

ISLAM, ORIENTALISM AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY - MODERNITY AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION SINCE IBN KHALDUN : A BOOK REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Mohammad R. Salama's "Islam, Orientalism, and Intellectual History" is one of the important texts specifically written for those who are interested in contemporary Islamic thought, European colonialism, postcolonial studies and intellectual history. This book unbolts an investigation for the development of two linked oppositional binaries in the context of their shared discursive journey over the past four hundred years or so. The first of these pairs is "fiction" and "history," whose break has been researched by such luminaries of cultural studies as Peter Gay, Perry Anderson, Hayden White, and Michel de Certeau, all of whom appear in this volume. The second, pioneered by Edward Said, situates "Islam" in opposition to the "West." The influence of Said's work is clear in the title of the book, and pervades the study thoroughly. It is an important and in many ways groundbreaking work of significance across several fields. Salama's most obvious innovation in this volume is to bring these two pathways of study together, but this fusion is supported by additional important strategies.

Keywords: Post colonial thought, European colonialism, Ibn Khaldun, Islam, Hegel and Egypt

INTRODUCTION

This book can be really counted as truly a history, and a one in which intellectual patterns, scholarly debates, and epistemological formulations and ruptures overlay a narrative of actions and experiences relevant to Egypt especially and the world more generally. Moreover, this is a history that is explicitly public, aimed at "examining the possibility of restoring the referent 'Islam' to a functional code of knowledge" (p. 9). Since this study looks at Islam both as a religion and as a social practice, locating it within binaries with which it is typically associated, this chapter continues with a list of keywords and corresponding definitions that are of crucial importance for the reader's understanding of the bone of contention between Islam and the West. Those keywords are meant to draw attention to the pattern of Islam's being seen as an "Other" to the importance of deconstructing the (perceived antagonistic) relationship that Islam has held vis-a-vis each of these concepts.

In Chapter 1, the author examines the intricate relationship between the writing of history and the writing of fiction. He interrogates and traces the borderlines between those two discourses since Aristotle; He also argues that Islam has been caught in the fault lines between the fictional and the historical. It further argues that the problem of misunderstanding Islam began with European modernity, and that it is in essence a question of epistemology. Tracing three crucial moments in modern European historical thinking – the Enlightenment's concept of intellectual history since Kant, European modernity's re-appropriation of intellectual history, and the rise of the poststructuralist critique of European modernity – this chapter

points to the gaps that Europe's contending 'history' of intellectual history creates in relationship to itself and to the Arab-Muslim tradition.

In Chapter 2, the author tries to criticize the Aristotelian/non-Aristotelian theses that now inform most Western criticisms of Ibn Khaldūn. He uses the case of the Arab-Muslim historian Ibn Khaldūn as my guiding example. He argues that conflicting critiques of Ibn Khaldūn reveal a major issue in scholarship on cultural heritage: the problem of Islamic thought as "Other" and as "Othering," namely, Islam as constituted in the West where a "thinking" "Self" distinguishes and distances itself from an alien "Other," and Islam as it constitutes itself in the Arab world against the colonial West in the same dialectical movement.

Chapter 3 focuses on the place of Islam in Hegel's philosophy of world history. Islam and the Arab world represent a palpable gap in Hegel's understanding of history. In Hegel's scattered references to Islam, he paid more attention to a dominant or received impression of Islam without attending to its original texts, subsequent developments, or contemporary living expressions, and without careful documentation of his sources. He also emphasizes a major difficulty in grasping Hegel's concept of history, namely, that the real to Hegel is not what is out there in the phenomenological world. He also investigates the historical framework that 'shaped' Hegel's views on Islam in world history and the recycling of those views in contemporary critiques of Islam.

Chapter 4 focuses on the evolution of Islam in modern British thought. Salama examines the cultural productions which allowed 'interest' in Islam and the Arab world to thrive and become symptomatic of a broader historical positioning of the Arab-Muslim world in nineteenth-century England. The author tries to elaborate on the point that even before the emergence of anti-Islamic bias in the works of Edward Lane or Mary Shelley, the eighteenth century served as a clear predecessor to an imminent condition of coloniality.

In Chapter 5, the author has done a case study of French and British occupations of Egypt as a springboard for examining the contradiction between the liberal ideals imported from Europe and the denial of fundamental rights in the colonies. This chapter raises an important set of questions over the double standard of colonial penal systems, with particular reference to the incident of Denshawai, a central event in British–Egyptian colonial relations. In the postcolonial Arab-Muslim world, the depredations of colonialism have been transformed into nationalist memories of the brutal perpetrations of colonial Europe. Every time those memories are invoked today (in museums, TV series, or Friday sermons); a sense of resentment and indignation is rekindled. The author further argues that if colonial Europe's influence on Islam is hemmed by a number of complex issues, including the conflict between modernity and traditional culture and the protracted, conflict-ridden process of the emergence in the postcolonial Arab-Islamic world of versions of modernity and nationalism, then it must follow that these narratives will offer an alternative history that cannot be ignored.

Lastly, in the Epilogue, the author has discussed to restore Islam to a code of knowledge. Through a return to the overlap of fictional and historical representations of Islam, he has drawn attention to false continuums and constructed ideologies that took shape and continued in the post-September 11 political climate. He particularly investigate the positioning of Islam in relationship to fashionable concepts like globalization and cosmopolitanism and the effects those concepts have on the cancerous growth of Islamophobia in Europe and America today.

Islam, Orientalism, and Intellectual History is a well written book on the fresh debates such as ibn khaldun's theory of history, Hegel understands of Islam and the Anglo-French

occupation of Egypt. Tying them together is a powerful argument about Islam's relation to intellectual history. This book is a literary piece of work skillfully redeploing the postcolonial critique of Orientalism in the face of a renewed demonization of Islam. Salama's analysis is both provocative and expertly rendered, and he writes astutely about matters that have largely been ignored in both scholarly and popular discourses. This book will be indispensable for students and scholars interested in Islam, European colonialism, postcolonial studies and intellectual history.