

Orientalism provided a theory and science for the subjugation of the colonized



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■ ■ **Anti-imperialism found an indigenous expression in 'Estekbar Setizi' ('Fighting Arrogance') in Ayatollah Khomeini's discourse which, as you observe, was inspired by and based on "his interpretation of Shi'i tradition." Do you see any significant analytical or practical difference between the two concepts besides the theological roots of 'Estekbar Setizi'?**



Ayatollah Khomeini greets supporters after returning to Tehran in February 1979.

Ayatollah Khomeini was first and foremost a clerical revolutionary as I have called him in the only edited book published about him by a prominent university press. In one of the reviews of the book in Iran, I recall it was published in Fars News Agency, the colleague criticised that the book didn't entail a theological perspective. This was largely also due to the fact that in 1978 and in many ways before, Ayatollah Khomeini was a politician, one that was fiercely loyal to his clerical caste, but whose purpose in life ceased to revolve around the seminaries. Indeed, his idea of political Islam reprimanded the clerics who would not march into the presidential offices and who retained their quietist life in the courtyards of the beautiful mosques in Qom, Najaf and Karbala. Ayatollah Khomeini wasn't interested in this life of a theologian. He wanted to conquer the corridors of power. So all his concepts, including "Estekbar Setizi" had a very particular political dimension which was shaped and at times determined by the historical context that he was embedded in. We are all products of time, our biography and the

social, cultural and political factors that shape our life. Ayatollah Khomeini understood very well that it is ideology that can bring about something that theology can't: Revolution for the sake of usurping political power. The concepts that emerged in the lectures on "hokumat-e Islami" are not the same as the ones in Kashf al-Asrar. It's a little bit like the difference between Marx the Young Hegelian and Marx the individual behind the Communist Manifesto. What I am trying to say is, that individuals and their ideas metamorphize and in the case of individuals who want political power they change in a distinctly political direction. I think this is simply logical.

■ ■ **In your writings, orientalism seems to play a wide range of roles in regards to imperialism: Its intellectual equivalent, an extension of it, its sophisticated underpinning, one of its many by-products, and its legacy. How are we to understand the complicated relationship between these two notions?**

On a basic level, Orientalism was a language of imperialism. On a deeper cognitive level and institutional level, it turned the subjugation of the colonised into a theory, a necessity, and a science. It made it possible to rule in the name of a civilisational project, at the helm of which the "west" positioned itself during the fateful Enlightenment which did not only bring about incredible advances, but also the scourge of racism which merged into the Holocaust in Germany. Orientalism afforded to the enlightenment imperialists something that none of the other Empires of human history developed, neither the Inca in Peru, the various Muslim empires, nor Cyrus: It bestowed upon this period of human history the idea that subjugation is not only deserved. It is scientifically necessary for the survival and advancement of mankind. In this way "whiteness" became the yardstick for being a complete and advanced human being.

■ ■ **You observe that "racism was a central legacy of colonialism/imperialism and continues to be a major component in the rationalization of any**

clash with the 'other' in many ways until today." How is racism fuelling or feeding into the more contemporary clashes between the US and the rest?



American soldiers take a picture of a detainee in Abu Ghraib Prison as a joke. The detainee was instructed that he would be electrocuted if he moved.

Racism functions vertically within society in order to keep "the other" down in the name of social order, national security etc. and horizontally it feeds into world politics, increasingly also as malware in algorithmic forms of AI racism, a real threat that I am currently focusing on in my research. But it is equally true to say that we have reached a point where racially charged, civilisational planks that are used to justify wars have ceased to gain much traction. I think the disastrous wars on terror, the despicable torture at Abu Ghraib, the catastrophe in Afghanistan etc., changed the public perception once and for all. It's difficult to go out there and to say that we invade country A, B, or C because the people want democracy, or they are simply backward. The demographic composition of societies in Europe and the United States itself are so beautifully coloured that they do not allow for that type of racism, without a massive backlash. It doesn't mean that they don't try, though, as we can easily gauge for the Trump Presidency. But today racism provokes a good dose of outrage and this is a good thing.

■ ■ **You observe that "an extreme form of neo-imperial logic" formed the US 'shock and awe' campaign in Iraq in 2003: "Superiority had to be**