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SPECIAL GUEST EDITED SECTION

Guest Editor: Khaldoun Samman

Question for Contributors: From your perspective, is there anything Islamist movements offer for a radical and positive reconstruction of a possible future world-system?

1. Val Moghadam

Illinois State University and UNESCO

“The old is dying and the new is not yet born.

In the interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”

The Islamic resurgence has been the subject of much scholarly and political discussion since at least the early 1980s. The effects of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran seemed to have a demonstration effect, and Islamist movements and parties emerged throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. At the same time, governments in those regions responded to the growing Islamist wave by accommodating their demands for the strengthening of Muslim family laws (also known as personal status codes).

Questions that emerged at the time, and which still are relevant, are the following. How was Islamism related to capitalism and imperialism, and what world-systemic developments or events had brought it into existence? Were Islamist movements reactionary, right-wing movements, or forms of resistance to imperialism and hegemonic modernity? Were they “the sigh of the oppressed in a heartless world”, or oppressive and patriarchal movements? What were the prospects of including them in any progressive coalition?

In the 1980s, the stakes were highest for Middle Eastern progressives, especially feminists and Marxists, whose approaches were very critical. Much of the literature denouncing “political Islam” was written by secular or left-wing scholars and activists from the Muslim world. They noted, for example, that the Islamic movements of the Middle East, North Africa, and Afghanistan were very different, in terms of their methods, their values, and their objectives, from the Christian liberation movements of Latin America.

Others took a largely sympathetic approach, emphasizing the “indigenous” or “grassroots” or “non-elite” origins of the movements, their appeal among the poor, and the social services they provided. This approach, which was shared by Western academics as well as some scholars from the Muslim world, obscured a number of details: the petty-bourgeois class location of Islamist leaders and many followers, and their comfort with various forms of capitalism; the funding they received from the United States (especially for the anti-communist “resistance” of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan), Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other states (including Israeli support for Palestinian Islamists as a way to undermine the legitimacy of the PLO); and values, norms, and behaviours that displayed misogyny, intolerance, and an obsession with public morality.

In the 1990s, the world’s attention was focused on the post-communist transitions, civil war in Yugoslavia, and the carnage in Rwanda. Meanwhile, veterans of the U.S.-supported jihad in Afghanistan were biding their time in the Middle East, Europe, and Southeast Asia, or beginning to engage in spectacular acts of terrorism in Algeria and Egypt. At the same time, those parts of Europe with sizable Muslim immigrant communities saw an Islamic resurgence – in large measure the result of misguided multicultural or refugee policies that allowed ultra-conservative Muslims to build and control mosques, schools, and centers, often with public funds that were denied the liberal or secular Muslim groupings. The tensions that exist today between Muslim immigrant communities and other populations in the United Kingdom, France, Holland, Austria, and Germany – revolving around free speech or the veil or the status of Muslim females in the family – are at least partly the legacy of those misguided

policies.

In Europe and the United States, some progressive organizations joined forces with Islamic groups in building an anti-war coalition before and after the US-UK invasion of Iraq. Some secularists have been wary of the cries of “Allah-o Akbar” during the UK anti-war rallies, while others wonder where the Muslim groups were during the peace and anti-nuclear demonstrations of the 1980s or the anti-WTO rallies of the turn of the century. While it is politically savvy to craft as large an anti-war coalition as possible, alliances probably should be avoided with those whose solidarity is limited to co-religionists.

In brief, a number of macro, meso, and micro-level factors may be identified in the expansion of Islamic resurgence since the early 1980s and continuing into the new century:

- [if !supportLists]• [endif]Global economic restructuring: the defeat of the project for a New International Economic Order and the shift to neoliberalism, leading to economic difficulties in national economies;
- [if !supportLists]• [endif]Authoritarianism and state failures in parts of the Muslim world;
- [if !supportLists]• [endif]The decline of communism – of its values, institutions, and controls;
- [if !supportLists]• [endif]U.S. imperialism, including its funding of the Afghan Islamist rebellion in the 1980s, and its war in Iraq today; continuing non-resolution of the Palestinian question and uncritical support for Israel;
- [if !supportLists]• [endif]Social exclusion and the failures of integration in Europe; the inability or unwillingness, especially on the part of less educated, lower socio-economic Muslim immigrants, to accept the values of the wider non-Islamic society.
- [if !supportLists]• [endif]Changes in family dynamics and gender relations, leading to renewed controls over daughters, sisters, and wives, along with an emphasis on, and the politicisation of, culture, difference, and identity;

It is important to note that there are many Muslim critics of the Islamic resurgence. This is based partly on political and ideological stances, and partly on socio-economic characteristics and cultural preferences. Secular, liberal, and cosmopolitan Muslims (e.g, most Iranian expatriates, former Afghan communists, highly educated and urbanized Arabs) tend to be far more critical of the Islamic wave than are those from traditional families or lower socio-economic backgrounds. There is also a reform Muslim tendency of believing persons, including “Islamic feminists”, who desire a peaceful path of integration or co-existence and are dismayed by the intolerance and violence of many of their co-religionists (Moghadam 2003).

Progressives should be mindful of Marx’s astute observation about religiosity as the sigh of the oppressed while also recalling Marxism’s Enlightenment roots. Important, too, is the recognition that contemporary religious movements signify power struggles – power over the state, gender relations, cultural institutions and values – at a time of global transition.

Reference:

Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, 2nd ed.)

2. Mohammed Bamyeh

Macalester College

Musa Sadr, the famous spiritual forefather of such movements as Amal and Hizbollah in Lebanon, is reported to have said that the only difference between him and the communists, who were organizing from his same constituency of Shi'a underclass, was the belief in God and the emphasis on moral character. Otherwise, a distinguished man of religion and the communists had the same objectives, and even used the same slogans: social justice, empowering the disinherited of the earth, and resisting imperialism.

Yet God and moral character, the “only” objects of difference, are no small issues. Old religious institutions provide their communities with a familiar basis of trust, trust which new social movements must acquire at great expense of time and effort, and which they are still liable to lose easily with a couple mistakes. In addition, old religious institutions, to the extent that they exist outside of state control, may provide a natural potential base of opposition especially in repressive environment where no other outlet is allowed. As the example of the Iranian Revolution illustrates, mosques become the natural venue for opposition because unlike civil society groups or political parties, mosques could not be as easily closed down by the government.

Those helpful factors, significant as they are, still do not fully explain the appeal of religion as a political force especially since the late 1970's. Most talk about the danger of politicized religion focuses on the Muslim World—where most governments are in fact still secular. In comparison, little is said about the *more* politically consequential religious revival in the US since Jimmy Carter, where the Christian right currently forms an important pillar of the governing coalition, or Israel, where religious parties have usually sat in governments and *succeeded* in actually pushing through significant parts of their agendas.

The Islamic revival seems in fact to be a recent reaction, thus far less politically successful than the Evangelical revival in the US or the religious revival in Israel. For several decades before the late 1970's, the public sphere in the Middle East had become so thoroughly secularized that it was hard to imagine, from the point of view of say

1976, any meaningful political role for religion at all. For by then all significant forces in the political spectrum spoke only the language of secular reason. There was no Hamas in Palestine, certainly no Islamic Jihad, no Hizbollah in Lebanon, only a rather weak Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The opposition to the Shah in Iran or to the Turkish governments of the period was expressed most loudly by radical left organizations. There were large and old communist parties in Iraq, Sudan, and Lebanon, and in the former two these parties came close to capturing state power on different occasions. A Marxist party was in charge in South Yemen, and its nemesis in the North was a secular national government. Nasser was still the most revered leader of recent Arab history. The Saudi theocratic state was a glaring exception, an exception that had been possible due to its marginality to the world and even to the Middle East when it was established, the unique conditions of its foundations, and the US guarantee of regime protection. Even in a place like Pakistan, a country founded explicitly as a sanctuary for the Muslims of India, the secular legacy of the country's founders was still the reigning supreme. Afghanistan had been enjoying such tranquility that it could scarcely be imagined as a potential source of trouble for anyone. Thus secular progressives were far from being alone in being so ill-prepared for this religious revival, even as it moved precisely into the political space that had been occupied by them. The main reason for this lack of preparedness was and still is, I think, ideological. Along with defenders of free market capitalism, secular progressives shared a vision of history that expressed faith in the increasing rationalization of society and its domination by technological and scientific paradigms. The postmodern reaction notwithstanding, there was no envisaged role for religion in that scheme, and the increasing irrelevance of religion worldwide until the 1970's, including in the Muslim World, seemed only to confirm this approach to history.

What is required now is not simply the usual recrimination one so often hears, namely that religious discourse is a cover for material grievances that other, more secular forces have failed to address. That is true and can be amply demonstrated. Rachid Ghannouchi, one of the main figures responsible for mobilizing religious sentiments into a genuine social movements in Tunisia, exemplifies this transformation in an autobiographical remark, where he mentions his early dissatisfaction with the fact that Islam had in his society become a "museum Islam." Like the advocates of liberation theology in Latin America, Ghannouchi wanted to replace "museum Islam" with a more "genuine," that is to say *social*, Islam defined by its attention to real needs and dislocations, especially of the urban poor.

However, simply observing that religious revival is related to a social reinterpretation of the faith does not take us very far. An observation of this kind does not prepare us to actually engage religion *on its own terms*. If religious revival now is religion coming closer to earth, it is a kind of closeness that is further assisted by what secular progressives gave little thought to, namely the empowering idea of God and the definition of moral character--i.e. what Musa Sadr already recognized as his main advantages.

It will be difficult therefore to continue to avoid engaging religion on its own terms. What this means is that the role of culture and even spiritual experience in human life must occupy a far more prominent place in progressive thought than has been allowed. This requires entertaining something beyond soulless, cold, "materialist" analysis of "hard reality," formalized *ad nauseum* to smaller and smaller audiences. Most academic progressives in particular have preferred the world of structures, determinations, predictions, and political economy, narrowly and stultifying defined.

The fact of the matter is that a social religion provides its members a richer repertoire of experiences, ideas, and possible traditions. By coupling social commitments with venues open to spiritual experience, an automatic sense of membership in an ancient global community, and an apparently solid ground for moral behavior, a social religion provides far more than what traditional left analysis has done. That these properties of social religion also lend themselves to fanatic appropriations does not mean that they must always or necessarily do so. If everything is dangerous, as Foucault once said, the danger inheres not in the idea but in us. The greatest slaughters of the 20th century, after all, had been committed precisely by secular political forces, and precisely with the aid of science, technology, and the rational organization of society. The record of the past century, even with September 11 factored in, still shows that there is no special reason to regard a socially active religion with more alarm than other forces.

The reason everything appears dangerous has to do with the fact that all our struggles, including those of the social religion, gravitate toward the state. That is, modern society being organized around a singular institution with great power and legitimate claim to stand for society as a whole. And a political theatre so conceived gives us an "all or nothing" specter (under which we currently languish in the US). It is this specter that creates in us (and them) such a sense of danger. Marx was already cognizant of the pitfalls of a statist approach to emancipation, and therefore posited "human emancipation" as possible only in a society beyond statism—an insight long forgotten amidst an ongoing fixation of Left analysis on the state as an appropriate and desirable vehicle of social engineering. But social religion will not be as dangerous, in the same way that nothing else would be as dangerous, if the only arena of politics available to us is that of civil society rather than the state. Because it is in civil society that all grand schemes come down to size, as they should.

3. Ali Mirsepassi
New York University

Social Contexts of Political Islam

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The vast body of popular literature and images, combined with the ever increasing growth of scholarly works on political Islam, have yet to provide us with the adequate conceptual clarity, contextual vision and grasp of the social settings necessary for a genuine critical understanding of these important social movements of our time. While the current literature does offer us a wealth of important historical and theological information about Islam as well as descriptions of specific religious sects and figures and their relevance, we are nevertheless merely at the start of our work in understanding Political Islam as a complex social and cultural configuration. This is so because of the great variety of social movements, arising within their equally important national and regional social contexts, which take the multiple form of Political Islams and each generate the intellectual visions which ultimately constitute both mass movements and small groups. It is for this reason singularly unhelpful to speak of Political Islam as a monolithic movement or ideology. It is rather a variety of different social and political circumstances which have led to the formation of unique social, political and intellectual movements within different Islamic societies as well as in western countries with significant Muslim minorities. We may stress, then, directly from the outset that in spite of the importance of knowing Islam as a religion, it is at least equally important to have a rigorous and specific understanding of contemporary Islamic societies and Muslim communities beyond the borders of these societies. For these reasons I propose, as an elementary point of departure, that we need scholars - in particular social scientists with area studies expertise in terms of specific regional histories and languages - to investigate historical and social contexts within particular regions or countries where unique forms of political Islam have evolved.

Ironically, by way of approaching such social and intellectual movements as historically or even geographically specific, we may learn that in at least some regions these movements can only be best understood in comparative analysis with other societies experiencing similar cultural and social crisis. My own work on Iran has testified to this, and Turkey may well also provide an example. Therefore, I suggest that in addition to the need for an understanding of the specific 'local' contexts of Islam as a social and intellectual force, a broader range of relevant global perspectives from elsewhere is also needed. A comparative study of Political Islams at the intellectual level in addition to studies of political movements can offer us a view of the broader background where Political Islam has evolved and continues to operate.

The current rise of political Islam is part of a long and difficult struggle in many Muslim societies, to reconcile with the modernity and its social and cultural requirements. The complexities, tensions, and even contradictory nature of political Islamic movements reflect the difficult experience of particular societies to craft "indigenous" cultural contexts for contemporary Muslim societies.

Therefore, Political Islam, contrary to popular belief, is a recent phenomenon, and to understand the nature of this global movement, one needs to explore the challenge of modernity to the Islamic world and the nature of different ideologies and political institutions which represent the forces of modernization in different Muslim societies. Politicization of Islam represents the latest attempt by the Middle Eastern and Muslim elites to respond to the challenges of Western modernity. In this context Political Islam is a challenge to variety of secular ideologies (Arab Persian and Turkish nationalisms in particular), as well as traditional Islamic establishment.

The politicization of Islam represents the latest attempt by Middle Eastern and Muslim elites to respond to the challenges of Western modernity. In this context political Islam presents itself as a challenge to a variety of secular ideologies (Arab, Persian and Turkish nationalisms in particular), as well as the traditional Islamic establishment.

The phenomena of social movements invoking 'indigenous' or 'authentic' cultural discourses to mobilize masses has a long history and is not necessarily unique to the Political Islam. Populist movements based on discourse of authenticity tend to stem from the same conditions as most twentieth-century revolutions: rapid modernization from above, urbanization and destruction of traditional modes of life, and domination by powerful foreign interests. "However, the narratives projected by these movements are often framed in the language of cultural identity. We must look at these 'cultural' movements as being among significant faces of modernity for our time.

SEQ CHAPTER \h \r 1At the same time, the development of the Political Islam also represents certain distinct historical and theological characteristics which in the historical development of the religion and those societies where Islam has become meaningful. Therefore, Political Islam, contrary to popular belief, is a recent phenomenon which, in order to be understood in its global dimensions, needs to be explored in terms of both the challenge of modernity to the Islamic world and the very nature of the different ideologies and political institutions which represent the forces of modernization in different Muslim societies.

1. The aim of ideologies based on discourses of authenticity is to bring about modernity, not to return to the past. It is simply that the nostalgic mode of politicization is extremely effective in the battles among competing modern ideologies, and this power has been recognized. The movements inspired by these ideologies aim for a specific form of modernity, one considered consistent with "national tradition." Since tradition has already been physically displaced and proven futile by modernity, then in order to spearhead any movement, tradition (real or imagined) must integrate itself with the objective foundations of modernity. There is a curious magic to this moment in that "tradition" picks up the objects of modernity as though they were never in any way alien, but completely consistent with an "ancient" and "indigenous" destiny. Of course, the point of rooting these 'objective' forms in the subjectivities of the mass is to turn them into a revolutionary weapon against the encroaching enemy.

It is important to note that "tradition" does not simply dissolve in the natural course of time, but is perceived as being conquered by a stronger, alien "tradition." The enemy is within and without, and society is called upon to purge itself collectively of all traces of enemy infestation. In the cases presented here, this universal culture of modernity is explicitly associated with a "soul-less" materialism that preys upon the "natural order" of things. The "natural order" is implicit in the "given" forms of pre-modern social organization: family, clan, tribe, ethnicity and religion. The shift from these horizontal forms of social organization to vertical forms such as class and occupation represent the uprooting of a self-evident identity, forcing people to seek a new one. The ideology of authenticity invites people to embrace these new forms while referring them to old principles, thereby creating a bridge of continuity where their once was a hole in the people's souls.

In the post-independence era the secular-modernizing elite monopolized state power structures in many Middle Eastern countries. Many initially enjoyed some level of popular support (Turkey, Egypt, and Iran). The crisis of secular and nationalist states, in the Middle East resulted from their failure to achieve basic socio-economic and human needs (political participation, human rights, etc.) and led to a decline in the legitimacy of universalist ideological foundations.

2. From the beginning of the Middle Eastern/Islamic encounter with modernity and the West, several different forms of accommodation have evolved. Throughout most of the twentieth century, Middle Eastern versions of modern ideology have generally dominated the social and political discourses of these societies: Kamalism, Nasserism, Pahlavism, Bathism, and, to a lesser extent, socialism became powerful ideologies in the Middle East. These ideologies, largely involved with the state structure and/or the colonial powers, adopted a national ideology that viewed Islam and Islamic culture as fundamentally opposed to modernity. A second group, of "traditional" intellectuals such as Jamal al-Din Al Afghani, inserted a discourse of accommodating modernity to Islamic culture. Al Afghani combined Islamic cultural precepts with Western science, technology and nationalist politics in an attempt to articulate an anti-colonial, pan-Islamic nationalism. The goal of such thinkers was to make an Islamic reform movement compatible with modern science and ideas, but retentive of the values and culture of Islamic society.

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4. Khaldoun Samman

Macalester College

Islam and the Future of Antisystemic Movements

It is simply not true that capitalism as a historical system has represented progress over the various previous historical systems that it destroyed or transformed. Even as I write this, I feel the tremour that accompanies the sense of blasphemy. I fear the wrath of the gods, for I have been moulded in the same ideological forge as all my compeers and have worshipped at the same shrines.

Immanuel Wallerstein, 1983

After an extremely exhausting yet spiritually rewarding day of completing a Hajj ritual in Mecca this last January, my mother and I went outside of the great mosque in search of our American group of Hajjis. Upon finding them, I took the first available seat to rest, with my mother finding an empty seat besides me. At that moment our senior American sheikh from NJ gets up and insists that my mother removes herself from the company of men to sit in the "women's area." After a number of days of experiencing similar scenarios, I no longer could keep silent, deciding to confront the sheikh head on in front of many other Hajjis. I insisted that my mother and I are exhausted and she will remain here with me, telling the sheikh that "I did not appreciate your policing of rigid gender segregation." He responded just as forcefully, claiming that "since we are in Mecca we have to practice our religion in its proper form, not what suits us at the time." After it was obvious to him that my mother was not about to move, he looked at me and became quite disturbed and added, "you are obviously Westernized. The problem with much of your young generation is that you have lost your true religion and have

imitated the culture of the West by losing sight of proper Islam.” Insulted by being branded “Western” and not wanting to be outdone, I returned fire: “It is you who has been Westernized, for the prophet Muhammad did not invent these gender divisions. It was only much later in history, indeed in our modern era, first originating in the West and then accepted by men like yourself that such rigid understandings of gender came into being.” We then continued this debate for some thirty minutes, with the sheikh trying to demonstrate to me and the other men around us the textual evidence for this gender division while I, likewise, attempted to provide a completely different interpretation of those very same texts.

But what became obvious to me was the creeping feeling that this debate was not simply about hermeneutics, or who had the most persuasive argument. Instead, what troubled the sheikh most was that he interpreted this challenge as between two men representing two radically antithetical civilizations. The fact is that he thought of himself as representing authentic Islam while I, on the other hand, was to him nothing more than a spokesperson for the West, regurgitating something exterior to the true religion, belonging to a secular culture somewhere “West” of Islam.

Giving the history of our modern world-system, including the activities of antisystemic movements, his view of me is not surprising, maybe even understandable. His understanding “Islam” as religious and the “West” as secular, after all, runs deep in the way the modern world is constructed, as the late Edward Said has shown so effectively in his writings. I saw this played out several weeks earlier in another major pilgrimage center in central Florida: Disney World. Here you can roam the four major theme parks, including Epcot Center. The latter is organized by two central themes, with science, technology, and progress on one side called Future World containing science exhibits and rides like *Earthship Space*, while on the other side of the park you’ll find the World’s Showcases where you can visit many “traditional civilizations,” like Morocco. The first thing you notice is that the latter is showcased in a Mosque, where you can shop and experience the Orient, meeting great figures like *Aladdin* while listening to Arabic music and observing the sensuous belly dancers. In Futureworld, on the other hand, you’ll find a “developed” civilization, where science and technology reign. On the “West side” of Epcot, you can take a ride on *Earthship Space* where you travel through time “from the dawn of man to the future.” Here Europe and the US represent the civilizational location where science, philosophy, and secularism were invented and now thrive. Only in the “Dark Ages” did Islamic or any other civilization lend a hand. But even then this civilization only held the torch of progress in a time of civilizational illness, just long enough until the West recuperated from its mid-life crisis, whereupon Islam simply gave back the torch, unchanged, to its rightful owner.

The sheikh’s criticism of me had to do with this humiliating context, a feeling of defeat at the hands of the West that many Muslims face. My connection to progressive politics was understood by the sheikh as coming from the West, fueling his anger against me. My remarks were interpreted as another judgemental intervention by the West, where the latter placed itself at the center of world history, demanding the rest of the world to bow before the shrine of progress that it thought it best represents. But to bow to this shrine is a painful insult to your own God, acting as “hidden injuries of civilizational discourse,” to use an analogy coined by Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb when discussing the humiliating impact of upper class discourses of meritocracy on the poor. Indeed, if you look at the discourses of class, race, gender and civilization from the point of view of those who hold power, you’ll find in all of them a similar pattern of forcing the subaltern to pay respect to a small sector of the world population in the most humiliating and disrespectful manner. But rather than simply being victims of modernity than creative users of it, religious folks invented new versions of modernity that challenged the norms of Western notions of progress. That is, Islamists had to create alternative symbols in which they dressed themselves with competing badges of dignity. Their alternative versions of modernity in the form of Islamic cultural performances were informed by their knowledge of a world-system hierarchy of civilizations. In other words, by being fed a version of modernity that was ultimately racist, Islamists were forced to reject Western-sanctioned notions of proper modernity for that of a perceived authentic religion.

I believe this is the paradox that progressives must deal with. The fact is that progressive discourses unfortunately have been – maybe incorrectly – constructed by many today as emanating from the West. Even though I hold the belief that our political identities are much more consequential than our locational grounding in our stratified world-system, we have to find ways to speak to injustice in a manner that allows us to negate the equation of our politics with that of “the West.” The fact that historically many on the left, including Marxists, used modernist discourses of progress in ways that were similar to liberal and conservative discourses is still haunting us today. Even after genuine effort by many in the New Left to remove this ugly past from our political projects, the aftershock of the old antisystemic movements remain, with their institutions still in the process of crumbling even as we begin to build new ones. But even though we are constructing new and improved political projects, we have a long ways to go before we can convince others that we have shed the skin of our ancestors. This will take serious work on our part, rethinking some of our ideological collusion with racist enlightenment thought. The past intellectual and political allegiances of antisystemic movements with the ethos of the enlightenment, even though we are beginning to bury such a past, weighs heavily on the living.

Sayyid Qutb, a leading figure in Islamist politics, is a reminder of this political reality we find ourselves in

today. He quickly sized up our weaknesses, capturing well the problems of the old antisystemic movements as early as 1964: "The communists failed. The nationalist leaders failed. The secularists totally failed. Now the field is empty of all ideologies – except Islam... Now at this most critical time when turmoil and confusion reign, it is the turn of Islam, of the *Umma* to play its role. Islam's time has come." As this quote demonstrates, Qutb was politically astute enough to understand the practical limits of these antisystemic movements, as Wallerstein effectively argued more generally in his essay "Islam and the West" (2003). But more significant from our point of view is that Qutb also recognized the ideological limits of these anti-systemic movements. Qutb effectively exposed the political/ideological collusion of these 3rd world movements with Western racialized discourses, leaving the left vulnerable to right wing architects to take advantage of the left's shortsightedness. Many others would follow him with the