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The 1978 publication of Edward Said’s Orientalism inaugurating the field of postcolonial theory, and the subsequent explosion of studies of imperialism and colonialism in the 1990s, have been the most important developments for American studies since the multicultural challenge to a unified national consensus two decades earlier. Drawing upon the work of earlier scholars such as R. W. Van Alstyne, Carl Eblen, Robert Rydell, and Richard Drinnon, who had repudiated the idea of American exception from European imperialism, critics such as Amy Kaplan, John Carlos Rowe, and Edward Watts acknowledged their indebtedness to postcolonial studies, albeit to different models.1 Ever since then, there has been a proliferation of studies of colonialism and imperialism as central to American culture. These have ranged from Haunani Kay-Trask’s searing indictment of colonialism in Hawai’i in From a Native Daughter (1999), to Ed White’s analysis of white settler colonialism’s negotiations with different subaltern populations in The Backcountry and the City (2005), to Andy Doolen’s study of U.S. slavery and republicanism as entangled with imperialism in Fugitive Empire (2005).

Works dealing with U.S. cultural and geopolitical investment in the Middle East, different Arab societies, or Islamic nations have understandably been central to analyses of imperialism, given Said’s monumental critique of the disciplining and othering of what was deemed the Islamic Orient by the British, French, and then the United States. Particularly since 9/11, with neoconservatives’ attempts to revive an old-style Orientalism devoted to excavating the essentials of a singular Islamic society or an Arab mind through the republication of works like Raphael Patai’s The Arab Mind (1973), the resurrection of

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Zionist Orientalist scholars such as Bernard Lewis, and the Right approval of anti-postcolonial polemics such as Martin Kramer’s *Ivory Towers on Sand*, scholars dealing with Islam and the Arab world have been particularly self-conscious about the ideological implications of their work. In *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, Timothy Marr specifically addresses the need to understand the cultural distortions of U.S. representations of Islam post-9/11 and hopes that his book “will contribute to a fuller analysis of the impasses between Americans and global Muslims and in some small way help to create new avenues of intercultural understanding” (xi). Similarly, Brian T. Edwards in *Morocco Bound* sees his study as a contribution to the “ongoing crises of otherness” in conversations between Americans and Arabs (301). But neither of these books is simply a response to the current political situation. Rather, following Said, both are acutely conscious of the workings of imperial power in U.S. constructions of knowledge about the Arab world, even as they add nuance to or question aspects of Said’s arguments—Marr by examining U.S. investments in the Arab world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and by delineating varieties of Orientalism, Edwards by focusing on ruptures in the discourse while recognizing the corporate aspect of the United States’ Orientalist understanding of the Maghreb.

*The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* builds upon the work of American studies scholars who have vigorously challenged Said’s dictum that U.S. imaginative interest in the Islamic Orient was negligible prior to World War II because of the country’s investment instead in its own western frontier. These scholars retrieved political confrontations such as the so-called Barbary Wars from historical neglect and demonstrated them to be central to early nationhood while deeming American interactions with Islamic and Arabic cultures pivotal to understanding the early United States. While Fuad Sha’ban’s pioneering, archival study *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought* (1991) painstakingly revealed the intense involvement and attachment of early Americans to the Muslim world, Robert J. Allison’s *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776–1815* (1995) demonstrated how numerous late-eighteenth-century writers used the idea of Islamic despotism and tyranny as rhetorical devices for their own political positionings. I ventured an argument along these lines in my book *U.S. Orientalisms* (1998), where I demonstrated the centrality of the Barbary Wars and Near East missionary fervor to articulations of early imperial nationhood. In addition to these general studies, some scholars have focused specifically on early U.S. interactions with the Holy Lands, thus unearthing the vast archive of evangelical and travel literature about the area. The best work on this topic,
regrettably one that Marr ignores, was Hilton Obenzinger’s *American Palestine* (1999), a brilliant explication of U.S. views of the nation as New Jerusalem and dominant typological and eschatological readings of the Holy Lands as part of the dynamics of settler colonialism. Obenzinger reads Melville’s *Clarel* and Twain’s *Innocents Abroad* as counternarratives to popular views of millenialist restorations of the Holy Lands to Christianity.5

*The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* is an engaging, lively, and well-researched contribution to the newly established field of U.S. empire studies and more specifically to recent work on the formative influence of Islam on the making of imperial culture. In addition, through his examination of Islamicism, Marr demonstrates the deep imbrications of the domestic and the foreign in aspects of U.S. culture that have hitherto been seen only through a national lens: the temperance movement, Mormonism, and slavery (which are only recently being examined in a comparative framework). Marr builds upon Said’s arguments that Orientalism registers Western ideas about Islam as an affront to Christianity and that Orientalist discourse is a configuration of cultural ideologies more revealing about the cultures that produced them than about different Muslim societies to examine uses of Islam in U.S. culture from the colonial era to the mid-nineteenth century. But rather than simply critiquing U.S. representations and uses of Islam, Marr brilliantly demonstrates the vitality with which islamicism (his lowercase term for the heterogeneity of U.S. Orientalism) was used to authorize and criticize national mission, religion, ethnic identity, and gender. Marr analyzes a practice he terms “domestic orientalism,” which used islamist notions of Muslim despotism, sensuality, and fatalism to render domestic communities in the United States heretical, and thus to articulate local knowledges in a global context.

Marr’s first two chapters examine different rhetorical usages of Islamic despotism to reinvent republicanism through its difference from Islam. Through the genres of the oriental tale, the Muslim spy narrative, the Barbary captivity narrative, and dramatic plays set in the Islamic Mediterranean, for instance, Americans created a narrative of counterdespotism that emphasized the republican virtues of the new nation. Works such as Susanna Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers* (1794) and Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive* (1797) bolstered cultural constructions of national strength even in moments of historical weakness by presenting the imaginary conquest of Islamic tyranny by an “imperialism of virtue,” while eschatologists such as William Miller and the missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions pushed for policies to help the United States fulfill its providential mission to redeem the world. Chapter 3 examines the use of an Orientalized Islam by the temper-
ance and antislavery movements, focusing on moments when Islam serves as a symbol for slavery and for being enslaved to drunkenness, while the next chapter engagingly analyzes the Orientalizing of Mormonism. In chapter 5, Marr turns his attention to Herman Melville, the major figure in nineteenth-century islamicism. Marr's analysis of Melville's works is complex, nuanced, and carefully researched. Marr argues that although Melville subscribed to stereotypes about Muslim despotism and sensuality, he used the images to perform important cultural work. In *Moby Dick*, for instance, Melville employed images of the Islamic despot to register the tyranny of sea captains that he embodied in Ahab, while using Ishmael, the Abrahamic ancestor of the Arabs, as a prototype of those who, in the guise of infidels, could transgress against Protestant conventions. Yet, as Marr is careful to point out, Melville's islamicism varied according to racial types: Arabs and the Moors of Arab Spain were noble; Persians, Malays, and African Moors were dark and cunning; and Turks were mixed figures denoting both antidemocratic tyranny and a romanticized patriarchy. In an eclectic final chapter titled “Turning Turk: The Gendered Pageantry of Mid-Nineteenth-Century Islamicism,” Marr focuses on material manifestations of domestic islamicism in mid-nineteenth-century art and dress to demonstrate how an identification with (rather than an opposition to) Islam's cultural repertoire was used to express worldly social positions, particularly in relation to gender roles.

The strength of Marr's book lies in its rendition of the complex cultural work carried out through islamicism and the centrality of islamicism to U.S. culture. If John Smith's experience with Pocahontas is part of an originary national mythos, Marr reminds us that Smith's battles with Turkish warriors in Wallachia, his enslavement to a Muslim woman who sent him to Tartary to “learn the arts befitting a gentleman,” and his bloody escape, all prefigured his attitudes toward the people of America. Islamicism in Marr's book, while clearly always marking a refusal to understand the difference of Islam, is a signifier not only of cultural imperialism but of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization. The use of islamicism within abolition and temperance discourse, for instance, both contained Islamic cultural difference and globalized the relevance of U.S. reform by utilizing islamicism's transhemispheric dimension.

While Marr's book focuses on nineteenth-century U.S. Islamic orientalism, Brian T. Edwards in *Morocco Bound* takes Said's statements about the United States assuming the mantle of European Orientalism after World War II as a point of critical departure. Edwards accepts Said's arguments about the corporate aspects of Orientalism and the importance of institutions in furthering
Orientalism, but nuances Said’s broad arguments by focusing on a smaller geopolitical space and on a particular historical moment. Edwards focuses on American representations of the Maghreb—Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and parts of the Sahara—between 1942 and 1973, a period beginning with the Operation Torch landings of Anglo-American troops in northwestern Africa and the premiering of *Casablanca*, and ending with what he views as the beginning of globalization as well as the near ending of the Vietnam War. The only work in American cultural studies that comes close to *Morocco Bound* is Melani McAlister’s *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945–2000* (2001), but the two books are remarkably different. While McAlister studies the intersection between “cultural texts, foreign policy, and constructs of identity” that knit together a discourse, Edwards is at pains to point out the chasm between cultural productions and foreign policy; while McAlister finds Orientalism inadequate as a model for understanding U.S. post–World War II representations of the Middle East and argues for a post-Orientalist logic, Edwards questions McAlister’s dismissal of Orientalism, and reminds us of Said’s insistence on the role of institutions such as the media in furthering Orientalism. But the major differences between *Morocco Bound* and *Epic Encounters* are Edwards’s remarkable focus on the circulation of representations of the Maghreb, particularly Maghrebi responses to U.S. representations as well as Maghrebi collaborations with Americans, an analysis that only a multilingual scholar can muster; and his emphasis on the particularity of U.S. material, political, and touristic engagements with the Maghreb made possible through a situated study.

The Maghreb, Edwards argues, was never an unmediated exotic for Americans but always seen in relation to the French. Thus the specificities of colonial policies for different regions are crucial to understanding U.S. representations that both use the French presence to register the Maghreb’s foreignness and normalize French colonialism to keep the idea of Oriental difference uninterrupted. The eclectic opening chapter examines the convergence of Orientalist discourse, the mythology of the frontier, Hollywood films, and military engagements. Edwards examines texts as diverse as Henry Luce’s essay “The American Century” in which North Africa is seen as an extension of the American west, General Patton’s journals, and the movie *Casablanca*. Edwards’s treatment of *Casablanca* is paradigmatic of his meticulous scholarship. He offers a close analysis of the movie, drawing attention to the hitherto unnoticed relationship between the Moroccan Abdul and the African American pianist, Sam, both of whom are placed in the “temporal lag of racial time” and therefore cannot be true participants with the Allies. But if the film works as staple
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U.S. Orientalism, postcolonial Moroccan readings of Casablanca question the primacy of U.S. cultural production. Yet, Edwards is careful to point out that not all Moroccan readings are resistant. The Moroccan tourist industry, he shows, has exploited and profited from the stereotypes of Casablanca as bound to moribund tradition and conservatism. In contrast, ‘Abd al-Qader Laqt’a’s film Al-Hubb fi al-Dar al-Baida (Love in Casablanca) depicts a dynamic and modern Moroccan culture.

Chapter 2 focuses on Paul Bowles’s popular novel The Sheltering Sky, written while Bowles was living in Tangiers in the late 1940s. While U.S. readings of Bowles’s work are exactly Orientalist in seeing the novel as a rendition of a dreamy space, Edwards introduces Moroccan readings of the novel that place Bowles’s relation to Tangiers as central. The next three chapters, under the section “Queer Tangiers,” examine the multiple Tangiers in circulation: the Tangiers of U.S. popular discourse, the Tangiers of the State Department, Tangiers as haven for Maghrebi nationalists, and Tangiers as experienced by local residents. In contrast to scholars who have been blind to the Tangiers context of Burroughs’s Naked Lunch, Edwards brilliantly demonstrates the importance of the novel of Tangiers as International Zone, and thus a supranational space of possibilities. Then, through an examination of Jane Bowles’s unfinished novel Out of the World as well as Paul Bowles’s twelve-book “collaboration” with Mohammed Mrabet, Edwards teases out the implication of literatures that fall outside of national paradigms and accepted linguistic classifications. Mrabet’s narration to Bowles in darija (colloquial Moroccan Arabic) belongs to no accepted literary language in the Arab world, and Bowles’s English translation of Mrabet does not render the works American. Edwards thus posits the category of “Tangiers literature” to think about these works. Regrettably, there is virtually no analysis of any of the twelve books and thus it is difficult to understand exactly how these works constitute a new genre. The final chapter, titled “Hippie Orientalism,” examines the interest in Morocco of two different groups: the hippies who went to Marrakech and anthropologists such as Geertz and Rabinow who conducted research nearby. Hippie Orientalism, Edwards argues, represents a conservative turn away from Vietnam and from 1960s Casablanca riots, both of which hardly register in the hippie archive.

Morocco Bound is an exemplary work of postcolonial American studies scholarship, one acutely sensitive to the importance of the specificities of colonial and imperial relations in the Maghreb. Yet Morocco Bound is no predictable ideological study. Edwards constantly foregrounds the historical complexities of encounter in each text he analyzes while simultaneously presenting nuanced
close readings. In the process, he challenges familiar theoretical paradigms and presents us with new possibilities. Edwards argues, for instance, that a popular theoretical category like the borderlands, while productive in challenging the monolingualism and exceptionalism of American studies, is unhelpful in thinking about the work of Jane Bowles and Mrabet because of the particularity of their relationship to Tangiers, a space of multiplicity and collaboration that is better explained by the Moroccan writer Zubir Bin Bushta's phrase, “al-adab at-Tanji,” the new genre of Tangiers literature of Arab residents and expatriates. Similarly, in his analysis of Paul Bowles, Edwards carefully unravels Bowles’s simultaneous criticism of Moroccan nationalists and his lack of support for French colonialism through Bowles’s investment in the Moroccan folk culture he felt that nationalists were repudiating.

Indeed Edwards’s methodology of deriving theoretical models from a particular geopolitical space suggests possibilities for transnational American studies in other locations. What if, instead of privileging the category of borderlands in thinking about U.S. interactions with Latin American countries, scholars derived theories from smaller spatial scales and local languages? Such a move would be counter to the current vogue of developing global models but would open up the rich multiplicities of Latin America. As many subaltern studies scholars have demonstrated, theories derived from a place-based methodology such as Edwards’s can fruitfully challenge dominant rubrics for conceptualizing cultural difference.8

The Cultural Roots of American Islamism and Morocco Bound are major contributions to transnationalizing American studies and also demonstrate in complex ways how the domestic and the foreign are deeply imbricated. In this move, Marr and Edwards participate in an important trend in American studies signaled by key essays, such as Amy Kaplan’s “Manifest Domesticity” (1998), which demonstrated the importance of a rhetoric of empire to home-making, and John Carlos Rowe’s “Culture, U.S. Imperialism, and Globalization” (2004), which analyzed the ways in which the threat of difference was neutralized in U.S. culture by translating the foreign into the domestic. Indeed at different points, Marr and Edwards both focus on this process of neutralization. And in their demonstration of the use of North African colonization to signal the oppression of African Americans (Edwards) or the comparison of Malay practices with those of the U.S. South (Marr), their works contribute to a growing body of scholarship that has focused on the global aspects of African American resistance, including Nikhil Pal Singh’s Black Is a Country (2004) and Cynthia A. Young’s Soul Power (2006).
Yet Marr’s and Edward’s books mark a distinct version of transnationalism. Many critics who accept the premises of globalization theory—that models such as center and periphery, domination and subjection are outdated—tend to celebrate any paradigm that questions unequal power relations or the force of the nation-state. Hence the popularity of models of transnational flows (Appadurai and Hardt and Negri), or cosmopolitanism (most recently Appiah) not only for studies of a contemporary moment but as methodologies to invigorate all of American studies. Thus transnationalism, postnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and internationalism become vaguely synonymous methodologies breaking the stranglehold of the nation and its accompanying exceptionalism. Yet there is a danger that relatively neutral terms such as transnationalism and cosmopolitanism can displace more politically charged terms such as colonialism and imperialism, that the imperatives of globalized studies simply replicate the globalization of U.S. capital or that, as John Carlos Rowe warns, transnational cultural studies can contribute to cultural imperialism. Thus in Through Other Continents (2006), for instance, Wai-Chee Dimock displaces the centrality of U.S. history by thinking of American literature through the deep time of geology and astronomy. However, the privileging of ahistorical time also displaces the centrality of colonialism and imperialism. In clear contrast to the methodologies of Marr and Edwards, and Said who is summarily dismissed as hierarchical, binaristic, and ultimately Eurocentric, Dimock reads any U.S. literary reference to Islamic cultures as evidence of a liberating planetary perspective. A similar de-emphasis on imperialism haunts Dimock and Lawrence Buell’s recently published collection Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature (2007). The transnationalism of Marr and Edwards, on the other hand, is clearly based on a recognition of the importance of colonialism and imperialism, the othering of “colonial difference” that critics like Walter Mignolo argue cannot be dismissed. Just as important, both authors ground their analyses in particular historical situations.

The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism and Morocco Bound point to a promising direction in transnational American studies, revitalized through a commitment to postcolonial critique. They demonstrate the continuing importance of Orientalism as a paradigm not only for understanding U.S. encounters with the Middle East but also for conceptions of national and local identities. Along with studies such as Hilton Obenzinger’s American Palestine, which situates American literature within the dynamics of covenantal settler-colonialisms such as those in Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Israel, Marr’s and Edwards’s books are exemplary works of a truly postnational American studies.
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Notes


5. See also Lester Vogel’s *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), which examines millenialist interpretations of the Holy Lands prior to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire.

6. Although Douglas Little’s *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) does pay some attention to cultural constructions of Arabs, it is mainly a diplomatic history analyzing the failures of U.S. understandings of Arab nationalism and the significance of Israel as an asset for the United States in the Middle East.


