

Theory, Politics and the Arab World

Critical Responses

Edited by
Hisham Sharabi

Published in cooperation with the
Center for Contemporary Arab Studies,
Georgetown University.

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Editor's Preface

In the last decade or so, mainstream academic scholarship on the Arab world, the Middle East, and Islam has come under severe criticism as a new generation of scholars, raised and trained in a different political and intellectual milieu, came of age. The new criticism, largely fashioned by the concepts and vocabularies of postmodernist paradigms—continental theory, neo-Marxism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and feminist theory—has called into question some of the fundamental assumptions, methodologies, and ways of writing, teaching, and research of established scholarship.

Within closely guarded traditional disciplinary boundaries, conventional scholarship has maintained itself by preserving hierarchical structures within carefully delimited fields defined by certain kinds of expertise and sanctioned by established disciplinary authority. In the various fields and subfields, competition for power and position has been governed by implicit and explicit ideological and professional values set by the scholarly institution. In this situation, development within the various disciplines has remained limited and uneven. For example, in history the focus has been mostly on political history, the state, and high culture; in political science, on Islamic institutions and current developments; in anthropology and cultural studies, on literary history, old-style ethnography, and religion; in sociology and social psychology, on the kinship system, tribal and family structures, and modernization. In its theory and method the general field of Arab or Middle East studies has remained—despite some borrowing from Max Weber and recent social theory—anchored in the concepts and vocabulary of nineteenth-century historiography and social science.

The older generation of scholars belonged to the pre-World War II and immediate postwar periods. Some of its members had emigrated from continental Europe before the outbreak of the war to Britain and

the United States; during the war, some served as specialists and advisors on Islam and the Middle East. The “Middle East” as an academic field flourished in the postwar era, which was marked by United States hegemony and the Cold War, when liberalism, anticommunism, and modernization emerged as the dominant ideological undercurrents. Not surprisingly, these historical and intellectual circumstances shaped much of the structure and orientation as well as areas and modes of research in Middle East studies.

The present cleavage within Middle East scholarship between what may be termed “traditionalists” and “innovators” became perceptible in the early 1970s. The former generally held on to old-time conventions and views—the canons of European Orientalist scholarship, Anglo-American positivist humanism, anticommunist ideology, “area studies” approaches, and so on—while the latter stressed new perspectives derived from the experience of the 1960s—Vietnam, the student movement, the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, and the accompanying intellectual upheavals.

The writers of these papers were invited to participate in a collective effort to examine from different disciplinary standpoints the implications of these upheavals for Middle East and Islamic writing and research. Along with a critique of the mainstream scholarship, these essays provide a description of some of the methodologies, theories, and changing patterns of thinking and writing in the various disciplines. Before a few notes on some of these, a word about the way the project was carried out.

The papers were presented at a faculty study group held at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, during the academic year 1987–88. Faculty members and graduate students from neighboring universities were invited to participate in the study group. Before each session, a draft of the paper to be discussed was made available to the participants. The first part of the meeting was devoted to a presentation by the writer, followed by a vigorous and sometimes heated discussion. The papers were revised in light of the discussions prior to being submitted in their final form.

A certain rule should govern the reading of these essays. They should be read not only as an expression of a profound crisis within the field of Middle East studies, but also as a comprehensive multidisciplinary effort at reconstructing this field.

In their tone and style, all of the essays gathered here express self-conscious skepticism regarding writing, reading, and interpretation, in stark contrast to the self-assured and placid authoritarian attitude of established scholarship. The new critical approach is perhaps best expressed in Lila Abu Lughod’s characterization: “a reading and writing

from a particular place, from an individual who is personally, intellectually, politically, and historically situated."

Despite differences in assumptions and points of view, these papers attempt a single critical project. In most of the essays, the old tendency to totalize has been largely abandoned and closure has been displaced by self-reflexive criticism. In rejecting the Olympian all-knowing point of view of the old scholarship, the younger scholars do not intend to subvert science as such, or to undermine meaning and truth, but only to frame them differently, by underscoring the historicity of truth and knowledge and the perspectival character of science. For them, the politics of theory extend beyond considerations of explicit content and into those of form. From this standpoint the authority of mainstream scholarship and its hegemonic claims can no longer be taken seriously.

What is, from the vantage point of the different disciplines represented here, the current state of scholarly writing in the field of Arab, Middle East, and Islamic studies?

In political science most mainstream scholarship is largely descriptive, consisting mainly of diplomatic history and journalism focused on current politics and the ruling elites ("the regional counterpart," in Lisa Anderson's terms, "of contemporary Kremlinology"). Anderson attributes the poverty of American political science not so much to the difficulty of the languages of the region or the inaccessibility of certain of its parts to American writers and scholars, as to American foreign policy and its effect on political writing and research on the Middle East. Although she is not overly optimistic about fundamental changes taking place in her field—which "remains unsystematic and even unself-conscious"—she does see some significant shifts occurring in current research, redirecting focus from "the state" to "a revival of political economy in both international relations and comparative studies," from "crisis management" to structural "trends and patterns," from prediction of "what is coming and how it will get here" to analysis of political practice, "where conceptions of accountability and responsibility are defined and realized."

In a similar tone, Samih Farsoun and Lisa Hajjar decry the disarray of American sociology on the Middle East as "undeveloped" and "underdeveloped." It is a "distorted" sociology, applying concepts and modes of analysis developed not in the study of the Middle East itself but in the course of the West's own transformation—a distortion found in most Western social science disciplines. To this aberration is added the Orientalist syndrome, which has in Western sociology "earned a new lease on life." Perhaps more than any of the other writers, Farsoun and Hajjar detail the destructive consequences of Orientalism within mainstream writing in their field, but they are more optimistic than Anderson about

their discipline's prospects for change. They see an emerging scholarship already successfully challenging established concepts and approaches and laying the ground for a new radical sociology of the Middle East.

This emerging scholarship is adumbrated in Halim Barakat's analysis of social-psychological writing. Taking a position close to Farsoun's and Hajjar's, he describes a "dynamic approach" which he envisions already replacing the static approach of institutional scholarship. In this approach he sees a process taking place simultaneously of "learning and unlearning," producing a radically new mode of reading and writing.

A similar division between "new style" and "old style" writing is evident in Judith Tucker's careful elaboration of the new social history perspective, where she focuses on precisely what traditional scholarship has neglected most: the history of ordinary people, of families, classes, peasants, women. In both theory and method the social history she describes, "history from below," represents perhaps the most direct challenge to the established forms of writing and research. And, reading from the left, Peter Gran presents an account of why political economy, so rich an interpretive tool in other fields, has failed to develop an autonomous approach on the Middle East. Attributing this failure to the acceptance by many Marxist-oriented scholars of some of Orientalism's basic assumptions as well as of the "liberal trade theory" or simultaneously of Anglo-American positivism, Gran gives a trenchant critique of some left writing in the field.

Lila Abu Lughod's criticism of mainstream anthropology takes a softer, non-agonistic form, addressing the limits of theory and communication rather than the specific failures of established anthropology. Her essay exemplifies the sort of self-critical consciousness to which the emerging interdisciplinary writing in the field aspires, giving the most sensitive treatment of the epistemological and linguistic problems that writing about the Other has to confront. This theme is the focus of my introductory essay, dealing with the problem of the scholarly point of view, and of the role of politics, perspective, and paradigm in shaping representation and meaning. The introduction focuses on the rising critical movement in Arab scholarship, which is largely influenced by the self-same upheavals in Western epistemology and linguistics mostly ignored by Western mainstream scholarship.

Some readers may think some of these essays have gone a little too far in their contestation of established conventions and in their criticism of prevailing academic scholarship. Such a view would only reinforce the conservative trend entrenched in the field and encourage those who still reject skepticism on principle and who dismiss "nihilistic" theories out of

hand. One thing is certain: The division between the emerging scholarship and conventional scholarship is likely to grow deeper and take new oppositional forms.

But it is important to reiterate that this collective effort is not concerned with just attacking established scholarship; its aim is to arouse mainstream thinking, writing, and research to the implications of the conceptual upheaval wrought by recent theory. Its main point is that traditional rationality, with its *a priori* certainties and common sense convictions, along with the old modes of writing, teaching, and research it embodies, must be called into question and reconstructed.

Already, the language and vocabulary of conventional scholarship have to a large extent been destabilized. Between signifier and signified, sign and referent, a gap has opened up which cannot be bridged simply by a "return"—by renewed commitment to plain language and unproblematic theorization. To maintain that the present crisis is a passing phase and scholarship will revert to normal practice, is to refuse to confront post-modern reality. True, intellectual fads come and go; but some will not easily go away until they have transformed the prevailing paradigms (as classical Marxism and Freudism did earlier in the century). The poststructuralist phenomenon—in its semiological, psychoanalytical, Marxist, deconstructionist, feminist, and other forms—may be a fad, but it is not likely to disappear before it has played out its impact and has changed some of the existing modes of our representation and meaning.

Contents

Editor's Preface	v
1 The Scholarly Point of View: Politics, Perspective, Paradigm <i>Hisham Sharabi</i>	1
2 Policy-Making and Theory Building: American Political Science and the Islamic Middle East <i>Lisa Anderson</i>	52
3 Anthropology's Orient: The Boundaries of Theory on the Arab World <i>Lila Abu-Lughod</i>	81
4 Beyond the Always and the Never: A Critique of Social Psychological Interpretations of Arab Society and Culture <i>Halim Barakat</i>	132
5 The Contemporary Sociology of the Middle East: An Assessment <i>Samih K. Farsoun and Lisa Hajjar</i>	160
6 Taming the West: Trends in the Writing of Modern Arab Social History in Anglophone Academia <i>Judith E. Tucker</i>	198
7 Studies of Anglo-American Political Economy: Democracy, Orientalism, and the Left <i>Peter Gran</i>	228
Index	255
Contributors	261

1

The Scholarly Point of View: Politics, Perspective, Paradigm

Hisham Sharabi

I. Critique of Academic Scholarship

The Question of Perspective

The following critique of Western academic scholarship on the modern Arab world and Islam derives from a familiar assumption, namely, that scholarly interpretation is never neutral or objective but is always linked to certain theoretical and methodological perspectives that determine the course of understanding and interpretation. It is precisely this connection between perspective and interpretation in which I am interested here, not just in order to find whether the connection can be broken and interpretation freed from its constraints, but rather to examine the constraints themselves and to see how they actually affect understanding and interpretation. My contention is that although it might be quite legitimate to distinguish between what is explicitly or unconsciously political or ideological and what is clearly epistemological or methodological, it is frequently the case that theory and method, far from being free of politics and ideology, and thus autonomously constituted, are often grounded in convictions, preferences, and interests framed in various paradigmatic styles and forms.

Thus the point of departure of this exposition may be defined as "perspectivist," the term taken in its most comprehensive sense. Let me briefly outline the sense in which I employ this term.

Clearly, perspective shapes understanding and interpretation most decisively under the aspect of spatio-temporal determination; thus what we may see and what we may know are circumscribed by history and geography, by culture and physical conditions, i.e., by factors and forces that come together to form a determinate perspective. Above all, the fact of perspective denies transcendence, a position "outside" or "above,"

and affirms historicity, temporality, and the relativity of all interpretive discourse.

Thus if it is legitimate to speak of a Western perspective (in general as well as in specific terms), of a specifically Western framework and understanding of the Other, how do a non-Western culture and society get interpreted in a Western perspective? How is the relation between Self and the Other established in the interpretation from such a perspective? For example, what is the colonial mode of interpretation, and what is the post-colonial mode?

Two points we often tend to forget must be kept in mind in this context. First, the scholarly disciplines in the humanities and social sciences are all initially products of Western experience and thought. Second, the kind of knowledge that the Other, the object of Western knowledge—in this case Arab society and culture—has of itself is therefore essentially Western knowledge even when it is locally produced. Modern Third World scholarship is basically derivative scholarship, producing and reproducing a Western knowledge. This latter fact sheds strong light on one of the major impulses of fundamentalist Islam and its insistence on the need for a total break with the West and return to Islamic values and categories—that is to say, to independent interpretation and scholarship.

Against this background the current movement of secular cultural criticism in the Arab world presents itself not as a synthesis or a compromise binding Western-type modernity to Arab and Islamic modes of thought, but rather as an oppositional discourse seeking to transcend *both* Western hegemony and fundamentalist resistance through systematic critique. This new critical consciousness, still in its formative stage, seeks, on the one hand, to go beyond mainstream Western scholarship—which has dominated Arab scholarship and training in most Arab countries since the nineteenth century—and, on the other hand, to establish its own independent perspective. But before dealing with this movement—which expresses in embryo the most radical extant approach to established scholarship and which might well serve as a sounding board to the nascent critical movement in Middle Eastern studies as a whole—we must examine Western academic scholarship and characterize its implicit politics, perspective, and mode of writing.

Knowledge of Self and Other

Let us pose the question again: How can knowledge be “objective” when it is knowledge of an Other? Academic scholarship has generally approached its subject matter (here, Arab society and culture) as though from a position of timeless knowledge. A distinctive feature of the notion

of perspective is the implicit assumption of *perspectiveless* knowledge, of an Archimedean point in space from which truth is grasped in its Hegelian, universal form. For a very long time we have been taught that social and historical reality can be grasped and objectively represented in the disciplines of history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc., if only we follow valid theory and rigorous method.

The point of radical criticism is that it is not just ideology or stereotyping or hidden interests that distort understanding and interpretation of the past and present of the Other, but also the way established academic scholarship is constituted. To begin with, Western knowledge is the product of European expansion and of world domination. Self-knowledge (the way Western scholarship understands its own Western culture and history) is achieved in terms of categories and assumptions that are centered on the Self and as such essentially different from those that constitute the knowledge of the Other. Thus the social-science disciplines developed in pursuit of knowledge of non-Western cultures and peoples are based on forms and categories of analysis designed *specifically* for grasping the Other, as in ethnology, the prototypical Western discipline invented for understanding non-Western (primitive) cultures. Once recognized, the outlook implicit in this orientation readily reveals how values cultivated within established scholarship could create the cultural contrasts and oppositions between the Self and the Other (primitive/civilized, backward/advanced, traditional/modern) that serve to justify Western practices in a non-Western world.

In its current form, radical criticism in the West aims at questioning the validity of the perspective in which this scholarship functions and thrives. Western *radical* criticism, from Marx to Derrida, is not satisfied with merely revealing the political or ideological content of bourgeois scholarship: a good deal of this criticism centers on the questions of perspective (for Nietzsche the determining condition of "truth" in all the "human" sciences), which is no longer seen as innocently determined by the way the subject matter is presented or approached; it is rather the result of certain conscious and unconscious choices made by the observer that determine both the methodological approach and the type of analysis embarked upon.

An example of the privileged self-view implicit in the European perspective is provided by Edmund Husserl in his important book *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, published just before World War II. In it, Husserl asserts that only European man enjoys the historical privilege of philosophy; he describes non-Western cultures as primitive and prescientific and in any case congenitally incapable of philosophical reflection. Husserl assumes the qualitative superiority of the European perspective as a starting point, never for a moment

thinking of putting the privileged viewpoint of European consciousness into question. "This," as Paul de Man points out, "although by his own definition philosophy, as unrestricted reflection upon the self, necessarily tends toward a universality that finds its concrete, geographical correlative in the formation of supratribal, supernational communities such as, for instance, Europe. Why this geographical expansion should have chosen to stop, once and forever, at the Atlantic Ocean and the Caucasus, Husserl does not say" ("Criticism and Crisis," pp. 15–16).

A most telling element resulting from the way perspective is constituted in this sense is the determination of what is attended to and what is excluded by it—of what one wishes to see and what one turns away from. As the Marxist critic Terry Eagleton puts it: "What you choose and reject theoretically . . . depends upon what you are practically trying to do . . . In any academic study we select the objects and methods of procedure which we believe the most important, and our assessment of their importance is governed by frames of interest deeply rooted in our practical forms of social and political life" ("Political Criticism," p. 286).

Again, it is not the validity of the conventional discourse that is being questioned, but the standpoint and the unspoken assumptions that give rise to it. In whatever disciplinary form it may be expressed, the conventional scholarship I am referring to proceeds from a perspective in which two basic assumptions seem to be always implicit: that the non-Western Other is behind but will *catch up* (i.e., is always behind), and that this Other has a *separate* destiny (i.e., will always be Other). The first assumption is in its discursive construction modeled on the specifically Western experience of transformation and change understood as progress—modernization, science, technology, economic development. The second proceeds from the view that non-Western cultures somehow belong to a different order of existence and develop according to a different impulse. Both assumptions imply a qualitative difference between Self and Other, indefinitely deferring equality or identity of West and non-West.

Another Reading of Texts

In this section I shall attempt a *reading* of a few Western texts on Arab society and culture representative of mainstream academic scholarship. The disciplines these texts exemplify are history, anthropology, social psychology, sociology, and intellectual and institutional history. Taken together they fairly represent the three main tendencies of conventional academic scholarship: Orientalism, area studies, and liberal humanism. The representative samples below are by André Servier, Raphael Patai, Carlton Coon, Clifford Geertz, Daniel Lerner, Gustav von Grunebaum, H. A. R. Gibb, Albert Hourani, and Jacques Berque.

This reading consciously supersedes both the reading of the abstract general reader and that of the academic specialist. It is the reading specifically of a critical Arab reader approaching these texts from a perspective in which the premises and assumptions, attitudes and goals of the Western general reader and specialist are no longer the natural or conscious frame of reference. It is a reading, however, that is not shut in on itself but fully mindful of its own perspective and that insists on a nonconventional, nonacademic, and non-Western interpretation of scholarly texts.

In this reading my purpose is to give specific, brief examples of how the relation of Self and Other may determine the perspective and thus the orientation and language of scholarly writing on Arab culture and society. The fact that the relation itself is anchored in, to use Frederick Jameson's term, a "political unconscious" helps to elucidate how perspectives (conscious or unconscious) can influence the forms as well as content of scholarly texts. This same relationship will be later considered from the other side—the side where the Other appears as Self—by means of similar textual examples taken from recent Arab critical texts.

Let me outline very schematically what such a reading will reveal about the writing of mainstream academic scholarship.

First, that conventional scholarship is characterized by a mode of writing in which narrative description tends to be dominant and concepts and their "objective" referents are taken unproblematically: history and social reality are presumed to be transparent and fully graspable provided one applies the appropriate rules of research.

Second, that it is a scholarship grounded in the language and conceptual framework of nineteenth-century (Western) thought. Even when academic scholarship questions its categories and methods, it does so by means of concepts embedded in the traditional discourse from which it stems. Categories such as subject, object, reality, concept, cause, effect, etc. (in which recent linguistic criticism has revealed profound ambiguities and inconsistencies) are taken at face value and almost never subjected to radical criticism; when they are, they always get reinstated practically unchanged in the conventional discourse.

Third, that it is a scholarship that consciously grounds itself in authority ("scholarly" or "scientific") and expresses itself in "correct" modes of writing and exposition, remaining generally unmindful of its own ideological or political biases or of the consequences of its own rhetoric and mode of discourse.

And finally, that it is fundamentally a patriarchal scholarship, rejecting or eliding the feminist claim, viewing with sarcasm all new or different readings, and pretending to establish only one *correct* reading (there are only true or false readings).

Colonial Scholarship: Servier and Patai

The first two texts we shall deal with, André Servier's *La psychologie du musulman* (published in English translation in 1924) and Raphael Patai's *The Arab Mind* (1973), belong to the late-colonial and early-post- (or neo-) colonial periods of mainstream scholarship; one is in cultural history and the other in anthropology. Although Servier's and Patai's texts belong to the same field, the two writers use markedly different "languages" in their analysis. Servier's text illustrates the kind of mainstream scholarship that was prevalent in the final stages of imperialism and a type of writing that is anchored in the hegemonic Self, directly and frankly contemptuous of the non-Western Other. It is paternalistic in its approach, with no self-doubt about its scholarly legitimacy or the integrity of its interpretation. Thus *La psychologie du musulman* will not only contribute, as Louis Bertrand puts it in the preface, to historical knowledge as such, but will also "enlighten the natives themselves to their own past history" (p. vii). This history is constituted on the basis of two simple assumptions: the natural inferiority of the conquered Other, and the natural superiority of the conquering Self. Thus, in Servier's assertion, "the inferior Arab has borrowed everything from other nations, literature, art, science, and even his religious ideas. He has passed it all through the sieve of his own narrow mind, and being incapable of rising to high philosophic conceptions, he has distorted, mutilated and desiccated everything" (p. 73). Similarly, Islam is not "an original doctrine but a compilation of Greco-Latin traditions, biblical and Christian; but in assimilating materials so diverse, the Arab mind has stripped them of all poetical adornment, of the symbolism and philosophy he [*sic*] did not understand, and from all this he [*sic*] evolved a religious doctrine cold and rigid as a geometrical theorem: God, The Prophet, Mankind" (p. 12).

It is easy to see how this kind of writing would drive a generation of Arab intellectuals and writers to anger and frustration as well as to an enormous outlay of energy to disprove these claims and to prove their opposite: the greatness and splendor of Arab history and culture. The apologetic obsession in all contemporary Arabic writing may be traced to a reaction to this kind of late colonial scholarship, of which André Servier's text is perhaps an exaggerated but a clear example.

Raphael Patai's book *The Arab Mind*, written after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, is more sophisticated only because expressed in social scientific language. In Patai's text, as in Servier's, Arab society, history, culture, appear thoroughly transparent and comprehensible. The similarity underlying the structure of the two texts derives from the perspective they

share based on the facts of power and domination. From this perspective the Other, conquered and subdued by force, must simultaneously be conquered by knowledge. For only by grasping the history, religion, psychology, etc., of the native can the conqueror truly overcome and control. It is a perspective that calls for a special kind of knowledge, one already determined by a given conjuncture of historical forces and circumstances, a knowledge that is necessarily totalizing, essentialist, and reductive, in which the Other can appear only as essentially different, as simultaneously monolithic and mosaic, both socially and psychologically.

Patai, as a knowledgeable scholar, approaches Arab culture from *within*. Throughout the text he quotes Arabic terms and phrases to demonstrate his close familiarity with the language and the culture. From his preface we learn that he studied Arabic "twice a week for an hour" with the famous German orientalist Carl Brockelmann at the University of Breslau and again in Palestine, where he studied and "taught Arabic at a high school in Talpyot." Yet, curiously, he uses no Arabic sources in his book, and his quotations are mostly oral or secondhand, interesting not so much for their content as for the kind of messages they convey about the culture and the psychology of the people he is dealing with. One of the proverbs he quotes illustrates the point: "I and my brothers against my cousin; I and my cousins against the stranger (or 'against the world')." This is an acute comment on the Arab traits of family cohesion and hierarchical loyalties. A proverb current in Syria and Lebanon comments on Arab pride: "Even if I have to see the worm of hunger emerge from my mouth, I shall not debase myself [i.e., by asking help]" (p. 22). And he adds, "A study of these proverbs would yield a fascinating folk view of the Arab character and would set forth the Arab value system as applied to personal conduct" (*ibid.*).

Patai quotes opinions given by various individuals, in one instance those of one 'Abdul-'Aziz Zubi ("Deputy Minister of Health in the Israeli government") on Arab "emotionalism." Again, what is of interest is less Mr. Zubi's insights than the portrayal of Arab "behavior" and "psychology." Mr. Zubi declares that one of the bad characteristics of the Arabs is their tendency to exaggerate: "'Our hearts do the job of our brains,' were his words. 'We exaggerate in both love and hate. We are emotional rather than coldly analytical. Honor is exaggerated at the expense of the real need. We would *like* to see certain things [so] we think they *are*'" (p. 52, emphasis in original).

The Arab "mind" is represented as a unified, finished, static structure, and the Arabic language as a reflection of Arab "psychology": a language of "predilections," "exaggeration," "hyperbole," and "repetition" (pp. 51–53). An Arab, according to Patai, remains captive of this state of mind and language even when he studies other cultures and succeeds

in mastering a foreign tongue. Though some Arab authors may have managed to acquire a true mastery of a European language, including not only its vocabulary, grammar, and style, but also its spirit, they still have difficulty ridding themselves of the Arab linguistic tradition of exaggeration, even when writing in a European tongue (p. 55).

Patai's conclusion: "Arab thought processes are . . . more independent of reality than the thought processes typical of Western man" (p. 311).

Hegemonic Anthropology: Coon and Geertz

Carleton Coon and Clifford Geertz are two anthropologists whose texts accurately reflect the similarities and the differences within Western hegemonic anthropology of the postcolonial period.

Coon's *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East* (1952) reflects the relation between Self and Other as no longer that of European and native (colonialist and colonized), but between the developed industrialized West and the underdeveloped or developing Third World. Though not motivated by the imperialist ideology of Servier or the ambivalent anxieties of Patai, Coon is nevertheless keenly sensitive to the American structure of power on which this relationship is based in its new postcolonial form.

In Coon's perspective, Arab or Middle Eastern society appears as a static, mosaic structure. The concept *mosaic*, the opposite of united or uniform, reflects the implicit contrast between the structure of modern, industrialized societies and the premodern ethnic and religious diversity of Third World societies. Thus such categories as *sect*, *tribe*, *ethnic group*, *village*, *peasant*, *nomad*, and so on become central signifiers in the social and cultural analysis of those societies. On this view, these societies seem to lack an inner core or center: individuals and groups have no distinctive identity and appear only as manifestations of the religious, ethnic, and linguistic mosaic of which they are faceless products. If mosaic traditional society is defined by the lack that differentiates it from Western society, it is this lack that at the same time bestows on it a special symbolic value: "Caravan" becomes a metaphor of a society that offers "wisdom long ago forgotten," "basic truths about man's relations to man," "basic principles of human behavior" (p. 344), and so on.

As an analytical category, changelessness is central to this perspective; Coon is not interested in what might be a basic feature of Middle Eastern society—rapid social change. He wishes to approach Arab or Middle Eastern society or culture "at rest" and to turn away from problems posed by "the newly Westernized Muslim intellectuals" (p. 349). He places "Westernized intellectuals" in quotation marks because they do not represent the authentic traditional, mosaic society to which he assigns value. For him "the automobile and the movies and the parliament and the