

CONCLUSION

WESTERN self-scrutiny discourse, as introduced by Zygmunt Bauman, had a great impact on Abdelwahab Elmessiri's deconstruction of the Enlightenment and modernity at large. Though belonging to different religions, ideologies and cultures, Elmessiri and Bauman mitigated the conceit of natural sciences, the deification of man and the perception of the world as a machine or as a self-sufficient organism. Both of them uncovered the other face of modernity, its tendencies and consequences. Modernity is represented as a Gnostic narrative, revolving around the human obsession with notions of perfection, salvation, purity and full clarity in the here-now rather than the Hereafter. This narrative of an Earthly Paradise has had grave consequences in the different phases of modernity.

The cognitive mapping of the secular modern as understood by Bauman and Elmessiri is based on the assumption that metaphors in modern western thought can never be treated as merely decorative or rhetorical figures of speech. Rather, they are indispensable hermeneutical tools of cognitive mapping, and they can provide us with a hermeneutical ontology or ontological hermeneutics that treats the text not of its own sense, but of some comprehensive theory of human existence. In cognitive mapping, metaphoricality stresses ontology, and thus it mitigates not only the previous structures of language but also the previous structures of the so-called reality. The major metaphors Bauman has used to map the ambitions and the consequences of modernity are 'solid modernity' and 'liquid modernity.' Elmessiri's mapping of western modernity is based on almost the same tropes: solid rational materialism and liquid non-rational materialism.

Aware of their existential experience and cultural bias, Elmessiri and Bauman have stressed the role of subjectivity and ideology, thus

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stressing the consequences of the secular modernity in relation to their existential experience and identity. However, they have transcended their ideological space and distanced themselves from it so as to represent a more humanistic critique that goes beyond ideology, ethnicity and existential experience.

Though belonging to a never-forsaken European identity, Bauman as a European Polish-born British Jew never hesitates to point out that the Enlightenment project was not a noble dream of bringing light to the ignorant and freedom to the oppressed. *Les philosophes* or the intellectuals of the Enlightenment, on the contrary, created a worldview that served the interests of the nation-state and its universalistic ambitions. Modern rulers and *les philosophes* were literally and metaphorically gardeners and legislators aspiring for the creation of a utopian and perfect world even if at the expense of demonizing, excluding or even exterminating other human beings. The discovery of the laws of Nature did not lead to man's mastery over and the spread of light, freedom and knowledge but to coercion, exclusion and even the advocacy of endarkenment. With the advent of modernity, the entire world was perceived as no man's land and as a vacuum to be designed and perfected regardless of the human consequences.

In mapping modernity, Bauman takes the Holocaust as a possibility or a test of modernity, focussing on European Jews and their representation as strangers, weeds and parasites that threaten the garden of modernity. Bauman's focus on the conditions of Jewish communities, however, cannot be attributed only to his ideology or Jewishness. On the contrary, he goes beyond his ethnicity and introduces a humanistic mapping that defends all human beings or, to be more precise, all the victims of modernity who are socially excluded, unfairly colonized and ruthlessly driven out, not only from their lands but also from the universe of moral obligation itself.

Unlike Bauman, Elmessiri has not invented new sub-metaphors to map the solid phase of modernity or 'solid rational materialism,' but he has managed to trace and weave the major metaphors in modern western thought into a cohesive whole. The major metaphors that Elmessiri focused on to map western modernity are the organismic

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metaphor and the mechanistic metaphor. Both metaphors celebrate self-contained and closed systems that deny transcendence and pluralism and thus reduce human beings and human existence into the dynamics of 'nature' and 'matter.' Solid rational materialism, in Elmessiri's view, started with the deification of man and nature but ended tragically with man's alienation and ontological loss. Like Bauman, Elmessiri has always maintained that science and philosophy were used to legitimize immanent secular ideologies that promise the possibility of worldly transcendence, the establishment of an Earthly Paradise and the realization of the end of History.

While Bauman does not offer any alternative and sees the role of critical theory as a modest comment on the present and human experience, Elmessiri uncovers the dominance of immanence so as to contrast it with Islamic monotheism and transcendence. Elmessiri's mapping of the modern can be seen as a defence of man against materialism, monistic interpretation and all forms of totalitarianism. Elmessiri is aware of his cultural background as an Arab Egyptian Muslim living in a region dominated by a western imperial legacy and Israeli aggression against the neighbouring Arab countries. It is precisely for this reason that he has used his critical skills to highlight the consequences of Nazim and Zionism within the framework of western modernity, putting them in one and the same category of western gnostic modernity that celebrates the deification of man and conceives of him as the master of nature and the maker of history, though it leads ironically and in the final analysis to his alienation, exclusion and even extermination.

Western modernity as mapped by both Bauman and Elmessiri has given rise to a universal situation of strangers, vagabonds, *Mumlüks*, functional groups, *unwertes Leben*, *homo sacer*, *untermenschen* and *Muselmänner*.

Cognitive mapping is not a static process but an intellectual effort confronting a world dominated by a state of confusion, fluidity and ambivalence. This state of confusion does not exclude the cartographers themselves. However, this state is more obvious in Bauman's mapping of postmodernity. Bauman finds himself in a perplexing situation in which he hesitates to declare an explicit break with the

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foundations of modernity. However, he has lost hope in postmodernity as a promised paradise of transcendence, pluralism and tolerance. This moment of illumination is accompanied with the abandonment of the term postmodernity, celebrating instead the metaphor of liquid modernity. The state of liquefaction covers art, culture and human relations, giving rise to two major metaphors in mapping the contemporary human condition: sex and the body.

The use of these new metaphors in mapping the emergent human reality has signalled the liquefaction of all solids and the shift in emphasis from grand narratives to small stories and individualistic pleasures. The gardener and the legislator metaphors are no longer operative because the position of the intellectuals has been reduced to the modest role of interpreters and semiotic brokers. Though the intellectuals may remain loyal to their universal, elevated and lofty ideals of perfection, purity, full clarity, freedom and justice, they are confronted with the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of claiming the role of the legislators who defend the universalistic ambitions of modernity.

Unlike Bauman, Elmessiri has not taken this long detour to map the contemporary human condition as a process of liquefaction. From the outset, Elmessiri has equated postmodernity with “liquid non-rational materialism,” arguing that it is not only an anti-metaphysical revolution but also a revolution against metaphysical materialism itself and its faith in humanism, worldly transcendence and the power of Reason to understand the world.

Elmessiri’s existential experience and ideology, particularly his awareness of the decline of leftist movements and the rise of political Islam, have enabled him to envisage the possibility of a break with modernity and postmodernity. Islam represents a worldview that repudiates the materialist outlook and calls for a balance between man and the universe rather than the creation of paradise on Earth. Elmessiri has never seen postmodernity as a possibility of transcending the closed, mechanistic and organismic paradigm of modernity but as a worldview that denies history and does away with referentiality. The project of modernity has ended with the declaration of the death of man in favour of such non-human categories as the market and power

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or in favour of such one-dimensional categories as the body, sex and pleasure.

Due to Elmessiri's awareness of the other face of modernity in its both solid and liquid phases, he has been keen on establishing an intimate relationship between modernity and postmodernity on the one hand and Zionism on the other. *Auschwitz* is represented as an allegory of the tragic decline of the West and the absurdity of the political process of assimilation, and the Jew as the victim and witness to this tragedy. The aggressive nationalistic drive of modernity, its scientific racism and mechanistic rationalization led to the aggravation of the Jewish problem in Europe. As a non-national nation, European Jewish communities had only two solutions: socialism and Zionism. The latter was consistent with Nazism, since both aimed at ridding Europe of the Jews and transferring them to another place.

According to Bauman and Elmessiri, the Jews are not the only victims of modernity, since the whole world was seen as an instrumental matter and a barbaric wasteland in need of the civilizing mission. From this perspective, Zionism can be seen as a legitimate offspring of the European imperial legacy. Like western imperial powers, Zionists, who attempted to liberate the Jews from the nationalistic extremism in Europe, could conceive of Palestine as a land without people and a geographical space without history. The solution of the Jewish problem was thus achieved at the expense of another nation. Postmodernity and Zionism are united by an attempt to dissolve human identities, thus both Jews and Arabs can be reduced to rootless objects that can be easily transferred to another place for the sake of imagined chosen people armed with the most sophisticated weapons of value-free science and the most advanced products of neutral technology. Zionism, like postmodernity, is the ideology of small narratives which repudiate the belief in a human meta-narrative; it is the narrative of the Jewish chosen people in their pure and perfect nation/state.

This mapping of modernity and postmodernity underlines the fact that the deep structures of all utopian ideologies, including Nazism and Zionism, can be traced in the paradigm of comprehensive secularism and its inherent worldview. It is a paradigm that annuls human and

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cultural specificities, leading to the deconstruction and perhaps the destruction of all that is human, unique and authentic, throwing man away from complex history and civilization into the simple and monistic world of instrumental matter for the interests of imagined chosen communities.