

The Location of Anticolonialism; or, Al-Afghānī, Qāsim Amīn, and Sayyid Quṭb at the Peripheries

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ABSTRACT Recent decades have seen a turn toward colonialism and anticolonial thought in the discipline of political theory. This turn has done the crucial work of bringing questions of dispossession, racialization, and the critical imaginaries of marginalized bodies of thought into the mainstream of the discipline. The expansion, however, has been marked by a tendency to typecast the archive of anticolonial thought with a handful of figures. This article examines the edge of the archive, or three thinkers who are only at its margins. They are Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Qāsim Amīn, and Sayyid Quṭb, each of whom occupies a central place in the archive of modern Islamic thought. The article reads the peripheries of their works, tracing the arcs formed by their incidental references to places around the world, and, ultimately, probing their location in anticolonialism and contemporary critical thought. The article calls this double method of selection and interpretation *periphēria*.

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1. The Edge of the Archive

Recent decades have seen an important turn toward colonialism and anticolonial thought in the Anglo-American discipline of political theory. This turn has done the crucial work of bringing questions of dispossession, racialization, and the critical imaginaries of marginalized bodies of thought into the mainstream of the field. A discipline previously limited to a cast of characters whose collective story could only narrate the arc of European modernity, and whose gathered faces could only but fill in the stylized Leviathan-like silhouette of the West, has been slowly expanding, questioning, and perhaps reconstituting itself. From studies of the imbrication of modern European thinkers with settler colonialism and colonialism to the study of non-European, Indigenous, and minoritized thinkers, the gates of the discipline are no longer as closed.

This expansion, however, has been correspondingly marked by a tendency to typecast a handful of figures (e.g., Du Bois, Fanon, Gandhi) whose names have become synecdochical for anticolonial thought. Thus, anticolonial thought comes to be constituted as another archive of “great thinkers” (or, as often ends up the case, a few luminaries who were [mostly] great). If David Scott noted almost twenty years ago the troubling trend among postcolonial theorists to somewhat ungenerously—and sometimes dismissively—criticize earlier anticolonial thinkers, the disciplinary orientation today has been to canonize.¹ The disciplinary movement toward canonizing a few select thinkers and histories risks reifying the differential inclusion and erasures of an archive. The terms on which historical works and thinkers attain disciplinary sanction, the specific roles they are made to perform, and the historiographic discourses that structure their reception must always be subject to scrutiny; such terms and representations reflect broader operations of power. What unacknowledged histories and assumptions, then, animate the differential inclusion at the margins of the anticolonial archive? What modes and histories of interpretation have been fundamental to that topography and where it locates anticolonialism? How should one read the edges of the archive?

In moving beyond merely expanding a discipline, we must simultaneously account for the conditions that, at some particular moment in history, have placed certain works at the margins of an archive *and* for the interpretive lens and discursive filiations through which that work or some part of it is then read. Put differently, it is important to insist, with Scott, on reading texts in the ruins of the postcolonial present, and reading them, too, as the ruins of a discipline—that is, to read their names as signs partially absorbed into a disciplinary historiographic discourse and to read the texts as containing anticolonial signs that remain partially buried. “Does the moral point of anticolonialism,” Scott asks, “depend on constructing colonialism as a particular kind of obstacle to be overcome? Does the purchase or salience of anticolonialism depend on a certain narrative form, a certain rhythm, and a certain conception of temporality?”² I take these questions to invite us to scrutinize the moral valences and political rhythms of the present, of anticolonialism in the text, and of a discipline’s ongoing attempts to demarcate, produce, constrain, and absorb the anticolonial archive and subject. Alongside Scott’s critical diagnosis of what might be called the will to romance, and alongside his renarration of colonial modernity through the prism of tragedy in order to consider how a thinker deliberately reconstitutes what counts as a problem, there remain the fundamental questions of the constitution of the anticolonial archive itself: what is in it, how to read it, where to locate its problems, and what determines who its legitimate speakers are.

This article examines three thinkers located at the margins of the anticolonial archive. The first is Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–1897), a pan-Islamic modernist

and a cornerstone in the treatment of the Muslim world as a geopolitical unity. The second is al-Afghānī's contemporary, the liberal modernist and jurist Qāsim Amīn (1863–1908), whose social Darwinism advocated the education of women as a means for national progress. The third is the theorist of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Quṭb (1906–1966), often denounced as the ideological inspiration for “Islamic terrorism.” Each is critical of colonialism and its operations; at a minimum, their writings demonstrate the sheer complexity of navigating and theorizing colonialism's structures, audiences, and scales.

The three are also fundamental to the contemporary construction of a canon of modern Islamic thought. The dominant disciplinary lenses and historiographical inheritances through which they have been apprehended keep anticolonialism out of sight; in this landscape, anticolonialism is siphoned off to other fields. Instead, these lenses and inheritances make al-Afghānī a *conspiracist* of esotericism, secularism, and various plots, a thinker who only alleges belief in Islam in front of Muslims but confesses unbelief to a European audience, and whose political activities render any of his allegiances suspect. Although anti-imperial, al-Afghānī's writings are alleged to contain layers of deception toward the masses of colonized Muslims. Meanwhile, Amīn is made into a *client* of European empire, or a Europhile who puts on a show of chastising Europeans and quoting the Qur'ān but exposes his obsession with European progress and himself as a parrot of colonial discourse. Finally, Sayyid Quṭb exemplifies the *religious fanatic*, or the radical Muslim who justifies religious violence and absolutist theocracy, and whose writings have “supplied ideological fuel for militancy in Egypt and beyond for decades.”³

These three roles—conspiracist, client, and religious fanatic—inadvertently push al-Afghānī, Amīn, and Quṭb to the edges of the anticolonial archive. These roles reflect the narrow ways in which their relationships to colonialism and anticolonialism have been read, in favor of evaluations of their piety and how “Islamic” they are. Their writings, however, contain a different kind of engagement with anticolonialism: not a sustained meditation so much as a series of impulses, not a solid line so much as the outline of an ellipse. It is these anticolonial impulses and ellipses that this article excavates. Beyond the construction of al-Afghānī as conspiracist, I excavate his attention to the logistics of colonial conquest. Beyond the image of Amīn as empire's client, I draw out his momentary reflection on how ties with Europe are an instrument of slowly exterminating the colonized. Finally, beyond Quṭb as a fanatic ideologue, I excavate his uses of a lexicon drawn from critical political economy and his critiques of how Orientalism is a colonialist ideology embedded in capitalism. Each of these impulses represents an acknowledgment of structural connections, infrastructural routes, and shared fates across the colonized world; seen at an angle, each example lightly traces the contours of an ellipse,

the arc of which binds together colonial geographies, temporalities, and archives. Each ellipse disrupts the dominant disciplinary choreography to provoke us ultimately into probing the limits of the genealogies of contemporary thought.

As I detail in the next section, I call this double method of selection and interpretation *periphēria*: selecting a work located at the edges of the archive and retroactively excavating the anticolonial circuits and contours at the edges of that work itself. As a mode of selection, a periphēritic reading approaches reception history as a discourse, one that positions a work inside or outside a particular archive. As a hermeneutic, it creates a cross section in each work, closely reading the constellation of places, objects, and analytics that it outlines and tracing contours that seem to point beyond the work's own conceptual structure; excavating such constellations disrupts the work's archival location. This is not to say that al-Afghānī's, Amīn's, or Quṭb's prescriptions or commitments should be endorsed or approached for value instruction. Nor is it to say that they should be central to or even part of a new canon of anticolonialism; a periphēria is a momentary, suggestive, untimely slice of a bigger whole, and thus, I think, uncanonizable if not against canonization itself. Reading periphēritically does, however, challenge the terms on which these thinkers are read; it might also disrupt the investment in canon-building. Regarded from a different angle, the apparently stray or loose threads—in marginal observations or meandering tropes—weave momentary, alternative circuits in texts. In such moments, each text exceeds the limited place that the discipline has allotted it. Reading this way entangles each thinker, like an interloper, in multiple geographic zones, in others' pasts and futures, and in contemporary bodies of thought.

2. *Periphēria*; or, The Contours of the World

Reading Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Qāsim Amīn, and Sayyid Quṭb periphēritically is a double method. As a mode of selection, it challenges their limited archival location and the corollary culturalized roles each is made to exemplify. It disrupts how “Islamic thought” circumscribes the conditions of their appearance and their settled placement at the edge of anticolonialism. In this sense, *periphēria* runs counter to the disciplinary discourses and investments that have structured their reception. Meanwhile, as a method of interpretation, to read *periphēritically* is to turn to the edges of the work, to what appears at its margins, and to excavate the arcs and routes that those peripheral considerations suggest. These arcs lie beyond a disciplinary understanding of Islam as a problem or a solution (whether in these works or in the scholarship surrounding them). They point to routes and connections that may well be authorized by textual invocations of Islam but that do not belong to the text's interventions about the structure of society, law, and political theology. Instead, the arcs disrupt the choreography of disciplinary canonizations and interject new thinkers into the genealogies of contemporary thought.

The ellipse traced by periphereitic reading should be distinguished from *nomos*. In *The Nomos of the Earth*, Carl Schmitt develops the idea of *nomos* as a sharp, solid *line* that marks divisions and distinctions in the language of law.⁴ *Periphereia* is neither an alternative *nomos* nor its negation. To read a text in accordance with the grid of *nomos* is to draw out the central lines carved into the world it represents or calls forth—the lines that provide a “unity of order and orientation” or that structure a political community’s limits, hierarchies, enemies, and modes of engagement.⁵

Alongside the *nomos* that carves the globe is what I have been calling the *periphereia* (pl. *periphereies*), or the contours of the world. These other signatures are sometimes made possible by the divisions of *nomos*, and sometimes they appear on entirely different planes. They do not mark distinct zones so much as temporary routes and momentary connections. If Schmitt’s *nomos* is symbolized as a persistent sharp line, *periphereia* is an ephemeral ellipse. It can be visualized not as lines of division and partition but as arcs, circuits, and contours. The Greek term *periphereia* (circumference, outer surface, contour, arc) referred once to administrative entities and regions, just as *nomos* referred to the administrative subunit in a periphery. Although it is also the word from which the English “periphery” is derived, I do not mean to restate the basic division and hierarchy between metropole/periphery, colonizer/colonized, and legislation/lawlessness: the *nomos* of colonial modernity. When I use the word *periphereia*, its older connection to *nomos* is an invitation to critically see the incomplete routes and half-buried paths webbed around *nomos*, and to hear an echo of the resonances that define the shared fates of those who live in the periphery.

A *periphereia* begins where the text describes a connection to other parts of the world or historical moments that are not otherwise its central stage. The connection does not partition; it uses a common language that makes the distant seem near. By following these references and drawing out the vocabularies, impressions, and contours they inadvertently outline, a periphereitic reading connects the segments of these arcs out of the text and into the present—catapulting the text into contemporary critical thought and concepts, as an interloper in their genealogies. If *nomos* names, a *periphereia* makes a cross section in which the work betrays the role it has been given. If *nomos* divides, a *periphereia* traces distant connections and untimely links. And if *nomos* marks, a *periphereia* disappears from view in gaps that do not quite intersect with the rest. *Periphereies* are not the ruins of an old *nomos*, but they can resemble ruins, like faint carvings and incomplete signs. They are neither a hidden transcript of resistance nor the itinerary of an alternative order. They become visible from a specific angle, through points that do not fit with the rest and whose signs point in a different direction. Their gaps and segments can blink around portions of a *nomos*, sometimes circuitously, to retrospectively and momentarily produce partial resonance or map a circuit along unlikely paths.

At first glance (and even after deep examination), a periphēria does not lead somewhere definite. Its arc culminates in a provocation. Nonetheless, it exceeds both the world that the lines of *nomos* mold and the structures of meaning that a *nomothetic* reading strives to resolve, apprehend, and exhaust.

A *nomothetic* reading searches for coherence, seeks to reconcile contradictions, and diagrams elegant systems. It makes through lines to define the whole. A *periphēritic* reading does not represent the whole; instead of contradictions and arguments, its shift in perspective regards the stray markings of arcs that fade, routes that end, and thin streams that lead to no seas. Al-Afghānī's, Amīn's, and Quṭb's writings can, undoubtedly, be read—and have been read—with a focus on coherence, contradiction, and the whole, alongside their calls for various reforms or a general social blueprint. All this registers across their texts as an engagement with the injustices of European domination and the reconstitution of an Islam that can provide freedom, justice, and progress for Muslims. Thus al-Afghānī invokes an Islam that embraces reason and progress to overcome materialism, imperialism, and secularism. Qāsim Amīn describes an Islam compatible with the Enlightenment, one that finds progress by shedding what he casts as oppressive customs and habits extrinsic to Islam itself. Sayyid Quṭb treats Islam as a singular system that can transform society and restore God's sovereignty. Each of these political theologies occupies an important place in their thought. These readings are not wrong. But they have tended to overshadow other aspects of their writings.

To read *periphēritically* draws on what Alexis Wick calls “slow overreading,” or salvaging the worlds concealed in apparently trivial or quotidian terms—be they phrases, places, events, or citations. Here, too, the distinction between primary and secondary source blurs, in ways that center the text's incidental plays with reality and representation, materiality and literariness.⁶ To anticipate the next sections, such circuits appear when al-Afghānī narrates the travels of those subjects and material objects that constitute the violence of the colonial world: weapons, their invention, their seizure, their itineraries. The circuits lie in momentary resonances and identifications across temporal densities, or when Qāsim Amīn redescribes the elimination of the native through settler colonialism as the slow future of other colonies engaged in colonial trade. The circuits are in the apparent deployment of a critical theoretic vocabulary outside of its discursive terrain, as when Sayyid Quṭb elaborates colonialism as an ideology of knowledge production that relies on missionaries, Orientalists, and dependency. To read the texts *periphēritically* is to focus on unconventional moments that reimagine the archive and “undiscipline” al-Afghānī, Amīn, and Quṭb as interlopers in conversations about the logistics of militarized empire, genocide and trade, and Orientalism and dependency theory. In these moments, each seems to see, through an “Islamic” discourse, the shared fates, futures, and idioms of the colonized.

3. Beyond Conspiracist: Al-Afghānī and Armies

Much of the Anglophone scholarship on Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī has focused on explaining ambivalences and contradictory statements across his works, particularly when he seems to say different things to different audiences, and sometimes reading them against the backdrop of his political activity and allegiances. The result has been the construction of al-Afghānī as a conspiracist involved in a dizzying array of intrigues, in which the sincerity of his piety is at stake. From his uncertain national origins to his “rather obscure” activities in India, Istanbul, and Russia, from the ideas that he was secretly a Freemason, a freethinking atheist, or a dissimulating elitist, to the undecidability between the Orientalist presumption that al-Afghānī only spoke honestly about Islam when he confessed its shortcomings to a European audience or the opposite view that his apology had, in fact, “duped” Europeans into seeing him as an ally, some interpreters have—and not always without reason—read his writings and life as a menagerie of conspiracies.⁷

Scholars tend to point to the divergences across two sets of al-Afghānī’s texts. The first is an 1881 essay titled *Ḥaqīqat-e Mazhab-e Naychirīye va bayān-e ḥāl-e Naychirīyān* (*The Truth of the Naturalist Sect and an Explanation of the Naturalists*), which was translated into Arabic some years later as *al-Radd ‘alā al-dahrīyīn* (*Refutation of the Materialists*).⁸ There, al-Afghānī attacked philosophical positions that explain the world without reference to a transcendent God. He argued that Islam is the religion of reason and transcendence. The second set of documents were written seven years later. The famous anti-Semitic philologist Ernest Renan delivered a lecture in Paris on the racial inferiority of Islam and its incompatibility with science. Al-Afghānī wrote two separate responses published two weeks apart.⁹ The former, a three-paragraph editorial in Arabic, observed that Renan, although polite, had been thoroughly criticized by other French intellectuals who rushed to defend Islam; al-Afghānī redirected attention to English Protestant missionary and colonial activity in India as the real threat. The latter was a longer reply in French that affirmed European progress and argued for the ability of Muslim society to develop and for Muslims to be enlightened but conceded that religion could cause decline and stifle reason. As Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss note, “al-Afghani’s critique all too readily accepted the false premise that European superiority was based on science and reason—rather than on economic and military might derived from the Atlantic slave trade—because he shared Renan’s concepts of time and civilization.”¹⁰ Renan himself responded positively, apparently flattered. Meanwhile, al-Afghānī’s student and collaborator Muḥammad ‘Abduh is said to have written privately to al-Afghānī, confessing that it was fortunate that his attempt to find a translator for the French article had failed; religion should only be criticized from the point of view of religion, and were al-Afghānī to look at them, he would only see pious men. Guided by his shifts in emphasis, al-Afghānī’s interpreters have sought to discern his true intentions,

religious and political agendas, and loyalties, especially his views on Islam and progress. With a handful of exceptions, the debate has treated his anticolonial thought as secondary to his personal piety or “anti-Western” views, with untenable assumptions about scholars’ access to authorial intent and sincerity.¹¹

Furthermore, in privileging those sets of documents, the debate has largely treated the content of the journal that al-Afghānī founded and wrote with Muḥammad ‘Abduh in Paris in 1884 as unimportant.¹² That has been the case even though the journal is widely recognized as “the first pan-Islamic” serial publication and exemplary of the modern formulation of an essentialized Islamic civilization and identity.¹³ The journal ran for just under eight months and had a total of eighteen issues. It was called *al-‘Urwa al-wuthqā* (*The Surest Bond*).¹⁴ Its title adapts a Qur’ānic phrase to interpellate its readers as sharing in the strongest solidarity, one that took shared Muslim identification as the basis for anticolonial resistance.¹⁵ The journal’s articles move from brief commentaries on Qur’ānic verses to updates on European activity in the Muslim world—especially British activity—to analyses of social and political issues across these territories, with a frequent Egypt-centrism. The authors explain the focus on Egypt thus: “Muslims on any plot of land are concerned with the question of what happens in Egypt. In fact, their souls are overtaken by grief whenever they see or hear that a foreign soldier roams in its direction, whether to fight or to defend. The significance of Egypt, for them, is not that of some other countries. It is the center of Islam [*buhrat al-Islām*] and the gate to the sacred places of Mecca and Medina.”¹⁶

By focusing on this journal’s content, the remainder of this section offers a periphereitic reading of al-Afghānī. Whereas the fixation on al-Afghānī’s interiority—that is, his belief or unbelief—facilitates his construction as conspiracist, reading the edges of the journal’s articles outlines a different conspiracy—namely, the infrastructural traces of European colonialism. In the fourth issue of the journal, published on April 3, 1884, in an article whose title quotes a Qur’ānic verse about discernment and taking heed, the authors reframe the civilizational comparison between Islam and Christianity. In the process, the article inadvertently provincializes the civilizational discourse, displacing it with attention to the materiality of conquest. God, the article begins, created humans with the ability to learn, make things, innovate, and invent. Following a lengthy philosophical discourse on human nature, the article suddenly shifts: “That said, the topic of our discussion now is the Christian community and the Islamic community.”¹⁷ Christianity, it goes on, is “the peaceful religion” and the religion of love and submission that preaches turning the other cheek. Islam, on the other hand, is built on the pursuit of victory, valor, conquest, and glory; it refuses any rule and any government that do not accord with its laws and ordinances. Whoever reads the Qur’ān, the article says, would reasonably assume that Muslims are world leaders in the arts of war and

inventors of all new weapons. And yet, in the course of their development, Christianity and Islam have traded places.¹⁸ Thus European Christendom has become the most adept in the arts of war:

Whoever compares the two religions will be baffled at how the Krupp and Mitraillease cannons were invented by the children of the former religion rather than the latter; with how the Martini-Henry rifle would be found in the lands of the former before the others! How it ruled fortresses, equipped ships with arms and armor, and seized the seas' straits with the forearms of the people of safety and peace, and not the people of victory and war.¹⁹

Christendom, it turns out, is the religion of war and conquest; or rather, those who regard themselves as its heirs are the people of conquest. A civilizational comparativism concerned with extracting politics out of scripture and religion misses this dynamic. The invention of advanced weaponry and mastery of the arts of war constitutes an ellipse that arcs outside the journal's usual cartography of "the Muslim world" and exceeds the scholarly discourse about al-Afghānī's intentions.

The Krupp cannon is one such segment along this ellipse. Consider the discussions of Tonkin's conquest by the French, both for the reappearance of the Krupp cannon and the transregional map they outline. In its second issue, from March 20, 1884, the journal turns the reader's gaze outside the relations of European colonizer and Muslim colonized. The article is titled "The French in Tonkin." It reads:

Months have passed while the French have waited to see where their armies' movements in Tonkin will lead. They were about to doubt whether the outcome would be good until a telegraph came to the Secretary of War [*nāzir al-jihādīya*] in Paris from the commander in chief that the French soldiers had entered Bắc Ninh along a path that leads to Lạng Sơn. The Chinese were defeated and pushed toward Ninh Bình, at which point the French attacks on them intensified both from the north and the east. They suffered severe losses. Meanwhile, the French carried away no more than seventy men. The French armies also took a large quantity of provisions and *an entire battery of Krupp cannons* which they found in the Bắc Ninh citadel.²⁰

This periphery does not end there. A new point will have been charted because, after all, the French forces captured an entire battery of Krupp cannons—and what does the colonizer do with captured Krupp cannons if not deploy them elsewhere? The cannons raise the specter of a militarized empire whose conquests bind distant places together. Indeed, the article ends by pivoting to Egypt: "In our estimation, conquests such as this one neither help the French forget their grief nor console them over what they lost in Egypt. The bandage does not mend those wounds."²¹

It implies that French violence in Southeast Asia is a reaction to having lost Egypt and that France's colonial desires—and trauma—continue to pose a threat. Egypt is the apparently irreplaceable prize. The conquest of Tonkin performed French imperial power; the expedition itself is the consequence of the empire's earlier loss.

The rare moment represented by this article sketches a different set of global resonances. The connections are largely unelaborated, beyond the line about French sorrow and anxiety over Egypt fueling its colonization elsewhere and the allusion to captured weapons and provisions empowering further colonial conquest.²² In the next issue, the journal surveyed the Anglo-French colonial rivalry. French newspapers, *al-Afghānī* and *ʿAbduh* report, finally understand the motives behind British colonial actions in Egypt. French newspapers have asked their government to militarily occupy the island of Disei, off the coast of Eritrea in the Dahlak Archipelago in the Red Sea; authorities in Massawa protested, echoing the British War Secretary's claim that the coasts of the Red Sea are the road to India, the centerpiece of the British Empire. They continue: "However, we can even say that it is the road to Tonkin [northern Vietnam], Cochinchina [southern Vietnam], and Madagascar. And, even more, occupying that island is one of the most important requirements for monitoring the ban on the slave trade, as dictated by the treaty between us and England."²³

The resonances and momentary strokes here can be read peripheretically. These sites and military objects shift the journal's orbit from Egypt and "the Muslim world" to other colonizations. These connections bring a new view to the surface. First, the cartography that these articles outline exceeds both *al-Afghānī*'s interiority and pan-Islamic solidarity. To read *al-Afghānī* peripheretically is to connect the momentary resonances and the circulations they put into play. The resonances then provide a parallax viewpoint that plots Egypt, Tonkin, and Dahlak on the same map. From this viewpoint, the route by which colonialism secures its hold can be more broadly charted. It makes visible an ellipse in which the colonized—in Disei, Egypt, Tonkin, India, China, Madagascar—share a fate.

Indeed, two of the French brigades involved in Tonkin were led by generals who had served in Senegal and who had suppressed an anticolonial rebellion in Algeria. The travels of the generals and their regiments violently bind China and Africa, tracing the political form of colonial military suppression. Their coordinates do not determine the territorial boundaries of an empire; rather, like points on a grid, the generals' itineraries trace a periphēria: the conquest of Tonkin calls up Senegal and Algeria, rebellion and suppression.

The articles lightly trace the connections between sites of colonial violence, rebellion, and anxiety. Their reports inadvertently point to the temporalities of military campaigns, from the invention of the Krupp cannon as the other face of a discourse about "Islamic violence," to the global travels of colonial military officials

and their units, to the circulation and redeployment of military technologies. To read these articles peripheretically is to connect the logistics of colonial violence and the named sites that this violence binds together. It is to find in al-Afghānī's allusions to the circulation of Krupp cannons a theorization of militant empire and a diagnosis of its anxious insatiability; it is to see his references to the invention of the Krupp cannon as exemplifying discussions of colonial hypocrisy, in which the colonizer champions the rhetoric of loving peace while, in fact, increasing the destructiveness of war. The two come together in a political theology that enables and obscures a colonial political economy: the incessant repetition of a secularized civilizational commitment to peace serves to deny imperial militarization and plunder; *and*, at the same time, the naturalized description of an Islamic devotion to violence serves to shore up the claim that religious and civilizational difference distinguishes the colonized Muslim from the colonizer and from other colonized peoples—even as the itineraries of plunder say otherwise.

4. Beyond Client: Qāsim Amīn and Annihilation

The liberal jurist Qāsim Amīn accepted a notion of “progress” and philosophies of history that treat Europe as the standard and non-European peoples as occupants in the “waiting room” of history.²⁴ As with the Enlightenment-era developmentalist discourses fundamental to the writings of John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, Amīn's developmentalism translates geographic diversity into historical sequence: difference points to lag. The progression of human development divides the world into developed and undeveloped, civilized and uncivilized, modern and premodern. According to his social Darwinism, Muslims must modernize.

Thanks to Leila Ahmed's important work in the 1990s, and Albert Hourani's in the 1960s, it is now widely recognized that Amīn was never the “father of Egyptian feminism.”²⁵ When he called for the education of Egyptian women, it was because he considered it integral to the nation's progress. In his three major works, he argued in favor of the education of women as something necessitated by history and authorized by Islam. As with al-Afghānī's response to Renan's lecture, Amīn's *Les égyptiens* (1894)²⁶ is a response to a European: Charles François Marie d'Harcourt's *L'Égypte et les égyptiens* (1893). D'Harcourt had described Egyptian backwardness and insisted that progress and reform in Egypt were impossible.²⁷ Amīn replied that progress was possible and ongoing. A few years later, Amīn published two books in Arabic: *Tahrīr al-mar'a* (*The Liberation of Women*, 1899), which offered an interpretation of Islam and the Qur'ān in support of women's rights, and then a response to critics, *al-Mar'a al-jadīda* (*The New Woman*, 1900).²⁸

The scholarship on Amīn has focused on his views about Islam and gender, treating them as symptomatic of colonial discourse. Because his engagement with Islamic history and the Qur'ān appears primarily in *The Liberation of Women*,

scholars have approached it with suspicion. Meanwhile, his admiration for Europe and his reliance on European sources and examples are apparent in *Les égyptiens* and *The New Woman*. It is little surprise then that the scholarship has been defined by Leila Ahmed's admonishment that not only is Amīn *not* the father of feminism but that he is in fact "the son of [the British colonial administrator in Egypt, Lord] Cromer and colonialism."²⁹ As I have shown elsewhere, in this Ahmed follows both Amīn's critics in early twentieth-century Egypt and his admirers in Europe who took his enthusiasm for European philosophy, technology, and society to indicate that he was a client of empire.³⁰

Amīn's criticisms of the European imperial presence in Egypt generally appealed to a developmental teleology in order to assert Egypt's place in it. On the one hand, progress is a law of nature: as he says to d'Harcourt, no nation is immune to "the law of perfectibility that governs the whole universe. And did not nineteenth-century France have this past as we now do?"³¹ The crucial difference between the colonized world and Europe's precolonial Middle Ages is Europe—or rather, the absence of Europe. Rather than the Eurocentrism that sees in European hegemony evidence of its greater worth, Amīn asserts that "Egypt has before it a formidable obstacle: it is Europe."³² European rule, not Islam, it turns out, is the arbitrary, absolutist despotism that the colonized must overcome: "Europe has been the one and the biggest obstacle against which we have been struggling to regain our place in the world."³³

On the other hand, in *The Liberation of Women* and in *The New Woman*, Amīn affirms that there are no obstacles preventing Egyptians specifically and Muslims broadly from progress. All that is needed, he argues, is a return to what he identifies as Islam's "original" commitment to gender equality by shedding all pre-Islamic and non-Islamic customs, together with a commitment to self-improvement. Egypt, he writes, faces absolutely no obstacles—certainly not Europe—except the lack of hard work: "There are no obstacles preventing us from walking on this path of salvation except for those in ourselves."³⁴ He intensifies the apology in *The New Woman*, responding acerbically to Egyptian critics who found him too Europhilic: if Europeans had intended to truly harm Egypt, he says, they would have simply left Egyptians to their own devices.³⁵

But in between these claims about Europe, Egypt, and the temporality of progress, Amīn momentarily offers a different description of colonialism. This other description begins with a social Darwinian understanding of the European presence in Egypt. Amīn then resituates this presence in relation to European actions across the globe. To read these passages peripheretically means tracing the resonances across the places they gather. The descriptions, I suggest, outline different kinds of colonialism only to inadvertently disrupt the belief that they have radically divergent horizons.

Amīn affirms God as the author of social Darwinian human development around the globe. He invokes the “law of mutual competition for survival [*qānūn al-tazāḥum fī al-ḥayāt*]” as if it is an Islamic doctrine: “It is an instinct with which God endowed every species in order to enable it to advance toward perfection. Members who prove too weak in the competition for dominance against their opponents disappear, eliminated from existence and vanishing into nothingness. Meanwhile, God grants clear victory to the one who emerges stronger in the competition; he returns from the fields of perpetual battle, his triumph evidence of his superiority and distinction over others in his species.”³⁶ He describes the steady advancement of European colonialism, in which the Egyptian colonial story is only one small part of a planetary structure:

Our nation [Egypt] has never gone through an age when it faced as much danger as it does now. The civilization of Western nations advances with the momentum of steam and electricity, until it has spread from its origin to every part of the inhabited world. There is not an inch on which it hasn’t stepped foot. Whenever it enters a place, it appropriates the sources of its wealth, such as agriculture, industry, and commerce. There is no method that it has not deployed in order to benefit itself, regardless of any harms it inflicts on all the original inhabitants of those regions.³⁷

Within this apparently natural struggle, he gives European conquest and resource extraction an itinerary. Egypt is of a kind with India, Algeria, China, and Zanzibar: “In fact, what drives the English to reside in India, the French in Algeria, the Russian in China, and the German in Zanzibar is a love for profit and the desire to gain riches from countries that have treasures but whose inhabitants neither understand their value nor the means to benefit from them!”³⁸

Amīn continues, drawing a distinction between two varieties of European colonialism. One variety is the elimination of the native:

If they encounter a primitive nation, no matter how wretched it is, they either exterminate its people and destroy them [*abādū ahlakā wa-ahlakūhum*], or they remove them from their land [*ajlawhum ‘an arḍihim*]. This is what happened in America and Australia, and it is happening right now in Africa, where one finds no trace of the original inhabitants of the areas that the European has occupied, for they either left on their own or were forced to leave.³⁹

Meanwhile, the other variety follows a more indirect route. Instead of outright dispossession, it is slow appropriation; instead of displacing or quarantining the colonized, the colonizers commingle with them, befriend them, and gradually

seize all key sites of economic development. As time passes, the colonizers grow in power while the colonized become weaker and weaker. Amīn writes:

If they encounter a nation like ours, in which there had previously been some kind of civilization, with a past, religion, laws, manners, customs, and something of elementary organizations, they mingle with the inhabitants, cooperating with them, and living with them on friendly terms. After only a short time passes, you'll definitely find that those who came [*al-qādimīn*] have seized the most important sources of wealth. This is because they have the most money, intellect, knowledge, and power. So they advance [*yataqaddamūn*] every day. And the more they advance in [also: come to] these countries, the more backward [or: underdeveloped] become the original inhabitants.

The descriptions of the two modes of colonization roughly map onto some key elements of “settler colonialism” and “colonialism,” or eliminating the natives to replace them as opposed to seizing resources and institutions perhaps with the ruse of benefiting the colonized, respectively. On the one hand, Amīn's insistence on Egypt's relative superiority to other colonized spaces reflects an anxious comparativism. A nomothetic reading would hold fast to Amīn's civilizational hierarchy and fold these passages into his developmentalism: there is no way out, only a way forward, and it is to develop, catch up to Europe, and strive to become a colonial power, too. His investment is symptomatic of the desire to not be on the very bottom of the racial hierarchy of oppression. It would seem that Amīn can be reassured of Egypt's civilizational status thanks to the means of dispossession that Europeans pursue.

On the other hand, the European encounter traces an ellipse in which the colonized—across Africa, America, Australia, and Asia—share the same eventual outcome. Reading the descriptions peripheretically, we might see that settler colonialism and colonialism are two lanes along the same highway of extinction and destruction. Their juxtaposition inadvertently provincializes European discourses of civilizational difference among the colonized, in which the strategies are supposed to reflect a difference in the civilizational status of the colonized, because at the end of the day they converge: no matter the method, the colonized face the threat of absolute dispossession and total annihilation. Whether it is at the hands of soldiers or merchants is secondary. The difference is temporal, and indeed, only temporary. It is located in the respective relations between colonizer and colonized, colonist and land.

In one model, the colonizer is a predator. In the other, the colonizer is a parasite. In both, the colonizer consumes the colony's resources, land, and population. Each is a form of dispossession; they are distinguished in terms of visibility, intensity, and temporal density. They have the same telos: annihilation. The difference

between the oppositions settler/native and colonizer/colonized shrinks when they are recast as tactics with the same potential outcome.

Reading Amīn peripheretically tracks how his concern with Europe as either an obstacle or aid to progress frames the colonial relation as being about time. But the time of development is underwritten by the temporalities of European global dispossession, or a political economic structure that goes to different places, differentiates their civilizational status, and brings them along different tempos into the same frame of annihilation. This periphēria injects Amīn as interloper into the genealogies of theorizing colonial dispossession and the history of its distribution of necropolitical formations around the globe.⁴⁰ On the one hand, European advancement dispossesses even as it presents itself as offering tutelage. And, as Amīn implies to d’Harcourt, European modernity would have been impossible had Europe been confronted with a version of its later self, in the way that colonized societies face a despotic obstacle called Europe. This is the case whether the colonist acts as predator or parasite; Europe would have been impossible, swiftly or slowly, directly or indirectly, visibly or quietly, all depending on how its hypothetical colonizer had read its relative civilizational status.

On the other hand, America, Australia, and South Africa are coordinates on the same colonial map as Egypt and all other colonies, and they *all remain coordinates* on the same plane, as candidates for annihilation. British and French colonialism in Egypt refers to the possibility of annihilation and to the colonizer’s drive to eliminate the native.⁴¹ The anxious comparativism turns on itself when, as colonialism continually extracts and pushes the formerly semicivilized colony “backward,” it becomes a candidate for the other path, namely displacement and elimination. Genocide in America is the future of Egypt, settler-colonial dispossession the future of colonialism. Indeed, the fact that the history of colonialism is rife with episodes of massacre, quarantine, and displacement, and the fact that settler colonialism often has colonists searching out friendships, dealings, and cooperation with the native, further underscore the interchangeability of the tactics, or how the trajectories are interlocked.⁴² The ellipse flashes in America and Egypt, in Australia and India, to braid together the colonial tactics of violence, progress, and demands for “nonviolence” through self-improvement. Whether noting predatory or parasitical relations, the periphēria outlines an itinerary of annihilation at changeable speeds.

The temporality and geography that this ellipse traces also turns the colonial basis of state-of-nature discourse inside out.⁴³ Rather than a precivilizational past that is saved by Europeans introducing security or money, the state of nature—or, scarcity, insecurity, famine, war, and status outside history—is the future of *all* colonies. Colonialism *makes* the state of nature; that is, the “state of nature” is not what precedes European colonialism but is the very condition that European

colonialism produces, sometimes slowly and even where it seems to be moving a colony toward progress, until the colonized and the native are eliminated. Egypt, then, is the past of Europe—a past that contemporary Europeans derail. Egypt's future is dispossession as in America, at the hands of Europeans. And the fate of Egypt is shared with India and Algeria, China and Zanzibar, and the Indigenous peoples of America, Australia, and South Africa.

5. Beyond Fanaticism: Sayyid Quṭb and Orientalism

Sayyid Quṭb is known as the main theorist of twentieth-century Islamism. He is often considered to have been the intellectual backbone of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s. During his imprisonment by the Egyptian state starting in 1954, he wrote his political tract, *Signposts along the Road* (1964), and a multivolume commentary on the Qur'ān. Both prior to and during his imprisonment, he wrote a number of other books and articles that reflected his preoccupation with Islam as a comprehensive ideological system, the sovereignty of God, and Islam as a solution to social injustice, economic inequality, colonialism, and war.⁴⁴ As I discuss elsewhere, he also called in the early 1950s for the formation of an Islamic federation that would police the globe against the injustices of colonial powers, as a kind of militant humanitarianism of the colonized in the name of universal peace; this strand of his thought has tended to be underexplored.⁴⁵ After 9/11, and primarily in relation to *Signposts* and the Qur'ānic commentary, he became better known around the world as an inspiration for al-Qaeda and “global jihad,” as well as for having reconceptualized *jāhiliyya* to mean that the contemporary world's ignorance mirrors the time before the advent of Islam.⁴⁶ Quṭb is regularly identified with revolutionary ardor. As John Calvert puts it, Quṭb's belief in an elite vanguard and refusal to compromise “resembled the nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary Chernyshevsky and, later, Lenin.” He had “imbibed and repackaged in Islamic form the Jacobin characteristics of the European revolutionary tradition.”⁴⁷ Even so, in the vast literature on Quṭb, his writings have only very rarely been treated in relation to anticolonialism and the critical analysis of capitalism, empire, Orientalism, and the postcolonial state.⁴⁸ In scholarly and popular discourses, then, Quṭb has come to exemplify the religious fanatic; the phrase “radical thinker” is often used to describe him, but with none of the positive connotations the word has when attached to non-Muslim thinkers.⁴⁹

This section traces the ellipse formed by Quṭb's momentary reflections on the politics of representation in relation to the Korean War, Yugoslavia, and Orientalism in two of the books that he published in 1951: *Ma'rakat al-Islām wa-l-ra'smāliyya* (*The Battle of Islam and Capitalism*) in January and *al-Salām al-‘ālamī wa-l-Islām* (*Universal Peace and Islam*) in October. When he offers a list of Islam's enemies, I read the list peripheretically, to draw out an arc that puts Quṭb's observations

about representation in dialogue with a critical political economy of Orientalism and colonialism. Thus rather than Quṭb the fanatic ideologue, there is a different “radical” thread palpable in this cross section of his thought, one that treats “fanaticism” as a colonial discourse and diagnoses its workings.

In *Universal Peace*, Quṭb observes that the American intervention in Korea reveals the violent, colonial truth of a self-styled democratic bloc. “The war drums are beating,” he writes, as they have been “even before the outbreak of the Korean War. Everyone who lived in America during the last two years has realized with clarity that America will wage war.” He continues, “Anyone who followed American journalism, as well as other propaganda apparatuses such as radio and cinema—and even in universities and colleges—realized with clarity that this is a nation preparing to wage war—war in the near future—and that it is packing public opinion [with this idea] and preparing it fully, completely, comprehensively.”⁵⁰ The war is coming because “the heads of American capital are in dire need of a new war.”⁵¹ They engage in massacres, “no matter how much their propaganda waves around the names of ethical principles and humanitarian goals.”⁵² Meanwhile, in *Islam and Capitalism*, Quṭb observes that Yugoslavia reveals the truth about communism: it is a means for Russia to exercise absolute control over its neighbors rather than a form of principled solidarity.⁵³ America in Korea, Russia in Yugoslavia, and both blocs in Palestine exemplify colonial hypocrisy.⁵⁴ Quṭb’s 1953 essay “Principles of the Free World!” likewise observes that the name “the free world” is a cover for colonialism: in Tunisia, Marrakesh, Kenya, and Vietnam, the free world “rips apart the skin of ‘freedom,’” and it “strangles ‘free people’ everywhere.”⁵⁵

This view of colonial discourse, rhetoric, and misrepresentation as tactics across the globe produces a geography in which North Africa and the Middle East, Eastern Europe and East Asia, and Africa and Southeast Asia are all bound together. Reading this concern with representation peripheretically draws attention to “Islamism” outside the disciplinary tendency to silo it off from the orizations of colonialism and anticolonialism. Taking Quṭb’s terminology as segments of this ellipse, as somewhere between quiet citation and adaptation, gestures toward Islamism’s filiations and genealogies in critical political economy and the cultural politics of empire. Likewise, the seemingly stray terms in Quṭb’s critiques of the political economy and cultural politics of representations of Islam in *The Battle of Islam and Capitalism* can be read as interpolating him between bodies of knowledge.

The two penultimate chapters of *The Battle of Islam and Capitalism* form an arc. The first of these, “Doubts about the Rule of Islam,” enumerates caricatures of Islam, whereas the second, “Enmities toward the Rule of Islam,” describes different antagonisms. The six “doubts” are Islam’s primitivism, the authority of shaykhs and dervishes, tyranny and torture, the vagueness of scripture, harems, and the oppression

of minorities. Quṭb's selection is important today because these six reflect the definition of Islam as the antithesis of modernity, liberalism, freedom, and civilization. Thus the idea that Islam seeks to "return" to the seventh century, to tents in the desert, casts it not simply as lagging or obsolete but as a destructive refusal of modernity.⁵⁶ Quṭb writes:

Many confuse the historical background of Islam and the idea of Islam on its own, which is receptive to expansion and inclusion in terms of its ramifications and applications. When those people hear the phrase, "the rule of Islam," images of primitive tents in the desert leap to their imaginations, as well as images of Bedouins trekking on camels or Arabs living in caves. They naively imagine that the meaning of Islamic government is a return to that simple, naive way of life that lacks any element of human civilization that emerged over the course of fourteen centuries! So there would be no architecture and no urbanization, no manufacturing and no commerce, no science and no art—not even poetry, that most authentic of Arab art forms. That group of people imagines that the rule of Islam would seal up the mouths of those who declaim and recite poetry, unless they transformed it into religious sermonizing and didactic poems on Arabic grammar.⁵⁷

Quṭb responds that an idea is not the same thing as its historical origins or historical development. In the process, his arguments provincialize discourses about Islam that reinscribe a series of resilient tropes and caricatures. For example, he asserts that "harems" were a specifically Turkish institution, one that was un-Islamic.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the negative image of religion's oppression of minorities and its torturing, imprisonment, or killing of artists and thinkers arose not from Islam but from the practices of the Spanish Inquisition, which have since been exported to present-day governments in the name of religion in Muslim lands.⁵⁹ He situates these "doubts" in relation to discourses about Islam that entail a set of generalizations, misrepresentations, and projections. This repertoire of "doubts" entails imagining Islam as a specific temporalization, oppression, or atrocity. It finds its complement in the "fake Islamic rule" that colonialism and communism permit in order to serve as "negative models" to repel people from Islam.⁶⁰

The repertoire of "doubts" has enjoyed a long life, centuries before Quṭb started writing, and it remains decades after his death.⁶¹ To read Quṭb's enumeration of these doubts peripheretically means regarding the list and his own language from an angle at which their significance is not exhausted by his own claims about the authentic and true Islamic essence; the doubts need not be folded into his convictions about what Islam *actually* is. Instead, their significance is in the ellipse they trace, or how they make the critique of Orientalism a part of Quṭb's thought even if he does not name it, and how they insert Quṭb's thought in the lineage of critiques

of Orientalism. The repertoire of tropes belongs, after all, to a series of Orientalist discourses and interests. His own critique is about how representation and stereotype masquerade as knowledge.

The following chapter, on different enmities toward Islam, can similarly be read to relocate Quṭb in relation to anticolonialism and its bodies of thought. Quṭb differentiates these enemies under six headings: crusaders; colonists; exploiters and oppressors; professional men of religion; the uninhibited and immoral; and communists. These different external and internal enemies, sometimes competing and sometimes complementing each other, “converge in their shared interest around driving Islam away from ruling in [ordinary] life.”⁶² The convergence among these different enemies represents how knowledge production and discourses about Islam are interlocked with violent dispossession across the globe.

The first enemy is the crusader. According to Quṭb, “the modern crusaders” reflect a fundamental transformation in Christianity from “individual religious belief” to a “nationalist banner.”⁶³ When Europeans and Americans call for “protecting Christian civilization from communism’s assaults, just as they had against fascism and Nazism, they do not mean Christian belief as a religion. They mean Christian nations as homelands and nationalisms.” Christian teachings are largely irrelevant to the intensifying “calls in the name of Christian civilization.” For the crusaders, “Christianity is only a screen [*sitār*] that they put up in order to mobilize armies to defend all Christian countries.”⁶⁴ Along this ellipse, I read Quṭb as accidentally offering a genealogy of Christianity and secularism, in which a religious Christian identity makes way for and is replaced by a racialized and ambiguously secularized crusading structure in the form of civilizationism.

It is also a genealogy of a theological excess in the colonial enterprise and in the language of the international. The foreign policies of the Western bloc, he says, cannot be reduced to colonialism. The argument that “colonial machinations and personal interests alone are what move England and America” fails to apprehend that “the spirit of the crusades is concealed behind colonialist politics as well, fueling its outward elements and strengthening them.”⁶⁵ Thus colonial attempts to seize Jerusalem do not do so blatantly in the name of the crusades, but in the name of “internationalization [*al-tadwīl*].” By pitting Arab mini-states and their various elites against each other, the colonists, crusaders, and communists become unlikely allies working to seize Palestine.⁶⁶

At the same time, Quṭb agrees with the crusaders’ construction of Islam, and here *he* himself is part of the lineage of a long history of Orientalists. The crusaders, he asserts, acknowledge that Islam is the only religion that threatens them (which communists acknowledge too, he later says). Unlike Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism, which are “national religions that do not wish to expand outside their nations and adherents,” modern crusaders speak of the “march” of Islam and how

it “expands on its own.”⁶⁷ Like Christianity, Islam is a missionary religion with a universalizing project, whereas these others are “particular” religions. Whether Quṭb is recounting Hegel’s views about Islam as competitor to Christianity, or later Orientalists who went from classifying Islam as a particular Semitic religion to a universal one,⁶⁸ the trope finds a vessel in the Orientalist Bernard Lewis some fifty years later.⁶⁹ For Lewis, the permanent, continuous conflict between the only two universalistic and expansionary religions is the “clash of rival civilizations” (a phrase later popularized by Samuel Huntington). Whereas Lewis treats the idea of a permanent war between Islam and Christendom (in which Palestine was always ground zero) as an objective truth, Quṭb observes that belief in the claim vivifies the crusaders’ worldview and ambition. Perhaps unwittingly, Lewis performs and hews surprisingly close to Quṭb’s gloss on crusaders; and, perhaps also unwittingly, Quṭb reproduces the same structure he attributes to crusaders when he treats European settler colonialism in Palestine as the expression of a historically continuous crusaders’ desire. Quṭb’s description of Islam in relation to “world religions” and global competition inadvertently connects these moments—and his own use of them—within a long history of Orientalism.

The second enemy is the colonizer. “It is difficult,” Quṭb acknowledges, “to separate the enmity of the crusades toward Islam and the enmity of colonialism. Each nourishes the other; they support and justify each other.”⁷⁰ If the crusader relies on the tropology of a world historical battle between two mutually hostile universalisms, the colonizer more directly promotes and relies on Orientalism as a professional field of inquiry. In fact, Quṭb suggests that the notion of Orientalists’ neutrality or objectivity functions as a mask. Its ideological structure works to enable colonialism by providing justifications and analysis and by transforming the colonized population’s consciousness so that they internalize its standards. Its “comprehensive and diverse studies covering every dimension of the peoples whom they colonize” aim to neutralize if not “kill the seeds of resistance.”⁷¹ Quṭb writes:

[Orientalism] was established in order to aid colonialism from a scientific point of view and in order to extend its roots into the intellectual soil as well. But we here, we worship Orientalists simple-mindedly. We naively think that they are the monks of science and knowledge, that they moved away from their initial formation and severed their connection from the cause that had shaped them! Especially if some of them feign a kind word about our religion and our Prophet, to serve as bait to lull our thoughts into accepting their insinuations along the opposite direction!

It can make one laugh sometimes—though it’s bitter laughter—as the “cultured!” among us feign erudition by talking about the Orientalists’ “scholarly integrity.” If it occurs to you to doubt the innocence of those saints, then you’re uncultured, or you’re a fanatic who brings in religion at every opportunity!⁷²

Corresponding to these arguments about the function of professional Orientalists, Quṭb elsewhere also argues that the histories of all dark peoples are narrated and assessed strictly in relation to whiteness and European history as the standard.⁷³ The narration of history—whose history and how it is narrated—is thus ideologically bound up with Orientalist and racial colonial structures.

Economic dependency is of a piece with the colonial narration of history. Quṭb explains that the English always knew that their armies would have to leave Egypt someday, and so they ensured Egypt's dependence on them. He offers a version of dependency theory, *al-tabāʿīya*, asserting that one of the central pillars of colonial control is making the colony economically dependent on the metropole. The English “established [colonialism's institutional] supports in the economic field by occupying Egyptian markets and by attempting to close off other international markets to Egyptian products. They also established such supports in the world of finance by making our currency dependent on theirs [*bi-tabāʿīyat naqdinā li-naqdihim*] or on their treasury, etc.”⁷⁴ However, these institutions, he writes,

would not be enough for colonialism to persist if not for the colonization of consciousness and intellect [*al-istiʿmār al-rūḥī wa-l-fikrī*] that colonialism has attended to over the last century and to which it still devotes the greatest attention in the present. The white English have vacated governmental offices in order for the “dark English” to take their place, or their favorite intimate Egyptians, whose consciousness and intellect are colonized, who are assembled according to colonialism itself, in order to accomplish colonialism's objectives.⁷⁵

Having shaped the Ministry of Education, the “white English” can be confident that the “dark English” will continue their mission across generations. With the colonization of consciousness and intellect, “The occupation has reared successive generations, which are only multiplying thanks to the rule of that mentality that prevails over the Ministry of Education, that regard Islam as a remnant of backwardness and decadence [*al-taʿakhhur wa-l-inḥiṭāʿ*]; it is considered that to be rid of it is to be rid of the accusation of stagnation and ignorance, and it is evidence of ‘culture!’ and freedom.”⁷⁶ Colonialism conscripts “the emancipated and cultured!” and “those who oversee education” in its battles against Islam, “whether they realize it or not.”⁷⁷ In their curricula, the study of Islam and Islamic history is reduced to “military assaults and wars, incidents and events. The upshot is that Islam was a military battle and that it had never been an intellectual, social, and humanitarian battle.”⁷⁸ The production of Islam through the narration of violence and as a mere sequence of events has been a fundamental part of Orientalism, though here, too, Quṭb does not name it or connect it with the rest of his observations. He does claim, however, that colonial education culminates in colonialism

without colonists—that is, “for the colonization of consciousness and intellect to reach its high point, even after the departure of the occupation.”⁷⁹ He goes on to outline how exploiters and oppressors, professional men of religion, and those without morals take advantage of the impact of colonizers and crusaders for their own benefit, and how they, in turn, reinforce colonial structures.⁸⁰

Communism is the last of the enemies that Quṭb describes. Like colonialism, communism aims for control over the consciousness of the colonized. In an inversion of Marx, Quṭb describes communism as an opiate for young Egyptians, as they escape from reality, smoke hashish, and “dream soothing dreams of ‘Stalin Claus’ slipping delicious social justice under the Christmas tree, which they can eat without even lifting a finger.”⁸¹ This enmity aside, Quṭb’s vocabulary at crucial points resonates with a Marxist and Leninist lexicon. Alongside his discussion of dependency and the colonial capture of economic, financial, and educational sectors, he also refers to the alliance between dictatorship, *diktātūrīyat al-ḥukm*, and the despotism or autocracy of capital, *istibdād al-māl*. “Colonialism,” he writes,

is always concerned that the masses should not rule themselves, because it then becomes difficult to subdue them. Thus, there must be a governing dictatorial class that possesses autocratic authority [*suluṭāt istibdādiyya*; absolute power] and possesses great wealth. This class is the one with which colonialism can have dealings. This is because, first, its numbers are few, and second, it depends on colonialism to persist and needs its support in the face of the masses. This class is in charge of subduing the masses and governing them. Colonialism disappears from view behind it.⁸²

Quṭb’s terminology and his class analysis have their provenance in the writings of Marx and Lenin, which had been translated into Arabic by Rāshid al-Barrāwī in the years prior.⁸³ The terms appear with neither citation nor explanation. Treated nomothetically, the borrowed vocabulary clashes with Quṭb’s broader project and analytics; it is legible either as an attempt to recruit sympathetic leftists or to conscript the revolutionary Marxist tradition in the service of “Islam.” But read as a segment along an ellipse, Quṭb’s use of this vocabulary, like his theorization of Orientalism, refines his analysis of colonialism while broadening its geographic horizons. His discussions contain a composite of analytics, from colonialism’s representations and denials of violence across the world, to structures of dispossession and a class analysis derived from Marxism, and to the political theology underlying secularized anti-Islamic colonialism and knowledges, all in overlapping frames. The composite analytics draw in multiple regions across the colonized world into the same fate, one enabled by complementary structures of dispossession.

To read Quṭb peripheretically, then, is to put him in a frame with Marxism and critical political economy, not as a competing ideology or simplistic borrowing

of “vanguardism” but in the incidental Islamization of Marx, or the deployment of “Islamic” critique with Marxian categories as two fully compatible idioms. It is to also put him in a frame with the genealogical examination of religion and secularism, in which the imbrication of Christianity and secularism, or the political theological traces in apparently secular missions together with the secularization of apparently religious rhetoric and identity, prefigures contemporary analyses. And likewise, through Quṭb’s references to the professional academic field of Orientalism, one might reconcile “Islamism” with the secular humanism that critiques Orientalism as a colonial cultural formation, a formation that provides support to an entire system of representation. After all, Quṭb’s discussions of education, curricula, doubts, and consciousness refer to the production of knowledge about Islam. In an untimely moment, Sayyid Quṭb—nearly thirty years before Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, twelve years before Anouar Abdel-Malek’s “Orientalism in Crisis”—would be a theorist of Orientalism, its complicity in the colonial project, and the fantasies that it sets into motion and rationalizes for European policymakers and authors as well as for colonized Muslim intellectuals and Arab subjects.⁸⁴ This is not to simply say that the anti-colonial critique of Orientalism predates Said and that various Arab and non-Arab intellectuals can be inserted into its history.⁸⁵ Quṭb’s terminology and analysis are not so consistent, and his rhetoric is more polemical than scholarly. Nonetheless, to read Quṭb peripheretically is, perhaps somewhat irreverently, to put Quṭb the Islamist alongside Said or prior to him, or to see Quṭb’s *The Battle of Islam and Capitalism* and his articles on knowledge production as internal to the genealogy of theorizing Orientalism. To do so is to trace a question around which thinkers and texts have permission to speak about which topics—or, to borrow a different phrase of Said’s—which have the permission to narrate a critique of Orientalism, capitalism, and their structures, or to be in that genealogy of critique.

If one reads Quṭb’s stray remarks and terms as gestures toward a critique of cultural politics and an analysis of political economy, then Quṭb emerges as a neglected interloper in the diagnosis of colonialism in terms of “culture” and/or “capital”—or better yet, this peripheria would interpolate Quṭb the Islamist in between Karl Marx and Said, nestling “Islamism” in between Marxist and post-structuralist analysis. To do so disrupts the disciplinary pedigree of “critique.” What, then, is the condition of possibility for an Islamist theorization to be a *source* of critique and of its structure, rather than its object? If the discipline’s question over the last twenty years has been “Can the non-European think?” then reading Quṭb in this mode is to add: which non-European, and on what terms can the discipline think with him, and even then, which non-Europeans have contemporary disciplinary formations already foreclosed the possibility of thinking with?

Finally, this mode of reading puts Quṭb’s references to Orientalism, colonialism, and capitalism in a single frame, one concerned with the politics of represen-

tation and dispossession. What Quṭb names and what he does not name exceed the discipline's culturalized politics of what it names "Islamism." Although Quṭb does not name it, *The Battle of Islam and Capitalism* describes the cultural politics of Orientalism as an entire system of representing Islam, narrating Islamic history, and molding the consciousness of Muslims. Furthermore, the geographic sites that appear as examples of colonial hypocrisy and violence—Palestine, Korea, and Yugoslavia, Tunis, Marrakesh, Kenya, and Vietnam—come together in a shared structure of representation. Like the "negative models" of Islam, bringing them together sketches a world map built around colonial representations of dispossession as inevitable or even good, and of resistance as impossible and backward. The colonial and capitalist dismissal of alternatives is internal to their justifications of violence and hierarchy. In this sense, just as Amīn's analysis of elimination shows how the developmentalist discourse represents some places as "primitive" and thereby marked for military suppression and others as "civilized" and thus ripe for economic exploitation, Quṭb's own set of expanded geographical coordinates and multiple hidden enemies suggests how such representations and responses draw on the same bodies of knowledge and institutions. Orientalism's tropologies and representations are thus one example of a broader set of colonial techniques.

6. Conclusion: *Periphereia* against Discipline

To read Sayyid Quṭb, Qāsim Amīn, and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī periphereitically is a double intervention. First, it inverts their place at the margins of the archive of anticolonial thought. Their existing location reflects a mode of reading that has siloed "modern Islamic thought" and siphoned off anticolonialism. Their constructions as religious fanatic, client of empire, and esoteric conspiracist, respectively, are in this sense, symptomatic; their (non-)status in the anticolonial archive may exemplify how "modern Islamic political thought" and "anticolonial thought" have largely proceeded as disconnected disciplinary formations.⁸⁶ They are thinkers who, in the Anglo-American discipline of political theory, are made to play a culturalized role, as the cast of an Orientalist choreography of "the Islamic." Ironically, Quṭb dismisses the idea of the religious fanatic as strategic colonial rhetoric, Amīn imagines that the clients of empire may face annihilation, and al-Afghānī bears witness in real time to military conspiracies. Each, in fact, can be read as provincializing a key aspect of the colonial discourse, from the civilizational discourse about Islamic violence, to Eurocentric narrations of progress, to the recurrent tropology surrounding Islamic lack and excess.

Second, to read the thinkers periphereitically is to create cross sections in their work, to follow their incidental references to places or objects—Korea and Orientalist curricula, America and wealth, Tonkin and the Krupp cannon—and

to excavate the arcs of these segments. The cross sections may run against the current of their body of work, exceeding its conceptual structure. Reading them slowly, in the present, is to connect such segments in an ellipse, weaving them into the text and out of it; one might read quotidian documents and non-elite discourse in this fashion as well.⁸⁷ When al-Afghānī, Amīn, and Quṭb mention places that are peripheral to their texts and the immediate worlds they sought to constitute, these should be read as moments of acknowledging the shared fates of the colonized across the globe.

That ellipse points toward the possibility of alternative genealogies to contemporary critical thought. I thus read al-Afghānī in relation to the genealogy of militant empire and its itineraries, Qāsim Amīn in relation to the temporality of dispossession and the distribution of annihilability among the colonized, and Sayyid Quṭb in relation to a system of representation and expropriation that underlies Orientalism and colonialism across the globe. These peripheries may not be the authors' intentional arguments. Reading peripheretically is not a comprehensive method; nor does it replace other modes of reading and narrating, including nomothetic modes. After all, to even speak of these contours and cross sections, and of the points that their arcs follow, is to presuppose solid lines that run through their work and that have played a role in determining the thinker's dominant archival position and interpretations today.

Their challenge now is about where we can look for anticolonial moments and impulses, and how locating anticolonialism at the edges of archives and the edges of works might provoke us to read the multiple lineages and lives of contemporary concepts differently. This mode of imagining is, I think, also diagnostic, allowing us to ponder the elevations and depressions in the archives of contemporary disciplinary formations, or how different thinkers are authorized to speak about certain topics and not others, and what injecting them into contemporary conversations and genealogies makes imaginable, beyond the scripts and choreographies of difference that haunt the discipline.

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Notes

1. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*.
2. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 7.
3. Perry and Youssef, "In Egypt."
4. Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth*, 186, 326–28.
5. Schmitt writes of one such line: "At this 'line,' Europe ended and the 'New World' began. . . . Consequently, so, too, did the bracketing of war achieved by traditional European international law, meaning that here the struggle for land-appropriations knew no bounds." The line "set aside an area where force could be used freely and ruthlessly," in which European man could be a wolf to non-European man, in the New World, south of the equator, and on the free sea. This line of a colonial *nomos* delineated a European core defined by statehood and that "determined the *nomos* of the rest of the earth." From this view, when Schmitt theorizes *nomos* using the terms appropriation, distribution, and production, these terms refer to dispossession, colonialism, and capitalism, respectively (Schmitt, *Nomos*, 90n6, 93, 94–96, 126–27). As Du Bois put it some fifty years earlier, "The color line belts the world" (Du Bois, "Color Line"). One of the most powerful examples of reading *nomos* as a stark line is Fanon's description of the colonized world as "a world divided in two. The dividing line, the border, is represented by the barracks and the police stations. In the colonies, the official, legitimate agent, the spokesperson for the colonizer and the regime of oppression, is the police officer or the soldier." From roads and lights to sanitization and building materials, from the institutions of policing to those of education, the two sectors are absolutely and permanently mutually exclusive (Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 3–5).
6. See Wick, *Red Sea*, 88–91.
7. A useful and balanced introduction is Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, chap. 5; and more recently, Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, chap. 4. For al-Afghānī as atheist, see Kedourie, *Afghani and Abduh*. For al-Afghānī as inclined toward secular rationalism or "Islamic deism," and his religious rhetoric primarily a cover for political unity, see Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal Ad-Din Al Afghani*, 91, 171–81, 189–99; Keddie, *Islamic Response to Imperialism*, 96–97. For the claim that François Guizot's evolutionary civilizationism is the master key to reconciling these two of al-Afghānī's texts, see Kohn, "Afghānī on Empire, Islam, and Civilization." For a powerful critique of Elie Kedourie's and Nikki Keddie's Orientalist presumption that al-Afghānī only spoke sincerely when addressing Europeans (and that they have special access to his

- intentions and belief), see Olomi, “Oriental and the Orientalist,” 4–6; and for the astute observation that Margaret Kohn’s privileging of Guizot risks distorting al-Afghānī into a Eurocentric thinker, see Olomi, “Oriental and the Orientalist,” 6–7. For the reverse of these views, that based on these texts *as well as* his other writings al-Afghānī may have “duped” Ernest Renan, see the excellent article by Josep Puig Montada, “Al-Afghānī”; this article also offers a very helpful overview of the scholarly debate and of al-Afghānī’s own writings. On al-Afghānī’s “obscure activities” and imperfect French, see Keddie, *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn ‘al-Afghānī*,” 4, 190; Keddie, *Islamic Response to Imperialism*, 4–9. For an exploration of these activities, see Lazzarini, “Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani.”
8. al-Afghānī, *al-Radd ‘alā al-dahriyyin*. For an English translation, see Keddie, *Islamic Response to Imperialism*, 130–74.
 9. The texts from the “debate” with Renan are preserved in Arabic in ‘Abd al-Hāfiz, *al-Islām wa-l-‘ilm*: Renan’s lecture (33–50), al-Afghānī’s Arabic editorial (51–52), al-Afghānī’s French response (53–62), Renan’s rejoinder (63–67), and ‘Abduh’s letter to al-Afghānī (69–70). For an English translation of al-Afghānī’s French response, see Keddie, *Islamic Response to Imperialism*, 181–87.
 10. Hanssen and Weiss, “Language, Mind, Freedom, and Time.” On the Orientalist and civilizationalist assumptions that al-Afghānī and Renan shared, see Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 11–16.
 11. For a complementary observation, see Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, 96–97.
 12. Plenty of ink has been spilled dwelling on the journal’s funding and sponsorship, as well as its anti-British outlook. A notable exception is Montada, “Al-Afghānī,” though he does read the journal to evaluate al-Afghānī’s consistency and overarching position (or what I have been calling a nomothetic reading).
 13. Aydin, *Idea of the Muslim World*, 62.
 14. ‘Abduh and al-Afghānī, *al-‘Urwa al-wuthqā*.
 15. The phrase appears in Qur’ān 2:256 and 31:22.
 16. [‘Abduh and al-Afghānī], “al-Bāb al-‘ālī wa-l-Ingilīz,” 72. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.
 17. [‘Abduh and al-Afghānī], “Inna fī dhālika la-dhikrā,” 89.
 18. [‘Abduh and al-Afghānī], “Inna fī dhālika la-dhikrā,” 89–91.
 19. [‘Abduh and al-Afghānī], “Inna fī dhālika la-dhikrā,” 91. I offer a different reading of these passages in Idris, “Islam Out of History.”
 20. [‘Abduh and al-Afghānī], “al-Faransāwīyūn fī al-Tūnkīn,” 52–53; emphasis added.
 21. [‘Abduh and al-Afghānī], “al-Faransāwīyūn fī al-Tūnkīn,” 53.
 22. Al-Afghānī and ‘Abduh gesture toward this idea three months later as well: “France is caught between the wiles of the British and the machinations of Bismarck. It has previous claims in Egypt, the traces of which have been nearly erased because of English interference, and it has dire need to magnify its words as it establishes itself in China, the Indian Ocean, and Madagascar” ([‘Abduh and al-Afghānī], “Paris, Thursday, June 5,” 4).
 23. [‘Abduh and al-Afghānī], “Paris, March 27,” 60.
 24. On liberal “developmentalism” and empire, see Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*; McCarthy, *Race, Empire*; Marwah, “Two Concepts of Liberal Developmentalism.” For an excellent discussion of anti-imperial uses of developmentalism in South Asia, see Marwah, “Provincializing Progress.” On developmentalism and white supremacist utopias, see Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race*, chap. 7.

25. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 149–63; Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 166.
26. Amīn, *Les égyptiens*.
27. d’Harcourt, *L’Égypte et les égyptiens*, 18. For example, he argued that Arab violence is opposed to progress—a common Orientalist trope about a warlike Arab culture that ends progress everywhere it goes (d’Harcourt, *L’Égypte et les égyptiens*, 272–73). On this trope, see Idris, *War for Peace*, chap. 6. D’Harcourt, somewhat paradoxically, coupled his indictment of Arab culture’s violence with criticisms of Egypt’s military weakness: it had not produced a conqueror since the pharaohs. See d’Harcourt, *L’Égypte et les égyptiens*, 19–20.
28. Amīn, *Tahrīr al-mar’a*, 319–416; Amīn, *al-Mar’a al-jadīda*, 417–517.
29. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 162–63.
30. See Idris, “Colonial Hesitation.” My argument in this section expands on my research in this earlier piece.
31. Amīn, *Les égyptiens*, 26–27.
32. Amīn, *Les égyptiens*, 276.
33. Amīn, *Les égyptiens*, 282, 277–78. He concludes by informing France that its colonial services in Egypt are no longer required. Amīn, *Les égyptiens*, 297.
34. Amīn, *Tahrīr al-mar’a*, 375.
35. Amīn, *al-Mar’a al-jadīda*, 512.
36. Amīn, *Tahrīr al-mar’a*, 374.
37. Amīn, *Tahrīr al-mar’a*, 374.
38. Amīn, *Tahrīr al-mar’a*, 374.
39. Amīn, *Tahrīr al-mar’a*, 374.
40. Mbembe, “Necropolitics.”
41. See Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism.”
42. For recent theorizations of similar dynamics, see Kotef, *Colonizing Self*; Tallie, *Queering Colonial Natal*, especially chap. 3.
43. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1.13, 77; Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, bk. 2, §§35–38 and §49. For my reading of Hobbes, settler colonialism, and America, see Idris, *War for Peace*, chap. 5.
44. I am currently preparing a translation of some of these texts. On Islam as a system in Quṭb’s thought, see Shepard, “Islam as a ‘System.’”
45. On Quṭb’s federationist thinking and his neglected plan for peace, see Idris, *War for Peace*, 297–304. See also Quṭb, *al-Salām al-‘ālamī wa-l-Islām*, 176–78.
46. See Shepard, “Sayyid Qutb’s Doctrine”; Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*, 56–85.
47. Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 16. *Signposts along the Road*, Calvert writes, is close to Lenin’s *What Is to Be Done?* (Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 231).
48. See Idris, *War for Peace*, chap. 6; Abu-Rabi’, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence*, chap. 4, 198–208. For a complementary discussion of Quṭb and Islamism more generally as a neglected part of decolonization, see Elshakry, “History without Documents.”
49. See Idris, “Peace,” 141–42.
50. Quṭb, *al-Salām al-‘ālamī wa-l-Islām*, 157–58.
51. Quṭb, *al-Salām al-‘ālamī wa-l-Islām*, 159.
52. Quṭb, *al-Salām al-‘ālamī wa-l-Islām*, 163.
53. Quṭb, *Ma’rakat al-Islām*, 143–44.
54. Quṭb, “al-Ḍamīr al-Amrīkānī.”
55. Quṭb, “Mabādi’ al-‘ālam al-ḥurr!,” 14.
56. On such claims more recently, see Holsinger, “Carly Fiorina Goes Medieval.”

57. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 82–83. On the significance of this temporality and its objects, compare with the famous passage in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1.13, 76; as well as Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 2.30, 220. See Idris, *War for Peace*, chap. 5.
58. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 111.
59. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 96–97, 114.
60. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 132, 142–43.
61. On the earlier resonances of some of these tropes, see Malcolm, *Useful Enemies*. On the contemporary formation of the ideas that Islam is against freedom, women, minorities, and progress, see Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*.
62. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 119.
63. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 120.
64. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 120.
65. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 122.
66. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 122.
67. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 122.
68. See Almond, *History of Islam*, chaps. 6–9; Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, chaps. 6–7.
69. Lewis says of Christendom and Islam:
- These two religions, and as far as I am aware, no others in the world, believe that their truths are not only universal but also exclusive. They believe that they are the fortunate recipients of God's final message to humanity, which it is their duty not to keep selfishly to themselves like the Jews or the Hindus, but to bring to the rest of mankind, removing whatever barriers there may be in the way. This, between two religiously defined civilians [sic], which Christendom was at that time, with the same heritage, the same self-perception, the same aspiration, and living in the same neighborhood inevitably led to conflict, to *the real clash of rival civilizations* aspiring to the same role, leading to the same hegemony, each seeing it as a divinely ordained mission. We can date it precisely with the advent of Islam, which spread very rapidly by conquest. If you have ever been to Jerusalem, you must have been to the Dome of the Rock. That in itself is a mark of the conflict. (Lewis, "Islam and the West")
- Although Samuel Huntington generalized the phrase "clash of civilizations," he, too, retained something of what Quṭb identifies as the crusaders' enmity in the racialized opposition between Islam and a Judeo-Christian West (or rather, Islam and the rest by virtue of so-called "bloody borders"). See Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations?," 35.
70. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 126.
71. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 126.
72. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 126–27.
73. Quṭb, "Adūwunā al-awwal."
74. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 127.
75. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 127.
76. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 128.
77. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 131.
78. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 128.
79. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 129.
80. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 132–41.
81. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 145.
82. Quṭb, *Ma'rakat al-Islām*, 131.

83. See Meijer, *Quest for Modernity*.
84. For a complementary view, see Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence*, 201.
85. For a nineteenth-century Arab response to Orientalism, see El-Ariss, "On Cooks and Crooks."
86. For three important exceptions, see Iqtidar, "Jizya against Nationalism"; Ahmad, *Religion as Critique*; and Devji, *Muslim Zion*. See also Elshakry, "History without Documents."
87. Wick, *Red Sea*, chap. 3.

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