

"Post-Colonialism and The Crisis of Identity"

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International Workshop *Middle East: Globalization and Development*

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Thank you very much. First of all I want to say that the proceeding speaker, Professor Hirsch has taken around sixty percent of my talk this morning! I agree with his description of what is taking place in the region. I want to make a couple of provisos before I express my views about this issue.

First of all, I am deeply mistrustful of the term "Middle East." I think "Middle East" is an Euro-centric concept and renders the populations derivatives of their identity, whether we're Near East, Middle East, or Far East. So I have serious objections to the term. Although I know that this defective description is widespread in a way which is no longer acceptable, at least among Arabs and other peoples. The region that I would like to include here is not only "Middle East" in the geographic or even geopolitical sense. It includes the region from Mauritania down to Somalia, the Fertile Crescent, Egypt and the whole region what is the Arab national patrimony. Of course within this Arab national patrimony, there are many divisions, due to the fact that Arabs were unable to acquire a unified framework of national liberation. Arabs fought against a variety of colonialists and a multiplicity of levels of colonial control. Hence, there was an intrinsic inability on the part of the Arabs to organize a pan-Arab nationalist movement, although there has been a strong pan-Arab commitments, as in the "Istiqlal" party in Morocco,

the Al-Kutla Al- Watiniya in Syria, the Wafd in Egypt, etc. In a way they were not able to structure and organize a unified Arab national liberation movement in the same way as many others such as the National Congress in India and other similar national liberation movements, which despite the multi-national structure of India, it was one state. In the Arab world it is one nation with twenty-two states. I am, as you know, weary of allowing the term "Middle East" to persist. If it denies the peoples in the region their identity and is intended to dilute the legitimacy of the Arab identity, or Iranian identity, and other legitimate identities. Having made this proviso, what does that have to do with the process of globalization and fragmentation. Let me begin by clarifying some aspects of the narrative and the semantics involved.

A) **"Globalization"** We are living in a historical period where two conflicting simultaneous trends are taking place. The globalization of issues such as environment, women's empowerment, social development, mega-cities and human rights, movement of refugees, disasters, terrorism, all these issues are trans-national. They are global in nature. Simultaneously the fragmentation of many civil societies and states along religious, ethnic, sectarian, tribal, and regional loyalties. The question is how to deal with these conflicting trends? How can we manage the ensuing chaos, in terms of the new emerging "World Order?" The challenging question as it applies to the region we are discussing constitutes one of the most problematic subjects that we face. As we enter the next century, we seem unprepared today to deal with this plethora of complex issues. Hence, it becomes necessary to begin reexamining the terms that achieved currency due to the "CNNization" of information. The "CNNization" means that we can be instantly informed of what takes place everywhere, but in most instances at the expense of analytical knowledge. Our capacity to absorb what is taking place and harness them into knowledge can be indeed a

difficult process. Exposure to information at the expense of analysis constitutes an unlearning process that must be avoided. It is not only important to only learn, but there are so many things we have to unlearn too, as they are unburdened we access knowledge. The term "globalization", has assumed a connotation that everything has become globalized. Why do we use "global" globally? Because "global" is a material and physical description.

The term "the world", which in one way is equal to "globe" in terms of the geographical frameworks includes people, connotes that centrality of people, while "globe" is more geo-economic as it emphasizes the market forces. The whole notion of globalization, addresses, market forces and the term "world" addresses human development. The market forces seek to address the market, issues of economic growth as end in itself. The "world" concept addresses human concerns. This entails focusing economic policies on human development so economic growth becomes an instrument for sustainable development and not its alternative. We have witnessed recently a growing gap between the industrial North and the developing South. This discrepancy exists in that nearly twenty percent of the human population possess or owns nearly 82 percent of the global wealth. This discrepancy continues in its polarizing trend. 1

How do we arrest the drift to further polarization? Do we stop it through the Bretton Woods institutions, which are the instruments of new globalization, or do we stop it by a world organization geared towards equity, equality and equilibrium in the human situation. This is a very difficult question.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, a countervailing force ceased momentarily, we found ourselves in a situation where the global South, of which the Arabs are an integral part, is in a critical period restricted in its contribution to construct adjust world society. To be relevant in shaping an

equitable world we need to answer questions on how to devise organizing instruments for developing countries, how do we take incremental steps towards a modicum of equity in the overall global economy. I am not saying we want to be equal instantly, but at least we must move in that direction. As a matter of fact we have the dynamics to do it, but we do not have a clear sense of direction, as most of the South -and the Arabs- we are presently pulled in several directions at the moment.

The neo-realists say that there is the United States; it is the only superpower and the key to whatever is taking place; its culture is prevalent, its economic influence is the single most important determinant of the global market, its CNN is spreading terminologies which are accepted without question. One might plead with the US, you might even persuade it to change, but in essence, its policy supposedly will prevail. While at times more sophisticatedly expressed, the thrust of the realists is the same. It manifests itself in different ways. The realists maintain that as long as the United States is the sole superpower and its government holds the key to change and that the Arab world is too fragmented in their political attitudes and economic circumstances, then the neo-realists ask why not go directly to the US and if necessary, as with the late President Sadat, go directly to Israel?

This logic goes this way that Israel has "the key" to the United States, so make peace with Israel and then the Americans' doors would be open. Bolstering this argument the United States establishment defines the term "moderate Arab" as the Arab who accommodates America's accommodation of Israel. The "radical" Arabs are those who try to seek redemption of Palestinian rights, the unity of their Arab patrimony, and who mobilize the untapped potentials of the people to break through, and who resist Israeli occupation. These are the "radical" Arabs.

Now this translates in, for example, the Wye and Oslo Agreements. These agreements, bring forward several crucial questions, what is the status of Israel in the West bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem? Are the occupied territories, "occupied"? Does Israel consider itself an "occupier" of the West Bank and Gaza, and East Jerusalem? US official spokesmen, when asked to answer these questions tend to dismiss them as "legalisms". The question that follows is that if Israel is not an "occupier" and thus not accountable to the fourth Geneva Convention, can it therefore be a "claimant power". The extent of the claims might vary among Israeli parties, but there is a "claim." This negates "occupying", which the international community recognizes as the status of the Palestinian and Syrian territories. Israel, on the other hand, never acknowledged that it is an occupying power in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Hence, the term, which you read and hear that Israel is going to "withdraw" from 13.1 percent, etc., is blatantly misleading. Withdrawal is invariably from an occupied territory. When Israel "withdraws", the territories revert to the sovereign prerogatives of the liberated territory. In this case, Israel "redeploys". What does redeployment mean? It means that Israel can re-enter Gaza if it considers its "security" at stake, at will, as it defines its own security. I am using these words "redeployment", "withdrawal", etc., in order to clarify that if you predicate policies on a basic legal distortion, then you affirm the distortions and they become substitutes for reality, legality and facts.

The globalization of issues has rendered the Arabs, in many ways, more in touch with issues they were not necessarily aware of. It has the benefit of networking. It transcends national boundaries, and legitimizes hyphenated identities. You can say, "I am an Egyptian environmentalist," or "I am a Syrian-feminist," or "I am an Iraqi-human rights activist." Becoming a citizen with a hyphenated identity, you are sure that your legal, national identity is

not superseded, but is indeed complemented and, in many instances, reinforced by other globalized identities. Herein lies an opportunity for the enhancement of human potential, as the person is no longer confined to the parameters of state citizenship, but is equipped with the capacity to be a citizen of the world. This is achieved by a commitment to the emerging issues of women's empowerment, human rights, environment, social development and other human concerns. It is in this respect that various UN conferences led to a heightened level of consciousness about the need for interaction on the global level. In this respect, globalization becomes an instrument of plugging humane consciousness into the actual and prevailing political culture, which at this moment is, dominated by the neo-liberals and neo-realists. The neo-realists believe that we have to admit a new power equation wherein the United States is the sole superpower, yet the Arab popular response is that we do not have to submit to its permanency and inevitability. This explains the tension between the neo-realists and the mainstream groups.

Let me go back to the region which we are discussing. The Arab world, or more precisely, the Arab patrimony is a rich nation of poor people. This situation is due to Arab oil production. Oil obviously is a resource required for industrial sustenance and Western technological and economic growth. Yet, there used to be, in the Fifties and Sixties, a slogan which now became "unrealistic", namely, Arab oil for Arab people. A situation however, developed where some Gulf oil producers became strategic dependencies of the West as the West and Japan became dependent on a continuous, regular supply of oil and at a reasonable price. This in turn led to the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council in order to manage collective security requirements a collective policy.

In order to render the Arab region more manageable to face any kind of Arab renaissance and/or

unity, the Camp David Agreements took place. The breakaway of Egypt from its historical role as the catalyst and the arena of interaction between the North African experience of nationalism against the British, the French and the Italians, and the West Asian or Fertile Crescent experience which broke away from the Ottoman Empire and subsequently bore the divisiveness of Sykes Picot Treaty, these developments dissipated energies and fragmented the Arab body politic. Because of Egypt's geopolitical centrality, its population, and its viable institutional infrastructures, it was enabled to be in the forefront of Arab thought, Arab intellectual ferment and Arab culture. Its role was pivotal as it rendered Egypt able to introduce Arab secularism to Arab Islam. This role, although made dormant by the consequences of the Camp David Agreements, can hopefully be established in order to restore Egypt's cross-fertilizing functions in overall Arab community. If Egypt's role is resumed it would remove the current misconception about a conflict between the secular tradition and the formative role of Islam in Arab national and cultural consciousness.

The present ideological polarization is imposed on the narrative of the Arab discourse. In this respect Egypt becomes an Arab necessity and, if I may say, an Islamic necessity too. What is happening now is by introducing false polarization we begin to lose sight of realities that have emerged. Arab secularism is not the laicite of Western European origins. In Islam there is no church. Arab nationalism emerged when the Caliphate in Constantinople became the institutional cover of the "Touraneya", or the Turkization of the Empire at the expense of Arab and other national identities. This led Egypt introduce Islam, as known, in North Africa to secularism in the Arab East not as alien but as a complementarity. This role rendered dynamic and vitalized the movement of Arab nationalism.

Arab nationalism was good in mobilizing, but not in organizing. That remains its contemporary dilemma. It was able to mobilize because there was a ready made constituency cemented by a unity of language, the prevalence of Islam (prevalence not exclusive), prevalence of our ethnic background, all those factors contributed to a community of interest, culture and destiny for the Arabs. This remains the potent glue that keeps bringing Arabs together even in the most adverse circumstances. Sovereignty of the Arab State system was usually questioned, although not threatened. Questioning arose as to why every Arab state needed the Arab League. The answer lay in the inadequacy and insufficiency of the sub-national state identities. In that respect there was always a quest for an Arab identity to be ratified and emboldened.

The Camp David Agreements took place almost simultaneously with the Islamic revolution in Iran. Within that time framework in 1979, the beginnings of a distortion took place that seriously weakened the Arab nationalist project. There was a reintroduction of polarity in the midst of the Arab and Islamic worlds. I) Here is the Sunni President of the largest Arab state going, in a very theatrical manner, to occupied Jerusalem addressing the Knesset and becoming the recipient of the Western kudos and especially from the United States. On the other hand, you had the Iranian "Islamic revolution" of a non-Arab country, basically the only country where the Shiites are the majority, stating that while the President of Egypt goes to occupied Jerusalem the Islamic Revolution of Iran 'is planning to liberate Jerusalem'. Sadat was not able to make the Arab states follow his footsteps. Neo-realists would say that if they had followed they might have gotten a "better deal" than was gotten in Oslo. The Iranian revolution did not liberate Jerusalem although it has contributed to make Israeli occupation in South Lebanon costly.

The polarization made the Arab world realize that its nationalism, although authentic and deep-

rooted, remained flawed because it has been associated with failure in dealing with the Zionist project and it was associated with regimes of oppression, autocracy, and characterized by denial of human rights. Arab nationalism to the new and emerging Arab generations become associated with this distortion. While at present, we seek to reclaim a sense of direction for the revival of Arab nationalism, it becomes imperative that it must be associated with a new discourse, and particularly with struggle for human rights and let the chips fall where they may. A revived Arab nationalism must assume the responsibility for women's empowerment as a matter of belief not as a matter of "concession". Hence, while Arabs organize themselves by a modicum of coordination they can begin to interact with the globalized economic and political trends and render them resonant with peoples aspirations.

We have seen what happened in many developing countries, as in Indonesia, Malaysia and others, when market economies became the criteria of "neo-realisms". We have seen how the concentration of economic power by the United States stimulated rebellion within multi-polar system. The United States is universally recognized as the pivotal power in the world. It must however, begin to realize that is not a unilateral power. The various distortions of secularism in Algeria, and Turkey with the military forces claiming to be the instrument of modernization and the 'custodian' of the state interest brought a reaction in the form of Islamic fundamentalism. Distorted secularism, helped distortion Islam's values in Algeria when reckless killings and massacres took place. Interpretation by the Taliban's concept of Islam is also a deviation. We are living in a period of planned distortions of The Arab national identity as with the term "Middle East", constitutes an attempt to legitimize Israel's conquest at the expense of the national rights of the Palestinian people.

Now I come to one more issue, namely the question of "minorities." And hopefully, it will be discussed in much more detail in the Q&A session, particularly the problem of the Kurds. Let me just reflect for a moment on this subject, as it presents us with a gripping challenge. The Kurds, whether in Syria, Iraq, Turkey, or Iran, are a nationality. It is a much more cohesive nationality than some nationalities that exist throughout the world. Ethically Kurds are entitled to the right of self-determination. If the outcome of self-determination is to have a nation-state called Kurdistan, it would be legitimate. On the other hand, the region is not prepared for providing this right to the Kurds which in turn leads, rightly or wrongly, to a geopolitical explosion. The region is not prepared, indeed reluctant to admit this reality. As a result some Kurdish political groups, became amenable to manipulation by all sorts of outside forces, especially by the United States. The US tries, on the one hand, to cement the nationalist identity of the Kurds in the north of Iraq, but seeking to shield Turkey from the emerging nationalist in of the Kurds in Turkey because Turkey is a NATO member and because Iraq is an adversary regime. This is when a superpower projects power irrespective of other considerations. I think this issue should be addressed in a way that seeks to allow the ethical commitment to keep guiding the pragmatic eventuality of avoiding a geopolitical explosion. Now it is the reverse. Now the geopolitical considerations are inhibiting these countries from listening to Kurdish genuine aspirations. Nobody seems to want to listen. It will upset Turkey, it will break down Iraqi territorial unity, it will ferment trouble in other countries. The Kurds are against Saddam Hussein so the US will use them. Turkey is within NATO, so no help to its the Kurdish minority. We find ourselves in a situation where Kurdish minorities and others such as in South Sudan have become problems. We must seek to avoid their marginalization. This is a serious challenge. So before we discuss globalization, the issues of social development is the key by which we will

insure the human and legal rights in these regions, where minority concentration exist and a regimen of governance that respects their cultural and broad administrative autonomy. State and society especially in this field ought to be partners. It is essential that current narratives about the Arabs do not become pervasive. Attempts to facilitate the capacity for an intellectual breakthrough where the Arabs can face effectively and credibly the challenges arising currently from globalization.

These are reflections which hopefully will further contribute to a genuine understanding between the West and the Arab peoples.