

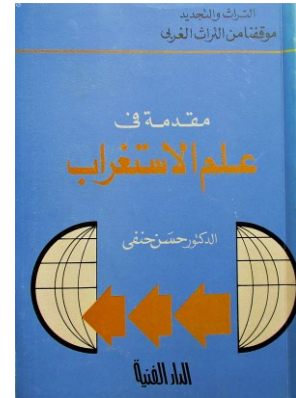
Hanafi

Occidentalistics or Occidentalism?

Founding Father?

Some scholars insist on a rigid separation between so-called serious research on the one hand and on investigations into more popular topics on the other. However, because of both fields vary and fluctuate under the influence of each other, fresh impetus to scholarship often results from popular publications and, more important, some traditional ways of thinking among esoteric circles easily vanish as scholastic filigree work is tested. Orthodox scholars are suspiciously watching creative ideas of the **lively pen** of Hasan Hanafi (حسن حنفي, 1935-2021). This former professor of philosophy at Cairo University has been editing volumes on tradition and modernism since 1980. They include five books on dogma and revolution 1988 and eight books on religion **and** revolution (this **about** Egypt).

Cairo 1991 مقدمة في علم الاستغراب



1996: اليمين واليسار في الفكر الديني: تأليف الدكتور حسن حنفي



Left, Right and Religion

At the beginning of the same decade he founded Al-Yasar Al-Islami, the Islamic Left. Although this journal of “The Islamic Left” appeared just once, it nevertheless anticipated tendencies thriving on the banks of the Nile at the end of the 1980s, when the Soviet Union as well as Eastern Europe disintegrated **and** a historic set of values died. Suddenly, some leftists found themselves grouped with those **they** used to call “enlightened believers.” This has swayed social sciences in the Mideast, which are beginning a philosophical reconnaissance (on the left book The Right and The Left In Religious Thinking, ed. by Hanafi in Cairo/Damascus 1996; see Jacob M. Landau, **Pan-Islam**).

The year 1960 entered history as the “African year” because more than a dozen African lands gained independence. Afterwards scholars of the continent **like** the Egyptian Anwar Abd al-Malik (1924-2012) or the Senegales Sheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986) in addition to Arabs living in the United States **as** Edward W. Said (1935-2003) **and** Hisham B. Sharabi (1927-2005), reproached European **scholars for** “orientalism:” Not only had the European populists paved the way for colonization; even now, despite the removal of the superstructure of colonialism and the recent independence of more than 100 countries, ending colonies in the Mideast until 1971, a Euro-American “supremacy” still dominates scholarship, glorifying a **past** (“orientalizing **the** Orient”) and “falsifying the present,” as two mottos go.

Then discussions started **about** “orientalists” **and** “orientalism” [and, according Sadiq Jalal al-Azm (1934-2016), “ontological orientalism in reverse,” الإستنشراق والإستنشراق معكوساً]. It was only a question of time before the tables were turned. Now under the heading “Inheritance and Renewal,” which refers to his own heritage, foreign heritage and the recent world, Hasan Hanafi introduces “occidentalistics.” Although the Egyptian who considers

himself a Muslim on the Left translated his basic **term** into English as “occidentalism” (22), the word “occidentalistics” more closely corresponds to his conception: research into Western civilization within the Mideast to enable the social scientists and others there to rise of being an object of orientalism to devising a subject of their very own – occidentalistics, the exploration of the civilizations of **the** West: just look at the book’s subtitle as “**our** position to **the** Western heritage” – موقوفنا من التراث الغربي – (I will deal **with** the echo in another article).

Hasan Hanafi, Cairo 1993, **Photo** W.G. Schwanitz



The first Occidentalizer?

It makes sense to promote a home-grown rereading of sciences in the Mideast, a self-confident philosophy of history and of a redefining of their own paths of development, which are too rarely explored. Secondly, the appearance of a multiplicity of philosophies in Europe may be expected. So, this resembles a first swallow circling western skies over Euro-American centered social science. Is Hanafi a **first** “Occidentalizer”? Philosophers (Marx to Weber) asked why “oriental move-

ments” had not led to “occidental rationalization,” but they were not able to find a “bottom” of that question. This will be possible only after the South makes its own researches **into** global history, first on its own and then with the North. Both must be reconsidered. Thus, Hanafi’s “Muqaddima” or “Introduction” (Into Occidentalism) as published in Cairo 1991, perhaps is more appropriate “Occidentalistics,” (some would **even** see a slight anti-western “occidentose” – “Occidentalism,” I don’t), though both are not fully established yet. Thus, Hanafi may have very well acted as a founding father of new academic research directions.

Summary

Hanafi’s first chapter deals with essentials of his proposed “occidentalistics” as an answer to Eurocentrism and other Western domination. The next three sections review European consciousness, its structure and great schools of thought from Kant via Hegel to Marx. Chapters five and six examine ideas from Europe and their limits in the 20th century. Final remarks illuminate this “we and the others” concept as well as European sway on the world of thinking in the Mideast (or the **more** ancient expression “Orient”). A rare self-criticism (778-791) concludes this seminal work of the author, who hopes his book will give impetus in certain directions (50-56). Here is my brief summary of his key thoughts in ten points:

- 1) Contents and structures of European consciousness should be relativized and in their influence reduced: one’s own should be emphasized. This puts European consciousness into its historical dimension and not outside history, which moves inevitably in one possible civilizing direction. European consciousness is neither seen an experience alone nor a single way of civilization but only one of parallel periods and ways in past, starting with Egypt and China up to other civilizations of the ancient Orient.
- 2) European civilization created a philosophy and methodology of history determining directions, covering also the so called nonhistorical discourse in other civilizations and giving birth to Marxism as historical materialism as well as sciences like sociology, cultural criticism and anthropology in their capacity as the **first** sciences focusing their creative forces **on** themselves.

- 3) But “occidentalistics” does now prove [that](#) consciousness outside Europe, although called non-historic, is really able to venture into European consciousness and turn to history again. Perhaps the ancient peoples of the Orient are more entitled to be aware of history than others, comparing their roots to those of the young peoples of the Occident. For what are five centuries of European consciousness since the age of Reformation and Enlightenment compared with more than 3,000 years of oriental consciousness in Egypt or China?
- 4) The West will be reduced to its natural boundaries, its cultural imperialism will be stopped, European philosophy will be returned to its local origin, thus ending an overflow due to colonialism and media dominance. Because yesterday, in the era of European leadership, something special and unique became something general and dominant, such relations should turn dialectical today.
- 5) The fairytale of one world culture vanishes as peoples recognize their authentic features, inasmuch as each population not only finds its genuine civilization and its specific consciousness but also perceives its own unique knowledge and peculiarities. Applying European sciences in their historical birthplace develops innate creative force elsewhere. Relations between center and periphery are no longer those of a recognized main civilization and a denied fringe civilization.
- 6) Many civilizations will prosper and global centers diversify. All will have similar standards. There will be exchange and interaction without one large bloc forcing the other small one to abide by its rules of culture and thinking. Ways are opening up for the creative forces of non-European nations to throw off mental servitude. Thus the intellectual abilities of the peoples grow as well as their means [and](#) methods (see at the end; also Abd al-Aziz Jawish in [1917](#) on “Islamic Colonization”).
- 7) There is no one single way for all nations nor a creative force without liberation from guardian ship nor indigenous productivity without the search [for](#) identity as well as the search for its picture in the other’s mind. Originality is more than folklore and outward features; it determines levels of mental paradigms and modes of communication (this is not that distant of some of the ten insights I have concluded on Bernard Lewis possible advice on research, see [here](#) also at the end of this text).
- 8) History is discovered anew and the highest level must be reached in equality with other civilizations in the framework of the Occident too. The West should not be “the navel of the world” anymore because each civilization leads in certain eras. Yet, European civilizations make such claims while consigning other civilizations to oblivion ([2001/2010](#) he asked again “What is the Globalization?” – ما العولمة؟).
- 9) Authors usually dedicate $\frac{1}{4}$ of their books to 7,000 years of history and $\frac{3}{4}$ to no more than 500 years ([not](#) so 1889 August Bebel). Oriental winds of change and “occidentalistics” lead to a new philosophy of history, and perhaps to a new era. Geographical discoveries marked its beginning about 500 years ago [and](#) the restriction of Europe to its natural boundaries will be the end. A reborn civilization takes the stage.

10) If you look behind the geographic and other more schematic terms **for** underlying patterns and problems, you will discover some really profound ideas in Hasan Hanafi's magnum opus. An idea lingers on: will Hasan Hanafi not only be the founding father **of** "occidentalistics" but of "occidentalism" too as some "Euro-Americans" foresee? In **2000** he again specifically clarified this "What means Occidentalistics?" "ماذا يعني علم الاستغراب؟"

Questions

Yet, here is an observation that I found in Hisham B. Sharabi's **text** of his **1993** book "Neopatriarchy" – النظام الأبوي واشكالية تخلف المجتمع العربي – as a challenging **thought** dealing with Hasan Hanafi's topic as well:

In all attempts in the Arab world, similar to creating an Occidentalism **as** in Orientalism, Hisham B. Sharabi pointed out some limitations: No path bypasses the northwest of the world, the antagonistic Other that is to be overcome, yet always remains the reference culture.

Thus, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx, David Émile Durkheim and Maximilian Carl Emil Weber, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault designed paradigms that not only govern European thought but also absorb that of the farthest corner of the earth:

- Thinking is thinking in Western forms.
- What criticism could possibly replace such self-universalizing thinking?
- What methodology can historically contextualize and delimit it?
- What should an approach look like that allows interaction and exchange without antagonism and subordination?
- How can Karl Marx and Jacques Derrida be properly understood in Arabic?

Hypothesis

"Ten Lewis-Principles," **my** hypothesis if one were to ask Bernard Lewis for **his** advice on researching Mideastern **history**, he could list these ten guiding principles: **1** Explore other cultures primarily in **their** languages; without these systems of communication, there is no true increase in knowledge. **2** **Use archives** [also online], discover, remember, and imagine that past. **3** Do not sit on a high horse, especially since all civilizations have given so **much** to the West. **4** Understand religions **also** as conveyors of knowledge and cultures. **5** Defend principles once recognized as correct in a rapidly (de-/) globalizing world. **6** Stand loyal to liberalism and to democracy—help others in their search for their paths there. **7** Confront **any** slander, such **as** antisemitism, as humanist **with** better arguments. **8** Shake your own prejudices and strive for a high degree of objectivity. **9** Always remain curious, critical **and** fair. **10** Put yourself in the other's shoes and offer your insights widely as inquiring citizens.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz

This review first appeared as Wolfgang G. Schwanitz on Hasan Hanafi: Muqaddima fi 'ilm al-isti-ghrâb (An Introduction to "Occidentalism"). Cairo: 1991, دار الفنية للنشر والتوزيع, 882 pp. ISBN 7531422977, in **Middle East Policy**, Washington DC, III (1994) 1, 173-175, ISSN-10611924. Dr. W.G. Schwanitz, Research Center Modern Orient, Berlin, Germany (1990-95). Updated, expanded, pics, links inserted (300124). More on W.G. Schwanitz see his **books and articles**. Look also into Hasan Hanafi's Cairo memoirs of **2018**: 2018-1935، ذكريات، الجمعية الفلسفية المصرية.