

# ISLAM, ORIENTALISM AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

**MODERNITY  
AND THE  
POLITICS OF  
EXCLUSION  
SINCE  
IBN KHALDUN**

LE TAEUBIN

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**I.B. TAURIS**  
LONDON · NEW YORK

Published in 2011 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd  
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010  
[www.ibtauris.com](http://www.ibtauris.com)

Distributed in the United States and Canada  
Exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan  
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

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Library of Middle East History 22

ISBN 978 1 84885 005 7

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library  
A full CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress catalog card: available

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham  
Camera-ready copy edited and supplied by the author

*For my parents,  
Aziza and Ramadan,  
and for my children,  
Salma, Malachi, and Aliya*



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## NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

Unless otherwise noted in the text or endnotes, all translations from Arabic and French are my own. For the purposes of clarity, I use the standard Western spelling of terms that have entered the English language like 'Arab,' 'Islam,' and country names. I use the standard Library of Congress transliteration system for all other Arabic terms.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to San Francisco State University for granting me a Presidential Award to work uninterruptedly on this study, and to Dr. Paul Sherwin, Dean of the College of Humanities at San Francisco State University, for his generous support. My colleague and friend Edwin Williams has read most of this work and provided me with excellent feedback. My gratitude also extends to my graduate students at SFSU who joined in the discussion of the issues raised in this book during seminars on Islam and modern Arabic literature and culture. Several friends and colleagues have read this manuscript at various stages, either in whole or in part: Muḥammad Azadpur, Shirin Khanmohamadi, and Jillian Sandell of San Francisco State University; Luis Madureira, Dustin Cowell, and Marjorie Rhine of the University of Wisconsin; Gerhard Richter of UC Davis; Jacques Lezra of NYU; Muhsin al-Musawi of Columbia University; Jan Plug of the University of Western Ontario; Steven Salaita of Virginia Tech University; Ghada Osman of San Diego State University. Their criticisms were stimulating and important in helping me formulate my ideas. The defects are of course mine.

Much of the writing of this book was done between San Francisco, Madison-Wisconsin, and Peterborough, Ontario. Colleagues, librarians, and friends of these three cities added much to the enrichment of this work. I am especially grateful to Nezar AlSayyad, Emily Gottreich, Meġan Massoumi, and the CMES staff and faculty of the University of California, Berkeley, for hosting a presentation on this book. I am equally thankful to the English Department at Trent University for inviting me to give a talk on the topic.

In Egypt, my gratitude goes first to ustāth Fū'ād Ghoneim, my Alexandrian High School teacher of English, who showed me the beauty of the

English language, boosted my very humble beginnings and told me that he could see me at the end of the road. To Salwa Bahgat, of 'Ayn Shams University, who opened her home for many intellectual discussions and whose untold kindness and unceasing support solidified my steps along the way. To Shebl al-Komy, a remarkable Egyptian scholar. To 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Abd al-Salām, Wagīh Ya'qūb, Manāl Ghoneim and 'Āṭif Bahgāt, outstanding professors of Arabic at 'Ayn Shams University whose friendship and support and the many books they generously sent me from Egypt have been of fundamental value for my research. At various archives and libraries there are a number of helpful people. My special thanks go to the library staff of al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma lil-Kitāb who helped me during my research in Cairo to find documents I would have never found without their support. I am deeply thankful to the circulation desk staff of the Memorial Library at UW-Madison, especially Mary Weber, Ron Larson, and Jimmy Johnson (J.J.), with whom I worked for five years, and who were as kind to me as my own family. My thanks also go to all my students in Al-Alsun of 'Ayn Shams University, UW-Madison, Beloit College, UW-Whitewater, and San Francisco State University.

My sincere gratitude goes to Hāla Ghoneim who gave me the idea for "Denshawai" and pushed me for it. The daunting task of formatting and copy-editing a convoluted and diacritical manuscript was performed heroically by Rachel Friedman, now a graduate student at UC Berkeley. Her diligence and intelligence made the preparation of the manuscript a teachable process. Likewise, I am grateful to Dustin Cowell for his patient and thorough proofreading. My sincerest thanks are owed to the editors of I.B.Tauris, especially Rasna Dhillon, for her helpful encouragement and instructive directions. I am indebted to Matthew Brown for his work in preparing, typesetting, proofreading and indexing the text.

Finally, this book would have been impossible without the patience, support, and love I received from Kelly McGuire, who followed its composition with all its ebbs and flows. My greatest debt by far is to her.

# PROLOGUE

## Thinking about Islam and the West

As a literary scholar, I never thought I would venture to write a book on Islam. While Islam was the lived experience of three decades I spent in Egypt and is surely a penetrative force and an inevitable discourse in all the Arabic texts I read and analyze, authoring a work exclusively dedicated to the relationship between Islam, the West, and intellectual history was, at one time, far from imaginable. I began writing this book early in the summer of 2006, after I flew from San Francisco to Canada in order to obtain my new work visa. Immediately upon my arrival at the US Consulate in Toronto, I was singled out from a group of seven similarly circumstanced Europeans applying for the same type of work visa. I was profiled by the visa officer, who, acting on specific orders from the US Department of State, fingerprinted me, put a “cancelled without prejudice” stamp on all my previous US visas since 1993, and took my Egyptian passport. He told me that I could not re-enter the USA until I heard from his office, and that I “should find a place to stay because it is going to be a long wait.” I was soon to learn that mine was not an isolated case and that there are thousands of male Muslims with Middle Eastern names going through the same ordeal at various US embassies and consulates. Confused, stranded, indignant, and in limbo for three months until the US State Department decided that I was not a threat to its national security, I began working on this present study.

While in Canada, the two writers that I often read and reread were Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Perhaps it was because they were both exiled that I felt a strong and renewed affinity for their work. Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* restored my faith in the emancipatory power of hope after



failure and gave me the strength to cope with the negative effects on my own life affected by the so-called “war on terror.” His definition of exile as the sharing of the suffering of humanity and a renunciation of the “administered” world of commodities and consumer culture humbled my short-lived ordeal. “It is even part of my good fortune not to be a house-owner,” writes Adorno, echoing Nietzsche’s words in *The Gay Science*, “[T]oday we should have to add: it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.”<sup>1</sup> Benjamin’s theses on the concept of history were a different source of intellectual forbearance, allowing me to situate myself in a larger context and to observe history with Benjamin’s eyes. Benjamin’s thesis reassured me that the struggle for justice and humanism is far from over, that “when the fields are still, and the tired men and dogs all gone to rest,” we too must “cross and recross the strips of moon-blanch’d green,” and like Matthew Arnold’s stubborn Scholar Gypsy, must “come, and again renew the quest.”<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting on Klee’s famous painting “Angelus Novus,” Benjamin speaks about “the angel of history” who seems ready “to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.”<sup>3</sup> This conflicted angel, whose gaze is endlessly captured like the Laocoön’s silent cry,<sup>4</sup> looks back for a lost harmony among nations and epochs past, while more destruction and disharmony is yet to come as the angel of history steps forward towards an unforeseeable future. This magnificent image of the angel of history readily sums up the main idea of this book, in which I seek to reconstruct the recent prehistory of Islam and ‘the West’ with the intention of analyzing the connections between knowledge and politics.

The chapters in this book examine modern encounters between Islam and the West from the point of view of intellectual history, which broadly touches upon the Enlightenment, European modernity, colonialism, and the postcolonial. I strongly believe that the task of radical historiography in both Islam and the West begins with reading history as a history of “responsibility.” This responsibility means that we must resist the reading of history as an act of confirmation or totalization and must always leave room for doubt.

As a critic and cultural theorist, I am not particularly eager to take sides in overdetermined battles of “civilizationisms” or engage in futile clashes of ignorance. Instead, this book poses a set of fundamental questions. To what

and to whom does the term 'Islam' refer, and what does this reference imply today? How can 'the West' speak meaningfully about Islam when there are many references on the subject and no absolute concept that channels our knowledge, and how do Muslims in turn understand 'the West'? If there is no absolute code of knowledge or criterion for validity, then certainly struggles or disputes over Islam's religiosity and meaning will continue to emerge. In other words, Islam has fallen into a textual trap, one that often derives its material from world events, but which is mostly rhetorical in its reproduction of such material. If Islam is the world's third Abrahamic religion to appear, why has its appearance and geographical spread over the last one and a half millennia posed a threat to existing religions or beliefs in the West? Has Islam ever really coexisted with Judaism and/or Christianity, and if so, to what extent? Who were Muslims and who are they now? Is there only one Islam or are there indeed multiple Islams? If so, what are the core differences between those varieties of Islam and between Islam and other religions? What are the relationships between Islam and violence, Islam and women, or Islam and freedom? What does this tell us about the differences between Islam and religious beliefs in the West?

Addressing each of these questions from all aspects would certainly require a book-length reply, and most of them have been asked before, but to ask them now – after Islam has been just recently re-subjected to the negative implications of media coverage during the recent US presidential campaigns – is to open an old wound that was closed but never healed. It is unfortunate that then-presidential candidate Barak Obama had to spend millions of dollars on brochures distributed across the USA just to let Americans know that he is not Muslim, while his opponent, Republican John McCain, took every chance to emphasize the Judeo-Christian values of his campaign where there was no tolerance for "fundamentalism" or "radicalism," the two famous descriptors for Islam today.

Announcing in an economically challenged post-Bush America that "the United States is not and will never be at war with Islam," as President Obama said on his first visit to Turkey, is a step of good faith and a sign of hope, as are all Nobel Prize-worthy visits to the Middle East to promote peace through public diplomacy. The fact that Obama felt the need to make this declaration confirms the grim reality that in America today, a ruthless war on Islam has been taking place and that there is no guarantee that this war would stop or would not flare up again at the slightest provocation.

And flare up it did, except this time it erupted on a small scale and against no one but the president himself. In the late summer of 2009 the GOP Tea Party proponents roamed the streets of Washington D.C. to show their disapproval of President Obama's health coverage reform plan, while in the process revealing the naked face of flagrant anti-Islamic racism. In post-September 11 America, it has somehow become unremarkable to "accuse," falsely of course, the first African American President of being "an Indonesian *Muslim* turned welfare thug,"<sup>5</sup> while it is understandably horrendous to utter racist or anti-Semitic remarks about anyone.

More recently, Islam re-surfaced in the political arena when Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, speaking before *The Atlantic's* First Draft of History Conference on October 2, 2009, said that the right-wing "birthers" who think that President Obama was not born in Hawaii or was a "closet Muslim" are simply "crazy." Coming from a Republican senator reprimanding members of his own base, this would be a promising critique, except that Graham went on to explain to those who question President Obama's religious background and loyalty to the country that "the President is not a Muslim, he is a good man."

How did things get to this point? Although I don't think that "Muslim" was ever automatically seen as "good" in the USA, when did the two become mutually exclusive? These images and statements are painful enough to evoke the unutterable disappointment of the six million Muslims who live in the USA and of the billion Muslims around the world. But the mainstream US media again laughed the matter off and dismissed the associations and accusations as slander and smear propaganda. The problem is multi-sided. On the one hand, there is the ignorant disrespect and desperate attempt to tarnish someone's image for political gain. On the other hand, Islam has become the material for this "tarnishing." While the President has every right to stop having others describe him inaccurately, how did Islam become a sanctioned label for negative accusations in the USA and Europe under the watch of the whole world? One does not need to be a Muslim to feel the offense.

We must not forget that the word George Bush mentioned in his first reaction to the war against terror was "crusade." This is a heavily loaded term only used anachronistically to describe medieval Christian military campaigns against Islam to restore Christian dominion over the Holy Land. Soon after, Bush modified his tone and announced that the USA was not at war with "good Muslims." How are we to understand these contradictions?

Did the Bush administration *really* believe that there was such a person as a “good Muslim”? How can we not think that Orientalism is still alive and metamorphosed in a ‘new speak,’ *à la* George Orwell, that takes the sin of a man hiding in a cave to besmear the whole of Islam? Maybe there is a teachable formula or a magic recipe that Islam somehow misses.

Why, one might ask again, has Christianity managed to wash its hands of the Ku Klux Klan, Eric Rudolph, Terry Nichols and Timothy McVeigh? How has Germany persevered after the Holocaust, and Judaism survived Baruch Goldstein, while Islam has failed to shake itself of Osama bin Laden? There is naturally a substantial difference in the volume and magnitude of various crimes committed against humanity. The fact that bin Laden is still on the loose aggravates the tension, while the threat of his large-scale criminality is still a viable one. But we should not pick and choose. All such crimes are combined products of sociopolitical abnormalities and the darker side of the human soul and should be treated as such, and not as a symptom or indication of one religion’s irreparably violent nature.

Perhaps the most telling sign that there is something dangerous or “something wrong,” to play on the title of a polemical book on Islam, is the silence among many of its “experts.” In the face of widespread skeptical and disenchanting critiques of Islam, relatively few have come forward to assert that Islam is not to be misunderstood as a religion promoting violence and terrorism, or that Islam should not be confused with the inhumane agenda of bin Laden’s al-Qaeda.

To me, such silence suggests either resignation or concurrence, and a sense that many so-called “experts” on Islam have abandoned their responsibility to epistemology and to the world community. Either that, or they simply agree that Islam is a violence-promoting religion, i.e., that it is what the US mass media says it is, without any historical verification or careful investigation. No sense of responsibility remains on behalf of a religion abandoned by its “experts” and misunderstood by millions in the USA and Europe. This lack of action is stunning in comparison with the astounding number of classes and seminars taught, presentations and lectures delivered, conferences convened, books and newspaper columns published, television and radio shows aired, and films produced on a regular basis to raise awareness of issues such as racial profiling, gender equality, and anti-Semitism.

In the face of these phenomena, the desire to prevent the fatal “return of the same,” if it hasn’t already been here, and the urgent need to interrogate

false continuums and prejudiced associations do not require extensive justification. For a better grasp of the present condition of Islam as a perceived threat to Western Europe and America, we need to make sense of the roots of this predicament. In very broad terms, one can distinguish at least five points of exclusion at work between Islam and 'the West': Europe's Greco-Roman heritage, its Judeo-Christian tradition, and the bewildering mingling of the two categories; secular modernity; colonialism; and finally globalization. These points of reference reveal the complexity of research and scholarship on Islam and its relation to 'the West' as well as how pivotal periods in recent history, especially colonialism, which led to the rise of Arab nationalism, could become much more than a minor supplement or background to the economic and political history of the Arab-Muslim world.

Frantz Fanon makes an important observation on the bias of the Western historian of colonialism, arguing that "the history which he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation."<sup>6</sup> This tendency to silence or marginalize the colonial experience among some Western scholars is also underlined by Edward Said, who makes a salient argument about the "obstinate assumption that colonial undertakings were marginal and perhaps even eccentric to the cultural activities of the great metropolitan cultures."<sup>7</sup> I am not assuming that colonialism was the only significant factor that shaped the contemporary Arab-Muslim world, but its deepest consequences should not be overlooked. Fanon and Said warn us that this thread of excised colonial historiography will almost inevitably be reproduced in the postcolonial. If this reproduction indeed exists, how can one understand it without a radical interrogation of all postcolonial historiographies on Islam and the Arab world developed in the Western world?

To answer this question, I take a few steps back and investigate the dynamics of historiographical thinking in Western Europe since the rise of modernity. In fact, the term 'modernity,' which has often been seen from a mainstream Western perspective to be at odds with Islam, is a pivotal point of departure for this study. One of the arguments I explore in this book is that European modernity has misunderstood its responsibility towards history. This misunderstanding did not occur because history did not exist or was fabricated, but because in a moment of colonial triumph, Western Europe reconstructed its past to suit its present interests. While a critique of European modernity has been the material for many books and critical essays, I do not argue that the current animosity towards Muslims in Europe

and North America is simply a residual effect of this historicized colonial imagination; but neither do I say that the tension between Islam and the West today is something new or marks a break with all pasts. I do assert, however, that Islam now exemplifies the permanence of a catastrophe, that a history of the 'history' leading to this persistent catastrophe needs urgent restatement, and that Islam in 'the West' has too often been discussed outside of a proper historical framework.

I therefore confront issues that many theorists have struggled with, particularly the intricate connections and disconnections of 'Islamic cultures' with the colonial cultures forced on them as well as the contemporary effort to "Occidentalize the West." The specific concepts compared here have not been brought together in a single study before: a genealogy of the difference between history and fiction; the genesis of historical thought in Europe; its revolutionary development during the 'Enlightenment' by Kant, Hegel, and Marx; the construction of Islam in the public sphere and modern philosophy of Western Europe; colonial and postcolonial battles over the location of Ibn Khaldūn's theory of history both in 'the West' and the Arab world and their connections to hegemonic appropriations and apologetic nationalisms, in addition to related philosophical and historical discourses in French, English, and Arabic.

But one must also acknowledge that the Arab-Muslim world has become plagued with nationalism, and that Arab nationalism has veered from the path of social justice and political responsibility, creating instead tyrannies, abuses of authorities, and a resurgence of despotic traditions of the worst form. We must stop thinking sympathetically and imagining that the Ottoman-ruled pre-colonial Arab-Muslim world was a safe haven. However, this "absolutist state" of corruption and political failure, to borrow Perry Anderson's phrase, is not an excuse for colonialism, for nothing justifies the ruthless usurpation of other people's lands and resources. But the Arab-Muslim part of the world certainly had its share of misgovernment and abuses of human rights, as my analysis elucidates.

Albert Hourani warns us against the danger of seeing modern nationalism in the Arab-Muslim world "as being no more than a new version of an 'Islamic' idea of political domination."<sup>8</sup> Arab Muslims must see through the ideologies of cultural pride, the affirmation of roots, and the drum-beating fanaticisms that characterize the empty speeches of their rulers today. Nationalisms capitalize on geohistorical notions of belonging to

one's own place. In so doing, nationalisms create an illusion of continuity and stasis and enable social diseases like despotism and corruption to roam unchecked. There is no question that in a post-national era, most Arab-Muslim states will have to make serious choices. Some countries may choose simply to submit to their own version of 'modernity' and accept it as it is; others may opt to merge their own culture and identity in a larger, more dominant whole. Some may try to turn their back upon the so-called 'cosmopolitanism' and all the fashionable universalizations it stands for, choosing to withdraw to a lost theocratic ideal. Some may continue their autocratic practices of exploiting their people in the name of democracy and Islam. Yet some Arab countries may eventually transform their social forces from within and meet the 'globalized' world on equal footing. Other countries may choose to adopt some 'Western' ideas and merge them with their own traditional values, principles, and philosophies. While there is still much that Arab states aspire to achieve, especially on the political level, many try to adjust the balance between their own specific cultures and the cultures of Europe and America.

But in order for this to happen, we have to interrogate the multiple dimensions of political autocracy and economic stagnation in the Arab world, which cannot be separated from the hegemonies exercised mainly by the USA and to some extent by Western Europe. This hegemony, which began with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, makes it evident that the forms of cultural exchange brought about by colonialism were themselves both the causes and effects of the modes of economic domination and political tyranny that constituted the basis of colonial relations in the Arab-Muslim world. It is therefore completely 'natural' that cultural hegemony and its satellite discourses, which forget their own violence and capture only the violence and antagonism of the so-called 'Islamic world,' would become the governing paradigm that continues to channel the passionate current political views on Islam in America and Western Europe today.

A crucial element of this crooked line of continuous hegemony is the transfer of colonial power from Western Europe to America during the 1950s, which is most exemplified in the latter's unflinching support of Israel in the latest incarnations of the Middle East conflict and the most recent involvements of the two Bush Administrations in oil-rich Iraq. Through complex legacies, the USA inherited British and French colonial paradigms in the Arab-Muslim world, with systems and policies of management that

replicate the colonial tradition of the last two centuries, albeit with a different, more sophisticated technology: this is exactly the implication of the various accounts of Euro-American colonial continuity.

Therefore, it makes little sense to focus only on the image of Islam in 'the West' after September 11 and disregard the protracted and complex involvement of Western Europe and the USA in incessant acts of transnational (neo-)colonial aggressions against this part of the world. There is an insidious continuity at work here, and it must be broken asunder in order for us to have a more informed understanding of the relationship between Islam and 'the West.' This understanding can only be achieved through a responsible invocation of history, since the task of radical historiography, as Walter Benjamin argued, cannot be downgraded to a recounting of events in fixed time, but must "seize hold of memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger," and "grasp ... the constellation that [one's] own era has formed with an earlier one."<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, this book has one core goal: to examine the possibility of restoring the referent 'Islam' to a functional code of knowledge. In fact, at no other time has a careful examination of Islam and its relationship to the West, to historiography, and to the discourse of intellectual history been more compelling than in today's post-September 11 political environment. The attacks of September 11, which resulted in the deliberate brutal killings of thousands of innocent Americans, have raised many questions about Islam. Those questions range from investigations of the relationship of Islam, both as a religion and as a social practice, to the discourse of violence, to issues of democracy, liberalism, gender, secularism, and freedom, among others. More importantly, the events of September 11 have reopened old debates on Islam and 'the West' and brought to the surface 'inconvenient' questions not only about the position of Islam in relationship to modernity and the European understanding of world history, but also the implications of this understanding in the world today.

I hope this book does not fall prey to the ready-made ideological assumptions that because I am an Egyptian/Muslim/Arab, I must somehow be writing from a provincial position or represent the point of view of the Arab-Muslim world, supposing that this part of the world indeed has a single unified view on any one question, much less in general. Those assumptions are wasteful obfuscations that only serve to nourish the minds of conspiracy theorists who choose to ignore rigorous critique and divert attention from



core matters and crucial issues involving our common humanity. Those critical issues raise a genuine and humanistic concern over the divide between the palimpsestic abuses of the past and an understanding of history as a rich and teachable discipline.

Engagement in arguments makes us all victims in a war of fruitless reasoning that is inevitably lost on all fronts. It is easy to take sides and to simply deny, prove, or dispute pro-Islamic or anti-Islamic positions, especially when there is no absolute standard or norm of grounding statement to which all can return. In this sense, the Muslim world's witness to Islam being anatomized and critiqued has divested the Muslim world of the means to argue. If a scholar seeks to prove a given statement about Islam as an empirical fact, say Islam's tolerance for coexistence, then the moral gravity of Islam as a dynamic religion based in ethics will be unnecessarily lost. If he or she attempts to demonstrate the bias present in anti-Islam campaigns, then the general and the universal value of the argument will also be lost, and so on and so forth. This is because radical revisionists of Islam deny not merely the referent of Islam, but its historical sense as well. In other words, a statement of spirituality and peace in Islam or a lecture on the beauty and loftiness of Islamic sophism is not enough to defeat revisionism and antagonism. It is no longer a matter of making others submit to the verification game, because, in a postnationalist global world, Islam *has become* a political and an ethical question.<sup>10</sup> How then in this already alienating globality can we speak about Islam? If there are no grounds, or, if the grounds have been shaken and questioned, how can we meaningfully write about Islam?

An important starting point for making sense of Islam today is contextualization. To learn about Islam is to situate it in relation to its non-Islamic correlatives. Since Islam will achieve its meaning, in fact its stamp of verification, through linkage to, or difference from, the non-Islamic, what other discourses, networks, or fields of knowledge and practices can one define as essentially non-Islamic or anti-Islamic? Modernity? Globalism? Cosmopolitanism? Humanism and all its offshoots of secularism, freedom, democracy, progress, and enlightenment? Is it also fair in this context to add colonialism as an anti-Islamic discourse? After all, most of the Arab-Muslim world was colonized for decades by European forces with 'civilizing missions' that symbolized the above differences. With all those fields of difference in mind, how can we link the current political and economic conditions of the Arab-Muslim world to European colonialism and global conflict? Approaching

such questions requires serious considerations of global tendencies and connections. In the postcolonial, the differences between Islam and its others, or what Islam is the other of, are no longer seen from a strictly religious point of view that differentiates between 'right' and 'wrong' or 'truth' and 'error,' for those are passé, though in some discourses the dichotomies of 'good' versus 'evil' have never broken down. They are rather viewed from the trendy 'globalizational' standpoint of acceptability, whether Islam is suitable or unsuitable, useful or superfluous, sophisticated or obsolete, worldly or nihilistic for a world moving rapidly towards internationalism.

Some recent and contemporary studies have in fact raised the question of Islam in relationship to globalization. A number of scholars approach this topic as if the Arab-Muslim world's recent history had not passed through colonization,<sup>11</sup> or as if the experience of imperialism had somehow shaped a common concern of an imaginary Muslim "*ummah*,"<sup>12</sup> or even as if the culture of Europe had set the standards against which Muslim national cultures must measure themselves.<sup>13</sup> We would have learned nothing from the last three decades of theory and cultural studies if we did not question assumed coherences and wide generalizations, especially when many spaces within the Arab world have not yet achieved complete cultural decolonization. As I elucidate in the Epilogue, I take issue with the 'global,' the 'cosmopolitan,' and their associated '-isms.' The first because it normalizes relationships among world's nations and assumes a homogeneity that is at best questionable in a world of political rifts and economic hierarchies, and the second because ours is unfortunately a world completely different from Aldus Huxley's *Brave New World*; there is simply not enough "soma" to entertain the bourgeois idea and produce the "historical amnesia" and the "identitarian reconditioning" necessary for the fresh cosmopolitan start.

In a post-September 11 political world, 'global' research on Islam has unfortunately mainly been focused on the study of its relationship to violence and terrorism. Notions like Islamdom, Islamism, political Islam, the rise of the new *umma*, and the revival of the Caliphate have been viewed as phenomena facing 'western modernity.' In her important work on the Islamic revival and feminism in Egypt, the anthropologist Saba Mahmoud draws attention to this syndrome by arguing that "the neologism 'Islamism' frames its object as an eruption of religion outside the supposedly 'normal' domain of private worship, and thus as a historical anomaly requiring explanation if not rectification." Because of September 11, Mahmoud continues,

there is now powerful support “to strengthen the sense that it is secular-liberal inquisition before which Islam must be made to confess.”<sup>14</sup>

While those and many “Islamism” studies that Mahmoud critiques and that clutter our bookshelves and libraries could use some radical unpacking, most of them come as a consequence of or a reaction to current political thought about Islam in a “new world order,” where the ‘global’ becomes coterminous with ‘the political’ and inextricably linked to the notion of secular modernity which followed the European Enlightenment. In this context, the most prominent religious culture that does not portray itself as ‘global’ is that of Islam. In this universally ‘democratic’ cosmo-politicality, Islam is seen not just as an “inquisition-able” religion that refuses to immerse itself in a global environment, but as one whose refusal to assimilate automatically implies that all its adherents could pose significant threats to the world at large. By accepting this limitation, we narrow our research and miss opportunities to broaden the discussion and engage with more informed studies on Islam and ‘the West’. Despite the anti-Islamic scare tactics of people like Daniel Pipes and Martin Kramer, Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies now is at its heyday in the Western world, and could in fact be the transnationalizing vehicle with which to escape obsolete apologetics, biased polemics, or the return of vicious forms of knowledge like ethnocentrism. Therefore a meaningful approach to Islam cannot dissociate itself from the wider historical and cultural European and North American contexts embedded in the contours of various political, economic, and social traditions.

There are many scholars and historians in ‘the West’ who study Islam discursively as part of a rigorous intellectual endeavor spanning both ‘the West’ and the Arab-Muslim world. Not only have a number of those scholars contributed influentially to Islamic studies, but they have also raised the bar for quality scholarship on Islam both within and outside the Islamic world, maintaining the primacy of evidence over all theory, some of whom are native to the Arab-Islamic world and normally write in English or French (such scholars include Edward Lane, Arnold J. Toynbee, Franz Rosenthal, Jacques Berque, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Albert Hourani, Mohammed Arkoun, and many others). We must take into consideration the fact that numerous studies have dealt with ways in which the West perceives Muslims and Arabs and vice versa. Works like Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) and Ḥasan Ḥanafī’s *Muqaddima fī ‘Ilm al-Istighrāb* [Introduction to Occidentalism] (2000) create a continuity thesis on Orientalism, although the

two have different ideas about the response. Even before Said and Ḥanafī, Hourani had already taken broader steps in theorizing the divide between the East and the West. Hourani's incisive analysis of major Western writers ushers us through the intricate and daunting task of a historian like Marshall Hodgson, whose *Venture of Islam* Hourani examines very closely in *Islam in European Thought* and discovers intriguing similarities between Hodgson and Ibn Khaldūn. Hourani's talent also exposes the anti-Islamic bias of eighteenth-century thinkers like Voltaire, Diderot, Comte de Boulainvilliers, and Schlegel as well as Orientalists like Henri Lammens and Sir William Muir.<sup>15</sup> Many years after the writing of *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Hourani acknowledges that he may have been "wrong in laying too much emphasis upon ideas which were taken from Europe, and not enough about what was retained from an older tradition."<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, Hourani illuminated many dark corners in Islamic and European cultures; only a rare scholar like him can successfully navigate the rough terrain of Arab-Islamic and European exchanges in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But we should not take Hourani's acknowledgement lightly, as it does point to a constitutive lack in Islamo-European studies. In trying to explain to post-September 11 readers not just the history of Islam but Islam as a condition enabling historical thinking, especially that of 'the West,' one must be aware of two interlocking forces working simultaneously: that which Western schools of thought and philosophies of history tried to impose upon world readers, and that which an Arab-Muslim society with a long tradition of historical thought was producing from within itself.

There are also those who are mere accomplices to power, who already know the argument before they read the text, and can produce and promote ideas tailored to serve an existing political agenda. They are usually the ones who play the role of Othello's Iago, the knowledgeable villains in a tragedy they may not have sparked but are sure to orchestrate to the end. It is a tragedy whose most diabolic script can best be shown in Daniel Pipes' following statement:

There is no escaping the unfortunate fact that Muslim government employees in law enforcement, the military, and the diplomatic corps need to be watched for connections to terrorism, as do Muslim chaplains in prisons and the armed forces. Muslim visitors and immigrants must undergo additional background checks. Mosques require a

scrutiny beyond that applied to churches, synagogues, and temples. Muslim schools require increased oversight to ascertain what is being taught to children.<sup>17</sup>

As history continues to disrupt the neatly ordered speculative structures and theoretical assumptions we cast on ourselves and on others, we yearn for a firm and trusted ground to stand on, especially after Islamic fundamentalism had stood out as extremely hostile to the new world, allowing people like Pipes to inaugurate a new age of “thought police” against all Muslims inside and outside America. While ‘Islamism’ has received its due of scholarly and non-scholarly attention over the last few years, a critical examination of the mechanics of the production of history between Islam and ‘the West’ and the logos of rationalism and positivism is long overdue.

Thus, this book’s argument is structured around the development of intellectual history in Western Europe and its distinctive academic ramifications as we encounter them in studies of Islam and the Islamic world. I build this framework not simply around contested definitions of history, or around Europe’s transition from a modernity of ‘historical progress’ to a colonality of legitimation, but more importantly around some highly loaded historiography of “encounters” between East and West, whether those encounters were colonial, personal, or even textual, since texts too are a viable form of hegemony.

One final cautionary question. How can one write a book on Islam, modernity, and ‘the West’ without being apologetic or polemical, or without being labeled as Islamophilic, or pro-Islam, or anti-Western? I have tried to avoid the often truncated and abusive reference to the ‘Muslim world’ which includes Muslim populations in the Arab world, as well as wherever they live in small or large numbers outside of this region. I say “Islam *and* the West,” which are not two totally distinct entities, in order to refer specifically to the intricate encounters in modern history that brought the two together, or one to the other. But I also assert the ‘Arab’ and ‘Arabic’ part of Islam in this book, as I elucidate below, to specify not only the original language of Islam, but also the part of the world that uses this language today, which I will refer to as the ‘Arab-Muslim world’ throughout this study.<sup>18</sup>

My view of the West’s impression of Islam is that it was shaped in struggle and that thoughts about the lost empire in Africa and Asia, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the rise of militia wars and political strife in Lebanon, the