings in order to achieve or build a more just world, a world ethically centered and alterity-sensitive.

It is due to all of the above problems that beset postmodern alterity that I used the phrase “alterity hypothesis.” Granting alterity a hypothetical status necessitates testing its internal (in) consistencies, yet more crucially, its workability and consequences. Moreover the ethical claims made in the name of alterity are very often confined to theoretical/philosophical categories and debates leaving much needed work of translation into lived realities. This, too, makes alterity ethics hypothetical—it may or may not be realizable. ‘Hypothetical’ also intersects with ‘theoretical’ as characteristically an abstract and speculative genre with a utopian function. The phrase “alterity hypothesis” also better denotes the state of controversy and debate surrounding postmodernism and its potential ethical claims. Critics, in principle, seem to valorize alterity, at least on the philosophical/theoretical level; moreover, the causes/claims of others (minorities, nature, and the colonized) populate academic and public discourses, as well. To a large extent, doing justice to alterity may be more realizable and palatable in textual settings; it may not change the political and economical conditions of lived realities. The discursive and textual are coextensive with lived realities, but their stakes—what can be done and achieved within their parameters—differ from those involved in everyday life matters, whether domestic or international. Sometimes, the concern for alterity can become a rhetorical means to appropriate and utilize the cause of the others. Discursive practices can be so divorced from intention and consequent actions.

Moreover, there are some blatant gaps between alterity ethics as theorized and prescribed and as possibly carried out and implemented. The alterity hypothesis would
have had radically tangible effects on our everyday lived realities, had it been translated into practices. In fact, a haunting gap exists between an ethics that prioritizes alterity (the different, underprivileged, usually exploited and underrated others) over identity (the principle of the Same, egocentrism, or mainstream subjectivity), casting ample doubt upon the very possibility and attainability of such ethics. Here too, the undertones of “hypothetical” come to play: one may detect a deep-seated idealism/utopianism underpinning the desire to deal justly with the others and redress wrongs done to them. But one may also discern diversionary mental labor that may, in fact, be sidestepping ethical issues through the ideal of alterity ethics. Alterity and other related words can become fetished buzzwords as long as they are a priori co-opted in a consumerist system. Actually, there are many interpretations for the rise of such ethics at a time when consumerism, globalism, fundamentalism, exploitation, genocide, simulation and narcissism proliferate. Once again, one may ask: “Does the escalation of violence, or the persistence and intensification of exploitative unjust relations with others, make postmodern alterity ethics irrelevant? Or does it make the need to adopt postmodern ethics of alterity more urgent than any other time ever?

Besides, alterity ethics remains hypothetical in the sense that very little has been done to test whether it can solve conflicts involving self/other, subject/object, or colonizer (oppressor)/colonized (oppressed) parties. The problematic can be reworded differently: does an ethical system based on unbounded commitment to otherness work? Does it create just relations and prevent violence? Or is it problematic since it does not explain why people, particularly those who are privileged, would adhere to such ethics, when it entails removing their privileges and curtailing their powers? Consequently, the
descriptive as well as the prescriptive/constrictive potential of this ethical model are also questionable. It does not describe real ethical practices taking place. Nor does it have any prescriptive legal power to substantiate such ethics other than the vague idealistic assumption of human goodness.

Sometimes, I think that alterity ethics’ main power resides in its utopian and ethical nobility. This appeal and desire is not to be dismissed as insignificant. It is rooted in the search for justice and the human desire for fair inhabitable world. One also may read such ethics in terms of serious attempts to avoid repeating historical tragedies that mainly characterize self-other relations as embodied in massacres, ethnic cleansing, World Wars, rise of fundamentalism and escalation in armament. More importantly, alterity ethics may soar above contextual, historical, economic and other material issues that cannot be solved by merely shifting paradigms. The subject—deconstructed or depthless—still plays the role of initiator of action. I am also not sure whether allotting alterity a central role results from the subject’s recognition that this is the right thing to do to live ethically with the other or whether this is the case because this is how things really are. There is a side to Levinas’s and Derrida’s thought that relates to poststructuralist insights that this is really how language works and consequently how all systems should work. Meanings and identities are illusory whenever they denote centrality and closure, a closure usually attained at the expense of the different both linguistically and socially.

One also can sift Levinas’s and Derrida’s debt to liberal humanistic (modernistic) values, even when they oppose or engage them in the negative. There is no clear and conclusive answer to these tricky issues. At best, I think one should focus on the workability and utility of alterity ethics in the realm of lived realities.
More important, problematics surrounding the alterity hypothesis become more challenging when developed in tangent with the “constructivist hypothesis.” Put in a simplified and thus reductive way, the possibility of a new ethics of alterity becomes questionable and paradoxical when juxtaposed to the role (social/cultural, linguistic/discursive, or economical/capitalistic) constructivism plays in postmodern thought: if subjects are constructed through and through, how can they resist or change their realities or better their lives? How can subjects act ethically toward their others when the very self-other divisions are constructs on their own? How can subjects critique and escape the systems that engulf and mold them? Where does agency reside, or come from, if subjects and alterities are products, or social puppets, to state the extreme, of social constructivism? In light of the above queries, I will contextualize and explicate the problematic of postmodern constructivism.

The Constructivist Hypothesis

Like alterity, the constructivist hypothesis needs explication and testing. The term along with other substitutes and derivatives figures frequently in postmodern theorizations and critiques of these theorizations. It is also heavily used in sociology, psychology, International Relations, Environmental Studies, educational-curricular studies and others although with different, yet related, meanings. Basically, the term has two dominant senses. First, postmodern constructivism dominantly collocates with the “constructed subject,” the subject as a product of various linguistic, political, and economic systems. David Pilgrim states that postmodernism has been “associated, and at
times conflated, with *constructivism,*” but this is not necessarily the case. Not all postmodernists are constructivist and vice versa (9). He further objects to radical constructivist positions that over-invest in linguistic systems to the extent of rendering social justice and activist movements a contradiction of terms (9-12). One may discern or misread such radical constructivism in the writings of Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Levinas, and even indirectly in Jameson’s and Baudrillard’s theorizations. Understood in this negative and narrow perspective, radical constructivism undermines the other positive aspects in postmodern thought such as openness, alterity-ethics and its potential to empower and foreground marginalized voices. Actually, instituting alterity would render these very terms obsolete. The adjective radical, however, may signify two different meanings when associated with postmodernism and its constructivist side. Radical may denote fundamental and originary changes. Alternatively, postmodern constructivism is radical in the sense of being excessive, leaving little, if any, room for human agency. If used in this sense, constructivism verges on determinism. If followed to its extreme implications, it renders the prospect of change, intervention, critique, or resistance obsolete or ironic.

I think the constructivist thesis needs to be studied in light of essentialism. From an essentialist point of view, people are born with essences such as maleness and femaleness. However, these are not mere essences; they stand for hierarchal and dialectical values. Being a male essentially, yet dialectically, entails not being a female: males are reasonable and thus legitimate power brokers, whereas females are identified according to the opposite traits or their lack of them. The above prejudices have been exposed as steeped in power relations and hence male-favoring. While females are
biologically females, relegating their gender to secondary status is something culturally constructed. Postmodern constructivism challenges such equations as Man-made. According to the constructivist thesis there is nothing natural about marking gender difference with inferiority or lack. Similar arguments extend to racial and other forms of differentials. While race is a realistic descriptive category, essentializing or hierachizing some races as essentially superior to others generates many unjust and misleading consequences. Postmodern constructivism points out that such descriptions are social and cultural creations—nothing natural or essential about them. However, this liberating side of constructivism can verge on its opposite, when pushed to the extreme. Radical constructivism almost converges with essentialism if it invests epistemic, linguistic or social systems with a too major role at the expense of human agency. Individuals or groups become products of closed sometimes invisible and inescapable systems. In a sense instead of natural or God-given essences, postmodern constructivism in its uncritical or extreme manifestation offers man-made or power-relational constructs. 20

Very often the constructivist hypothesis’s sense of the human subject as constructing agents is lost or understated. The liberating implications of such constructivism are mostly manifest in disciplines, such as education, psychology and civil and social justice movements, such as women liberation movements. For instance, students construct their own knowledge and environment. Thus, student-centered classes stress critical thinking—usually in the sense of subverting and exposing State power, or socially unjust practices such as racism and sexism—and attempt to construct more just social arrangements. Social justice movements such as women’s liberation movements aim at raising consciousness, bonding with and empowering their subjects. 21
There is a very delicate line here, though. Postmodern anti-essentialism can be very politically and ethically influential as long as a moderate form of constructivism replaces the radical one. Otherwise, recuperative, reformative and interventionist possibilities are occluded in advance. For if we are all constructed, any action on our part is part of the system making us produce it. How can one account for his/her agency if one is as immersed in the system as anybody else is? This leveling paralyzes any claims that one narrative may be better, or more just, than the other. Besides, the prospect of changing the present and avoiding past wrongs remains theoretically problematic as long as the constructivist hypothesis looms there unmodified and untested. Any constructivist thesis that leaves no leeway for human agency undermines civil and social movements. Accordingly, minority critics have critiqued, modified or sometimes dismissed postmodern thought as politically ambivalent, if not ineffective. Cara Aitchison contends that constructivism is provisional and culturally bound. Specifically, we are not equally constructed by (invisible) impersonal or metaphysical/linguistic systems. Rather, constructivism is a relational inter-group process; there are those who construct and those who are constructed. She succinctly states that:

Characterized by dualisms, this process inevitably defines norms and deviants, centers and margins, cores and peripheries, the powerful and the powerless. . . . First, the construction of the Other is dependent upon a simultaneous construction of “the Same,” or something from which to be Other to. Secondly, this relationship is one of power whereby that which is defined as “Same” is accorded greater power and status than that which is
defined as Other. Thirdly, that which is defined as Other is accorded a
gender and this gender is always feminized. ("Poststructural" 35-6)

I agree with the above critiques of radical constructivism. Notwithstanding, I believe that
human agency has always been a contested site, subject to all kinds of influences and
limitations that may hinder, distort, mislead, divert, and in rare cases completely co-opt, it. Agency does not have to be a priori given, nor is it a mere construct or logocentric
figment of thought. Rather, agency is negotiable. I think discussing whether we are or are not free agents misses the point. Instead, we should be focusing on the best way to protect and practice our negotiable powers. Furthermore, being an agent, capable of constructing, does not necessarily entail acting ethically. An agent can be driven toward unethical relations with the other, or he/she may choose to evade ethical dictums for any possible reasons, usually self-interests.

Contrary to modernist optimism and idealism, rationality alone does not guarantee ethical existence. On the contrary, a lot of the violence that permeates modernist times has been blamed on modernist rationality. The rational-irrational, scientific-superstitious, scientific-religious/literary, secular-theological dichotomies comprise complex context-bound and metaphysical evaluations. An unfettered rationality lapses into a fascistic principle. It becomes exclusionary and reductive. More problematically, rationalism itself is an ethnocentric and power-laden term. Charles Olson’s “Projective Verse” critiques modernist instrumental reason on the ground that it reduces the human, not only the other, to a mere object at the disposal of the rational subject. Feminists also have exposed the sexist implications and prejudices embedded in the concept of reason, particularly
when it positively characterizes males and negatively characterizes females. Men are reasonable; women are emotional and passionate. 23

Additionally, modernist ethical failures cannot be exclusively blamed on metaphysical ethnocentrism or the claim that power relations permeate and dictate our actions. I see the point in arguing that modernist thought prioritizes presence/self/the same over the non-self or the different other. But, economic, political, ideological, racial, and many other possible variables are fundamental factors, too. We need to approach these issues holistically against the tendency to depict the epistemological and metaphysical as non-political and vice versa, when such a division is very problematic in the first place. This is one of the hermeneutic vicious circles. Do we act unethically due to imbalanced or ethnocentric metaphysics? Or do we fail to act ethically by choice? Do we choose to act unethically toward others because our metaphysics make such choice the right option? In other words, metaphysics and dominant cultural and social relations predispose us to act in one way or another. Postcolonial critics usually differentiate between metaphysics as a concept as reductive and Western Metaphysics as reductive. They want to hold such distinctions. This is another thorny issue. For such distinctions, as important as they are, risk reducing Western culture to its metaphysics and also risk equating Western culture with modernity, rationality and science, when science and ideas are gypsies. They migrate and move around. 24

One way to deal with the aporias the above circular questions generate is to distinguish among various degrees and types of constructivism. Postmodernist constructivism concerns epistemological, metaphysical or discursive systems; feminists, post-colonial and other minority critics emphasize the role social-cultural relations,
institutions and realities play in conditioning, indoctrinating, or ideologizing subjects. They attribute sexism, racism, and colonialism to dominant practices, although they do not deny the role of metaphysical systems. Mick Smith’s following comment is typical:

“Social constructivism” encompasses a variety of theses, some stronger than others. Drawn widely, it might include all those theoretical frameworks which emphasize the determining influence of social relations on the production knowledge, values, beliefs, or behavior, i.e., on our “lived” realities. In this we might include even an overtly materialist discourse like Marxism. . . . Drawn more narrowly, constructivism is more usually associated with phenomenological, ethnomethodological, symbolic interactionist or postmodern perspectives focusing on the role of cultural, institutional, symbolic or linguistic systems in delimiting and moulding our perceptions of the world. (“To Speak” 360-61)

Postmodern constructivism concerns not only one group’s perception of another, but more accurately it addresses the conditions and limitations of human knowledge. The way we look at an object and the tools we use to do so affect how we see, or even not see, it. Accordingly, one might better understand the many charges leveled against postmodern thought such as idealism, anti-realism, nihilism or relativism. Postmodern relativism and anti-realism question foundations and Truths: truths are relative to other truths, provisional or situated. Postmodern relativism and anti-realism may also question the validity or availability of any neutral ground from which one can know what is and what is not true. There is no reality separate from human consciousness. To explain, there must be real objects separate from our bodies and consciousness, but we can only access
or conceptualize them through our human consciousness. Consequently, there is no way one can know whether one’s representation of an object coincides or really represents it. All realities are mediated.

Sometimes postmodernism’s problematizing reality is read into a denial of referential reality. Charges of textualism and nominalism have been mentioned earlier such as in the case of Terry Eagleton, Christopher Norris, and Edward Said. Nevertheless, postmodern constructivism does not deny reality as much as it exposes the way reality is framed, represented and mediated. Reality is always reality to and for a certain consciousness. We cannot escape such ethnocentrism. According to Foucault, knowledge and power relations are so intricately tied that objectivity truth or neutrality cannot be maintained as before. Traditional explanations of meaning formation or representation such as the correspondence or nomenclature theories of language have been exposed as logocentric and reductive. They cannot be disposed of, though. Meaning making becomes more than the struggle to best represent reality, or reach a transcendental truth. It becomes a political, contested site, embedded in, rather than transcending, social contexts.

Obviously, these ideas may not be reduced to an ‘either-or’ logic—either we are absolutely free agents, or our actions and freedoms are created and granted by a system that gently (violently when need be) controls us. The difficulties these positions entail are numerous and haunting: constructivism essentializes culture into framing systems and framed subjects; sometimes, one can discern traces of avant-garde system-hating at the background of such stances. In fact, one can also perceive echoes of Althusser’s concept of “interpellation” and Terry Eagleton’s concept of “ideology” in such views. In
addition, Plato’s idealism in the “Myth of the Cave” is another allusion here. But while Plato’s prisoners are enlightened and may eventually leave the cave, extreme constructivism has no exits. Deep constructivism has no outside; it does not tolerate real critical distance: it preempts any attempt to exit it.

Furthermore, the constructivism hypothesis neatly polarizes constructing systems against constructed subjects. This polarization glosses over the fact that subjects do not only perform and follow pre-determined itineraries set for them; they also can maintain double-binding and more complex relations with their culture; subjects may identify with and invest in the systems they live under; they can partially or fully distance themselves from, or oppose, them. That is if such distinctions can be made in the first place in light of postmodern constructivism. I think that there is a need to differentiate between constructivism as an absolute inescapable process and constructivism as a contested process that can vary in intensity, form, mode, and thus, results. The first form dissolves human agency, responsibility, and renders the search for change, for a more just existence, self-contradictory, if not completely obsolete. The second form offers a richer and more sophisticated agency—agency as a site subjected to distortion, co-optation, manipulation, but never completely neutralized or obliterated.

While the first model allows one to blame a vague impersonal concept of culture or system and implicitly absolve oneself of responsibility and guilt—some kind of psychological therapeutic transference—the second model acknowledges the massive influence of cultural, linguistic, political, educational and economic systems on what we do and who we are. But these influences never reduce the subject to the sum product or side effect of these powers. Deep constructivism, if pursued to its extreme logical
implications, no matter how radical it looks, risks becoming another neoconservative ruse. That is, any illusion of agency attains a phantom-like fabric. For example, consumerism as a system cannot be overturned. But subjects can define their relations to it by making wise consumerist decisions, an option that the consumerist system may provide and utilize. Consumerism persists unscathed, though.

Obviously the combination of the alterity and constructivist hypotheses along with their integral relation to agency complicates an already difficult situation. The alterity hypothesis appears to be yet another utopian thought deflected and spoiled by prospects of extreme constructivism. On the one hand, those occupying the position of otherness aspire to amend their image and position on the power grid. Knowing that they are not essentially inferior, they set out to salvage their voices and share their real identities. But if they give in to extreme constructivism, their cause and objective may never materialize. However, opting for a moderate form of constructivism can produce more realistic results, as subjects would be aware both of their potential and limitations.

Although the above issues are vital, to primarily dwell on them and never consider their workability and implications risks making the discourse an academic scholastic mental duress blatantly at odds with ethical questions of the time. We need to move beyond accepting or rejecting postmodern constructivism to investigating its potential to create social change or its failure to do so. We need to better understand and contextualize the risks that are constantly hemming human agency under the tightening of sophisticated globalizing capitalistic and media alliances as constructing systems. The very existence of postmodernism as an ethical breakthrough becomes questionable if postmodernists overemphasize radical alterity and radical constructivism. It would entail
the demise of others—this time even without being able to sugarcoat such demise in paternalistic, optimistic or humanistic progressive narratives. Modernism has an optimizing factor where wars and massacres are optimized as necessary evils (combating dictatorship: fascism and Nazism) in the way for attaining higher good (democracy). Deconstructing such optimizing narratives, postmodernism cannot resort to such soothing or concealing pretexts, unless we see it as an “offshoot” or stepchild of modernism.

Of course, such a claim is fraught with difficulties and unfeasible conclusions. While I think the postmodern goal is to unveil the covert violence entailed in master and optimizing narratives, it may inadvertently turn into a bleak relativist and real-politik view of the world. One also needs to guard against re-inscribing and extending Western metaphysics, or anti-metaphysics, into other cultures. The skepticism toward Western meta-narratives does not have to translate into a pervasive skepticism against all authorial positions, all traditions, all foundations—Western or non-Western, lest again Western metaphysics, this time in its deconstructed form, acquires a global “norming” status. The critique of Western foundations does not necessarily have to signal the failure of all foundations, some of which—like the Native American ethics of thanking—have never been tested beyond their locale.
In conclusion, both the alterity and constructivist hypotheses have to be scrutinized concomitantly with global capitalistic developments. For despite the proliferation of diversity, alterity, ethnicity and hybridity ideals and discourses, Others may consistently end up at the receiving end of exploitation and marginalization. These are also big categories and propositions that will also be contextualized and modified in a timely manner. I do not intend to polarize a monolithic West versus a monolithic East or the greedy capitalists against their Third world victims. The relationships are too complex to be captured in one monolithic term or equation. As many critics have been arguing these words are indispensable, but they in no way should denote a homogenous or ossified category. Both the East and the West have sub-cultures and non-mainstream trends within them; they are not the opposite or negation of one another, either. Nor are they fixed entities in time.

Moreover, what is also missing is a historical and contextual problematization of the various manifestations of otherness/alterity and constructivism by dislodging them from abstraction and vagueness. Otherness is not an absolute category; it can be a matter of degree. An Arab as Other to an American is not the same as an Italian or North Korean other to an American. Indeed, even within the same Arabic category, otherness to American as a category tends to vary biologically and culturally. The same reality applies to Americans and Westerners as Others to Arabs and Easterners. Theoretically speaking, if these terms are deconstructed, the end result should make these terms obsolete as they are shown to be arbitrary and products of power relations. But ironically,
the deconstruction of those linguistic categories does not coincide with the deconstruction or rearrangement of power relations. The danger can also reside in that we may assume that our theoretical labor is enough—has done the job—and just stop short of completing the work of redress. Embracing “the others” becomes a theoretical felicity that may substitute for real encounters with otherness. It is more feasible to embrace an abstract other than to embrace and do justice to a concrete contextualized other. An empty disembodied otherness does not really present hard ethical choices. What would it be like to encounter, empower, a mass of others not necessarily friendly toward the Same or willing to be embraced—others who want to maintain their otherness without submitting to modern or postmodern logic?

To simplify, the alterity and constructivist hypotheses have powerful descriptive powers, but should not be taken separately or extremized. I have noticed that the other in both modernist and postmodernist is an ambivalent term. Very often, mainstream critics, some are postmodernists and modernists, still talk and act on the other’s behalf. The other, even when granted the status of absolute alterity in Levinas’ philosophy or hospitality in Derrida’s, still occupies a less powerful or less active slot. Even Bakhtinian dialogism does not capture the complexity of intra and inter-cultural human relations. The self/other or same/different dyads tend to designate divisions in the status quo in terms of power relations and current conflicts. The West stands for the self/same; alterity or otherness designates the West’s other. In philosophical and theoretical terms, the other is whatever the system labels as other in terms of identity and difference.

Freud, Lacan, Kristeva, and Dr. Laing, all have used the ‘Other’ to denote the subconscious, suppressed, or complementary part of the self or the ‘I.’ In *Strangers to*
Ourselves, Julia Kristeva states that “the foreigner lives within us; he is the hidden face of our identity…” (1). The psychological also echoes the Romantic and Biblical concepts of otherness: Nature and God, consecutively. In political and media terms, nowadays, the East (more specifically Arabs and Muslims) are the other. The above characterizations are rough and difficult generalizations. Then, the question is: are these two different modes of otherness the same? Can we substitute one for the other without provoking objection? More important, to what extent does the Muslim/Arab become other due to metaphysical or epistemological dialectics or due to political or ideological differences? These are thorny and circular issues. I plan to return to them in more specific terms in the coming chapters.
What I'm trying to say is that postmodernism poses as anti-authoritarian and anti-foundational, but postmodernism itself has its own foundations. Achieving justice in terms of openness to and respect for differences has its own set of assumptions and foundations. Modernist foundations such as the self’s autonomy and legitimacy in relation to a dialectically and hierarchically established Other become a problem when such arrangements translate into suppressing, exploiting, or absenting the other. Modernism as associated with ‘sexism,’ ‘racism’ and ‘colonialism’ is also problematical. To ‘found’ one’s race as a priori superior to other races is also problematical. Although we cannot live without some sort of foundations, these foundations have to be examined lest they become dogmatic and arbitrary.

For further information read Mannheim’s Ideology and Utopia. The following excerpt, however, highlights his connecting ideology to utopia:

Ideologies and utopias share this condition of transcendence in that they are both ‘incongruent’ with social reality. They differ, however, in their mode of incongruence, in that ideologies are antiquated modes of belief, products of an earlier, surpassed reality, whilst utopias are in advance of the current reality; ideologies are therefore transcendent by virtue of their orientation to the past, whilst utopias are transcendent by virtue of their orientation to the future. Underpinning this distinction is a ‘dialectical’ theory of history, owing a great deal to Marx and Hegel, which claim that progression in modern history has been driven by succeeding social strata. Each of these strata generates a vision which
articulates its alternative to the status quo, and animates its transformative social and political project. These society-busting visions are what Mannheim understands as utopias. In time, each new utopian creation is itself challenged by a newer vision, thus rendering the former utopia antiquated, or ideological. Thus liberalism is at one stage predominantly utopian, and at a later stage, predominantly ideological.

Now, whilst Mannheim undoubtedly does say all the foregoing, he also says other things which greatly complicate the issue, and render the ideology/utopia relationship much more problematic. Indeed it leads Mannheim on a number of occasions to say how extraordinarily difficult it is to identify what is ideological, and what utopian. ("Ideology and Utopia" 1-2)

The Platonic idealism is most obvious in the “Myth of the Cave,” where the captives are freed, and hence, can transcend the illusionary prison house of shadowy forms, attaining the Idea behind them. This dialectical ascension is another name for enlightenment. However, Plato’s enlightened journey materializes through the formation of subject-object positions, where the rational subject detaches ‘himself’ from the object of study.

In The Reader’s Guide to the Social Sciences, a range of definitions are given to the concept of utopia:

Formally, utopian and utopianism are used to describe any “speculation in ethical philosophy about the Good life; or to any speculation in political theory about fundamental political principles or forms of government; or
to any imaginary society found in a treatise, novel, story, or poem; or to any vision or conception of a perfect society. Utopian also describes ideas that are at variance with “reasonable expectations or ideas that imply a radical departure from existing conditions. (Reader’s Guide 267)

5 For instance, Jeffery Wallen’s Closed Encounters raises serious questions about the exclusions and blind spots in postmodern and cultural studies academic discourses. He objects to replacing academic discourse as grounded in critical thinking and proof with an academic discourse based on one’s place on the grid of race, gender, or sexuality.

6 Some studies have related Levinas’s and Derrida’s thought to Biblical traditions. Levinas’s alterity is modeled after the alterity of God. For more details, see Michael Merry’s “The Phenomenology of the Other.”

7 The general mood recognizes the need to deal more ethically and justly with the Other, the need for a reformation or at least revision of the realities of our relations with the other. But the means and procedures for such revision and reformation are a matter of debate among theorists and critics in their various disciplines and alliances. The postmodern alternative strikes some critics as the ultimate solution inaugurating an ethical cultural turn toward a more just existence. However, many other critics betray some sense of insecurity toward postmodernism. The conflicting appeals that postmodernism, in general, and postmodern ethics, in particular, engender very often translate into locating postmodern ethics at the extreme end of opposite evaluations. It is much easier to side with one view or the other than to convincingly explicate one’s position. Usually theorists’ priorities, ideologies, methods, and key concerns influence what they look for, and hence, what they find.
Very rarely do critics approach postmodern ethics holistically—this is a very
difficult, if not impossible, task. It is more convenient and doable to focus on one element
of postmodern thought. For example, it is more challenging to study postmodern key
terms such as alterity along with constructivism or fragmentation, or pastiche.

Still, polemic excursions and apologetics become requisite gestures. There is no
escaping reiterating, and sometimes lamenting, the multiple aporias the postmodern
problematic is fraught with. On the one hand, a researcher has to grapple with
proliferating and refracting (speculative) incommensurable theorizations and
commentaries as to what constitutes the postmodern, its inception, relation with
modernism, politics, ethics, limitations, and intersections with postcolonial studies,
ecological criticism, feminism, multiculturalism, law, education, and a list of many other
current concerns. On the other hand, theorists and critics very often end up depicting
different species of the postmodern, and arriving at different conclusions due to
differences in approach, method, focus, discipline, position, and ideological alliances—
both articulated or covert.

Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of
the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Similar to
Jameson’s theory of “late capitalist logic,” Baudrillard’s theory of simulation, de-
realization and mediatization entails dire consequences, the most obvious of which is
jeopardizing the public sphere. While Jameson attributes postmodernism to the
‘perfection’ of capitalism, Baudrillard also has capitalism high on his list, but he also
focuses on new technological advances that have become known as “virtual reality,” or
more accurately, have imploded the boundaries between the real and the image.
Fukuyama’s argument has provoked massive critique. It is simultaneously mistaken and right. Capitalism is winning and becoming globalized, but this victory does not necessarily entail the superiority of Western capitalistic liberalism or free market over all other systems. The issues are very complex ones. I cannot address them in this study, but I reject Fukuyama’s argument as self-serving and shortsighted.

hooks recognizes that the black community is not a given or an ideal state; she even argues that such calls mislead and blind blacks to their differences ‘now’ despite shared or collective experience/identity, then. There are class conflicts within the very same black community. Middleclass blacks can have a very complex relation with the mainstream culture (425).

This extreme constructivism actually verges on social determinism, which casts ample doubt on the efficiency of the postmodern theorizations of Foucault and Derrida as products of the system, rather than free agents evaluating and critiquing it. I think that postmodern thought sometimes can be responsible for such views, particularly in light of Baudrillard’s theory of simulation and even Jameson’s late capitalist logic’s co-opting all social, literary, and critical aspects. However, a closer look at this theorization reveals that these are trends rather than completed and perfected processes. One can always find gaps. At best, I see these theorizations in the context of social critical traditions and even critical thinking. These theorizations, however, should alarm us to the growing of the state hegemony through its alliance with the media and globalizing capitalism. Moreover, we have to see these critiques as provisional, yet valuable, analyses with ‘utopian’ and practical motives and goals.
14 Some minority critics celebrate the postmodern subject’s fragmentation because of its leveling effect: everybody, be they black or white, is fragmented and disoriented. Similarly, Harper’s *Framing the Margins* contests the genuineness of what looks like postmodern radical demystification with foundations and fragmentation. He argues that the conditions that postmodernism is talking about such as disorientation and fragmentation have always been the prerogative of minority subjects.

15 Such studies that demonize postmodern thought tend to be dismissive. They are either reactionary phobias or instances of misunderstanding. Some critiques are reasonable and merit consideration, though. For example, Christopher Norris’s *What’s Wrong with Postmodernism* and Jeffery Wallen’s *Closed Encounters* both raise serious questions about postmodern thought, although they sometime seem to be too judgmental or pre-disposed against postmodernism.

16 To some extent, I understand McClintock’s point, but I also think that these terms can become reductive and rigid categories. Reducing a whole nation’s history to colonial and post-colonial markers is truly colonial-centric. But I also object to terms such as post-colonialism and post-modernism since the ‘post-’ may prematurely suggest that the non-equivalent exploitive relations between ‘x-colonizers’ and previously colonized countries have ended. I think we are never in the ‘post-’ of post-colonialism in any real sense. The departure of colonizing military forces does not coincide with ending colonial relations. Most of the time, economic and political, even administrative/educational marks are left forever. Maybe, it is just a change in mode instead of practice or intention. In the Arab world, for example, upon departing, the colonial powers have instituted colonial-friendly governments through which they can
still maintain their influence and guard their interests. The relations, too, cannot be reduced to colonizer as exploiting and colonized as exploited; rather, there are mutual self-interests between the newly set local governments and the colonial centers.

17 The relationship between Islam and West cannot be reduced to military confrontation or opposition in values. The West and the Muslim world are both in flux with many sub-currents and trends. The opposition itself is dangerous, if we take it for granted.

18 The ecological, deep ecologist and environmental debates wallow in controversy. I think we cannot just stop the harm done to nature if we stop seeing it as an object and start seeing it as creature or spirited entity that has value on its own regardless of our interests. That is, changing the way we discourse about nature is necessary, but it may not be sufficient to stop capitalistic exploitive relations with the natural world. Edgar Snyder’s and Wendell Berry’s writings and activisms are important steps in such directions. Focusing on capitalistic exploitation of nature should supplement focusing on the status of nature in our epistemological formulas.

19 Alterity is also used to refer to that part of ourselves that goes unacknowledged or suppressed in the social legal orders: Freud’s unconscious mind, the Romantics’ desire for self-nature unity, and Levinas’s concept of alterity come to mind.

20 There is a tendency toward prejudging any authorial or foundational position as restrictive, logocentric, and thus conducive to unjust power relation, when in fact there is no escaping power relations. The writings of Chinua Achebe provide a different and necessary perspective on power and authority. In Things Fall Apart, he juxtaposes colonial arrogant and self-centric authority with native forms of power that are based on
wisdom and structured hierarchies and social rituals. Authority or power based on wisdom is needed to protect social structures and regulate social relations. Ibo’s chieftains and tribal gods have consolidating functions. When the missionaries undermined and violated their order, things started to fall apart.

21 It is even problematic to read or annex social and civil rights movement to anti-metaphysical roots. Women rights and minority rights movements have diverse and socially-historically bound roots. They are not academic or discursive practices per se.

22 Critics have delineated different degrees or types of constructivism. A moderate conception of constructivism that recognizes pressures and power relation does not have to preempt agency. Only when constructivism becomes radical that it may lapse into its opposite: essentialism. For if subjects are products of superstructural systems or economic political substrata, prospects of critical thinking, change, or opposition become paradoxical.

23 In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault shows how a libertarian principle such as rationality may become a state tool for normalizing the same and othering the different. What falls beyond the reach of reason or does not comply with its criteria, more accurately values, is labeled as mad. Postmodernist critics have succinctly pointed out the shortcomings and blindness of taking a single criterion for explaining human conduct. Reason becomes a metanarrative or a foundation that relegates what it cannot handle to non-reason or to the irrational. There is no doubt, however, that the human mind can discern differences, gain, and produce knowledge. But the route from human brain to enlightened Reason has not received enough focus. The brain basically refers to faculties,
while reason is a relational term defined by it opposites: one or a combination of some of the followings: passion, madness, nature, or chaos.

24 Gary Snyder’s poetry and even Wendell Berry’s writings attempt to revive pre-modernist traditions, or to look for other alternatives in other cultures such as the ethics of thanking in Native American communities.

25 I do not use “optimism” in Leibniz’s terms. Rather, I use it as related to Hegel’s progressive view of history as teleologically moving toward the better. I think we need optimistic, humanistic and philanthropic narratives and objectives. Yet, these become troublesome if they justify and conceal exploitive ulterior colonial, imperial, or millennial motives or unconscious bias.
CHAPTER II
MODERNITY AND ITS OTHERS: HIERARCHICAL
AND SUBSUMPTIVE RELATIONS

In this chapter, I analyze samples of modernist literary texts to highlight their discursive (narrative) strategies and assumptions with regard to the question of the “Other.” I investigate how modern (imperial, racial, or humanistic) metanarratives, dialectics, and power relations supposedly reduce and violate alterity, focusing on the relation among the above concepts and modernist literary (and sometimes non-literary) texts that particularly deal with instances of cultural alterity.\(^1\) However, modernism and its derivatives denote multiple temporal and conceptual/cultural trends. Hence, modernism is best understood as a contested rubric term. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on contemporary critiques leveled against modern Western culture’s foundations as alterity-blind and reductive, particularly concerning the question of alterity. Modernism/modernity relayed through minority and postmodernist lenses is held responsible for colonial-exploitative, sexist, and racist beliefs and practices toward different forms of otherness, even when deploying legitimating narratives of humanism, scientific progress, or providential history.\(^2\)

Thus, it is assumed that modernist texts consciously or unconsciously betray their own tendencies to reduce alterity through idealizing, homogenizing, or demonizing difference. Accordingly, modernist texts suffer from instances of foundational blindness toward otherness. They are mainly Occidentally ethnocentric despite sponsoring (universal) humanistic rhetoric or appealing to scientific truth and providential (or even
secular) teleologically progressive history. Not all texts are modernist in the same manner or to a similar degree. Modernism and modernity have their own sub-currents and internal critiques. Similar to all concepts and movements, modernism encompasses various currents at one and the same time. As such, modernism does not only produce modernist texts, it may also produce pre-modernist, anti-modernist, or pro-modernist discourses as long as we can agree on these terms. Thus, texts that are most critical of modernism may end up reinforcing it, as they may unawares reenact modernist critical dialectics. We also need to differentiate between labeling a certain text modern simply because of its date and place of publication and labeling it modern due to embodying modernist dialectical foundations.

Nevertheless, instead of dwelling on such thorny issues—many critics have already done so—I focus on specific instances of othering attributed to the convergence of Western epistemological foundations and political stakes to better explicate the mechanisms through which the modernist (Western) subject institutes himself in relation to embodied others. For the sake of convenience and clarity, I have singled out two major interrelated ones. First, modernist identity materializes in terms of “hierarchal difference”: the self is both different from and superior to the non-self, the Other. Difference, here, is not merely a representation of what really is. Rather, it involves a ranking of the relation from the point view of the Same. That is, such relation is not reversible since it capitalizes on visible signs of difference and is based on nonequivalent power relations. Usually, the (imperial) self is associated with the more powerful and legitimate party, or with the imperial mainstream culture. Thus, difference and marginality become collocatable. While self-identity gains legitimacy by virtue of being
the Same, the different is marked as that which does not belong or does not rival—hence
the center-periphery dialectics. More important, difference negatively correlates with
power: the more different one is, the less he/she is supposed to access or wield power.

Nonetheless, on concrete levels, cross-cultural relations are always more messy and
complicated than any neat theorization or impressive generalization.

The second mechanism establishes identity by what I call “representational
subsumption.” When a mainstream subject, for example, defines what is normal and what
is aberrant, or defines what is universally humanistic versus what is culturally-bound,
he/she ethnocentrically generalizes his own values and image as the norm. Consequently,
he (she) acquires representational rights, while others become objects subject to acts of
representations, misrepresentation and even distortion. Others also are not endowed with
similar representational rights. For example, very rarely would one encounter Native
American values as universally humanistic, although there has been a surge of interest in
them due to their being eco-system-friendly. Such other lacks universal dimensions even
when it is subsumed under ‘universal and neutral’ criteria that happen to coincide with a
certain—rather than really universal—conception of self. For example, promoting
Western values as universal invests the White Man with centrality and legitimacy: his
values and characteristics dominate and propel others toward them. This subsumption
mechanism governs cross-cultural interactions, unless the different culture is strong
enough to choose not to enter such losing arrangements, although the dominant culture
poses as a neutral or natural order of things, an ideal to be emulated and sought. Similar
subsuming relations operate within the very same culture. Accordingly, masculine values
such as aggressive competition, mastery, and detachment become more legitimate, more public, and more scientific than female values of care and connectedness.\(^5\)

Representationally, truth becomes mainly compatible with the Same; the self’s narratives also are not merely representative of the values and truths of a specific group, but of the realities and values of the whole human race. Problematically, such universal humanism glosses over historical, economic, cultural, and political realities of other cultures and their relation to the supposedly Western ideal. Whenever such an external cultural model or ideal extends to other cultures, cultural particulars are undervalued and differences are created, not to forget that such a supposedly neutral subsumption results from, and enacts, intercultural power relations. The universal culture becomes hegemonic and homogenizing, in a sense.

Furthermore, such hierarchizing, subsuming, or othering mechanisms have to be maintained in order to congeal self-identity or totality. The subject has to keep drawing and redrawing these boundaries so as to sustain and upgrade Self/Other dichotomies. Self/other contact or osmosis is tolerated as long as it observes foundational hierarchies and does not disturb the established universal order of things. The terms of contact between the Self and the Others are usually dictated from the subject’s power position, a move that may not amount to more than an exercise in solipsism. For the Self remains the source and goal of the enterprise. Accordingly, identity-formation through positing difference in terms of cultural hierarchy usually leads to imbalanced (unethical) relations with the other, usually manifest in colonialism/imperialism, racism, sexism, and fascism. I am talking about politicized self-other relations. I do not deny or undervalue the fact that there exist some sanguine philanthropic attitudes toward different others.\(^6\)
Nevertheless, the passage from the narrative or discursive to the practical or lived self-other interactions is a very tricky one. Their relations cannot be limited to cause-effect ones. While we have to use language/discourse to describe and delineate self-other relations and name/comprehend our surroundings, language or discourse alone cannot be held responsible for the conflicts and violations that usually characterize our relations with, or conception/creation of, different others. That is, while a modernist text deploys modernist language, still the way it configures self-other relationships, whether balanced or distorted, cannot be exclusively attributed to the modernist discursive. For if the cultural discursive is assigned a too powerful role, the status and relevance of human agency become problematical. If culture becomes excessively detrimental, the possibility of transforming the very ‘culture’ into a more alterity-sensitive and just site becomes paradoxical. Culture is not DNA: subjects can be bi-cultural and multicultural; they can variously support, resist, or modify their cultures.\(^7\)

Thus, do modern subjects reduce others because the discursive/epistemological tools at their disposal make them do so? Or do such subjects (partially or completely) choose to do so depending on a myriad of contextual motivations and interests. To what extent is the modern subject a construct of modernist epistemology or the engineer of such very epistemology? The above questions cannot be answered without getting polemical and indulging in hair-splitting distinctions, something I do not intend to do in this chapter.\(^8\) Instead, I analyze Mark Twain’s *The Innocents Abroad* as an example of one dominant mode of cross-cultural encounters between embodied American travelers and Arabs.
I also briefly touch on a number of literary and non-literary texts such as Conrad’s Heart of Darkness and Bernard Lewis’s “The Roots of Muslim Rage” to better elucidate my points.

**The Innocents Abroad and Other Orientalizing Texts**

Mark Twain’s *The Innocents Abroad* occupies a central cultural status in the American consciousness. In “Mark Twain in Venice,” Gorman Beauchamp states that “*The Innocents Abroad*, it is frequently reiterated, is the most popular American travel book ever written, and its popularity stems in large part from the narrative persona that Twain creates—the archetypal American tourist” (sec. 2). However, other critics attribute the success of the book to its humorous (rather scathing) depictions of Europe and the East at a very important juncture in American history. Yet critics disagree on Twain’s intentions and point of view with regard to the others. As a bulky account, Twain’s book can be interpreted differently. A reader can find all kinds of examples to support one reading or another, but if taken holistically, the travelogue enacts disproportionate relations between the we and the they. Yet the narrative suffers from divided loyalties and persistent ambivalences, particularly in Twain’s response to other cultures and terrains. The ambivalence in tone is manifest in his response to Europe. However, the more he advances toward the territory of the Arab or Muslim other, the less ambiguous he becomes in terms of his scathing assessments and othering postures. Twain’s ambivalence decreases as he advances more into the East. There are times when one may perceive that Twain is predisposed to “other,” devalue, and demonize Arabs as radically
different from the American Self. Even when sometimes it is not quite clear whether Twain is being ironic or serious, his representations of Arab territory and people mainly remain stereotypical. Mostly, he essentializes Arabs/Muslims as inferior, irrationally violent, and thus untrustworthy. Worse, Twain (or the narrator) even voices outright animosity toward Islamic/Arabic difference. Very often Twain and other travelers resort to verbal violence, fantasizing about splitting Bedouins or Mohammedans into two halves. Such verbal venues expose high levels of lurking insecurities and desirable violence toward the different culture.  

In fact, I was introduced to Innocents through American Orientalism, a very highly documented and informative book by Douglas Little. Little highlights Innocents’ milestone role in establishing and reinforcing the image of Arabs and Muslims in American consciousness. He traces the interplay of various genres and traditions that constitute and feed American orientalism through both pop and elite discourses. Little states that:

No one probably did more to shape nineteenth-century U.S. views of the Middle East, however, than Mark Twain, whose darkly humorous account of his calamitous tour of the Holy Land sold nearly 100,000 copies in the two years after it was published in 1869. A master of irony, Twain titled his saga of this eastward odyssey The Innocents Abroad and provided scathing sketches of his fellow travelers, most of whom he found guilty of tactless, excessive pride, and what twentieth-century critics would call cultural imperialism.
What may well have stood out in the mind of Twain’s readers, however, were the venomous vignettes he offered of the local population. Terming Muslims “a people by nature and training filthy, brutish, ignorant, unprogressive, [and] superstitious” and calling the Ottoman Empire “a government whose Three Graces are Tyranny, Rapacity, [and] Blood,” Twain found little correlation between the “grand oriental picture which I had worshipped a thousand times” in Arabian Nights and the gritty reality he encountered during his Arabian days. The Arabs of Palestine were mired in dirt, rags, and vermin, he observed, and “do not mind barbarous ignorance and savagery.” . . . To be sure, some readers of Twain’s account must have marveled at the author’s sarcastic wit, but many more probably put down Innocents Abroad with their orientalist images of a Middle East peopled by pirates, prophets, and paupers more sharply focused than ever. (13-4)

The crux of Little’s argument is that such stereotypes and modes of relation have been maintained through conscious and subconscious coalescence of elitist and pop representations of the Arab. Implicitly, Little does not rule out the possibility of intentional and willful distortion of the image and reality of Arab people and terrain due to ulterior motives. Although Little’s study does not engage postmodernist or post-colonial perspectives, his expositions and the texts he refers to show a convergence of many factors such as the prevalence of logocentric blindness toward alterity, mutual misunderstanding and the recycling of old and surfacing of new conflicts, such as the Crusades, Barbary Wars, and Ottoman Empire’s thrust into Europe. All these comprise
active subtexts that need to be reckoned with. For example, in a recent thesis submitted to the Naval Postgraduate School, Timothy E. Kalley revives “Barbary Wars” history and memories. He states “The USA was forced to pay up to 20% of its income to Barbary States” (Kalley 15). Kalley’s study discusses the Barbary Wars’ role in establishing the American Navy and the rise of the United States as an imperial or international power that needs free passage through the Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea. This study avoids one-sided explanations and does not demonize cultures as a whole. It basically presents the strategic stakes involved and explains why the USA cannot let the Middle East break away from under its grip. The study also proves that the French and even the British—not only Arab states—practiced piracy on a regular basis as an easy way to earn money.  

Yet, the official explanations of the 9/11 terrorist attacks invoke the Barbary Wars to prove that Arabic-Islamic aggression against the United States is not something new, despite historical and power differences between then and now. A post-9/11 Department of State report states that:

America’s experience with international terrorism is as old as the United States itself, and many of our presidents have faced difficult choices in crafting appropriate responses. The Barbary pirates were a famous early example. During the late 1700s and early 1800s, seaborne bandits from Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers frequently raided American ships off the Mediterranean’s Barbary Coast. . . . President Thomas Jefferson finally put a stop to this with an early version of our current no-concessions policy, by refusing ransom demands of the Barbary pirates. (Department of State 202-3)
As a result, Arabs occupy a negative image in (mainstream) American consciousness. It seems that such images have found their ways into Twain’s account of the East. Some of these stereotypes still function these very days.

Looking at *Innocents* from contemporary critical perspectives, Reinaldo Francisco Silva notices its colonial and imperial undertones. She argues that:

Contemporary postcolonial critics would not hesitate to note that Samuel Clemens’s mindset when publishing *The Innocents Abroad* was similar to that of a “colonizer”—that is, an individual who looked at Otherness with patronizing eyes”. . . . The dialectics of a dominant versus minor or subordinate culture present in narratives about empire—such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, and E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*—is comparable to the one we encounter in the *Innocents Abroad*. . . . In Said’s words, the “inferior” will always be inferior no matter what, and this is what we gather from Twain’s narrative.

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Although I would not equate Twain’s writings with that of Conrad’s or Kipling’s, it is still understandable why Silva views *Innocents* as part of the colonial canon, although Twain claims his book to be a realistic account of “pleasure” trip into Europe and the East. To explain, in the preface to *Innocents*, a manifesto-like statement, Twain announces his intention to distance himself from a whole tradition of travel writing that romanticizes, instead of factually, represents the other. Twain states that:

This book is a record of a pleasure trip. If it were a record of a solemn scientific expedition, it would have about it that gravity, that profundity,
and that impressive incomprehensibility which are so proper to works of that kind, and withal so attractive. Yet notwithstanding it is only a record of a picnic, it has a purpose, which is to suggest to the reader how he would be likely to see Europe and the East if he looked at them with his own eyes instead of the eyes of those who traveled in those countries before him. I make small pretense of showing anyone how he ought to look at objects of interest beyond the sea—other books do that, and therefore, even if I were competent to do it, there is no need.

I offer no apologies for any departures from the usual style of travel-writing that may be charged against me—for I think I have seen with impartial eyes, and I am sure I have written at least honestly, whether wisely or not. (1; emphasis in original)

“Realistic” and “pleasure” suggest neutrality and exclude the possibility of intentional distortion or politicized accounts. Hence, one would expect the book to offer a more nuanced and engaged approach to the reality and conditions of the others than that is offered by previous travel writers who resort to romance and sentimental dramatizations. But strangely enough, Twain’s realistic writings, too, silence and reduce alterity by appropriating the image of Arabs for public consumption.

Twain’s “mimetic” approach is designed to correctively and correctly represent Europe and the East to the American reader, as if “he” is looking at them “with his own eyes.” What Twain will see may very likely correspond to what any other American will see had they been to the same places. Thus, Twain claims a public representational role. Since reality is just out there, he basically needs impartial eyes and a pen to
unproblematically represent and mediate the reality of the other to the public. Hence, two American travelers looking at the East with impartial eyes will see and represent similar objects. Yet, it is worth noting that in both romance travel writings that Twain parodies and his mimetic travelogues, it is the American audience and the American on-looker/writer that really matter. In both cases the other remains at the disposal of the observing and representing agent.

Even if Twain successfully substitutes romance with realism—a very questionable feat on its own—the move does not engender any fundamental change in self-other positions on the grid of power relations. Realistic representations do not empower the other, nor do they allow him/her to actively participate in the construction of his/her own image and reality. Supposedly, realistic representations objectively mediate reality through linguistic or other mediums. By virtue of his position as a modern rational subject, Twain or his narrator guarantees meaning by striving to objectively match objects with their meanings or signs. Such a mimetic approach correlates with the correspondence and nomenclature theories of meaning that function by maintaining the possibility of correspondence among signs and their referents. Assuming that the representing subject is neutral and that the linguistic medium he/she uses is transparent make meaning-formation a less problematical process that it really is and elides the fact that representation or discourses are entrenched in power relations.

However, the shift from romance to realism does not disturb subject-object relations. For power relations are not questioned in either genre, nor are contemporary critical concepts such as logocentrism, Eurocentrism, or positionality part of the problematics of representations. Therefore, if Twain finds American culture and
landscape superior to foreign terrains and cultures or Moroccan women exceedingly ugly, this is the case because this is how things really are. Twain has nothing to do with it since he is simply recording what his eyes see! No prejudice or malice is involved, let alone postmodernist concepts of logocentrism or ethnocentrism. The touristic relation of Twain as observer versus foreign terrains and people as objects of observation is not thematized or questioned. Twain’s financial as well as authorial/power privileges do not seem to affect what he writes or the image of those whom he writes about. However, it turns out that similar to romance, Twain’s mimetic writings are ethnocentric and alterity-reductive. In a sleight of hand, Twain’s new approach confirms previously established negative stereotypes, on the one hand, and ironically demystifies American audiences with the images of the “noble Arab on his Arabian steed” or Arabic pictographic landscapes, on the other. Twain deconstructs those positive and noble images that constitute the stock of previous travel writings concerning the East, particularly Palestine and Syria. In their stead, he sees filth, vermin, backwardness, and stupidity.

Furthermore, such staged encounters have a limited value. I use staged to denote that cross-cultural meetings can be superficial due to mutual preconceptions and expectations. More specifically, some kind of touristic, I would say (generic), play between guest and host parties takes place: host subjects try to cater for tourists’ demands. Alternatively, the staged/framed self-other inter-cultural encounters may be the dominant, if not the only, way a modernist mainstream subject processes and meets its others. The outcome of such encounters is almost always predictable: what one is looking for and how one is looking for it determine what would be seen and unseen. Although Twain allegedly distances himself from previous romance travel writers, he still upholds
the East to its images in romances, the Bible and Arabian Nights. Worse, Twain even lashes out at the other for falling short of its representations in romances and other fictional writings, though he also critiques previous travel writers who are responsible for such misrepresentations.

This double-binding gesture—discrediting romance representations, yet still penalizing reality whenever it fails to live up to them—renders the account ambivalent and inconsistent. Critics have been quick to highlight such divided loyalties or contradictions in Twain’s narratives. For example, in “Patterns of Consciousness,” Forrest G. Robinson deftly argues that Twain’s “binary sensibility” is mainly responsible for the ambivalences and paradoxes that permeate the travelogue. He maintains that “Such related perspectives, all featuring a variation on the contrast between proximate and distant points of vantage, are cognate with thematic oppositions between romance and realism, the “literary” and the “vernacular” styles, “pilgrims” and “sinners,” (my emphasis 47-8). The close examining look of the realist strips foreign lands and peoples of their auras, exposing their usually overlooked defects. It is a detached gaze even when it looks closely—a distancing rather than empathizing gaze. More important, the realistic perspective is not value free; foreign lands and terrains are measured relative to American customs, values and landscapes. Whoever and whatever does not conform to the American yardstick is usually stigmatized as different or lacking.

As a result, the new representations become satiric, parodic, or burlesque. While romances emphasize or represent the world as it should be, realism supposedly represents the world as it is, but satire capitalizes on defects and wrongs. Thus, I think Twain’s realistic pretensions collapse, particularly toward the end of the book where he becomes
so sarcastic being both physically and emotionally drained. Besides, Twain’s humanism as well as his penchant for humor and irony contributes to textual ambiguities and contradictions. For instance, Henry Nash Smith faults Twain for failing “to conceive an overall structure or even a way of handling separate incidents that could express reverence and irreverence simultaneously” (37). In contrast, Shelly Fisher Fishkin argues that Twain cannot be pigeonholed in one or another category due to his development as a writer and also due to the diversity of his experiences. His *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894), “exposure to the abolitionist cause,” and his “marriage to Olivia Langdon” all point out that Twain is not racist. But the letters he sent home after moving out of Hannibal in 1853 “show a young man” who “assumed white superiority to be part of the natural order of things” (Fishkin 73-74).

As an Arab-Muslim reader, I think *Innocents* is not that ambivalent or contradictory when it comes to the treatment of Arabs. In fact, most of the ambiguity can be attributed to Twain’s having to revere the Holy Land when he detests its unchristian inhabitants. Twain or his Narrator persistently mocks Arabs’ clothes, cities, women and children, although, sometimes, it is not clear whether he is ironic or serious about it. Twain very often imitates styles and voices to the extent it is hard to know whether he is being serious or parodic/ironic. However, assumptions of cultural superiority orchestrate American travelers’ attitudes towards Arabs and influence Twain’s representations of them. Whenever he looks at the Arab, he sees inferiority and backwardness. If Twain says something positive about the Other, he either contradicts it later or frames it in imperialistic and colonial vocabulary. For instance, in the only case where Twain pays attention to the Other as a fellow human being, he contradicts it a little bit later and
frames the whole critique in imperial discourse. Commenting on how the Ottoman taxing system has adversely affected the Syrians and compromised their potentials, Twain says that:

These people are naturally good-hearted and intelligent, and, with education and liberty, would be a happy and contented race. They often appeal to the stranger to know if the great world will not some day come to their relief and save them. (335; emphasis added)

To paraphrase, according to Twain, the Syrian people cannot help themselves; they consequently seek help form the “great world,” Europe and the United States, to deliver them. Indeed, this is one version, if not the main version, of colonial-imperial metanarratives—casting foreign intervention in terms of sought-after humanistic aide. The romance undertones and heroic gestures are too obvious to miss. The other world, like the helpless female captive, needs the altruistic feats of the masculine hero.

Yet there is more to it than a shift in genres or perspectives. There are times when one can sift political undertones in some of Twain’s passages particularly when he talks about the shift in power relations between the dying Ottoman Empire and the rising European powers. For example, Twain voices his indignation toward England and France for obstructing the overdue destruction of Ottoman Empire at the hands of the Russian Empire. He hopes that Russia would “annihilate” Turkey a “bit.” Such intervention is cast in humanistic philanthropic terms; it is a gift the West delivers to the less fortunate. Ironically, the above single case in which Twain said something nice about Arabs or Muslims becomes contradictory in light of Twain’s following confessions:
It is soothing to the heart to abuse England and France for interfering to save the Ottoman Empire from the destruction it has so richly deserved for a thousand years. It hurts my vanity to see these pagans refuse to eat of food that has been cooked for us; or to eat from a dish we have eaten from. . . I never disliked a Chinaman as I do these degraded Turks and Arabs.

(349)

The Turks’ and Arabs’ not eating with the American travelers may be explained different ways. I suspect that hatred is one of them. Islam does not prohibit eating with Christians or Jews. More important, one can sift that attributing the reason to hatred based on religious grounds is more of Twain’s rather than the hosts’ problem. It seems that he is projecting his logic or hatred unto others. Furthermore, Twain’s racism is blatant as he admits to hating Turks and Arabs more than he hates the “Chinaman.” Actually, whenever Twain struggles to convey the otherness of Arabs, to make it tangible to American audiences, he usually compares them to Red Indians or black slaves—American domestic others. The following example is revealing:

But here in Mellahah, after coming through Syria, and after giving serious study to the character and customs of the country, the phrase “all these kings” loses its grandeur. It suggests only a parcel of petty chiefs –ill-clad and ill-conditioned savages much like our Indians.” (368; emphasis added)

In another passage, Twain writes, “These people about us had other peculiarities, which I have noticed in the noble red man, too: they were infested with vermin, and the dirt had caked on them till it amounted to bark” (357; emphasis added).
Such patronizing stances and supremacist attitudes can be found in texts before and after Twain (e.g., Voltaire’s *Mahomet*, Kipling’s *Kim*, and Huntingdon’s *Clash of Civilizations*).

Twain’s mix of mockery and humor betray the working of dualistic valuations where the Self is the center around which the periphery Others revolve. The following incident reveals that Twain’s representational strategies have involved more than a commitment to mimetic criteria. Twain reports a certain incident when an American doctor of medicine applies some medication to an Arab baby’s sore eyes. The baby’s mother spreads the news and the natives “swarming” toward “us.” Then, Twain describes how “they” looked at the doctor as if he were a “god.” Twain further appropriates Jesus Christ’s miracles into the imperialistic-scientific narrative. In a very complex gesture, Twain compares the scene where impoverished natives flock around the physician to Biblical scenes where they must have flocked around Jesus Christ when he preached to them. After all, “Christ knew how to preach to these simple, superstitious, disease-tortured creatures: He healed the sick” (359). Ironically, Jesus Christ becomes almost a stranger to these natives. In such appropriative narrative act, American scientific-medical advancements look like religious miracles for those science-less people.

Furthermore, Twain does not use this incident of contact and humanistic exchange to empathize with the poor and disease-stricken fellow-human beings, but rather to reaffirm their backwardness and insignificance, casting the scene in colonial terms where the colonized receive philanthropic help from their colonizing benefactors. Such as scene of helping-helped parties recurs in other oriental-colonial writings, such as the image of savage Friday bowing at the feet of Robinson Crusoe. The problem with
such descriptions is that they fail to focus on power relations and the destruction imperial and colonial powers perpetrate, underplaying and ameliorating political and economic interests.

Furthermore, Twain does not see the American traveler in any way obligated or answerable to the other. When he is comical or humorous, the humor is usually at the expense of the other. Sometimes, one senses that the American travelers’ attitudes and that of Twain toward the other are basically similar: the other is too worthless and degraded to merit serious treatment. Even more, the very passages Twain cites as examples of romance exaggeration and formulaic stylized language reveal the presence of deep-rooted hatred and xenophobia from the very first encounters. Mocking Wm. C. Grimes writing style, Twain uncovers underpinning insecurities and anxieties in the land of the enemy. In *Mark Twain on the Loose*, Bruce Michelson states that “William C. Prime, the sentimental and notorious “Grimes” whom Mark Twain ridicules so frequently in the last quarter of *The Innocents Abroad*, knew perfectly well where every such trip by an English-speaking Christian writer had to arrive” (55). However, Twain singles Grimes out to expose the distortions and sometimes contrived scenes to keep the audience interested. Grimes supplies the audience’s or market’s demand for such narratives, one of which seems to be a clear Manichean good we versus evil they paradigm. Accordingly, Twain states that: “I love to quote from Grimes, because he is so dramatic. And because he is so romantic. And because he seems to care but little whether he tells the truth or not, so he scares the reader or excites his envy or admiration” (404).

However, Twain shows that the lurking and low-lying Bedouin mainly serves an imaginary function in such romances. The presence of the menacing Bedouin spics the
tale and allows the audience to identify with Grimes as their Christian American hero. Romances need such polarities to hold and materialize. The enemy or antagonist helps consolidate a “we” against an outsider other, both narratively and extra-narratively. The following passage, taken from Grime’s, is typical. Twain narrates that:

At Beit Jin, where nobody had interfered with him, he crept out of his tent at dead of night and shot at what he took to be an Arab lying on a rock, some distance away, planning evil. . . . In Samaria, he charged up a hill, in the face of a volley of stones; he fired into the crowd of men who threw them. He says: *I never lost an opportunity* of impressing the Arabs with the perfection of American and English weapons. (404; emphasis in original)

The above passage reveals a lot about the travelers’ and their audiences’ psychodramas and religious sentiments. It also reveals certain acceptable and conventional levels of enmity toward a demonized alterity. There are instances when the American travelers along with Twain fantasize about battling the enemy. These fantasies range from splitting the enemy into two halves to eating them.

Twain adopts similarly patronizing and authoritative postures toward Arabs. More important, he appropriates their voice, speaking on their behalf. Essentializing them in terms of their supposed opposition to Western Christianity, Twain inadvertently attributes Western dialectical ways of thinking to them. In fact, Islam does not posit Christianity as the enemy, nor does it promote conflict with others simply due to differences in faith. Islam establishes its relations with non-Muslims on contractual terms of mutual rights and duties. If such regulations are observed, conflict will not ensue. Besides, Islam
mandates fair dealings with Muslims as well as non-Muslims. More important, Islam does not submit to reductive Manichean or essentialist view of human nature. Islam recognizes its being different from Christianity and Judaism, but it also recognizes similarity of source and the possibility of peaceful co-existence.

Accordingly, I find Twain’s repeated depictions of Muslims as “xenophobic” problematic. For example, Twain’s statements that Muslims will never allow a “Christian dog” inside their mosques or that Muslim women will not let a “Christian dog” see their faces do not stand scrutiny. There are no “untouchables” or demonized people in Islam. Paradoxically, Twain reports on many instances when the travelers enter mosques and other Islamic holy places. As for Muslim women who choose to cover their faces, they are not supposed to show their faces to any stranger, be it Muslim or Christian. Twain, too, talks about Christians as if they were a novelty in Islamic and Arabic world, when, in many places in the Arab world, people of all faiths and sects live together as one community, despite differences. The enmity motif is also questionable as one can infer from the book: host communities, including Muslim ones, have been catering and helping tourists travel safely so as to reach their destinations. Ironically, there is only one instance that Twain reports about a host subject acting mean toward tourists. The narrative is taken from Grimes’ writings, which Twain has shown to be prone to exaggeration and distortion. Grimes reports how they were swindled by a young man who offered to show them about the city. The young man is a Christian. Ironically, the Muslim governor, upon hearing of the incident, disciplines the boy by whipping him in front of the tourists and his family. After all, the Arab world was not a lawless jungle.
Therefore, I think Twain’s elisions result from imposing his own preconceptions and dialectical thinking on foreigners, although he critiques former travel writers for bringing with them their own ideological and religious baggage to impose on Palestine. Perhaps, the seeming mistrust has to be contextualized rather than essentialized. The tense relations between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, memories of the Crusades and other Islamic-Christian Europe confrontations are palimpsests. Twain also reveals that the host communities knew little or nothing about America. In spite of the tantalizing accounts of the dangers and vulnerability of travel in Muslim land, something we do not see in Twain’s travel in Europe; actually, Arab Muslims and Bedouins have done nothing whatsoever to harm or endanger the travelers. Rather, Twain confesses to the fact that tourists are made to believe that they are going to be attacked by marauding Bedouins so as to be forced to hire guards for protection. Of course, tourists are made to pay extra money for protection form imaginary dangers. They are expected to give “baksheesh” to the impoverished natives and pay in order to gain access to special sites. Host communities devise ways to squeeze money out of tourists. Tourists are stereotyped as moneyed leisurely people who have a lot of money they need to spend.  

Ironically, Twain’s statements remain one-sided as the Arabs never speak. Due to pre-conceived stereotypes and ideological or epistemological biases, the journey does not initiate dialogue or mutual understanding. No real thick interaction happens. On the contrary, Twain leaves the region disillusioned with his childhood romantic images of it and ends representing it rather negatively to a massive number of readers. On his way back, Twain confesses to being relieved—he is back to normal life. He even mocks other travel writers who would write how difficult it was for them to leave the Holy Land. In
contrast, Twain’s attachments and repose are at home, rather than an ancient holy place or a biblical site. The Palestine he has seen not only does not correspond to the one he has imagined or read about, but also has enforced his Americanism or American exceptionalism.

In fact, Twain argues that former travel writers have not really seen the real barren and impoverished Palestine; on the contrary, Palestine has been a psychological spiritual space unto which they have projected their own desires and confirmed their own religious views. Interestingly, Twain affirms Said’s argument in *Orientalism* that the Orient Europe has seen and produced is mainly a psychological cultural ‘construct,’ most of the times at odds with the reality of the other. Such a construct basically consists of a conglomerate of projections of European fears, desires, and values. To create a distinct superior European self, white Europe has to create its opposite other. The following quote from Twain’s *Innocents* is revealing:

> I am sure, from the tenor of the books I have read, that many who have visited this land in years gone by, were Presbyterians, and came seeking evidence in support of their particular creed; they found a Presbyterian Palestine, and they had already made up their mind to find no other, though possibly they did not knew it, being blinded by their zeal. Others were Baptists, seeking Baptist evidence and Baptist Palestine. . . . Our pilgrims have brought *their* verdicts with them. They have shown it in their conversation ever since we left Beirut [sick]. I can almost tell, in set phrase, what they will say when they see Tabor, Nazareth, Jericho, and
Jerusalem—*because I have the books they will "smouch" their ideas from.*

(388; emphasis in original)

Paradoxically, Twain himself brings in his own mainly secular verdicts with and against which he measures other cultures. The very language he uses is not only subjective but rather charged with historical and cultural connotations; such language is anything but neutral or mimetic. If other previous writers looked through spiritual romance or their different religious confessions, thus producing a Palestine that satisfies and affirms their creeds, Twain, in his turn, has brought his own ethnocentric criteria, such as American spaciousness and technological progress in comparison to an ossified or declining other. To describe lakes and villages in terms of size and depth is not the same as to describe them as ugly and beautiful according to how well they score on such criteria. American cities are spacious, while Arabic cities are small, crowded with narrow streets and homely houses. America symbolizes a progressive technological frontier while these people are still using primitive tools from Adam’s time. Describing caravans in Syria, Twain reports, “Here, you feel all the time just as if you were living about the year 1200 before Christ—or back to the patriarchs. . . . The scenery of the Bible is about you” (352). More problematically, Twain betrays the criteria he is holding the other against also come from reading oriental romances such as *The Arabian Nights.* He too has used the orient as a psychological space unto which he projects his own desires, dreams, and insecurities. With a sense of disillusionment Twain confesses that,

In boyhood I longed to be an Arab of the desert and have a beautiful mare, and call her Selim . . . and feed her with my own hands, and let her come
into the tent, and teach her to caress me and look fondly upon me with her
great tender eyes. (361) 13

Still, I think that some of Twain’s descriptions are historically true. For example,
the Ottoman Empire was in a state of decline at the time of Twain’s travel; the Arab
world was very heavily taxed so as to pay the ever-increasing foreign debts the Turkish
rulers were accumulating then. For instance, in The World's Wasted Wealth II, J.W.
Smith maintains that “By the middle of the nineteenth century, the collapse of the
Ottoman Empire was imminent, and European powers started positioning themselves to
claim the spoils” (World’s Wasted). Such contexts and realities are mostly missing from
travel books. For instance, Twain’s descriptions may be selective and limited although
with some historical truth to them, but he does not explain them the way one expects a
historical book to do. Rather, Twain vaguely blames the Ottoman Empire for such
miserable conditions and sometimes he would blame them on Arab-Islamic culture’s
incompatibility with progress, science, and rationalism. Thus, Smith’s account
counterbalances Twain’s seeing such states of affairs in terms of Arab backwardness or
Islamic superstition for historical accounts reveal a very complicated picture where the
Ottomans as well as the Europeans contributed to the disintegration of the Ottoman
Empire. Military losses, internal conflicts, administrative and economic corruption, and
international (European) alliances, forced Turkey to “seek financial help” from “those
with capital (France, England, Russia, Germany, and Austria) for loans to build modern
infrastructure” thus opening the door for Europeans to intervene to further their interests,
and consolidate their control of Turkey’s sources and businesses (Smith). Smith
succinctly sums up the adverse effects of such developments on Ottoman Empire’s subjects:

Through the operations of diverse combines the foreign powers sucked the wealth out of the country. The share of the national income which did not flow directly into the Sultan's coffers went to London, Paris, Viennese or Berlin banks. . . . European capitalism was at its zenith at the time and drank the blood of its victim. ‘With such perfect organization the people were deprived of the fruits of its labour. Nothing was left for the abandoned cities, the treeless forest which had been overfelled, for the fields parched by drought, for the people themselves, who had neither doctors nor teachers.’ (World's Wasted) ¹⁴

Twain repeatedly points out the miserable and sickly appearances of the Arabs they meet, the spread of beggary and many other observations that match historical descriptions of the Arab world as deforested, sapped, and abandoned. Twain also seems to be aware of the competition among France, Britain and Russia over the Ottoman Empire. He actually alludes to a French-British role in protecting Turkey from its inevitable collapse. He does not explain why such countries, staunch enemies of Turkey, should act as such. However, history books reveal that France and Britain were instrumental in thwarting Russian interests in Turkey. They also wanted the nominal Turkey intact till they positioned themselves in the best manner to inherit the Ottoman territories and keep power balances (see Benoist-Mechin’s The End of the Ottoman Empire and Fromkin’s A Peace to End All Peace).
In addition to the above historical elisions as to why the Arabs and Muslims were so uncomely and disarrayed, Twain’s prejudices and frustrations have often interfered with his reactions and descriptions. He is unhappy with the Muslim women who hide their faces and describes them as “mummies,” although whenever he could see a Muslim woman’s face, he describes it as “ugly.” Of course, it is not clear whether these are descriptions or pre-judgments. The audience obviously will accept Twain’s descriptions for their face value, even if they will have a laugh about it. Twain is particularly frustrated with the invisibility and inaccessibility of Muslim women for the tourists’ imperial or examining gaze. The veil frustrates and defies the gazing imperial eye. It also prevents the masculine gaze from mapping the female body. Somehow, the fact that Muslim women are veiled makes them unavailable for Subject-object dialectics. Twain cannot tolerate the women’s inaccessibility or respect these people religious and cultural differences and beliefs.  

One also can perceive the working of dualistic valuation systems; one for the Same and one for the different others. Upon leaving Turkey, the travelers are stopped and asked to disgorge any souvenirs and antiques they may have carried away with them. The travelers, including Twain, have reacted vehemently to such a move, affirming cultural (racist) views and resorting to verbal violence:

I never resist the temptation to plunder a stranger’s premises without feeling insufferably vain about it. This time I felt proud beyond expression. I was serene in the midst of the scoldings that were heaped upon the Ottoman government for its affront offered to a pleasing party of entirely respectable gentlemen and ladies. I said, “We that have free
souls, it touches us not.” The shoe not only pinched our party, but it pinched hard; a principal sufferer discovered that the imperial order was enclosed in an envelope bearing the seal of the British Embassy at Constantinople, and therefore must have been inspired by the representative of the Queen. This was bad—very bad. Coming solely from the Ottomans, it might have signified only Ottoman hatred of Christians, and a vulgar ignorance as to genteel methods of expressing it; but coming from the Christianized, educated, politic British legation, it simply intimated that we were a sort of gentlemen and ladies who would bear watching! (323-4)

The American tourists respond one way to the Turk or Arab as Other and another way to the British or French as moderately Other. Thus, if the “order” to “disgorge” comes from the Turks, it affirms hatred, vulgarity and ignorance on their part, but if it comes from a Christian educated party, it is merely a bad thing that is still rationalizable and justifiable. After all, the British are “Christianized” and “Educated”; their action is economically motivated: they are protecting their excavation rights. But if the order comes from the Turks, it is completely unacceptable. This is Turkish territory; yet they do not have the right to protect it. Twain’s not recognizing the Turks’ right to their patrimony may be attributable to the fact that at that time, the Turkish rule was nominal; almost every thing was controlled by European countries. The situational irony is too blatant to miss, at least for me as a Muslim reader. I do not think that it is intended to be read ironically in light of Twain’s targeted audience. I will cite another example of double-standards to dispel doubts that Twain does not mean what he says:
We entered, and the pilgrims broke specimen from the foundation walls, though they had to touch, and even step, upon the “praying-carpets” to do it. . . . Suppose a party of armed foreigners were to enter a village church in America and break ornaments from the altar railings for curiosities, and climb up and walk upon the Bible and the pulpit cushions? However, the cases are different. One is the profanation of a temple of our faith—the other only the profanation of a pagan one. (412; emphasis added)

The above-quoted passage shows that Twain linguistically distances himself from the profanation act. “We entered” refers to all the travelers including Twain, but it is the “pilgrims”—Twain usually uses this term to mock those travelers, who are specifically traveling for religious purposes—who chop specimen from the mosque’s pillars, touch, and tread on, Islamic holy items. Twain, or the narrator, does not participate; he merely witnesses and reports, thus setting himself apart from the pilgrims’ obsession with sample-collection that usually proves harmful and disrespectful to monuments and native cultures. Nonetheless, the last two statements complicate the narrative. If Twain means what he says, he then must share the pilgrims’ deep-seated disrespect and antipathy toward Muslims: profaning Islamic holy places is not a big deal. After all, it is merely a “profanation of a pagan temple.” Difference justifies disrespect and consequent violence against others.

Some critics defend Twain by pointing out that he is critical of American travelers too. Other critics capitalize on the ambiguities in Twain’s narrator’s voice, or the fact that Samuel Clemens is not the same as the narrator of *Innocents*. However, I tend to agree with Bennett Kravitz who argues that Twain, or his narrator, is as implicated as
everybody else “in the text’s cultural hegemony” (“There’s No Place”). Likewise, Gorman Beauchamp points out that Twain’s “narrator is unabashedly chauvinistic; America, for him, clearly serves as the measure of all things” (sec.2). Even if one would argue that Twain is actually parodying—rather than condoning—such statements still debunk the presence of cultural predisposition toward devaluing and violating the realm of the other. The Same is not ethically bound to, or accountable for, the other. The Same-Other are mutually nullifying. One is an antidote of the other.

From postmodernist, “Cultural Studies,” and postcolonial perspectives, Twain’s stance vis-à-vis the other reaffirms dialectical hierarchies. More accurately, the very stance of the American tourist gazing at and observing a different other is a product of power relations and alterity-blind epistemological foundations. Other cultures are empirically other due to their different beliefs, customs and languages, but more importantly, they are others in relation to the Same. In *Downcast Eyes*, Martin Jay presents a very complex and highly documented argument that Western logocentrism is paralleled by “ocularcentrism,” a subject that is central to touristic sightseeing and gazing at the other. Privileging the Western male subject is paralleled by privileging the ‘eye’ over the other senses. In *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault, too, scrutinizes the nexus between epistemology and seeing, between seeing and knowing, in Western culture. Many feminists have also highlighted the visual relationships between males and females, where females are usually subjected to the male gaze as a sign of their difference on the power grid. In *The Society of Spectacle*, Guy Debord also presents a very complex
argument about the relationship between capitalism and the dominance of the image—the
spectacle—in modern Western culture.

Many writers have studied such concepts as they pertain to travel writings and
tourism to find that such activities are both products of cultural imperialism and
contributors to it. According to Loredana Polezzi, travel writing “represent[s] one of the
crucial cross-roads of the colonial imagination” (32). In “Looking for the ‘Other,’” Jason
Sumich argues that “instead of breaking down boundaries,” tourism depends on, and
reinforces, “Othering,” stating that tourism is “characterized by cultural imperialism,
which is used by tourists as a justification for the massive differences in wealth between
the hosts and the guests” (40). Similarly, in “Research Agenda for the History of
Tourism,” David Engerman argues that many critics note that the “signifier supersedes
the signified” in the tourist's eye: “The ‘tourist gaze,’ then, is not simply constrained but
constructed” (sec. 3). 16

Engerman’s observation about the signifier preceding the signified echoes
Twain’s critiques of romance travel writings where tourists come to affirm their own
creeds and expectations when they look at the other. This also constitutes a major
premise in oriental and post-colonial critiques of Eurocentrism or I would say
“American-centrism.” An example of the signifier supplanting the signified or of the gaze
as a “constructed” post determining the “gazed at”—contra to Twain’s mimetic
manifesto—is when Twain confesses to his and other fellow travelers’ longing to feast
their eyes on radical or exotic difference. This is what he writes about Tangier:

We wanted something thoroughly and uncompromisingly foreign—
foreign from top to bottom –foreign from center to circumference—
foreign inside and outside and all around—nothing anywhere about it to
dilute its foreignness—nothing to remind us of any other people or any
other land under the sun. And lo! In Tangier we have found it. Here is not
the slightest thing that ever we have seen saving in pictures—and we
always mistrusted the pictures before. We cannot anymore. The pictures
used to seem exaggerations—they seemed too weird and fanciful for
reality. But behold, they were not wild enough—they were not fanciful
enough—they have not told half the story. Tangier is a foreign land if ever
there was one, and the true spirit of it can never be found in any book save

*The Arabian Nights.* (47)

I think Twain’s travelogue re-orientates the American audience by correlativey re-
Orientalizing the East, particularly Arab-Islamic world. If the audiences, through
previous travel writings and guide books, see the Orient as a desirable place, a place
where they can see unadulterated beauty, holy sites, historical monuments, or romantic
adventures, Twain’s account belittles such venues through attributing them to generic or
fictional rather than real causes. Twain almost completely replaces the Other as
desirable/exotic with an Other that is primarily a negative site of lack and inferiority. The
economic and political implications of seeing Arabic cities as disarrayed, filthy and
small, Muslim women as mummies, and children as sickly are tantamount to absenting
and de-legitimizing them. Such views when processed in colonial discourse may facilitate
and justify colonial endeavors. For if Palestine is empty other than for those dying
villages, and if the people do not count for much proving *unfit for survival*, the next thing
is to take custody of them and decide on their behalf.
In addition, Twain shifts the terms through which The New World perceives the Other. Instead of seeing Damascus in historical terms as the most ancient city in the world, he looks at it spatially: its size, dimensions, and streets. If he looks at it temporally, it is to point out its lagging behind in terms of progress and technology. The New World is larger, cleaner, and more advanced than the Old World: “The general size of a store in Tangier is about that of an ordinary shower bath in a civilized land” (Twain 51). The comparisons polarize a dying world with that of a prospering civilization. The New World is a civilized one—the Arab world does not merit such description. To see Damascus as a dirty gloomy city differs from seeing it as such by pitting it against the inevitably privileged American city. The following two passages are typical cases:

Magdala is not a beautiful place. It is thoroughly Syrian, and that is to say that it is thoroughly ugly, and cramped, squalid, uncomfortable, and filthy—just the style of cities that have adorned the country since Adam's time, as all writers have labored hard to prove, and have succeeded. (308)

First, it is not clear whether the above passage is descriptive or judgmental. Its logic reads like this: “All Syrian cities are ugly; Magdala is a Syrian city; therefore, Magdala must be ugly.” Syllogistically, “Magdala is ugly” is correct. Such a statement can be derived from the general premises. But, reality may be a different story. Secondly, Magdala is a city of the Other. Hence, it is “ugly” when viewed in light of Twain’s American privileged city. The next passage reveals a lot about Twain’s and other travelers’ negative attitudes toward natives:

We are camped in this place, now, just within the city walls of Tiberias.

We went into the town before nightfall and looked at its people—we cared
nothing about its houses. Its people are best examined at a distance. They are particularly uncomely Jews, Arabs, and Negroes. Squalor and poverty are the pride of Tiberias. (382-83)

Twain and other travelers keep distancing themselves from the native inhabitants of the Arab world to the extent that Arabs become some kind of untouchables. Twain’s detachment is not even scientific where the subject has to distance himself from the object of observation to best analyze and understand it. Rather, this distancing comprises cultural othering and psychological loathing.

Twain’s characterization of the other follows similar linguistic patterns. “I/we” always occupies a privileged agentive spot, delineating a “they” basically on racial and cultural grounds. Linguistic distancing correlates with cultural distancing—some kind of psychological warding off. For example, Twain comments on their own refusal to recognize their guides’ given names or call cities and villages by their Arabic names, too. Although Twain knows that calling guides Ferguson deflates their self-pride, he affirms that no harm is intended. Twain concludes his explanation why they could not use the guides’ names with an indifferent remark: “All guides are Fergusons to us. We can not master their dreadful foreign names” (my emphasis 381). The travelers also rename cities and villages: “After nightfall we reached our tents, just outside of the nasty Arab village of Jonesborough” (353). The place is called “El,” but the American travelers refuse to use such a name. It is not a difficult or unpronounceable name, either.

Obviously, Innocents teems with problematical descriptions and ambiguities. However, I think if read as a semi-historical account of the formations of cross-cultural American-Arab relations, the book reveals the working of systematic othering and
stereotyping. Starting with an irreversible hierarchy where the Same is privileged and empowered over its inferior opposite, the outcome can be predictable. Consequently, the Other becomes a silenced and confiscated party fit for ridicule. Twain also is a legitimate representing agent by virtue of being an American tourist. He legitimates his journey and writing as more correctly representative of the reality of the others than previous writings. Actually, representation is an act of appropriation, reducing the other to the Same—not in the sense of assimilating the other, but rather in the sense of ethnocentric and egoistic processing, a practice that constructs the other negatively or positively, but never as is. Alterity is reduced and elided; it is an absent presence.

In concrete terms, appropriating others’ image and voice and recasting them negatively may sanction physical violence against them along with eliding their rights or any obligation the Self may have toward them. For example, at the beginning of Othello, Iago and Horatio awake Desdemona’s father to inform him about his daughter’s elopement with the Moor. They verbally transport Othello from the human realm to that of animals by comparing him to monkeys, horses, and rams. Such a rhetorical move is problematical as violence against animals is more sanctioned than violence against the Same: humans. In action, those who are different, or made different, may become subject to physical violence concomitant on or simultaneous with sanctioning verbal violence against them.
Although Twain very often polarizes Christians and Muslims (savages, pagans, and infidels), his main othering mechanism remains modernist: he privileges the spacious, technologically advanced, and temporally progressing American city over the backward, crowded, narrow, and filthy Arab cities. The previous analyses illustrate the working of more than ‘anti-otherness’ epistemological predispositions. Rather, one can detect the convergence of a sustained cultural effort to create the other in a certain way as a result of the convergence of epistemological blindness and context-bound (situational) pragmatics. Pragmatics, here, is a question of political and economic interests that slant the self toward delineating a certain culture one way or another. The pragmatics of the situation also allow one to consider the role others play or fail to play in their image construction and dissemination. I have already provided some context behind mollifying the Ottoman Empire as it started to decline as a superpower. In fact, a powerful State or Other has more control over its image. Demonizing a powerful Other is not the same as demonizing it when it is weak and vulnerable one. In fact, when contextualized, self-other dichotoms may cease to denote clearly drawn boundaries between West and East or masters and slaves. Such boundaries operate intra-culturally as well as cross-culturally, although it seems that the modernist subject forms or happens at the expense of its others, a relation that is bound to create imbalanced self-other encounters and distortions.

Although I have focused on Innocents as an example of modernist reductive dialectics, it is important to see it in relation to a whole tradition of orientalist writings as it is intertextual in a sense: it falls back on Biblical stories, Arabian Nights, former travel
writers’ accounts and other historical subtexts such as the Barbary Wars and the Crusades. Conversely, *Innocents* is not a politicized account in the sense of an official State document or even in the sense one may consider Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” to be pro-colonialism. Still, it is worth noticing when similar frames and even vocabulary deployed in *Innocents* resurface in later accounts of the region and its people in both official/political, elite, and pop genres. One persistent motif pre-shadowed in Twain’s *Innocents* is conditional cultural attack. Namely, the attack on Arabic-Islamic identity singles out certain characteristics as bad; such characteristics are blamed for Arab-Muslims’ failure to catch up with the civilized modern world.

For instance, Islamic faith is usually singled out as a major cause behind Arab-Muslim difference and backwardness. Constructed as a “superstitious” faith, Islam is usually blamed for making Arabs irrational anti-Western fanatics. If Arabs would slough Islam off or modernize-rationalize it, they would catch up and become more appropriable. Whether such judgments are based on malice or misunderstanding is a different story. The fact that Islam is a world religion embraced by peoples from all races and regions, that Islam has contributed to human civilization, that it was the leading world civilization for more than a millennium, do not seem to count. When in fact unlike Christianity of the Middle Ages, Islam is compatible with ethically-guided science. As long as American-Arab encounters submit to established cultural power dialectics that are self-centric, no real breakthroughs will occur. Although I do not understate Arabs/Muslims roles in such relations and contortions, we need to more meticulously analyze the causes of such distortions rather than systematically blame the different other (sometimes victim) for everything.
The same strategy was also followed with the Native Americans that resulted in their extermination and destruction of their communities. For example, H. H. Brackenridge (1782) argues that Indians have no land rights due to their being sub-humans; he unproblematically wonders:

> What do these ringed, streaked, spotted and speckled cattle make of the soil? . . . I would as soon admit a right in the buffalo to grant lands, as in Kill-buck, the Big Cat, the Big Dog, or any of the ragged wretches that are called chiefs. (qtd. in Mayfield 63)<sup>20</sup>

Brackenridge denying Indians any rights to their land because their chiefs are named after animals is surprising. He wants to take their land by any means, but he has first to rhetorically/verbally deny them their patrimony rights by transporting them into animals.

What is interesting about the previous examples is that some of the formulas and ways of talking about the Other keep surfacing in other genres and in throughout different historical periods, although American Orientalism sheds light on the significant role popular magazines such as National Geographic and Atlantic Monthly have played in forming the negative image of Arabs: “In the late 1920s [National Geographic] had become a window on the world for millions of middle-class Americans, contributing to widening the “political and cultural gap” between the West and the other world (Little 17). Little quotes from a massive number of texts that point in the same directions. For example, a 1927 article titled, “East of Suez to the Mount of Decalogue,” describes Arabs as “fatalistic and irresponsible,” bandits roaming “Sinai desert as childlike camel jockeys, shunning Western technology and embracing Mohammedan superstition” (qtd. in Little).<sup>21</sup> Such views are echoed in a “photo essay on Libya, where
Benito Mussolini was waging one of the most brutal colonial wars of the twentieth century,” predictably covering up “imperial carnage” and optimizing it into the metanarratives of progress: “To-day the will of New Italy dominates this long derelict land and Italian agriculturalists are teaching new ways to Berber, Arab, and black Sudanese” (qtd. in Little). Little also cites an October 1932 article, “Into Burning Hadhramaut,” describing an incursion into “the interior of Southwest Arabia straight out of the tales of Scheherazade” (qtd. in Little 18). The following passage reinstitutes subject-object dialectics with sexual undertones that cannot be missed: “That Arabia has been able to guard its mysteries so long against the inquisitive Westerner,” “is due partly to the physical features of the country and partly to the religious fanaticism of its sparse population” (qtd. in Little 18). The language and set images used to describe Arab-Muslims uncannily concur with Twain’s, Voltaire’s, and even contemporary accounts of the Arab-Western relations. 22

Ali Bouânani concurs with Little with regard to the suspicious roles widely read magazines such as National Geographic and Atlantic Monthly play in obscuring (through elucidating) the causes behind Arab-West tensions. He holds that, with millions of subscribers, National Geographic’s “articles about other people and cultures” “remain suspiciously focused on the exotic” . . . to underline of [sic] the “difference” between the American and the Other” (21). Bestselling books such as Jihad vs. McWorld simplify the picture, too. Ironically such studies offer and recycle packaged-for-mass-consumption answers that obscure hegemonic-imperial powers’ more destructive roles in international relations. Such studies conceal more than they reveal about alleged or real Arab-Islamic anti-modernism. For example, despite being highly documented, Jihad remains
incomplete: it does not present the point view of the other. Besides, its analytical efforts count for very little since they predictably polarize Islam and modernity as mutually exclusive. More significant, in his 2001 introduction—specifically designed to provide confused and concerned American people with answers to the 9/11 atrocities—Benjamin R. Barber presents a bleak clash of civilizations scenario modeled after wars between good and evil. Barber downplays American political and military roles while focusing the spotlight on Muslims’ religious insecurities in the face of a global consumerist culture. This is how he begins his introduction and sets the tone and tenor of such analyses:

> On September 11, Jihad’s long war against McWorld culminated in a fearsomely unprecedented and altogether astonishing assault on the temple of free enterprise in New York City and the cathedral of American military might in Washington, D. C. . . . Until that day, history’s seemingly ineluctable march into a complacent postmodernity had appeared to favor McWorld’s ultimate triumph. (xi; emphasis added)

Such packaged stock images find their way into State foreign policies, political discourses, academic institutions, and (particularly mainstream) elite news programs. The following excerpt is typical:

> When Ambassador Henry Villard found himself mired in endless negotiations over a U. S. airbase in June 1954, he cabled Washington that the tactics of Libyan officials were ‘tantamount to blackmail and show[ed] [little change from [the] Barbary pirate tradition. Two years later Henry Byroade, the U. S. ambassador to Egypt, confirmed that Nasser and his followers were volatile, unpredictable, and quixotic. ‘Arabs are quite
capable of getting completely beside themselves’ on matters related to
Israel, Byroade warned Dulles on 14 March 1956, “because by nature they
[are] inclined to fight windmills.” (qtd. in Little 28)²³

Moreover, celebrity authors such as Bernard Lewis, a founding father of Middle Eastern
studies, blame Muslims’ rage toward the West on their Islamic faith and inability to
modernize. In “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” Lewis attributes Muslims’ “irrational
hatred” of “Judeo-Christian civilization” to many homegrown causes, most important of
which is the “revival of ancient prejudices” among Islamic extremists (Lewis 50-60).
Lewis never stops to analyze the real roots behind the revival of ‘ancient prejudices.’
Actually, casting Islamic world problems in terms of “rage” and “prejudice” almost
completely occludes empathetic or attentive probing analyses. This Hollywood style
characterization of a whole civilization reduces it to a number of negative
images/emotions—rage and prejudice. The Islamic world with its intellectuals and a
spectrum of currents and sub-currents is reduced to its irrational emotive side. Such
negative expositions usually overwhelm positive or balanced presentations such as the
ones we find in the writings of Edward Said, Naom Chomsky, and Douglas Little.

In addition, the media through news programs, Hollywood movies, local radio
stations, and news networks such as CNN, NBC, and others consolidate and disseminate
such images. For example, different versions of Aladdin, The Sheik, Black Thunder and
The Haj all widely viewed movies characterize the Arab as exotic, ‘anti-modern’
childish, and thankless. In The Haj a British soldier tells the main character, “The Arabs
will never love you for what good you have brought them. They don’t know how to
really love. But hate.” Similarly, True Lies, a Hollywood hit, pits Arnold Schawrsnigger
in the role of a CIA undercover agent against a secret terrorist group referred to a
“crimson Jihad,” planning to carry out a nuclear attack in the USA. At best, these young
Arab men receive a dismissive treatment since they are mysteriously bent on destruction.
Their planned aggression against a host country like the United States is not investigated;
it is explained in terms of these Arabs’ mysterious or misplaced anger. The logic of
normal “we” versus “irrational they” is reaffirmed.

At least for me as a Muslim-Arab, Western and particularly American mainstream
discourses about Arabs as others create their own différends in the Lyotardian sense: the
Other is judged according to the phrase regimes of the Same rendering the Other’s pain
or cause unrepresentable. The suffering or violence the Other undergoes is preemptively
rationalized, neutralized, or subsumed through the idioms of the judge/victimizer. To
explicate, Taylor Merleau Chloë states,

Sometimes a damage cannot be expressed, whether because the being who undergoes the damage is unable to speak in a language to which the judges will listen (as in the case of animals, children, the mentally ill, the dead), or because the judges are the ones who have done the damage, whether directly or through affiliation, or because the testimony of the one damaged is deprived of authority for whatever reason. Such a scenario is called a différend, and the person who suffers from both a damage and a loss of the ability to prove it is a victim. . . . ‘The silencing of certain voices, the effacement of certain persons’ sufferings, is achieved through the denial that they are ‘whos,’ or through their abjection, and this makes violence to them permissible, indeed invisible. In the case of the Gulf
War, for instance, the Muslim was abjected, Butler notes, not only through the traditional feminization of the Easterner, but through homophobic tropes, which facilitated the acceptance and erasure of the violence of this war. ("Postmodern Ethics" par. 1-2)

Chloë employs Judith Butler’s appropriation of Julia Kristeva’s concept of “abjection.” I want to comment on the relation between abjection in concrete action and defacement in rhetorical acts. Actually, the thrust of post-modern ethics as indebted to Levinasian focus on the infinite obligation to the human face comes into play here. Others in the example of Iraq are rendered faceless so as to facilitate their victimization. In many military and political accounts, the Islamic subject accused of terrorism is characterized as faceless. Faceless means different things, here. Levinas’s focus on the human face’s role in guarding against violating alterity or eliding ethical obligations illustrates the dangers involved in rendering others faceless and voiceless. I have noticed the erasure of the reality and pain of the other while watching news programs, debates, and analyses concerning the Second Gulf War. To go, or not to go, to war is formulated in terms of political and economic self-interests. Such debates and analysis would detail the war scenarios in terms of losses and gains within the metanarratives of scientific efficiency.

Moreover, the mainstream media along with the State have successfully performed several elisions through something close to Orwellian Newspeak of world order, security, preemption, and humanitarian aide for the oppressed captivated Iraqi people. The war discourse cast in humanistic terms leaves no room for opposition. Whoever opposes such noble intentions of bringing democracy and modernity to a region trudging under a dictator like Hussein must be an enemy of freedom. Thus, those who say
no to imperial forces and resist become faceless enemies, thugs, insurgents, and terrorists. They fall beyond human boundaries and thus do not merit fair treatment or dialogue. They only merit destruction—being faceless. I know how delicate and thorny such issues are, especially the 9/11 and Gulf War realities are still raw. To try to contextualize and explain these issues is not the same to justify or condone them.

Stances toward the other, even those that critically push the edges, still fall short of voicing or completely dialoging with and engaging the other. Alterity remains unacknowledged, or if it is, it is never acknowledged in terms of Heideggerian letting be or Levinasian infinite obligation to the human face. For example, writers who are critical of colonial and imperial powers such as Joseph Conrad and Aurora Bertrand never take a real leap into the other, or consider the other a legitimate rival party beyond logocentric or self-centric frames. If they critique imperial powers’ actions, they mainly critique imperial means, rather than imperial ideological or epistemological foundations. Despite its subtlety and ambiguity, Heart of Darkness constructs the Other based on European epistemological foundations. If the light-darkness dyads are disturbed at one moment, they are reestablished in another. The novel also submits to available modes of speaking about the other such as the civilized-savage differentials. Conrad’s Marlow deploys dominant anthropological and psychological beliefs about human psyche and nature to make sense of the other. Psychologically speaking, Africa stands for the subconscious mind or brutal instincts of human psyche, while Europe generally stands for the Superego. If Africa is lawless and tempting, Europe is a civilized space where there are police stations and other constraints. Thus, Africa is dangerous as it is somehow Europe without restraints or “rivets.”
The inability of the center to recognize the periphery as equally legitimate, and the persistence of logocentric/Eurocentric paradigms when dealing with the different can be detected on all levels. We all begin with instances of minimum ethnocentrism: we bring our value systems and experiences with us whenever we look or write about the other. What I am critical of is excessive ethnocentrism. I am also critical of willful distortion and reduction of alterity. The following example provides a borderline case between unconscious and intentional reduction of alterity due to submitting to hierarchical logic. In their analysis of Aurora Bertrana’s *El Marroc Sensual i Fanatic*, Abel Albet-Mas and Joan Nogue succinctly highlight recurrent instances of resisting the other’s narrative or point of view, if it does not conform to pre-set frames. Identifying as Western liberated woman, Bertrana has to construct Moroccan women within these very terms. Accordingly, Bertrana, somehow like Twain, is disappointed when her Muslim sisters do not confess to their oppression and inferiority. When the Muslim women affirm they are happy, Bertrana would not accept their statements. After all, as a Western researcher, she knows Muslim women better that they know themselves. Leila Ahmed exposes the self-congratulating and patronizing rewards of constructing Muslims women “as existing mindlessly passive” and “perhaps unaware of the oppression, tolerating a situation no Western woman would tolerate (526). Such polarizations not only misappropriate and misrepresent Muslim women’s voice and image, but they also establish European women as superior. The dialectics of the norm-aberrant, or legitimate center versus unhealthy periphery, are very obvious here. Ironically, beginning with such premises, a Western feminist does not even need to interview or travel to Morocco to
prove her points. Her very logic necessitates such conclusions of self-superiority—her very journey is a quest to verify and satisfy such a conception.

As a Third World subject, one is bound to encounter such custodial paternalistic postures on the part of hegemonic Western subjects. For example, in some recent novels and memoirs about the First Gulf War, such as Anthony Sowfford’s *Jarhead* or Daniel Folz’s *Into a Dying Sun*. In such accounts, one may encounter humanistic critiques of the war as wasteful and destructive, but the critiques usually remain within mainstream accounts of the war as necessary evil done for noble ends, thus optimizing or ameliorating a realpolitik reality into humanistic metanarratives or political necessity. For instance, the soldier turned narrator in *Jarhead* critiques the war as basically benefiting the rich and powerful oil czars and international oil corporations with victims on both sides of the conflict, but he winds up justifying the massive carnage and life destruction the first Gulf War has caused to the region by processing the oil war within optimizing humanistic and noble metanarratives. Ironically, one of the revelatory moments in the narrative is when the soldier-narrator discovers that, after all, the dead Iraqis are helpless “humans” caught in a situation bigger than they are. Besides, the novel reveals that the other is partly a construct and partly a reality. Having been prepared to fight a cunning and ferocious foe, the soldiers are disappointed that the Iraqi military did not put any real fight as the war ended so quickly without having a chance to confirm their manhood and superiority.

In other words, such critiques rarely remain logocentric or ethnocentric. They rarely question already established hierarchies and power relations. The questions usually are raised about whether the decision to go to war has been beneficial or necessary. For
example, such writings question whether such a war has improved stability and established a more just world order, but they never question these very arrangements or terms. For example, the tacit assumption is that USA as a Western and powerful country has to regulate and fix the world. Very rarely such right or legitimacy is questioned. Rather, mostly it is the means and outcomes that are mainly focused on. The foundations remain intact. There are many examples that enact crude and subtle hierarchical and subsumptive mechanisms, obviously occluding real dialogue, analysis and communication. On overt levels, humanistic and altruistic concerns frame such relations. But on covert levels, one may sift the working of power relations in terms of realpolitik. These two levels create a lot of tensions and confusions within the very texts. Such contradictions are apparent in *Innocents*, *Heart of Darkness* and the other texts I have touched on.

* * *

Finally, I would like to conclude this chapter by referring to one important study by J. A. Progler, “The Utility of Islamic Imagery in the West: An American Case Study.” Progler studies “Islamic-Western encounters from the perspective of utility” so as to “locate the correlations between imagery and political economy” (“Utility”). He argues that Western political and media interests construct a certain image of the Muslim other that usually fits certain political-economic goals. He states that:

When the Ottomans were at the peak of their power in the 17th century, European princes viewed them as a respected and powerful rival. However, with the waning of Ottoman power, the Muslim world was seen as a place of exotic trials and espionage. This newly exoticized Orient
began to be loved for its objects, while its people were despised or belittled. By the 19th century, race-based explanations for colonization had fully re-emerged. (“Utility”)

Islamic sexuality receives two opposite evaluations depending on Western own views of sexuality at a certain historical juncture. For example, Medieval West used to consider Islam as sexually licentious and lax while modern West considers Islamic sexuality as restrictive. To quote, “In Medieval Europe, the Popes began to use Islam as a proxy to convince backsliding Christians to return to the fold and to convince themselves that Christians were chaste, denouncing Islam as a sexually liberal and even licentious religion” (“Utility”).

Thus, literary and theoretical accounts of cross-cultural dynamics have to be supplanted with contextualized historical political and economic factors. To essentialize self-other relations, or cross-cultural interactions, as mainly exploitive may backfire unless lived realities are examined, too. There is a risk that such views homogenize diverse and resilient cultures and historical eras into a monolith. An interdisciplinary holistic approach to cross-cultural and intra-groups dealings is necessary for subjects are not merely constituted in opposition to their others. Subject can fall on complex networks of relations that exceed clear-cut oppressor-oppressed descriptions. We need to surpass such restrictive and inaccurate delineations to more grounded analyses of realities affecting self-other dealings. Analysis and description should be a first step toward taking proactive roles in changing realities and rhetorics responsible for imbalanced and unjust arrangements. Others also have to participate in changing their own realities materialistically as well as discursively. A strong and full-fledged confident Other not
only carves a positive space for itself, he/she also can avoid entering relations that exploit
and imperialize him/her. For it is idealistic to wait for the other party to charitably fix
one’s image and raise one to his/her level unless one seriously works for it. Thus, in
Chapter Three, I read texts that present more proactive others who launch a counter
discourse and resist unjust arrangements since it is one thing to dwell on how modernism
reduces the Other to the Same and a different thing to work toward changing and
subverting such reductionism from the grass-roots to the superstructural.
Notes

1. There is a general tendency to characterize modernism as oppressive of, and insensitive to, differences. Thus, postmodernism poses as anti-modern through initiating alterity ethics. For more information, see Danne Polk’s “Ecologically Queer: Preliminaries for a Queer Ecofeminist Identity Theory.” Polk’s holds that postmodernism rearranges, “overturns, or at the very least bypasses a long standing tradition of dualistic, oppositional, value-hierarchical logics” (73).

2. It is more appropriate to see modernity and modernism in terms of temporal, spatial, and cultural variables. It is safer to talk about modernisms rather than one uniform modernism. Modernism in literary theory differs form that in economics or visual studies. Sociologically speaking, the transformation from modernism to postmodernism is a complex claim. Some critics entirely suspect that such a transformation has happened in the first place. Other critics see postmodernism as logical sequel to the modernist project. Such a shift from modernism to its post, it is argued, is basically fueled by economic and technological transformations.

3. Nevertheless, Western cultural monologism is a problematical claim, particularly in light of the fact that Western countries are run by democratic and pluralistic (libertarian) governments. One also should not reenact what one initially sets out to critique—monologism, cultural subsumption and blindness to context and specifics. The charges that modernism is reductive and assimilative, or more rightly hegemonic, are held to function intra-culturally. Western Metaphysics and all consequent institutions become female-blind, if not female-oppressing, for example.
Critics such as Anthony Giddens and Jürgen Habermas contest the modern-postmodern divide. They disagree with Levinas, Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault on the roots of and solutions for modernist failures. Giddens and Habermas think that modernism and modernity are not necessarily oppressive or reductive. Habermas, for example, thinks that modernism misses its mark or strays form its plural and liberal potential by giving in to “instrumental” reason instead of focusing on communicative reason or intersubjectivity.

Contemporary literary and critical theories witness a surge of interest in those values that have been othered or undervalued. For example, some trends in feminist criticism and activism stress “ethics of care” and attachment to counteract the masculinist canon’s valuing detachment, reason, and mastery. Ecocritics and deep ecologists, too, stress holism in place of dialecticism. They hold that such binary oppositions between subject-object, male-female, or man-nature are responsible for the victimization of the second party in the dyad.

One should not pre-judge all philanthropic and caring gestures on the part of the Same in terms of power relations, though. There are serious academic and philosophical revisions that aim at establishing self-other relations on ethical terms by exposing the blind spots in humanistic and teleologically driven world views such as Western democracy, capitalism, and secularism. People from different cultures are also contributing to such efforts. Moreover, I think that assuming representational status and authority does not merely result from following wrong metaphysics or schemas. Rather, subjects intentionally seek power and may intentionally clad their enterprises and motives in ameliorative language. Human action does not happen in vacuum; it needs mediation
through discourse. Discourse on its own does not oppress or subsume difference. It has to be studies as propelled by human agency, too.

7 Sometimes, tendencies to subsume and hierarchically “other” the different can be detected in all cultures and within all groups. Rather, such inclusion-exclusion acts are vital to all cultures and groups in the sense of identity-formations. But such tendencies become problematical if they obstruct mutual dialogue or essentialize one culture as a menace/enemy to be battled or controlled. That is, if taken to the extreme and applied logocentrically, such mechanism will lead to oppressing and violating those who are different both discursively and physically.

8 The nature and format of such questions are problematical on their own; the either-or structure is a product of modernist dialectics that postmodernist critics want to deconstruct. The problem also reveals some levels of irony and paradox of deconstructing modernism using modernist structures and vocabularies.

9 Western established ways of discourse with regard to the Arab other tend to detract from Arabs’ humanity and significance. Such discursive practices usually discredit Arabs’ discourse, feelings, and language. Such exclusion correlates with the distribution of feelings. For example, the Arab as victim does not get as much sympathy, and hence, media coverage as other kinds of victims may receive, even animals.

10 Little’s study is important in many ways. First, it cites more than a thousand sources from various periods and genres to contextualize American orientalism, some of these sources are not available through public and university libraries and search engines. Second, he does not attempt to judge or slant texts one way or another. He presents the documents and comments on what they really say. Such balanced and comprehensive
studies are so much needed these days since they cannot be found in best-selling books or pop magazines.

11 Kalley’s thesis is available for the public. I think literary analyses should be supplanted with factual studies, especially if the authors as in the case of this study present facts in their historical contexts without distorting realities. The thesis presents a usually missing side in theoretical and literary analyses of American-Arab relations: it is the fact that the United States and Europe need passage through the Mediterranean Sea and also need the cheap and vital supply of oils from the East.

12 A whole tradition of Arabic hospitality toward strangers is eclipsed. I find it strange that such things are never mentioned and I think this is part of the touristic dynamic. Tourists never really see the real thing; they are usually controlled by guides whose main concern is to get money out of them. Certain subjects such as politics are taboos. Guides showcase things and never take tourists to the squalid or real centers of their own cultures.

13 There are instances when Twain heaps insults on Islamic values. For example, he fantasizes about calling his Arabian horse “Muhammad.” It is not clear whether he is serious about it or whether he is just insensitive to the special status of this name for Muslims. A Muslim would never ponder doing the same, for example, with the name of Jesus Christ. Such a move on the part of Twain would make many Muslims angry as they will understand that naming an animal after their Prophet is designed to insult and humiliate them. Indeed, one can also detect Twain’s sexual punning on Muslim women through feminizing the horse, somehow parodying Arabian Nights’ language.
14 The last section of Smith’s quote is taken from Jacques Benoist-Mechin’s *The End of the Ottoman Empire* (104). There are many passages in Twain when he reports that Arab villages are in disarray and that the natives were in rags and looked sickly. Obviously, such conditions are not due to Arabs’ or Muslims’ medical backwardness as much as a result of Ottoman Empire’s weakness and European exploitive relationships with it then. Such relations would further drown corrupt and mismanaging Ottoman rulers in debt. Actually, as I read in Arabic history textbooks, the Arab people were subjected to strict and unfair, sometimes arbitrary, taxations by the center powers to meet the increasing demand to pay the debts owned to rising European powers. Thus, the picture Twain depicts needs to be contextualized rather than read in terms of essentialist characterizations of Arabs as backward or unprogressive.

15 Veil and unveiling Muslim women are hot issues these days. In “Veiled Voices: Fanon, Djebar, Cixous, Derrida,” Brigitte Weltman-Aron argues that the veil has become a mark of difference. She traces the Western man’s difficulty with it. She shows that it has gained multiple meanings and functions with colonizer-colonized frictions: “Unveiling women is then a strategy used by the colonial administration in order to demoralize Algerian society and profoundly upset its culture. . . . Algerian woman [is] conceived of as the support of the Western penetration of the native society” (16-21).

More important, Islamic women’s clothing codes are viewed as a sign of women’s oppression, when many women freely choose Islamic hijab and fight for the right to wear it. The French banning of Islamic hijab confirms the fact that the West sees it as an affront against their values. Besides, the French argument that the Hijab is a religious symbol is another instant of imposing on the Other. Western clothes stand for
and embody liberalism and progress; Muslim clothes are merely symbolic of their ethnicity and usually symbolize backwardness and mystery. Western ways of dressing are part of the order of things—Western images of singers and dancers, and models are broadcast all over the globe as the norm when other culture’s clothes are merely ethnic, a mark of difference.

16 While tourists may go abroad in their search for an "authentic" society, it seems unlikely that they will find it, according to most scholars who write about host-guest interactions. Tourists traveling in search of the authentic must be satisfied, however, and the host culture will insure that they find authenticity, even if it is created for them.

17 Cara Aitchison’s argues that deconstruction of truths, identities, and histories cannot be afforded by women at this juncture in history citing other feminists’ cautioning against such a position. For men “have had their Enlightenment”; therefore, men can afford to “deconstruct truths and to decentre themselves.” For women to adopt such a ‘position is to weaken what is not yet strong’ (“Poststructural”135).

18 Examples of American pragmatic rather than principled advocacy of human rights and social justice are too many to list: The School of Americas, American imperialistic involvements in Latin America, Asia, and the Arab-Islamic world. While Iraq’s or Syria’s human rights record makes news, that of Egypt is overlooked—as long as the Egyptian government cooperates and plays a “constructive” role in the world. “Modernity,” “liberty,” “democracy,” “human rights,” “women rights,” and “progress”—all noble desirable objectives—are nevertheless rhetorically manipulated that they end up legitimating hegemonic powers’ intervention into the affairs of those nations judged to lack them. Such interventions rarely improve human rights records, but
very often consolidate colonial exploitive relations. Sometimes, alliances are forged on the levels of States at the expense of the less powerful country’s population. Human rights records surface and disappear depending on the smoothness and cooperativeness of local governments with imperial powers.

19 USA’s human rights issues, such as violence against minorities, prison population, and civil violations are internal issues. Such autonomy does not apply to other countries that are subject to America’s watchful eyes. This dualistic gesture extends to almost all dealings with the other. For instance, when the West was happy with Anwar El-Sadat, he is transformed from an enemy to a friend. He is cleansed of his Arabness as he becomes a noble Pharaoh. He is hardly identified as an Arab.

20 I got this quote from Marlys Mayfield’s *Thinking for Yourself: Developing Thinking Skills through Reading and Writing*. I have tried to read H. H. Brackenridge but I was not successful.

21 The article was written by Maynard Owen William and published in *National Geographic*, December 1927, 709-43.

22 These documents are cited in Little’s *American Orientalism* as the following: “Cirenaica, Eastern Wing of Italian Libya” was written by Harnet Chalmers Adams and published in *National Geographic Magazine*, December 1930, 689-726. “Into Burning Hadhramaut” was written by D. Van Der Meulen; it was published in *National Geographic Magazine*, October 1932, 387-429.

CHAPTER III
POSTMODERN ALTERITY: THEORY, FICTION
AND LIVED REALITY

While Chapter Two examines samples of modern texts as to their Self-Other relations showing that the Self mainly relates to the Other through established hierarchies and subsumptive mechanisms where the Other is partly real and partly constructed, this chapter examines samples of “postmodern” texts that subvert such mechanisms and try to move beyond them. Hence, I scrutinize the reality, practicality, and consequences of postmodernism’s alleged break with modernist reductive epistemological foundations.

Although I understand the generic difference between postmodern theory and postmodern fiction, I still examine the translatability and thematization of theories of the postmodern into literary texts fully or partially labeled “postmodern.” A postmodern text is a “hybrid” one. In general, a postmodern text is postmodern in a specific sense or a limited manner. Hence, I also analyze texts that intersect with the postmodern even when they are in a state of tension with it. Such texts are usually labeled “feminist,” “postcolonial,” or “anti-colonial.”

My hypothesis is that theorizations of the postmodern, postmodern fiction and postmodern culture have complex relations and tensions even though they share the same “post-” prefix. The other assumption is that postmodern theorizations and culture coexist with other forms of writing, such as postcolonial writings, that may display a myriad of postures toward modernist and postmodernist theories and foundations. However, that postmodernist and minority perspectives focus on the question of alterity and
representation accounts for their convergence and divergence. Postmodern theoretical writings mainly deal with Western Metaphysical foundations vis-à-vis alterity and difference, whereas fictional writings mainly address context-bound self-other transactions in light of historical, economic, and legal realities. However, the interactions among postmodern literary theories, postmodern culture, and postmodern fiction follow different scenarios that cannot be mapped in this study. All concepts and ideas are porous and contested. The whole postmodern problematic is still in a state of flux. In fact, for some critics, postmodernism is mainly an academic fad. Nevertheless, there is a discernible tension between a postmodern deconstruction of voice, history, and meaning on a theoretical level and minority perspectives that may contest specific forms of authority and certain versions of history in context-bound transactional situations, but never can do without some modernist foundations.

Critiquing universal humanism as products of Western Metaphysics, postmodernism, paradoxically, becomes universal anti-universalism, risking incapacitating all positions and narratives—be they mainstream or marginalized. Such a leveling move (all narratives are ethnocentric; truth is relative; our positions determine our writings), too, preempts marginalized cultures’ endeavor to salvage and reconstruct their own history based on their own authority and occasionally their own metaphysics. It also complicates any concept of social justice. Alternatively, if postmodernism critiques of authorial foundations are limited to Western epistemological foundations, this might boost minority and marginalized alterities. They start to occupy center stage since they are the West’s Other that has been suppressed or erased. Namely, subverting mainstream
narratives opens a space for the previously marginalized difference to flourish as a legitimate “phrase regime,” to use Lyotard’s term.

Ironically, once again the fate of the other remains contingent on the fate of the Same. Perhaps, there is no escape from such dialectics: modernist residuals come back to haunt postmodern and marginalized narratives. Deconstructing or counteracting mainstream canons summons that which it wants to exceed or replace, although Linda Hutcheon sees this double-binding gesture differently by arguing that postmodern fiction is “historiographic metafiction” that utilizes as well as breaks away from modern conventions and foundations. If postmodernism is understood in terms of the shift from modernist reductive to alterity-centered paradigms, still it cannot do without modernist dialectics responsible for self-other dichotomies and imbalanced relations. For instance, Walid Mushawih argues that although we need to use terms such as West and East, these terms are not monolithic, nor are they ontologically or culturally separate, particularly in light of global developments and New World Order. He contends that “The East and the West—after they have come into contact—cannot be set apart” (“East and the West”; my translation). To paraphrase, the other is not a mere party or opposite to dialogue with; rather, the other, in light of global developments, has become a necessary constituent of cosmic identity (Mushawih, “East and West”).

Another difficulty facing postmodern theorizations is their generic limitations. Levinasian, Derridean, and Lyotardian versions emphasize originary inceptions of the Same and the different. But such terms remain abstract as I have shown in Chapter One. Alterity is almost a vacuous signifier with no signified or referent. For example, it is generically doable and possible to talk about preserving and foregrounding alterity in
philosophical and theoretical treatises. But Levinas’s alterity ethics or Derrida’s undecidability may not be conceivable or achievable other than in abstract theoretical discourses. Embodied situations have their own urgency and require practical resolutions. Context-bound considerations require resolutions that mainly maintain self-other divides and differences. Metaphorically speaking, the leap from modernist into postmodernist alterity-sensitive territories demands more than deconstructive labor. The move from the theoretical, to the fictional, and to the real uncovers the persistence of idealistic and metaphysical residuals, and hence, the limited descriptive and prescriptive utility of the theoretical to the practical.

To simplify, it is more doable to embrace and foreground difference in philosophical discourses than it is in fictional discourse. Moreover, embracing the Other in context-bound real life situations or conflicts is the least conceivable option. Fictional writings that engage self-other ethical relations expose different forms of idealisms present in postmodern theories, casting ample doubt on postmodern interventionist and transformative potential beyond the theoretical universe of discourse. For example, Derridean deconstructive play and resistance to closure, or Levinas’s infinite obligation to an inaccessible disembodied other can hardly be translated into self-other encounters in lived realities. Such prescriptions and practices cannot be thematized in any straightforward or simple manner, nor can they function in practical contexts. Postmodernism retains recalcitrant idealism and reductions of the other while attempting to meet the other on more fair and just ground although postmodern deconstruction of master narratives is a contested matter. Theorists disagree on the causes, motives, sources, viability, and consequences of postmodern thought—particularly its anti-
foundational premises. For critics such as Ziauddin Sardar and others, postmodernism is a “Western” product that can be as imperialistic and hegemonic as modernism is. Sardar critiques any move to generalize and extend Western postmodern malaise and fin de siècle sense to non-Western civilizations.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, some critics see postmodernism as a primarily “neo-conservative” or apolitical fad despite its radical anti-foundational views: Because postmodern ideas are impractical and paradoxical, they may inadvertently endorse the status quo. Alternatively, if all foundations are deconstructed, one cannot fight for social change or justice without any grounds from which to launch critique or actively work for change. However, postmodern discourses remain very valuable despite the above limitations. If institutionalized and mainstreamed, postmodernism can reverse a long history of aggression toward difference, provided that abstract concepts of alterity and difference are supplanted with minority, “Cultural Studies,” grass-roots, and leftist critiques. However, such potential to reverse dominant self-other modes of constitution cannot materialize without changing concrete realities and balancing power relations. For after all, what would make one concede power and act ethically toward others, if one chooses not to do so? In other words, we are dealing with realities that are regulated and affected by rhetorical foundations as well as realpolitik style power relations. The whole distinction between rhetorics and action or pairing them as if one is a causer and the other is a consequence, signifier-signified, is part of the problematic. 3

The texts I will be reading are Toni Morrison’s Beloved, Sam Shepard’s States of Shock, Abdul-Karim Nasif’s Two Faces of One Phoenix, and Donald A. Folz’s Into a Dying Sun. These texts shed light on the different facets of Self-Other transactions
through context-bound economic and political realities. These texts can be considered historical narratives as they use or simulate fictional narratives to account for and narrate reality. They all tackle variably contorted self-other relations through the institution of slavery and capitalism, mediatization and consumerism, and war and peace. Theorists and critics assign these texts to different genres and modes. For instance, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is said to be postmodernist, anti-postmodernist, modernist, and anti-modernist. It has been dubbed a slave narrative, a (black) feminist or even a postcolonial novel. In other words, it is a hybrid novel that exposes the limited utility of such classifications. Although I resort to such taxonomies, I am mainly concerned with *Beloved*’s ambivalent relationship with both modernism and postmodernism since it both debunks the inhumanity of slavery and turns toward alterity both voicing it and allowing it to voice itself.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*

Assigning Morrison’s *Beloved* to a certain genre such as “slave narrative tradition,” or “postmodernist meta-fiction” creates its own problematic, unless such labels remain porous and provisional. *Beloved* negotiates available taxonomies exceeding them into a hybrid text that is highly intertextual, historically anti-historical, and deconstructively constructive. Morrison’s double-binding relation to history stems from the African-American’s unique relation to mainstream American history. It is a history she has to firstly resurrect and investigate so as to be able to subvert and redress. The African slave history is organically tied to that of the mainstream metanarrative, a
metanarrative that has to be deconstructed to allow the marginalized localized African-
slave experience and history come to the fore. Such turning to yet against mainstream
canonical history crosses generic boundaries: the official account, the personal account,
and the communal vernacular or gossip accounts, all come into play modifying and
limiting one another. History does not only include archives and facts, it also includes
narratives, prejudices and erasures. For the non-mainstream or victimized party, history is
what history leaves or suppresses. In a sense, it is anti-historical, or history’s
subconscious. Thus, the turn toward and against history serves many conscious and
unconscious functions, such as reckoning with, redressing, healing, and voicing the
marginal différend. Such turn toward history is a thick one—it is neither a nostalgic
gesture nor a depthless pastiche. The possibility of redress and healing is at stake.

To begin, I address how Beloved as a fictionalized historical account handles
representation, slavery agency, and identity in light of postmodern deconstruction of
modernist metaphysical foundations. To what extent does Beloved expose the utility and
limitations of theoretical postmodern tenets of alterity and constructivism? Specifically,
Beloved does not seem to advocate Levinas’s alterity ethics, Derrida’s undecidability, or
Lyotard’s incommensurability. Instead, it highlights immediate and consequent
repercussions of discursive and physical violence perpetrated against the slave’s body
and spirit. Slaves, both body and spirit, become charged, yet othered, historical sites and
throttled voices that Morrison excavates and voices, taking care not to reduce or
optimize them in any mainstream metanarratives. In place of preserving radical alterity—
before epistemological and ontological reductive processes—Morrison opts for the need
to know, communicate with, and understand the other. Moreover, the marginalized other
needs to come to terms with its own history and communicate its own grievance. The other representing him/herself may signal a shift in power relations and the birth of proactive agency. Thus, Morrison does not accept the deconstruction of history and representation as illusory and reductive practices although she is aware of poststructuralist insights that the signifier and the signified are arbitrarily related. She also does not espouse an ethics of caution traced back to Heidegger’s concept of “letting-be,” or Levinas’s critiques of Western Metaphysics as alterity-reductive (see Heidegger’s *Time and Being* and Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*). Minority subjects cannot afford forfeiting history and the right to representation. They need foundations or at least “strategic essentialism” (Fuss 81).

I think that the complexity of African-American history correlates with the many complex oxymoronic roles Beloved, Sethe’s murdered-to-be.saved daughter, occupies in the narrative. As dead yet alive, owned yet lost, absent yet present, and destructive yet constructive, Beloved becomes allegorically synonymous with African American historical/personal experience. To ignore history is to compromise the present and the future; to get entrapped in history, to not be able to move beyond the painfully externally-wrought-and-imposed History toward a different self-carved history, signals self-defeating and destructive impulses.7

In “Postmodern Blackness”: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved,*” Kimberly Chobat Davis commends Morrison’s ability to synchronize postmodern critiques with “social protest” due to their shared “oppositional relationship to the bourgeois state or to the universalizing objectivity of some humanist intellectuals” (244). Davis adds, “Morrison demystifies master historical narratives. . . . She also wants to raise real or authentic
African American history in its place” (245). Morrison’s fictionalized characters have historical origins. For example, Sethe’s character is based on a newspaper clipping about a “Margaret Garner,” a runaway slave who “had murdered her children at the moment of capture” (Davis 245). Morrison learns about this incident “[w]hile working on The Black Book (1974), a collection of cultural documents recording African American "history-as-life-lived” (Davis 245).

As a social protest text, Beloved sheds light on the traditional concept of representation as the prerogative of the powerful and resourceful masters. There are those who represent and subsume and those who do not have much control over their own bodies let alone image or the act of representation. Hence, it becomes a site where those who are being represented are erased and violated because of logocentric blindness or ethnocentric bias and because those who control the economy and have the weapons can impose their own version of things on others. Thus minority writers focus on representation as a selective act by a select number of people. Not everybody can represent and not all representations are legitimate. One’s race, class, color, gender, and nationality affect his representational rights and cast him/her as a representing agent or a representable (reducible) object. Representation exposes power relations as not only discursive, but also materialistic, physical, and institutional. In poststructural terms, language is a differential system and meaning is differentially constructed. The relationship between agents and language is reversed, too. Subjects, both masters and slaves, become internal, rather than external, to language or more accurately discourse. Instead of the correspondence theory of language as a tool or medium at the subject’s command, language inhabits and constructs its very subjects. Consequently, concepts of
Reality/Truth, objectivity, neutrality, universality, intentionality, all become problematical and paradoxical. Reality becomes another construct of our own methods of seeing and position on power grid in terms of race, gender, class, nationality, sexual-orientation, and many other constituencies.

Morrison does not see slavery in terms of epistemological or ontological blindness, or difference-unfriendly mainstream ideologies. Slaves are both discursive constructs by the mainstream culture and something in excess of such limiting and limited constructivism. Discursive othering, though, correlates with physical and social violence and ostracism. Accordingly, Sethe’s and Baby Suggs’ counter-discursive gestures aim at correcting images and stopping violence. If their pain and anger may not be fully “representable,” it is not because of poststructuralist insights, but because of palpable linguistic insufficiency in the face of slavery’s excessive and multi-layered violence. Language falls short of the inner experience. Hence, at best language points to the excess that it cannot represent; it betrays its own insufficiency due to specific historical reasons. In “Missing Peace,” Rachel Lee extensively tackles *Beloved’s* representational limitations. At one point, Lee states that:

*Morrisson contextualizes "corrupt" language as historically specific, even against deconstructionist theories which atemporalize and universalize language. Her historicization in *Beloved* thus speaks on some level about the limits of poststructuralist findings for African American writers who remain doubly circumscribed by a language which can no longer convey authentically, but which has hitherto effectively constructed black subjects as less than human. Her grounding of discursive slippage to*
historical circumstances thus offers praxis of resistance to these theories which would subsume all narratives as corruptions, just when alternate narratives taking the formerly enslaved as their subjects are beginning to emerge. (“Missing Peace”)

Beloved does not submit to post-modern de-differentiation or leveling of all positions and narratives. Sethe’s experience is not un-representable in the sense of Lyotardian sublime or Levinasian mystic alterity. Minority find the deconstruction of voice and history (at a time when circumstances seem more amenable to their grievances and pasts) problematical since they specifically want to voice their views and consolidate their communal identities. Minority critics target superstructural causes behind their minority status, but more importantly, they single out embodied practices that violate their dominion and perpetrate their marginalization and suffering. They do not deconstruct a general vague entity such as modernist Self; rather, they target a specific supremacist, sexist, and autonomously detached self and offer their own alternatives such as grounded, connected, and caring pivots, instead. Accordingly, Beloved foregrounds power as “physical” tangible divide between groups based on color, race, gender, nationality, and “guns.” It also exposes the limitations of explaining human violence toward others in terms of metaphysical error when in fact intentional willingness to act unethically remains an option. Maybe, the postmodernist concept of power has some explanatory and interventionist power, but it suffers form idealistic and functional/ translational limitations, here.

Without considering economic-political factors, the complexity of self-other constitutions cannot be fully captured. Intensions, self-interests, historical realities and
economic systems as well as the actions of the other party, all play different roles in human relations. For example, we cannot understand slavery in all its ramifications without analyzing its relation to the economics of the “sugar industry,” “capitalism,” and British-French rivalry at that specific time in history. In the Introduction to Dr. Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery*, D. W. Brogan writes that “the abolition of the slave-trade, then the abolition of slavery, were not merely the results of a rising standard of political ethics in Britain . . . but were a form of cutting losses” (qtd. in Williams1). Slavery was “tolerated, defended, praised as long as it was profitable” (qtd. in Williams 1). Of course, there were many intellectuals and activists who opposed slavery on ethical bases. Morals and laws have always existed. But choosing to observe or bend such codes is the real issue. The problem arises the moment self-interest supersedes ethical standards and justifies a myriad of inequitable arrangements with others—of course, the fact that one party can harm another with impunity plays a crucial role in such relations.

Winthrop D. Jordan’s *The White Man’s Burden* elaborates on the establishment of slavery as a loss of humanity and concomitant obligations and rights. He writes, “So much was slavery a complete loss of liberty that it seemed to Englishmen somehow akin to loss of humanity. . . . To treat a man as a slave was to treat him as a beast” (32).

Indeed, the commercial side of slavery covers up its inhuman violent realities. Making slavery an administrative or business matter diverts attention away from other incalculable issues, such as the damage done to slaves’ psyches and families. Of course, business as business is regulated by concerns other than humanistic ideals. Paradoxically, based on differences in color or nature, the slavery institution divided people into masters and slaves, into human and not so human parties. The prominent concerns in slavery as
business are profit and loss. The slave’s welfare becomes subordinate to his master’s financial welfare. The whole compartmentalization of business, politics, literature, and ethics into separate fields requires a separate study to fathom its roots and effects on human perceptions and actions. Notwithstanding the fact that disciplinary boundaries are convenient, such boundaries become limiting strictures if science is what scientists do, and politics is what politicians do, and ethics is what ethicists study, as if these were separate activities. Seeing ethics as a branch of philosophy or constructing science as an autonomous field beyond ethics presents a fragmented provisional instead of a holistic approach to human existence. The ethical is intrinsic and inherent to the political, economic, scientific, and literary.

As commodities, slaves become a means to fulfilling, or objects of, their masters’ desires. Rape is one prominent example. The following passage sheds light on some facets of commodification of the slave object. I use object rather than individual or subject because slaves are caught in relations that mostly rob them of any sense of autonomy, privacy, independence, or agency. Their existence is always in relation to their utility for slave owners and traders. Hence, commenting on their slavery lives, Sethe, Paul D, Baby Suggs and the framing narrator always invoke checkers, rape, loaning, selling, and trading as “metaphors” of their experiences. Actually, it would be reductive and misleading to consider such terms as tropes or metaphors because they really describe the reality of slavery. To quote,

In all of Baby’s life, as well as Sethe’s own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up,
brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. . . . What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. (Beloved 23)

The slave as commodity is expendable in an exchange economy. If we pursue the analogy to its extreme, we see an exchange economy that rarely questions the ethics of enslaving and commodifying others. A commodity does not have any intrinsic value; it is the sum of its exchange value. In Marxist terms, the capitalistic system’s focus on exchange value conceals labor relations. Subjecting blacks to market logic cancels their history, feelings, pains, fears, and loves, thus severely compromising their alterity. Such economy reduces them to their capital or market value while they will always be in excess of such institutionally sanctioned transactions.

The novel keeps returning to this irreducible un-capturable transportation of the human into the logic of commodity. Processing the human slave within a utilitarian business “phrase regime” almost neutralizes or preempts ethical humanistic concerns. Within such phrase regimes, the “Schoolteacher,” his nephew and the sheriff could not comprehend Sethe’s pain and infanticide:

Schoolteacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think—just think—what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education. . . . The whole lot was lost now. . . . What she go and do that for? On account of a beating? . . . And that is what he asked the sheriff.

The sheriff turned, then said to the other three, “You all better go on. Look like your business is over. Mine’s started now.” (149-50)
The above quote reveals three related othering mechanisms. First, Sethe is talked about the same way one talks about animals. The relative pronoun, “which,” denotes unreasonable, inanimate, or beastly entity. As a beast or a cow, it is natural that she will be sold, milked, worked. Consequently, as animalized, Sethe has no right over her offspring; they can be sold or traded the same way one sells cattle. Furthermore, animals have be controlled and domesticated, but they also may turn against their masters if over beaten or abused. The master-animal relation is natural, though. Second, Sethe and her kids are a lost “lot” now. They are commodities or animals that have perished. This is a financial loss from the salve master’s perspective. Third, Sethe’s actions cannot be rationalized other than in terms of an animalistic terms. In fact, Sethe is associated with animals throughout the narrative. Even Paul D, an ex-slave and friend, tells her that she has two feet not four.

The novel also highlights the physical violence needed to transform humans into commodities: masters use guns and whips. They starve and rape their slaves to keep this abominable “unnatural” arrangement going. Rape as a reality and symbolic approximation of the violence of slavery ties in with reductive commodity logic and the insignificance and insecurity associated with the checkers metaphor. Rape remains a site of excess signified by multiple levels of sexual, metaphoric, and psychological abduction of private parts, breasts, milk, labor, offspring, kinship, and self-respect. Rape completely represents one-sided desire as violence. Ironically, it also represents the closest form of physical contact between subject and object, and yet, it signifies unbridgeable psychological distance between them. For this contact is not one of recognition or equivalence; it is more like the contact we make with our food. More
important, it is an incarnation of power in terms of coercion. It marks a move from commodifying an object to consuming and abjecting it.

The novel also approximates the violence of slavery in Sethe’s suicidal/infanticidal troubling act of slitting her daughter’s neck with a handsaw to spare her from a slavery life. Therefore, the readers are implicated as they are called upon to understand, judge, or maybe hold judgment. The narrative enmeshes the reader in multiple aporias, exposing slavery as an excess:

Denver thought that she understood the connection between her mother and Beloved: Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it. But there would never be an end to that, and seeing her mother diminished, shamed, and infuriated her. Yet she knew Sethe’s greatest fear was the same one Denver had in the beginning—that Beloved might leave. That before Sethe could make her understand what it meant—what it took to drag the teeth of that saw under the little chin; to feel the baby blood pump like oil in her hands; to hold her face so her head would stay on; to squeeze her so she could absorb, still, the death spasms that shot through the adored body, plumb and sweet with life—beloved might leave. Leave before Sethe could make her realize that worst than that—far worse—was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D. tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn’t like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were
and couldn’t think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean. No undreamable dreams about whether the headless, feetless torso hanging in the tree with a sign on it was her husband or Paul A; whether the bubbling-hot girls in the colored-school fire set by patriots included her daughter; whether a gang of whites invaded her daughter’s private parts, soiled her daughter’s thighs and threw her daughter out of the wagon. She might have to work the slaughter house yard, but not her daughter.

And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter’s characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no…. Sethe had refused—and refused still. (251)

The above passage reveals that Sethe’s infanticide is not completely an irrational action. Rather, it has to be understood in the context of the slavery institution in general, and Sethe’s personal experience, in particular. As abominable as it is, infanticide points to the violence of slavery, but cannot completely capture or represent it. The slavery experience remains partly incorporable, pointing to the incommensurability of slavery with straightforward or ordinary human expression. Thus, the need to signify and allude to the limitations of language.

Ironically, the narrative may trick readers into reenacting mainstream or white ways of looking at the black other such as blaming the victim or rationalizing the act. Sometimes, readers sidestep the ethical crux of the novel—slavery as inexpressible pain
and violence—and instead, concentrate on Sethe’s single act of violence (infanticide), although such act is proven beyond doubt to be motivated by love. Because she loves her kids, she’d rather mercy-kill them than let them suffer continuous killing. Ironically, attention is diverted from understanding the complexity of blacks’ experience under slavery’s multiple reductions and violations to judging Sethe’s psychological and legal status modernist humanistic terms.

The passage also exposes many other facets of violence against blacks seeking a free normal life. Even when slavery may have ceased to be economically useful, blacks were still subjected to aggression motivated by xenophobia, self-supremacy, and sheer display of power. Such acts betray insecurities and resistance to integrating the other into the economy of the self. Having been already essentialized as inferior and alien, the other cannot be easily accepted as equal. Even with the dissolution of slavery, basically white-black distribution on the power grid has not changed that much. Rhetorically speaking, the mainstream self may not yet be ready to absorb an otherness it has essentialized as its opposite or negation.

Even when Sethe’s infanticide is contextualized, it remains aporiatic—an act of unthinkable violence to stop slavery’s legitimate violence. Beloved is aporiatic because it places the audience in very difficult positions where judgment cannot be held back or spelled out in any simple straight way. Sethe’s rememories and narratives gradually contextualize infanticide within slavery, I think, alluding or indirectly showing slavery the bigger evil. As a narrator, Sethe voices her pain and point of view that is missing from official accounts and even from the black community members who thought the action was “unnatural.” She particularly narrates the role the Schoolteacher (who is a
slaveholder) plays in pushing her into the extreme. Ironically, the Schoolteacher, an
educated person, performs some kind of anthropological research on black slaves to
prove their being sub-human. The Schoolteacher’s assumptions are those of modernist
epistemological dialectics and hierarchical dualisms of male-female, white-black, human-
animal, and master-slave. Things are defined by their opposites, by what they are not. But
the polarizations also involve evaluating: the first party in the dyad becomes the
legitimate superior norm. This dualistic paradigm stigmatizes and others difference to
maintain self-identity and justify power differences and abuse.

Postmodern fiction and theory unravel the logocentric blindness and violence of
dialectical hierarchical thinking. The Schoolteacher is a modernist subject/scientist who
submits to such dialectics. However, as Rafael Perez-Torres argues attending to
postmodern deconstruction of modernist epistemological foundations per se cannot
capture the complexity of power relations. Thus, postmodernist critiques need to be
supplanted by a “cultural studies” element that accounts for race, color, class, nationality,
gender, and sexuality in context. I would add that postmodernist critiques need to be
combined with Critical Discourse Analysis to expose power as both disseminated in all
systems and institutions and power as inter-group divide: there are those who wield
power and those who are subjected to its different manifestations. It is only through
analyzing the connectedness of discourse to lived realities that we can move from
speaking about identity as an abstract philosophical concept to identity as a site of power
relations. Perez-Torres adds that:

Sethe’s identity, circumscribed by these “scientific” practices, is subject to
the effect of the schoolteacher’s discourse. As often happens, the treatment
she receives as an object of discourse transforms her into an object of violence. . . . Just like the page of the schoolteacher’s notebook, Sethe is divided and marked, inscribed with the discourse of slavery and violation.

(Posited as the other, Sethe is measured, discoursed about, objectified, analyzed, gazed at, and partitioned. Scientific neutrality and authority are subservient to the powerful party. Science becomes implicated in power relations—actually, scientific foundations themselves hide behind power relations. More problematically, power resorts to the scientific metanarrative to help prove white supremacy: such practices are found in anthropological studies that have focused on the African man’s skull, or Hottentot’s carnal capacities to prove racial difference.

The narrative does not follow a chronological order or develop like a Bildungsroman novel. On the contrary, every forward narrative move engenders a backward or retroflexive move into the past to provide context. For example, whenever Sethe wants to explain what she has done, she finds it imperative to contextualize what had been done to her. Thus, meaning and history become deferred and layered. Our judgments are deferred and implicated. Trying to explain to Beloved why she has used a saw on her neck, Sethe feels compelled to fill her in:

  Schoolteacher’d wrap the string all over my head, ’cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth. . . . I got near the door and heard voices. Schoolteacher made his pupils sit and learn books. . . . This is the first time I am telling it and I am telling it to you because it might help explain something to you although I know you don’t need me to do it . . . you
don’t have to listen either, if you don’t want to. . . . He was talking to his pupils and I heard him say, “Which one are you doing?” And one of the boys said, “Sethe.” . . . “No, no. That’s not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don’t forget to line them up.” (191-93; my emphasis)

Sethe discloses this incident for the first time. Beloved is her exclusive audience. We as readers come next. The narrative is mainly designed to “explain,” rather than absolve or “elide” responsibility. The mini-narrative speaks directly to any audience who may resist or refuse to listen. Implicitly, to refuse to listen is to reduce the complexity of the narrative and to compromise the ethics of reading and listening.

As a postmodernist or minority novel, Beloved exposes the juncture between representation and judgment. The more comprehensive and representative the narrative act is, the more complex and intricate the act of judgment becomes. In fact, the novel focuses on the need to put things in their contexts, the need to listen to the marginal side of the story, before we rush to judge Sethe’s infanticide. As readers, however, we can choose to listen or not, we can condemn or absolve. But it is only through wanting justice that we can extensively listen. Our listening-reading acts are complicated; our judgments are deferred. In “Ten Minutes for Seven Letters,” Joanna Wolfe highlights the reading/responding ethical demands of the novel:

These gaps require a renegotiation of the traditional Western relationship between reader and author—and thus critics have variously described Beloved’s narrative structure as providing ‘the places and spaces so that the reader can participate,’ . . . calling for an ethical reader to recognize
otherness by hearing what she does not know..., transferring the role of
object and weight of oppression to the reader..., and revealing the
limitations of interpretation’s desire for mastery... (264)

As a collective narrative, *Beloved* places multiple demands on the reader, one of which is
to piece the threads together not by moving toward a teleos or fulfilling a generic
convention, but by participating in the narrative act, motivated by the desire to
understand before the desire to close and judge.

Morrison’s narrative techniques also contribute to the complexity of the reading
experience. Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D and other slaves collectively and individually
participate in the narrative act. Their narratives are counter-narratives to mainstream
historical accounts that cover up the individual and collective pain of slavery. Their mini-
narratives also modify and enrich one another’s. Sethe’s narrative counteracts the official
account written in the newspaper clipping that Stamp Paid gives to Paul D. Although he
cannot read, Paul D challenges the newspaper account on the grounds that slaves do not
make news. News always focuses on white people. A black person becomes a newspaper
topic only if he/she is lynched, burned, staked, or raped. Ordinary events such as getting
married, having a new born, or other delightful incidents are kept for the norm.

*Beloved* also deals with the act of gazing. Throughout the novel, Sethe basically
refers to two ways of gazing: the schoolteacher’s gaze is an example of a detached
othering gaze, while Paul D’s gaze is an empathizing warm one. The schoolteacher’s
gaze scars and objectifies the gazed at other, while Paul D’s gaze makes Sethe feel loved
and secure: “Sethe knew his gaze was on her face... Still, there was no mockery
coming from his gaze. Soft... He was not judging her—or rather he was judging but not
comparing her” (25). That is, he is not comparing her to animals; she is a unique human being. The same theme is reinforced in Denver’s relation with Beloved. Beloved, belonging to the world in-between, does not judge; her look is almost self-preemptive; it focuses on the other as fullness rather than an object to be comprehended or reduced to the same:

It was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other. Having her hair examined as part of herself, not as a material or a style. Having her lips, nose, chin caressed as they might be if she were moss rose grandeur paused to admire. (118)

The above passage is close to Levinasian pre-ontological self-other encounters. The self meets the other in its fullness without or before the desire to know/control and judge. The uncritical eyes need to be contextualized in terms of blacks’ visibility—their color factoring in their visibility and invisibility. Looked at as an object, the other is partitioned and mocked. This is why Beloved’s looking at Denver holistically and non-judgmentally makes so much difference.

However, the gaze is not exclusively a white-black divide. After her act, Blacks, too, have shunned Sethe and looked at her judgmentally and alienatingly. However, Morrison does not repeat mainstream narrative reductive dialectics. She does not valorize the black community as flawless or conflict-free, nor does she demonize all whites in racial terms. Not all whites were engaged in, or approving of, slavery. Hence, Morrison warns against essentializing self as victim and other as victimizer. In spite of the realities of slavery and racism, black subjects need to be proactive in order to break off past
shackles. To exclusively dwell on the painful and unpleasant past is to plague and circumvent the present and the future. Such self-destructive relation with the past was dramatized with an element of magic realism in the narrative relation that has developed between Sethe and Beloved. Such as relationship becomes consumptive. The more Sethe tells Beloved about the past, the more she wants to hear. This narrative transfusion emaciates Sethe and inflates Beloved. It took community’s collective will, intervention, and care to free Sethe of her Beloved and painful past.

*Beloved* is postmodern in a narrow yet positive sense. It is not nihilistic or relativistic as some label postmodern fiction, nor is it minimalist. Rather, postmodern concepts of power relations, undecidability, and fragmentation take a different turn there. Sethe’s or Paul D’s fragmentation results from historical pressures and violations against the sanctity of their very being. It does not stem from informational entropy such as in the case of Oedipa Maas’s in Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot*. Nor does it result from demystification of human values and foundations and a recognition of entrapment in an inimical consumerist logic such as one witnesses in Don DeLillo’s minimalist characters in *White Noise*. Although Morrison recognizes that the subject or the self is a linguistic or discursive site, a cultural construct, she does not forfeit the modernist sense of subject/self as implying agency and depth. Language inhabits and constructs us; but we also use language to question our constructivism and sometimes move beyond it.

*Beloved* ends with an optimistic note. Sethe’s only child around, Denver, ventures out looking for work and education. Paul D returns seeking reconciliation and urging Sethe to live her present and look to the future. The following quote represents a re-construction, a counter-fragmentation, that results from reckoning with past to understand
and overcome. Toward the end of the novel, it becomes very hard not to empathize with Sethe’s point of view and not to see through her eyes. Thus, the framing narrator intimates to us as readers the following passage about Sethe’s reconstructive and inner powers as a full-fledged human being:

Paul D sits down in the rocking chair and examines the quilt patched in carnival colors. His hands are limp between his knees. There are too many things to feel about this woman. His head hurts. Suddenly he remembers Sixo trying to describe what he felt about the Thirty-Mile Woman.” She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. (272-73)

Sam Shepard’s *States of Shock* also deals with constructivism, launches a counter-narrative, and warns against dialectical oppositional stances that antagonize difference. Yet, it does not focus on the bright side of postmodernism such as sensitivity toward and obligation to the other. Instead, it addresses war rhetoric and its spectacular mediatization for a generally indifferent audience. *States of Shock* focuses on the negative side of postmodernity: consumerism, spectacles, simulation, and simulacra. Like *Beloved*, the drama highlights the fact that otherness and difference can be imposed constructs in addition to products of real variables and power relations. In the following section, I grapple with these problematics.
Sam Shepard’s *States of Shock*

*States of Shock* tackles self-other relations in war discourse. The play takes place at a family restaurant where the Colonel takes Stubbs, a young war veteran, later revealed to be his son, for a treat. In fact, the Colonel wants Stubbs to help him reconstruct the war scene where his son was killed by friendly fire, but Stubbs keeps wandering away calling attention to a massive wound in his middle. There is a communicational dysfunction taking place between them. Tensions escalate as the Colonel keeps focusing on reconstructing the scene in scientific details and arithmetic calculations, while Stubbs is more concerned with making people see his injury.

Notwithstanding my reductive sketch, *States of Shock* does not represent a raw loss of agency such as what slaves experience in *Beloved*, nor does it reconstruct or salvage the voice of the marginalized other, although it dwells on the self-other formations or negative constitutions. It also critiques the ongoing spectacle of war in a “society of spectacle” in Guy Debord’s sense. Desensitized to violence, such a society fails to see violence for what it is in its immediate happening. Violence is spectacular, a virtual reality show. The here and now of Stubbs’ mutilation goes unnoticed. People can no more process immediate data; they are used to mediatized, packaged, simplified, or framed accounts. Thus the TV screen becomes a simulacrum that not only confuses reality with its representation, but also replaces reality. That which escapes the camera lens escapes reality, too. ⁹ Instead of mediating reality, the media become reality. Hence, the audience does not seem to care or comprehend war as a destructive action.
The roots of such indifference are attributed to two major factors: mediatization or simulation and war rhetoric. Baudrillard and others have complained that the first Gulf War was broadcast to American households as if it were a videogame, as a pastime, rather than as some from destructive violence against other human beings. Technological advancements that enable one to map the battlefield, locate and destroy a target from behind a computer screen also contribute to the de-realization of war. On the other hand, war rhetoric as a specific form of constructivism, or a constructivism of a certain form of essentialism, plays a role in the audience’s indifference to or coolness at the sight of war. Hence, American public’s agency is marginalized or suspended through turning the conflict into a spectacle and through depicting the conflict in essentialist unavoidable terms. The military paradigm essentializes good “we” against a demonic “they” enlisting public agency in a good cause, or at best, neutralizing or downplaying public opposition. War rhetoric depicts the conflict in necessary terms and usually resorts to some version of a just war theory. The Colonel embodies war rhetoric in a dialectical manner. The self-enemy dyads are in a mutually nullifying relation. The other endangers the self. By necessity, the threatened self has to establish boundaries and launch offensives to keep an invasive outsider at bay. In Levinasian terms, this form of ontology as opposition and reduction becomes responsible for all violence against the other. Likewise, Shepard shows how the mainstream self is mainly responsible for pushing conflicts to the extreme.

In “Aliens and Others” Richard Kearney invokes Rene Girard’s concept of scapegoating to analyze war, particularly the Gulf War. Scapegoating unites the Same against a singled-out different other. Somehow, the scapegoating community vents its
anger and anxieties by blaming an external source or by externalizing the source of its troubles. Kearney writes,

Girard believes that human societies are founded on myths of sacrifice. The myths operate according to a mechanism of scapegoating which has to function to transform targeted ‘others’ into ‘aliens.’ “Holding these aliens responsible for the ills and divisions of society, the scapegoaters proceed to isolate or eliminate them. This sacrificial strategy furnishes many communities with their sense of collective identity.” (251)

Girard’s “scapegoating” concept has powerful descriptive powers, but it does not capture the complexity of intra-community and inter-community transactions. I do not think that his scapegoating concept is an absolute mechanism. Patriotic and nationalistic narratives usually resort to such mechanisms, but they do not have to be limited to them. Girard’s argument resembles modernist dialectics of the Same and the different, too.

However, one can discern scapegoating mythical residues in the Colonel’s rhetoric, particularly when he repeatedly acknowledges the role of the enemy in uniting us. He, to great extent, identifies with modernist dialectics and even pushes it into a Manichean “good versus evil” mentality. Such paradigms allow him to affirm himself against the other. This is a debilitating logic occluding self-critique, second thoughts, or flip-flopping. The Colonel himself becomes a victim of such posture, although he acts as discourse dispenser/legitimator. Stubbs, as a member of a younger generation, falls prey to the Colonel’s (his father’s) ploys and myths. The Colonel’s son can after all become part of the patriotic security narrative.
Patricia Molly’s article, “Desiring Security/Securing Desire: (Re) Re-Thinking Alterity in Security Discourse” provides invaluable insights into the translation of security discourse into security as enacted in battlefields and media representations. Her “central thesis is that it is through desire, which I understand to be the self's relation with the Other, that security is lived,” a logic that engenders “thinking in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (306). In other words, “we could argue that it is a logic of ‘us and them’ which produces the (perceived) need for ‘security’” (307). Postmodern thinking attempts to subvert such frames and their foundations, but so far it seems that modernist dialectics are still as functional as, if not more resilient than, any other time before.

Molly also utilizes Shapiro’s concept of “abstract enmity” and “derealization”: the resort to “abstract and distancing modes of symbolic representation” (322). Casting the other as fatefully threatening our security de-contextualizes motives, interests, and consequences. The self-other didactic turned into security concerns has been explained in capitalist terms, too. Baudrillard brilliantly highlights the role of capitalism in the surge of security concerns and discourses. In Symbolic Exchange and Death, Baudrillard contends that,

>We have successfully infected people with the virus of conservation and security, even though they will have to fight to death to get it. In fact, it is even more complicated, since they are fighting for the right to security, which is of a profoundly different order. . . . They had to be infected over generations for them to end up believing they ‘needed’ it, and this success is an essential aspect of ‘social’ domestication and colonization.

(179; emphasis in original)
Security as a discourse not only plays a major role in international relations, it also plays a very decisive role in keeping the masses in place. This connects with Foucault’s argument about modernist new methods of discipline and I would say self-discipline. Security cannot be achieved for once and all. It has to be repeated and manufactured again and again to work. The War on Iraq is a primary example. State accounts and mainstream media hammered the public with arguments that the war is necessary for American security, particularly at the backdrop of 9/11 terrorist attacks. The security concern overrides all concerns.

To return to the play, Shepard does not explore economic or capitalist motives behind the war. Still, he defies the divisive and scapegoating security pretexts, exposing their egoistic and hyperbolic nature. The enemy is partly real and partly constructed. The problem is that such discourses obliterate the boundaries between security as a construct and security as a real issue due to external aggression. This implosion is detrimental. If the public would see the difference, they may change their passive accepting stance. Moreover, if the war is presented to the public in terms of its destructive consequences without turning it into a pastime spectacle, maybe the public will not condone or remain indifferent. This is why Stubbs as a demystified and victimized veteran upsets the Colonel who is trying persistently to understand and rewrite Stubbs injury into a patriotic and heroic metanarrative. The Colonel refuses to see the injury as a reminder of the human toll of the war, particularly in an avoidable one. The public are not used to hearing or seeing unmediatized accounts of the war or mini-narratives that are not subordinated and channeled into grand narratives of sacrifice and heroism. Stubbs threatens the whole foundation on which patriotic wars are fought by showing that both parties are victimized
if locked up as negations of one another. Stubbs recalls one of the most important war scenes. The scene is surrealistic since it mixes the human parts of the enemy with those of the self in one scene:

STUBBS: From here, I can see their bodies mixed with ours.

COLONEL: Sit up now, Stubbs, and take stock of things.

STUBBS (still lying on the floor): Their heads are blown off.

(COLONEL spanks STUBBS hard on his ass).

COLONEL: SIT UP, I SAID! (STUBBS pulls himself to a sitting position, facing the toys.)

STUBBS: Some of their heads have fallen on the bodies

Of our own men. It’s a funny sight. (28-29)

Such scenes do not make news or spectacles at home. More problematically, both the friends and the enemies are caught in the same cross-fire whose source is the American party. Subtly, Shepard plays with or puns on rationalistic scientific-military promotion of the war in medical, hygienic, and rational terms. The strikes are surgical; the bombs are smart; they smell and seek out human flesh.

In another uncanny scene, the Colonel toasts the enemy acknowledging his role in cementing and maintaining self-unity. Ironically, the enemy is playing a constructive role: keeping the self from falling apart or disintegrating into internal fights. The argument that an outside menace unifies an inside fragmented front is repeated in political and media discourse. It is also maintained by establishing the self as an autonomous center that is differentially forged. As such, the creation of the enemy becomes also an essential first step in the direction of clash:
COLONEL: Let’s have a toast. (They click cups and drink together.) TO THE ENEMY!

STUBBS (holding his cup high): TO THE ENEMY!

COLONEL: Exactly. WITHOUT THE ENEMY WE’RE NOTHING!

STUBBS (toasting): WITHOUT THE ENEMY WE’RE NOTHING!

COLONEL: Exactly. Where would we be today without the enemy?

STUBBS: I don’t know… where would we be?

COLONEL: THE ENEMY HAS BROUGHT US TOGETHER!

STUBBS: THE ENEMY HAS BROUGHT US TOGETHER! (15)

The Colonel’s way of thinking is fallacious. To claim that the enemy is responsible for one’s progress is like claiming that thieves and murderers have improved the penal system! The last two statements can be ambiguous. It is not clear whether the “us” refers to the Colonel and Stubbs or whether it refers to a national identity against a foreign “they.” To toast the enemy can be pursued differently, but I think when it is read along with the following passage, one can discern the enemy as foundational to the self:

COLONEL: It is a question of training. Repetition and practice. Repetition and practice. All those days. All those horrible long days without the enemy. Longing out of the window. Staring at the stupid boredom of peacetime. The dullness of it. . . . Did you think I was treading water back then? Spinning my wheels? I was gearing up, Stubbs. Silently stockpiling
my secret arsenal for just an occasion as this. Knowing full well that the enemy has the same hunger for me as I have for him. Never doubting for a second that he would reemerge. He would reemerge because I commanded it. (39-40)

What this essentially polarizing mechanism entails is a continuous frontier, a creation and resurrection of the opposition lest the self disunites and fragments. The enemy becomes necessary for self-identity—no enemy, no self. Furthermore, Shepard blurs the boundaries between real (grounded) and imaginary or constructed, enemy. The Colonel’s equations are bound to create and will an enemy with or without real imminent danger or offensive form the other side. He thrives on, is obsessed with, repeating the mechanism of securing identity against external threat: security as shaken is security regained and affirmed. Yet, it needs to be re-shaken so that it could be reaffirmed, theoretically speaking, ad infinitum.

The self as dialectically carved will always be in conflict with non-self; hence, self-security becomes hostage to the enemy since it is founded on ontological insecurity. Ironically, the other as enemy inevitably becomes dangerous when it enters the game and ironically when it does not. The absence of the enemy entails self-fragmentation or maybe civil/internal conflicts. Political, historical, and literary examples of externally imposed categories upon a weaker or othered party are numerous. For instance, the terms, interpretations, and trials of Salem’s “witch hunting” were unilaterally imposed on the mainly female victimized population. Reading about the trials one may sift that the accused person’s self-defense or confession would not make a big difference since the whole ordeal was unilaterally imposed and operated. Demanding that the accused female
give the names of other partners means that the case is already closed. The Witch Hunting episode in American early history has been explained many ways. One such explanation has to do with the Puritans’ obsession with setting good and evil apart. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown and The Scarlet Letter dramatize Puritan’s inability to understand that there is no pure evil or pure good, that humans are capable of both. The logic of you are either with God or with the devil is a very reductive and dangerous one. Alternatively, materialist feminists explain Salem’s witch hunting and trials in economic terms: any convicted female loses her estate as well as life to the State. In another sense, witch hunting becomes a flourishing business. It is very important to consider the logic and procedures of witch hunting as much as it is important to uncover the fact that the state confiscates the property of those accused of trading with the devil.11 In fact, I think security discourses and consequent wars sometimes submit to similar logics where conclusions are drawn first and imposed then.

Anyhow, States of Shock can be said to be postmodern by implication. It critiques postmodernity’s society of spectacle, yet it seems to fall victim to the very order it resists. According to Johan Callens the play “enacts a cultural critique” that “harkens back to the Situationist International, whose self-proclaimed leader was Guy Debord” (291). Ironically, the very techniques Situationist International borrowed from Dada and Surrealism have been co-opted or appropriated by mainstream commodifying postmodern society of spectacle. Thus, for Callens the play ends ambiguously. In fact, the play ends with Stubbs’ sexual recovery and regaining manly attitude posed to decapitate the Colonel, or his father. Such a recovery is negative since it reinitiates Stubbs into
myths of masculinity and violence. Callens succinctly explains the ambiguous, ironic, or self-deflective end. He states that:

> With verve Shepard exposes the late-capitalist, high-tech conjunction of nation state and global economy, ideology and commodification. . . . Instead of going for specific popular icons . . . States of Shock is more concerned with the conditions, (re)productions and effects of the media-fed war hysteria. The play thereby prolongs Shepard’s preoccupation with the power of delusive representations, whether filmic . . . , or mental and theatrical . . . . [T]he aggressive, Artaudian reactivation and reappropriation of Stubbs’ sexual desire and body-memory, in reaction to a larger cultural amnesia and anesthesia, threaten to divert States of shock and recuperate it into the very thing it opposed. Consequently, Shepard’s play exemplifies the pitfalls of resistance . . . . (291)

More importantly, the play is metafictional. It predicts its own reception by the American public. It critiques the lack of response or indifference on the part of the audience. Stubbs would continually pull his shirt up to show a massive wound, but nobody in the play’s approximate audience seems to care. The White Couple—white old man and woman dressed completely in white—are concerned with their delayed order of clam chowder. The White Couple are so angry that waiting for their order is keeping them from shopping “right now.” Not surprisingly, States of Shock was negatively reviewed as a setback in Shepard’s achievements. It never caught up with audiences, although interest in it has been reviving since 9/11. According to David J. DeRose, States of Shock has received a mixed response. DeRose explains,
When *States of Shock* did open in May of 1991, critical and popular response was mixed. The play was not what audience or reviewers anticipated from a Pulitzer Prize winning playwright . . . . The overwhelming consensus among critics and theatergoers was that the play seemed like a regression on Shepard’s part . . . . Even more perplexing to the public was the fact that *States of Shock* was clearly written as a bitter outcry against America’s involvement in the Persian Gulf. . . . *States of Shock* condemns both the American government’s military invasion of Iraq in February of 1991 and, more notably, the compliant and complacent reaction of the American public to that invasion and to the manner in which it was mass-marketed by our leaders. (“*States of Shock*”)

Likewise, in “Sam Shepard’s “*States of Shock,”* Aslý Tekinay concurs with DeRose that the play is a “political” as well as “philosophical” response to the invasion of Iraq. More important, Tekinay states, “it is at the same time a reaction to the American public’s complacent attitude towards these events. The play goes on to strip American democracy of its glamour, to present—in all their nakedness—the values on which it is founded” (“Sam Shepard’s”). However, I think that the public’s response is emblematic of their unwillingness to question their ideological and overblown patriotism. Such a response also reveals that the play has hit a sensitive string—it forces the audience to see their role in the destructiveness of war through their complacency and narcissistic consumerism.

To explain, postmodernism in Shepard’s account is closer to Jameson’s and Baudrillard’s concepts of commodification, consumerism, hyperreality, and simulation. If
war changes from a violent act that should be avoided to a spectacle or a mediated event that boosts the stock market and entertains the public, then we are in a very difficult ethical dilemma. More problematically, ethical questions about the humanistic consequences of the war may not be raised or may become mainly marginalized. Oddly enough, the public’s passive response to the war does not correspond to the way the Colonel or Stubbs sees the war. The Colonel invests so passionately in the war invoking conservative hawkish military values as well as metanarratives of American universalism and exceptionalism. Stubbs as directly affected by the war presents an involved uncensored account that usually goes missing in mainstream media lest support for the war recedes. The following novel written by an Arab Muslim writer also exposes the fact that Arab-Muslim audiences see the war in different terms. They cannot afford the White Couple’s detachment, nor can they explain it in terms of universal metanarratives. The stakes and circumstances are completely different.

Abdul-Karim Nasif’s *Two Faces of One Phoenix*

The Arabic novel, *Two Faces of One Phoenix* (2004), defies all categories. It is anti-modernist in a very narrow sense, when modernism is synonymous with colonialism. It does not expound an ethics of alterity or a celebration of difference—these being postmodernist key issues. Rather, it looks more of a reactionary counter narrative that reaffirms the Self—here the Iraqi self—against an invading destructive other. In this narrative, the 'self/I' belongs to the Iraqi individual, while the American is the foreigner invading other. *Two Faces* launches a counter narrative not because it belongs to the
minority-marginalized side, but because it deconstructs American hegemonic master narratives and exposes context-bound economic-political causes of the invasion. Furthermore, *Two Faces* is historiographic and intertextual. For example, the text presents local official and local unofficial versus foreign official and media coverage of the war.

*Two Faces* starts off with Dima’s personal story. Dima is a young Iraqi girl under pressure to quit school and marry her cousin, Hammam. She keeps postponing and creating excuses looking for a way out of such scheme: she loves Hammam as if he were her brother and thus objects to cousins’ marriage or close relatives’ marriage. Eventually, she successfully maneuvers, not without some help from her mother, out of the marriage and ends up earning a midwifery diploma, falling in love with a gentleman from Damascus, and marrying him. Dima dies shortly after giving birth to a baby girl that her husband names “Dima” after his late wife. Dima’s death gains tragic stature as well as allegorical dimensions. Dima’s death at the moment of giving birth to another ‘Dima” is framed in a sacrificial context: she chooses to get pregnant so as to fulfill her husband’s wish to become a father although she knows that from a medical point of view this is tantamount to suicide as she suffers heart disease. Her death also becomes tragically allegorical as it coincides with the fall of Baghdad. The tragic fall of Baghdad, like Dima’s death, promises the possibility of new life or resurrection, particularly in light of the phoenix symbol that permeates the narrative. The story has many twists, flashbacks, interlaced mini-narratives, and multiple narrations, thus entangling the reader into a myriad of personal, political, and allegorical meanings.
Dima’s struggle for independence correlates with Iraqi’s fight against British colonial rule. Her father asks her to quit school and marry Hammam; she does not need to study as Hammam will provide for her. Dima resists this paternalistic and somehow sexist or traditional argument. In a stream of consciousness moment, Dima recalls her response to that:

“No, it is not a matter of a job or salary,” I vehemently replied. I felt that I should (like a lion) show them my claws. “It is a question of life, existence . . . and self-fulfillment. I do not allow anyone to negate me. . . . Do you hear, Hammam? I do not allow anyone to make me into a dependent tail . . . a mere female sitting in the corner of the house. I have my own identity and I want to live it, and fulfill that self.” (Two Faces 30; my translation)

The affirmative proactive tone and content of the above passage is clear—contrary to dominant stereotypes about Arab women’s passivity and subordination. In another place, Dima draws a triple analogy among her parents’ cornering her into almost marrying a man she does not love, Rome’s Caesar capture of Queen Zenobya, and Arab rulers’ oppression of their people. Obviously, the analogy also applies to the Anglo-American conquering of Iraq and deciding on her behalf in paternalistic, imperialistic, or coercive capacities.

Dima’s personal struggle to complete her education, escape traditional prearranged cousin-marriage, and Hammam’s bitterness and plot to take revenge upon her dominate the first two thirds of the narrative. This differences and scenarios dwindle as the narratives moves from personal tragedies and differences to national ones upon the start of the Second Iraq War. The Iraqi national tragedy supersedes all personal suffering.
The American attack on Iraq coincides with Hammam’s taking over the narrative thread from Dima and her mother. As he takes over the narrative thread, the scene is shifted to the media presentation of the war. For a while, the people fluctuate between American-British and Iraqi media versions. People want to understand the war, particularly as they witness the coalition’s use of massive military and technological power against a small poverty-ripped country. One claim of American media after another is put on the table and shown to be a pretext to the real motives behind the war. The war as launched on behalf of the Iraqi people, a war of liberation, the war as necessitated by urgent security imperatives—WMDs and terroristic ties with the Taliban—are all refuted.

The last thing a colonizer and invader would give out to the colonized is liberty. For instance, the first wave of European colonialism upon the weakening and eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire has resulted in the partition of the region into small divided states according to artificially drawn boundaries. The British and the French in pacts carve the region into pizza-like slices among themselves. Arab history textbooks, state rhetoric and the media keep blaming such colonial partition for the post-independence Arab disunity and weakness. Toward the end of the novel, a Syrian young man contextualizes his family’s concern for the people of Iraq. The artificial borders not only have stopped Arabs’ free overflow from one region to another, but have split families and tribes into two. The young man explains:

When they divided the Fertile Crescent, they never considered that the Fertile Crescent consists of tribes spread all over the riverbanks, pastures and deserts without being limited by border and chains. A clan positioned
today in Transjordan may move to the west of it tomorrow. (Two Faces 82; my translation)

Ironically, the colonial divisions imposed on the region by partitioning it into small states—most of which do not even have the basic requirements of statehood—still thwart Arab unity and facilitate re-colonizing Arab lands. Gathered around their TV set, a group of Iraqi young men discuss the roots of the war and the failure of the Arab and Islamic world to intervene and stop the “shedding” of the Iraqi people’s blood. They wonder, “How can a colonizer divide us? Why doesn’t the colonizer want us other than fragmented, when he is building big coalitions?” (Two Faces 68; my translation). These are really good questions: Europe is uniting; the United States is building global coalitions while Arab leaders are divided among themselves; feelings of kinship among Arab States’ subjects clash against artificial boundaries, too.

For the characters in the novel and a large section of Arab world, “history repeats itself.” The new Anglo-American colonial wave similarly violates Iraq’s will and appropriates its voice and concerns despite claims that Americans are there to free Iraq and destroy WMDs. As a group of young Iraqi men gather around their TV set to hear the news of Baghdad’s bombardments, they voice their anxieties and skepticism toward American real motives. One young man states, “America’s intention in Iraq was clear”: “We want Iraq’s oil no matter what … let the whole world cover the sea with lag stones” (Two Faces 84; my translation). The powerful party imposes its will in defiance of international laws, domestic, and international protests. Moreover, the characters in the novel highlight the paradox of a civilizational bombing of Iraq to the “Stone Age”: “Iraq returned to the Stone Age, no radio, no TV, no communication. . . . Didn’t Wolfowitz
plan that? Didn’t hatred push Bush the father and Bush the son to do this with Iraq?” (Two Faces 139; my translation). This realization that American involvement in the region is self-motivated affects the consequent course of action the novel will take. Resistance. Thus, the novel ends with spontaneous formation of resistance groups. The young men also send a defiant message by deciding to go to Baghdad to resist foreign occupation. Before he leaves for Baghdad to defend it, Hammam writes the following letter to his mom:

Since this life cannot be tolerated anymore. . . . Our loved ones leave us and our enemies invade us, then why live if life is but misery and despair? Weakness and humiliation. Yuma [mom] I am going to Baghdad to fight for us. (Two Faces 178; my translation)

These closing lines reveal war from the victim’s perspective as a replay of colonizing-colonized scenarios: raping of colonized land and resources and immobilizing its agency. Yet, colonization very often backfires, mobilizing the colonized toward resistance and reclamation of dignity and rights. The young men, leading a leisurely life before the war—football being their primary pastime—decide to go to Baghdad and fight the invaders. Before the war, Hammam does not have any public dimension or voice; he has been mainly a grunting young man obsessed with marrying his cousin, Dima. Then, he becomes angry over not succeeding to do so. But, the moment Iraq is in danger, he metamorphoses into a mature person ready to die for what he believes to be a just cause. The mothers in the novel, too, forget about their personal loss and focus on Baghdad. A new agency and will may be born out of colonial conquest. The novel also closes with an optimistic note: Baghdad has been ransacked by many invaders before; every time,
Baghdad would rise renewed and strengthened. Foreign intervention and military occupation cannot be made to appear beautiful or noble, at least for those disillusioned with colonialism. For the colonized, occupation is a humiliating and unnatural situation that is bound to engender resistance regardless of religion or nationality. Obviously, the novel creates a différend when juxtaposed to American official version of things. The différend happens on the discursive and physical levels. The Iraqi people disappear as the colonizer speaks in their name and on their behalf: the hegemonic power knows what the others’ needs are and knows what is best for them. The Iraqi people who suffered under Saddam’s dictatorship wind up suffering under foreign military occupation, not to mention their feelings of shame and loss of face.

Like all narratives, this one has its own aesthetic appeal and limitations. It seems that the author is a Sunni who does not focus on Saddam’s cruelties and failures. According to the overall thrust of the novel, even Saddam’s infamous human rights record is manipulated to justify the aggression and divert public attention from real motives. The novel remains a valuable unofficial historical account of the conflict revealing the stark discrepancies between American and Arab understanding of the conflict. I would even argue that the novel concurs with the views of a considerable section of Arabs and Muslims toward the United States’ involvement in the region as arrogant, imperialistic, and patronizing.

Coming from an Arab-Muslim writer, who displays Pan-Arab nationalistic sentiments, this novel may sound offensive to Western readers who might be Americans uncomfortable with perceiving their “double-standard” in foreign politics given their destructive military occupation. Nevertheless, many journalistic and political analysts in
the Arab world—even those who are anti-American—distinguish between homogenizing and rejecting Western culture as a whole and rejecting Western or American imperial and unjust occupation of Iraq and exploitation of Arab wealth. Arab politicians, gritty journalists, and activists, too, critique and oppose alliances between imperial foreign governments and local “puppet” ones at the expense of national and local interests. Furthermore, capitalistic, imperial, religious and crusading goals coalesce as they are all coming from the same power center. That is, we are back to the paradox of cultural hierarchy and subsumption.

One can discern the contours of a paradoxical, self-refuting, move on the part of the superior West that wants to transform the inferior or violent East into a more advanced community. But, to be able to carry out such a custodial relation, the center has to construct, maintain, and carve such rifts for such movement to be conceivable and to materialize. This is on the level of rhetoric. On the level of deeds, the contradictions are so blatant to miss, at least from the perspective of the weak victimized party. In fact, the Western philanthropic humanistic discourse is as injurious as, if not more injurious than, military suppression of populations and destruction of infrastructures. Nevertheless, if we accept propagandistic arguments that the West and the East are mutually-exclusive, the implications would be limited and limiting. It is neither in the West’s nor in the East’s interest to submit to deterministic essentialist and misleading characterizations.¹²

If taken as a provisional contextualized narrative, Nasif’s narrative may bridge some of the gaps in American-Arab points of view. This literary work rarely conceives of America as homogenous monolith; the novel acknowledges that many Western and American citizens protested the war refusing its promotional rhetoric of liberation,
WMDs, and regional stability. However, the war and other conflicts are not exclusively American responsibility. Saddam Hussein’s unconstructive and oppressive policies along with Arab-Muslims world’s weaknesses have facilitated and made occupation possible. In addition, it is for the sake of convenience that I use almost vacuous polarizations such as Arabs and Americans. I am aware that these two words refer to collective, diverse groups and sub-currents. Hence, distinctions need to be made among different levels of responsibility. Responsibility correlates with knowledge, power, degree, and office. Heads of states, academicians, and religious leaders bear more responsibility than the half-educated, or misinformed, masses. States and the media bear a higher responsibility as they mediate to the public.

Theoretically speaking, if Levinasian or Derridean versions of the postmodern were dominant, the whole east/west conflict would not be there in the first place. Interestingly, if people deal with one another according to postmodern alterity ethics, we will be living in a conflict free prelapsarian, pre-capitalist, pre-discursive world? There is a sense of belatedness of all of this postmodernity in that we are already in the ethnocentric and political. In a very real sense, we are not “post” anything. We cannot exceed our realities. Still, we can negotiate and modify them. It is not either we are always bound to reduce the other to the self or we have to selflessly meet and preserve alterity. If pushed to the extreme, these theories either take us out of human boundaries or transport us into diversionary and myopic wishful thinking. Preserving alterity cannot be made a first priority in lived political situations, where we need to know others and get known by them.

In addition, this Arabic novel sheds more light on the limitations of colonial and
postcolonial descriptions complicated by new historical developments such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, ‘war on terrorism,’ global capitalism, and the return of military colonial expansionism. It would be naïve to think that we are past or ‘post’ colonial and imperial relations. The situation in Iraq is chaotic that neat theoretical frames prove insufficient. More important, colonizers-colonized polarities do not hold like they used to in first colonial waves. For example, multinational corporate capitalism has beneficiaries and victims on both sides of the globe, although foreign Third World countries still pay the major toll.

Two Faces presents the views of local unprivileged Iraqi and other Arab Muslims through multiple narrations, political allegory, and I would say discourse analysis tactics that contextualize utterances and debunk the rift between rhetoric and deeds. What looks like a metanarrative of American exceptional and providential role in protecting the globe and fostering New World Order for a large portion of Western audience is mere greed, show of force and rape of land and wealth, for the majority of local victimized Iraqis, Arabs and Muslims. Is such a stark disparity in perspectives attributable to difference in position? Or does one side have a more truthful and convincing explanation of the conflict than that of the other’s? This is a charged issue, but still, through critical discourse analysis, historical, political, and economic contexts, one may find his/her way through such conflicting accounts.

It is clear that Nasif through the framing narrator and other characters-turned-narrators does not see his narrative as incommensurable with the American mainstream ones. Rather, his narrative version is presented as more truthful than that of the imperial side. The young men’s decision to fight the invaders rests on the conviction that such
attack is unjust, unethical, and destructive. Yet, despite advocating resistance, the characters are also aware of internal rifts inside Iraq and the Arab world. They strike a balance between critiquing the Shia and the Kurds and upholding an Iraqi unified front. Arab rules are also critiqued as self-serving, passive, and complicit with the powerful party. They also obstruct their people’s desire to aide and even join their Iraqi brothers’ resistance to occupation, because they do not see this as a specific attack on Saddam or Iraq, but an attack on the whole Arabic-Islamic body. Realizing the existence and causes of these rifts inside Iraq and all over the Arab-Islamic world, Nasif’s characters strike a reconciliatory note. They both critique such divisions, but do not want to reinforce them. For, rifts and differences have been the major factor in Arabs’ and Muslims’ weakness and further colonization. If Arabs unite despite their differences, it would not be easy, or maybe conceivable, to colonize them.

Like *Beloved* and *States of Shock*, *Two Faces* shows that there are many incommensurable realities. Discrediting official and State filtered voices, the narrative simultaneously voices vernacular and unmediated accounts. Cultural membership, ideology and position play a major role in how these cross-cultural encounters and conflicts are viewed. If the novel were written from a Kurd’s or a Shiite’s point of view, perhaps we will get a different perspective on the war. Do we accept all such narratives as positioned and relative to one another or do we see some as more representative of reality? Is reality a construct and hence a contested site? Or is reality discernible from falsehood or non-reality? Or is it both? The following novel by Donald A. Folz broaches such issues, showing variable levels of reality, their sources, and limitations.
Donald A Folz’s *Into a Dying Sun*

Folz’s *Into a Dying Sun*, a recent novel based on First Gulf War, is problematic in terms of both its genre and stance. It displays dialogic and postmodernist sensibilities. However, it also highlights the limitations that of cross-cultural encounters. Problematically, the narrative ends up reaffirming a dialectic of us versus them despite moments of self-critique. Basically, the American military intervention in Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia is optimized as noble and altruistic. As such the novel cuts a half way deal: it marks a step toward dialogue, making room for an Iraqi perspective on the conflict, yet it reiterates and almost accepts mainstream metanarratives of democracy and humanism. The Iraqi other provides important insights into the history of the region and questions American motives behind the war by invoking British colonial precedents in the region. The soldier-narrator critiques the fact that American leadership has not liberated the Shia or overthrown Saddam’s despotic regime after liberating Kuwait. Implicitly, the narrator submits to colonial metanarratives where the colonizer aides and liberates the colonized—ironically colonialism itself figures as a desired natural order of things.

The narrative deals with the ordeal of two pilots whose aircraft is shot down after the war has ended. David, the main character, and his co-pilot Paul narrowly escape capture by Iraqi soldiers loyal to Saddam. Although they manage to escape with the help of Sa’ad, a young Shiite military deserter, Paul sustains an injury causing his death sometime later. The American pilots and Sa’ad spend sometime together running away
from Saddam’s National Guards. David develops some kind of friendship with Sa’ad and they engage in a cross-cultural dialogue. David displays sympathetic feelings toward Iraqi people, particularly the Shia, whereas Paul resists dialogue and resents the Other.

However, David as character and narrator is somehow inhibited due to many factors, such as the rawness of emotion, fear of being labeled unpatriotic, and belief in American exceptionalism. Writing about the First Gulf War is not the same as writing about Vietnam or WW II. The American-Iraqi (or Arab) conflict did not end with the first Gulf War. New developments after 9/11 terrorist attacks have dramatically shrunken the possibility of dialogue and made the possibility for empathy and psychological acceptance of the other very dim. In fact, the Arab-Muslim other has become a demonic site, despite some superficial calls to differentiate between good and bad apples. Reservoirs of negative images are too strong to dispel by mini-statements about the differences between fanatic and moderate Muslims—Islam itself being stigmatized as incompatible with American culture’s liberal and humanistic values.

Nonetheless, Sa’ad’s being a Shiite who speaks fluent English having been educated in Britain renders him moderately Other. These factors attenuate his otherness and make him more trustworthy. Addressing the American soldiers in English, he tells them he is a “friend.” Such encounters reveal that there is no mutual demonization, particularly on the part of Sa’ad. He sees them as partners against Saddam’s Ba’ath regime. Had Sa’ad turned out to be a Sunni Iraqi or an anti-American fighter, there would be no dialogue or narrative in the first place—one of the fallacies is that Sunni Iraqis support Saddam Hussein, he himself a Sunni, when, in fact, many oppositional groups in Iraq that have suffered from Saddam’s prosecution are Sunni Iraqis. However,
the novel’s logic capitalizes on such taken for granted divisions. In such a framework of similar and different, the Shia become American local allies. Both share the same enemy: Saddam’s Ba’ath regime and loyal National Guards. This new alliance between American soldiers and Iraqi Shiite populations is a pragmatic deal. According to American mainstream explanations, it results from seeking the same goal: liberating Iraqi from Saddam’s dictatorships.

Other views, particularly in Arab media and streets, explain American-Shia alliance in instrumental terms: Americans want insider help to topple Saddam and control the country; the Shia (and Kurds) want to replace Saddam’s regimes and seek some kind of political autonomy. However, such alliances are also interpreted in terms of the colonial maxim of “divide and rule.” The neo-colonization of the Arab world depends on fanning colonially-sponsored racial and religious divisions. A fragmented front cannot stop invasion or foreign intrusion, nor can it launch effective counteroffensives. Turning the enemies or the Others against one another is a powerful political and war tactic. Such tactics can be traced in literary discourses as well as in political rhetorics and actions. For example, Bernard Jackson’s Iago parodies and reinterprets Othello in terms of Greco-Turkish conflicts. The Greeks smartly mobilize one Muslim constituency against the other. The Moor, Othello, is recruited to help the Greeks stop the Turks. Such political strategies have been expressed in Samuel Huntingdon’s Clash of Civilizations. Huntingdon warns that the West and Islam are on an inevitable clash course. He recommends that the West takes all measures to win. One of his recommendations is to keep the Arab-Islamic world fragmented among themselves and to turn them against one another in civil and border conflicts. Critics cite Iraq-Iran as a primary example of such
policies, despite the presence of many other homegrown as well as global factors (see Huntingdon, Clash of Civilization). However, I would like to return to the dialectic of enemy and friend and the distribution of benign feelings accordingly. A friend deserves humanistic treatment. He/she has some psychological space. But an enemy is one who falls beyond the walls of humanity and hence is not subject to humanistic or ethical considerations. From the following quote, it seems that Sa’ad understands such dialectics and uses them to his advantage. Upon encountering the American pilots, he makes clear that he is on their side:

The driver opened the Toyota’s door, held his arms out to David and in well-spoken English, said, “My friend,” “I am not a soldier. I have no weapons.” . . . “I am an Iraqi citizen, sir, and if I speak English well it is because I have worked to learn the language. You see, I plan to reside within the United States or Great Britain some day, if my troubled Iraq will not right itself.” (32-35; emphasis added)

This short introduction establishes Iraq as a troubled place against the stable more inhabitable Great Britain and United States. As an Arabic speaking subject, I even doubt that an Iraqi would refer to Britain as “Great Britain.” We ordinarily use this term in historical textbooks that deal with the British Empire. Mostly, such use has a negative register in our culture. We do not see Britain in terms of greatness; Britain is usually singled out for its destructive colonial actions in the Arab world: form partition to implanting puppet regimes to the creation of Israel. Particularly, the British colonial rule of Iraq was bloody. They, even, were instrumental in establishing Sunni as rulers of Iraq, too.
Still, Sa’ad utilizes the pragmatic of a shared enemy: he openly asks David if President Bush would help free them from Hussein’s dictatorship. Interestingly, Sa’ad’s call for help echoes American mainstream media’s representation of Gulf Wars in terms of international aide and global responsibility. The strong comes to the weak party’s aide. American war discourse has also been coded. It has targeted certain groups, basically the Shia and the Kurds as potential allies and beneficiaries. Ironically, as the novel attests to, the Shia foreseeing the defeat of Hussein’s military rose up against him. They thought Saddam was over. Ironically, Saddam crushed the opposition under American supervision. Upon such a disappointing end to the First Gulf War, Sa’ad tells David that “we” shall never trust you again. David also is very disappointed and angry when he is told that we are here to “liberate Kuwait,” rather than interfere in a country’s domestic affairs! American soldiers, too, have been briefed about Iraq’s internal divisions: “David and Paul had been briefed on current Iraqi affairs back at Dhahran. The Shi’a, though fanatic Muslims, were sworn enemies of Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath party” (50).

Nevertheless, Sa’ad in a problematic move absolves the Bush Administration of any responsibility in the Gulf War. The war was caused by Saddam’s annexation of Kuwait. America’s ulterior motives or roles in hyping and escalating the situation are not mentioned. There is some truth in such descriptions, but they do not capture the complexity and intricacy of the First Gulf War. It has been documented and proven that United States Administration has played at least an indirect role in Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. Sa’ad does not bring that up; he focuses on the outcome. Sa’ad, or David through Sa’ad, reestablishes colonial and imperial metanarratives. Sa’ad historicizes: after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the colonial powers directly controlled parts of the
Arab-Islamic world and put other parts under mandatory rules—till these Arab States could stand on their own. For example, in section VIII article 94 of the Treaty of Versailles (1919), it is stated that “the High Contracting Parties [European colonial powers] agree that Syria “shall . . . be provisionally recognized as an independent State subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such a time as they are able to stand alone” (“Treaty of Versailles”). In Section IX article 101 of the Treaty, “Turkey declares that in conformity with the action taken by the Allied Powers she recognizes the Protectorate proclaimed over Egypt by Great Britain on December 18, 1914” (“Treaty of Versailles”). Sa’ad’s call for help reaffirms the American official discourse that casts its involvement in the region in terms of helping the oppressed, stabilizing the region, andshouldering cosmic duties contingent on American exceptional military and humanistic achievements. To quote, Sa’ad says,

Many of his friends and countrymen have died because of this war. They do not blame the Americans. They blame Saddam. He says because of President George Bush, Saddam’s army is crushed. Will the Americans help establish the Shi’a as the rightful heirs of Iraq?” (50)

As the conversation proceeds, Paul ridicules Sa’ad’s version of the roots of Iraqi problems. Paul, a hardliner, discredits and blocks Sa’ad’s voice. Sa’ad becomes speechless as a result of Paul’s sarcasm and racial slurs. Such a silence can be read two ways. Sa’ad’s silence marks his failure to make his point or prove it. It signifies defeat. His arguments are viewed in terms of Arabic people blaming the West for their own failures. Second, Sa’ad’s silence in the face of Paul’s scathing attacks betrays the limits of cross-cultural dialogue. The silence may mark an impasse. It may prove extremely
difficult, if not impossible, to dislodge deep-seated biases and misunderstandings. Thus, the exchanges among David, Paul, and Sa’ad highlight the limitations and potentials of cross-cultural dialogue. Dialogue does not necessarily resolve differences, nor does it necessarily result in establishing more just arrangements, as the engaged parties are not equivalent in power. We are not dealing with the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism where the self-other complete one another.

Resolving conflicts needs more than refuting fallacies, exposing blindness, and deconstructing metanarratives. It requires a willingness to enter into dialogic relations, negotiate one’s values, and concede power, sometimes. What if one knows that his or her actions are wrong, yet still does not want to change—change would entail curbing one’s power or some material loss? To enter negotiation with the other party for the sake of understanding and acting based on new givens is different from entering negotiations to convince the other party of the status quo or further consolidate his/her lower status on the power grid. Paul is an example of power’s refusal to respond to its other. Believed to be noble, American actions and intentions cannot, should not, be doubted. Stereotyped as inferior and backward, the Iraqi cannot know the truth, nor can he offer a competing historical-political perspective. In fact, Paul refers to Iraq as a “shit hole” and sees Iraqis as bunch of backward useless “rag heads.” One senses the presence of a barrier keeping the other at bay: there is no psychological as well as rhetorical room for the other in the economy of the self, yet.

Paul’s stance of total rejection and exclusion of the other form the economy of self is in tension with that of both David’s and the framing narrator’s more empathetic ones. The very opening of the novel capitalizes on empathizing with that side of Iraq that
is suppressed and victimized by a despotic regime. The narrative opens with Baraka’s pain and suffering at the hands of Saddam’s secret police. Baraka is enslaved and raped by Saddam’s police that have arrested her husband and confiscated her home. Such a narrative establishes the obvious for the American public: Hussein’s violations of human rights. Then, it is noble to interfere to stop such oppression. Describing Saddam’s secret police as rapists may serve a propagandistic function, regardless of whether such accusations are true or false. It is the narrative’s effects on the audience that mainly matter. Strangely, Baraka disappears from the narrative. As a reader, I have expected the novel to focus on her, but this is not the case. Nevertheless, I do not contest that human beings regardless of their race, religion, or political alliances, can and sometimes do empathize with the pain of the Others based on a sense of shared humanity and justice. Any sensible human being finds the victimization and rape of a helpless woman objectionable. Rape repulses us. I contest such humanistic narratives whenever they cover up ulterior materialistic motives whose effects may be as inhuman and destructive as dictatorships. Anyway, I will quote the passage as I think it sets the tone of the whole novel:

    HER HUSBAND HAD BEEN DRAGGED AWAY, forced to enlist in Saddam Hussein’s callow army. One month later two security soldiers of the Amn Khass arrested her. The security agents said nothing. Her house—the house that had belonged to her husband’s family for generations—was seized. I am going to be raped like the others. Baraka toiled in slavery from dawn till midnight at General Abdul-Salem Al-Tekrite’s palace. (7)
I find this passage problematic. I see the working of double-standards. It is what the passage does not say that is revealing. As a humanistic concern, such incidents are utilized and enlisted as a moral justification of the war against Saddam. Ironically, waging a massive war against an entire people, dropping prohibited uranium-depleted bombs on their military and civilian places, bombing their shelters, infrastructures and hospitals, and imposing a prolonged economic blockade that caused the death of more than a million Iraqi children, are not protested or considered serious humanistic violations. Aren’t these violations as serious as if not more serious than the rape of Baraka? Somehow, violence perpetrated by the victorious is legitimate, figuring in a teleological narrative, whereas violence committed by the other is just violence, explained in terms of depravity, evil, hatred, or any other negative register.

Sa’ad’s historical insertions and contextualization of Western involvement in the Arab world modify optimistic Western master narratives and reveal the working of a teleology of power relations. Sa’ad’s feels compelled to contextualize the historical and colonial roots of Iraq’s troubles for his American companions:

The British . . . installed King Faisal Al-Awal, but he was a puppet of the British governor, Arnold Wilson. The people called him Jaz-zaar, or ‘The Butcher.” When King Faisal Al-Awal turned against the British, ‘the Butcher’ Arnold Wilson had him killed. This event—when the people stood up to the British—is known as the Intifatha [uprising] of 1920, one of the most significant events of Iraqi history. (71)

Sa’ad shows the role Britain has played in shaping the future and divisions of current Iraq. The British involvement with Iraq was not for the people’s sake, nor was it, as
usually stated in colonial discourses, to bring light and relief to the others or to modernize them. It was a self-serving act. The British may progress and prosper, but the colonized Others are suppressed and exploited. Their wealth and will are scarred. Ironically, Sa’ad does not see America as a colonial power. He, as I have stated earlier, is hopeful that America will correct the political imbalance and reinstall the Shia as the rightful rulers of the country.

Similarly, Sa’ad’s historical insertions are disdainfully dismissed as insignificant mere ranting by Paul. “How the hell do you know all this is even the truth?’ said Paul” (72). Sa’ad’s answer is important: “The same way you know of George Washington or Woodrow Wilson. It is my history” (72). If you know your history, we also know our history. The Western version of history versus the Eastern comprises thorny issues that pertain to political and ethnocentric factors. History is a discourse. Hence, Sa’ad historical explanations clash with Western modernist inscriptions. The civilized-uncivilized explanations of colonialism are products of logocentric assessments as well as disparity in power relations. The dominant culture imposes its criteria and definitions/strictures on the dominated ones.

Again Paul’s voice is important as it concurs with American mainstream imperial rhetoric. He does not find the American involvement in Iraq blamable. Rather, he sees it in terms of American noble responsibility. The Americans come to this region to “spread democracy”; nobody can protest that (73). Daniel T. Rodgers discusses the revival of exceptionalist thought in America and shows its dire consequences for the Others. He maintains that “exceptionalism, even more than nationalism, is especially focused on the “others,” on the nation’s antitypes elsewhere” (16). One can detect this exceptionalism in
the mainstream media and other venues. In *Into a Dying*, it is Paul who disseminates
exceptionalist rhetoric when he affirms the superiority of American military power to any
one in the whole world. America is superior to all nations in all aspects: economics,
government, education, athletics and entertainment, according to Paul.

Paul also shrugs off Sa’ad’s attempt to reclaim Iraq’s place in history by asserting
that:

I am talking about the industrial age, the information age, and the age of
free men and women. America has lead the way for the last two hundred
years. Who listens to Iraqi music? No one. Who watches Iraqi movies? No
one. You people need to step into the twentieth century. (80)

American culture is a global culture. American music is listened to all over the world, but
who listens to Iraqi music? No one does, according to Paul, when, in fact, Iraqi music is
listened to all over the Arab world, more than 300 million people. Paul, like Mark Twain,
sees the Arab world as a barren desert lagging behind history. Paul describes Islam as
“medieval” and incompatible with modernity, a very limited and decontextualized
understanding. Such characterizations overlook colonial, political, and economic
variables. To blame Islam for all the negative realities in the Arab world reenacts the
reductive logic of exclusively blaming the West or America for all the misery in the Arab
world. America is advanced and actually has many great institutions, but other nations
can be as advanced and modern. One does not nullify or deny the other: I will quote the
following dialogue as it puts my critiques in perspective. When Sa’ad asks Paul about
what he means by “medieval,” Paul typically responds:
“It means,” said Paul, “that the U.S. is envied by everyone over here. You want to be like us, but you can’t until you adopt our politics. You try so hard to have a modern industrial system, but it can’t be run by people living in a medieval political system. That’s your whole damn problem.”. . . “Islam is medieval, controlling, and fanatical.” (81)

The above exchange between Paul and Sa’ad encapsulates many of the distortions about Islam and Muslims. Paul the liberated modern subject has the authority to analyze Arab world’s backwardness and prescribe remedies. He also invokes women’s Islamic clothing as a sign of Arab males’ oppression of their women. Against Paul’s demonizing stance, David represents a more self-critical and sensitive attitude. He admits “inequality” among nations and that “America does come across as arrogant” (82). A concession that infuriates Paul in a manner similar to the Colonel’s rage at Stubbs’ momentary loss of faith in America: “Damnit, David, you’ve turned into a goddamn hippie” (82). This is a very funny exchange; Paul resists criticism branding it as merely hippie fads, rather than well-deserved or partially correct.

In general, the narrative comes across as ambiguous and self-contradictory, values postmodernism promotes, although this is a different kind of ambiguity and inconsistency. For at the background of the destruction and killing of massive numbers of Iraqis, environmental disasters, and the recognition of economic motives behind the conflict, David rebounds to reaffirm the nobility of the American objectives whenever it gets involved in the globe. Once more, the intention is noble, the execution is wanting. The way David, who loves other cultures and sympathizes with Iraqis, seems to retract or undermine his critiques of American foreign politics is very paradoxical. Like Paul, he
thinks America is different and superior, and hence, invested with higher duties: America has to police and protect the world from chaos. He admits, though, that such custodial posture vis-à-vis the Arab world will ignite resentment and resistance. Those who are on the receiving end of global charity may prove thankless—this is also one of the themes found in Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden” and even in Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant.” David tells Sa’ad that,

But as we *baby-sit* this region, resentment will grow, and even you and your countrymen will resent us. I may agree with you to a certain extent; we do impose our values politically, and our free markets silently impose our culture on people. *But our values are right. Our intentions are noble.*”

(86; emphasis added)

The baby-sitting analogy is charged and very highly patronizing and misleading. It casts America in the role of a paternalistic caregiver. The Arab world is still immature. Like a baby, the Arab region cannot be left to *itself.* If the mother or father leaves, they have to call in a baby-sitter. For a baby cannot take care of *itself.* America becomes a surrogate parent—a stepmother—or guardian over the baby, till *it* reaches adulthood and can drink! Excuse the joke! It is very insulting, not without some touch of reality, that the Arab world is cast as a minor that still needs an adult around. The baby-sitting analogy connotes a noble responsibility and a caring duty, unless the baby-sitter happens to be a registered sex offender.
Notwithstanding, David admits to the humanizing effect of meeting Sa’ad as a human face:

Before this man appeared, David viewed the war as a game. He never associated a face with the armored targets he pursued, the little targets on the video screen. He was doing the right thing, fighting for American ideals, and ridding the world of a ruthless tyrant. Now, however, in this dirty corpse-filled hole, in the middle of a war-torn Iraq, David was beginning to understand the true despair of the Iraqi people. (88)

This passage echoes postmodernist critiques of the media and its hyperreality. Postmodern war is virtual and digital. It is fought from behind computer screens. The human toll is barely visible. The scientific-military nexus is one of efficiency—hitting or not hitting the target. The consequences of hitting or missing are not centralized. They become statistics used in the future to better improve the efficiency of the weapon. The human face is missing. In Levinasian vocabulary and I would say in all cultures, the human face has a special ethical and humanistic value. If it is effaced or defaced, its destruction becomes less objectionable and less noticeable. Modern technology with its cold statistics and instrumental reason may facilitate that.

In fact, the whole ordeal of being shot down, chased by Iraqi National Guards, and getting Paul killed has resulted from David’s interest in other cultures, or his assigning a human face to the Iraqi other. David also violates military codes against getting personal and fraternizing with the enemy. For David, Iraqis have faces; they are not just targets or statistics. Such recognition upsets military clarity and precision. To get confused about the humanity of, or associate a face with, the enemy is to miss the point.
Overridden with feelings of guilt, David ends forsaking his interest in the other. When he is on leave and has a chance to communicate with natives, he only sees Paul’s face. Pain, loss, and death emaciate his desire to bond with the Other. Perhaps, David becomes disillusioned. Unfortunately, the dialogic does not prosper or develop; it gives in to the dialectical, monologic, or nihilistic.

Despite its momentary breakthroughs, the novel fails to foreground ethics as responsibility for one’s deeds, let alone ethics as answerability to the other. The loss of immediacy, State’s elision of reality, and media’s filtered news dilute the passage from the act to its effects. Computer screens become battlefields. TV screens teem with pundits and political analysts hammering ideas of clean or surgical war, smart-bombing, collateral damage, and the like.

However, the narrative itself makes prominent the human undertow of war, be it for Americans who lose loved ones or Iraqis who suffer much more. The narrative, too, questions American intentions and actions in the world. Yet the novel’s closing remarks somehow reaffirm mainstream war metanarratives or strike a note of disillusionment with war in general as wasteful and absurd. Although David admits that America is involved in the Arab region because of its interests, he still sees this involvement in humanistic and justifiable terms. The fact that the narrative does not show that America is part of the problem as much as of the solution comprises a primary political elision of reality. To argue that Iraqi problems are all homegrown or to attribute such problems to Islam sidesteps nuanced reality—Iraq has been governed by secular regimes since British colonial rule. Alternatively, it is similarly reductive to blame Iraq’s troubles exclusively on American imperialism. We always need to look into immediate and larger contexts.
The Arab world contributes a big deal to its state of weakness and disintegration. For Arabs, to primarily blame foreign hands or past histories for social and political stagnation and economic dependency is to avoid responsibility and divert attention from and thwart much needed reformation. Going one extreme or another perpetuates the status quo.

Therefore, the texts analyzed in this chapter shed light on self-other transactions in context-bound situations, proving the limited descriptive power of postmodern theorizations. It seems that the break with modernism cannot be taken for granted—both modernism and postmodernism are products of Western thought. A postmodern alterity-sensitive and dialogic approach is a necessary and helpful first step. Cultures, groups, and individuals can choose to act ethically or to enjoy life at the expense of their others. A superstructural fix won’t avail without taking proactive measures on a grass-root basis to stop imperial and exploitive relations. We need to recognize the many limitations that impede human agency. We need to carve new space for such agency and defend it as well. We can participate in reconstructing our priorities and realities to be more ethical and less harmful.

In postmodernist terms, American war falls in the modernist colonial imperial tradition. Rather, it is a global enterprise. Into a Dying Sun voices different points of view even though it stops short of acknowledging minority/Iraqi perspective as equally legitimate or rivaling explanations. Ironically, the novel’s structure resembles that of some postmodernist novels, such as Thomas Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49 or Don DeLillo's White Noise: it has a cyclical structure; it begins with self-assertion, moves through some moments of opening to other, yet it ends with American rituals and
patriotism. More problematically, I would say, the narrator ends with a generalized condemnation of war as wasteful of human life, both American and Iraqi. This last note is somehow not written into a humanistic or liberal metanarrative. It does not see death as sacrifice or necessary evil for a higher good. Such an end remains ambiguous, still. It may indicate demystification with war narratives and glory or it may signal apathy and nihilism.

All in all, the previous texts modify and counteract generalizations about both modernism and postmodernism. The question of the other cannot be resolved by deconstructing metaphysical foundations or abandoning metanarratives of progress and humanism; it needs to be tackled proactively. Others need to take control of their own image and destiny by strengthening their own economies and social fronts that would prevent any unnecessary and unfair foreign intrusion. They need to change the realities behind their victimizations as well as engage their others in dialogue based on shared concerns and mutual cooperation. As long as it centers it ethical embrace on an unmoored Other, Postmodern alterity ethics cannot really do much to change self-other tensions. In a postmodern universe of discourse, one can embrace, turn to, and foreground alterity, but in real lived realities, the whole stakes change. Postmodern turn toward alterity in Levinasian sense cannot be thematized. For, the obligation to alterity remains beyond human faculties of knowledge or control; it is some kind of a meta-ethical situation. As such, it remains incommunicable. Instead of engaging hair-splitting scholastic debates about the nature and novelty of such ethics, if we turn to lived realities, we realize that such parameters cannot be easily maintained. In the following chapter, I look into postmodern ethics in light of political realities and discourses.
Notes

1. These terms are highly hybrid although some critics feel that there is a need to distinguish between postmodernism as a set of theorizations and post-modernity as a cultural condition or processes of postmodernization. Postmodernism’s significance and scope tends to vary depending the theorists’ alliances and priorities. For instances, Fredrick Jameson offers a bleak account of postmodernism conflating it with advanced capitalism. Thus, postmodern fiction is given to pastiche, parody, and historical nostalgia. However, Linda Hutcheon views postmodernism more positively: she argues that postmodern fiction is “historiographic metafiction.” She writes that:

   Postmodern culture . . . has a contradictory relationship to what we usually label our dominant, liberal humanist culture. It does not deny it. . . Instead, it contests it from within its own assumptions. Modernist like Eliot and Joyce have usually been seen as profoundly humanistic. . . in their paradoxical desire for stable aesthetic and moral value, even in the face of their realization of the inevitable absence of such universals. . . . Postmodernism . . . refuses to posit any structure . . . or master narrative . . . which for such modernists would have been consolatory. . . . It is precisely parody—that seemingly introverted formalism—that paradoxically brings about a direct confrontation with the problem of the relation of the aesthetic to a world of significance external to it, to a discursive world of socially defined meaning systems (past and present) —in other words, to the political and the historical.  

(Politics of Postmodernism 6-22).
2 Theorizations of the postmodern constitute a different genre from postmodern novel, poetry, or drama. Theoretical writings deal with abstract speculative and even prescriptive hypothetical issues although they may also be descriptive generalizations based on concrete data or observation. Fictional writings are more prone to the particular situated self-other encounters. The presence of context enables one to test the translation of one into the other and the workability and viability of theoretical writings.

3 We need to grapple with the roots of Western culture’s idealistic humanism and epistemology, such as the assumption that knowledge translates into ethics. In other words, as a humanistically and ethically driven citizen, I strive to deal with the other in the best way. If I know that my previous dealings were oppressive and reductive, I will opt for more liberal options. It is not a question of whether this is true or false or possible or impossible. Theoretically speaking, this may be correct, but in action, knowledge itself cannot guarantee change.

4 As usual labels are reductive. To describe the Arab world as post-colonial is reductive and a-contextual. The situations in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Palestine defy or complicate the “post-” in postcolonialism. Any close attention to power relations among previously colonizing and colonized countries reveal a continuation of exploitive relations and subordination of the periphery to the center with beneficiaries on both sides. Some critics refer to this in terms of neo-colonialism, domestic colonialism, or political corruption.

5 I think slave narratives and even post-slave narratives have a naturalist ring to them. They still deal with black characters who are struggling to secure basic and rudimentary needs. Slavery narratives are realistic in the sense of being based on lived
experience. Hence, identity-formation, autobiographical and historical concerns permeate. This does not necessarily detract from their being part of social protest narratives or counter narratives.

6 Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” proclamation differs from Jameson’s argument that postmodern fiction turn toward history is a nostalgic, commodifying, and depthless one—a pastiche. Jameson’s argument is more complicated and less celebratory. Fukuyama contends that “History” in terms of Hegelian dialectics has ended due to the victory of Western-American capitalistic democracies over Russian communism.

7 Beloved ends with the disappearance of Beloved and Denver’s taking a proactive role. Denver ventures out in search of work and Paul D and Sethe reconcile with the prospect of a future ahead of them. Beloved’s turn to history ties in with the problematic of representation in its modernist and postmodernist senses. In modernist and traditional senses, representation is possible and can be reliable. Yet, in postmodern terms representation or discourse enacts power relations: it is a privilege unequally distributed among subjects. In poststructuralist terms, the object of representation is never identical with the outcome of the process. Representation seems to rest on metaphysical violence and suppression of other possible representations.

8 Configuring the Self in terms of security-insecurity dialectics makes it ontologically insecure. All the labor that goes in constructing difference and keeping non-self at bay necessitates repetition, something akin to Freud’s return of the oppressed. Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall” is a good example. Walls have to be set and maintained. Security discourse is affected by this narrow conception of the Self. Ecocritical thought and some strains of feminist ethics of care agree with the postmodernist deconstruction of
the modernist autonomous detached subject. Instead of the fragmented and shallow alternative, they offer the grounded and interconnected model. For further information on this subject see Murphy’s *Literature, Nature, and Other* and Code’s “Second Persons.”

Another factor is that Stubb’s injury, and for that matter loss, is optimized and written in a symbolic metanarratives of sacrifice, patriotism, truth, and bravery. Death is replaced by ceremonious rituals: the dead become another brick in national or global master narrative.

For example, one of the main themes that have emerged in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks on World Trade Center is national unity: Americas, both republicans and democrats, are united in the face of this threat. This is not to deny or underestimate the atrocity of 9/11 attacks or to relegate them into discursive practices. Rather, it is natural and understandable that in times of catastrophe, people reach out to one another. It is politicizing or over politicizing these gestures that may be an issue.

Romances and science fictions, too, are structured on a dialectic of insiders-outsiders. However, in pre-modernist times, there was an internal sense to conflict. The enemy is both intrinsic and extrinsic. For example, in Chaucer’s “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” the fox is a declared enemy, but his success or failure to overcome Chanticleer depends on the rooster’s weakness—his pride.

These arguments are perpetrated by mainstream media, best selling books, conservative-exceptionalist politicians, and the evangelical church. Likewise, some extremist reactionary constituencies in the Arab world sometime forfeit dialogue since they essentialize the West as egoistic and exploitative. The alternatives become limited and limiting: mutual hurting, demonization, and militarization.
CHAPTER IV

POSTMODERN ETHICS, DIALOGUE, OR

REALPOLITIK GRIM REALITIES

In this chapter, I examine the practical implications of postmodern theorizations for political and economic cross-cultural relations. I deal with postmodernism as a set of theories and methods of textual analysis. I am concerned with postmodernism’s potential to explain political discourse or transform cross-cultural exploitive relations. Can postmodern deconstructive strategies explicate the complexity of political stakes? Can postmodern alterity ethics function against the realities of political discourse and action? In other words, I attend to the gaps between postmodern alterity ethics and political-economic realities and their (un)-bridgeability. On the level of discourse and even institutions, every party has its own set of humanistic ethics, be it liberal, conservative, mainstream, or minority. Nonetheless, the dissemination of all such ethical sets has not stopped serious breaches against the other although some ethical sets are more sensitive and less egoistic than others.

These ethical infringements do not merely result from flaws in the superstructural or foundational assumptions of such ethics as much as from the clashes between ethical edicts and political interests. Do we exploit or idealize the other because of following reductive egoistic ethics? Or do we violate our established ethical values for the sake of power, money, prestige, or any other desirable objective; this alternative entails that we can uphold these ethical values even if they limit our power and wealth. Examining Self-Other relations in context, one is bound to notice the prevalence of economic and
political injustices, all forms of oppression, and physical clashes. However, one also can find cases of cooperation and mutual recognition. Lived realities expose postmodern limited descriptive and prescriptive utility. Very often the political supersedes the ethical, although it may not completely eclipse it. Rather, the political is cast in ethical terms, although in deconstructive, cultural studies, or discourse analysis, such a move is exposed as a logocentric or political ruse.

In a sense, postmodernist thought exposes modernism’s originary blindness toward alterity although this exposition does not necessarily translate into action or penetrate modernist institutions in any straightforward effective manner, relatively speaking. The assumption is that our current realities and institutions have been shaped by Enlightenment and modernist thought of Kant, Descartes, Hegel, Hobbes, and others. Such thought foundationally privileges the Same and undervalue the different. By the same token, it is assumed that the postmodernist alternative will change, or is already changing, our realities toward more balanced institutions. Yet five minutes of NBC, ABC, CNN, FOX, or "Aljazeera.net" challenges humanistic metanarratives and postmodernist micronarratives. The present has not significantly changed for the better; past prejudices and foundations—deconstructed now and then—have not disappeared; rather, they have mutated into healthier and subtler modes, although usually posing as inclusive and humanistic. Religious and secular fundamentalisms, capitalistic exploitive logics, global hegemony, mediatization, simulation, and consumerism, all define and limit our realities. I do not deny that social activist movements and academic practices are carving more room for alterity and marginalized, ecological, and environmental concerns. Many people all over the globe realize that we are all connected and that our
actions and inactions may either help prevent natural disasters or improve human conditions. Such stances may resort to general categories such as human welfare; they do not use these as merely rhetorical ruses.

To best tackle such thorny issues, I dislodge postmodern theorizations from their polemical abstract mode so as to test them contra and through lived realities so as to make sense of the apparent schism between the ethical-utopian postmodern focus on alterity and the grim realities that we witness on a daily basis. Accordingly, Elizabeth Ermarth contends that the “political implications of postmodernity have not often received sustained analytical attention, although a certain amount of unspecific anxiety concerning such implications has been expressed” (34). Nevertheless, Keith C. Pheby argues that (deconstructive) postmodernism is a form of political praxis because,

The unmasking and demystification of unconscious or naturalized binary oppositions in contemporary and traditional thought, together with a demonstration that they grow out of a particular mode of disclosure (logocentrism or a metaphysics of presence) is of itself a formidable political weapon considering that the legitimation of the centrality of a particular term is effected by means of the marginalization of the inessential one. (4)

Despite the above statement about the formidability of postmodern deconstructive thought, Pheby tones down his appraisals of postmodernism’s transformative potential, the moment hard practical questions are raised. Postmodernism does not have any blueprint of how it will work in lived realities. Besides, it not clear if postmodern thought can affect the public sphere or if it may remain a theoretical matter, an academic fad, or
personal styles, of course depending on how one understands and uses it. This realization makes Pheby stress that postmodern thought has to exceed stylistic, personal, academic niches to bear on “international relations” where “sovereignty and autonomy have not been sufficiently critiqued” (88). For he thinks that postmodern alterity ethics can diffuse conflicts and amend mistakes on the international level. Hopefully, translating postmodern ethics into praxis may help avert global disasters rendering the “deployment of nuclear weaponry obsolete” (Pheby 88).

The above remarks rest on the assumption that postmodernism politics/ethics can be translated into political practices or can be applied to political relations. Such arguments retain idealistic residuals through implying that discourse prefigures or precedes lived realities. More accurately, they assume a direct, or a loose, connection between the two. While, in postmodernist thought, it seems that discourse precedes and frames action, I think setting these two poles apart can be a matter of convenience, as they are definitely mutually constitutive. It should not be a reductive choice between idealistic views that thought precedes language or a materialistic one where economic and political constituencies govern our ways of thinking and expression. Rather discourse, metaphysics, and realities have multiple and complex relations that fall on a spectrum of correlation or tension. More over, reality and discourses about reality have to be investigated in their immediate as well as larger contexts.

Theoretically, if postmodern thought translates into reality or shuffles self-other relations according to its ethics, conflicts and divisions will be rendered obsolete or anachronistic. Can this be really so? Can postmodern theory create a harmonious world order that prioritizes alterity ethics or dialogism, instead of power blocks and
monopolies? Can the adoption of a postmodern ethics engender harmonious relations inter-states and intra-groups? Is postmodern theory as an “ethical corrective” adaptable to lived situations? I will engage these questions. I do not pretend to have the solutions or know the final answers. Rather, this study is provisional and limited in many ways.  

In this chapter, I utilize deconstructive reading methods to expose instances of epistemological and material violence against others. Still, I also subject postmodern thought to its own methods of analysis and skepticism to highlight its subtexts and underlying idealisms. In the previous chapters, I have used deconstructive and minority insights in my analyses and critiques. The common denominator that has governed such mergers is the concern with the question of alterity as a question of ethics and justice through critical and contextualized analyses of mainstream or modernist discourses and institutions. These methods and theories (postmodern-deconstructive, feminist, ecocritical, or post-colonial) focus on power relations in material situations. They also make visible the subtexts of assumingly neutral philosophical or epistemological writings. Besides, these critiques seek to correct wrongs, replace untenable arrangements, and intervene, all for the sake of a more just coexistence. As a consequence, (hopefully) mainstream (and non-mainstream) subjects realize that their relationships with the other are unbalanced at their origin. Second, human subjects very probably will heed this new knowledge by resisting logocentric positions that subordinate and reduce the other. Unfortunately, there are serious elisions and idealisms underlying the above two possible scenarios.

To highlight such aporias, I analyze samples of mainstream political discourse, actions as well as mainstream media news coverage that concern cross-cultural relations.
I also deal with instances of counter-discourses that offer counter-narratives and critique the hegemon. I address their various contexts, receptions, tactics, and relations to political behavior. To explicate such problematics, I supplement deconstructive strategies with critical discourse analysis (CDA) as I think postmodern insights about the linguistic system and power relations cannot by themselves capture the complexity of political discourse and lived realities. Postmodern critiques make it very difficult to talk about a down-to-earth concept of power as a divide between those who control political decisions, mobilize superior military forces and technologies, control the media, and financial sources versus those who relatively do not. Thus, postmodern radical critiques become questionable beyond exposing superstructural self-other dialectics. In other words, we cannot reduce political actions and relations to the sum of postmodern insights. There is always an excess that betrays postmodernism limitations when juxtaposed to the complexity of reality. Thus, I opt for discourse analysis in general and critical discourse analysis in particular so as to supplement postmodern and deconstructive readings. Critical discourse analysis escapes the paradoxes and controversies that haunt postmodernism such as performative paradoxes, relativism, nihilism, and preemption of agency in light of the constructivist hypothesis that I have discussed in Chapter One.

In “Discourse Analysis,” Robert de Beaugrande argues that “The highest goals of discourse analysis are to support the freedom of access to knowledge through discourse and to help in revealing and rebalancing communicative power structures” (emphasis in original). Furthermore, in “Discourse Theory” George L. Dillon explains the utility of using the concept of discourse against using language, philosophical arguments, or even
Speech Act theories. Discourse analysis recognizes discourse as a “type of social action.” Dillon explicates his rationale in the following passage:

A theory of discourse therefore implies a theory of society, most particularly a theory of power, legitimacy, and authority. Moreover, since society can to a very large extent be viewed as the sum of discourses, there is a tendency in discourse theory, particularly in its French varieties, for discourse to merge into praxis, undermining the commonsense ("Anglo-Saxon") distinction between talking and doing. . . . Discourse as a mode of concealing and perpetuating inequality and of regulating behavior is a theme also of such non-Marxist advocates of resistance to discursive regulation as Foucault and feminists focusing on the silencing and marginalizing effects of hegemonic discourses. (“Discourse: 2.”) 3

Nevertheless, critical discourse analysis intersects with some key postmodern insights with regard to textual analysis: it illuminates textual lacunae, reinstalls the margins, and disrupts closures in favor of multiple and open readings. More significantly, CDA unravels covert connections and highlight discrepancies between the publicly disseminated message and what happens on the ground. Although postmodern deconstructive reading strategies seem to favor philosophical or romantic texts, CDA can be applied to all discourses and genres. Besides, CDA more effectively focuses on the text’s linguistic and stylistics features, reception, historical, and political contexts. CDA has a more grounded stance toward power as verbally disseminated through the media or embodied through institutions and political bodies. CDA can debunk logocentric or ideological elisions and specific elisions and rifts between publicized intention and
withheld motives as well. Critical discourse analysis focuses on textual rhetorics in the traditional Aristotelian sense: rhetoric is an art of public oration and persuasion, although it utilizes postmodern concept of rhetoric: all texts and acts are instances of, and are inhabited with, power relations. Postmodern rhetoric is influenced by poststructuralist Linguistic Turn where everything works like a text and all texts operate with and through power relations.

This chapter has three sections. First, I briefly restate postmodern diagnosis of modern unhealthy, even unethical, constitution of self and its others in terms of hierarchical dialectics. I also address postmodern alterity-oriented alternatives and correctives. Supposedly, this shift in paradigm bridges the self-other divisions and prevents the self as a dominant site from blindly reducing and othering the different. I grapple with the idealism underlying such endeavors. In the second part, I analyze samples of current political discourses in order to underline the contexts, motives, and pragmatics of a we dialectically opposed to a they. To be specific, I focus on American-Iraqi relations in particular and American-Arab-Islamic relations in general. Since my thesis, as stated in the Chapter One, is to test the workability and consequences of postmodern theory in lived daily realities, I will examine the possibility of bridging the gaps between theory and practice. The assumption, a problematic one I admit, is that postmodern theory has, or should have, political application. In the third section, I present a myriad of counter-discourses initiated by “non-mainstream” and oppositional discourses. Specifically, I discuss the Other’s stance toward the mainstream or imperial Self. Although I focus on the Islamic and Arab views that oppose American hegemonic discourse, one does not need to be a Muslim or an Arab to launch a counter-discourse. I
use categories such as the Self and the Other, Muslims, Arabs, and Americans not to
denote uniform or essential differences; rather, I am aware of their descriptive limitations
and reductive potential. These terms are somehow indispensable. Sometimes, they are
imposed on us. The trick is to analyze and deconstruct such categories to distinguish
between real differences and highlight common concerns.

Postmodern Healing: Boomerang

Many theorists and critics see postmodernism as political—I would even say
meta-political—through and through. However, some other theorists contend that
postmodernism is apolitical or neoconservative. Otherwise, how does one read the
persistence in today’s world of divisive, alienating, hegemonic political discourse,
harmful political relations, economic exploitation, and difference in wealth—let alone,
the rise of secular and religious fundamentalisms and corporate globalism? Do we read
the perpetuation of such discredited relations as signifying the failure of both modern
humanism and postmodern anti-humanism or neo-humanism? Or do we read these
disproportionate relations as indicative of an urgent need to heed postmodern insights and
incorporate them into lived practices? How do we explain the rise of imperialism,
militarism, terrorism, and secular fascism as filling the postmodernist vacuum as some
have claimed?

Theoretically in Levinasian terms, if we avoid modernist reductive ontology that
reduces alterity, consequent disproportionate inter-group or cross-cultural relationships
will be amended. In Lyotardian terms, hegemonic master narratives are no longer
Debunking metanarratives’ suppression of incommensurate differences inaugurates radical democratization of all narratives by default and due to a conglomerate of social justice movements, academic efforts, and minority rights activism. Consequently, difference blooms and minority voices sprout. In Derridean terms, foregrounding the margins and deconstructing the myth of presence result in a more just, although less certain, world. However beautiful and appealing such feats and revelations may sound, their workability and potential to effect change in the world of political, cultural, and economic realities are debatable. In brief, postmodern thinking—alterity, multiplicity, incommensurability—betrays deep-seated modernist utopian traces in the sense of impracticable solutions that keep the status quo and ahead-of-its-times Mannheimian idealism that is based on modernist or Marxist dialectics.

Postmodern ethics of alterity is at odds with dominant political and economic behavior. Postmodern alterity as well as its subject is generic, abstract, and idealized. Dislodged from historical, cultural, and personal contexts, these terms become almost vacuous. An Other that is merely non-self in abstract relation won’t be too difficult to accommodate or embrace. Alterity is not smoothly substituted for with discursive shifts such as African Americans, gays, or Muslims. What is missing in such a translation is the fact that difference and otherness in reality are context-bound and ranked. Realities cannot be reduced to a binary of self versus the other as essentially distinct and opposed. Moreover, the other is not merely a philosophical or linguistic sign. The other, too, has agency and depth. More important, the equation does not distinguish between “difference as essence” and “difference as effect”: that is, sometimes we are different due to
perceived characteristics, habits, and what really is; at other times, we are made different
due to clashes in interests or due the will to power. Acts of othering are rationalized in
such a way that confuses causes with effects. Sometimes, it is not clear whether a group
of people are different because of what they are or what they have done, or because of
how they are processed or made to appear. Difference by itself may not be a sufficient
reason for othering. Usually, it is through the convergence of epistemological and
materialistic factors that difference is transformed into negativity.

How can a wronged group embrace its other, when the stakes are not mere
epistemological perception of difference?—when survival, rights, and values are at stake?
The moment concrete constituencies move in, the tone and vocabulary of the discourse
shift. Moreover, the self or the hegemon remains centric. For, it is the subject that
undertakes reinstituting the other. In other words, the framework looks like a (charitable
modernist) gesture on the part of the mainstream self. The other, to some extent, though
not reduced or objectified, plays the role of the to-be-saved party. Alternatively, the other
humanizes and humbles the self by decentering it, or rather, initiating it into relation or
obligation in Levinasian terms. My point is that alterity ethics does not give the other an
equally participative role in the creation of its own self-image. One wonders if real
otherness can still look infinitely desirable when it rivals or threatens the mainstream
subject, or if it attempts to shift such power relations. These generalized descriptions risk
overlooking historical and economical factors in human relationships. Fixing an abstract
division in abstract terms may haze real issues, producing sideshows, instead.

In “Ethics of Ambiguity and Irony: Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty,” Honglim Ryu echoes similar concerns about the practical implications of postmodern ethics in a
political realm that is “determinate”: “postmodern thinking shows its limits in dealing with most ethical-political matters in the contemporary world” (5). Besides, he charges that postmodern ethics consequently becomes dependent on individual life styles as it does not supply a blueprint or “determinate framework” that would help “adjudicate conflicting ethical claims” (5). Then, the question becomes: How to “link the unconditional affirmation of emancipatory ideals” and the “democratic accountability in determinate political terms” (5)? In short, Ryu argues that “philosophical deconstruction and ‘responsibility to otherness’ undermine each other in the public sphere” (5). In other words, it is one thing to assume “that idea and reality are inseparable” and another to prove this assumption, particularly in the context of lived realities (5-6).

I think postmodern ethics as a turn toward alterity or a lapse into incommensurability or incredulity toward master narratives has little to tell us about current political discourse where postmodern ethical tenets are at best present in absence. In one sense, postmodern ethics may signal the end of the political as it unconditionally prioritizes otherness—an act of self-suspension or preemption. The political in the sense of conflict or relation between two parties over power and sources disappears or becomes obsolete. Thus, instead of self and other as forever locked in opposition and competition, the self’s only gesture toward the other is one of caring, letting-be, or embracing. If not so, at least, self and other are leveled in a state of coexistence without any party having a master or hegemonic power over the other. A whole tradition of concepts and vocabulary is rendered obsolete or anomalous as a consequence of such leveling. Modernist modes of subsumption and hierarchy are replaced by those of inclusion, paralogy, heterogeneity, and non-judgmentalism.
The problem with postmodern ethics as solutions is that they focus on superstructures. Deconstructing authority, Truth, and neutrality, postmodernists could not advocate a cause or commit them to a certain ideology, other than postmodern anti-foundational foundationalism. More importantly, postmodern gestures toward healing rifts and reinstalling the different as legitimate on a par with the Same does not avail much unless it considers self-other relations in their contexts. Postmodernism has to grapple with social and cultural constituencies of class, race, color, gender, nationality and other variables if it is to inaugurate social change. Otherwise, postmodernism may remain utopian and neoconservative by default.

In addition, postmodernism in Jameson’s and Baudrillard’s terms as depthlessness, mediatization, consumerism, implosion, loss of faith, and fragmentation of the subject is more objectionable than a postmodernism that subverts modern dialectical constitution and hegemonic logics. As I have shown in Chapter One, minority critics resist a “postmodernism” that sweepingly deconstructs voice, history, identity, essence, or truth. For these are the very (strategic or real) foundations and values they seek to affirm and upon which they found their social and textual activism. Some anti-postmodernism critics such as Ziauddin Sardar warn that postmodern anti-foundationalism and sense of fatigue are Western-specific. They should not be imposed on other civilizations. Otherwise, postmodernism is no less hegemonic or occidental than modernism is. Ironically, critics may debate such propositions ad infinitum, when I think they should focus on the workability of postmodern ethics in real situations. I broach this problematic in the following section.
Can Postmodernism Ethics of Alterity Have a Place in Political Discourse?

In this section, I analyze political texts and situations as sites where postmodern thought is mostly needed, yet mostly, limited. Analyzing political utterances enables me to show the rifts among postmodern theorizations about self-other relationships and their interactions in political discourse. It is also timely to re-examine the tension between the American Self and the Arab-Islamic other in historical grounded complexes. I focus on samples of American Presidential speeches, war rhetoric, and media coverage of incidents such as Abu Gharib violations. Surveying mainstream political discourses and watching media news coverage, I have noticed that humanistic, scientific, and exceptionalist metanarratives operate through, and frame, such political discourses. Strangely enough, one may notice some cases of adverse correlation between humanistic metanarratives and violence perpetrated against the others. The more violent the hegemon becomes toward its others, the more humanistic, altruistic, or inclusive its discourse becomes. Hence, one can also notice a parallel rise in Manichean dialectics.

President Bush’s speeches fall into a whole tradition of Presidential rhetoric. They do not submit to regular authorship—White House Speechwriters’ and other parties help compose them. These orations have their own format, protocols, and functions. Aiming at political party and public support, these speeches usually have a rallying celebratory, self-congratulatory, unifying, or affirmative mood, although they can address challenges, make concessions, or spell out coming political agendas. To explain, detail, or analyze is not their primary function. Thus, they conceal as much as they reveal, which allows
various audiences to project their hopes and expectations on them. Such articulations have international dimensions, usually polarizing a unified front against the other. As prototypes of political discourse, Presidential speeches constitute politics incarnated. They do not merely sketch and verbalize plans; they are political actions on their own. It is not a question of whether political discourse is the form and political action is the content. Rather, political speech and political decision have multivalent relations. To better elucidate the way political discourse and action handle self-other relations, I combine Norman Fairclough’s and Robert de Beauprê’s critical discourse analysis methods with the postmodernist insights of Derrida, Foucault, Levinas, Lyotard and others. I also utilize the insights of cultural critics such as Edward Said and Noam Chomsky. In brief, I favor an interdisciplinary or a holistic approach that focuses on texts and contexts.  

I also take my cue from Mark Twain’s “The War Prayer,” a prototypical instance of discourse analysis and deconstruction. In Twain’s piece, a stranger suddenly appears at a community church where the people are communally engaged in a war prayer. He disrupts the audience’s identification with the prayer by grafting what it excludes—its unverbalized subtexts and implied physical violence. Perhaps, the intruder’s ability to see through the prayer depends on his being a stranger who does not identify with the audience’s point of view or position vis-à-vis the other. Listening critically instead of dogmatically or identificatorily allows the stranger to see through the prayer’s blind spots and comprehend it non-verbalized purport.

To explain, the incident concerns townspeople who gather on Sunday to pray for a swift victory and safe return of their loved ones. The predominance of surging patriotism,
religious fervor, glory, and heroism eventually blind the crowd to the violence embedded in their pious and egoistic yearnings. As they finish their piously patriotic prayer, the stranger takes over to spell out its implications for the others. The dialectical structure of the prayer reveals what I call a nullifying correlation. Evil done to the other is good done to the Same. The Same nullifies the other and vice versa. The prospect of good happening to both sides is out of the picture. One side’s gain is necessarily the other’s bane according to such logic. I reproduce almost the whole prayer because it particularly reveals the convergence of religious, patriotic, and personal interests and discourses in consolidating a unified front against a specific enemy. To quote,

You have heard your servant's prayer—the uttered part of it. I am commissioned of God to put into words the other part of it—that part which the pastor—and also you in your hearts – fervently prayed silently. And ignorantly and unthinkingly? God grant that it was so! You heard these words: 'Grant us the victory, O Lord our God!' That is sufficient. The whole of the uttered prayer is compact into those pregnant words. Elaborations were not necessary. When you have prayed for victory you have prayed for many unmentioned results which follow victory—must follow it, cannot help but follow it. Upon the listening spirit of God fell also the unspoken part of the prayer. He commandeth me to put it into words. Listen!

“O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle—be Thou near them!. . . [H]elp us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale
forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with
the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their
humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their
unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out
roofless with little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their
desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames of
summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail,
imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it – for our sakes
who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their
bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears,
stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in
the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-
faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with
humble and contrite hearts. Amen.

It was believed afterward that the man was a lunatic, because there
was no sense in what he said. (emphasis added)

(Re)-presenting the unpleasant, the stranger (as a cultural critic or discourse
analyst) marks the unmarked and unearth the hidden momentum of this discursive act.
He shows the destructive inhuman side of a war cast as patriotic duty with religious
rewards and heroic splendor. That is, war as narrated or written into patriotic and heroic
terms legitimates violence and makes it less objectionable or conscience-pricking.
Surprisingly, Twain’s “War Prayer” resonates with current political discourses and war
justifications. Obviously, it is the juncture or coextension of language use/discourse and action that the prayer also questions and underscores. The stranger makes the covert overt by underlying the connection between discourse and action and by spelling out war actions and their consequences to the enemy as weaker party, with no euphemism or reduction. Thus, as both an outsider and through maintaining critical distance, I look at the following Presidential Speeches and interviews as instances of political discourse to spell out their discursive implications, political consequences, and elisions.

In “Political Discourse Analysis,” Christina Schäffner states that political discourse is “‘a complex form of human activity’ . . . based on the recognition that politics cannot be conducted without language” (118). However, Schäffner singles out “texts that are crucial in constituting a political community or group (e.g. treaties, a manifesto of a political party, a speech by a politician)” as particularly political (119). In light of Schäffner’s statements, I analyze samples of President Bush’s speeches, announcements or interviews to delineate their rhetorical tactics and to show how they address the question of the other.

In the “2001 Inaugural Address”—before 9/11—President Bush eloquently states:

We have a place, all of us, in a long story. A story we continue, but whose end we will not see. It is the story of a new world that became a friend and liberator of the old, a story of a slave-holding society that became a servant of freedom, the story of a power that went into the world to protect but not possess, to defend but not to conquer. (“2001 Inaugural Address”)

This inclusive opening emphasizes collective identity of a we that has a place in the great story of a New World. The speech enumerates a litany of historical achievements, the
crux of which is to emphasize American exceptional role at home and in the world. American is cast as a protector and defender of the world, rather than a capitalist conqueror. These are mainstream political statements that dispel critiques that America’s thrust in other regions is simply motivated by self-interests. Rather, such involvements are painted by a broad brush and optimized in a narrative of progress and liberty. President Bush’s speech seems to be preparing the public for another American colonial wave, although he casts this plan in terms of American exceptional duty. “If our country does not lead the cause of freedom, it will not be led” (2001 “Inaugural Address”).

President Bush’s speech highlights the persistence of a cold war rhetoric and an emergent security as immunity discourse—security as sovereignty beyond challenge rather than security in terms of international social justice or treaties: “We will build our defenses beyond challenge, lest weakness invite challenge; and we will confront weapons of mass destruction, so that a new century is spared new horrors” (“2001 Inaugural Address”). President Bush’s concluding remarks re-state the creed of American exceptionalism by invoking the legacy of the founding fathers and their visions of the future of America. Despite the passage of time, “This story goes on. And an angel still rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm” (“2001 Inaugural Address”).

Invoking history and providence as guiding American history and march to better future, President Bush writes himself as part of this providential grand plan, despite his questionable victory in 2000 Presidential Elections. Officially secularist, still America is a site for divine intervention, if not the manifestation of divine will and grace. Implicitly, endowing America and its deeds with divine sources makes any anomaly or misfortune ameliorable within this providential narrative. Politically speaking, such messages target
wide conservative and evangelical constituencies that play certain roles in American politics. More important, Bush espouses an expansive hegemonic rhetoric. Thus, America becomes as expansive as the rhetoric it expounds. This expansiveness is not registered in terms of power relations. On the contrary, it is relayed through humanistic universal vocabularies as well as a firm belief in being called or chosen. To understand the complexity this calling, one needs to understand the context of such speeches: the end of the Cold War at the backdrop of USSR’s collapse, the rise of the United States as an unrivaled superpower, and renewal of American imperialism and cultural hegemony through military and economic factors. The rise of the Evangelical Right, revival of exceptionalism, millennialism, and a thrusting global corporate capitalism are also contexts and subtexts to such speeches. It is not sufficient to point out that such discourse is logocentric. One needs to delineate other variables and players. One also needs to understand such discourses in their pragmatic contexts.

I discuss one specific context against which the speeches should be viewed—Project for the New American Century (PNAC). On June 1997 PNAC issued its Statement of Principles. I quote at length as I think the “Statement” as a political manifesto can correct the impression that what is going on in the world right now is basically a response to the reality of a post-9/11 world. If one scrutinizes the following passage, one may detect global imperial intentions. One may also detect the centrality of security as a key political and rhetorical element as well as the beginning of preemptive actions as a viable foreign and defense policy. The PNAC’s Statement of Principles reads:
We seem to have forgotten the essential element of the Reagan Administration’s success: a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad. . . . America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenge to our fundamental interests. The history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge and to meet threats before they become dire. . . . [W]e need to accept responsibility for America unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles.” (“Statement”)

President Bush’s major speeches seem to be variations on the above statement. Imperial hegemonic intentions are framed in terms of noble responsibility and providential calling. As a foreigner, I see exceptionalist imperial rhetoric to be incompatible with that of humanistic and inclusive ones. The speeches’ ostensibly inclusive universalizing rhetoric soon gives in to dialectic of friends and enemies, the Same and the Different. Of course, a little political realism moves in as “we” have to protect our self-interests and maintain “our” presence in the global arena as a major, if not the only, shaper of destiny.

Providential, military, and economic forces are conflated with moral certitudes. Any constituency that resists or opposes becomes an unenlightened enemy, an enemy of all humanity—ironically, this enemy becomes less than human. The speeches do not directly state that the enemy has to be evil; rather, it is deductible through the simplistic
polarizing Manichean logic. Although dictionaries define an enemy as a “hostile,” “harmful,” or “unfriendly” thing or person, in Bush’s political discourse, it cannot be but evil having been pre-defined as the enemy of America/democracy and freedom, keeping in mind that these are gifts entrusted to America by divine providence. Essentializing the self as benevolent leaves few options for the non-self or the other party. Definition by the opposite is a judgmental monologic act—unilateral in political terms.

President Bush’s speeches and actions obviously declare their right-wing conservative values as pitted against more liberal, leftist, environmental, or minority perspectives. According to Robert A. de Beaugrande, the right adheres to “simplistic,” “anti-intellectual,” monologic rhetoric, capitalizing on “uniting its adherents into a single faction (or ‘klan’) [sic] to attack and silence its immense gallery of ‘enemies’” (ch.1, par. 18). Moreover, this polarization entails evading responsibility, on the one hand, and creating scapegoats—public/national enemies—on the other. These enemies are “ceaselessly accused of an evil conspiracy to destroy the sacred values of family, home, and homeland — intellectuals, artists, minorities, gays, immigrants, foreigners, and now Muslims” (ch. 1, par.18). De Beaugrande scathingly exposes how the “right converts victims into perpetrators,” thus legitimating aggression against them: “The discursive reduction of human potential thus legitimises the physical reduction” (ch. 1, par. 181).

To take another example, in the 2004 “Republican National Convention Speech,” President Bush restates the American story more emphatically, of course capitalizing on the audience’s identification with and support for his agendas. Overtly, the message is humanistically and understandably appealing. Still, if this very message is scrutinized, it may ring differently, particularly with other audiences: it constitutes a declaration of a
continuous war against all kinds of enemies. As “an ever widening circle, constantly
growing to reach further and include more,” . . . “we will extend the frontiers of freedom”
(“2004 Republican National”). Typical motifs and structures recur in almost all of Bush’s
speeches. The above leitmotifs are constantly invoked in American political discourse,
particularly in the tradition of presidential inaugural speeches.

America as both national yet universal, material yet spiritual, choice yet divine
calling, and storm yet providence can be found for example in President Woodrow
Wilson’s, Ronald Reagan’s, and other presidents’ rhetorics. For example, Bush, the father,
asserts that, “America is never wholly herself unless she is engaged in high moral
principle. We as a people have . . . a purpose . . . to make kinder the face of the Nation
and gentler the face of the world” (“1989 Inaugural Address”).

As oral “texts” these speeches resort to epical-mythical national symbols. Voice,
juncture, pause, intonation are elements that cannot be captured in a written “text.” The
style of delivery and the theatricality, conventionality, prestige, and seriousness of the
occasion capitalize on first immediate impression, momentum, and consensus. These
oration have a momentum as they address a collective psyche and thus serve
legitimating functions, at least for the many who identify with and believe in them. These
speeches are spectacular media events, too.

Stylistically and structurally wise, these speeches are generally brief, affirmative,
intertextual, mythical, and highly allusive. The affirmative mood correlates well with
uplifting morale and mobilizing support. Complex structures are not often used. The
cause/effect structuring principle is also used in a simplified, sometimes, nonsequeter
manner. More over, conditional and stipulative structure of “if we act, then,” or “if we
fail to act, then” are repeated almost verbatim. If looked at closely, the conditional seems to offer two options—acting and failing to act—but one of the options is too seriously dangerous to take or too important not to take. Namely, one of the options serves a rhetorical purpose. It alarms the audience, raises concerns, or scares. Psychologically speaking, the listener would take a leap into the prosperous and self-securing alternative, even impulsively. For, for example, in talking about Iraq’s terrorist potential, the Bush Administration and media pundits repeatedly deployed the two options logic: either we act and go to Iraq and stop an imminent danger, or we trust the enemy and then have to deal with the enemy at home. Another example is the repeated formula of “If the United States does not shoulder its responsibility and accept its calling, nobody will. Therefore, the world will lapse into chaos and lawlessness. These “either-or” formulas reduce the security concern to two options, problematically at the expense of analysis and context.

In addition, the first person “we” is extensively used. Sometimes, “I” or “America/USA” and other variations take over. There is a tension/intention to occasionally merge and then separate the “we,” “I,” “people,” or “government” from America. America is the whole sum of Americans, yet it exceeds limitations and fixity as a flux, sought-after ideal, and an unfinished project. There are moments when the “we” refers to speaker and audience and when it denotes a more specific category such as the administration. There are instances when the American we epitomizes the yearnings of mankind. Others long to achieve or reach “our” status, or logically, naturally, and historically have to. In other words, others’ hope should inevitably lead them to emulate USA’s policies and, somehow, become similar. This thrust for sameness is teleologically natural as it is the right and nature of mankind to desire freedom and felicity. By a
synecdochal gesture, America is simultaneously both above and with the world. Such a trajectory, taken for granted in spite of the urge to keep reaffirming it, betrays hegemonic impulses regardless of whether benevolence is authentic or just a rhetorical ruse. The logic of being exceptional, yet imitable, echoes the motif of cultural subsumption and hierarchical difference I have outlined in Chapter Two. As equivalent to freedom and man’s best aspiration, American expansionism territorially and rhetorically is a natural order of things, or a survival of the fittest in ‘realpolitik’ terms. In Hegemony and Survival, Naom Chomsky succinctly points out America’s posing as a “historical vanguard” where “US hegemony is the realization of history’s purpose, and what it achieves is for the common good, the merest truism, so that empirical evaluation is unnecessary, if not faintly ridiculous” (43). To pose as providential and almost inerrant is to occlude prospects of revision and retraction. This also muffles critiques assigning them to the negative or unpatriotic. (I do not know if Bush’s Administration’s tendencies to shrug off critiques and instance on keeping the course is related to such convictions or if it is merely a sign of disdain and arrogance).

To write history in exceptionalist or humanistic metanarratives or similar generalizations overlooks political contexts of international relations and absented, subsumed, or appropriated others. The other is either the essentialized enemy or the less fortunate human being living under undemocratic rulers and longing for aide. The logic in all cases is one of subsumption and paternalistic/custodial legitimacy. In light of the insights and aporias of (post)-colonial and other competing points of view, the mainstream/imperial idealized self’s image and role is exposed to be elusive and duplicitous. Values of altruism, sacrifice, and freedom are possessions of the
here/American/Western civilization, and the lack of the there/non-Western others. More problematically, these very beautiful and desirable values have been used as pretexts for colonial exploitation and military occupation of other regions. Such polarization facilitates imperial hegemonic assimilative plans; the different other has to become similar, or more accurately, has to be neutralized. As a result, he/she ends up accepting cultural hegemony and subordinating his/her difference as untrue in juxtaposition to the overwhelming stronger/true imperial self. After all, imperialism is a historical necessity, a teleos of providential origin, a gift of the Enlightenment.

To concretize the rhetorical and political junctures, I will analyze the war on Iraq as relayed/fought in political discourse and as field work, particularly through predominant security lenses. Against the background of 9/11, security has acquired unprecedented priority. Understandably, political discourse presents such terrorist attacks in essential terms designed to close more than open venues for dialogue with the other. Just after 9/11 atrocities, President Bush asks a question probably on the minds of many people. Why did they do it? The answer is because “they hate us,” our freedom, and our way of life. Attacking civilians is neither justifiable nor acceptable, but to explain this violence in terms of the other’s hatred, jealousy, or insecurity also precludes any sense of direct or indirect responsibility. The answer, too, is too reductive and simplistic. In fact, after 9/11 there was a surge of questions and many politicians and analysts have pointed out some possible causes of the anger and frustration in the Middle East/Arab world such as despotic regimes, political corruption, poverty, and USA’s unflinching support for Israel, the Gulf War in addition to fanaticism, jealousy, and insecurity. However, these voices were throttled by sinewy analyses that would enact similar gestures. As a viewer, I
understand that such attacks signal many things, one of them desperation or deep anger. 

Yet, I think (maybe I am being wishful) that Muslims do not act based on anger or hatred; Muslims should act based on ethical principles. Of course, some Muslims may twist or merely misunderstand Islamic principles one way or another. This is a factor, but to focus on this as the sole issue misses the point. It is not a question of who is innocent and who is guilty; rather, it is a historical, political, moral, and cultural one.

In fact, Islamic and Arabic countries unanimously condemned and distanced themselves from such acts. Islamic leaders and Arabic scholars did not condone or approve. Many Muslims would argue that next to the immediate victims who lost their lives in the World Trade Center, Muslims countries, immigrants, and image are the eventual victims. Such attacks attributed to Muslim terrorists undermine and abrogate any ground or respect Muslim communities may have gained in their Western host homes.

Moreover, Islamic violence as de-contextualized, irrational, or home-grown boomerangs to reinforce old prejudices and clash of civilizations scenarios. So-called jihadists, extremists, fanatics, and terrorists are bent on hurting Americans because of their irrational hatred, inferiority, and insecurity as freedom is on the march. Rigid demarcations of inside and outside, friends and enemies, axis of good and axis of evil predominate.

But a thorough analysis of political discourse as security discourse reveals a number of elisions and distortions that confuse/conflate ends and means. Security as a desired state through military or peaceful means transforms into security as deferred. The only way to security is through temporary or permanent insecurity. War becomes the only viable means to security—of course in light of terrorism. What I mean is that although
the search for security is natural and important, it has been used as an alibi, an unmoved mover, in subsequent discourses and actions. Security in its traditional sense as an achievable condition/goal mutates into an unachievable, yet consistently sought-after, condition. In a Baudrillardean sense—despite the presence of real enemies wanting to attack and shake security—security becomes an illusive matter or a simulacrum. In “President Discusses the Future of Iraq” (February 2003), President Bush states that, “On a September morning, threats that had gathered for years, in secret and far away, led to murder in our country on a massive scale. As a result, we must look at security in a new way.” As truthful as this passage may be, it still misleads since it suggests that the massive geographical distance separating the terrorists’ homelands from the United States entails a causal distance, or break, between their actions and our actions. The territorial distance between “us” and “them” precludes the prospect of causal relation between what they did and what we may have done. The dismissal of thinking about “our” actions as possible causes of “their” actions puts a cap on critical analysis, self-revision, or negotiation. In almost all of his speeches, the President sidetracks political realities and contexts, let alone the voice of the others, be they terrorists or moderates, who read terrorism in terms of a bigger picture where nobody is completely innocent. Venturing into questioning or foregrounding the geographical, historical, political, economic realities of previously colonized and continuously oppressed people becomes a taboo, or whenever it happens, it ends up incriminating or implicating those daring to offer these perspectives. Such a tactic evades traditional and postmodernist sense of ethics.
Responsibility and accountability for one’s actions are evaded. Postmodernist sense of responsibility as response to the other or as obligation to and connectedness with the Other are absent, too.

Even the official definitions of terrorism as a violent act aiming at attracting public attention and making a statement, expressing a grievance, are dismissed. The terrorist act itself is its own message. Terrorists’ means are their ends. As evil and despicable, terrorism cannot have any message other than that. This is the paradox of terrorism and I would say of physical aggression. It is, of course, one thing to acknowledge the roots and context of terrorism and another to condone or support it. Unfortunately such a distinction seems to be intentionally muddied by the neo-conservative strategists. The American mainstream official stance has fused them. To try to explain, to communicate with, and to listen to the terrorists entails defeat or submission to intimidation. Essentially irrational/destructive, terrorists cannot be negotiated with. As “we” and the “terrorists they” are forever incompatible, we cannot have dialogue or listen to one another.  

The security concern becomes somehow an infinite demand; security cannot be secured once and for ever. It has to be secured and re-secured in a vicious circle. Because we have gone to war, we are safer, but still not completely safe. There will always be enemies in a sense, at least for unforeseeable stretch of time. To reduce the complexity of war or politics to the clarity of Manichean good versus evil is to compromise human intelligence, moral complexity, and embrace conflict as necessary. Sam Shepard parodies such clear-cut mentalities that do not tolerate ambiguity or take a day off into self-revision or critique. The Colonel has his own exceptionalist view of America as
inculpable or impregnable. The Colonel’s inability to see beyond his sacrosanct image of infallible America in States of Shock or Beloved’s Schoolteacher’s inability to see Sethe’s pain as a consequence of his actions is almost reenacted in such optimizing and self-centered evaluations one finds in mainstream conservative discourse. Worse, political analysts point out that the Bush Administration had decided to go to war first and started to look for justification next. So with WMDs or without, with Saddam or without, the war was going to be imposed on all parties. Such a revelation makes all the pre-war rhetoric and public debates on the pros and cons of waging a war against Iraq anomalous, or in Baudrillard’s terms, simulacral. Anyone who pays enough attention to the official version of war as necessity and is patient enough to pull the strings together will perceive glaring distortions and political simulacra. The logic of absolute monologic demands or ultimatums signals arrogance and unwillingness to concede anything to the other party. Such dialectic pushes the security situation into an impasse.

For example, the American administration official stance relayed through (mainstream) media has diligently striven to link 9/11 to Saddam Hussein. In “Drinking Cool-Aide,” W. Patrick Lang unveils disturbing details the crux of which is that the Bush Administration went to war with Iraq despite the “overwhelming view within the professional U.S. intelligence community [that] . . . that there was no Saddam Hussein link to the 9/11 terrorists” (48). Furthermore, Lang points out that the Bush Administration deliberately overlooked and undermined UN inspectors’ work and reports, particularly as they were undermining claims about Saddam’s WMDs or his refusal to cooperate. The following quote is typical:
The March 7, 2003, appearance by the chairmen of UNMOVIC (Hans Blix) and the IAEA (Mohamed ElBaradei) before the U.N. Security Council was a disaster for the neoconservatives. The Iraqis and Saddam Hussein had "accelerated" cooperation with the United Nations, said Dr. Blix. Blix told the Council that Iraq had made a major concession: they had agreed to allow the destruction of the Al Samoud ballistic missiles. "We are not watching the breaking of toothpicks," Blix said. "Lethal weapons are being destroyed. . . . The destruction undertaken constitutes a substantial measure of disarmament—indeed, the first since the middle of the 1990s." (58)

In light of the above passage, I would like to quote Adam L. Silverman’s distinctions between just and useful war. In “Just War, Jihad, and Terrorism,” he states that:

In order to create an ethical juxtaposition of the moral use of force, the just war tradition criteria seek to make a virtue out of an immoral necessity—violence and killing. It is very important, however, that, in an attempt to justify the need for war, necessity is not reduced to utility. When this occurs, it is possible to justify almost anything as being necessary. (76)

Thus, the war-justification phase was mostly a rhetorical sideshow, if WMDs is the real issue. Nevertheless, several rhetorical substitutions and elisions of realities also were deployed to haze issues and evade real discussions. The war rhetoric slides from WMDs immanent danger to demonization of Saddam Hussein. A whole nation is replaced by a “madman.” Iraq as a country with institutions, diplomats, and even proposals to end the escalation disappears. Informing the public that Saddam is a madman also ties in with
oriental stereotypes of the volatile irrational Arab or Bedouin. Saddam’s madness is a cultural ideological one. Again, real political stakes, concessions, and proposals from all sides to peacefully end the conflict are overlooked and underplayed. The state and the media seem adamant on maintaining a momentum toward clash.⁹

In addition, the war discourse also becomes hypothetical. The ideology of a preemptive war itself is hypothetical. A strike is administered not because an enemy is preparing to strike, which is a very old war tactic, but because hypothetically the enemy must have the intention to gain the needed weapons—or already possesses them—and consequently will strike. It is like sentencing people for what they may end up thinking or must have thought. Or more problematically, it is like jailing people for what the State thinks they must be thinking. The logic and constitutionality of preemptive wars or arrests are questionable. Philip K. Dick’s The Minority Report (a science fiction genre, originally published in 1956 to be republished in early 2002 at the backdrop of 9/11) dramatizes the constitutionality and rationality of preemption. The novella deals with the institution of Pre-Crime where the State arrests people for crimes they have not yet committed but will inevitably commit. The Pre-Crime commissioner discusses the legalistic impasse of Pre-crime preemptive logic with “Witwer”:

“[Y]ou’ve probably grasped the basic legalistic drawback to Pre-Crime methodology. We’re taking individuals who have broken no law.”

“But they surely will, “Witwer afire with conviction.

“Happily they don’t—because we get them first, before they can commit an act of violence. So the commission of the crime itself is
absolute metaphysics. We claim they’re culpable. They, on the other hand, eternally claim they’re innocent. And, in a sense they are innocent.” (7)

Pre-Crime legitimates itself on two bases. First, arresting prospective criminals precludes the possibility of crime and thus solves one of the most stubborn problems of modern societies: crime. This act is justified because it serves the welfare of the community. The Minority Report’s community being almost completely crimeless serves the common good. Second, Pre-Crime depends on highly complicated informational technologies that are presented as faultless. The system depends on data processing. However, the more one scrutinizes Pre-Crime, the less sure and comfortable one becomes with the whole idea. I do not want to get into the fact that pre-crime data and reports are processed by dehumanized pre-cogs—humans with oversized heads and emaciated physiques. As humanistic and attractive it is, Pre-crime depends on abolishing any private space, anonymity, and many other civil rights. Even the human mind is flattened: no corners, no hidden spots. Ironically, Pre-Crime is a marriage between scientific rationalism and state control, a rationalism that reduces the human mind and the human condition into the sum of available data. This rationalism is teleologically propelled. Problematically, it crosses the delicate line between pre-knowledge—which is divine—and educated prediction. Very ironically, when Pre-Crime messes up and predicts that its very Commissioner will commit a crime, Anderson (the Commissioner) has to fulfill the prophecy for the institution to remain valid!

Pre-Crime shows that the State or those in power would not accept others’ to apply pre-emptive logic on them. To go back to political discourse, it seems that preemption is a discourse of power. Only the powerful can hold others accountable in
terms of preemption; it is not a reciprocal process. In “Cruel War? No, This Is to Help You,” Lawrence James also shows that preemptive wars are not new phenomena. Rather, the East India Company used to resort to such tactic to scare opposition and maintain power. The following passage sheds more light on preemptive logic or more accurately power and makes connection between then and now:

“To stop is dangerous; to recede ruin”; President Bush justifying war against Iraq? No; an Indian proconsul in 1805 defending the East India Company’s policy of pre-emptive hammer blows against any native ruler who showed signs of intransigence. “Britain has always been the one friend of the oppressed. It has been our policy for generations, and we are known to the world over as a race who love freedom and hate the oppressor.” British Prime Minister Tony Blair outlining his vision of liberated Iraq? No, a fictional officer in Somaliland 100 years ago, explaining the humanitarian mission of empire in a novel for schoolboys. . . . The principle was one that is understood in the White House: A dominant power’s authority rests on a monopoly of modern weaponry and the will to use it ruthlessly. . . . More commonly, imperial powers turned to the pre-emptive strike as an instrument for enhancing prestige, maintaining a favorable balance of power, and to unnerve potential challengers. (“Cruel War”)

Similarly, the rhetoric of the ultimatum of unconditional demands marks the end of diplomacy and the beginning of coercion. On the 17th of March 2003, three days before the second War on Iraq, President Bush demands that Saddam Hussein and his
sons “leave Iraq within 48 hours” (“Saddam Must”). He adds, “Their refusal to do so will result in military conflict, commenced at a time of our choosing” (“Saddam Must”).

The tone and tenor the above passages are clear—not to mention that the diplomatic process was aborted and declared useless in light of a constructed “gathering threat.” In the same speech, President Bush adds, “[I]n the name of security and peace . . . we'll disarm him . . . . I hear a lot of talk from different nations around where Saddam Hussein might be exiled. That would be fine with me—just so long as Iraq disarms after he's exiled.” Reading the speeches in light of one another, I have also noticed persistent inconsistencies with regard to the unconditional demands placed on Iraq: their drift I think, although I do not have enough space to demonstrate, is to reach an impasse, a breaking point, in the diplomatic efforts to make room for military action. Many commentators spoke of this ploy. To reiterate, when WMD does not work, Saddam himself becomes WMD as a madman allegedly tied to terrorists.

Edward Said, in “Israel, Iraq, and the United States, “scathingly comments on Bush Administration’s presumptuous patronizing and power-enabled political discourse and action:

What concerns me here is the whole idea of regime change as an attractive prospect for individuals, ideologies and institutions that are asymmetrically more powerful than their adversaries. What kind of thinking makes it relatively easy to conceive of great military power as licensing political and social change? . . . and to do so with little concern for the damage . . . fantasies about surgical strikes, clean war, high technology battlefields. . . . all of it giving rise to ideas of omnipotence,
wiping the slate clean, and being in ultimate control of what matters to “our” side? (“Israel”)

Mustapha Marrouchi and Noam Chomsky, too, concur with Said in their critique of using an ambiguous decontextualized terrorism to justify all action against others. Marrouchi and many others object to turning war on terrorism into an impregnable demand. Marrouchi writes: “Terrorism overrides history, politics, economics, and above all common sense. . . . Terrorists are, or have become, a Platonic essence: they never change, they have no history, they simply terrorize” (13).

What I am trying to show is that current American political discourse and politics capitalize on a very intricate mix of modernist dialectics, enlightened rationalism, and market capitalism, on the one hand, and transcendental, exceptionalist, or providential ideologies, on the other. The Bush Administration’s political discourse, too, invokes the negative image of the oriental irrational terrorist who shuns liberal values and is bent on combating the powers of good. These two trends have their own rifts in spite of their seeming coherence. The first capitalist spear-headed trend is imperialistic. Capitalistic states and markets need to open foreign territory for goods, investment and raw materials. It creates wealth differences among wealthy and impoverished poles. The second exceptionalist trend rewrites imperial relations in terms of American special status and role in mankind’s welfare and human history. It asserts American duty by virtue of its uniqueness to interfere in the world and keep it from disintegrating or deliver it toward a manifest destiny. Both currents have their own paradoxes. However, both mask and attenuate real political and economic stakes underpinning them. A corollary of ancillary medieval or spiritual combat between good modern man and the forces of the dark,
sometimes Hollywood style, is also invoked. In a sense, American-Iraq wars, or American-Saddam wars, have been imposed on the USA as a care-giver and protector of the world. In another sense, good has to combat and stop evil.

To make my points more concrete, I discuss the American official as well as mainstream media’s stances toward Abu Gharib for two purposes. Abu Gharib is a rhetorical site as well as a physical one. Second, to pause for a minute and think about the realities of the twenty first century such as Abu Gharib, one wonders about the role of academic and literary discourses, specifically alterity and dialogic ethics. Abu Gharib as deed, visual and written discourse, media event, political and legal haggling is a site full of revelations and paradoxes. The way Abu Gharib was framed and discussed by official and mainstream media is logocentric and purposefully designed to shape a very disturbing happening into the metanarrative of noble occupation. What happens “there” is merely an abuse, a violation, or an unaccepted scandalous matter. Not scandalous to Arabs and Muslims but to the American administration and policy makers. To use such terms to comment on American soldiers’ treatment of the prisoners is to suggest a strong moral background against which such unacceptable acts have happened. Abu Gharib is not a scandal in the sense of exposing imperial and colonial Machiavellianism and immorality. Rather, it is a scandal for the American public and political constituencies; it blemishes the self-made image of the noble imperialist. This is a very well-planned gesture that owns to the act to disown it, or more cleverly, to consolidate its moral façade through this mini-scandal. Many explanations or apologetic inputs have precedents in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: the civilized European may revert to his natural state if exposed to the lawlessness of African beastly jungle. Somehow, the state of confusion,
lawlessness, fog of insurgency and foreignness of land and people have contributed to otherwise unexplainable scandalous acts.

As a mini-scandal, Abu Gharib is written into American civilized and democratic metanarratives. With a sleigh of hand, Abu Gharib is appropriated into the general narrative of American gift to Iraq, the rule of the law and democracy. The American occupation and presence in Iraq, though unlawful and unwanted, is taken as a de facto reality. It is not a discussed matter anymore. Rather, Abu Gharib provides the United States with a useful sideshow. Abu Gharib makes news headlines, mobilizes fact-finding committees, necessitates Senate Hearings, invokes public outcries and reactions, and undergoes media replays, analyses and mutations. Not withstanding genuine feelings of revulsion and dismay displayed by many American politicians and ordinary people, Abu Gharib transforms from a disgraceful scene that needs to be explained and written away into an example of American democratic accountability.

Another observation is that most of those who condemn the abuse based on humanistic values and American moral mettle and true character still cast the discourse in a self-centered manner. A large number of politicians and ordinary people strongly reacted to Abu Gharib images. There is no denial that true feelings and ethical values are involved. Nevertheless, it is this discrepancy between seeing this abuse as inhuman, shameful, or “un-American,” while not seeing the whole war, the whole situation, in the same manner. Alternatively, the strong reaction against these images can be attributed to their negative effect on American image and reputation in the world, particularly Arab-Islamic parts of it. Many news reporters and analysts argued that these images undermine American humane actions and work to win the hearts and minds of those still on the
fence. In other words, the circulation of such images in Arabic and Islamic world would increase enmity toward the USA and probably help recruit more opposition to its presence in the region. President Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s rushed to denounce such actions as ‘Un-American,” and went as far as to articulate a semi-apology to the Iraqi people. I find it very ironic and smartly hypocritical to find such “abuses” horrible, unacceptable, and depraved, and not find a mega-assault on a whole nation's infrastructures and civilians for materialistic and strategic purposes equally blamable. Ironically, even those well-intentioned protestations of Abu Gharib unawares accept mainstream right wing frames.

The focus was on whether the soldiers were acting on their own or were following pre-set policies. Questions were raised whether the involved soldiers did what they did because of lack of training, psychological pressures, depravity, or whether they did it under the command and supervision of high ranking Pentagon leaders. In other words, these actions were either exceptional personal immoralities or systematic and intentional policies. Nobody ever asks what right do these American soldiers have to detain and control massive numbers of Iraqis in violation of all laws and conventions. These questions are taboos; they broach the natural order of things, but still they are asked by Iraqi and Muslim people. It is a very irreducible paradox of the reality of crude power that entitles one party to enslave, control and coerce another, despite any humanistic or sometimes useful outcomes. Very often those writers that set out to investigate the destructive effect of Abu Gharib on both sides have unconsciously submitted to the State official framing of the act.¹¹
Yet Abu Gharib for Muslim and Arab audiences is shameful and disgusting in many other ways. While in American mainstream media and to some extent public opinion, it is an exception or unfortunate happening that should not disprove the good work done in Iraq, for other audiences, Abu Gharib confirms what they already know about imperial and colonial forces. The United States have been disrespectful and inimical toward Arab and Muslim populations too many times, especially after the establishment of the State of Israel. Abu Gharib is just another instance of American double-standard foreign policies. For many Arabs and Muslims, Abu Gharib is the true face of American involvement in the region: destructive, antagonistic and disrespectful of the whole culture. Although Arab-Islamic response and analysis of Abu Gharib is not uniform, still the masses saw Abu Gharib as consistent with American foreign policies and official attitudes toward Arabs and Muslims: disrespect and attack on their culture and values, particularly in light of the sensitivity of sexuality and honor issues. In “Planting Democracy in Abu Gharib,” Walid Mushawih contends American mainstream explanation of the abuse as personal aberration. He scathingly asserts that:

We, in our turn, know by absolute conviction that the American democratic models have indeed behaved according to an educational method they have absorbed since the Red Indian massacres passing by Vietnamese “My Lai” to the blatant human rights violations inside Guantunamo cages. This conduct will not stop at Abu Gharib at all.

This violent education beyond values, conventions, and principles . . . has not happened by way of aberration, nor has it happened by accident. On the contrary, it is based on a behavioral movement established by
violent movies, racial hatred, resentment, insecurity, spiritual angst, let alone the lies that cover the truth under the shades of the Liberty Statute that Senator Robert Kennedy has wanted demolished since it has completely lost its symbolic meaning after broadcasting photos and documents about what happened at Abu Gharib. . . . This is the USA that has made alliances with agents and tails [client governments] . . . and came to ‘liberate the Iraqi nation’ from its independence, sovereignty and pride, and establish a plant to manufacture a new Arabic human being that is operated by remote control. . . . As for those who shed tears—over the reputation of USA (after the scandal), they—no doubt—suffer from a mental defect, since the reputation of (the master of the axis of good) has always been within the circle of suspicions through its bloody history that is first founded on interests and reinforced by arrogance and supremacy, and secondly, its practice of suppression. (“Planting”; my translation) 12

Mushawih as well as other critics form all over the world see America as a colonial-imperial power that disseminates sweetish and soothing humanistic rhetoric to conceal its real aggressive self-centered and Machiavellian actions. Wrapping imperial actions within humanistic or scientific metanarratives tones down opposition and even recruits support from within the colonized front. Otherwise, colonialists will be met with comprehensive unified resistances. How would it ring with the colonized if official and mainstream special interests media would come out and call things by their real names—no euphemism, no evasion, and no metanarratives. Some Muslim and Arab people may give up on dialogue and realize that it is a world governed by power—realpolitik. 13
I find it so difficult in light of the realities of political discourse and actions to talk about postmodern or cultural studies focus on alterity or social justice in terms of representation, diversity, and voice. To talk about postmodern ethics in such context is very highly hypothetical. It is not only a question of postmodern ethic’s idealism or marginality in terms of power relations, but it is also a question of the incompatibility of postmodern ethics of alterity with political discourse and action even though I am optimistic that certain political constituencies are more compatible with postmodern tenets of undecidability, plurality, and positionality. In fact, many researchers and scholars in IR (International Relations), Legal Studies and other disciplines are starting to heed postmodern insights. There are also many academic and other circles that are carving more discursive space, and consequently, social political space for the different other. Besides, mainstream subsumptive and hegemonic discourse is challenged from within and without that its mainstreamness is a provisional question. It is possible that support for hegemonic capitalistic states will erode the moment subjects, be they conservatives or liberal, realize that in fact the commodifying and ever expanding capitalistic machine harms community, family, and the ecosystem by prioritizing consumption. This realization is mobilizing many scholars, citizens, and cultural critics to oppose mainstream packaged descriptions and categories by contextualizing and seeing beyond political rhetorics. In the following section, I discuss such counter-discursive postures, actions, and writings.
Counter Discourses

Counter discourse is discourse vis-à-vis another discourse. More specifically, it is a discourse that opposes hegemonic or mainstream assumptions and rhetorics by offering a more convincing alternative or by showing the rifts and elisions in the discourse opposed. Moreover, such discourses have their own built-in discourse analysis tactics and deconstructive potential as they show or make visible relations and hiatuses the original discourse underplays, sugarcoats, or absents. One integral constituency responsible for the proliferation of discourses, counter-discourses, and counter-counter-discourses is searching for more truthful representations of reality and caring to counteract what one thinks to be false or misleading. That is, there is an inherent ethical animus in such writings. What earns a discourse a counter status exceeds mere opposition. On the contrary, articulating through another perspective, analyzing, synthesizing and critiquing are necessary ingredients. Hence, to some extent, postcolonial, feminist, underground, oppositional, leftist, minority, postmodern, and ecocritical writings are counter-discursive. De Beaugrande’s following comments are relevant:

To “deconstruct” a discourse can be to produce a counter-discourse that engages with its texture and probes how its implicit assumptions contradict or subvert its explicit exposition, argument or narrative – not just because the speaker or writer was inconsistent, deceptive, or misled, but because discourse at large asserts a dialectical potential that subverts closure. (New Introduction ch. 2, par. 172)
Accordingly, Qadri Ismail argues that the other is hailed to explain the hegemon to itself in addition to responding to reductive or misleading information about the other. This does not necessarily make such writings primarily reactionary. Rather, these writings do not necessarily submit to mainstream polarizing logic of insiders and outsiders, hierarchical dialectics, or nullifying de-relation or negative constitution. Many postcolonial and other minority critics have cautioned against falling prey to the mainstream subject’s dialectical or Manichean structures, or even accepting these terms for their face value. For example, in Chapter One of this study I referred to Annamaria Carusi’s stressing the need to avoid getting entrapped by the colonizer’s epistemic strictures. It is not sufficient to debunk reductive epistemological or ideological superstructures. One needs to resist responding to the hegemon according to the hegemon’s terms and frames.\(^{15}\)

It is also vital to remember that a counter-discourse does not have to come from the periphery against the colonizer or the hegemon. Cultures are not monolith; they have their own dialectics, political tensions, and discursive dynamics. For example, Arab thinkers’ and writers’ discursive practices perform a double gesture. They respond to Western hegemonic discourses and target other domestic discourses, too. The Arab-Western dialectic represents a myriad of stances that are context-bound ranging from outright rejection, to conditional concession, to dialogue. I do not consider those writers who replicate hegemonic views as engaging counter-discourses. The Arab-Arab or Arab-Islamic dialectics also range from dialogue to mutual incrimination over solutions to current problems and relations with the West. One dominant trend is the need to reform, strengthen and unite Arab-Islamic so as to build a strong front capable of stopping
foreign military invasions and cultural hegemony. Another trend discusses opening on the
West and selectively benefiting from its experiences, while another argument
recommends a return to the true spirit and teachings of Islam as necessary to reinstitute
Arab-Muslims past prosperous status. One needs to remember that categories such as
East and West are reductive; unfortunately, in light of current wars and media distortions,
these terms become highly negatively polarized to the demise of the weaker party in spite
of some fits of mutual demonization. One needs to remember that calls to modernize,
reform, and liberate nations through instituting political freedoms and accountability are
not exclusively western ideas or ideals. Any gesture to ossify West and East as one
another’s opposite or negation should be resisted. For if we do so, discourse, counter-
discourse, and analysis become needless.16

Therefore, I will focus on context-bound and dialogic rather than monologic
discourses vis-à-vis mainstream discourses. For example, Laila Al-Hmoud counteracts
mainstream war on terror making visible its elisions, paradoxes, and hidden subtexts.
She finds how the world unites to combat terrorism as an external evil completely
distorting and reductive. Besides, Al-Hmoud warns that the use of force “will not make
people forfeit their rights” (“Papers”; my translation). She adds, “If the world/West
comprehends this maxim, it would spare itself and others more “blood shedding”
“destruction,” and suffering. To paraphrase, she holds that security cannot be secured
through building fences, militarization, or preemptive offenses. Rather, the West has to
look into its own actions and policies that victimize the other for the sake of “material
and strategic interests.” In short, what the USA labels as terrorism is in fact mainly
counter-terrorism (“Papers”; my translation). There is a persistent structuring of security
as always violated or threatened by the irrational, backward, or terrorist other. Somehow by virtue of its difference, the other is a threat to the self. This equation is nor reversible: The other’s security concerns rarely emerge or make news.

Similarly, Qadri Ismail’s “Something Like a Response to 11 September” launches a counter discourse against Edward Rothstein’s remarks after 9/11 that the “resultant ‘shock’ would lead to an ‘intense rejection’ of ‘postcolonialism’ (and postmodernism)” (154). Ismail then argues that,

One of the more urgent tasks of postcolonial studies, now more than ever, is to reject Rothstein’s advice; not to disappear but to be more active; to help the west comprehend itself, know the pedigree of its own ideas. And to make it not just listen to, but speak to, work and engage with the other. This paper then is a response to being interpellated as a Muslim today in these very United States—not as a minority but as the other; indeed, as the enemy within. A response, most particularly, to the intellectual logic of US foreign policy after 11 September.

In the post-11 September conjuncture, the Muslim has been targeted – in the United States, Afghanistan, and elsewhere – for demonization, on the ground that she is culturally different, not just by Bush but by The New York Times too; by, that is, the US state and media working together. One can always respond to this by accepting the fact that of cultural difference and replying that the Muslim is not a demon; that most Muslims are peace-loving and so on. However, [to do] . . . so is to accept the
terms set by the west, whereas the task of postcoloniality . . . [has to] finish the critique of Eurocentrism. (15)

Interestingly, Qadri asserts the need to understand and resist colonial or patronizing discourses. He urges postcolonial critics to exceed being locked in mainstream’s frames. He argues that we need to reject Rosenstein’s logic and strictures, but more important, we need to change such relations in the first place.

Likewise, Marrouchi critiques the fact that terrorism “overrides history, politics, economics, and above all common sense,” turning terrorists into ahistorical or history-less “Platonic essence” (13). Marrouchi counter-discourse is also pointed at Arab and Third World actions and discourses. He warns against giving up on social struggle and political activism and falling into subtle forms of dependency and passivity: “Everyone seems to be waiting for someone to die, for a new American Administration, for the odd crumb proffered by the West. Victory is rarely more than a UN Resolution” (Marrouchi 19). Marrouchi critiques the “Third World’s” tendency to blame all of its failures and troubles on foreign sources.

In “Toward Renewing the Colonial Era,” Burhan Ghalyun echoes the above critiques when he perceives a renewal of colonial relations this time alliances with despotic or anti-public regimes based on mutual self-interests. Ghalyun’s provocative argument is worth quoting:

[T]he Arab regimes have only two options: renewing their contracts of dependency and submission to traditional colonialism or semi-colonialism that has secured for many of these regimes their continuity and stability through the past five decades . . . or establishing a new social and national
contract that connects these regimes with their community, a society that they previously—through the past long decades—have suppressed using a mix of despotic violence, martial laws, propaganda, religious or patriotic confusion or vacuous socialism. (“Toward Renewing”; my translation)

Ghalyun deftly demonstrates that these two options are not equally available. It is the “reality of power relations” rather than “benevolence and humanism” that is “behind choosing one way or the other” (“Toward Renewing”). However, Ghalyun argues that “colonial forces will use the old regimes to secure their interests” although they “will eventually” have to “concede if partly to the desires of nations” (Ghalyun). Ghalyun seems to be talking about the revival of anti-colonial resistance such as that of Algerian resistance to French occupation or Libyans struggle to free themselves from Italian supremacist and racist control. Today’s realities and current political scenes resemble past ones despite their own specific complexities.

Ghalyun’s argument that domestic or local regimes somehow continue or facilitate colonial relations is very popular in the Arab world. Many people attribute Arab Worlds’ backwardness and subordination to such alliances. In “Technology!” Noor’ddin Al-Hashimi satirizes local regimes’ special relations with colonial powers. His narrative is an allegorical or a ‘Roman à Clef’ piece. The king whose name is “Mismar Altaboot” [Coffin’s Nail] visits uncle Sam’s and uncle George’s countries to get the best and most advanced technology so as he can take it back to his people. He wants to “transform” his obedient subjects from backward to modern civilized subjects. Upon arriving back home, the king delivers a compassionate speech full of progressive and reformatory sentiments. He demands that his subjects spontaneously celebrate,
My loyal subjects! I have come back to you eaten by the desire to see your obedience. I demand that you spontaneously celebrate . . . because I have decided to transfer you from an era of caves and darkness into a time of civilization and light. Indeed, I have roamed and toured Uncle George’s and his brother Sam’s lands. I swear to God . . . that I did not go there for rest or pleasure, fun, or tourism. . . . I have brought for you the latest technology reached by the infidel West to benefit our homeland and make happy the subjects [i’bad اﻟﻌﺒﺎد]. (9-10; my translation)

The ruler’s absolute power cannot be captured in the English translation. The king calls his people “i’bad,” an expression that combines the secular meaning of subjects and religious meaning of willful worshipers. Allah uses this term to refer to Muslims in the Koran. It is presumptuous and sinful for a human being to refer to others as if they were his “i’bad.” Besides, it turns out that he has brought a box with “Made in the USA” and “specifically manufactured for the Third World” written on it. Ironically, the latest technology the king has bought is revealed to be the “latest model of electric execution chair” (10). However, as the farce goes on, the king discovers that he cannot use this new technology in his homeland as his country does not have electricity yet. Al-Hashimi’s message has different implications, the most important of which is underscoring the fact that local governments usually import harmful or unfit technologies instead of building infra-structures and local industries. Second, local governments resort to foreign help to keep their subjects under control. Or less directly, such international relations keep third world countries in their right place. The masses are the primary losers in such arrangements. Besides, the passage scathingly underscores several situational ironies. The
hypocritical relationship between the ruler and the West. The king refers to the West as “infidel” although it seems that he spends most of his time relaxing, shopping, and touring, there. Such a gesture also alludes to the fact that some Arab official discourse and media rhetoric cross the line between critiquing exploitive colonial practices or American double-standard foreign policies and turning the West into a scapegoat responsible for “homegrown” problems. Usually, such discursive and media practices exploit anti-imperial feelings to divert people’s attention from local governments’ failures and corruptions. Thus, instead of fixing and reforming, a Fifth Column is accused and blamed for homegrown failures. Such scathing and even bitter critiques are abundant in Arabic counter discourses and self-critiques. Everybody blathers about the necessity to reform and modernize but almost nothing changes.

In Hegemony or Survival, Noam Chomsky very succinctly points out the alienation and polarization of the State against the masses, a regressive and wearisome move. Commenting on the way the White House imposed war on the world and American public despite massive global and domestic protests, Chomsky reports that, “Two months later, after enormous worldwide protests, the press reported that ‘there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion’” (4). Chomsky looks at the problem from a global perspective. American assault against Iraq and its infinite war against terrorism comprise not only an aggression against a Third World country, but rather, it constitutes an assault against world population and the public sphere. American expansionism is a global problem. Chomsky and other critics are alarmed by such developments as excessive on the part of the Bush Administration,
although he traces this imperialism back to Woodrow Wilson’s times. Consequently, Chomsky makes the following connections:

The fundamental assumption that lies behind the imperial grand strategy . . . is the guiding principle of Wilsonian idealism: We—at least the circles who provide the leadership and advise them—are good, even noble. . . . In Wilson’s own words, we have “elevated ideals” and are dedicated to “stability and righteousness,” and it is only natural, then, as Wilson wrote in justifying the conquest of the Philippines, that “our interest must march forward, altruists though we are; other nations must see to it that they stand off, and do not seek to stay us.” (42)

Writings such as Chomsky’s are very timely and courageous. As a counter-discourse, Chomsky’s accounts debunk any mainstream conservative pretensions of altruistic intentions—at least they show deep contradiction in posing as an altruistic agent that is ready to use infinite force to practice altruism or more accurately to secure self-interests. Chomsky’s writings have been stirring a lot of anxiety and disapproval from American and Israeli conservative hawkish rights. Understandably, the book alerts anyone who reads it to the dangers of American hegemony and somehow mobilizes resistance, activism, and counter-discourses. The title of the book Hegemony or Survival indirectly though rightfully equates hegemony with death. Counter-discourses such as Chomsky’s cross the boundaries of race, nationality, and religion to focus on justice as a global concern. Appeals to global humanism or to the human masses against State power or corporate capitalism are very abundant today. Holding the discourse-dispensers up to their promises and demanding that they translate their ideals into actions is also another
counter-discourse tactic, although the repercussions of such strategies are debatable. The Jordanian Prince Hassan bin Talal appeals to the international community, reason, and shared humanity to step in and end all forms of oppression on all people. This universal justice ends conflicts and brings peace. Discussing how Arabs can rid themselves from their “West complex,” he urges that Arabs open to Asian democratic and economic revivalism experiences:

The Prince, who chairs Arab Thought Forum, emphasized that if “we deal with these Asian experiences we will rid ourselves of our Western complex and consequently will contribute to ridding the West of some of our complexes.” . . . On the cosmopolitan level, the Prince sees that humanity has to transform from a culture of frivolity to a culture of reason and discrete wisdom backed by ethical codes that strengthen values of solidarity among human beings. (“Al-Hassan”)

Prince Hassan’s ideas reverberate in the Arab world. Unfortunately, with international world order becoming more and more unilateral than ever, the “middle” is correlatively threatened. Many critics see the deep ironies of for example a Bush Administration’s calls that the Arab world democratize, modernize, and move beyond fanaticism, when is has been handling world affairs single-handedly against more moderate European stances and more importantly world masses. In other words, it does not make sense to demand the world to compromise and exceed Manichean mentalities when one’s visions and interests are uncontestable and privileged in advance.

A vibrant plethora of counter-discourses is emanating from all over the world: from within the United States’ liberal, leftists, and various counter culture movements,
European left, and Arabic and Islamic dialogic points of view. I cannot do justice to any of these other than point out that they share a concern for justice and global welfare despite being variously positioned toward the center. I have also noticed a blurring of boundaries. Old facile divisions for example between Leftists and Islamists seem to crumble in the desire to counteract the rise of secular/capitalist fundamentalisms as well as religious ones. Tariq Ali’s writings such as “Recolonizing Iraq” and The Clash of Fundamentalisms represent such a trend. In fact, these counter-discourses are historicizing as well as opening to one another more than ever. As such Islamic grievances and neo-leftist critiques of capitalism can benefit from one another and they usually cross-fertilize. The common denominator, I repeat, is the realization that multinational corporate capitalism engenders all kinds of ecological and demographic injustices that do not care about race, nationality, faith, or gender—although women, colored people, non-mainstream Christians, Muslims, and non-Western subjects pay the highest toll. That is, this global capitalism still retains colonial and imperial residues although its reach complicates old distinctions, such as those between colonizers and colonized or the oppressors and the oppressed.
Notes

1 My assumptions have their own problematics. On the one hand, there are those who may object to my crossing the lines between theory and praxis. Postmodern theory is just a theorization, an abstract alternative. It does not have to be subjected to tests that violate generic boundaries. However, there are many claims on the part of theorists and critics that postmodern is a theory of praxis or praxis incarnated. Postmodernism is also applauded, sometimes blamed, for blurring the boundaries between disciplines, fiction, history and reality. It resists modern or classical disciplinary boundaries and in this regard it is related to modernist avant-gardism.

2 Postmodernism as a new ethical or critical breakthrough retains modernist traces it supposedly resists. Some critics consider postmodernism an “offshoot” of modernism or modernism without its ethical or metaphysical certainties. The questions can be naïve as it may not be whether a postmodern attitude can bring a change or not, but rather, how to make people adopt and appreciate it. We are back to idealistic assumptions about human nature.

3 Robert de Beaugrande succinctly sums the history of discourse analysis and the shift from analyzing language to analyzing discourses. He explains the cons of this shift:

Discourse theorists take discourse, rather than language, as their domain in part because of difficulties with the latter term. The standard definition of "language" in linguistics (a set of units and the rules for combining them to make well-formed sentences) treats language as invariant over domains, occasions, speakers, and purposes; other traditional uses of language do
specify for some particulars (the language of the courtroom, insurance policies, advertising, Satan in book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, this document), but even these uses share with linguistics a tendency to analyze texts (or transcriptions of speech) in terms of patterns of choices, to objectivize in terms of words and structures. . . . Discourse theory criticizes theories of Speech Acts for their focus on the acts of individual agents speaking without social determination or constraint. . . . Because of this orientation toward social action, discourse theory also distinguishes itself sharply from philosophical concerns with the truth of statements and the validity of arguments, substituting a concern for conditions under which one can be judged to have made a serious, sound, true, important, authoritative statement. . . .Broadly construed, discourse theory draws insights and support from three intellectual traditions—Hermeneutics, social construction and ethnography, and the analysis of power of the political Left. The tradition of hermeneutics as transmitted by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas (and Thomas S. Kuhn) emphasizes that every discourse takes place within a shared horizon of preunderstanding (or "lifeworld") that cannot be fully or explicitly formulated. No discourse can be completely self-grounded, and the ability to function as a participant cannot be acquired wholly from a book, but arises from initiation and experience. Relevant concepts here include the notions of discourse community and "culture." . . . A second major source for discourse theory is the vein of ethnography and social theory that is
concerned with the offering and validating of accounts of cultural practices, including the writings of Clifford Geertz, Erving Goffman, and a host of others supporting the general program of symbolic interaction or social construction. . . . These approaches typically seek to "make strange" or denaturalize or make visible rules and practices underlying various institutions and transactions. . . . Discourse as a mode of power, which in late capitalist societies means the enactment and legitimation of inequality, is the special emphasis of Marxists such as Louis Althusser, Michel Pêcheux, and Fredric Jameson. ("Discourses Analysis")

4 I have referred to Karl Mannheim’s concept of utopia and ideology. If postmodernism is understood in terms of its opposition to modernist capitalist dominant ideologies, then it is utopian in that it justifies its own happening by offering a more just world or more utopian existence than that available through modernist scienticism and capitalism.

5 Much of the controversy surrounding postmodernism can be viewed as recurrent philosophical or political thought issues such as the debate between Marxists and idealists, libertarians and communitarians, or even deterministic versus existentialist points of view. Postmodernism presents a peculiar situation as it can be read as presenting the extreme of both right and left, existentialist and essentialists, if its constructivist hypothesis is decontextualized or misunderstood. Paradoxically, an extreme left is closest to extreme right, if not in content, at least in posture. Extreme constructivism is almost neo-conservative or essentialist.
Professor Robert de Beaugrande is a very popular researcher and scholar in Europe, Asia and the Arab world. He is a prolific writer whose insights in text linguistics and discourses analysis are very crucial to political discourse analysis. Prof. De Beaugrande has posted the following disclaimer on his homepage:

The time is long overdue to announce the free distribution of my 'big' books to be downloaded gratis from this website. If I advocate 'freedom of access to knowledge and society' (see especially my newest book uploaded below), I cannot address people in expensive or hard-to-find books.

Presidential dialectics also have to do with party differences and the need to assert that the new phase is both a continuation of a metanarrative, yet, a turning point toward the better.

The other shift in the security problematic stems from reversing a long tradition/pattern of aggression and its location. Rarely have colonial and imperial powers been at the receiving end of aggression, and most of the wars that USA engaged in happened in other territories. It is indeed a different war to have the USA attacked at home. This new reality necessitates new measures. Accordingly, war has to be relocated back to Afghanistan and Iraq.

I am also aware that Saddam has been depicted as a public enemy of his own people through his despotic and corrupt regime. This argument mostly resonates with the views of Iraqi Shia and Kurds, who have suffered dearly under his rule. Still, we need to differentiate between recognizing these realities and using them to cover up ulterior self-
serving motives behind the war. Although almost all Iraqis have suffered under Saddam, this suffering becomes spectacular headline news and recycled images to justify another aggression on a very massive scale. Even the economic sanctions on Iraqi people are blamed completely on Saddam’s actions. In contrast, hurtful economic sanctions, dropping of internationally prohibited bombs, bombing of infrastructures are written as necessary measures in the road to democracy and liberation.

President Bush’s speech about exiling Saddam and his sons rings as double-talk, basically targeting Shia majority in an attempt to foreclose or neutralize their opposition. Singling Saddam and his men as the enemy is partly true and partly a political maneuver:

Many Iraqis can hear me tonight in a translated radio broadcast, and I have a message for them. If we must begin a military campaign, it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against you. As our coalition takes away their power, we will deliver the food and medicine you need. We will tear down the apparatus of terror and we will help you to build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free. In a free Iraq, there will be no more wars of aggression against your neighbors, no more poison factories, no more executions of dissidents, no more torture chambers and rape rooms. The tyrant will soon be gone. The day of your liberation is near. Yet, the only way to reduce the harm and duration of war is to apply the full force and might of our military, and we are prepared to do so. (“Saddam Must”)
For the Arab street, the liberation and freedom talk is merely chattering so starkly double-standard and deceptive. This talk is consistent with colonial powers’ patronizing rhetoric that kills in the name of freedom.

Public opinion reveals a myriad of stances that range from crude endorsement of the abuses to true sense of revulsion and condemnation, although very often the respondents would see American military occupation as a natural order of things or at least as a necessary evil. Some respondents have critical thinking skills and look at the issue in its contexts. Some others, however, focus on Abu Gharib and are diverted from the real issue itself, which is American imperialism and military conquests. For example, BBC News reached out to the public to solicit their reactions to Abu Gharib under “Iraqi Prisoner Pictures: Your reaction.” Surveying the public responses coming from British, American and other nationalities, I have come with some observations. A large portion of the responses echo American official stance: distancing and condemning: what is done at Abu Gharib does not represent ‘our’ values and deeds in Iraq; it is an aberration. Some respondents wanted to provide more context, somehow listing all kinds of adverse conditions that may have lead the soldiers into such sadistic behavior. Sometimes, the lines separating explaining and justifying these acts are blurred. More interestingly, even some responders went as far as to justify Abu Gharib. For example, “Zurich Bogoni” writes,

I really do not understand what all the fuss is about. What do people expect from the military? They are trained to KILL & they have probably seen & done things that none of us can ever imagine. The fact that the idio-democratic [sic] minded media are trying to self destruct their own
country as usual by publishing pictures . . . does not surprise me. Anyone who is shocked by the actions of the US & UK soldiers must be either very naïve or a complete idiot. You go out there & see how you react to people who want to kill you!!!! (“Iraqi Prisoner”)

In fact, some respondents went as far as to suggest massive genocide—“exterminate all the brutes” logic to use one of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*’s solutions to the question of the other. David from South Carolina expresses his disgust and shame that American soldiers who are there to liberate and aide Iraqis should lapse into such depravities. He critiques the White House for its “duplicity” and waging a war on “false pretense.” David also is wary of media complicity with the state and military censorship.

Furthermore, military reports, investigation committees, Senate Hearings are overshadowed by bi-partisan conflicts and presidential elections. Diana West in “False Analogies,” asks:

Why? Because Abu Ghrailb is, more than anything else, the fulfillment of the media dream, the Vietnam they think they never had [or had a very long time ago], the aberration to obsess about, the disgrace to exult in and the opportunity—and this is key—to shift the political landscape. That is why 30-some instances of abuse at Abu Ghraib, which range from acts resembling extreme fraternity hazing to actual sexual assault, have sucked the oxygen from all urgent questions of life and death, truth and falsehood, and civilization and barbarism. (“False Analogies”)

In contrast, in “The Right's Abu Ghraib Denial,” Timothy Noah critiques the conservatives’ politicizing Abu Gharib to discredit liberal reactions and calls for
Rumsfeld’s resignation. Noah adds that “other conservative commentators” have resorted to the following ruse: “Torture is bad; liberal outrage against torture is worse” (“Right’s”). I have watched news coverage of Abu Gharib, Senate Hearings and read about it extensively over the Internet. I was curious about how the American public and the White House would handle it. I was very disappointed. Despite official outcries and vague apologies, I saw the discourse’s inability to break beyond certain political taboos and describe Abu Gharib for what it really is. In general, for the Arab world, the Western involvement in their culture and land has always been a variation on Abu Gharib: violence, disrespect, duality, and evasion of ethical responsibility. Abu Gharib is the epitome of colonial realpolitik. Example’s of French military occupation of Algeria—how the French used to crush opposition, dehumanize their prisoners, rape their wives or daughters, and enjoy cutting their ears, Italian brutalities against the Libyan people: mass jailing and concentration camps, burning of crops and trees, and even Israel’s violations of Palestinian basic rights are part of the picture—Israel being an extension of British/Western (Zionist) imperialism and colonialism, all are subtexts to Abu Gharib.

Nevertheless, moderate Arab-Islamic voices do not resort to cultural demonization: oppositional critics usually point out that their stance is not an essentialist one. It is rather a reaction against that side of Western hegemony or imperialism. Arabs know that their life, rights, children, and voice do not mean a lot in a capitalist or imperialist word order; Abu Gharib has not resulted in a single NU resolution. The perpetrators were not held accountable before the International Court. If the parties involved in Abu Gharib were reversed, who knows what would have happened. If Arab-Muslims or Iraqis were the ones responsible for the photos, murders, sexual abuse,
sodomization with broom sticks or torches, definitely world reaction and actions would have been completely different in quality and scale.

The discrepancies are so glaring. If we take another example of violence perpetrated against Arab-Muslims we will see similar patterns. At most, the mainstream or perpetrating parties would acknowledge the violations as unfortunate collateral or necessary damage. The violations will not be taken as representative of a whole culture, religion or nationality. For example, the AIDS scandal that involved Bulgarian nurses injecting hundreds of Libyan children with AIDS never made mainstream news. The Bulgarian government has not accepted responsibility for what its subjects have done. Nobody came and blamed these acts on a culture of irrationality or hatred. The Bulgarians were not demonized. Had it been the other way around, who knows what would have happened. The list goes on!

12 Dr. Walid Mushawih is a Syrian Ph. D. holder in Arabic Literature. He is a prolific writer. He also is the chief editor of *Al-Mawqif Al-Adabi* (Literary Stance). His writings are usually dialogic where he attempts to strike a balance between critiquing the Other/West and critiquing the Self’s failures and contribution to its own problems.

13 If the imperial rhetoric matches imperial real intentions and actions, or vice versa, we would be living in a completely different world. For example, colonial powers have learned that resorting to a Crusading rhetoric to justify intervening and conquering the East would invite strong reaction and mobilize massive resistance. Shifting to enlightenment and humanistic rhetoric would curtail resistance and even recruit inside help. Very rarely would a power declare its action in terms of self-driven aggression for self-interests or aggression against the different. What would be the Islamic-Arab world’s
reactions if the war on terrorism were configured in crusading, millennial, or racial terms? What would the world’s reaction be if the Bush millennial politicians deploy Tim LaHaye’s language? For example, in “Writing for Godot,” Nancy Shepherdson comments on the resurgence of eschatological and millennial writings that espouse a violent and intolerant world view or teleology. She reproduces some of LaHaye’s millennial convictions. Surprisingly, his book sold “26 million” copies:

The city of Babylon in modern day Iraq will be rebuilt, as will the first temple in Jerusalem, on land now occupied by one of the most sacred sites in Islam, the Dome of the Rock. By then, though, all of the Muslims in the world will have been eliminated, either horrifyingly killed or converted to Christianity. Nearly all Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists and other “unbelievers,” even some Christians face the same fate.

14 Edward M. Graham’s book Fighting the Wrong Enemy contends that antiglobalist forces are gaining momentum as the agencies and groups behind these forces are weary of the negative effects of global market hegemony. There are plenty of books that discuss the new global challenges and the need to coordinate the efforts of antiglobalist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist movements as well as ecological and environmental activists. Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21st Century is a collection of essay that puts such movements in perspective.

15 Not all counter-discourses are oppositional in the same manner or to similar degrees. There are discourses from within the hegemon and discourses from without, and there are those borderline ones. More importantly, there is a new trend that resists dualisms and reaches for solidarity and connectedness in ecological sense rather than
universal and humanistic sense. Thus, global activist groups do not see themselves as limited by race, nationality, past, sexuality, or class, although they recognize these factors. They see themselves as citizens of the universe. The events at Seattle, opposition to the Big Seven are typical instances.

16 The Arab-Islamic counter-discourses fall on a spectrum of Islamic, pan-Arabic, leftist, global, pro-western, and anti-western stances.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN WE DO?

A specter is haunting American academe--the specter of alterity. From research universities to junior colleges, from land grants to the Ivy League, from phalanxes defending the Western canon to cohorts clamoring at its gates on behalf of ethnic, racial, sexual, economic, political, religious, and other groupings--we are all confronted now to an unprecedented degree by the problematics of "otherness." (Alexandrov)

To be a Muslim nowadays is to live perpetually on the edge, to be constantly bruised and bloodied from the harsh existence at the margins, to be exhausted by the screams of pain and agony that no one seems to hear. We, the Muslims, live in a world that is not of our own making, that has systematically marginalized our physical, intellectual and psychological space, that has occupied our minds and our bodies by brute force — even though sometimes this force comes in the guise of scholarship and literary fiction. . . . We have been developed to death, modernised to extinction, Leninised into oblivion, and now we are being written out of history by postmodernism. Criticism and self-criticism is the only tool we have to fight back; and excellence in thought and action our only guarantee of success. (Sardar 18-19)

This study has been so long in the making and unmaking. I would have slipped into perpetual research if it weren’t for my family and sponsors who kept pushing me to finish. To take an excursion, I first became interested in postmodern thought in my graduate studies at Yarmouk University in Jordan. Back then, Derrida’s and Foucault’s ideas were presented as the epitome of new literary and critical theory. However, this new school of thought as appealing and radical it appeared to be had a downside to it. Bracketing reality and deconstructing foundations somehow detracted from its critical value and radicality.¹ My interest in postmodernism as a philosophical, political, or pedagogical trend was renewed as well as shaken after September 11th atrocities. I was
drafting my proposal and finding it difficult to articulate my sense of uneasiness with contemporary literary theory, particularly postmodern thought. This disillusionment became keener in light of United States media’s response to the national trauma of these terrorists’ attacks. I witnessed media’s, State’s and general public’s hostile response to Arabs and Muslims as radical dangerous aliens. I also lived the reality and rhetorical slides as “war on terrorism” become war against Afghanistan, Islamic institutions, charities, outspoken university professors, American civil liberties, and eventually Iraq.² Although national security concerns are commendable and legitimate, the question at the back of my mind was about the disparity between national and international responses to the victims of 9/11 and the insignificant and barely noticeable reaction to the victimization of Muslims all over the world. If anything, September 11th and all other direct and indirect acts of violence point to the limitations and duplicity of (some forms of) humanity. State violence, violence of the strong against the weak, is “necessary evil,” comprehensible through various registers such as self-defense, self-interest, fight against despotism, and other pretexts. In contrast, violence whose source is the weak is outrageously despicable and punishable. Of course, all kinds of violence need to be historicized and judged accordingly, not to justify, optimize, or overlook, but to understand and help prevent further violence.

I also have re-thought my different roles as a Muslim, a father, a teacher, and a citizen of the globe. I have become more sharply skeptical of my own position as an Arab Muslim living in the West, studying and teaching English as I witness the demonization of my own language, territory, and culture. I wondered about the role academia could play in the face of these grim political realities. I also wondered about theories of justice,
particularly postmodernism justice. I have noticed that ethical and humanistic discourses, be they modern or postmodern, thrive on generalized ambiguity and remain mainly occidental. Moreover, if the discourse shifts from the category of alterity to black American prison population or Muslims, the humanistic or inclusive alterity-oriented embrace halts. There is a vague sense that Muslims are not even others in the traditional or postmodern senses: All humans are equal; all humans are humans, but some humans are more human and more equal than others—to use some Orwellian vocabulary.

Faced with such unpleasant questions, I decided to explore these vague and thorny issues for the sake of understanding, correcting, and intervening in the current discourse on otherness. Thus, this study is a response to new realities that face all citizens of the globe, particularly Arabs and Muslims. Of course, academicians and students have a lot to explain, teach, and learn through critical thinking skills and contextualizing/historicizing lest the world lapses into mutual demonization, the beneficiary of which are the powerful, special interests groups, or multinational corporations. Thus, I felt compelled to investigate hard issues and raise questions about the role of the humanities, particularly postmodern ethics, in light of grounded messy otherness, the otherness of Arabs and Muslims. Of course, the task was not easy as the sites teem with contradictions, ambiguities, and even informational entropy. 3

Thus, in Chapter One, I had to grapple with the buoyancy of philosophical and ethical arguments and their paradoxes. Instead of simply reiterating that postmodernism is paradoxical or self-undermining, I focused on tenets of alterity and constructivism to examine their tensions and their repercussions to the problematic of human agency. It is one thing to hold that postmodern thought is radical or neoconservative, and yet another
to prove or explicate that. I felt that this introductory chapter helps limit unnecessary excessive ambiguities and miscommunications about postmodernisms. Postmodernism as a theoretical and critical practice exposes originary epistemological violence or blindness toward the different other. Nevertheless, postmodern thought seems to underplay power relations as manifest in physical and institutional sites as well as linguistic/discursive ones. Although postmodernism politicizes everything, it ignores the traditional sense of politics as power relations among states, states and the masses, and political parties and bodies. These power relations are regulated by economic, political, and ideological interests. The implicit conclusion is that postmodern theoretical writings debunk epistemological and ontological blindness and violations against alterity although it cannot account for the complexity of lived real transactions.

Accordingly, Jeffrey Poke highlights the inherent paradoxes in postmodern thought, pointing out that despite its radicality, Levinsonian intersubjective ethics or infinite obligation to the human face resorts to norms, states, and institutions, and thus, risks reiterating Kantian universal imperatives it originally opposes on the basis of being reductive of the other. Popke explains that Levinas “was never explicit about the mechanism by which ethical responsibility toward the other might translate into a moral state-form” (304). Paradoxically, critics such as David E. Cooper even see in the celebratory turn to difference an avoidance of the question of the other on more serious terms: “And it is, perhaps, a wider sensitivity to, and ‘celebration’ of, ‘difference’ [that is] . . . responsible for the reluctance . . . ‘to take seriously. . . the objective arguments of others’” (Cooper 42). To avoid celebratory symbolic gestures toward not reducing the other to the Same, I have focused on context-bound instances of self-other encounters and
I also have undertaken to explore the limitations of these very terms by attending to the political and economic as well as the discursive.

Thus, in Chapter Two, I have focused on Twain’s *Innocents* as a sample of modernist or oriental “literary” discourse to concretize what postmodernism claims to be modernist dialectical reduction of the other to the Same. This Chapter serves two purposes. First, it explores Self-Other cultural constitutions at the superstructural level—something manifested in Twain’s logocentric and ethnocentric approach to the different other. It also exposes the limitations of theoretical-superstructural explanations of the imbalanced self-Other relations—cross-cultural relations are also shaped by political, economic, and intentional constituencies. The other, too, plays a certain negative or positive role in such relations and representations. Exposing originary violations against alterity is a very important step. Still, deconstructing though it is not a sufficient one at that. Acknowledging that Arabs are conceptually different does not account for their heightened otherness unless we contextualize Arab world’s strategic geographical position, natural sources such as fossil oil, and Arab nationalist and Islamic opposition to colonial and imperial projects. I have shown that the persistence of dialectical hierarchies and subsumptive representationalism in self-other relations have facilitated colonial and imperial enterprises.

Chapter Three presents different moves that counteract mainstream reductive practices. The literary texts I have examined manifest postmodern, deconstructive, feminist, and postcolonial oppositional efforts toward voicing alterity or exposing the Same’s reductive one-sided constitution of the other. These texts cannot be fully understood without foregrounding historical, political, and economic realities as well as
epistemological ones. War as action cannot be completely explained in terms of
Levinas’s ontological reduction of the other to the Same, Girard’s scapegoating, or
Derrida’s metaphysical violence. If one attributes the imbalanced self-other relations to
inherited predispositions, the next step may very well absolve historical agents of their
share and responsibility. Human subjects are not mere products or constructs of
superstructural systems; subjects can utilize, invest in, comply with, or critique and
oppose these systems based on context-bound stakes, pressures, and choices.

If modernist thought espoused idealistic rhetoric, so does postmodernist thought
unless it attends to real political factors concomitant with—or sometimes at odds with—
declared intentions or philosophical foundations. Postmodern critiques of modernity or
mainstream culture may turn into “nominal” circuitous practices unless demographic
factors such as gender, nationality, class, sexual-orientation, religion, and economic-
political realities are historicized. If modernism never attends to the reality of the other as
other because it processes alterity through the Same, postmodernism, too, may gloss over
the reality of the other unless it foregrounds concrete relations and reinstalls what modern
thought marginalizes or absents.

Accordingly, Chapter Four is a further step in the direction of historicizing self-
other relations. I have showed that discourses and political actions can be at odds with
one another. Alternatively, altruistic humanistic discourse can conceal hegemonic and
other-unfriendly motives and actions. Deconstructing mainstream discourse or the
discourse of other is a necessary, yet not sufficient, step in the right direction toward
social change. CDA and historicizing are more efficient as they attend to lived realities
and expose the relation between discourses and power. CDA, deconstructive strategies,
and historicizing are not sufficient courses of action unless they coextend with lived realities and mobilize political opposition/activism through counter-discourses and reclamations of the public sphere. Forfeiting the public sphere to hegemonic interest-driven political bodies perpetrates various forms of injustice against the other. Hopefully, exposing the other face of neo-conservative and sometimes complicit neo-liberal capitalistic global hegemony will erode public support and mobilize opposition commensurate with the danger of such a trend to self, others, and the whole globe. However, there is still a lot of work to be done. For hegemonic capitalistic and consumerist systems can co-opt the most radical oppositional stances through subtle manipulation of the terms and boundaries of public debate and through limiting and misleading human agency.

Hence, in the remainder of this chapter, I focus on some subtle challenges that face critics and activists. For example, while concerned critics may indulge refuting the fact that Islam and the West are not mutually exclusive, this very mental labor may backfire or divert attention from the fact that these publicized issues are imposed via mainstream channels to divert attention from other more urgent concerns. Accordingly, critics need to grapple with these issues to be able to move beyond them so that they can address other cumulative problems. To perpetually dwell on these controversial matters is to fall prey to subtle simulacrum.s. Hence, I explore post-modern Islam tensions or overlappings with an eye to differentiate between grounded and constructed conflicts, lest the whole ordeal becomes a sideshow. It is important that analysis does not turn into fortuitous self-sufficient academic mental labor at the expense of moving toward other problematics and political action. We need to understand and contextualize the problems
to hopefully solve them and surpass unnecessary strictures. Very often academic and scholarly debates lose sight of the fact that they need to problem-solve and not merely problem-find and define. Problem solving exceeds the textual and discursive to the realm of action, or more accurately, keeps thought and action coextensive. Hence, I comment on the structures and repercussions of relaying Islam as other to an established legitimate order. I, too, reflect on the limitation of my study and advance some recommendations for further studies and courses of action.

Incompatibility: Fact or Fiction

The way the West deals with Islam has generally been ethnocentric. Islam has been dominantly approached in terms of its opposition to or incompatibility with the West. This ethnocentrism, however, is a scaled matter; it ranges from the acceptable (natural) fact that individuals bring their experiences and values with them whenever they deal with a new situation to a problematic and questionable ethnocentrism that verges on outright prejudice and intentional distortion of the different. Islam has been variably ethnocentrically stereotyped as opposed to the West, to modernity, to science, to democracy, and many other positive values. These terms and Islam are mainly defined from a Western point of view. What is true and what is fiction or distortion in these charges is a big question that is beyond the scope of this current study. These issues need collective and interdisciplinary studies. Nevertheless, I think that the question of Islam-West incompatibility is exaggerated and misplaced most of the times. Very often studies and efforts dwell on refuting or proving these propositions, thus inadvertently or craftily,
diverting attention away from focusing on historicized and enacted modes that have affected Islamic-Western encounters and sometimes mutual distrust and stereotyping. What I mean is that sometimes ideological or religious differences are used to cover up political and economic ones. This is why I challenge the whole formula/stricture or question about Islamic-Western incompatibility. Unless contextualized, Islamic-Western conflicts may become devised sideshows that augment an already muddied situation. I hope my argument will be clear by the end of this chapter.

If modern thought as a Western product manifested in major orientalist, colonial, and imperial encounters and writings has cast and written Muslims and Arabs as incompatible with progress, democracy, and scientific advancements due to Arab-Islamic mentalities/essences or due to their “superstitious” fundamentalist faith, these very questions still beg answers in today’s world despite informational technologies, cultural migrations, and a plethora of academic writings that tackle and refute such charges. To some extent, the otherness or incompatibility of Islam and the West persists in the postmodern world: as secular, postmodern thought does not seem to have room for Islamic points of view, particularly in light of Islamic held revelations and divine truths, for Muslims who still practice Islam. In contrast, if Islam is viewed as alterity or as the legitimate, yet discursively marginalized, other, then postmodern deconstructive and subversive readings of mainstream and logocentric assumptions will open new venues for the Muslim other in terms of legitimate diversity. In Honglim Ryu’s terms, postmodern “proponents believe that the negation of modern “metanarratives” opens a way to the Other, which is ordinarily marginalized and suppressed both in thought and in social
practice” (6). Levinas himself reformulates the ethical question in terms of “calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the other” (*Totality* 43).

Of course, these are theoretical propositions that assume full or limited translatability. In other words, we can shift from the other as a generic term into embedded Muslims without having to modify or change our first premises. In Chapter One, I have shown the impasses embedded in such shifts. In another sense, alterity and diversity very rarely extend to Muslims as others. Islam seems to be a charged, alien, stubborn, or controversial other that has not yet gained solid ground as legitimate or fully human, let alone desirable, difference. On the contrary, one may notice the rise of hate speech and demonization at one end of the spectrum. The paradox would be that under postmodern non-judgmentalism, hate speech becomes an autonomous phrase regime, although postmodern thought has deep-seated concerns for social justice as I have shown in the previous chapters. One wonders if a demonized other has alterity or any discursive legitimacy.

The problem is not exclusive to Western or postmodern thought’s ability to recognize Islamic otherness as a legitimate rival or incommensurable phrase regimes. Rather, Islamic thought resists hegemonic and secularist frameworks. Islam as other differs from blacks, females, gays and lesbians, or working classes as others. These are some kind of homegrown domestic more manageable insider others that have carved some political rights and gained some social recognition. These can be dealt with under identity politics. Islam cannot be reduced to identity politics or commodified in the mainstream or tolerated as opposition. Its otherness is peculiarly more problematic and
challenging. It belongs to other territories and is modified by particularly specific historical, geographical, and strategic interests and tensions.

Paradoxically, critics such as Daniel J. Adams and Zygmunt Bauman argue that if modernity is secular, postmodernism restores the sacred (“Toward a Theological”). One wonders if the sacred here involves Islam. For Islam does not accept secular-sacred divisions. The very same logic that imposes Western divisions such as that between the secular and the religious also extends to branding Islam as unscientific and thus blamable for Arabs’ backwardness—a move that violates historical realities; the Western experience with the Church and its hegemonic and suppressive role against scientific knowledge cannot be imposed on Islam. Western rationalism also plays a role in othering Islam due to its recognition of only the empirical and quantifiable. Both Western experience with the Church and rise of rationalism are experiential Western-specific issues that cannot be automatically extended to different cultures that have different religious institutions and experiences.

Rarely do predisposed dismissing attitudes care enough to look into Islamic texts and investigate Islamic concepts of science, reason, and progress, although Islam does not contradict or limit scientific thought. Nor is Islam threatened by science. However, Islam’s recognition and encouragement of scientific enterprises do not make Islam an object at the disposal of scientific rationalism. Islam recognizes the limitation of science and human knowledge and places the divine beyond them. Scientific findings do not contradict Islamic faith although science does not explain or encapsulate all facets of human life and the world—it being limited as a form of human knowledge. Postmodernist critiques, even critiques from within science itself, have been exposing the
limitation of science as a form of human knowledge. Lyotard argues that science is one of many language games (Postmodern Condition).

Contrary to stereotypes that Islam is autocratic and superstitious, Islam urges people to observe their surroundings and think rather than take things for granted or follow inherited traditions. Islam’s concept of “taklif” encompasses the joint meanings of “responsibility and accountability.” According to the Muslim American Society, *Taklif*, Islam affirms, is the basis of man's humanity, its meaning and its content. Man's acceptance of this burden puts him on a higher level than the rest of creation; indeed, than the angels. For only he is capable of accepting responsibility. . . . A world of difference separates this humanism of Islam from other humanisms. Greek civilization, for instance, developed a strong humanism that the West has taken as a model since the Renaissance. Founded upon an exaggerated naturalism, Greek humanism deified man, as well as his vices. That is why the Greek was not offended by representing his gods as cheating and plotting against one another. . . . Being part of the very stuff of which human life is made, such acts and passions were claimed to be as natural as the perfections and virtues. As nature, both were thought to be equally divine, worthy of contemplation in their aesthetic form, of adoration – and of emulation by man of whom the gods were the apotheosis. Christianity, on the other hand, was in its formative years reacting to this very Greco-Roman humanism. It went to the opposite extreme of debasing man through “original sin” and declaring him a “fallen creature.” (“Tawhid”)
In Al’Aqlaniyeh: Hidayeh am Ghiwayeh (Rationalism: Guidance or Seduction) Abdul-Salam al-Basyuni shows that the Western concept of rationalism differs from Islamic concept of “a’ql” (reason). While western modern rationalism subsumes or de-legitimizes religious experience, in Islam reason is a precondition for religious “taklif.” Instead of being the antithesis of religion, reason is exulted as a means to knowing and revering God, although in a non-empirical or reductive way—different kind of knowledge. Islam recognizes and elevates “a’ql” (reason) as a guard against fallacies and blind imitation of harmful traditions. The Islamic concept of reason has several meanings that are not basically dialectically opposed to feelings or passions. Islamic reason is not sexist or anti-natural. Muslims are called upon to let principled reason adjudicate, rather than, give in to whims, desires, or alliances as these may obstruct the rendition of justice. Reason’s other meanings are “holding to” and taking precautions; it also means understanding and distinguishing between true and false. Al-Basyuni shows that Islam fought illusions, magic, traditions, and stressed individual as well as collective responsibility by protecting the human mind from anything that corrupts or suspends it (103). As holistic, the Muslim mind flexibly moves between fixed principles and variables (103).  

Very rarely intimate and un-predisposed analyses touch on such positive issues or touch on Islamic stances on social justice, community and solidarity where the rich are responsible for the poor although the social system works to shrink these gaps and prevent exploitation. Islam makes these edicts into both acts of worship and legislative regulations. Muslims are told that exploiting and oppressing others damages their spiritual record. Such deeds are punishable acts in the here and at the day of judgments—
of course one has to be a believing Muslim to heed such warnings. In addition, Islam establishes laws and guidelines for commercial transactions and dealings that punish fraud, disallow usury, and encourage ‘alqardh al-hasan,’ interest-free loans. The loaning system is regulated in order to prevent abuse or failure of payment. A Muslim who loans another has to write it down in a contract in the presence of two sane, adult, and trustworthy witnesses who swear to tell the truth if they are called to. Many Muslims get and give interest-free loans as it is recommended as a distress-relief venue: helping other members of the community out. I myself have loaned and received loans from other people without paying interests or finance charges. Unfortunately, these details go missing or never reach non-Muslim populations, particularly who think Islam is a mere ideology or spirituality. On the contrary, most studies select highly polarized and controversial issues and reduce Islamic faith to them at the expense of holistic and contextualized approaches, sometimes in the spirit of mollifying and faultfinding. Polygamy is one of these abused and de-contextualized issues. Even those scholars who pose as authority such as Bernard Lewis start with enumerating Islamic “Golden Age” past and some of its merits just to blow them off two paragraphs later. The positive is merely mentioned as rhetorical tactic to give the appearance of objectivity and even-handedness.

Very often these characterizations of Islam’s incompatibility or opposition to the West conceal the realities of Western-Eastern encounters by casting their differences in mainly superstructural or “ideological” generic vague terms. For example, it is Islam as a whole and the West as a whole that are polarized as opposites. Or Islam is dialectically opposed to certain positive values in the West such as democracy, scientific progress, and
freedom of expression. Rarely would such accounts mention that Islam or Muslims have opposed colonial and exploitive supremacist or missionary incursions into their territories and affairs. Casting such differences in general terms places the other party in an unfavorable position. Paradoxically, historical evidence shows that Muslims have always wanted to modernize and advance because they do not enjoy the secondary status that facilitates their victimization and undermines their identity. They also feel so much pressure that other countries are so advanced when they still depend on importing foreign technologies. More important, these questions are life-and-death matters; Muslims know that their weakness makes them vulnerable to all kinds of harm, while building strong modern infrastructures and defense systems puts them back as equivalent participants in a world order they give to and selectively take from.\(^5\)

The very questions have their own strictures that in a very subtle way limit the course of discussions and answers. Questioning Islam as to its compatibility with the best of Western government systems conceals the working of non-equivalent power relations and reenacts cultural hierarchy and subsumption mechanisms. If to such questions Muslims answer yes, then they are to blame for not having modernized or democratized, yet. Implicitly, they need to follow in the First World’s footsteps and modernize as a logical consequence of the affirmative answer. If the answer is an outright decontextualized no, then Muslims are in big trouble; they have to undertake drastic changes or they have themselves to blame for not catching up and joining the human family. What such questions hide is the fact that democratizing and modernizing may not be really available options for Muslim populations in the first place. Most of the time,
these are joggled on the rhetorical levels: the Muslim masses desires and wills are rarely heeded domestically and internationally.

The interrogation establishes Western-style democracy, capitalism, or secularism as a usually desirable privileged norms, relegating the other term to the problematic, pathological, or unprogressive, must-go or readapt party. The compatibility demand is a survival demand that conceals hegemonic or assimilative appropriative forces. It is important that the other is made compatible; otherwise, it may very well fail the survival of the fittest test. Surprisingly, such discursive parameters come from above, form the center of power, to the weaker party, a priori establishing hierarchical orders and power divides. Besides, using the term compatible assumes that both parties are part of the same order or same vocabulary, when this may not be the case. The terms of the question are not reversible? It would sound unnatural or unthinkable to ask if the West or modernity is compatible with Islam, casting Islam as the established party in whose terms others need to define themselves. Notwithstanding, showing the discursive strictures and power relation embedded in such formulas does not reduce all such queries to power relations. Such questions also beg comprehensive collective efforts to answer.

How different would it sound and mean to structure the questions differently—either from the point view of the other or based on context-bound modes of West-Islamic encounters! How would a Muslim’s position/dilemma sound if the questions read: “Is Islam compatible with colonialism, foreign military occupation, or economic exploitation? Is Islam compatible with free (exploitive) market force? Is Islam compatible with a disintegrated individual whose drives and ties are materialistic and consumerist, or whose spirituality is subsumed under a commodifying personal styles
order? Or is Islam compatible with nihilistic or absurdist explanations of life and the
universe?” The answers to the above questions is understandably and commendably ‘no.’
All cultures and religions have their built-in resistance to oppression; all have a system
that delineate boundaries between the acceptable and the not so acceptable.
Unfortunately, Western media never structure the questions in this manner. If they would,
the whole discourse, the whole outcome and the way Islam is positioned will change.
Historicizing the questions and the answers does not pre-ordain or limit the answers, nor
does it absolve or indict any party before extended analysis. Although such questions
need to be investigated now and then, they become sideshows and cover up more urgent
contextualized problems.

To repeat, to ask whether Islam is incompatible with democracy, science, or
modernity is to assume that these have been really available options for Muslims to
choose from. Such propositions gloss over the fact that modern science and democratic
governments have not been truly available despite a plethora of verbal rhetorical calls to
modernize or democratize. There are arguments that colonizers have not been serious
about modernizing the colonized: some critics very convincingly prove that the
colonizers have been instrumental in thwarting colonized people’s struggle to modernize
and break off dependency and subordination. It is naive to expect that a colonizing or
imperialist power would allow its colonized others build national and modern substrata
and industries that would eventually and inevitably facilitate their breaking off the yoke
of subjugation and subordination. Self-determination is more of a rhetorical than a real
option. History and current events attest to that. (The way colonial powers installed client
regimes before they left their colonies; the way the World Bank loans corrupt
governments billions of dollars contributing to the victimization of the poor masses and imposing harmful industries on the debt-drowned nations; what happened in Algeria and what is happening in Iraq, Egypt and Palestine and so on.) Another factor that many spotlight is the fact that Western humanistic and liberal values have not been adhered to when it comes to the Islamic other. Rather, humanistic values and altruistic stances were used as discursive pretexts and remained broken promises. American Democratic neo-liberals, moderate Islamic and Arabic voices, and many voices from all over the world frequently point out that liberal democratic governments do not live up to their proclaimed ideals: they usually do not deal with the other according to their humane standards. It's usually political-economic factors that orchestrate such relations. Such discrepancies are so obvious: for example, Mark Twain a proclaimed anti-imperialist and humanist opposed American imperial thrust into Asia and Latin America on the basis that it contradicted the very liberal principles America is established on. Twain's and other activist's efforts gave birth to the Anti-Imperial League.

Notwithstanding, it is important also for Muslim and Arab respondents to charges of Islamic anti-Westernism or anti-modernism not to downplay some real differences between Islamic world view and Western capitalist secular ones. Islamic teachings emphasize the fact that Muslims need to follow the Noble Koran and the Prophet's way. Islam also cautions against loss of identity through indiscriminate imitation of non-Muslims. Accordingly, critics such as Vickramabahu Karunarathne—a non-Muslim leftist professor—explicate why Western global capitalism is wary of Islam. Karunarathne writes that:
There are two reasons for global capitalism to be against the influence of Islam. Firstly, Islam opposes usury and money lending for an interest. This is a challenge to the hub of the scheme of postmodernist capitalism. The general method of exploitation and plunder of global capitalism is through loans which are tied to strict socio-structural conditions. The IMF, World Bank and WTO—the managerial trinity of global capitalism—rule the world on that basis. They tend to control the world by pieces of paper that indicate the details of interest payments. This is the basis of a new kind of slavery.

However, my second observation is more important. Islam stands for a strong community. Every Friday, all males are expected to come together irrespective of their social status to kneel together in community and brotherhood. No doubt this is a conservative patriarchic brotherhood. But it is a challenge to the free, private individuality expected by the market economy. Community, even in its most conservative form is an obstacle to the postmodernist civil society. (“Postmodernism, Liberal”)

Karunarathne’s insights are important since they not only point to some positive elements in Islam but also direct attention to the real factors that have been fueling conflicts and reinstating new forms of national slavery—IMF, World Bank, and WTO. Thus, in a sense, focusing on Islam and Muslims constitutes a sideshow unless the destructive roles that capitalist giants play figure in such analyses. Parvez Manzoor agrees with the above views although he refers to global capitalism as “postmodern Utopia.” Specifically, he points out that Muslims “need be circumspect and censorious of the postmodernist claim
to relativistic tolerance, for it may conceal the nihilism and will-to-power of the civilization in command” (“Orientalism, Postmodernism”). Muslims cannot accept postmodern anti-foundational or nihilistic explanations of the world. For example, it is stated in more than one place in the noble Koran that Allah has created the universe and mankind for a purpose rather than in vain. In “Al-Mu’mûn” (The Believers) Sûrah 23 of the Koran verse 115, Allah says, “Did you then think that We had created you in play (without any purpose) and that you would not be brought back to Us?” A Muslim who practices Islam strives to balance matter and spirit, the here and the hereafter, and cannot easily enter unlawful entirely materialistic transactions. Furthermore, Islam insists on social justice reminding mankind of their shared origin. It states that color, race, gender, nationality, social status, lineage, and tribes are there to facilitate interactions and identifications rather than segregate humans and favor some over others. Also Islam does not accept essentialist evaluations of human beings in terms of race, gender, or any other variable. Consequently, Muslims shall not judge others based on these appearances, but rather, based on their deeds or established principles. Allah says,

Oh Mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allâh is that (believer) who has At-Taqwâ [i.e. he is one of the Muttaqûn] (the pious). Verily, Allâh is All-Knowing, All-Aware. (Al-Hujurât, verse 13)

In Al-Nitham Al-Siyasi fi Al-Islam (The Political System in Islam) Muhammad Abdul-Qader Abu Faris explains Islam’s “justice and equality” as the second pillar after tawhid: Islam looks at people in a uniform way since they belong to one origin (40). In his last
speech, known as Al-Wada’ Speech (Farewell Speech), the Prophet (peace is upon him) says,

Oh, people, your Lord is one. No Arab is better than a non-Arab or non-Arab better than an Arab. Nor is a black person better than a red person or a red person better than a black person other than in piety; the most dignified in Allah’s sight are the most pious among you. (qtd. in Abu Faris 40; my translation).

For Western audiences who know Islam through mainstream media the above explanations may not make much sense. But what I am trying to say is that Islam is a world view that provides Muslims with guidelines on how to deal with one another and how to manage their financial matters. There are teachings in Islam against wasting sources and overconsumption. Islam also emphasizes an ethics of thanking as integral to faith and life. I know that I am transgressing many conventions trying to explain controversial issues from an Islamic point of view. I know that very rarely such inputs make their way to non-Muslim mainstream or academic discourses. And I also know that such discussions may not register with non-Muslim audiences used to see Islam as closed medieval, oppressive, and violent religion. Still, I think that such inputs may be appreciated as they point to a solid ethical system based on social justice and equality. Thus, I do not think that Western populations would find Islamic commitment to social justice objectionable, nor does Islam oppose social security and welfare programs. Rather, it opposes Western hegemony and racial exploitive relations. In addition, Islam deals with non-Muslims based on principles. Basically, it recognizes religious freedom. In Sūrah 109 of the Koran, Allah instructs the Prophet to tell the non-believers that he
does not have to worship what they worship, nor do they have to worship what he worships ("Al-Kafirûn").

Anyhow, in Chapter Four, I have presented counter-discourses that give back to the mainstream other what it forgets, elides, or suppresses. For one thing, Islam is different from any other system although it shares with many cultures and systems of thought deep commitment to social justice based on principles and changing circumstances. Although Islam takes pragmatics into consideration, it does not reduce the ethical to the pragmatic. Anyway, Muslims are not perfect nor is their history or actions unblemished. Any system or religion can be abused, misunderstood, and manipulated. We need to focus on the voice that comes from the middle of Islamic and Western culture. Otherwise, we may slide into mutual demonization, misunderstanding, and thus make life difficult for one another. We also need to remain vigilant lest we fall into the trap of sideshows and simulacrums. For I think that some of the West-Islam differences may become hackneyed sideshows and media simulacrums.

**Sideshow and Diversions**

In *A Genealogy of Modern Arab Subjectivity*, Stephen Paul Sheehi comments on some consistent discursive practices that inevitably conceptualize and disseminate the image of the Arab as backward diverting attention away from the Arab’s victimization at the hand of colonial forces. The following passage is typical:

The Arab is backward; his part of the world is underdeveloped. These are cases of fact that no observant person can contest. . . . Following the
[1948] war that pushed 1,000,000 of his people into homeless squalor . . .

he has come to appreciate the liability illiterate farmers and their unproductive farms. This quote is taken from a United Nations’ development project pamphlet entitled Bootstrap. It associates the dispossession of the Palestinian people to their “illiteracy” and “ignorance” while simultaneously negating their historical and territorial identity as Palestinians. So the assumption then goes that they are (only) Arabs whose circumstances must be attributed to their own failure. Here is the double colonizing move of the epistemology that will be under examination in this dissertation: as Deleuze and Guattari would say, the deterritorialized Arab (quite literally in the case of the Palestinians) becomes educated so that s/he may recognize his/her own inferiority and, consequently, accept the culpability of his/her immanent subjective and cultural failure. (1-2)

Such characterizations of the Arab world capture some limited truth. But they serve other ulterior purposes as they establish Arabs as inferior, backward, and underdeveloped. Somehow these look like essential characteristics. Arabs only got themselves to blame. In such a discursive move, the self disowns its responsibility for victimizing the other. Rather, the victim is also the victimizer. Similarly, in a very sophisticated and well-documented study, Khalaf Muhammad Al-Jarad tackles three areas where context-bound realities of Arab-American relations are elided and unilaterally distortingly formed: “the spiritual-religious background of American position toward Arabs and Muslims,” “orientalism and hate industry,” and “strategic research and studies centers.” Al-Jarad
blames major TV news agencies, school curricula, publishing houses, strategic research centers and millennial academic politicians for stereotyping Arabs in a certain way and depicting Israeli occupation of Palestine as benevolent and beneficial to the Arabs. He also discusses Israeli lobbyists control over USA media and blames it for demonizing or silencing Arabic point of view. Even in a recent book such as Philosophy in a Time of Terror by Giovanna Borradori who interviews both Habermas and Derrida, one still finds Arab-American or Arab-Islamic polarizations that almost attempt to preclude any further explanations by defining the other once and for all. A self-proclaimed philosopher, Borradori seems to be pushing Habermas and Derrida to condemn a whole culture using 9/11 as a breaking point. However, Derrida and Habermas have resisted his strictures and opened what he wants to close. In the Preface, Borradori proclaims that,

The explicit ideology of the terrorists responsible for the attacks of 9/11 rejects modernity and secularization. Since these concepts were first articulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, philosophy is called to arms, for it is clear that it can offer a unique contribution at this delicate geopolitical junction. (xi)

The problem with his analysis is that it posits terrorisms in superstructural terms as a battle between ideas. Although there is some truth in what he says about terrorists’ refusing modernity, still this is not the whole story. In their turn, Derrida and Habermas gently insert their own perspectives counteracting Borradori’s somehow eschatological millennial tone. Derrida reminds him that although human life cannot be a matter of numbers and quantity, 9/11 is not the biggest event of civil victimization pointing to what happened in Bosnia, Hiroshima, and Palestine. Habermas and Derrida also point
out the destructive roles of American hegemonic thrust in territory of the weak (Philosophy).

Likewise, Abdul M. Rageh Dardery’s Cultural Alterity is a step in the right direction against generalizing Islam-Western opposition and thus keeping the status quo intact. He historicizes by presenting case studies of Egyptians stances toward British rule. Instead of Islam-West dualisms, he maps the Egyptian response to British rule into three categories: “Those who rejected it [West] fully, those who embraced it fully . . . and a selective position that Albanna preferred (208).” Hassan Albanna says that Europe “has reached through natural sciences, human sciences and utilization of natural powers and the elevation of human mind to a higher degree” a modern state (qtd. in Dardery 119). Thus, he urges the Egyptians to “benefit from” the European experience. One of the implicit conclusions in Dardery’s study is that in reality Muslims mainly opposed the aggressive and destructive side of Western involvement in their territory and life. According to Dardery, Albanna “presented a strategically essentialist position where different civilizations can learn to live with one another without being forced to yield any major political, intellectual or cultural advantages to each other” (194).

Likewise, Hussein N. Kadhim surveys nationalist response to British military occupation of Egypt. He focuses on Ahmad Shawqi’ poetry (1868-1932) as launching a counter-colonial or anti-colonial discourse. Once again, it is not the whole of the West that is singled out; rather, it is the West they have experienced that they oppose. In “A Farewell to Lord Cromer,” Shawqi writes,

It entered Egypt in accordance with precepts of friendship

But proved to be a consumptive disease.
It destroyed the country’s landmarks, undermined its props,
And thwarted its hoped-for independence.
They said, ‘You [Cromer] had brought us prosperity and
Opulence.’

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Is it due to your liberality that school in your reign?

Neglect sciences and teach football? (qtd. in Kadhim 15-20)

Shawqi challenges the colonizer’s declared intentions by pitting them against his (mis)deeds. In fact, he reiterates one of the common claims or realities that colonial powers prevented the Arab-Islamic world from modernizing or attaining technological capabilities. This is a big question that has been tackled by many Arab scholars; I cannot deal with this debatable issue fully in this study. Still, there seems to be some consensus that malice and egoistic interests have fueled the colonial project.

*Al’Arab w’ Al’Âlam*, (Arabs and the World), a study conducted by the Center for Arab Unity Studies in 1988, confirms that the colonial or imperial priorities do not match that of the colonized people’s. Colonial acts of partitioning and fragmenting the colonized people’s territories and beings persist because they are beneficial to the hegemonic powers. Hence, when it comes to the interests of the Arab World, the United States will typically ignore them. This study flatly states that the “neoconservative” Reaganite trend is going to shape American relations with the Arabs. This trend “bases its positions on strategic military organizations,” and “depends on military power as a unilateral factor in correcting most of the political and strategic balances” (264; my translation). Furthermore, this political current appeals to ideological concepts such as
“the free world,” “Western Civilizational heritage,” and “democratic values” (264; my translation). The study argues that even the liberal trend that recognizes the “need to fix world order on the bases of human rights and development” and “respect the particularities and pluralities of the developing world” ironically stands paralyzed “when it comes to Israeli-Arab conflicts” (264; my translation). Somehow, the liberal front “drops its criteria and contradicts its principles to the extent one can describe this trend as selectively liberal” (264; my translation).

Similarly, Akbar Ahmed emphasizes the need to historicize what modernism and postmodernism mean to Muslims contra what they mean to Western societies: “If postmodernism in the West was fostered by a milieu which encouraged the growing security and confidence after the Second World War, opposite forces were at work among Muslims” (Ahmed 32). Besides, Ziauddin Sardar points to the paradox of Rorty’s reducing “everything to contingency” and dismantling “metanarratives as meaningless” to erect “postmodern bourgeois liberalism” instead (195). He concludes that postmodernism “gives representation to Other voices but only, as in postmodern fiction, on its own terms” (212).

I am aware that categories such as Arabs, Muslims, Westerners, and Americans are reductive since every category has diverse currents and sub-currents within itself. For example, not all Muslims are Arabs, nor are all Arabs Muslims. Not all Muslims relate to the West in the same manner, nor do all Muslims relate to Islam in a uniform way. In fact, many Muslims do not practice Islamic teachings. Still, the categories Arab and Muslim make sense as they usually refer to people who would identify as such. Moreover, somehow we are stuck with such terms even after we problematize them.
Whenever I use such terms, I use them in a limited sense and attempt to exceed their limitations.

My point is that as long as Muslims’ causes and grievances are presented as rootless or irrational, Muslims remain solely responsible for their own victimization, at least in some mainstream analyses. However, what gets lost in such mediatized events is the reality and depth of Muslim masses’ fear, anger, and anxiety as they suffer and see their brothers suffer from foreign and local forms of oppressions and erasures. In other words, these sentiments, although sometimes misrepresented, have causes. Remove the causes, and almost all the furor and consternation will abate. Fortunately, there are some openings where scholars and critics understand and empathize with Islamic grievance and contextualized (reactionary) anti-imperialism. The problem is that the media usually selectively interview half-knowledgeable Islamic-Arabic individuals, or focus on fanatic angry spokespersons whose anger is de-contextualized. Such interviews do harm more than good in explaining or communicating. Even well-versed scholars unawares find themselves on the defensive and apologetic whenever interviewed. Very often, the breath and time of well-intentioned concerned scholars are unfortunately spent counteracting stereotypes, conceding some failures, or apologizing for being Muslims, instead of educating or communicating Islamic points of view or grievances.

Another problem is that even when such scholars attempt to contextualize, these very contexts have already been othered and distorted. In short, there is a différend forming here, a différend that does not result from incompatibility or incommensurability as much as from the imposition of a dominant point of view on the other party by locking the other in the self’s categories and episteme. Hardly do the view points of
articulate and bi-cultural scholars such as Richard Falk and Ahmet Davutoglu reach the public or air on mainstream media. For example, this is how Falk and Davutoglu succinctly voice Islamic grievances without being put on the defensive. Falk objects to what he calls “false universalism” that generalizes Western Europe’s “decontextualized reason” to other cultures (7). He argues that Muslims have the right to feel angry and insecure as their voice and suffering are under erasure. Falk falls back on Ahmet Davutoglu’s articulation of the Muslim grievance,

The Muslim masses are feeling insecure in relation to the functioning of the international system because of the double standards in international affairs. . . . Muslims, who make up about 25% of the world’s population, have no permanent member in the Security Council and all appeals from the Muslim World are being vetoed by one of the permanent members. The Muslim masses have lost their confidence in the international system as Neutral Problem-solver after the experiences of the last decade. (qtd. in Falk)

Implicitly, Muslims are asked to accept realpolitik systems that perpetrate their suffering through blockades, wars, displacements, demonizations, and undermine their identity and values under the umbrella of a selective International System or a World Order not of their creation. That is, they do not only have to suffer, but they also have to accept imposed descriptions and analyses of the legitimacy of a world order and the de-legitimacy of their order. They become part of the United Nations whenever a decision is made against them—and these are too many—and become outlaws if a decision happens to be in their favor.
Many Muslims have given up on the UN. In fact, I remember when I was in Junior High, our class had a reading comprehension lesson that was about the humanistic role of the Security Council. The passage enumerates the merits of the Security Council as an *umbrella* that protects its members from one another’s unjustified aggression. The description was so ironic that our teacher asked us to change every affirmative statement into a negative one and vice versa. The United Nation and the Security Council are refrigerators that cool down hot issues, numb people, and legitimate violence. After all, the UN has not succeeded in protecting any weak nation from bullying, let alone the role IMF and World Bank play in perpetrating cycles of financial dependency through drowning nations into debts usually loaned to incompetent or corrupt regimes.

Sometimes, the UN’s intervention is usually belated and symbolic. These are the real incompatibilities that need to be addressed and contextualized. Luckily, more and more voices are rising against such injustices despite intimidations, smears, and blacklisting. I briefly refocus attention on the real issues that all citizens of the globe should worry about in the following section.

**Associations, Convergences, and Common Concerns**

Ironically, mainstream anti-Islamic discourses post-9/11 somehow have been critical of intellectuals, liberals, leftists, Cultural Studies critics, and postmodernists. It seems that part of such a backlash is reactionary—after 9/11 it was hard not to talk about “us” and “them” in terms of good and evil, even though these discourses exceed being merely reactionary: critical postmodernism, Cultural Studies, and some Middle Eastern
Studies and other alterity-sensitive points of view historicize and provide alternative perspectives on current political conflicts and matters, consequently upsetting the boundaries set between good and evil, us and them. They, too, implicate hegemonic centers as part of the problem. Such stances resist packaged and state-friendly explanations of conflicts. Notwithstanding, the neoconservative media and the State attempt to foreclose these issues under the ruse of solidarity and firmness in the face of the enemy. Thus far, they have not completely closed all venues for critical thinking. Many critics and analysts know that there is more to these realities than irrational hatred or Islamic retreat in the face of marching democracy.

Another neoconservative trend strangely associates postmodern thought with anti-Western leftist and Islamist movements. For example, Campus Watch was launched to implicate Universities and professors who critique USA’s foreign policies or point out to American imperialistic involvement in the world as responsible for some of the rising conflicts. In “That Awful Mess on Morningside Heights,” Hugh Fitzgerald objects to a myriad of practices at Middle East Studies Departments. He singles out “Columbia's Middle East Studies” as an example of the deterioration of academic standards. This is what he says about Said:

Through his industry, fame, and timely anger, he also created a kind of Jobs Program, which had results: Muslims and Arabs were the victims of "Orientalism," and were exempt from its charges. So if one were to study the Middle East, the preferred teachers and scholars were always Muslims and Arabs themselves. The inability to realize that the ideal of objective scholarship has almost no place in the Arab and Muslim world, where as
Lewis says the primary mode is "defensiveness," that a kind of academic mafia has driven out of the profession many non-Muslims….

What is it about the Muslim countries that explains their hatred of all infidels . . . or what is it that explains the failure of Muslim countries to develop, despite the vast OPEC oil wealth, modern economies, or what is it in the ideology of Islam that encourages despotism in Muslim countries, or why did modern science develop in the West, and such development come to a shuddering halt in the Muslim East? ("That Awful")

The above allegations demonize critical thinking in the name of state-approved critical thinking and historicizing. How would a state that advocates educational excellence and critical thinking skills deal with these tools when they focus on its impasses and hypocrisies. It seems that one way is to brand these as uncritical, dogmatic, or nonacademic stances and to categorize such critiques as indoctrination. Another tactic is to intimidate academicians and liberal institutions by branding them as “unpatriotic,” reducing their funds, and installing surveillance through turning students into informants.

Moreover, Fitzgerald’s gesture puts down both Arab scholars and any critics who happen to sympathize or present objective explanations to world problems. He writes the whole Arabic Islamic culture out as he claims that objective criticism almost has no place in the Arab world. Arab’s writings are mainly defensive. Fitzgerald sums and revives old oriental and special interest views about Islam’s incompatibility or inability to modernize, thus, the naturalness or desirability of imperial orders. Those who question such edicts are in trouble. High on the Campus Watch’s list are “post-colonial,” post-modernist
parodists and naughty professors who corrupt the minds of graduate students at elite universities.

Waller R. Newell’s “Postmodern Jihad,” drives Fitzgerald’s points home. He very clearly lumps postmodernists, leftists, and Islamists into one undesirable site. He writes,

The relationship between postmodernist European leftism and Islamic radicalism is a two-way street: Not only have Islamists drawn on the legacy of the European Left, but European Marxists have taken heart from Islamic terrorists who seemed close to achieving the longed-for revolution against American hegemony. (“Postmodern Jihad”)

Newel singles Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida as examples of leftist-postmodernists-Islamists alliance due to Foucault’s welcoming the Iranian revolution as a “new form of political spirituality that could inspire Western radicals to combat capitalist hegemony” and Derrida’s call for a “new international” after the collapse of the Soviet Union.11

Robert Tracinski reiterates similar attacks against academics. He asks,

“Why do these people hate us?”

No, I am not referring to militant Islamic terrorists. The America-haters I am concerned about are professors on America's own university campuses. . . . The currently fashionable academic dogma — taking over from Marxism — is something called Postmodernism. In the specialized jargon of academic philosophers, postmodern translates to: anti-Enlightenment. (“Why Do They Hate Us”)
Despite the conservatives’ associating postmodernism, leftism, and other oppositional stances with Islamic causes or labeling critical scholars as Al-Qaeda apologetics, by way of distraction and smear, there is some convergence in objectives among these trends.

Understanding Muslims’ stances toward the West, particularly the USA as a form of resistance to unjust global market hegemony makes a big difference. Noticeably, more analyses from Leftist, liberal, and postcolonial critics smartly avoid the trap or exaggerated mine of East-West essential difference. Instead, they look at ideological differences as fueled by disparities in social justice, too. Reviewing Tariq Ali's *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, Sam Ashman sums Ali’s arguments into three directions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism are context-bound and historical religions; Islam must be understood from a “materialist perspective” in terms of “capitalism and imperialism”; Ali shows that US imperialism to be the most fundamentalist trend today. Although I agree that we need to study Islam from a “materialist perspective,” I would not reduce Islam or any religion to material relations. I also agree that American imperial rhetoric and action is fundamentalist as it imposes on others its own ideologies as if they were the only viable option or inevitable destiny.

The new voices converge in rejecting ready-made analyses in terms of encounters between freedom and darkness, truth and falsehood, or any dualistic millennial terms. Instead, they focus on global capitalism’s effect on the poor all around the world. They also alarm their audiences to the rise of the Surveillance State that alienates the masses. For instance, Chomsky refocuses the new challenges that face sensible citizens of the globe as between State control and the public. He deftly reminds us that:
Those who want to face their responsibilities with a genuine commitment to democracy and freedom—even to decent survival—should recognize the barriers that stand in the way. In violent states these are not concealed. In more democratic societies, the goals are in many ways similar: to ensure that the “great beast,” as Alexander Hamilton called the people does not stray from its proper confines. (5)

If current conflicts are investigated in Chomsky’s terms, disenfranchised Muslims will become part of the solution. Their angst will be connected to the suffering of the masses in Latin America, Africa, Asia and working-classes in the advanced world. Focusing on the fact that the World Bank, IMF, and WTO are the real challenge constitutes a step in the right direction. This is not a war between good and evil as culturally essentialized. Therefore, if we want to resist the colonial and the imperial, we need to resist its strictures and structures, too. It is ironic to keep singling Islam out as the sole enemy that threatens world stability or as oppressive and suppressive of women and minorities, when the World Bank’s terms and loans further and protect the interests of the wealthy at the expense of the poor. It is women, children, the family, and the ecosystem that mostly suffer under such financial exploitation and corruption: drowning developing countries in billions of loans and ever increasing and accumulating interests. The ironies are so glaring and interminable.
Recommendations and Reflections

Although I know my study is limited and provisional, I still like to advance some recommendations because I care. First, academicians and ordinary citizens of the world regardless of their color, nationality, or faith need to take back the public sphere. This is a very complex recommendation and not an easy one at that. We need to work through our limitations and positioned capacities to analyze and expose media elisions. I think that most of the significant battlefields would be fought over who controls the public mind. When capitalist and consumerist orders try to neutralize opposition and co-opt the human mind so as to make exploitative relations natural, teachers and concerned citizens should empower the human mind and heart through critical thinking skills and caring.

Second, social justice and political activism movements, organizations, and anti-globalization (anti-harmful exploitive) institutions, all need to coordinate and join together to constitute any political weight if they want to influence decision makers and obstruct unjust practices. As long as voices and efforts are divided, the status quo may not change. A concern and love for the self should translate into concern for the other not by way of charitable gesture. Rather, we need to realize that we are interconnected. Individualistic narcissist limiting modes of existence facilitate market hegemony and weaken the human front. One remarkable thing about moderate anti-hegemonic and anti-capitalist imperialism is its focus on dialogue and collective communal and even multiple identities beyond the strictures of the autonomous dialectically conceptualized individualist. Realizing connections and common causes obstructs colonial penchant for fragmenting and diffracting opposition. In this spirit, Walid Mushawih asks, “why don’t
we turn back to the heritage of those late Western ethicists to explain, analyze and add to it and then write it in their languages and redistribute it?! . . Why don’t we turn to those still alive and support them financially and spiritually. . .” (“East” 2).

Third, as teachers we need to historicize and contextualize and launch countermedia discourses. We need to teach such skills to those around us: relatives and students. It is very unproductive to fall prey to packaged descriptions or negative constitutions where our mental labor and feelings get wasted on sideshows and simulacrum. It is not in the East’s or West’s, Islam’s or America’s, self-interest to get locked up in crusades and conflicts on false premises provided to cover up real motives and hidden agendas. Many of the enthusiasts from both sides believe they are doing noble work, when in fact they may not need reach such stages in the first place. There is a big difference between waging a war in self-defense or to remove oppression and waging it for material gains. Therefore, we need to be wary of state and extremist rhetorical tools that would depict human relations in final oppositional terms. In “Demonization and Polemics,” Anthony J. Saldarini very cleverly warns against “savage polemics” and “demonization” explaining them as “lazy expedients that become hard habits to break when a group becomes powerful” (“Demonization”). Saldarini sites the “grim joke about the Northern Ireland conflict”:

As a man hurried home at dusk, a hooded gunman emerged from an alley to confront him. "Are you Catholic or Protestant?" he asked. "I'm an atheist," the man replied. Without pause, the gunman inquired, "Aye, but are you a Catholic atheist or a Protestant atheist?" Such rigorous dualistic categories kill. (“Demonization”)
Exactly, it is very imperative not to decline into demonizing mentalities. Once again, it seems that demonization is the antithesis of critical thinking and care.

Fourth, Muslims and Arabs need to take the initiative and stop hoping that the United Nations or the superpowers would give them the justice they deserve; they need to work seriously to change their social and political reality as both their local states and the fragile corrupt international orders have failed and will always fail them unless they do something about it. They need to take a collective stance to join history and become respectable participants, or resign to secondary roles and negative identities. Thus, Muslims need to understand their colonial problems as well homegrown stagnations. I agree with Sardar’s recommendations that Muslims need to form a “contemporary identity” that is not reactionary to Western epistemes or molds. Rather, Muslims are challenged to “rediscover a contemporary identity for themselves,” one that is authentic to “their own history, traditions and worldview.” That is, Muslims have to claim their identity and cast away imposed distortions. More important, Sardar is not advocating a nostalgic return to the past. Muslims have to solve their own problems. “Islam does not provide ready-made answers to all human problems; it provides a moral perspective within which Muslims must endeavour to find answers to all human problems” (171: emphasis in original). Fahmy Huwaydi echoes similar views; he warns against lapsing into “self-laceration” and “incrimination” and indiscriminate submission to Westernized propagandistic, orientalist or imperialistic insinuations that the Islamic Arab world was “sterile” and “un-revivable.” If so, Muslims would have produced and enacted distorted and historically unfounded “colonial” claims that “absolve” the West of its responsibility. In addition, Abdul-Ghani Bareh recommends that Muslims perform “dialogic criticism”
where the self resorts to “strategic essentialism” so that they can engage the other without losing their identity and investigate their traditions without antagonizing or abandoning them.  

Fifth, in pedagogical academic circles, we need to supplant abstract theory with contextual analyses so as to render classroom and the world coextensive, thus reconnecting the University with the public sphere. As teachers, we have to remain vigilant lest we fall prey to bureaucratic and intimidating influences, indulge in sideshows, or get co-opted. More over, contextualizing keeps one focused and prevents one from slipping into self-sufficient polemics and tokenism. It is in this spirit that Colin Wright’s “Campus Watch: Surveying a Non-apologetic Solidarity” undertakes to respond to intimidations and diversions launched by Campus Watch pundits who want to curtail the human mind. Wright as well as many university professors has refused neoconservative bashing rhetoric launching his own counter-discourse. The Campus Watch website considers universities and professors a “weak link” in the response to 9/11 and blacklists the names of such “professors.” Wright and others resist such descriptions and ironically ask to add their names on such lists. More interestingly, they show that Campus Watch, as undemocratic as it is, may be nothing more than another political sideshow or intimidation mechanism. In fact, the American liberal ideals are being eroded by the rise of a surveillance state and the unfortunate marriage between lobbyists, the media, and the capitalist enterprise. Thus, we need to put some controversies and diversions in perspective in order to see beyond them. For example, Roger Burbach and others expose the contradictions of a marriage of convenience between capitalism and the religious right. Burbach very convincingly proves that “capitalism” is “incompatible with
authentic democracy” (10). Thus, mainstream conservative rhetoric is anomalous as it espouses unrestrained capitalist hegemony.

The best way to make the case is through case studies. To claim that the World Bank is a neo-colonizer or a destructive tool in the hands of money lenders would sound futile unless proofs are provided and connections are made. The challenge is to make others care. It is not enough to un-conceal connections; rather, we have to make us care. We sometimes resist knowing, for to know is to act, or at least, to get implicated. Action and proactivism entail an element of risk-taking and sacrifice. This is a real challenge in a mediatized fragmented desire-based world. As Jim Merod and other academicians state, we teachers are faced with real challenges as we do not have direct access to the public sphere.

We also compete against many odds. There is so much hope, though. Many critics and cultural analysts are devoting their time and scholarship to expose power relations, warning against forsaking human agency to lower orders such as consumerism, simulacral democracy, or personal ratification (see Dennis; Usher; Patrick and Sean Phelan; Povinelli; Simmons, Deep Surfaces). Many are mobilizing and crossing the boundaries between aesthetics and politics and choosing ethically to stand for social justice, the environment and a more dignified life. Hopefully, we, the concerned, the oppressed, and the caring will start building coalitions to counteract anti-humanistic anti-ecosystems and anti-agency coalitions.
Notes

1 Many critics such as Norris, Eagleton, and Habermas were quick to point out the pitfalls and impoverished nature of deconstructive thought in the long run. They basically objected to it nihilism, relativism, and paradoxes. Some other critics have come to its defense. One such important contribution is Simon Critchley’s The Ethics of Deconstruction.

2 Something akin to racial profiling and black listing became necessary: FBI agents interviewed, screened, finger printed foreigners, particularly those of Middle Eastern descent. The way the terrorist acts were so quickly blamed on Arab-Muslims despite many loopholes just make one feel something uncanny about them. For more information read, David Duke’s “How Israeli Terrorism and American Treason Caused the September 11 Attacks.”

3 Sometimes these terms are overused and become entropic. One is also caught in the paradox of investigating postmodern thought—that aims at moving beyond modern dialectics and strictures—using modernist vocabulary and strictures. The question of postmodernism and Islam is no less tricky. One cannot fix one meaning and say this is what is meant by postmodernism or Islam. Muslim communities are diverse; their relationship to Islam is not uniform. But, I mainly mean mainstream moderate Islam from my point view as a Sunni Muslim. I do not use moderate, Sunni or Shia as divisive or restrictive terms. I think that Muslims as well as non-Muslims need to search for common grounds and work for a more just existence by optimizing rather than demonizing differences.
The book is written in Arabic. I paraphrased and summarized it in English. The author refutes many allegations against Islam’s oppression of women or opposition to progress and freedom. Ironically, the author also shows that these old-new attacks generate from foreign and domestic sources and result from malice or misunderstanding. Some anti-Islamic movements in the Arab world went as far as to accuse the rise of Islamic movements in the Arab world to supposedly their connections to foreign imperial powers. In short, the situation is very messy. I relied on my understanding of Islam based on proof and authentic Islamic sources. According to such sources, reason is under ethical edicts and divine guideposts; it is never an authority on its own as it has its limitations. In Islam, reason is basically benevolent even when some Islamic sources distinguish between harmful and useful knowledge, or between needed and unneeded knowledge. For example, sorcery and fraud involve knowledge that needs mental activity. But such knowledge is forbidden.

Modernity is not unconditionally available for the taking as modernization has always entitled power relations, privileges, and capabilities. Modernism is being commodified and privatized in terms of patents, monopolies, and divisions of the world into consumers and producers. In addition, studies show the variable, usually negative, roles colonial powers played in convincing natives that they could not industrialize, or that they were more fit for agricultural productions. Industrialism also was accompanied by capitalism, urbanization, and the disintegration of community and family. Besides, rarely do analyses touch on the role of corrupt, suppressive, and inefficient regimes that squander funds and import ready-made technologies.
Many scholars and critics have set out to explicate Islam to the West and even to fellow Muslims. Some of these scholars have been so eager to prove that Islam is compatible and comprehensive that they set out to prove that Islam is democratic, Marxists and even liberal. Actually, Islam is a distinct system of thought that has alternative solutions to social, political, and economic problems. Some of its values intersect with Western values but cannot be reduced to them.

Albanna, a well-known Islamic thinker who established Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, contests the very colonial terms: he “refuses to call the European occupation colonization. He calls it Istighrab (destruction) not Isti’mar (colonization, which is an act of civilization in Arabic)” (Dardery 213). He also is critical of European “Crusading mentality.” Muslims usually remember the “story that after the British forces entered Jerusalem, Allenby, the British officer in charge, declared, “Only now have the Crusades come to an end’” (Dardery 215).

In Colonization and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the European in All Their Colonies (London, 1838), William Howitt highlights the contradictions inherent in colonial discourses and actions. He writes,

The missionaries ‘civilizing mission’ was “to comfort them (the colonized) and enlighten them’ –they had already been comforted by the seizure of their lands, the violation of their ancient rights, the kidnapping of their persons; and they had been enlightened by the midnight flames of their own dwellings!” (qtd. in Dardery 216)

After 9/11, people needed solid ground and explanations. In such consternated situations, confusion, undecidability, subversion, and alterity-respect do not avail. If 9/11
was a postmodernist event or a confusing one, it certainly exposes that people prefer
certainties and clarities to complex points of view or sophisticated explanations. The
State, neoconservatives, and media pundits seized on the publics’ fears and concerns to
reclaim ground they may have lost to liberal and minority perspectives.

However, conservative and State reaction to postmodernism has antecedents. In
Redrawing the Boundaries, Deborah Esch surveys the myriad of negative reactions to
deconstruction as “French” or continental alien thought against American analytic
tradition. The debates between Derrida and Searle are typical of misunderstanding and
difference. According to Esch, deconstruction was likened to a beast, reduced to nihilism,
sheer relativism, anarchism, and defeatism.

Hugh Fitzgerald also claims,

Derrida, meanwhile, reacted to the collapse of the Soviet Union by
calling for a new international. Whereas the old international was made up
of the economically oppressed, the new one would be a grab bag of the
culturally alienated, the dispossessed and the marginalized: students,
feminists, environmentalists, gays, and aboriginals, all uniting to combat
American-led globalization. Islamic fundamentalists were obvious
candidates for inclusion. . . . Hardt and Negri identify Islamist terrorism
as a spearhead of the postmodern revolution against the new imperial
order. Why? Because of its refusal of modernity as a weapon of Euro-
American hegemony. . . .

In professorial hands, postmodernism is reduced to a parlor game in
which we deconstruct great works of the past and impose our own
meaning on them without regard for the authors' intentions or the truth or falsity of our interpretations. This has damaged liberal education in America. Still, it doesn't kill people--unlike the deadly postmodernism out there in the world. Heirs to Heidegger and his leftist devotees, the terrorists don't limit themselves to deconstructing texts. They want to deconstruct the West, through acts like those we witnessed on September 11.

Fahmy Huwaydi writes,

The umma’s degradation/‘inhitat’ and backwardness of umma then, but also to testify to the loss of hope in the possibility of its ever rising up in the future . . . the umma was bankrupt and sterile before colonization … accepting such claims betrays not only prejudice and resentment, but also an a lack of knowledge or an ignorance about history, a separation from serious studies that has dealt with such claims, and a stunning surrender to the unfair orientalists’ allegations …. Exceed those limited dialectical imposed categories that are usually disseminated through a slanted media for they are limited and limiting.

The issue is more complex that the self taking a position, either with or against, rather, at best the self only can follow what is called “culture of difference,” or “dialogic criticism”; that is, the self separates itself from the other/west strategically, till the principle of difference is established, and till the self becomes an independent entity with distinct particularity,
separate characteristics, saturated with its cultural heritage. As such, it avoids the trap of assimilation. ("Discourse of Difference")

In “Agonistic Islam” Mohammed Ben Jelloun also asks,

Should we postcolonials (with Muslim backgrounds) either join the "successful" master against the "jealous" slave or choose one among equally greedy and power-hungry "masters"? Should we, with Francis Fukuyama, join triumphant secularism and the "progressive" West against defeated religion and "reactionary" Islam ("We Remain")? Or should we, with Samuel Huntington, choose one among equally hegemony-seeking civilizations? Should we either secularize Islamic societies or essentialize Islamic civilization; either Christianize Muslim human individuals or Orientalize resistant Muslim culture; either convert the Same or enslave the Other? Fukuyama and Huntington don’t leave us many options: either the "no borders" moralism or the power politics of imposed borders; either the Eurocentric Idealism of monocultural modernization or the equally Eurocentric Realism of a hierarchy of civilizations. ("Agonistic")
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