



Fear and loathing: Arab cultures need a strategy of resistance

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Concerned by the Arab world's culture of victimhood, a German Arabist issues a vigorous challenge to the prevailing sentiment of 'anti-globalism' among the Arab intelligentsia, typified by the prominent Egyptian intellectual Sherif Hetata.

The dominant cultural discourse of Arab intellectuals is characterised by a passivity and cultural pessimism which is its own worst enemy. Globalisation, in the 'North' and 'South' has its winners and its losers, its apologists and harsh critics, to be sure.

But Arab culture pays a high price for the patrician disdain for the processes of globalisation which is reflected throughout the Arab press, religious and secular alike. This approach, which tends to concentrate on its cultural aspects, partly reflects the long-lasting resonance of Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' in the Arab world.

To exemplify this position on cultural globalisation in the argument that follows, I might have chosen various prominent Arab intellectuals – figures such as Gamil Mattar, Burhan Ghalyun, Samir Amin, and Ahmed Abdallah. But I have decided to address my argument to Sherif Hetata, a renowned Egyptian novelist and medical doctor.

Hetata is western educated (as a psychologist) and economically well off. His freedom of movement is not restricted. He has access to an English-speaking audience and represents a secular current in Egypt. Still, he wrote in *The Cultures of Globalisation* (eds. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, Duke University Press, 1998): "What the World Bank calls structural adjustment is a potential economic genocide."

Hetata has always been active in trade union activities and in campaigning on women's as well as health issues. For eight years he worked for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Asia and Africa. As a Marxist and a member of the forbidden communist party he was imprisoned for thirteen years in the Nasser era.

Later on, in 1982 he was among the founding members of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA). More recently, he has actively participated in the debate around globalisation processes, publishing *Political Islam, Culture and Globalisation* in 2000.

His three-volume autobiography *Open Windows* was published in Arabic in the years between 1993 and 1998.

In his essay for *The Cultures of Globalisation*, Hetata paints a picture of the ‘masters of the global economy’ invading Egyptian society to a degree even he himself cannot resist. He claims that an economic substructure subordinates every other social level to the logic of market capitalism. Culture serves these masters only as a means to continuously expand the market and destroy any resistance thereunto.

I want to look closely at the terms of this debate in order to argue that they are not determined either by Arab culture or religion, but by a Fanonian rhetoric which centres on the ‘wretched of the earth’. In order to trace his main arguments against globalisation back to their origins I propose to concentrate on Hetata’s essay for *The Cultures of Globalisation*, ‘Dollarisation, Fragmentation and God’.

Originally, I regarded this examination as a contribution to the debate around the question of whether globalisation unifies the different cultures of the world or contributes to their heterogeneity. Reading Hetata’s text again after 9/11, I realised that such a study also gave me a better understanding of the ambivalent reactions to those attacks across the Middle East, which caused so much dismay and irritation in the west.

Globalisation–Americanisation

Sherif Hetata began his essay with a personal account of his youth in Egypt under British colonial rule: “Educated in an English school, I discovered that my English teachers looked down on us. We learned Rudyard Kipling by heart, praised the glories of the British Empire, followed the adventures of Kim in India, imbibed the culture of British supremacy, and sang carols on Christmas night.”

As a young medical student it was not difficult for him to uncover the connection between health and poverty, colonialism, class, race and the price of Egyptian cotton on the world market. But the male authorities – father, president, God – forbade him to make such connections.

Today, the author continues, we are witnesses of a previously unknown concentration of capital and technology in the hands of a few in the North. This accumulation depends less on natural resources or labour (which the South could easily provide) than on technology based on the intensive use of knowledge (by inference, not accessible to the South).

Here is our first example of a mode of reasoning common to the debate as a whole: the new economic world order alone is deemed responsible for the Arab world’s exclusion from knowledge-based technologies. Such a line of argument tends to ignore the fact that most Arab states, in order to maintain control over their media, deliberately started either very late or very selectively to permit national access to the internet.

Unlike natural resources, knowledge-based technologies are relatively independent of transportation routes, climate and political upheavals, and therefore offer the possibility of an economy based much less on incalculable risks, especially attractive to developing countries. High-value-added software can be produced in Bangalore as well as in Silicon Valley.

Moreover, the implosion of communication costs through the internet opens up many opportunities for developing countries, especially when the next generation of mobile phones becomes available, allowing easy access to the internet without a complete telephone infrastructure.

But Hetata is not alone among Arab authors in seeing only the spread of a free market that plunders developing countries, a veritable slave trade thinly disguised behind such seemingly innocent terms as aid, free trade, loans and development. As I have mentioned, he even uses the word ‘genocide’ to describe the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP).

Shop till you drop

To illustrate how the media manipulate global consumer behaviour, Hetata cites the case of his own son, Atef Hetata – a film director – who at the age of 25 started to smoke two packs of Marlboro a day. He is similarly shocked by his own behaviour, when at the

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age of 71 he has started wearing jeans and listening to rock music.

But what exactly do such confidences amount to? Does he want to tell the reader that his education failed, or that neo-colonialism cannot be defeated, or that Marlboro tastes better than the local Egyptian brand 'Cleopatra', or that even leftist artists like to surround themselves with western status symbols?

We might conclude from rereading Horkheimer and Adorno that advertising and television artificially create needs, as a means of compensating for alienation. But for Hetata, global Americanisation is solely responsible, with its quest for ever-increasing numbers of consumers:

To expand the global market, increase the number of consumers, make sure that they buy what is sold, develop needs that conform to what is produced, and develop the fever of consumerism, culture must play a role in developing certain values, patterns of behaviour, visions of what is happiness and success in the world, attitudes toward sex and love. Culture must model a global consumer.

He is at least logically consistent. If he does not claim the freedom and enlightenment to choose and decide for himself which products he likes to wear or hear, neither does Hetata grant this right to anybody else, certainly not those with less of an education.

For example, he describes a wedding in the Egyptian countryside that was very 'untraditional', with the bride wearing a white wedding dress and the couple eating a wedding cake after driving around in a hired Peugeot car.

This is not something he regards as an increase in choices for the Egyptian peasant or, for that matter, the American peasant, both of whom can now decide whether they want to play Elvis or Cheb Khaled at their weddings. He does not recognise the emergence of an innovative hybrid culture. Nor for one moment does he contemplate the possibility that globalisation happens not so much through mental persuasion as through the seductions of a popular culture.

This failure of recognition is a general shortcoming of the whole debate. For globalisation is not only something imposed from the outside, but also something absorbed from inside. This is a major part of the truth that such Arab intellectuals refuse to admit into their discourse on cultural globalisation:

...all this change in the notion of beauty, of femininity, of celebration, of happiness, of prestige, of progress happened to my peasant friend and his bride in one generation. The culprit, or the benevolent agent, depending on how you see it, was television.

Later, he accuses the commercial media of transforming women in every corner of Egypt into sex objects. But to elide the sexual objectification of women together with the effects of cultural globalisation in this manner verges on the ahistorical.

The introduction of sexual double standards within the family is not at all a contemporary phenomenon. It owes more to the historic prohibition of premarital sex than to the marketing of western beauty products in the Delta since the 1990s. As for the definition of women as luxurious sex objects, that stems most recently from the institution of the monogamous family and control over female sexuality (see, for example, *The Creation of the Patriarchy*).

Arabic literary mastery

In his attack on French publishing houses, which Hetata portrays as serving northern cultural hegemonic interests, the writer implies that blame should also be laid at the door of southern writers who are in league with their own exploiters:

French publishing houses are past masters at this art, aided and abetted unfortunately by North African Arabs or Africans living in France. The modern novel produced in the South, especially if it deals with the problem of our age, with the reality behind relations between North and South, with gender and class, is not considered suitable for cultural consumption in the North. The area of translation should be exposed to serious and systematic cultural studies in conferences, in academia, and in scholastic research.

The defamation of Arab communities living outside the Arab world is a recurrent motif of the anti-globalisation debate. But it ignores the many (especially young) talented Arab writers who are forbidden to publish in Arab countries or hindered from writing in Arabic, so the only way we know of them or their works is through western publishing houses.

So world literature and world music are introducing some of the best contemporary Arab artists to a global

audience – among them Hanan al-Sheikh, Ahdaf Soueif, Naguib Mahfouz and the Algerian Rai singers. One of the most famous novels by Mahfouz, *Awlad Haratina* or *The Children of Gebelaawi* (1959) is still blacklisted in Egypt due to objections by al-Azhar University. Hanan al-Sheikh's *Women of Sand and Myrrh* is not available in many Arab countries. Ahdaf Soueif's critically acclaimed novel *In the Eye of the Sun* is not available in Arabic yet.

Thanks to the General Egyptian Book Organisation, Ahdaf Soueif has a selection of short stories and articles available in Arabic. But this woman, whom Edward Said deems “one of the most extraordinary chroniclers of sexual politics now writing” has not yet found a translator, and this does not seem to be solely a financial question. Rather, Ahdaf is accused of being immoral and of tarnishing the image of Egypt – the main argument against critical cultural works.

Few Arab intellectuals defend Soueif's writing against allegations that they are ‘not part of Arab literature at all’ or recognise her works as inherently Egyptian – the hybrid result of a life that is no longer a singular experience, but which tells the story of a particular cosmopolitan Arab class. Part of this very Egyptian identity includes writing in English (or French) rather than in Arabic.

To make sure that all of these works can be seen, read and heard in Egypt and not only at the American University in Cairo, which is regarded as the imperialist thorn in the heart of Cairo, a local elite would have to commit itself to including such works rather than excluding them a priori (on the pretext that these authors are writing in English or meanwhile living abroad).

For the experience they enshrine is no longer an isolated one. It is shared by a whole generation of young Muslims who are beginning to generate their own narratives.

Intrusion in the first world's living rooms

Cultural globalisation does not reduce the luxury of choice. Local cultures are indeed being globalised, but not unified. How otherwise can we explain thriving global trends, such as Rai music or open-source

software, that never had the support of global corporations or television channels?

In the course of globalisation, the peripheries have begun to intrude into the centres of civilisation, both in terms of movement of peoples and movement of ideas. Trespassing boundaries is the first and foremost characteristic of globalisation.

Or as Wolf Lepenies put it: “There are only hybrid cultures. This fact alone makes the clash of civilisations prophecy appear unrealistic.” Denying blended cultures and one's own contribution to a globalised world has a self-constraining, ultimately self-destructive effect.

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Edward Said, in contrast to Hetata, refers us to an idea of ‘adversarial internationalisation’ – an intellectual battleground where the champions of the post-colonial and the quasi-imperial worlds meet. Said proudly takes up the position of a ‘Third World intellectual’ living in the west who has been “deeply affected by the remarkable outpouring of literature and scholarship emanating from the post-colonial world, a locale no longer ‘one of the dark places of

earth’ [...] in Conrad's famous description, but once again the site of vigorous cultural effort.”

Surely the emergence of authoritative post-colonial voices is one direct result of the processes of globalisation. Indeed, even in the course of events following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, intellectuals and artists from the so-called ‘periphery’ have become political authorities whose opinions are in demand.

The Indian writer Arundhati Roy triggered one of the burning debates in the aftermath of 9/11 with the article, ‘The Algebra of Infinite Justice’ (*Wut ist der Schlüssel*, 28 September 2001) published in *The Guardian* and the conservative German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Roy dared to write that Osama bin Laden was the dark twin of George Bush, both reprehensible in their own ways:

But who is Osama bin Laden really? Let me rephrase that. What is Osama bin Laden? He's America's family secret. He is the American

President's dark *doppelgänger*. The savage twin of all that purports to be beautiful and civilised. He has been sculpted from the spare rib of a world laid to waste by America's foreign policy: its gunboat diplomacy, its nuclear arsenal, its vulgarly stated policy of 'full spectrum dominance', its chilling disregard for non-American lives, its barbarous military interventions, its support for despotic and dictatorial regimes, its merciless economic agenda that has munched through the economies of poor countries like a cloud of locusts.

Ulrich Wickert, most well known of German newscasters, felt constrained to apologise on television for his emphatic response to this provocation in the pages of a popular magazine, thus beaming this intrusion of the periphery directly into the average German living room.

Ahdaf Soueif presents us with a similar example. After the attacks, she was asked to write four lengthy articles for *The Guardian*. On 15 September 2001 she wrote, "the nation that once said 'give me your poor, your weak, your hungry' needs to look at itself through the eyes of the world's dispossessed."

She severely criticised the US, stating: "You could almost say that US officialdom, the media and Hollywood dreamed this nightmare into reality." These sentiments cannot be classified as 'what the west wants to hear' – Hetata's reproach to Arab intellectuals in the west.

On 9 October 2001, she gave a balanced description of the TV station *al-Jazeera* in *The Guardian*. On 6 November, she was sent from London to Cairo to report about Arab reactions to Tony Blair and the British engagement in the American 'war on terror', where, again, she gave an unwelcome message, rejecting the caricature impression that Arab citizens had been rejoicing over what had happened in New York.

Finally, in December 2001, she was sent to the occupied territories to write a two-piece article on the Palestinian situation. Although her voice had been audible in the arts for quite some time, she only started to articulate a current political point of view after 9/11.

Islamism and Americanisation

Hetata performs another intellectual sleight of hand in his analysis of popular Islamist movements in the region. Rightly identifying them as movements which

are protesting against the cultural hegemony of the west, he somehow nevertheless manages to accuse the leaders of the fundamentalist groups as aligning themselves paradoxically with the global economy:

They propagate a culture that believes in fate, in obedience, in not questioning, in believing that happiness or unhappiness, wealth or poverty are apportioned by Allah, and so people should accept whatever lot is theirs. What better ally does the global economy want? And if they come to power in Algeria or in Egypt, after a period of adjustment, just as before, all will be well.

This is a surprising hypothesis, since Europe munificently turned a blind eye to the military obstruction of the democratic process in Algeria in 1991, carried out to prevent fundamentalists from coming to power. Europe's stance was deemed by many to betray the strength of western anti-Muslim sentiment.

Yet Hetata even sees Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman's being removed and, as he puts it, 'safely in jail here in the States, away from the clutches of Mubarak's police' as part of a conspiratorial global coalition between globalisation–Americanisation and Muslim fundamentalism.

According to Hetata, the processes of globalisation divide, confuse and fragment people:

They can think, but only in the way that the global powers want them to think. The global economy, the global culture, must exercise an undivided rule. And if people think, they must think in a way that will keep them from finding out what they have in common.

Yet if we take the internet as the epitome of the globalised community, we encounter the opposite. People are not divided, confused and fragmented. They – come together virtually from all over the world to send 100,000 e-mails within twenty-four hours, in protest against a human rights abuse. It offers them the possibility of finding people with the same health problem all over the world and exchanging solutions within minutes; the possibility of uniting to increase pressure on national politics.

Lost reference

If these processes are so disturbing, how does Hetata set about urging us to resist them? Edward Said rightly

points to the important scholarly endeavour originating on the Indian subcontinent under the heading *Subaltern Studies*, a whole area of research designed to decolonise science.

One may smile about French radio stations, since 1996 obliged to play no more than 60 per cent foreign music, but here is a country resisting cultural Americanisation to preserve its cultural particularity and independence; proving that it is possible to build a consensus between the elite and society, and to introduce counter-measures which protect one's cultural heritage.

We need an elite that recognises the value of a country's cultural products as a reason for interfering in the market. What is there to prevent a country in the South from introducing similar measures of cultural protectionism?

Hetata's double standards emerge particularly starkly when he looks at a phenomenon such as African art festivals in the North. Accusing the latter of being, 'disparate samples brought to entertain and delight without any reference to the societies, the problems, the miseries they represent and the factors behind all this, including relations with the North', he sees art festivals and 'world literature' alike as examples only of how obsessed the North is with the display of the 'exotic' and the 'strange'. Yet half a page later, a film made by his son is proudly referred to as having won prizes in Spain, France, England, Canada and elsewhere.

Do our reference points have to be confined to the northern hemisphere? Why doesn't Hetata mention the film festivals of Alexandria, Cairo or Carthage, in which his son also participated? Or Ouagadougou? Aren't these distinguished enough?

Hetata deliberately ignores what is happening in the South. He complains that there is no South-South cooperation, but perversely orients himself toward the North. Meanwhile, he reproaches Arab artists who display their work in the North as token Arabs who "help the North to appropriate the culture of the South, instead of letting the 'others' in the South speak for themselves." He has no recognition of those Peter Berger once designated the 'transnational intelligentsia'. For Hetata, these are simply parasitic intermediaries who service a western *gout*.

Why does Egypt import only American soaps and no African or Latin American ones? Why can we see the film festival of Ouagadougou in Berlin but not in Cairo? Why are there no 'authentic' African art festivals in Cairo, if such a thing exists? The answer is inescapable: because, even if Northern interest is only *à la mode*, the North's interest in the South is much more vibrant than the mutual interest existing among Southern countries.

We can go further. For in times of shifting real and virtual boundaries, as Ulrich Beck argues in *What is Globalization?*, Africa is no longer a continent, but a concept:

Hetata's double standards emerge particularly starkly when he looks at a phenomenon such as African art festivals in the North.

Africa is not a fixed geographical magnitude, not a separate place on the globe, but a *transnational idea and the staging of that idea*. [...] Where is Africa to be found in a world society with porous frontiers? In the ruins that the colonial masters have left behind in Africa? In the big-city shapes of an only half-modernized Africa? In the African four-star hotels? On organised safaris? In the 'back to the roots' hopes and

illusions of Black Americans? In the books about Africa that are written in western universities? In the Caribbean? [...] This Africa [the African carnival in Notting Hill], or counter-Africa, is in the strictest sense an 'imagined community'; it serves to break down and overcome the alienation of Afro-Caribbean groups in Britain. We could say that 'there is Africa' in Notting Hill.

Far from the token Africans Hetata sees ingratiating themselves with western images, Africa is to be found wherever a community tries to answer a question that is gaining ever greater urgency in the processes of globalisation: the question put by Beck: "what and where is 'Africa' within a transnational social space?" **Self-exclusion from the global village**

It was Rudolf Stichweh in *Inklusion/Exklusion* (1997) who first argued that the rise of the term 'exclusion' in the 1990s had two aspects, replacing theories that use 'class' to describe social inequality, and taking the place of the concept of poverty.

In this theory, 'poverty' is more than an economic phenomenon; it also indicates lack of proximity to the

decision-making centres, perpetuating marginality. Authors such as Hetata use the term 'exclusion' in this new sense, describing their societies as being excluded by the processes of globalisation.

But Stichweh refuted the idea of whole societies being excluded from world society. He used a physical analogy to illustrate the connection between exclusion and global society. The image of a universe with 'black holes' is intended to counter the idea of societies included and excluded en bloc.

Instead Stichweh called for attention to be brought to bear on how globalised functional systems are being fed from everywhere (economy, literature, law) and how we can find areas of exclusion in each of them – black holes, but not whole societies that are excluded in all their diversity.

Furthermore, Hetata's approach ignores the way in which the term 'exclusion' always denotes interaction. As a result, we must be more specific and ask who excludes the Arab world from global society. Put the question in this way, and we soon discover that this is a process with actors on both sides of the divide, in the North and the South. It is a process which manifests itself both in progress and setbacks.

For example, the role of the news channel *al-Jazeera* during the American 'war on terror' proves that Arab journalists can establish a counter-public even in times of 'globalisation–Americanisation at war'. Today, *al-Jazeera* is included among the global media players.

Attempts to discredit *al-Jazeera* for having shown videos of Osama bin Laden have not been fruitful. From now on, no journalist working on the Arab world can disregard its authoritative voice. Thus, access to the satellite telephone – part of the technological revolution connected with globalisation – has catapulted news reporting from an Arab perspective into every American home. Exclusion can be countered.

If these phenomena are ignored, it makes not for exclusion, but for self-exclusion. Society pays a high price for such a strategy. Moreover, the rhetoric of self-exclusion is of dubious intellectual worth. In part, it prepared the ground for the nearly unanimous reaction in the Arab World to the attacks of 9/11. Speaking of a 'society under attack', Arab public opinion was instantly thinking of itself and not of the people in New York.

The constant reiteration of theories of dependency, world capitalism and imperialism not only indicates a great neglect of internal actors and factors, but also disregards a whole school of literature that has emerged since the 1980s, written by former ardent proponents of the dependency school (such as Ulrich Menzel, Gunnar Myrdal and Dieter Senghaas) who have since revised their own model of a binary world divided between centre and periphery.

Furthermore, to reproduce this discourse of the 1960s without recognising the new dimensions of globalisation, offers the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East a convenient explanation for stagnation. It paves the way for those intellectuals who sooner or later become willing henchmen of the ruling elite, abandoning their sceptical and critically distanced attitude. Anti-globalisation now begins to serve as a new form of nationalism, ready to ingratiate itself with power and authority.

Double standards in reverse

I do not mean to suggest that there are not immense forces working to exclude the Muslim world. I am saying, however, that ignoring certain gains of globalisation in favour of some kind of Arab cultural capital deepens the western project of exclusion through encouraging self-exclusion. In my view, it is sheer double standards to appropriate the processes of globalisation only subjectively for oneself without acknowledging their impact on fellow Arabs – be they peasants or intellectuals.

I am not denying that some of these winners of the great game of globalisation do sympathise with its losers. But opinion-formers should not reproduce the old dichotomy of centre and periphery, since this division no longer exists. Such a discourse orients public opinion toward a fake enemy.

Finally, I think it is a failure to leave out strategies of resistance and alternative cultural policies, be they in the field of cinema, television and literature; or simply to confine this to calling on Arab intellectuals to boycott western forums, as Fatema Mernissi has done in *Why I will not go West in 2002*.

But in the end I must stop short to ask myself whether in voicing his urgent political concerns, Hetata is only thereby violating what Edward Said once called the 'code of *politesse* and ritual calmness' imposed by western research norms:

To misinterpret the historical force of such statements, discourses, and interventions from the Third World, to call them (as Conor Cruise O'Brien once did) the whine for sympathy of formerly colonized peoples, to dismiss them as emotional and subjective *cris de Coeur* of strenuous activists and partisan politicians rather than the 'objective writings' of real scholars, is to attenuate their force, to misrepresent their value, to dismiss their enormous contribution to knowledge.

Hetata is pointing in the same direction when he portrays himself (in *The Cultures of Globalisation*) as "incapable of understanding cultural processes and the role culture plays if I do not locate it in the power struggle, in the movement of gender and class, rulers and people."

Still, I very much object to his neglect of the highly ambivalent role played by local elites in the South. And I would really like to ask him this question: are you locating power and powerlessness in the right place?

Conclusion

After 200 years of interaction and integration between Arab and western societies, a substantial number of Arab intellectuals today display a distinct resistance to 'globalisation'.

It is such a resonant position for many reasons: because anti-globalism offers a clear demarcation line at a time of severe identity crisis; because defining oneself as the victim of a global onslaught helps to rally people together; because in this way, anti-globalism may serve as a new form of nationalism. Moreover, it allows one to entertain that paradoxical feeling of refusing western cultural products which nevertheless one so desires.

In this way, however, the majority of authors participating in the debate on cultural globalisation greatly impoverish the reality of cultural production. They ignore the transnational identity that has emerged and transferred part of their societies into the global context. And they turn a blind eye to the gains of cultural globalisation and the richness of recent Arab cultural production.

They are not willing to identify their own role in this process or see themselves and other people from the South as actors. Alternatives or strategies of resistance are rarely proposed, even though the authors regard themselves as the bearers of enlightenment. The frame of reference is not the marginalised Arab or Muslim, but the oppressed poor.

Parts of the debate in the Arab World embody a cultural pessimism that go back to leftist intellectuals in the 1960s. We encounter the old lamentation over violence on television, the power of multinational corporations, the misleading promises of advertisements and the seduction of youth; but no debate about cultural globalisation and its characteristics.

Such commentators totally ignore hitherto unknown phenomena that have emerged in the course of globalisation, such as the 'super-powered individual' (Thomas Friedman's term for individuals such as Osama bin Laden) or the exchange between people regardless of social, geographical or economic barriers.

Especially young Muslim women experience the latter phenomenon when for the first time in their lives they talk to a male person without patriarchal supervision, via the internet. Neither in Egypt nor in Saudi Arabia is this a rare pastime. It is welcome.

The asymmetrical picture drawn by these critics is counter-emancipatory, since there seems to be no way out of this 'globalisation–Americanisation', even though local groups in other regions of the world effectively protect their culture. The juxtaposition of these two designations is crucial to understanding the problem. Americanisation can be resisted; globalisation cannot.

The role of local elites as part of a movement in the region that counters the negative ecological, social and cultural effects of globalisation is ignored – quite to the contrary, this elite only gives an account of its own 'involuntary' merger with American consumer behaviour. The simplistic polemic against Americanisation, moreover, neglects the aesthetic and ethnic heterogeneity of American mass culture itself.

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However, it is right that the double standards of the west should be exposed. They have done much to undermine its moral credibility. But the answer to this should not be 'double standards in reverse'.

The 9/11 attacks generated admiration not because of malicious joy – an interpretation that was shockingly enough reiterated one year later in the biggest German ecumenical Memorial Service by the President of the Protestant Church of Hessen and Nassau, Peter Steinacker, in the Cathedral of Mainz – but because people felt that someone was mastering globalisation here in all its aspects: technically in the elegance of the planes, economically by speculating on the New York Stock exchange and culturally because it was 'their' elite students who had successfully studied in the west.

The fact that Mohammed Atta and his companions had blended in so well in German and US society, and had even obtained honours degrees, plays an important role in understanding the common reaction of the Arab streets. For a short moment they felt included in a world which usually excludes them from recognition. 'Sleeper' became a term of approbation. Reading Hetata's text again after 9/11, these paradoxical grievances against processes that include and exclude at the same time stand out even more clearly.

Still I very much hope to enter into a dialogue with

Sherif Hetata. Not from a scientific but from a political point of view, I ask myself whether it would not be more appropriate to defend Egypt's rich hybrid culture rather than to ignore it. Cross-cultural encounters and trespassing boundaries are frequent and forceful in the Arab world.

There are reasons to be afraid of globalisation, indeed, but these are not the reasons that Hetata wants us to believe. Strategies of resistance can be manifold. They are surely not confined to industrialised countries alone.

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