

Islam, Orientalism and Intellectual History: Modernity and the Politics of Exclusion since Ibn Khaldun. Mohammad Salama. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013. ISBN: 9781780764504

This book examines the relationship between Islam and the West from the point of view of intellectual history during the Enlightenment, colonialism, and the postcolonial era. As Salama argues, since history exists in a moment of colonial triumph, the study and the theory of history reads as “responsibility,” as “an act of confirmation or tantalization and must always leave room for doubt” (2). The West reconstructed its past to suit its present interest. The book sets out to address the questions of to what and to whom the term “Islam” refers. How can the West speak about Islam? And how do Muslims, in turn, understand “the West”?

These kinds of questions, the author contends, reflect the politics of today, such as when Barack Obama spent millions of dollars during his presidential campaigns to let American know that he was not Muslim. At the same time, the Republican candidates in both 2008 and 2012 took every chance to emphasize Judeo-Christian values and a lack of tolerance for any fundamentalism and radicalism that could symbolize Islam. These kinds of politics of Islam and the reflection of identity in the Western world were an outcome of orientalism discourse and colonialist power. But, instead of analyzing the politics of the present, the author investigates “the dynamics of historiographical thinking in Western Europe since the rise of modernity” (6) because this approach could help to explain the shape of politics today regarding Islam and orientalism discourse overall.

Throughout the book, the author traces the origin of Western thought regarding Islam that shaped the present negative representation in media and politics. The author examines the first encounters between Western and Eastern thought from pre-colonialism to the postcolonial period and separates fiction from fact regarding the intellectual history of Islam in Western thinking.

This book is structured around the concept that “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 ... were colonial, personal, or even textual, since texts too are a viable form of hegemony” (14). This approach focuses on problems of historiography and colonialism to acknowledge the product of global politics that shaped the post-September 11 world. The book provides examples and case studies from Egypt, since it has become one of the classic cases of Western intellectuals regarding colonialism and imperialism by constructing the encounters between Islam (as “Other”) and the West.

The problem of misunderstanding Islam, according to the author, began with the European Enlightenment and modernity, in which Europe’s contending history construes the Arab-Muslim tradition as the “Other” in relation to itself. In this context, “Other” meant those who were awkward, backward, and uncivilized in comparison to a modern and civilized Europe. In this case, the discourse of intellectual history has become a variation on the theme of colonial conquest, such as the problem of Islamic thought being represented as “the Other” as a way to frame Western thinking as “the Self” and as the origin of intellectual thoughts. These historical thoughts constructed ideologies that continued during the post-September 11 political climates and that positioned Islam in

opposition to globalization and cosmopolitanism, resulting in the Islamophobia that presently permeates Western politics. Any discussion of Self/Other dichotomies presented in the aftermath of September 11, according to Salama, was critical; in fact, the attack re-awakened this kind of division and facilitated the expansion of imperialism. This discussion of Islamic/Western scholarship and thought constructed the Self/Other by analyzing them differently. However, in response to colonialism and political power from Western hegemony, the Self/Other was constructed through the lens of imperialism that European colonialism imposed for “‘civilizing’ other cultures, and a growing historical reassessment of a familiar Christian ‘self’ versus an unfamiliar Islamic ‘Other’” (135). Although the division between the self and the other emerged during the Enlightenment, it is presented in world politics today as a new phenomenon. According to Salama, the conflict between the two divisions was based on the collapse of the Soviet Union and entered a new era of political antagonism.

The author provided scholarly definitions for “Islam,” “Arab,” “modernity,” and “nation” with regard to how these terms are used for political and ideological reasons as well as the development of each definition based on the political environment and other circumstances. For instance, European modernity has been institutionalized in the modern period, and it instrumentalized human history in a fashion that served modern-day European aims and efforts. Likewise, “the West” has been used to determine not a geographical location but rather the dominant, modern world and powerful imperialism that constructs social and political manifestations of Western politics and culture related to modernity and advanced society, while ‘the East’ is an inferior other. This kind of intellectual reading of history offers a more nuanced understanding of the West—Europe—and the East—Islam—in relation to power. Although the epistemological account refers to the West as a geographical direction, “the West” means the advanced Self, in contrast to the Other of “the East.”

The book is not a discussion about or an argument for an orientalism thesis; instead, it is an account of how Eastern and Western scholars conflict in their representations of the Other. The author presents an intellectual historical engagement in Western thought to interrogate the “relationship between the writing of fiction and the writing of history and to examine the level of autonomy from political influence in both discourses” (37) Because the foundations of intellectual thought in Europe reflect “the way in which today’s global politics maintains such a palpable polarization between Muslims and the rest of the world” (39), the author investigates the formative premises of historical thinking and the practical consequences, uses, and abuses of history in the construction of European political orientations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the first chapter, the author constructs the definition and concept of history and history’s relation to fiction and narrative. This account of history as a concept was to emerge from the root of modernity and its historical narrative to the Enlightenment and to the present. The essence of modernity, in the first place, occurs in the integration between modern and non-modern, between the Self and the Other in orientalism discourse. This concept of two unequal worlds, Salama argues, sparked the relationship between the West and the East in world politics today. Moreover, the chapter offered a historiographical account of how historians and philosophers have discussed history, and modernity in particular, and how the relationship between Islam/East and West emerged.

Chapter two is devoted to the post-colonial battle over Ibn Khaldun and the politics of exclusion. Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) is best known for his book *The Muqaddimah*, or *Introduction*, which engaged with the theory of history and intellectual history at large. Yet *Introduction* has been “harnessed and mobilized for particular colonial and postcolonial projects” (78). Ibn Khaldun made history a new science on which he based his historical model of civilization; he introduced the philosophy of history in connection with the modern notion of civic life and civility. This chapter highlights Ibn Khaldun’s accomplishments in the theory of history because his work contributed to an understanding of the major change in power relations between civilizations; Ibn Khaldun constructed the cyclic movement of civilizations and superpowers from an Islamic civilization to a European civilization after the Enlightenment. Also, *Introduction* presented the first image of the East to the world and to European scholarship. In this chapter, Salama discusses Ibn Khaldun’s scholarship on the explanation of human progress and civilization and its relation to colonialism. In Salama’s opinion, Ibn Khaldun’s contribution to the theory of history helped colonial projects; orientalist took advantage of Ibn Khaldun’s work, particularly of how it placed the “other” in historical thinking and in terms of how orientalist located Islamic thought in European intellectual history. The author argues that the engagement and differing perspectives of Western and Arab scholars in representing Ibn Khaldun and his thesis conflict in achieving an understanding of the relation of the Islam/West and Self/Other dichotomy.

Salama’s work deals more with existing scholarship on the intellectual history of Ibn Khaldun than with Ibn Khaldun’s work itself. For instance, instead of discussing Ibn Khaldun’s biography or writings, Salama cites scholars who analyzed the work of Ibn Khaldun from Islamic and from Western perspectives to demonstrate how each engages differently with Ibn Khaldun. Salama positions himself as a mediator between Western and Eastern scholarship in intellectual history and historiography. In chapter three, for instance, the author discussed the location of Islam in Hegel’s philosophy in comparison to its location in the writings of Ibn Khaldun. Salama discusses how the West and the East analyzed Western (Hegel) and Eastern (Ibn Khaldun) thinkers at the same time. Although Western scholars criticized Ibn Khaldun, some Islamic scholars criticized Hegel, while Western scholars dealt with Hegel positively.

Most conflict in present politics divides the world into two categories that were established as long ago as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Colonialist projects that came after that period practice these kinds of divisions to which orientalist devoted their work. In his discussion of Egypt as a colonial case study, Salama argues that colonialism itself did not cause the tension between Islam and the West, but rather that the West controlled the keys of history and allowed no room for non-Western perspectives. In the fourth chapter, the author explains how Egyptian intellectuals reflected on French and then British occupation and their roles in colonialism. He claims that in the 19th-century colonial period some scholars had such radical political ideologies that they rejected anything that came from the West, while others accepted almost everything from the West without restriction. This confrontation between refusal/acceptance positions in Egyptian society in the nineteenth century showed modern counterpoise between Western and secular thinkers and other Islamic conservatism. This kind of complete rejection of the West among Egyptians made the colonizers become

more aggressive toward the Egyptian society, forcing Egyptians to accept colonialism. This process led other intellectuals to call for acceptance of the colonial British as the other. This conflict between colonizers and colonized was depicted in Egyptian poems and novels.

Nevertheless, the book examined “the attempt to restore Islam to a code of knowledge by considering a protracted modern history of encounters with the West and the corresponding personal sensibilities as well public discourses that emerged from those encounters, especially in the field of intellectual history” (189). This kind of conflict, the author concludes, was based on legitimizing colonial and imperial domination, and this domination produced and reproduced itself in the postcolonial period, sustaining its underlying xenophobic codes into the present day. Salama claims that the state of present-day world politics is not so much a new phase of conflict as it is the outcome of colonialism and imperialism, which serve empires to divide societies and states into two camps: Self and Other. Islamophobia is one recent manifestation of this kind of conflict, which revolves around one civilization as a counter to another.

This book is ideal for advanced undergraduate students in history and comparative literature. While scholars from political and social science may have much to learn from this work, this book is also important for Middle Eastern studies and literature. Again, this text is not about or for orientalism; instead, it is a historical engagement with texts to show how present political conflicts are not new, but rather centuries old.

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