
Elmessiri and Postmodern Liquidity

THE solid phase of secular modernity, in Elmessiri's view, became impossible to hold by the end of the nineteenth century, and its inherent transformations reached their climax in the second half of the twentieth century. The major question of the period of solid modernity and the era of heroic materialism took the following formula: what was the centre of the universe, man or nature? More radical questions, however, emerged in the liquid era of modernity. Elmessiri formulates these questions in a way that is very close to Bauman's rhetorical questions in the opening pages of the previous chapter:

How to believe in the existence of a meaningful, transcendent and permanent totality within the framework of materialist philosophy? How can there be a state of permanence within a materialist framework while matter is discovered to be constantly mobile? How to achieve transcendence while matter does not know transcendence? How can we find a meaning in the universe while matter is a meaningless and aimless movement? How to maintain the duality of man/nature in a materialistic and monistic world while matter knows only one law? How to escape from the grip of perpetual becoming in the framework of a materialist philosophy?¹

Unlike Bauman who drew heavily on the philosophy of the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas to emphasize the potential of postmodernity for transcendence, Elmessiri devoted few pages in his

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Mausū'at to the analysis of Lévinas's philosophy as a way out from the crisis of modernity and its grave consequences. Elmessiri admits that Lévinas's philosophy is characterized by a feverish search for solid foundations that could resist the processes of liquefaction resulting from the modern and the postmodern worldview. However, Lévinas's philosophy, in Elmessiri's view, can be approached only within the framework of the death of God theology that attempts to establish relatively solid foundations.

Elmessiri repudiates Lévinas's idealistic philosophy though it attempts to replace the Hobbesian and Darwinian worldview with the metaphysical care for the Other. This repudiation can be attributed to two major reasons: (1) making the Other the eschatological hope and the infinite itself, and (2) stressing Judaism as the foundation of true humanity and the Jewish people as the best proponents of the care and responsibility for the Other. It is precisely for these reasons that Elmessiri conceives of Lévinas's attempt at transcendence as a form of immanentization. Judaism is represented as the ideal ideology that takes the form of a modern state and epitomizes the human ethical system. Above all, there exists, as Elmessiri suggests, not only one Other but two: acceptable Other and unacceptable Other. The very idea of the Care for the Other becomes problematic because the close Other (the Jewish Other) is preferred to the strange Other (the non-Jewish Other). The 'responsibility' for this perplexing Other can be promoted and protected by the State as the holy God and the Jews as the chosen people.² Elmessiri's critique of this philosophy is thus humanistic and convincing, since it repudiates the idea of the chosen community. This critique, however, does not include any reference citations that can prove the accusations levelled against Lévinas and his philosophy of the Other.

6.1 THE RHIZOME: ILLUSION OF TRANSCENDENCE

The early Bauman had great expectations of the postmodern turn, arguing that postmodernity is neither a mechanistic nor an organismic paradigm but an open system of pluralism and tolerance to difference.

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Unlike Bauman, Elmessiri kept underlining the failure of modernity and its false consciousness:

The humanist illusion of self-transcendence and of an ethics without metaphysics, or an ethics based on a metaphysics of immanence has been dealt an almost deadly blow by two world wars, environmental disasters, the increase of some negative social phenomena (crime, suicide, pornography, teenage pregnancy, etc.) and our increasing realization of the impossibility of ourselves or our environment.³

Elmessiri has never conceived of postmodernity as an open system, arguing instead that it is a completely closed system as it excludes all external manifestations of transcendence. The loss of all centres in the postmodern world does not necessarily entail that postmodernity is an open system, especially when the ideas of transcendence, identity, and permanence become outdated and old-fashioned. In other words, the destruction of reference cannot be equated with the liberation of man as it signals the reign of comprehensive liquidity and fragmentation. This perception of postmodernity helped Elmessiri develop his mapping of postmodernity without any sense of confusion and without a need for the long detour that Bauman took to introduce the metaphor of liquidity. Bauman, as a European Jew cannot easily abandon the civilizational adventure of Europe, but Elmessiri, who belongs to a completely different ideological background, can conceive of such a possibility.

Unlike Bauman, whose critique of modernity anticipated his early celebration of postmodernity, Elmessiri never saw postmodernity as a new horizon of emancipation, pluralism or tolerance of difference. On the contrary, he regarded it as a nihilistic and relativistic kind of philosophy with a highly sophisticated sense of pragmatism. It is precisely for this reason that Elmessiri's interpretation of postmodernity can be seen as a continuation of his critique of modernity in its new orientation, if there is any. In other words, the transition to a postmodern world of pluralism, multi-culturalism and alternative modernities is virtually absent, and it is merely a new phase that witnesses a radicalization or even a universalization of the consequences of modernity, one that

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has reached its climax, as Fredric Jameson suggests, in the “colonization and commercialization of the Unconscious” in the form of mass culture and the culture industry.⁴

One of the most outstanding features of Elmessiri’s critique is a constant insistence that postmodernity and postmodernism are synonymous and negative terms usually associated with deconstruction, post-structuralism and the attempt to put an end to metaphysics and humanism. Unlike Bauman, who had great and lofty expectations from the postmodern turn, Elmessiri insists from the outset that postmodernity celebrates the world as nothing but a purely materialistic matter in perpetual flux without any origin or purpose. Unlike Bauman, who has remained faithful to the project of modernity and had great expectations to be realized through postmodernity, Elmessiri has never abandoned his basic assumption that postmodernity is almost synonymous with the failure of modernity and its bankruptcy.⁵

In his attempt to describe the new version of modernity, the early Bauman argued that postmodernity is best seen through the metaphor of the rhizome because it is constructed as an open map rather than a closed book or any other kind of rooted or structuring way of life.⁶ Like Bauman, Elmessiri holds that the rhizome becomes the most dominant metaphor that effectively reflects the state of contemporary human condition. However, Elmessiri, unlike Bauman, never conceives of the rhizome as a possibility for openness and transcendence as it signals the absence of all notions of origins, centres and solid causality. Unlike Bauman, Elmessiri has elaborated on the significance of this metaphor, showing how it is intimately tied to the organismic paradigm and emphasizing that it provides us with a new interpretation that goes beyond the traditional and dominant nineteenth century organismic metaphors. The rhizome does not stand for the idea of an organic coherent and predictable whole based on solid causality. On the contrary, there is no distance between the root and the stem or the visible and invisible parts that grow endlessly in all directions. The rhizome signals the transformation from the predictable or monotonous organismic and mechanistic movement to the aimless and unpredictable movement of the postmodern world.⁷

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6.2 NATURE AND THE BODY: NEW FUNCTIONAL GROUPS

Elmessiri defines postmodernity as the “epistemological framework underlying the new world order. It is an outlook that denies the centre and does away with referentiality. It refuses to give history or humanity any meaning or centrality. It discards ideology, history and humanity. The world is in a state of perpetual flux.”⁸ Postmodernity is seen as the transformation from solid modernity to liquid modernity because the project of modernity pronounced the “centrality of man and his ability to control Nature,” but it has culminated with the declaration of the death of man in favour of such non-human categories as the machine, the state, the market and power, or in favour of such one-dimensional categories as the body, sex and pleasure.⁹

Elmessiri takes the beginning of the celebration of the body as the starting point of his critique of postmodernity. The celebration of the body, however, can be traced back, according to Jonathan Israel, to the radical Enlightenment erotic discourse or materialist *moralisme* that defended the erotic emancipation of men and women, repudiating the entire system of social pressures and promoting an erotic revolution or a whole new culture of desire and pleasure. What is at stake here is that this vision of nature as guaranteeing sexual utopia or paradise on earth is an entirely anti-Hobbesian “state of nature.”¹⁰

Here it is important to relate Elmessiri’s critique of the celebration of the body to Marquis de Sade’s (1740–1814) *La Philosophie Dans le Boudoir* [The Philosophy of the Bedroom] written in 1795. As William Connolly suggests, the Enlightenment viewed nature, particularly the Hobbesian and Rousseauian theories of nature as a state of war and a state of bliss, respectively, as the place where God’s light is reflected. However, this transcendental view of nature was despised by Marquis de Sade in his notorious book *La Philosophie Dans le Boudoir* which attacked the very idea of nature as the ground of truth. Marquis de Sade attempted to convey the message that morality, compassion and modesty are all absurd notions that stand between man and pleasure as the sole aim of human existence. Thus nature is no longer conceived as a cohesive system of laws that can help man aspire for such

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lofty ideals as sacrifice and modesty; it is represented, on the contrary, as a mode of existence that allows everything and anything and thus blurs such established dualities of enlightened discourse as virtue and vice, reason and unreason, natural and unnatural, modesty and indecency. Unlike Hobbes and Rousseau who attempted to reincarnate God or reason in nature, Sade repudiated such attempts and emphasized that nature can no longer be associated with the revelation of God's light or truth but with the pursuit of seduction and the immediate satisfaction of desire.¹¹ In other words, following the "voice of Nature" cannot be seen as the pursuit of Enlightenment reason, the Rousseauian general will, the social contract, the Kantian transcendental subject or the Hegelian Spirit. Rather, it stands for the immediate gratification of desire and the spontaneous response to the human body and sexual desire, both of which have become the major metaphors in Bauman's and Elmessiri's critique of the epistemological and ontological foundations of postmodernity.

In the phase of liquid non-rational materialism, almost all human beings have been turned into functional groups or *Mamlūks*. We can say that the postmodern condition is the condition of, to borrow Ernest Gellner's phrase, *the universal Mamlūk*, or to borrow Elmessiri, *the functional group*. The latter is the code of the age of comprehensive secularism, and it includes, in Elmessiri's view, immigrants in both the West and the Gulf countries, workers in the pleasure industry (prostitutes, hostesses, movie stars, sports men and women, models and sex queens), tourists, military elites, cultural and political elites and even functional or client states.¹² Against the metaphor of the functional groups is set the metaphor of the tourist, who is ironically perceived as a functional being in the eyes of the hosting society. Tourists, according to Elmessiri, can be described metaphorically as "foreign and temporary contractual persons" who move to the "earthly paradise" for a few days or weeks and whose contractual relationships with the hosting society do not differ much from those of the "functional groups."¹³ Elmessiri states:

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It can be argued that the tourist is the paradigmatic secular figure. He/she is a mobile being separated from the world of fundamental and absolute values, combining the traits of both the *homo economicus* (who accumulates money) and the body-centred man/woman (who rushes to spend his/her money to gratify his/her desires). When moving to a country (transfer), the tourist becomes totally obsessed with consumption and fun (pleasure) without any human considerations. In the eyes of the hosting society, the tourist is a source of money (interest and utility); thus both the tourist and the hosting society desanctify each other.¹⁴

Elmessiri, like Bauman, holds that the tourist has become the major metaphor and the paradigmatic secular figure of postmodernity *par excellence*. The emergence of the tourist as the major metaphor of liquid non-rational materialism, in Elmessiri's view, necessarily entails a revision of the Weberian thesis of the "dis-enchantment of the world" because we are confronted again with "re-enchantment of the world" in its postmodern form. Here Elmessiri modifies Weber's image of rationalized society as a workshop, stressing that liquid non-rational materialism is a call for a one-dimensional earthly paradise based on the triangle: production, consumption and pleasure. Elmessiri concludes:

Natural men and women are bombarded with images that seduce them into the belief that life is made up of this highly reductive rhythm and that society is populated with one-dimensional men and women who move voluntarily and happily from a one-dimensional workshop to a one-dimensional supermarket to a one-dimensional tourist agency that promises them a one-dimensional earthly paradise.¹⁵

History, memory and the dream of full control disappear, and metaphors that affirm fluidity and extreme plurality come to the fore: the state as neither a god nor a dragon; the world as a machine (the video and the computer); the world as a plant (the rhizome) and human beings as celebrities. Human beings are forced to participate in a competitive system of "signs, indicators, symbols and signifiers" that reflect their status in society.¹⁶ Elmessiri argues that postmodernity in

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its emphasis on liquidity is consistent with the so-called “culture of the disposable,” which is nothing but an “imperialistic utilitarian culture that consumes, utilizes, and wastes everything: energy, raw materials, songs, the female body, and the ozone.”¹⁷ On the political level, the nation-state is marginalized, and faith in the notions of common good and just society is lost. This liquid phase, as Elmessiri suggests, celebrates the emergence of the “one-dimensional man.”¹⁸ Elmessiri sees this worldview as inconsistent with Islam as a value system and a universal humanistic ideology:

From an Islamic perspective, we did not come to this world to buy or sell but to enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency. Honesty and dignity have their weight in the mind of Muslims and the Islamic worldview cannot reduce a Muslim to the two major realms of economy and sexuality, thus rejecting the reduction of these realms to nature/matter. A Muslim is not the natural man (the one-dimensional man) but a complex human being whom God made a viceroy in nature [the earth] so as to tend it for himself and the coming generations.¹⁹

6.3 SEX AND SIGNIFICATION

Like Bauman, Elmessiri draws on the heritage of the Frankfurt School to support his critique of modernity. This shows clearly in his admiration of Herbert Marcuse’s notion of the “one-dimensional man”; one who is seduced by entertainment industries and manipulated by the media. As Elmessiri suggests, by the 1960s, in addition to the crucial contribution of the movement of the Neo-Left, western critical discourse had been crystallized and the works of the Frankfurt school were abundant, criticizing the ambitions of the Enlightenment, colonial exploitation and western crimes against the Asian and African peoples.²⁰ The mid-1960s and the 1970s, however, witnessed the eclipse of the very problems of modernity, self and history, celebrating instead the world of structuralism, a world that simply repudiates the notions of time and selfhood, or embracing a mystique of post-modernism, which emphasizes expressiveness, play, sexuality.²¹

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With these facts in mind, Elmessiri argues that there is a transformation from partial secularism or “solid materialist immanentism” to comprehensive secularism or “postmodern liquid materialist immanentism.” “Partial secularism” or “the solid phase” of modernity started form the mid-nineteenth century till 1965; it was not centred on the natural law alone, and it allowed a space for human (and moral and religious) law. The post-1965 phase, on the other hand, is the starting point of “comprehensive secularism” or the “liquid period of modernity.”²²

Elmessiri conceives of the celebration of sexuality as a radical turning point i.e. the point of the transformation of modernity from solidity to liquidity. Sensual pleasure was no longer the monopoly of a particular group or class and it became available to all in the name of the “democratization of hedonism.”²³ This orientation is described by Hannah Arendt in the late 1950s as the avoidance of pain and celebration of reality only in the form of bodily sensations.²⁴ Though more dominant in western societies, the obsession with pleasure, according to Elmessiri, has become a universal condition in the era of comprehensive secularism; pleasure industries “have infiltrated our dreams, have shaped our images of ourselves, and have controlled the very direction of our libidos.”²⁵ This point is also underlined by John Esposito when he stresses that it is true that Christianity persisted in the consciousness of western man and provided him with ethics necessary to manage his personal and social life, but the culture industry and state security have controlled man’s dreams and even the “direction of his libido.”²⁶

Unlike Elmessiri, who does not refer to any western sources when he approaches the significance of this historical moment, Heba Raouf Ezzat, an Egyptian scholar of political sciences at Cairo University, has attempted to show the significance of the 1960s by referring to three major books published in 1993: David T. Evans’ *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (1993), Zygmunt Bauman’s *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1993) and Pat Caplan’s *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* (1993). She refuses to approach this historical moment as a single radical turning point and argues that it is, nevertheless, a key moment in the secularization/sexualization process because

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the human body comes to be seen as the “sole tangible container, carrier and executor of all past, present and future identities.”²⁷

Like Bauman, who has traced the prominence of sex as one of the prime metaphors of postmodernity, Elmessiri holds that the increasing levels of rationalization, secularization and immanentization have led to the emergence and the development of new organismic metaphors: “the human body has been the fundamental metaphor in the era of modernization. Now sex becomes the major metaphor of the post-modern era *par excellence*.”²⁸ Elmessiri even argues that modern western philosophy gives sex “epistemological primacy over all things.”²⁹ This primacy can be attributed to the endeavour to withdraw from the complex world of values, duties, obligations and responsibilities.³⁰ “Body and sex,” according to Elmessiri, “have been given a moral and epistemological priority over everything. They have become the ultimate point of referentiality, and they, in the modern materialist system, play the role of God in the spiritual monotheistic worldviews.”³¹

Though difficult to draw a clear cut distinction between the body metaphor and the sex metaphor, the former is said to be the major metaphor of the age of modernization whereas sex is argued to be the major metaphor of postmodern times. The emphasis on the centrality of the body, in Elmessiri’s view, can be traced in the emphasis laid on “*élan vital* or vital impetus” (Bergson), “*l’instinct* or the instinct” (Rousseau), “the will to power” (Nietzsche), “survival” (Spinoza, Darwin and Nietzsche), “the creation of the human self in the process of creating economic life” (Marxism), “the unconscious realm and dreams in their relation to sex and the body” (Freud), the “ontology of the flesh” (Merleau-Ponty) and “the writing of the body” (Helene Cixous).³²

The celebration of sex is also accompanied with the liquefaction of the family and the emergence of new liquid signifiers. With the celebration of casual sex, or what Elmessiri usually refer to as “instant sex,” sex and value have been conspicuously separated and reduced to a temporary physical relationship that aims at immediate gratification. Not surprisingly, prostitution, for example, becomes a merely “economic activity” and the linguistic sign “prostitute” is transformed into

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“sex worker,” a new sign with new signifier and signified, representing the prostitute as a labourer and an economic force in society.³³

The same process of liquefaction, according to Elmessiri, can be seen in the change of other signifiers such as “illegitimate children” who have become “children of unwed mothers,” “children of a single parent family,” “children out of wedlock,” “natural babies” and “love babies.” In short, they are the children of nature. Elmessiri argues that liquid postmodern sex or, to be more precise, the secularization as well as the de-sanctification of sex, deconstructs man as a “complex human being” (father/mother, husband/wife, male/female). In an ironic, yet serious, tone, Elmessiri argues that the “natural evolution” of the liquefaction of sex shows in the indifference to incest taboo, homosexuality and celebration of zoophilia.³⁴

The interest in ‘philosophia’ (the love of wisdom) is now replaced with an interest in pedophilia and zoophilia.³⁵ The saddest irony is that sexual abnormality, which is an assault on human nature, is defended in the name of human rights. Human beings are reduced into mere flesh to be utilized and exploited as a source of sensual enjoyment.³⁶

Postmodernists, according to Elmessiri, aspire to establish a world devoid of any reference to the notions of identity, memory, history, time, logos, origins, truth and sanctity, transcendence i.e. a world that celebrates the will to power, free play and desire. In his analysis of the postmodern celebration of the body, Elmessiri refers to Bauman’s belief that the absence of a transcendental subject, divine or human, means the reign of absurdity and that the absence of religious absolutes have led, in Bauman’s view, to the celebration of the body. When the body becomes the only, the ultimate point of reference, “the ideas of community, society and collective identity, all of which presuppose the transcendence of self/body, no longer exist.”³⁷

Elmessiri enumerates the examples that uncover the centrality of sex in the postmodern worldview: Derrida’s description of deconstruction as “continuous orgasm,” Barthes’s “pleasure of the text” as an act of sexual gratification, the call for the celebration of invagination (a symbol of immanence) instead of imagination (as a symbol of transcendence) and the assimilation of logocentrism into phallogocentrism,

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aesthetics and hermeneutics into erotics, textuality into sexuality, discourse into intercourse, eschatology into scatology.³⁸

Sex becomes the 'substitute of language' that defies interpretation as it becomes the actual, implicit, material point of reference that ridicules transcendence. As Elmessiri suggests, the postmodern era now relates aesthetics to erotics and intertextuality to sexuality. It is tempting to quote at length:

A closed text, according to postmodernists, is a form of suppressing sexual desire or elevating or going beyond it through an independent form that has its boundaries and identity. Intertextuality, on the other hand, a galaxy of open texts.... There exist no limits to a text because texts are always dancing. Consequently, the idea of the text as a unified artistic work, as the fruit of complex human consciousness, disintegrates and aesthetics is thus equated with the denial of transcendence and total surrender to the seduction of the fleeting (feminine) structure that has no ultimate fullstop.... It is (exactly like the moment of the orgasm) a return to the womb and the loss of any sense of being or of history.³⁹

In the post-modern phase, each text opens into further texts *ad infinitum*. There is always a surplus in meaning; one which is believed to be beyond man's control. As Andreas Huyssen suggests, both artists and critics share a sense of a fundamentally new situation because the claims of art and literature to truth and human value seem exhausted, and the belief in the constitutive power of the modern imagination seems to be nothing but an illusion. This strain freed art and literature from that "overload of responsibilities" to change life, society and the world. The focus is no longer on the "lofty horizons of high culture" or the "sensual experience of cultural artifacts" as defended by Susan Sontag.⁴⁰

In this context Elmessiri refers to Susan Sontag's 1964 essay "Against Interpretation" as a foreshadowing of the liquefaction of all solids and the celebration of sensuality as the centre of interpretation.⁴¹ Rejecting the role played by the "legislators" and the 'interpreters," to borrow Bauman's major metaphors, Sontag opted for a modest role or even no role for interpretation in the reception of art. Here Sontag

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refers to the role of modern cinema in eliminating the need for interpretation of art, since the cinematic sensory experience is based on a sophisticated level of transparency that helps us *see* more, *feel* more and *hear* more. She puts it bluntly when she concludes her essay saying: “In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.”⁴²

6.4 THE POSTMODERN, THE JEW AND ZIONISM

Elmessiri is very conscious of his subjectivity and ideology, and therefore, he never confuses Judaism, Jewishness and Zionism. Over and above, he repudiates the conspiracy theory that suggests that postmodernity or deconstruction is a Jewish trend aimed at the liquefaction of all solids. Elmessiri attributes this common, yet mistaken, belief among western scholars to the Jewish historical experience of the Jewish Diaspora (the pariah *Volk*) and the cognitive mapping of the Jew as the resident/eternal wanderer who dreams of the land of promise. The Jew is thus represented as a signifier separated from the signified or a signifier with overloaded and infinite meanings. Elmessiri’s interest in the significance of the Jews in the interpretation of postmodernity cannot be attributed only to his cultural bias but also to a dominant paradigm that embraces the existential situation of the Jews before and after the Second World War as an expression of the consequences of both modernity and postmodernity. As Max Silverman suggests, post-Holocaust allegories of the Jew are very crucial to approach much wider questions of modernity and postmodernity.⁴³

Elmessiri, however, repudiates the assumption that the Jews can be seen as promoters of the tenets of postmodernity (nihilism, deconstruction, fragmentation etc) in an attempt to take revenge from the civilization that persecuted them since early Christianity. This common belief according to Elmessiri expresses a racist ideology as it transforms the Jews into one of the terrifying and evil forces of darkness.⁴⁴

Elmessiri is not surprised at such demonization of the Jews, and he affirms that it is consistent with the western arsenal of racist discourse. Instead of viewing the Jew as an ordinary human being endowed with both good and evil, the West represents all the Jews as a symbol of

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either functionalism or nihilism. The writing of the history of Jewish communities is characterized, in Elmessiri's view, by an apparent dualism because it presents them as a totality i.e. as the "Jewry" or as the "Jewish chosen people," not as minorities belonging to different cultures and backgrounds. By and large, Jewish communities have been presented, paradoxically, as functional groups i.e. as traders, money lenders and human capital or, to borrow Elmessiri's term, as "human utilized matter" that can be transferred to serve the interests of others.⁴⁵

With the transformation from solid materialism to liquid materialism, the cognitive mapping of the conceptual Jew has slightly changed, especially when the Jews are sanctified in post-Holocaust literature. Both demonization and sanctification of the Jews, however, throws them outside the contours of time and space. Elmessiri remarks:

In its search for the sacred/satanic, the sacred of the era of liquid materialism, western civilization sanctified the Jew making him an icon of homelessness, absurdity, fragmentation and darkness [Bauman's images of the pariah and vagabond]. This sanctification provides the 'believers' [Bauman's image of the parvenu and the tourist] with a sense of bliss. Their 'faith,' however, does not necessarily entail an emphasis on morality and responsibility. On the contrary, it takes such theatrical forms as apologizing for the [crimes of the] Holocaust or the criminalization of those who [attempt to] violate its iconicity.⁴⁶

This view has much in common with Max Silverman's suggestion that the Jew is employed as a "trope for alterity," including all real outsiders, strangers, Blacks, Arabs and real Jews. Postmodern philosophy adopts *Auschwitz* 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."⁴⁷ Elmessiri, however, sees this interpretation as an incomplete picture lacking in both details and explanations. It is precisely for this reason that Elmessiri attempted to relate postmodernity to Zionism.

Like Bauman, Elmessiri argues that the West conceived of the world as a "vacuum," an "instrumental matter for its own interest," a

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barbaric wasteland, an empty space, waiting for the civilizing mission. Unlike Bauman, however, Elmessiri always argues that Zionism is the legitimate offspring of European imperial legacy. Ruling out Arab and Islamic history, Zionists conceive of Palestine as “a land without people,” a geographical space without history and an empty space inhabited by scattered and divided people. Elmessiri argues that what is common between postmodernity and Zionism is a feverish attempt to separate the signifier from the signified so that the identities of both Jews and Arabs can be easily deconstructed, reducing them to rootless objects that can be easily transferred to another place and endowed with a new identity. It comes as no surprise that the Jew becomes the Zionist settler; the Arab the Palestinian refugee; Palestine Israel; the West Bank (*al-Difa al-Gharbiyya*) Judea and Samaria and the Arab world the Middle East Market, consisting of “Turkish water,” “Arab Gulf capital,” “Egyptian labor” and “Israeli know-how.”⁴⁸

The concept of the region is very important as it is usually used to refer to the Middle East. It denotes a purely geographical reality without any reference to history, language and religion and thus pan-regionalism, as opposed to pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism, has been promoted by Europe and the United States. Within this vision, the whole Middle East, including Israel, could be integrated into the western globalized world. Like postmodernity, Zionism believes in absolute relativity and thus denies the notions of right and truth. It comes as no surprise then that violence becomes the ultimate pragmatic point of reference that decides the rules of the struggle game.⁴⁹

Like postmodernity, Zionism celebrates only small narratives rather than meta-narratives of human emancipation. Elmessiri comments:

Zionism is the ideology of small narratives which repudiate the belief in a human meta-narrative. A Zionist bases his vision of Jewish rights in Palestine on his eternal immemorable sense of Diaspora and longing for Zion; and therefore, he lives within the limits of his small narrative. And since the Palestinians' attachment and existence in Palestine lies outside this narrative, their narrative has no legitimacy or even existence.⁵⁰

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Like Bauman who approached the question of the end of history and geography as the major manifestation of solid modernity, Elmessiri conceives of both modernity and postmodernity as the celebration of the end of both history and geography. Postmodernity, in this sense, is a universalization or a radicalization of modernity. Elmessiri observes:

Postmodernity – I believe – is the ideology of the New World Order, one that is closely associated with the ideologies of the end of history. What gives rise to these ideologies is the dualistic position of the Enlightenment era on the nature of history. The first is a Hegelian orientation that glorifies history and stresses that it has an ultimate goal and once it is achieved, we reach its end. The second is the anti-Hegelian position that embraces the notion that history has neither goal nor end.⁵¹

Elmessiri holds that liquid modernity extends beyond the end of history to embrace the end of geography. Unlike Bauman who saw genocide as one of the possibilities of modernity or as a test to modernity, to Elmessiri genocide is the product and the direct expression of western modernity which conceives of genocide as the final solution for its aggravating problems; and therefore, it is a recurrent motif in western paradigms that deny the right of the Other to existence. This is why the cognitive map of the West emphasizes the end of History as well as the end of Geography.⁵²

Zionism is no exception from this imperial map because Zionist action is largely determined by the Zionist cognitive map which is based on power, myths, hopes, fears and divine promises rather than on a direct response to the complex reality and the contradictions surrounding it. Elmessiri always argues that Israel is not a Jewish state but a settler colonial depopulatory state that serves two major pragmatic and functional purposes: ridding Europe of its surplus Jews, and acting as a functional state to the interests of western imperialism.⁵³ Elmessiri uses the paradigm of “functional groups” to refer to Jewish communities and the term “functional state” to refer to Israel; the latter is nothing but a functional state serving the interests of the West in the Middle East. Bauman himself refers *en passant* to the role of the United

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States in guaranteeing the “survival of countries from Israel to South Korea.”⁵⁴

In this context, Elmessiri defines postmodernity as the ideology of the pragmatic acceptance, the surrender and the adaptation of the weak to the status quo; it is the free and unbounded play with reality instead of seriously dealing with its contradictions and changing it.⁵⁵ Unlike Bauman’s solid modernity or Elmessiri’s solid rational materialism, postmodernity is a non-rational materialism that recognizes neither heroism nor tragedy, neither farce nor absurdist rebellion.⁵⁶