Appropriating Islam: The Islamic Other in the Consolidation of Western Modernity

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It is nearly impossible to find a contemporary map of the Mediterranean. Maps of southern Europe are easy to find, and one can purchase maps of Palestine, Israel and Egypt. North African maps, as well as continental African maps, abound. Maps of the Middle East, defined as Turkey, Egypt, and the countries to their east as far as the Indian border, are less prevalent, but available. Historical maps of the entire Mediterranean basin, of the Roman Empire, exist. Strangely, however, the only way to view the contemporary Mediterranean and surrounding countries as a whole is to look at a map of the Earth from space, in which political boundaries are invisible, trumped by the wide expanse of the Mediterranean, the 'boot' of Italy, and the stark contrast of the North Africa desert.

  This situation is not coincidental. It is symptomatic of a worldview that reinforces the perception of distance between the West and the Islamic world. It is a view that 'serves to marginalize the Mediterranean world and accentuate the ancient break between its south-east and north-west.'[1] It reinforces opposition between the West and Islam by postulating irreconcilable differences between them. Fawaz Gerges has attested to the power of this mindset in the Arab world today:

> My own generation—people in their 30s and 40s—has also been socialized into an anti-American mindset, which is difficult to critique or deconstruct. America, it is often claimed, conspired to humiliate and dominate the proud Arabs by corrupting their local elite and empowering their hostile neighbors. Intelligent Arab men of letters advance conspiratorial theories to explain Washington's conduct and animosity toward the Arab and Muslim people.[2]

Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis and the views of many militant Islamists are examples of this perspective.

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[1] Mohammed Arkoun, 'Islam, Europe, the West: Meanings-at-stake and the Will-to-power,' in John Cooper, Ronald Nettler and Mohamed Mahmoud, eds., *Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p. 174.
[2] Fawaz A. Gerges, 'The Tragedy of Arab–American Relations,' *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 September 2001.

Today, this fractured 'clash of civilizations' outlook is vying for status with a view that espouses 'the political, economical, and especially cultural and historical reconstitution of the Mediterranean.'[3] The latter points to the interdependence of the West and the Islamic world. It highlights the mutual indebtedness of Euro-American and Islamic civilizations. And it contributes to less animosity between these civilizations, as their shared history and traditions gain emphasis. To counter the violent consequences of the 'clash of civilizations,' it is necessary to challenge accounts that portray the West and the Islamic world in strictly antagonistic terms. Both the 'discourse of the ideology of combat on the Muslim side and the discourse of hegemony on the Western side'[4] are insufficient.

The latter worldview, however, is only beginning to gain a cultural foothold in the West and the Middle East. It is through critique of the West's tradition of relating with Islam that one can work toward constructive dialogue rather than reflexive antagonism between these two communities. Given recent world events, it is especially important to create the conditions for such dialogue.[5] This article advances such a critique and offers a new perspective from which to promote this dialogue. It brings the politics of identity to bear on relations between Western and Islamic countries. My central claim is that modern Western identity is dependent on its appropriation of an Islamic other, often portrayed as 'fundamentalist,' 'despotic' or 'backward.'[6] Consider Michael Dillon's description of identity politics:

> How the alien appears, and the experience of the alien as alien ... waxes and wanes ... according to different times and different philosophical systems. How the alien is alien similarly determines how the self-same, in both philosophy and politics, is itself not simply constituted, but continuously reinaugurated in the process of trying to make the alien proper. There brews, therefore, beneath all identity politics and beneath all allied philosophical systems a secret *horror alieni* that insidiously seeks to dispel all aliens—alienness itself—to divest things of everything enigmatic and strange.[7]

Islam plays the role of the 'alien' in the construction of Western modernity.[8] It serves as the other against which Westerners have struggled to organize a collective self. 'The definition of Europe and what it was to be European was

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[3] Arkoun, 'Islam, Europe, the West,' p. 187.

[4] Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, trans./ed. Robert D. Lee (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), p. 122.

[5] On the potential of dialogue between the Islamic world and the West, see John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, 'Islam and the West: Muslim Voices of Dialogue,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29, no. 3 (2000): 613–40.

[6] This approach highlights subjectivity's ontological debt to difference and the inescapable connections between ethics and subjectivity. See further David Campbell and Michael Shapiro, eds., *Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[7] Michael Dillon, 'The Scandal of the Refugee: Some Reflections on the "Inter" of International Relations and Continental Thought,' in Campbell and Shapiro, *Moral Spaces*, p. 104.

[8] 'Modernity' refers to the drive to master nature, the world, and the self, and often the 'other'–all of which are seen to be at the disposal of humanity. This drive is bound up with notions of progress, development, secularism, democracy and justice. See further William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

continually linked to the external differentiation of 'Europeanness' from 'barbarity.'[9] The creation of a modern Western identity is an effect of the attempt to differentiate a Western self from an Islamic other.[10] Nevertheless, the West and Islam are, in fact, culturally, politically and historically interdependent, sharing a common Hellenic inheritance.

> The populations designated by the label 'Islam' are, in great measure, the cultural heirs of the Hellenic world—the very world in which 'Europe' also claims to have its roots. 'Islamic civilization' must therefore be denied a vital link to the very properties that define so much of what is essential to 'Europe' if a civilisational difference is to be postulated between them.[11]

The postulation of an irreconcilable civilizational difference between the West and the Middle East can be explained by a Western tendency to solidify ideals of order, domesticity, and democratic governance through opposition to an 'unfit' Islamic other. 'The very idea of what Europe was was from the beginning defined partly in terms of what it was *not* … the non-European barbarian or savage played a decisive role in the evolution of the European identity and the maintenance of order among European states.'[12]

In this essay, four examples illustrate how appropriations of Islam contributed to the consolidation of European and North American modernity: early orientalist discourse in the United States; Western literary representations of Muslim women; the European colonization of Egypt; and orientalism in American popular culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Each documents my claim that Islam has been appropriated historically to serve as the 'other' against which the West has consolidated its cultural and political norms. These appropriations have had powerful negative effects on contemporary relations between the West and the Islamic Middle East. Understanding them reveals the mechanics behind the socially constructed animosity between the West and the Islamic world. It also allows us to imagine ways to reformulate Western identity such that it does not depend on negative appropriations of Islam.

Anti-Christian Darkness and Political Tyranny[13]

'What else but evil can be told of the undisputed dominions of the enemy of God?' asked Mrs. Sarah L. Huntington Smith, a Protestant missionary to Syria

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[9] Iver B. Neumann and Jennifer M. Welsh (1991) 'The Other in European Self-definition: An Addendum to the Literature on International Society,' *Review of International Studies*, 17 (1991): 348.

[10] There are, of course, many other factors that have led to the creation of European identity. According to Paul Rich, 'European identity has really been characterized by the emergence of a disparate and rather amorphous series of different identities that have been formed in a variety of contexts and historical situations.' ('European Identity and the Myth of Islam: A Reassessment,' *Review of International Studies*, 25 (1999): 451.)

[11] Talal Asad, 'Muslims and European Identity: Can Europe Represent Islam?,' in Elizabeth Hallam and Brian V. Street, eds., *Cultural Encounters: Representing 'Otherness'* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 17.

[12] Neumann and Welsh, 'The Other in European Self-definition,' p. 329.

[13] This phrase refers to nineteenth-century American representations of the inhabitants of the Barbary States–the North African regions of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli; see further Timothy Marr, 'Imagining Ishmael: Studies of Islamic Orientalism in America from the Puritans to Melville,' unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, 1998, p. 93.

in the early nineteenth century.[14] Appropriations of Islam played an intimate role in the development of early American Protestantism and thus of early American national identity. These representations of Islam had several effects: Islam was interpreted as a direct threat to Christianity that was destined to fall; Americans developed an early antipathy toward Muslims and the Middle East; and US national ideals of order and governance were consolidated in opposition to what was perceived as Islamic tyranny and despotism. Each of these cultural norms remains influential today.

Early American Protestant missionaries interpreted Islam quite simply as the anti-Christ. They believed that Islam 'claimed a direct revelation from God after that of Christ, [and] could not be placed within a Christian world-view. Its very existence shook the foundations of Christian belief, spelling spiritual ruin and a return to moral chaos.'[15] In seeking to explain the reason why God would allow the foundations of Christian belief to be shaken, Protestant eschatology placed the blame on Christians themselves: Islam was interpreted 'as an enemy whose existence was solely a result of Christian mistakes.'[16] According to Martin Luther, the Turkish invasions of Europe were 'the rod of punishment of the wrath of God' for their infidelity to the spirit of Christ.[17] John Cotton went so far as to claim that 'popish idolatry causes Turkish tyrannie.'[18] A prevalent belief was that the Day of Judgment and the final destruction of the Muslim anti-Christ would follow the fall of Islam. Various religious authorities attempted to confirm signs of the coming fall.[19] Protestant biblical commentators in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries established this link between the fall of Islam and the return of Christ by arguing that Islam as a historical phenomenon was expressed by the fifth and sixth trumpets 'whose blasts were called the first two trumpets of woe,' described in the ninth Chapter of Revelation.[20] They believed that the sixth trumpet was passing and that the Day of Judgment was near. 'It was mainly through the agency of this "Turkish theory" that the fate of Islam came to be connected intimately with the possibility of Christ's return.'[21]

Second, Protestant eschatology figured prominently in the formation of early American attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. 'Dehumanizing notions about one of the world's major religions were implanted within the cultural perspective, and even the religious faith, of many educated Americans.'[22] Protestant eschatology represented a powerful interpretive tradition that spanned three

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[14] Edward W. Hooker, ed., *Memoir of Mrs. Sarah L. Huntington Smith, Late of the Mission in Syria*, 3rd ed. (New York: American Tract Society, 1845), p. 173, and cited in Marr, 'Imagining Ishmael,' p. 76.
[15] Marr, 'Imagining Ishmael,' p. 22.
[16] Ibid., p. 24.
[17] Martin Luther, *Works*, V, 88, and cited in Marr, pp. 28–29.
[18] Marr, p. 29.
[19] 'Any mention of natural calamities in the press, traveler's narratives, or any other form of intelligence that made its way from the east, were promoted as evidence of the imminent default of Islam'; ibid., p. 41.
[20] Ibid., p. 43.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., pp. 25–26.

centuries and a wide range of thinkers.[23] Pliny Fisk, Jonas King and Levi Parsons are examples of missionaries who contributed to this anti-Islamic mindset. They were convinced of the superiority of Christianity over Islam; Parsons even referred to Islam as 'this great empire of sin.'[24] Colorful biblical interpretations fueled this political and religious imaginary. Biblical commentators attempted to establish links between the 'perceived qualities of the Arabian peoples and the behavior of natural locusts' in order to assure readers that Revelation's locusts referred to Saracens from the east.[25] The drying up of the Euphrates, it was asserted, 'signified the declension of the Turkish empire to make room for the restoration of the Jews to Israel and their subsequent conversion to Christianity, a harbinger of the end of the antichristian empire.'[26] Such prophetic discourse was extremely influential in early America:

> The combined elements of these theories of the eastern antichrist—which identified the fifth trumpet with the rise of Islam, the sixth trumpet with the establishment of the Turkish empire, and the sixth vial with its imminent demise—was a mainstay of many American biblical commentaries in the first half century after the formation of the United States. The most popular resources—handbooks, dictionaries, family Bible commentaries, and reference compendia—incorporated the Turkish theory in their explanatory notes … These sources spread these views of Islam, while validating them as the authoritative judgments of experts, into the studies of ministers and living rooms of lay people.[27]

This biblical prophecy was interpreted as suggesting that Islam was fated to fall: 'It is not more certain, that the walls of Jericho fell before the ancient people of God, than it is, that the whole Mahommedan world will be subdued by the Gospel.'[28] Despite the success of their interpretive tradition at home and their unflagging zeal abroad, the Protestant missions faced great difficulty in terms of converting Muslims. In fact, within five years of beginning their mission in 1820, Fisk and Parsons had both fallen ill and died. Ottoman law punished apostasy from Islam, and 'to this date there has been no large-scale conversion of Muslims to Christianity in large part because the Qur'an acknowledges the divine mission of Christ.'[29] Despite their limited success abroad,

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[23] 'A brief historical exegesis of this interpretive tradition demonstrates the surprising consistency of overall interpretation of a wide variety of commentators over three centuries'; ibid., p. 43.

[24] Ibid., pp. 17–18.

[25] Ibid., pp. 49–51.

[26] Ibid., p. 39.

[27] Ibid., p. 71. Strangely, the missionaries relied on biblical prophecy as their principal source of information about Islam despite the fact that Islam appeared many centuries *after* the Bible:

> The major source for understanding Islam until this century, however, was not substantial comparative dialogue with Muslims and scholarly study of Islamic texts, but instead the investigation of what the Bible purportedly revealed about the existence of Islam and when and by what means its sway would be stilled. The fact that Islam had appeared centuries after the Bible itself did not concern these expositors. The Bible, as the textual source most available in their lives, had been sanctioned with the authority to explain the direction of human history. (Quote in ibid., p. 23)

[28] Alvan Bond, *Memoir of the Rev. Pliny Fisk* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1828), p. 114, and cited in Marr, p. 14, n. 9.

[29] Marr, p. 20, n. 27.

however, the missionaries were extremely influential in setting public opinion back home. They inaugurated a tradition of interpreting Islam through a particular Christian worldview that stood in the way of intercultural communication and cross-fertilization.

> Any hopes of understanding Muslims had to be attributed to the culmination of a divine plan and not as part of the struggle of understanding intercultural difference. Forcing diverse human communities into the procrustean bed of biblical metaphors, especially those describing them as locusts, scorpions, and other teratological beings, was a process of dehumanizing violence that sanctioned a religiously motivated prejudice … these Christian thinkers demonstrated the degree to which the orientalism of eschatology produced ideological blinders which prevented the perception of human diversity.[30]

Third, Americans constructed their national identity in terms of Christian superiority over the despotic Islamic infidel. In this way the threat of Islam was contained and repackaged into a confirmation of Christian superiority.[31] The United States became more engaged in the Mediterranean in the early nineteenth century due to an increase in commercial, missionary and trade activities. Disputes arose between the US and Algiers between 1785 and 1815; it was involved in the Tripolitan War of 1801–15, the Greek War of Independence of 1821–28, and bombed Sumatra in 1831. As the United States became militarily and economically more powerful, there was a need for Americans to legitimize their foreign policy as well as their domestic form of government.

> Events in the Muslim Mediterranean thereby performed necessary functions in the affirmation of American nationalism and functioned as a stage of legitimization, both historically and rhetorically, upon which Americans could dramatize the humanity and heroism of their own cultural practices and the global relevance of their form of government.[32]

Americans consolidated a common national identity over and against what they represented as the anti-Christian and despotic tyranny of Islamic rule.

> This orientalist construction of Islam as a cultural enemy, maligned as both antichristian and antidemocratic, served as an idealized antithesis against which Americans of diverse denominational, ethnic, and partisan stripes could unite in defining republican identities from the nation's founding up until the Age of Jackson.[33]

The link between the superiority of Christianity and American exceptionalism was strengthened by the widespread Protestant belief that 'the new American nation had been providentially created to play a significant role in bringing about the millennium, the thousand year reign of Christian peace.'[34] Early American

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[30] Ibid., p. 85.
[31] Ibid., p. 26.
[32] Ibid., p. 89.
[33] Ibid., p. 87.
[34] Ibid., p. 15.

orientalism, Christian superiority, and the American ideals of governance were bound tightly together in this modern belief system.[35]

Americans conceived of Islam as synonymous with despotic rule. The political disintegration of Mediterranean governments was interpreted as confirmation of the virtues of American republican government. 'The construction of tyranny and despotism was thus an inherent part of the process of reinventing republicanism.'[36] Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu were an important source of this mindset in which American ideals of governance were posited as the opposite of Islamic political order. Montesquieu's writings on the virtues of checks and balances, the separation of power, and civic virtue 'were only fully understood in dialectic relation to the despotism that arose in their absence.'[37] Thus, Montesquieu not only contributed to an understanding of republican government but also 'helped to form early American views of Islamic government … as the oppositional model of the excesses to be avoided in the new American system.'[38]

The views of Enlightenment thinkers also became part of the moral justification for Western colonial rule. An alleged deficiency in Islamic civil society 'created a vacuum that was used to justify the moral necessity of western imperialism in North Africa, the Middle East, and the East Indies.'[39] The development of a complex and vibrant civil society in the United States that represented itself as the exact opposite of the alleged Eastern 'system of absences' was a domestic counterpart to the colonizing mentality that sought to 'correct' those 'absences' through colonial rule.

Islamic imagery functioned in post-Revolutionary America as an 'interpretive horizon against which Americans oriented the direction of their national project, the morality of their cultural institutions, and the shape of their romantic imaginations.'[40] Even literary works produced consensus around the virtues of republicanism, Christianity, and democracy in opposition to Islamic despotism and exploitation.

> Most notably in the years before the development of a capable navy, the projection of American's cultural power through literary imagination, especially through the agency of female virtue, preserved visions of the global relevance of both democracy and Christianity at a time when the new nation seemed itself captive to dissension and disunity.[41]

Moralizing, fictional oriental tales stood in as the 'secular counterpart to eschatological utopianism … an important cultural enterprise of counterdespotism [that] stimulated the expression of a sublime moral idealism which

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[35] According to ibid., p. 87, the Islamic Orient figured 'in early American foreign policy, literary production and cultural mythology as a site for the projection of democratic nationalism.'
[36] Ibid., p. 88.
[37] Ibid., p. 91.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., p. 92.
[40] Ibid., p. 3.
[41] Ibid., p. 101.

Americans harnessed for nationalist ends.'[42] Themes of such productions included the family as the vehicle of virtue and bedrock of moral democracy, the harem as the seedbed of despotism; the conversion of the infidel and the naturalization of the despotic (and spying) alien. American national identity was an effect of the attempt to differentiate a modern, republican Christian self from an anti-modern, despotic Islamic other. Long before any Muslims settled in the United States, Islam played an important role in the construction of early American identity as modern and Western.

> Orientalist conventions served as vehicles through which Americans were able to negotiate the difference of Islam on a cultural level as a means of counteracting its threat as a contending ethos. But such a process of compensatory co-optation not only diffused the challenge posed by Islam; it also enabled diverse Americans to share in the exoticism of oriental Islam by domesticating its alterity as a resource of significant power for framing their own cultural enterprises. This imaginative transformation enabled oriental-ist notions of Islamic belief and behavior to become integrated into the hybrid construc-tion of American cultural identities early in the process of their formation.[43]

This process of collective self-identification 'laid important cultural templates for later constructions of Muslim tyranny such as the "terrible Turk" in turn of the century Armenia and the present notions of the rogue state and the Islamist terrorist.'[44] The effects of this early American national identity resonate today in Western stereotypes about the despotism of Muslim governments, perceived character traits of Muslims, and automatic sympathy for governments that stake their legitimacy in a Judeo-Christian heritage. It stands behind negative represen-tations of Islam by such prominent academics as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington. And it influences US foreign policy toward this region.

The Muslim Woman as Negative Ideal

If the Islamic despot served as a counter-ideal through which Americans consolidated their identity as virtuous Christian democrats, then the Muslim woman served as a negative ideal against which Westerners articulated their ideals of female domesticity and imperial domination.[45] Their opposition to a (female) Islamic other bolstered Western narratives on gender and imperialism. 'Shaped by literary conventions, linguistic tropes, and narratives processes within Western cultural traditions,'[46] the Western narrative on the Muslim woman has 'a genealogy and logic of its own, emerging from developments in Western representations of gender, of the self, and of the foreign or other.'[47] Representations of Muslim women both coincided with and contributed to

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[42] Ibid., p. 102.
[43] Ibid., pp. 2–3.
[44] Ibid., p. 92.
[45] Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), p. 7.
[46] Ibid., pp. 3–4.
[47] Ibid., p. 2.

changes in ideals of female domesticity within the West itself. 'Both the external and internal processes, both the domination of foreign lands and the remapping of gender boundaries within European societies, combine to compose the new Muslim woman in the Western imagination.'[48]

Mohja Kahf's study of European representations of Muslim women, 'the Other within that powerful Other' demonstrates that European images of Muslim women changed according to developments within the West. For instance, Muslim women were active seducers in medieval European texts, but this changed during the Renaissance. The ambivalence of Renaissance literary representations reflects a 'flux in social appraisal of gender roles and the ambiguity in Western, especially Italian, relations with Islam.'[49] The themes of dress and silence, then, were interpreted as the literary symbols of the erasure of Muslim women in the context of Church/state repression of the moriscos (Moors) beginning *c.*1500 and culminating with their expulsion from Spain in 1609–14.[50] During this period, representation of Muslim women changes from depicting them as active agents to portraying them as silenced objects of pity and the Western gaze.[51]

The role of the *seraglio* (harem) in European discourse illustrates the triangular relationship between an Islamic other, European domestic discourse involving the organization of gender and sexuality, and Western imperial aspirations. The central role of the *seraglio* in Western narratives is 'curious, since the institution is not of Islamic origin, having been a prominent feature of the social organization of gender in ancient Greece and Rome (as well as Persia and India), and later, medieval Byzantium.'[52]

> When the Arabs migrated to the former lands, and when the Turks replaced the Byzantines, the upper class among them, and especially the rulers, readily adopted the idea of secluded quarters for women from their predecessors. The multiple genealogy of the concept is reflected in the etymology of the word 'seraglio.' From Latin *serraculum*, 'enclosure, place of confinement' comes Italian *serrare* (with French and Spanish cognates), 'to lock up, close.' The Italian form seems to have merged with the meaning of the Turkish word *serai* (lodging, palace), and the resulting English 'seraglio' and French 'serail,' meaning both women's quarters and the women inhabiting them, as well as retaining for a while the general meaning of palace, seem to have been used solely in relation to Turkey and the Islamic world (OED).[53]

Although it had existed for centuries, it was not until the seventeenth century that the concept of the harem became common in European discourse.[54] Why did the term suddenly capture the European imagination after centuries of

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[48] Ibid., pp. 7–8.
[49] Ibid., p. 80.
[50] According to ibid., pp. 80–81, 'Church and State in Spain worked assiduously to scrub out every residue of Islamic presence in the interest of national unity.'
[51] Ibid., p. 85.
[52] Ibid., p. 95.
[53] Ibid.
[54] According to ibid., the first citation in European discourse is 1581; the first English citation for 'harem' is 1634.

cross-cultural interactions during which the *seraglio* had been in existence? Kahf traces this sudden fascination to several developments within the West itself: an increasing emphasis on patriarchal authority, the sexual redivision of labor that pushed women out of sites of production and into the home; Reformation preachers who insisted on women's subordination to men on Earth; and general economic prosperity that generated 'a family unit suitable to capitalist production, and … a morality which consecrated domesticity and the domestic woman.'[55] These developments 'began to push toward a more rigidly hierarchical separation of male and female worlds and toward the enclosure of women in an idealized private realm.'[56] At this moment the concept of the *seraglio* entered the Western narrative owing to its 'basic similarity to the emerging gender paradigm in European societies.'[57] This concept, *due to its similarity*, heretofore could serve as a 'negative foreign counterpart to the ideal household.'[58]

The popularization of the *seraglio* was also linked to imperialist ambitions. 'The feminization of the Orient implied in relation to a virile Western master makes the harem as a discursive structure uniquely suited to the imaginative interpretation of the realities of expansion.'[59] French economic mercantilist and expansionist Colbert funded the travels of Tavernier and Chardin, who were among the first to produce an image of the harem in French.[60]

> The Muslim woman and the imagined harem in which she was now definitively enclosed served as a negative counterimage for the ideal Western female in the home, an image immensely capable of providing satisfaction for readers of any religious, political, or occupational affiliation. … Thus the discourse of the debased Muslim woman helped generate a supportive cultural environment for the colonization of Islamic lands which would not materialize in earnest until the nineteenth century.[61]

Harem discourse, exemplified most famously by Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, served to rationalize the 'kinder, gentler' European version of patriarchy in contradistinction to the crude and degrading repressive apparatus represented by the 'seraglio.'[62] This discourse solidified modern Western ideals of female domesticity as the opposite of 'Islamic' tyranny. And it provided a cultural venue for the justification of Western imperialism. This imperial project, described below, provided another opportunity for Europeans to imagine and then exclude an Islamic other.

[55] Ibid., pp. 96–97.
[56] Ibid., p. 97.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., p. 108.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., pp. 117–18.
[62] Ibid., p. 135.

'The Need for the Oriental':[63] The Colonizer and the Colonized

Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt inaugurated the European 'civilizing mission' to North Africa and the Middle East. This mission was conceived as 'raising 'backward' peoples to the level of a 'universal' culture and civilization.'[64] As Timothy Mitchell argues, one effect of European colonialism was that the world seemed to be divided into two. 'Modern politics was to reside within a reality effect, a technique of certainty, order and truth, by which the world seemed absolutely divided into self and other, into things themselves and their plan, into bodies and minds, into the material and the conceptual.'[65] Under this colonial order, an absolute 'other' was created against which a superior European 'self' was organized. European collective subjectivity was in part an effect of the attempt to differentiate the colonizer from the colonized.[66]

An example of this process of collective identification is found in the organization of the colonial city. Citing Franz Fanon's well-known description of the compartmentalized nature of the colonial city in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Mitchell describes the process of exclusion that created the distinction between colonizer and colonized:

> The identity of the modern city is created by what is [*sic*] keeps out. Its modernity is something contingent upon the exclusion of its own opposite. In order to determine itself as the place of order, reason, propriety, cleanliness, civilisation and power, it must represent outside itself what is irrational, disordered, dirty, libidinous, barbarian and cowed. The city requires the 'outside' in order to present itself, in order to constitute its singular, uncorrupted identity.[67]

In the first twenty-five years of colonial rule in Egypt, the population of Cairo increased by 70 percent, largely as a result of in-migration from rural areas; urban slums burgeoned as poor Egyptians increasingly were pushed out of their quarters and replaced by Europeans who could afford the rising rents.[68] Interestingly, despite these increasingly desperate conditions for poor urban Egyptians, colonial officials insisted on maintaining the 'Arab town' in its decrepit state. 'Native towns' and their crowded and difficult living conditions were in large part a *product* of colonial rule. In this way, the 'Oriental' is (somewhat paradoxically) an integral part of the modern city:[69]

> the argument that the native town must remain 'Oriental' did not mean preserving it

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[63] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 162.

[64] Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, p. 109.

[65] Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, p. 171.

[66] This argument stands in contrast to Rich's argument that colonization did little to reinforce European collective identity, which instead resulted from Napoleon's military conquests in Europe. Rich, 'European Identity and the Myth of Islam,' p. 446.

[67] Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, p. 165.

[68] Ibid., p. 163.

[69] According to ibid., p. 165:

> The order of the city does not stop at the limit of the modern town … The limit is something the city maintains within itself, by means of a continuous ordering that is the source of its own ordered identity. Yet it appears as the boundary of order itself. The city … can be taken to exemplify a paradox at work in the maintenance of any modern political order, any modern self-identity.

against the impact of the colonial order. The Oriental was a creation of that order, and was needed for such order to exist. *Both economically and in a larger sense, the colonial order depended upon at once creating and excluding its own opposite.*[70]

The West, then, has created and then excluded its opposite in its appropriations of Islam. This has occurred historically in the European colonizing process, in representations of Muslim women and in the creation of American national identity. More recently, this dynamic also has characterized American material culture. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries an Islamic other was commercialized to sell products and to reinforce a particular image of what it means to be a modern American citizen.

Islam in Early Twentieth-century American Popular Culture

In the twentieth century, Islam was appropriated by American popular culture to solidify ideals of American civilization. From Rudolph Valentino as *The Sheik*, to Turkish corners from Sears Roebuck in middle-class American parlors, to advertisements for Camel Cigarettes, one can trace the 'migration of Orientalist imagery from unique objects to mass-produced materials'[71] in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Images of the Orient were commercialized and popularized in American culture. The Orient served three specific functions during this era: it contributed to Americans' individual sense of self-worth; it allowed Americans to crystallize their developing standards of manliness and civilization; and it facilitated their response to new patterns of relations between the sexes. A concept of the Orient was 'created by a few and then elaborated to many more throughout the United States.'[72]

Visual orientalism played a critical role in the construction of individual Americans' sense of self at the turn of the twentieth century. This was a time of enormous societal change. Americans were casting about for a sense of national identity, and visual orientalism offered a compass with which they could orient their sense of collective self in the face of uncertainty.

> It is this nexus of events, heralding the massive reorientation of thought often termed the Darwinian revolution, that reveals the larger framework within which visual Orientalism was to proliferate. It was a time when commonly held convictions about God and history were being radically revised and cultural boundaries and psychic horizons were subject to radical change. Orientalism, then, was an organic manifestation and an agent of such change, serving to situate Americans in time, space, and the certainties of selfhood.[73]

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[70] Ibid., p. 164 (emphasis added).
[71] Holly Edwards, 'A Million and One Nights: Orientalism in America 1870–1930,' in *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America 1870–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press and Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2000), p. 15.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., p. 24.

Paintings of the Orient, exotic attire, collections of Islamic art, and Islamic interior design were all 'venues of turn-of-the-century enthusiasm, opportunities for creating selves and settings of aesthetic appeal and social charisma.'[74] This 'creation of self and setting by means of borrowed treasures' eventually trickled down to an increasingly consumerist middle-class America through department stores and mail order catalogues.[75] For instance, A.A. Vantine and Company's illustrated catalogue, *Products of the Orient*, offered 'embroidered slippers as worn by Turkish ladies in Harems.'[76] The borrowing of exotic oriental images to sell products became a trademark of this time period, as cigarette makers marketed brands such as Mecca, Medina and Camel, and color lithography made possible the mass marketing of advertisements as interior decoration. Thus 'the *Lamp Seller of Baghdad*, originally created by Maxfield Parrish to celebrate electricity for General Electric, ultimately found its way into countless homes in the form of wall calendars and fine art prints.'[77]

A veritable political economy of visual and material orientalism arose in the early twentieth-century United States. Manufacturers constructed a mass American consumer desire to sell products that promised to imitate, yet also to improve upon, the image of the oriental 'other.' 'The Orient was constructed and then disseminated in forms that conformed with American dreams and patterns of consumption.'[78] 'Islamic' taste was commercialized in a diverse array of products ranging from candy, to interior decorations, to beauty creams. Novels such as *The Garden of Allah* (1904) became wildly popular: After the staging of the book as a Broadway play, an 'explosion of consumer tie-ins' sealed its commercial success in 1912,

> Hotels and restaurants were decorated to evoke the mood of the Garden of Allah and diverse commodities were correlated with the theatrical event. Wanamaker's department store in New York employed members of the cast to parade around in costume as part of a fashion show. The increasingly liberated woman could wear Garden of Allah perfume or switch on a Garden of Allah lamp, casting the glow of desert romance around prosaic reality.[79]

Like the sermons and writings of early Protestant missionaries, this visual orientalism also played an important role in the consolidation of modern American collective identity and rise to global hegemony:

> There is evidence of Orientalist attitudes in the paintings, prints, and posturings of turn-of-the-century Americans. The diachronic arrangement of this material and its correlation with political and social developments suggest that visual Orientalism served

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[74] Ibid., p. 30; 'All of these activities make up what we might term Orientalism, capaciously encompassing product, performance, and person. They collectively reveal what the imagined Orient contributed to individual Americans' sense of self-worth' (ibid.).
[75] Ibid., pp. 31–32.
[76] Ibid., p. 32.
[77] Ibid., p. 33.
[78] Ibid., p. 44.
[79] Ibid.

as a preface to, or part of, the consolidation of the power that America sought in the emerging world order of the early twentieth century.[80]

Second, Americans mobilized the Orient to help negotiate changes in gender roles. They 'envisioned the Orient in terms of their own ideals and simultaneously extended those ideals by means of oriental imagery.'[81] Men 'utilized Orientalist imagery to visualize heroism and virility'; while for women the Orient provided 'metaphors and models for greater sensuality and liberated passions.'[82] A renegotiation of gender roles was underway, and visual orientalism offered the tools with which to respond to these new social needs. The concept of 'woman' was changing in signification, and dance and fashion trends with orientalist connotations—such as the 'hoochy coochy' and 'harem pants'—reflected these evolutions.[83] The velocity of change in public morality and its connection to orientalist fantasy is reflected in the fact that 'just a few years after Margaret Sanger was jailed for trying to promote birth control, men were using Orientalist rhetoric to market new options of freedom at the corner drugstore with the ultimate tie-in of all: Sheik brand condoms.'[84]

Finally, visual orientalism served as a vehicle through which a particular twentieth-century vision of national self-image came into sharper focus. This image crystallized around standards of American manliness, civilization and cultural superiority conceived in contrast to the lack of industrial and civilizational accomplishments of non-white subordinates and savages.[85] The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition was 'a stage for the display of American modernity and technological progress, and the Orient was a foil for those accomplishments.'[86] As a result of the fair, and photographic coverage of it, a 'stereotypical Orient became institutionalized in American culture.'[87] Fair organizers sought to celebrate American accomplishments; 'at this multi-faceted event, a national self-image was communally fabricated and witnessed by millions of people.'[88] The fair was divided into two principal sections: the White City, displaying American technological and artistic accomplishments, and the Midway Plaisance, 'an exercise in Victorian ethnography that presented the world in myopically conceived microcosms ranging from vignettes of a Lapland village to the streets of Cairo.'[89] While the former had a rational layout of buildings 'according to carefully controlled axes and vistas in domes and

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[80] Ibid., p. 17.

[81] Ibid., p. 33.

[82] Ibid., pp. 34, 45.

[83] This was a complex and contradictory process. Even as American women challenged tight corsets and restrictive public morality, 'men became unabashed voyeurs, harem hunters, and connoisseurs of cooch … Thus the obscure object of desire—part virgin, part whore—took modern form.' Ibid., p. 46, citing Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[84] Edwards, 'A Million and One Nights,' p. 50.

[85] Ibid., p. 36.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Edwards, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition,' in *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures*, p. 199.

[88] Ibid., p. 194.

[89] Edwards, 'A Million and One Nights,' p. 36.

columns of the Beaux-Arts tradition,' the latter depicted "'a sliding scale of humanity" in which the Teutonic and Celtic races were nearest the White City and the "savage" (Native Americans and the Dahomeyan peoples of West Africa) were farthest away.'[90] The Midway was 'throbbing' with oriental life: belly dancers, snake charmers, Bedouins, camels and donkeys abounded.[91] Admissions to the Cairo street exceeded 2.25 million people: it was the most popular exhibit of all.[92] Representations of the world and its inhabitants in 1893 in Chicago reflected an interesting convergence of gender politics and orientalism:[93]

> This was the point where the erotic and the exotic merged, institutionalizing a hierarchy in which white men exercised superiority over women and white people exerted dominion over everyone else. At this juncture, culturally specific notions about gender, race, and empire coalesced in a twentieth-century worldview.[94]

A range of 'unheard of but highly articulate voices coexisted with and contradicted the more popular ones' at the World's Fair of 1893.[95] These less prominent perspectives challenged dominant orientalist constructions:

> In the intellectual climate created by prominent figures such as Ahmet Mithat and Osman Hamdi, the Ottoman Empire offered a corrective to Orientalist stereotypes in the Chicago Fair and re-presented the Muslim woman to the Western world by means of two interventions: a collection of photography albums know as the 'Abdul-Hamid II Albums' and the publications of an Ottoman woman writer, Fatma Aliye Hanim.[96]

Such contributions, however, generally were ignored in favor of the sensationalistic portrayals of Eastern life described above. Visitors to the World's Fair 'read the Ottoman Empire according to the set of criteria already registered in their intellectual frame of reference by the multiple mechanisms of the Orientalist discourse.'[97] This was a powerful frame of reference, and its effects continue to circulate throughout contemporary American culture. There is a tendency in the West to view the Islamic world through a particular lens that emphasizes the influence of local custom and practice at the expense of a consideration of the history and global political economy of the region. Consider, for example, Mark LeVine's critique of the UN's 'Arab Human Development Report,'

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[90] Ibid., p. 37, citing contemporary critic Danton Snider, quoted in Zeynep Celik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
[91] Edwards, 'A Million and One Nights,' p. 37.
[92] Edwards, 'Catalogue of the Exhibition,' p. 194.
[93] Edwards, 'A Million and One Nights,' p. 37, citing Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
[94] Edwards, 'A Million and One Nights,' p. 37.
[95] Zeynep Celik, 'Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse at the World's Columbian Exposition,' in *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures*, p. 77.
[96] Ibid., pp. 83–84.
[97] Ibid., p. 96.

released in July 2002.[98] LeVine argues that the report presents the Arab world through an orientalist lens. The report's focus on the subordination of women, the lack of Arab book translations, Internet usage or cultural preservation confirms rather than challenges stereotypes about the collective depravity of the Arab world. It also neglects important factors in the global political economy that have been largely, though not entirely, responsible for the economic and sociopolitical problems in North Africa and the Middle East. LeVine cites 'the cycle of Arab petrodollars for Western arms, the disproportionate and generally increasing military budgets of Arab governments, and the disastrous impact of US and European agricultural subsidies (which flood markets with under-priced Western products that force local farmers out of business) that are crucial to the region's perpetual economic dependence on the West.' He concludes that because the report was prepared by Arabs, their 'collective mea culpa is useful for the renewed Orientalism of the mainstream press and politics in the wake of September 11.'

Conclusion

Bunyamin Simsek grew up in Aarhus, Denmark, the son of immigrants from the central Turkish village of Kizilcakisla. Working as a cabin attendant for a Danish charter airline company during the 1990s, he often was asked about his country of origin. His first response of 'Aarhus' always was met with incredulity, so he began asking customers to guess. Greece, Spain, they would venture, but never Turkey. 'They think I'm nice, so they don't imagine I could be Turkish. Turkey, for them, is Islam, and Islam is fundamentalism.'[99]

As this anecdote suggests, negative associations of 'Islam,' 'fundamentalism' and the 'east' run deep in Euro-American culture. Western appropriations of Islam, though rarely acknowledged openly, are an important part of the Western cultural heritage. This essay has tried to document some ways in which Western ideals of order, domesticity, and democratic governance have been consolidated in part through opposition to an Islamic other. Yet, it also has shown that Western appropriations of Islam are not set in stone. They are socially constructed to serve particular social and political needs. Missionaries' writings and sermons, Western literary representations of Muslim women, the European colonizer's view of Egypt, the spectacles at the 1893 World's Fair, and even the UN's 'Arab Human Development Report' are more than mere reflections of the political certainty and historical confidence of Western power. They are the means of production of this power through opposition to an Islamic Other.

Given that these relations are socially constructed, it is possible to reformulate Western identity such that it does not rely on negative appropriations of Islam. Faced with new forms of orientalism, the violent logic of the 'clash of civilizations' and the attempts by radical extremists to speak in the name of

[98] Mark LeVine, MERIP Press Information Note 101, 'The UN Arab Human Development Report: A Critique,' 26 July 2002.
[99] Roger Cohen, 'For "New Danes," Differences Create a Divide,' *The New York Times*, 18 December 2000.

Islam, this is a formidable but necessary endeavor. It has become increasingly clear that the deep-seated antagonism between the West and the Islamic world brings untenable and even violent political consequences. The time has come to create alternative ways of being 'Western' that do not legitimize themselves by opposing or denigrating Islam.

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