صدى العلوم

متخصصة بالبحوث العلمية المحكمة

المحتويات

contemporary resistive practice) that it shares with any revolt anywhere, i.e. social and political factors. Such project would certainly have to critically inquire the Euro- and US-centrism of Social Movement Theory and ask for the plausibility and limits of its explanations when applied to the Shi'a. Yet a comparative study of Shi'i revolt based on both, sound insider-knowledge and international research, will also have to place its specific subject matter within the broader history of shared humanity.

In lieu of a conclusion, allow us this partial resumee: Any critical undertaking aiming at complementing, if not countering, the dominant representation of Shi'a Islam must be aware of the continuing effects of the Orientalist discourse, both within and without academia. In our view, turning the question of resistance into an object of investigation from a decisively Shi'i subject position necessitates the obviously: a critical scholarly stance that is aware of both, the stereotyping pattern of Orientalist misrepresentations and the risk of essentializing what is distinctive and maybe unique about the Shi'i notion and practice of revolt. A comparative study of collective resistance that places the example of Imam al-Husayn at its center faces the epistemological and theological challenge of exploring the particularism and uniqueness of Shi'i revolt without at the same time denying those aspects of Shi'i resistance (regarding its sacred history and its contemporary resistive practice) that it shares with any revolt anywhere, i.e. social and political factors. Such project would certainly have to critically inquire the Euro- and US-centrism of Social Movement Theory and ask for the plausibility and limits of its explanations when applied to the Shi'a. Yet, a comparative study of Shi'i revolt based on both, sound insider-knowledge and international research, will also have to place its specific subject matter within the broader history of shared humanity.

the British correspondent Ian Mather wrote in the first year of the revolution that Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom «[…] has an honored—some would say obsessive—place in the Shia Muslims collective psyche, and most Iranians spend Thursday and Friday contemplating it» («Iran's 36 million martyrs,» *The Observer*, 2/12/1979).

Western media representations of the Islamic revolution do not ask for the importance of Imam al-Husayn's example for the revolt against oppression in the course of the Islamic revolution. Not willing to accept the revolution as an expression of resistance, mainstream media explains the Iranians' struggle against local tyranny and imperial hegemony with the contradictory qualities of what is presented as a transhistorical Shi'i psychopathology—a collective psyche irrationally caught between unconditional obedience under religious authority, fanatic anti-modernism, fundamentalist hatred of the West, intrinsic patriarchism, and violent martyrdom.

Conclusion: The challenge of an antithetical representation of resistance in Shi'a Islam

We have tried to demonstrate that the Western discourse on Islamic notions of resistance or on Islamic despotism for that matter is not a passive recitation of facts and globally accepted views. Any critical undertaking aiming at complementing, if not countering, the dominant representation of Shi'a Islam must be aware of the continuing effects of the Orientalist discourse, both within and without academia. At the same time such project can hardly escape from a serious comparative opposition to the criticized Orientalist discourse. Turning the question of resistance into an object of investigation from a decisively Shi'i subject position necessitates the obviously: a critical scholarly stance that is aware of both, the stereotyping pattern of Orientalist misrepresentations and the risk of essentializing what is distinctive and maybe unique about the Shi'i notion and practice of revolt. A comparative study of collective resistance that places the example of Imam al-Husayn at its center faces the epistemological and theological challenge of exploring the particularism and uniqueness of Shi'i revolt without at the same time denying those aspects of Shi'i resistance (regarding its sacred history and its

media showed a decisive unwillingness to acknowledge any rational reason for the popular mass movement. Instead of portraying the many details underlying and triggering the revolution, Khomeini was accused of nothing less than calling for «a holy war on the world» (Ibid. 107). This coverage was rich of assumptions, suggestions, and long-established stereotypes strongly entrenched in the Orientalist archive (Said 1980; Webster, 1990). If Shi'ism has been directly addressed during the first decade of the Islamic revolution of Iran, it basically appeared as a religious sect of fundamentalist fanaticism, extremism terrorism, and patriarchal oppression. Overusing the visual trope of the veil, of the hijab or the «chador,» Islamic Shiism was notoriously related to male dominance without consideration or explanation of religious and pious perspectives. Evoking a backwardness that is incompatible with the Western notions of (gender) freedom, *The Daily Telegraph*—a daily newspaper considered among Britain's quality press—argued that since the implementation of Islamic Shia law «under the Ayatollah's rule, women's role has been relegated to a subsidiary one in that they have barred from many jobs. Their main contribution has been to provide children for the revolution» (*Daily Telegraph*, 31/11/1989, p.10).

Particularly at the early stages of the Iranian revolution, Western media focused on the ways religious Shia leaders took over political power («Mosques tighten its grip on Iran,» *The Guardian*, 14/8/1981) or the revolutionary legitimization and use of force against the opponents of the revolution within and without Iran («Khomeini defends the sword,« *Daily Telegraph*, 10/9/1981). Special attention was given to Islamic codes of punishments applied on individuals who had violated the Islamic rules («Revenge is swift on the rapists of Iran,» *Daily Telegraph*, 7/3/1979 and «Thief's hand cut off in Iran,» *Daily Telegraph*, 28/4/1981). While Shi'ism was regularly represented by practices like praying, the veiling, or the collective commemoration of Imam Husain's murder in the streets of Tehran, notions and religious rites of martyrdom received particular symbolic attention. They were seen as expressions of the deeply irrational collective psyche of Shi'ites. Exaggerating the ritual role of martyrdom in Shi'ites' spiritual identity and thereby implicitly negating the importance of Imam al-Husayn as a role model for worldly resistance,

dividing the world into pro- and anti-American (or pro- and anti-Communist), an unwillingness to report political processes, an imposition of patterns and values that are ethnocentric or irrelevant or both, pure misinformation, repetition, an avoidance of detail, an absence of genuine perspective … The result is that we have redivided the world into Orient and Occident — the old Orientalist thesis pretty much unchanged — the better to blind ourselves not only to the world but to ourselves and to what our relationship to the so-called Third World has really been.» (Said 1981: 40)

The Islamic revolution has gradually introduced a new political and cultural discourses regarding the national interests of Western nations within the Middle East, i.e., the safe supply of oil, the geostrategic stability of the region, and the conditions of unrestricted international trade, and the protection of Israel. Media representation resonated these themes by turning it into a conflict between «Us» (and our legitimate interests) and «Them» (and their «medieval», and «authoritarian» order). Such representation not only assumes a shared and coherent interests of Westerners but also takes for given a consensus on Islam and Muslims as a coherent entity that stands for everything the West does not like about the Middle East's new socio-political pattern (Said 1981: xv). Although the effects of the Islamic revolution were decisively contemporary, mainstream coverage of Iran during and after the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime basically cemented a malevolent, ahistorical image of Muslims and Islamic culture. Eliminating both history and the specific configurations which led to the Islamic revolution, Western media thus constructed an almost «'ageless Persia' underlying the 'Persian psyche'» (Ibid. xxvii). It was primarily on this basis and not in reference to the specific traditions of Shi'ism or particular Shi'i modes of resistance that the revolution was explained to the Western audience.

However, sometimes and in particular after the takeover of the US embassy in Tehran, news media complained about what was variously described as the Shi'i «Ideology of Martyrdom» (Ibid. 77) or «Iran's Martyr Complex» (Ibid. 78). Linking the Islamic revolution to an assumed psychic contradiction between Shi'ites' intrinsic approval of authority (ergo despotism) and repressed violent anger (ergo irrationality), Western mass

1988; Chomsky 1989). In addition, the process of mediazation is embedded in the transmission of symbolic forms which resonate the dominant cultural discourse of identity and alterity within Western societies (Thompson 1991). In the case of Islam and the Islamic revolution, this discourse is decisively characterized by two main references: the first is the religious identity of Christianity, which historically has shaped the values of the West as well as its attitudes towards non-believers and non-Christians. The second reference is secularism, which after the withdrawal of Christianity from the political life dominated the Western self-identity. As a consequence, secular concepts of democracy, liberalism, freedom of expression, or tolerance formed the basis of Western political and cultural identity. Concepts outside these frames of reference tend to be seen as ideologically opposed and get represented in terms of negative values as not acceptable.

The images of Islam at work in Western media explain cultural difference as a threat. In this Islamophobic media discourse, the notion Islamic fundamentalism functions as the key ideological construct. Muslims appear as decisively irrational extremists. Such anti-Islamic ideology was formed in historical and recent clashes with the Islamic world. It evokes a coherent Western identity against the image of a quasi-eternal enemy holding different values and living a different way of life. Thus, media news participates in the making an «in-group» and an «out-group,» as mutually complementing oppositions. The in-group can be a nation, a society, a political party, a government or a pressure group which strengthens its coherence by emotional attachment, trust, security and cooperation. It perceives the out-group as a group which believes in values opposite to its own values and often disapproves of it. Thereby members of the in-group have a vague and fragmentary vision of what is happening in the out-group and they poorly comprehend its conduct. They regularly expect the out-group to act against their interests and seek to do them harm (Bauman 1990:40-50). The very pattern was at work in the Western media coverage of the Islamic revolution in Iran, whereby the West and pro-Western actors represent the in-group and Iranian Muslims the out-group:

«Representations of Islam have regularly testified to a penchant for

the Western media representations of the Islamic revolution are prefigured by a complex relationship between media and society, on the one hand, and media and state, on the other. It is against this background that news gets selected and materials presented. It is on this basis that images and language are chosen to convey in what light the Islamic revolution is supposed to be seen. The factors determining the ways in which the Iranian revolution was constructed in the press are mainly confined to three important areas: the source-journalist interaction; dominant western cultural values; and the journalists' professional and personal ideologies. These factors regulate the equally subtle and complex relationship between press, state, and society. While the state is usually represented by official representatives propagating its interests, the relation between news media and society is characterized by much more complex cultural symbols. However, in media practice, the political and socio-cultural spheres constantly interweave.

On a technical level, the interaction between a journalist and a source contributes to the news construction. Formal and informal, these interaction with sources provide journalists with so-called facts or opinions and influence a particular agenda setting and, in the long term, public opinion. Hence, sources can directly inspire media topics, promote or restrain the content, and influence journalistic contextualization. The interactions and relationships between journalists and their sources are reflected in the roles sources get to play in the news-making process. In the coverage of the Islamic revolution, journalists have shown great inclination towards particular sources so that their interaction almost formed a relation of symbiotic dependence. Three major sources were most notable in the coverage of Iran during and after the revolution: Western official sources, Western and Iranian experts, and the Iranian opposition. These selected sources were the primary definers of the ways Iran was represented to the Western public. Those considered illegitimate sources (i.e. Iranian official sources) were regularly excluded. With a view to the complex connection of ideological and communicative power with economic, political and social power, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky have explained the political economy underlying the manufacturing consensual media output within a propaganda model (Herman and Chomsky

and Shi'ism for the militant purpose of reinterpreting Shi'ism into a «kind of Islamic liberation theology» (57).

Media coverage of (Shi'i) Islam and the Islamic revolution

If scholarly works on Islam and Islamic despotism rarely differentiate between Sunnites and Shi'ites, this is certainly the case for Western mass media representations. There seems to be a consensus at work in mainstream media coverage of Muslim societies which is not in need of such differentiation. This might be partly due to the simple fact that the average Western reader of newspapers or watcher of TV news doesn't know of this schism in Islam. However, the Orientalist pattern of a transhistorical Muslimness at work in media representation does neither allow for complicating the essentialist notion of the Islam as a monolithic entity, synonymous with terrorism and religious hysteria. In addition, it seems to be important to see mass media within the context of their dependence on specific sources of information, principally academic and government institutions, for the knowledge they disseminate. In fact, Western media opinions quite often derive from those academic and government 'experts' to whom the media provides a forum. Hence, one cannot be surprised that centuries-old images of Islam as «a murderous and tyrannical religion, the quintessence of all cruelty» (Webster 1990: 139) which have operated to foster Western colonialism, are repeated in contemporary Western media news to justify hegemonic foreign policies. While the dissemination of historically prefigured images of the Islamic world does not result from one monolithic concept, wholly determining views of Muslim cultures and societies, an ideological consensus is formed that «sets limits and maintains pressures» (Said 1981: 49) on the individuals and groups who produce and circulate 'knowledge' about that very part the world within in mainstream Western mass media. In other words: the media discourse on Islam is anything but ideological disinterested.

This became particularly obvious after the outcome of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the fall of the Persian Shah in 1979. Without underestimating the relative autonomy of journalists whose professional ethos would allow them to reject total submission to dominant cultural codes and ideologies,

To this day his revolt is discredited as an emotional upheaval that was lacking practical political consideration. In this view the very notion of Shi'i rebellion is interpreted a traditional call for revenge that appeared only after the murder of Imam al-Husayn when many called for rising to avenge him, than the rationally grounded civil expression of resistance against injustice and oppression.

A more elaborated discussion of Imam Husayn as a role model for Shi'i concepts of resistance and revolution against tyranny can be found in Henry Munson's *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (Munson 1988). The American anthropologist and scholar of Middle Eastern Studies is considered an expert in the study of so-called Islamic fundamentalism and militancy. His 1988 study openly admits to be a work of advisory with a view to American foreign policy. Although he comparatively considers various Middle Eastern Islamic movements of the 1970s and 1980s, Munson primary aim is to explain what are the lessons to be learned from the Islamic revolution (136-37). He wants to explain why an Islamic revolution did occur in Iran while Islamist revolutionary movements elsewhere failed (vii). To answer this very question, he spends significant space on tracing how the figure of Imam al-Husayn was reinterpreted by the «fundamentalist Islamic ideologists» of the revolution as a «righteous revolutionary» (23). According to his argument, the original meaning of Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom in Shi'i sacred history and popular Shi'ism as reenacted every year on Ashura was a mythic model of a powerful spiritual patron «capable of forgiving sins and granting admission to heaven by virtue of his role of intercessor before God» (24). Following Munson, it was only during the 1960s and 1970s that Ayatollah Khomeini and others turned the «Lord of the Martyrs» into «a revolutionary leading the oppressed against their oppressors» (Ibid.). Affirming the general Orientalist pattern of Islamic despotism and Muslims' passive obedience, he argues that before this strategic reinterpretation «the mere existence of the story of Husayn's martyrdom has never, in and of itself, induced Shi'is revolt against oppressive government» (25). Reading Iran's revolution as a fundamentalist movement, Munson devaluates the active emulation of Imam al-Husayn's revolt by Islamic leaders and activists as a deviation from the sacred history of Islam

religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam (Wellhausen 1901) and *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall* (Wellhausen 1929) are such works. Here, Imam al-Husayn's revolt is basically represented as the ill-prepared attempt to power by a naïve person who demanded more than he actually did (71). According to the German Orientalist «Husain let himself be lured out of his retreat in Mecca […] besieged by the Kufaites begging him to come to them and accept their homage» (146) and fell in the battle of Karbala in an «attempt at revolution flickered miserably out» (147).

The 1979 revolution in Iran has undoubtedly led to a resurgence of scholarly and popular interest in Shi'ia Islam. While Shi'i history has long received less than its fair share of attention and effort from Western scholars, the events of 1979 clearly triggered some more severe studies in this important field. These studies pay particular attention to the first inter-Muslim war whose outcome marked the lasting schism between Sunnites and Shi'ites. Rarely they explore in-depth what can be considered the earliest Islamic revolution in history. Publications like Moojan Momen's *Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (Momen 1985) presents new scholarship on Shi'i history alongside the traditional Arab historiography, which still has great influence on Shi'ites' self-understanding. Momen pays particular attention to the question of the succession to the prophet Muhammad (not only on the question of who was the successor but also on the nature of the role of this successor) and other factors separating Shi'ites from the Sunni majority. The most comprehensive and probably most balanced Western study on the early caliphate is Wilferd Madelung's *The Succession to Muḥammad* (Madelung 1997). Acknowledging the fundamental importance of this conflict for the schism between Sunna and Shī'a, Madelung stresses Ali's early claim to legitimate succession, which gained support from the Shi'a, and Imam al-Husayn s revolt as one directly deriving from his father's claim (Madelung 1997: 11-22).

However, the heroic narrative Imam al-Husayn as recorded by Shi'i writers gets regularly questioned by Western scholars of Islam. The dominant image of Imam al-Husayn as a reckless man acting without rationally thinking about the consequences of his action rather than a self-conscious rebel motivated by his pious convictions and collective goals, has received little critical revision.

history, Panayiotis Jerasimof Vatikiotis (Vatikiotis 1972) explains Islamic despotism as the result of the assumed absence of the universal humanism of Christianity. For him the Christian notion of the rights of man on the basis of faith in equality before God did never «penetrate the new Islamic ethic (9). In his view, even the challenge and defeat of the Umayyads did not mark a change in Muslims despotic conception of authority or the sources of law and power. Hence, uprisings by Muslims therefore refer to «attitudes rather than political action» (11). Lacking the religious-cultural base of the idea of a just order which is radically different from the prevailing one, they can impossibly reflect any serious revolutionary commitment on the part of Muslims.

If Muslim resistance is at all acknowledged, it is usually explained as an aggressive and often decisively irrational reaction to economic deprivation or psychological alienation triggered by the frustration of severe impoverishment and failed modernization (Davis 1984; Cassandra 1995; Faksh 1997). Mohammad M. Hafez's important critique of this prevalent frustration-aggression approach of relative deprivation (Hafez 2003) suggests a more differentiated political interpretive model to understand contemporary Muslim rebellions. Yet, his argument that «Muslims rebel because of an ill-fated combination of institutional exclusion, on the one hand, and on the other, reactive and indiscriminate repression that threatens the organizational resources and personal lives of Islamist» (Hafez 2003: 21-22) only explains the interruption of radical Muslim movements onto Middle Eastern politics since the early 1980s. Hafez, too, does not for the specific historical legacies or unique religious traditions of rebellion in the Muslim world. Neither does he consider the particular Shi'i concepts of resisting injustice and oppression.

Imam al-Husayn's rebellion in scholarly Orientalism

Orientalist rarely differentiate between Sunnites and Shi'ites when making their readers believe that the self-proclaimed Judeo-Christian right to resist bad governments is alien to Muslims. In fact, the rebellion of Imam al-Husayn is hardly mentioned at all. If Shi'i notions of resistance and the rebellion of Imam al-Husayn are mentioned by Islamologists, this happens mainly in passing in studies on early Islamic history. Julius Wellhausen's *Die*

comparative sociology of religion by Max Weber and his idea of a necessarily European predominance in the history of world civilization (Weber 1904/5). For the popularization of the concept of Oriental despotism, the most influential 20th century scholar was certainly the German sociologist and US-emigré Karl August Wittfogel (1896–1988). Although criticized by some as empirically unsound, ecologically determinist and ideologically functionalist, his monumental 1957 study *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (Wittfogel 1957) engendered a transdisciplinary debate on despotic authority as the inevitable political order in so-called Oriental lands.

Hence, one cannot be surprised that scholars of Islam, too, have adopted the general interpretive pattern of Oriental despotism to their respective field of studies. Probably the most influential proponent of the concept of Islamic despotism among so-called Middle Eastern experts was Bernard Lewis. The long-lasting impact of his very generalizing statement that «[t]he Western doctrine of the right to resist bad government is alien to Islamic thought» (Lewis 1972:33) cannot be overestimated. Lewis argues that even the most popular term used by Arabs for revolution in the 20th century, *thaura,* was a gradually diminishing meaning as it tends to be applied to all types of political upheaval and disorder. He basically applies 19th century philological techniques to explain contemporary Muslim societies in the Middle East as categorically fatalistic and politically passive. Drawing on the classical Arabic etymology of the modern concept of revolution (*thaura*) and its verbal root (*thara*: to be stirred) he directly relates the Islamic understanding of resistive uprising to a 'grumpy camel reluctantly standing-up' (38). The blatantly racist strategy of selective semantic connotation is further supported by the argument that the prophetic imperative to resist impious governments was reduced by several «fatal flaws» (33). According to this argument the lack of legislation and institutions that allow for popular action against the ruler and the inordinate obligation of Muslims to avoid disorder (*fitna*) make revolt virtually impossible. Following Lewis's narrative, resistance, rebellion and revolt became therefore synonymous with sedition and dissidence against the established Islamic order—and therefore apostasy. Whereas this argument pretends to be solidly grounded in the knowledge of Arabic and Islamic

consequence, Muslims appear in dominant Western representations as lacking the capacity to deviate from the imperative to obey a patriarch, a religious scholar or political authority.

The Western notion of Oriental Despotism can be traced back to Aristotelian political philosophy. Over the centuries, it has assumed multiple variations depending on the specific contexts, individual attitudes, and concrete interests determining the works of philosophers, political theorists, travelers, diplomats, missionaries or administrators. The classical scheme of the arbitrary power of Oriental sovereigns and its implications for the ideology of imperial domination has influenced Western attitudes towards non-European cultures and Muslim societies particular considerable. In Aristotle's thought the concept proofed an effective tool of recognizing Greek identity superior over other «barbarous» nations and enemies. It particularly affirmed the assumption that Persians were subordinate slaves by nature because they accept—

voluntarily or passively—despotic power. It was first the Italian philosopher Machiavelli who after the emergence of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 13th century adjusted the concept of Oriental despotism to the European Christian fear of Islamic expansion (Machiavelli 1513).

During the age of Enlightenment, the notion of Oriental despotism functioned as a particularly important idea, especially for the writings of Montesquieu. Using works of travel literature as essential sources, the French philosopher identified Islam with the quasi-natural milieu of despotism. In his view, Muslims live under the conditions of despotism because of the strong interference of religious matters into the political affairs (Montesquieu 1748). In early modern European thought, the discourse of despotism is almost intrinsically linked to Orientalist representations of Islam (Rubiés 2005). Hence, one cannot be surprised that political thinkers of the 19th and 20th century, too, drew heavily on the Orientalist concept to develop their Eurocentric models of modernization and Western exceptionality (Curtis 2008). This is true for the writings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx on what they have variously described as Asia's civilizational immobility or its particular mode of production (Marx 1853) as it is for the

which distort local contexts and intentionally fail to perceive the point of view of their subject matter. As a consequence, specific religious, cultural, political or economic factors of local conflicts get regularly covered within the modernized framework of Orientalism:

«Modern day Orientalists who write about Islam have shed the overt hostility of the 19th century missionary scholars who viewed Islam as a heathen religion, unworthy of respect. Tolerance and inter-cultural understanding have been actively performed in Islamic studies in keeping with the accommodation and evidence of conflict that characterized US actions in its first ventures in the Middle East, but beneath the facade of understanding, most Orientalists basically view Islam as an underdeveloped religion, just as the Middle East is an underdeveloped area» (Barbec et al. 1975: 19).

Orientalist pattern of misrepresentations thus persist and function under new labels. The same continuing effects seem to characterize the particular Orientalist discourse revolving around the concept of Islamic despotism.

Islam as the paradigmatic location of Oriental despotism

Today, most scholars of social movements would agree that resistance and rebellion against injustice and repression form a constant and indeed transcultural pattern in the history of human and social behavior (Gurr 1970). Yet, when it comes to the question of revolt by Muslims in scholarly debates by Western area specialist, Islamic studies scholars, or journalists, we regularly find a significant restriction to this universal understanding of resistive movements. The scholarly reluctance to include Muslims in the transhistorical pattern of resistance is grounded in the assumed distinctiveness of Islam and the Muslims' lack of civic identity. The dominant insistence on what is regularly presented as the unique incapacity of Muslims to intentionally, rationally, and efficiently resist bad government has a long tradition in Western thought. It is firmly anchored in the history of Orientalist discourse and in particular in conceptions of Oriental despotism. Accordingly, despotism has afflicted Muslims from early theology to modernity. Islam is seen inherently totalitarian or fatalistic. Its rulers, the state or its surrogates are explained to reign supreme with no space for dissent or dissidence. As a

service and stationed in Tehran. His *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan,* published in 1824, was considered by the author himself to be the «ripened product of his Persian experiences and reflections» (Searight 1979: 258). The central character of this fictional work is a barber's son who is notoriously cheating his clients. Dressed in the narrative conventions of mockery, the novel strips Iran of its serious glamour to show what is presented as its deeply rooted roguish character. Iranians were, thus, grouped in the negative ranks in which the colonial-racist hierarchies already had placed Arabs and Turks. When *Hajji Baba* first appeared, the Iranian Ambassador to London, Mirza Abdul Hassan, wrote to Morier that «Persian people are very bad people, perhaps but very good to you, sir. What for you abuse them for?» (Searight 1979: 259). Nevertheless, the literary character of Hajji Babas presented in the series was considered by many British readers «typical not merely of the life and surroundings, but of the character and instincts and manner of thought of his countryman» (Searight 1979: 258).

Travelogues and other popular Orientalist representations such as paintings show two dominant pattern that allow to derive the West's right to rule over Orientals from the stereotypic perception of Orientals as a people intrinsically incapable of ruling themselves:

«The first was the insistent claim that the East was a place of lascivious sensuality, and the second that it was a realm characterised by inherent violence [...] if it could be suggested that the Eastern people were slothful, preoccupied with sex, violent incapable of self-government, then the imperialist would feel himself justified in stepping in and ruling» (Kabbani 1986: 6)

While colonial Orientalism began to slide from its pedestal in the course of political decolonization, Orientalist representations did by no means diminish after the formal independence of formerly colonized countries. When after World War II, American imperialism emerged as the new force in the Middle East, writings by Orientalists continued to influence a new breed of specialists in Islamic studies. Adjusted to newly developed programs like Area Studies their works maintained significant influence on a new generation of regional specialists. As we will discuss with a focus on the question of revolt and resistance in Islam, these studies still projected Western-centered approaches

popular Oriental travelogues. Whatever were the individual reasons, these writings regularly reinforced stereotypes and hostility to both Islam and Muslims (Said 1978; Kabbani 1986).

Already in the seventeenth century English travelers had begun to journey into the Middle East. «One such early traveller (William Lithgow) considered the Muslims 'infidels' and he divided them into the two categories, the tolerable Turks and Moors and the intolerable Arabs. The latter were considered thieves, the Moors cruel and the Turks «ill-best of all the three...yet all sworn enemies of Christ» (Sari 1979: 28). Among the most influential Orient travelers of the early nineteenth century was the Swiss explorer John Lewis Burckhardt (1784–1817) who travelled under the name of Sheikh Ibrahim Ibn Abdullah. Known in the West for his rediscovery of the ancient Jordanian city of Petra, he was commissioned by the African Association to discover the source of the river Niger. In preparation for this early 19th century journey, for which he needed to pass as Muslim, Burckhardt spent two years studying Arabic in Aleppo, before travelling widely in Arabia and Egypt. His widely circulated *Notes on Bedouins and Wahabys* (Burckhard 1830)*, first published in 1830, reinforced already established negative images of Arab Muslims. Although, he considered Turks to be more «cruel,» his sweeping generalizations about his Arab hosts were not flattering either. Burckhardt argued that «Arabs may be styled a nation of robbers whose principal occupation is plunder, the constant subject of their thoughts» (Sari 1979: 59-60). Similarly, Edward William Lane's (1801-76) *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (Lane 1936) mainly written during his stay in in Egypt between 1833 and 1835, advanced to almost a compulsory reading for Westerners travelling to and studying the Middle East. While many travelers showed particular interest in Turks and Arabs, they did not ignore the Muslims of Persia. In the course of the 19th century and particular during the Anglo-Russian colonial rivalry, the British had gained enormous influence over the ruling elite of Iran. First portraits of the country had already been published by Robert Porter in his 1820 travelogue (Porter 1820).

Much greater impact on the British imagination of the Orient and Islam had James Morier's *Hajji Baba* series. The novelist Morier had been in diplomatic

In the course of the 19ᵗʰ century older approaches to the study of the so-called Orient and Islam had partly given way to a new discipline with more rigorously formulated methods. Claiming to keep with the development of scientific standards of its time, this process of refined institutionalization formed a general consensus of how to study Muslim cultures and societies. Orientalist views have since then become «an integral part of Western culture» (Schaar 1979: 68). The works of men such as Silvestre de Sacy, Ernest Renan, Edward William Lane «made Orientalism effective and congruent with the interests and political concerns of imperialist rulers» (Ibid. 69). As Said has put it, modern Orientalism's function was «to understand in some cases to control, manipulate, even incorporate, what is a manifestly different world» (Said 1980: 12).

While some scholars of Orientalism supported the colonial project by justifying military conquests, others were directly involved by providing colonial administrations with interpretations which disputed native Muslim's own perceptions of Islam. Colonial administrators in turn used Orientalist expertise for the «pacification of the colonized territories as a means to achieve their colonial objective» (Benaboud 1982: 7). Introducing the secular notion of a strict separation of politics from religion they legitimized those newly installed monarchies who openly collaborated with the occupiers. At the same time, secular doctrines derived from Western political models of subordinating the institution of church to monarchs and parliaments, found new advocates among Arab, Turkish and Iranian intellectuals as well as their Westernized political leaders.

Travelers, too, participated in the making and consolidation of Orientalist stereotypes. From the eighteenth century, an increasing number of Europeans were journeying to the far corners of Muslim lands. They reported what they observed as affirmations of their expectations and ignored what did not fit into their preconceived pictures of Muslimness (Rodinson 1974). The reasons for such voyages to the so-called Orient were manifold: while some wanted to escape their own culture or seek the pleasure of exotic discoveries and spiritual regeneration as travelling gentlemen and gentlewomen of leisure, others aimed at making a carrier for themselves as writers of increasingly

international relations» (Buheiry 1982: 7). He argued that if colonial powers would accepted Islam in principle, Muslim subjects to Western colonial powers would perceive their present rulers «as an anomaly» (Ibid. 7). Similarly, the Pan-Islamist movement was seen as a threat to Western colonial projects. Hurgronge believed that although the Islamic Caliphate was «over-religious», religious power was still in the hands of the Ulema (Muslim clergies). The key problem therefore remained: how could Islam be contained? One strategy «to weaken Islam» and «to render it forever incapable of great awakenings» (Buheiry 1982: 5) was presented to the French Government by Baron Carra de Vaux (1867– 1953), a specialist of Ibn Sina's work and a member of the French Catholic Institute:

«We should endeavour to split the Muslim world, to break its moral unity, using to this effect the ethnic and political divisions... let us therefore accentuate these differences, in order to increase on the one hand national sentiment and to decrease on the other that of religious community among the various Muslim races ... in one word, let us segment Islam» (Ibid.).

This strategy of «divide and rule» was used by almost all Western powers throughout modern colonial history and seems to be at work in Western foreign policy to this very day (Enayat 1980; Dekmejian 1980). While the division of the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim lands into nation-states politically divided the Muslim world, the general danger posed by Islam as a uniting and possibly resistive force transcending national boundaries, however, continued to plague implementation and consolidation of colonial dominance. It was this concern that necessitated reinterpretations Islam as a religion and the political order guided by the principles of Islam. The Algerian Mohammad Ben Rahal, of Oran Province, summarized this strategic devaluation of Islam as follows:

«[H]ostility is the dominant note in Europe's sentiment towards Islam [...] if the Muslim defends his home, religion or nation, he is not seen as a patriot but as a savage; if he displays courage or heroism, he is called a fanatic; if in defeat he shows resignation he is called a fatalist [... Islam is] ostracized, systematically denigrated, and ridiculed without ever being known» (Ben Rahal quoted in Buheiry 1982: 14).

European colonialism. In fact, the spatial emphasis of his critical undertaking concerns both, the imagined geography of Orientalist representations and their real geopolitical implementation. For him, the decisive zero point of modern Orientalism is therefore marked in by Napoleon's occupation of Egypt in 1798. He interprets the French military expedition as Europe's first encounter with an Arab-Islamic society, in which Orientalist knowledge is directly used for colonial purposes. The Proto-Orientalists of the Napoleonic Expedition used the image of a classical Orient to judge modern Egypt, its socio-political order and culture as degenerated and backward. By doing so, the occupation could be justified in retrospect, as an act of civilizational development aid. The colonial project claims to restore a culturally stagnant space to its former greatness. Thus, the terms Orient and Oriental were given a special administrative and executive connotation for the first time. They become established as legal categories that explain why what happened—the violent subjugation of the region by a Western power—had to happen.

The self-understanding of Orientalism is based on this dubious causal nexus. With the systematic collection of manuscripts and other information on the history and culture of the Middle East, a process of institutionalization began, in the course of which Oriental Studies not only established itself as an academic field in its own right. At the same time, it institutionalized a European system of stereotypical statements about the Orientals. This Orientalist archive is part of a mixed economy of military-diplomatic practices, religious-educational discourses, scientific authority, media representation, and artistic-literary productions. Orientalist representations—understood in this way—indeed have participated in both, the scholarly subjection and colonial subjugation of people from different parts of the globe. With a view to the Middle East, Western powers had identified one particular threat and that was Islam. Throughout the colonial era, one finds a considerable debate, as to how Islam should be contained—accordingly the dominant the colonial project could never be successfully implemented without the containment of Islam. When the Dutch Orientalist Snouck Hurgronge realized the danger posed by the Caliphate of the Ottoman Empire, he warned the colonial powers of the danger of «Muslims' political and religious beliefs in the arena of

claims. Hence, Islam advanced to a quasi-natural enemy. The consequence of this historical and theological constellation cannot be underrated. It set Europe and the West against Islam for a long period (Djait 1985; Hussain 1990). Early European critics approached Islam from a highly competitive religious standpoint. Thinkers like John of Damascus (675-749), Peter the Venerable (1094-1156) and Martin Luther (1483-1546) openly discredited Islam. They argued that the Koran was not revealed by God to its prophet Mohammad, but created by men and that it was a Satanic production aimed at discrediting the Bible and Christianity. Luther proclaimed that what the Turks were learning from the Koran was about Satan and not God. For him it was Satan directing them to destroy «the faith of Christians» (Luther 1967: 181). The call for crusades by Pope Urban II in 1093 echoed across Europe. Kings, Knights, soldiers as well as ordinary Christian women and children were recruited to fight Muslims in the Middle East. This call resulted in the first crusade campaign of 1096. The campaign was followed by many later calls, of the last was by Pope Innocent IV who commissioned the French King Louis IX to lead a campaign in 1245. With the fall of Acre in 1291, as the last crusader stronghold, Muslims finally regained control of the region before they faced another threat from the Mongols. The wars between Muslims and Christians, known as the Crusades, had a long-lasting effect on both sides of the conflictual divide. These military conflicts not only reinforced hatred and distrust among Muslims and Christians within the Middle East, but in addition brought the conflict to the Europeans' homes. Negative and fearsome images of Islam and Muslims dominated both, the institutionalized religious discourse of the church and popular discourse in the West.

What matters in the context of our discussion is that both, classic and modern Orientalism, must be understood as more than just isolated philological practices of subjugation, producing an awareness of the Oriental as a coherent cultural figure of the Other, far away from the material world. Instead, the inner appropriation processes of Western Oriental studies responded to external power relations and thus enforced a directly regimenting practice. Edward Said has powerfully illustrated this very historical interaction between the performative power effects of Orientalist knowledge and the history of

Orientalism and its patterns of representation

One cannot sufficiently understand the essentializing perception of Muslims as intrinsically obedient subjects, incapable of resisting against unjust rule, without a sustained exploration of the dense correlation between overseas practices of colonial domination and metropolitan forms of cultural representation. Edward Said's seminal 1978 study *Orientalism* (Said 1978) has by now been widely acknowledged as a foundational work for such colonial discourse analysis. Using Michel Foucault's micropolitical analysis of Western disciplinary regimes and Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony as a model, Said has developed a macro-archaeology of the Western knowledge of the so-called Orient. By tracing the theme of Eurocentrism and racism and its relation to colonialism, he demonstrates that the discursive construction of the Oriental as a coherent figure of the cultural Other is deeply embedded in the comprehensive power/knowledge complex of colonialism. Hence, we can grasp European representations of the non-European as hegemonial effects caused by colonial relations of power. At the same time, Said's study reminds us that within the dominant Western identity discourse, the Orientalized functions as the negative matrix par excellence. In this mode of identification, the pair of opposites Orient/Occident forms a cross-cultural equivalent to the inner-European dichotomy of irrationality/reason.

Said's critique of Orientalism was directed primarily at the phase in which the study of Arabic increasingly advances to an academic field in its own rank and the strong position of linguistics enabled a special combination of imagination and empirical observation. However, early Orientalist studies were first and foremost placed at the service of Christian *philologia sacra* and politics. Christianity had been well established in the Middle East for more than 600 years, when a new religion, Islam, revealed to a prophet named Mohammed (PBUH) emerged and quickly spread beyond the borders of Arabia. Christianity for the first time felt threatened within the very geographical spaces from which it had emerged. Christian belief was no longer the principal religion in the Middle East, and instead established its institutional center in Europe. For Christians, to acknowledge Islam would have meant to undermine their own position of exceptional religious truth

in revolutions, is the only revolution whose memory is still as alive and fresh to Muslims in the present time as it was to Muslims in the past» (Shams al-Din 1985 n.p.). While Muslims certainly differ about the degree of Imam al-Husayn's sanctity and the implications of his struggle for the important theological and political question of legitimate leadership in Islam, they basically agree that his determination to revolt against oppression represents a revolution which the principles and laws of Islam demanded to be undertaken for the purpose of saving an integrated umma from unjust rule.

When it comes to question of resistance in Islam one cannot but get the impression that Muslim self-perceptions and dominant Western representations are almost oxymoronic. Starting from this general observation, our paper seeks to critically trace the representation of Imam al-Husayn in both, scholarly and popular Western discourse. Drawing on the larger Orientalist discourse, it sets particular focus on the question of how (if at all) his struggle against tyranny is placed within the narrative of Islamic despotism and political quietism.

The first part of our paper uses selected scholarly works to revisit seminal conceptions Oriental and Islamic despotism as to then look at Orientalist interpretations of the battle of Karbala. It demonstrates that while most Western scholars of Islam described Imam al-Husayn 's revolt only in passing to disqualify it as a premature and ill-prepared campaign by a reckless and violent rebel trying to secure despotic leadership for himself, Orientalists rarely acknowledged his struggle as one against the oppressive and anti-Islamic character of Umayyad rule. The second part of our paper explores the Western Media coverage of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. It illustrates how the traditional view of Shia Islam as a religion of political quietism was given a new interpretation—one that now stresses Shiites' tendency to fanatic irrationality, fetishistic martyrdom, and fundamentalist violence rather than acknowledging the revolution's original emancipatory impetus directed against local tyranny and global exploitation or its specific forms political activism inspired by the ideals of Imam al-Husayn.

The short concluding section points out some of the desiderata, challenges and possible predicaments regarding the comparative study of resistance in Shi'a communities.

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The concept of Oriental despotism has shaped the Eurocentric representation of Islam and Muslim societies for many centuries. According to the still prevalent Orientalist argument, the Western doctrine of the right to resist bad government is alien to Islamic thought. Thus, defeatism and quietism have been explained as transhistorical political attitudes of intrinsically obedient Muslims.

Commemorated by many Muslims and Shi'ites in particular, as a historical role model of emancipatory dissidence, the figure of Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib does not easily fit into such narrative. Playing a significant role in Shi'i popular consciousness, political symbolism and politics of resistance, Imam al-Husayn and the memory of Karbala rather seem to counter the essentializing synonymization of Islam and unconditional obedience. In fact, one can consider Imam al-Husayn's revolt against the oppressive rule of the Umayyad regime as the prototypical revolutionary resistance movement with a long-lasting impact: «The revolution of al-Husayn, among all the revolutions in the history of Islam which, itself, abound

No Place for Revolt?
Imam al-Husayn and the Orientalist Discourse of Islamic Despotism

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Abstract

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