This article examines the history of European Orientalist representations of the domestic space of Egyptian Muslims. It identifies these representations as promulgated in two of the foundational works of European Orientalism: the French *Description de l'Egypte* and Edward W. Lane's *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. These texts depict Muslim houses in three different ways: as virtually uninhabited material objects in Cartesian space, as "monuments," and as exotic places imbued with meaning by the imaginations of European outsiders. Seldom does Orientalist scholarship take up the question of the varieties of significance Muslims themselves might attach to their dwellings. The article concludes with an account of the emergence of antithetical, post-Orientalist studies of domestic space in Islamic cultures.

The values and meanings people attribute to houses grow from the interplay of history and imagination, of society and nature, and from appropriations and estrangements. They do not come about fully formed, immune from the forces of historical change. Even when people attribute religious significance to houses and hold that houses manifest timeless realities, they do so under specific circumstances, for comprehensible reasons.

In a generation we have seen a remarkable growth in the number of studies dealing with the relations between house form and culture, with the semiotics of domestic space, and with the mythico-ritual meanings of traditional dwellings. The treatment of houses in Islamic societies has moved from an emphasis on preserving individual monumental edifices...
and compiling inventories of discrete physical features to analysis of houses as components of a dynamic social environment. Recently some Muslim planners and architects have turned to medieval documents of sacred Islamic law, not to reconstruct the past, but to appropriate design principles that will rectify the estrangements caused by the careless intrusion of European and North American (hereafter "Euramerican") forms.

We should not forget that Euramericans are the ones who so far have dominated the study of houses, religions, and societies. Through colonialism, their political and economic institutions have dramatically affected the course of the economic and cultural transformations experienced by the peoples of Africa and Asia in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries — including transformations of their built environments. Therefore, because of the pervasiveness of Euramerican configurations of knowledge and power throughout much of the world, it is necessary to investigate the history of learned Euramerican representations of the domestic spaces of the cultures they have dominated.

In this article I shall discuss how the relation between Islam and houses has been represented in two Orientalist texts, the French Description de l’Egypte (1809—1828) and Edward W. Lane’s An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians (1836), both created as a result of direct encounters between European and Muslim peoples in modern history. These texts are exemplary because they contain early representations of Muslim domestic space rooted in the Enlightenment and Romantic eras, because they were produced by citizens of the two European nations that had the most direct impact on colonization and modernization of Egypt and most other Muslim countries, and because they definitively shaped Euramerican attitudes towards Muslim domestic space until the mid-twentieth century. Representations of Egypt in such works, as Timothy Mitchell has astutely noted, posit a false identity between the perceptible image (signifier) and the original condition (signified). Hence, writers and readers became convinced that Orientalist depictions of Egyptian domestic space described Egyptian habitations “exactly as they are.”

**TWO PRINCIPAL ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSLIM DOMESTIC SPACE**

On July 2, 1798, an army of 40,000 men under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte landed near Alexandria, Egypt. In their company were 165 of the best and brightest young French scientists, engineers, and artists of the time. Their common objective was the military and scientific conquest of Egypt, whereby they intended to establish a bridgehead for French expansion into Asia and a colonial source of wealth for the French revolutionary government that would challenge England’s imperial claims.

After occupying Alexandria and Cairo (July 22), Napoleon’s savants established their Institut d’Egypte, modeled on the Institut National in Paris, in the evacuated Cairene palaces of Egypt’s former rulers. The Institut served as a center for amassing information on Egypt’s geography, natural resources, industries, people, and history. But in 1801, because of the steady deterioration of conditions for the expedition, the French savants were compelled to return home with what remained of the army. The results of their collective research was finally compiled in the Description de l’Egypte, which appeared in installments between 1809 and 1828, dedicated to the Emperor Napoleon himself.

Edward W. Lane, a twenty-four-year-old Englishman, first arrived in Egypt from London on September 19, 1825.4 Quickly enamored of the country, he preferred to reside in Cairo with its Muslim inhabitants, apart from other Europeans. He assumed native manners, dress, and speech, and even took the Arab name “Mansoor.” After two and one-half years of concentrated study and travel in Egypt, he returned to England in the summer of 1828 with notes and sketches for his own Description of Egypt. In London Lane had access to the just-completed French publication, but he was unable to secure sufficient financial backing for a similarly extensive book. Instead, he was commissioned by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge to do a more limited volume about contemporary life in Egypt based on some chapters from the draft version of his Description. To complete this book, he again took up residence in Egypt between December 1833 and October 1835.

The first edition of the result of his endeavor, An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, was published in 1836.5 With the book’s publication, Lane became a prominent figure at meetings of the Asiatic Society of London and the Oriental Translation Fund. His last (and longest) period of residence in Egypt began in 1842 and lasted until 1849, during which time he was accompanied by his Greek-Egyptian wife Nefeseh, sister Sophia, and her children. After returning to England, he was honored by the Royal Asiatic Society (1866), the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres of the Institut de France (1864), and the University of Leiden (1875). During these years, he worked assiduously on An Arabic-English Lexicon, which remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1876. Posthumously, it became one of the foremost works of Orientalist scholarship.

The French Description, the result of planned collective endeavors, and Lane’s Modern Egyptians, the result of the efforts
of a gifted individual, are scholarly landmarks in the modern European encounter with Muslim peoples. The former is the crowning achievement of Napoleon's short-lived colonial occupation of Egypt. The latter served as the reliable companion for generations of English-speaking visitors to Egypt, and was read by British colonial officials and Orientalist scholars alike. The prominence of both works in the formation of modern European knowledge about “the Orient,” as well as their relation to the early colonization of a Muslim country, makes their representations of domestic space worth examining.

THE MUSLIM HOUSES OF NAPOLEON’S SAVANTS

The phenomenal size and erudition of the French Description has been frequently noted by scholars. Jean-Marie Carré states that it is “the most monumental work that has ever been consecrated, in any language to a people.” Furthermore, he writes:

In one year, at the turn of the [eighteenth] century, the genius of the French enlightened the depths of history. It revealed the vestiges of a lofty and mysterious past to Europe. Thanks to it, Egypt became an object of science, and grand vistas unfolded before all future researchers.

The publisher of the second edition called the Description a “monument reuniting the recollections of [ancient] Egypt with the glories of modern France.”

Truly encyclopedic in scope, it was roughly organized into three divisions: antiquities (nine volumes, with plates), modern conditions (five volumes, with plates), and natural history (nine volumes, with plates). Hence, for every volume describing or illustrating “modern” social life in Islamic Egypt, there were nearly four volumes devoted to the country’s ancient monuments and history, geography, zoology, and botany.

The Description’s chief ethnographic contributions are de Chabrol de Volvic’s Essai sur les moeurs des habitants modernes de l’Egypte and Edme-François Jomard’s Description de la ville et de la citadelle du Caire, both of which are contained in the volumes concerned with modern conditions.

The ethnographic chapters are imbued by a concern for comparative description. They compare the different social (rich and poor, urban, rural, nomadic), ethnic (Coptic, Arab, Turkish, Greek), and religious groups (Muslim, Christian, and Jewish). They also discuss the differences between Egyptian men and women in status, behavior, and dress. More generally, they compare modern Egyptians with the ancients and with Europeans. Because the French were looking at the country as a colony, they were guided in their judgements by an overriding interest in its human and natural productivity. Lengthy sections take up such matters as finances, commerce, industry, and agriculture.

The French used cultural comparison, together with the study of natural resources, to substantiate the claim that once they had helped the good “people” overthrow their corrupt Turkish and Mamluk rulers, they would restore civilizational greatness to the land. Comparison also gave the French a basis on which to measure native wealth, and on which to levy taxes proportionally.

What is the space of the Description as construed by Napoleon’s savants? It is a space that, as Carré suggests, is both Cartesian and monumental. In the Description, Egypt is represented as an object — matter in extension — subject to scientific measurement on a geometric grid. This type of spatial representation is first evident in the Description’s excellent maps, which facilitated both scholarly inquiry and military maneuver. It is also evident in the precise drawings and plans of the country’s pharaonic and Islamic monuments, in which Egyptians are either invisible or dwarfed by their surroundings. It is as if natives are included only to furnish an idea of scale and local color.

On the other hand, monuments can be anomalous; by their nature, some mystery about them eludes rational analysis — they form qualitative centers in quantitative space. They “reveal” to people of later times the glorious lessons of the past, but their messages are mediated by the experiences, categories of understanding, and institutions of their interpreters. Their objective existence is subverted by their beholder’s subjectivity. Hence, for the French, as for other Europeans, the monuments of “the Orient” contributed to the formation of “Western” identity once they had been surveyed by the eye of reason.

The Description’s frontispiece is one of the clearest examples of the wedding of Cartesian with monumental space (FIG. d). Space, as extension, is evident in the measured organization of the frame, the balanced arrangement of contents in the main scene (the Tableau) along horizontal, vertical, and diagonal axes, and the attention given to perspective in the Mediterranean view of the Nile valley and its monuments. Moreover, the objects in the foreground appear as if they were being collected for shipment to French museums.

Concomitantly, the frame is modeled after the portal to a pharaonic palace or temple. The top scene shows Napoleon as pharaoh driving the Mamluks to flight with his army (represented by the eagle), restoring the arts and sciences who march
behind him "to this land from which they have been exiled for so long." Below, the Mamluks surrender their weapons and bear tribute to Napoleon's emblem, which is encircled by the snake of immortality. The right and left sides of the frame memorialize the triumphs of the French army in Egypt and Palestine. A pictorial monument of Napoleon's expedition, therefore, is used to represent the monuments of ancient Egypt. The Tableau, without people or houses, depicts a void waiting to be filled by the civilized order portrayed in the frame. The message conveyed is that European military and intellectual dominance, and the submission of the indigenous population, are to be the instruments of Egypt's recovery.

Egyptian houses, plainly absent in the frontispiece, receive meager attention in the body of the Description. They appear either as geometric objects or as monuments in the illustrations. At one point, De Chabrol, in what he calls a "tableau abrégé" of modern Egyptian culture, mentions them while describing the idleness of a typical wealthy Cairene gentleman, who instead of taking promenades like Europeans, prefers to remain at home to enjoy his garden. The author also takes interest in discussing harems, the female apartments in wealthy houses. He correctly identifies these as "sacred refuges," i.e., places in which adult male intrusion is forbidden. But then De Chabrol turns to fantasy, imagining that the hot climate and seclusion combine to inflame female passions such that "they do not neglect any means for satisfying them." 13

This last type of discourse about the passionate life of Muslim women in the privacy of the harem has become a dominant theme in Euramerican literature about the Orient. It persists in today's cinema and television programs. Such discourse is more a product of the Euramerican male imagination than Oriental realities. The most ironic thing about it is that it seeks to transform a Muslim practice connected with preserving moral virtue in the domestic lives of men and women into a perverted fantasy of excessive immorality.

A different approach is taken in another chapter of the Description, written by its principal editor, Edme-François Jomard. Here, the author's remarks on houses accompany notes for the "geometric plan of Cairo," which was ordered prepared by the expedition's chief of military geographic engineers. In a few short paragraphs, Jomard points out differences between the housing of elites and masses, irregularities in their arrangements, and the varieties of construction materials. 18 Further on he provides some details on the principal palaces of Egypt's rulers, being especially concerned with their locations, owners, and the ranks they hold. Yet, of the 26,000 Cairene dwellings Jomard and his companions counted in their 1798 survey, only 133 are described at this level of detail. 19 The thousands of others (the majority) are not discussed at all.

Aside from such brief written remarks, only some thirty-one illustrations out of the Description's total of nine hundred are devoted to careful depictions of Egyptian houses. These detailed plates have historical value, but they reflect a prevailing interest in the houses of the ruling class, which they portray both geometrically and monumentally. For example, the house of Hasan Kashif is exhibited as a lifeless artifact—a complex array of polygons in relief (Fig. 2). By contrast, the palace of Qasim Bey is shown as a tableau, a peacefully inhabited space graced with a pleasant garden. Yet even in this latter, relativized humanized image, Egyptians are depicted as being dwarfed by the mass of the structure, while an incongruously placed woman ponders the scene from the balcony of the men's sitting area (Fig. 3).

For each of these illustrations, the point of view is that of one of the expedition's artists, and the intended viewer is a colonizer, or at least a colonial sympathizer. As a matter of fact, the two houses depicted were among those seized by the French and occupied by the Institut de l’Égypte. Since the previous occupants had fled, 10 the human figures must therefore have been representations of people who had submitted to the French, or else inventions based on observations in other settings. Since the French suffered serious losses from repeated uprisings and skirmishes in Cairo and the countryside during their occupation, and since they were occasionally besieged in their own quarters, such tranquil tableaus reflected wishful thinking more than actual reality.

The Description's treatment of Egyptian houses makes it clear that the French considered religion and houses independent categories of knowledge. They considered houses material entities, especially useful if they happened to be large palaces suitable for occupation after their former owners had abandoned them. By contrast, religion was a matter of public institutions and traditional dogma. On the one hand, the French identified Islam as one of their greatest obstacles. On the other, like the grand houses of Cairo, Islam was there to be absorbed and administered by French civilization. Napoleon declared to the Egyptians: “The French too are true Muslims.” In the same breath, however, he threatened to burn down any...
FIG. 2. The layout of Hasan Kashif’s mansion (Cairo, eighteenth century), which served as the headquarters for Napoleon’s Institut de l’Égypte. Source: E.-F. Jomard, ed., Description de l’Égypte (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1809–1828).
village that showed resistance, and he called upon the people to "seal up immediately all the property, houses, and possessions of the beys.""

A nineteenth-century Egyptian account of Napoleon's campaign testifies clearly to the violent and rapacious manner with which Egyptians and their property were treated:

[The French] authorized the destruction of the Husayniyya [quarter in Cairo], along with the residential quarters and neighborhoods, mosques, baths, shops, and tombs standing outside Bab al-Futuh and Bab al-Nasr. When they raided a house to destroy it, they did not allow its occupants to remove its contents, nor take any of the debris. They plundered and destroyed it. They carried away any usable floor tiles and pieces of timber for their own buildings, and sold the broken timber for firewood to the people at the highest price. . . . People lost possessions and property of inestimable value. As if this was not enough, fees were assessed on their possessions and houses, so that at one and the same time a person was confronted with the plundering and destruction [of his property], and demands to pay fees [on it].

In sum, the properties of those opposed to French rule were to be destroyed, usurped, or looted. Islam and Egyptian houses alike were to be represented and revivified only on a French tableau.

THE HOUSES OF LANE'S MODERN EGYPTIANS

Edward W. Lane turned to Egypt for refuge, referring to it as "that paradise"; unlike the French, he was neither a conqueror nor under constant threat of attack from the local populace. The Cairene houses he lived in were rented, not occupied by force. The Egyptians he associated with were friends and teachers, not subjects and prisoners. Hence, the chief benefit of his account is that it gives us a more intimate and personal glimpse of Egyptian daily life, particularly in Cairo. In contrast to the desolate landscape shown in the French Description's frontispiece, the frontispiece to Lane's book shows a genial gathering of men in the guest room of an Egyptian house (FIG. 4). Here human subjects clearly dominate. His book contains a few illustrations where the physical setting dwarfs its inhabitants, but these are outnumbered by illustrations which make human beings the center of attention.

Aside from the illustrations, Lane's text represents Egyptian houses within two intermingled schemas, one topical and one narrative. The topical schema is like that of modern ethnographic literature. A prefatory description of Egypt's topography and demography sets the stage for chapters on the "foundations of the moral and social state of the Muslims of Egypt," i.e., religion, laws, and government. The remaining chapters deal with subjects such as domestic life, letters, "superstitions," amusements, and festivals.

Within this schema, houses provide a main focus for the introductory discussion of Egypt's topography. They comprise part of the physical setting for cultural life. Lane describes them like a tour guide, from the outside to the inside. He leads the reader into the ground-floor quarters and courtyard, then to the upper apartments, and finally to the rooftop — all the while providing details about layout, furnishings, decorations, and their Arabic names. After nearly fifteen pages of illustrated text (twenty in early editions) devoted primarily to the "houses of the wealthy," however, he undermines his own exposition by observing:

Very few large or handsome houses are to be seen in Egypt, except in the metropolis and some other towns. The dwellings of the lower orders, particularly those of the peasants, are of very mean description: they are mostly built of unbaked bricks, cemented together with mud. Some of them are mere hovels.

Why does Lane choose to devote so much of the book's first chapter to describing "handsome houses," only to undercut his efforts by admitting that they are so rare? Why does he devote such little attention to Egypt's "inferior houses" — those of the common majority? I will answer these questions shortly, but first I will examine Lane's treatment of the relationship between houses and Islam within his topical schema.

While discussing Cairo's "private houses" in the introduction, Lane mentions three items that bear on their religious significance. First is the use of inscriptions on house doors, such as "He is the creator, the everlasting." Although Lane provides an illustration of this phenomenon, he offers no explanation except to add parenthetically that its purpose "will be explained when I treat of the superstitions of the Egyptians" (i.e., in chapter 11). The second item is the use of the name "Allah," the statement "God is my hope," and lion figures in wooden latticework window decorations. Lane offers his reader no explanation for this practice. Lastly, he points out the existence of paintings of Mecca and Medina on the interior walls of some houses. Instead of offering an explanation, he exercises his aesthetic judgement in remarking that these are "rude paintings . . . executed by native Muslim artists, who have not the least notion of the rules of perspective, and who constantly deface what they thus attempt to decorate." Therefore, from these few examples, we can see that Lane either overlooks the religious aspects of Muslim houses,
reduces them to the status of superstition, or pushes them aside to make room for negative remarks motivated by a not-very-subtle conviction in the superiority of European aesthetic sensibilities.

The second schema Lane uses in *Modern Egyptians* is a narrative following the life of a composite Muslim character—one whom Leila Ahmed has called Lane's "Muslim Everyman." Lane first describes events surrounding Everyman's birth and infancy, then—after breaking from the narrative to discuss Egyptian religion and government—he portrays his household life. One chapter details a day in Everyman's life from sunrise to nightfall. During this time his house is represented as a place for consuming food and drink in the company of male guests (refer to FIG. 4), and Lane provides readers with illustrations of the utensils employed in these activities. The next chapter focuses on the life of the women who are adjuncts to Everyman's life. With Lane as our guide, we learn about marriage customs, life in the "hareem," divorce, polygamy, the status of female slaves, domestic duties, and leisure activities.

In his treatment of the "hareem," Lane informs us that the master of the house endeavors to appropriate "a distinct suite of apartments [for] his women ... to prevent their being seen by male domestics and other men without being covered in the manner prescribed by their religion." He explains this practice by quoting a passage from the Quran (24 Nûr 3) that stipulates female modesty and concealment of their "ornaments."

There are two abrupt shifts in this narrative about the "hareem": one is from Everyman's house to the female body; the other is from empirical observation to Quranic proof-text. These shifts raise intriguing questions. By what logic is a dwelling place related to the female body? Who or what really controls female seclusion: men, women, or the Quran? What is the institutional and cultural apparatus through which Quranic rulings operate upon the lives of individual Muslims in the Egyptian milieu? Unfortunately, Lane does not explicitly answer these questions. Instead, he continues his excursus on the "hareem" by offering his readers a desultory series of observations: a comment on ornaments worn by women in seventh-century Arabia and nineteenth-century Egypt with a parallel citation from the Bible (Isaiah 3:16), a critique of classical commen-

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taries on 24 Nūr 1 reported in the notes to George Sale's Quran translation, and discussions of veiling practices and the segregation of the sexes in Muslim cemeteries. Lane finalizes his remarks with an anecdote about his encounters with the widowed mother of "one of my Muslim friends here," and with comparative observations about the impact of seclusion upon different "orders" of women."

Lane's explanation of the "hareem" is disappointing, even though it reflects a vague awareness of connections between the organization of domestic space, social norms, and religion. Instead of conducting a systematic analysis based on empirical observations, which would be a norm of twentieth-century ethnography, he allows the discussion to wander between obscurely related bits of information. It appears that it is Lane's presence, bolstered by the textual authorities he has selected and edited, which is the narrative's main unifying force. In fact, the shift in focus from the "master," who sets aside female apartments at the beginning of the "hareem" discussion, to Lane's personal anecdotes at its end signifies that Lane has identified — if not confused — himself with his Muslim Everyman."

Lane's identification with Egyptian upper classes stands in marked contrast to the antipathies expressed in the French Description. Born into the English middle class, Lane wished to cleave to the elites — if only temporarily. This simple fact distinguishes his view significantly from that of the French, who wished to displace them. His attention to Egypt's "handsome" houses may be partly explained by this identification. Even if Cairo's mansions were not numerous, for him they were both exemplary of, and in conformity with, his Victorian tastes.

We should bear in mind Lane's British readers, who had purchased nearly 25,000 copies of *Modern Egyptians* by 1877. Lane's description of palatial Egyptian houses appealed to the English Victorian *nouveaux- riches*, who at the time were producing opulent country mansions with maze-like arrangements of interior space. Like Cairo's mansions, these great Victorian houses had vast halls, segregated areas for "gentlemen" or servants, medieval features, and smoking rooms. Moreover, since the late-eighteenth century, some of England's great houses and public buildings had incorporated elaborate Mughal- and "Moorish"-style architectural and decorative features. The colonization of India, the growth of British tourism in both India and the Mediterranean countries, and the emergence of Orientalist art and exhibitions in the mid-1800s all contributed to the spread of this architectural fashion.

As England's industries and populations grew, and as its major cities became more crowded and polluted, the fascination of the *nouveaux- riches* with "Oriental" images created by men like Lane came to complement their attraction to and appropriation of the British countryside. It was here that they endeavored to concretize their romantic tastes and domestic ideals in monumental architectural forms.

**THE LEGACY OF ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATIONS**

The representations of Muslim domestic space that appeared in the *Description* and *Modern Egyptians* survived in subsequent Orientalist treatments of Muslim houses. When the study of vernacular domestic architecture was not being overshadowed by fascination with ancient monuments or diminished by philological obsession with texts, it was reduced to viewing houses as artifacts of material culture or objects of the romantic imagination.
Sometimes these representations reverted from textual forms back into architectural forms, as in the case of the Victorian mansion. For example, the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris included a full-scale replication of a street in the medieval section of Cairo, complete with two-story houses, shops, and even a Mamluk-style mosque. Upon closer examination, it is evident that this layout was no more than a facade for French, not Egyptian, notions of life in Islamic society. One Egyptian visitor reported that the interior of the Exposition’s mosque “had been set up as a coffee house, where Egyptian girls performed dances with young males, and dervishes whirled.”

The trajectory of Edward Lane’s work after Modern Egyptians demonstrated a growing preference for texts over real people, a bias that reverberated even more loudly in works produced by Orientalist scholars after him. Although this bias led to important positive achievements, it also produced judgments like the following, written by Stanley Lane-Poole (Lane’s grandnephew) in 1898. While discussing the layout of a great Cairene mansion, Lane-Poole declared: “The inhabitants of a house . . . lead a dreary, monotonous life: fortunately, however, they are not often conscious of its emptiness.” Scholarly authority, together with philological mastery over a select corpus of Oriental texts, was a sufficient basis of knowledge in this discourse; inquiry into the variety of native self-understandings and valuations of domestic space was out of the question.

Regarding actual Egyptian dwellings, the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe did perform a valuable service between 1881 and 1953 by preserving vestiges of Cairo’s older monumental residences. But this important institution did little to study their religious aspects or elucidate the meanings they might have held for their former occupants. For the Comité, grand houses were considered above all to be monuments, memories of an Orient as imagined by European men. A long-term member of the Comité, Gaston Wiet (who was also director of the Museum of Arab Art in Cairo from 1926 to 1951 and author of many entries in the Encyclopaedia of Islam), wrote:

>Cairo has less prestige than the centers of civilization of ancient Egypt, and nobbiness, coupled with archaeological finds such as the tomb of Tutankhamen do not help to change things. Yet this city holds a considerable place in the history of art, thanks to the brilliant flourishing of architectural works. There are still characteristic sections of the city which permit our imagination to carry us back to the Middle Ages; monuments evoke many memories of the past. . . . There, as elsewhere, the stones sing the glories of the past.”

Further interest in Egyptian dwellings was demonstrated by Cairo’s Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, which produced a series of important publications on Egypt’s monumental domestic architecture. But only in the last decade or so have its publications shown serious interest in studying houses as part of a living socio-cultural milieu. Even so, the religious dimensions of Muslim domestic space are often neglected. In the works of Euramerican historians of art, architecture, and society, Muslim houses are still viewed today as a variety of “secular” architecture.

Orientalist scholarship both reflects and anticipates the occupation and transformation of Muslim domestic space by colonial powers. Through what Orientalists wrote, Muslim houses became what Euramericans wished them to be. Muslim points of view were inconsequential outside the frame of Orientalist representations. The appropriation and estrangement of Muslim houses by the European imagination, evident in nineteenth-century “Orientalist” art and literature, has continued in more contemporary scholarly works, such as Olivier Marc’s Psychanalyse de la maison (1972), which carries Gaston Bachelard’s reduction of the ideal house to daydreaming in La poétique de l’espace (1958) beyond the confines of France.

When Marc lived and travelled in north Africa and Asia, he became particularly interested in Muslim dwellings. Of desert nomads, he says (contrary to established ethnographic research) that they do not have a notion of bounded or fixed space — neither within their tents, nor in their home territories. “Without asserting his human condition, the nomad wanders between heaven and earth, his gaze more often fixed on the immense blue horizon than on the ground at his feet.” Thankfully, “the nomad” does retain, for Marc, the archetypal form of the triangle, represented in the shape of his tent. Once the author has grasped this as a primary symbol, however, he insists that it is replicated in the stones nomads use to demarcate a place of prayer. Then he associates the triangle with the axis of the world, the Ka’ba (actually cubic in shape) and the pyramids of Egypt and Mexico.

Marc likewise discusses “the Muslim house,” per se. Rather than being a real construction, it belongs to an image that encompasses Mediterranean houses, African villages, Indian temples, and Buddhist monasteries. Less a house than an enclosed garden, it has “. . . at its center a gushing fountain whose waters fill a circular basin, a fountain of youth with a pool to reflect the sun, moon and stars. Repository of the universe, it symbolizes the cosmos within each man. In this respect it too is a mandala.”
One section of Marc's book discusses the work of Hassan Fathy, the internationally known Egyptian architect. During the late 1940s the Egyptian Department of Antiquities charged Fathy with building an experimental village for the relocation of the inhabitants of Gourna, a hillside settlement east of the Valley of the Kings in Upper Egypt. This was supposed to prevent villagers from plundering Egyptian antiquities. Fathy endeavored to use low-cost materials and modified forms of vernacular architecture, but the government did not provide adequate support, and the Gournawis resisted leaving homes their families had occupied for generations. The move would have forced them to give up their primary source of income and take up residence amidst agricultural lands owned by others. Moreover, Fathy's design relied heavily on domed roofs, a form imported from Nubia which these villagers used for tombs not the homes of the living. A ban on keeping animals corralled in their owners' homes, the traditional manner of protecting family livestock, also dampened enthusiasm for the project.

In other words, despite its use of indigenous motifs and materials, Fathy's project was not sufficiently localized. It asked people to choose between a domestic environment which they themselves had mostly constructed and managed and one imposed by outsiders. In the absence of strong government pressure, the choice between the two was not difficult. Today, old Gourna flourishes, while New Gourna, the planned town, stands unfinished and sparsely populated.

Fathy's work signifies what W.E.B. Du Bois refers to as "double consciousness" — the sense of seeing one's self through the eyes of others. In this case, Fathy saw the traditional built environment of his native Egypt through the eyes of Western Europeans, and he struggled to discover a resolution. Marc, on the other hand, attempted to draw lessons from the East and Fathy's experience for the benefit of the West. Contemplating the failure of Fathy's project, Marc romantically concludes that the visionary architect is a heroic figure who must act independently for the benefit of the collectivity, in spite of their resistance. Such a person is not only wiser than the common person, because he possesses knowledge of collective urges and symbols, but he embodies what all members of society secretly long for — self-sufficiency. This gives him tremendous power over mind and space:

"I recalled with Hassan Fathy the richness of an Orient which had given free play to its feminine aspect. Should not the West reintegrate the feminine principle, that source of intuition without which no man is wholly a man, and therefore no building really human? If architecture is once again to become creation, must not the barriers between conscious and the unconscious, the objective and the subjective, the inside and the outside, be torn down, so that the architect may discover the foundations of future expression inside the human psyche, which throughout the ages has given birth to form?"

Apparently Marc is prepared to recommend that an architect who is conscious of his own self-transcendence can legitimately propose the effacement of the epistemological foundations of other cultures and subcultures, as well as the destruction of their human habitations. This kind of mentality, with its romantic revolutionary overtones, reflects and endorses Euramerican imperial undertakings, which have often resulted in the direct or indirect displacement of the colonized.

Houses as Objects of Antithetical Knowledge

The dominant Euramerican discourses about the cultural and religious significance of houses are now being faced with challenges posed by alternative discourses. The expropriation of lands from rural and tribal peoples, rural-urban migration, population growth, and health concerns have all sparked a growing concern for improving the housing for the urban labor force, the poor, and the elderly. A respectable body of feminist scholarship on the relations between the house, culture, and the female in Euramerican society has also appeared in recent years, reflecting the accelerating involvement of women in public life and academic institutions in Europe and North America. Likewise, the collapse of the old colonial empires, coupled with nationalistic movements in Africa and Asia, has led to the appreciation, preservation, and study of local cultures and their vernacular architectures. Concomitantly, mass migrations of the formerly colonized to the homelands of the colonizers are shaking assumptions about what authentic cultural spaces really are. Developments such as these have spurred members of the Annales group to explore in detail the cultural history of domestic life and architecture in Europe itself.

Alternative approaches to the study of houses in Islamic cultures began to appear prior to World War II, but only in recent years has a noticeable quantity of this type of scholarly literature been created. Among the most notable contributions are Bourdieu's structuralist analysis of the Kabyle (Berber) house, Wenzel's vivid portrayal of Nubian house decoration, Bougali's treatment of collective representations of space in Morocco, and regional studies of vernacular architecture in Islamic West Africa, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, greater Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Southeast Asia.
Moreover, several well-financed collective projects involving architects, architectural historians, planners, and students have been initiated lately to promote the study and perpetuation of Islamic architecture. Together, these experts have been exploring ways to introduce traditional forms and techniques into the design of modern urban and domestic environments. The Aga Khan Foundation has played a major role in funding many of these projects.19

Such research testifies to a new multivocality and pluralism in modern scholarly discourse. Admittedly, there are traces of the formerly dominant constructions of knowledge: materialism, ego- and ethno-centrism, and romantic idealism. Hassan Fathy’s Gourna project reified an invented vernacular architectural tradition ill-suited to the people he was commissioned to house. In other instances, a certain type of neomonalism has sometimes emerged in conservation projects that requires people to abandon their habitations so that traditional architecture can be preserved for foreign tourists, merchants, and artists. For example, one critic has pointed out that the preservation of the old quarters of Fez, Morocco, ironically required the displacement of its long­time inhabitants in order to provide a proper locale for “Islamic thought” and “culture,” as these were defined by powerful post-colonial Moroccan elites.19

Yet beyond such initial shortcomings, the dominant Euramerican formulations of knowledge about the histories, lives, and built environments of others are being profoundly shaken. This is a positive consequence of globalization, as the colonized — male and female — enter established centers of power and knowledge, and as academics and planners become more engaged with the thoughts, passions, practices, and problems of their fellow human beings — no matter how similar or alien they appear to be to one another.

Renata Holod has captured the spirit of the sea-change in thinking about built environments in non-Euramerican communities in her description of projects promoted under the auspices of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. The cooperative efforts of international teams of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, planners, and local officials have evoked “the remarkable aesthetic and cultural achievements of Islamic civilisation” and reawakened “concern for the efficacious, the appropriate, and the beautiful in the architecture of the Islamic world today.”60

Careful studies of the residential habitats of people contending with the disadvantages of poverty and the design of housing that embodies the “pattern language” of the Islamic architectural heritage are among the explicit aims of such enterprises. By contrast, few, if any, Orientalists or students of Islamic architecture ever expressed even a scholarly interest in the housing of non-elites prior to the 1950s. Their concern was to preserve monuments of bygone rulers and their courtiers.

There has been extraordinary growth outside the boundaries of knowledge about Muslim houses, as they were first con­structed, by the works of Napoleon’s savants, Lane, and their successors. Perhaps this growth will help counterbalance the damage occasioned by the colonial restructuring of cultural space, and by the importation of expensive Euramerican materials, techniques, and design values by indigenous technocratic elites. Nevertheless, the dominant discourses will only be moved to conscious involvement with others — as opposed to their displacement and subjugation — when they are compelled to do so by a combination of internal and external forces for change. This is likely to be a long and contentious process involving social, cultural, economic, political, and, of course, religious components.

REFERENCE NOTES

This article is based on a paper delivered at the Second Conference of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments at the University of California, Berkeley, in October 1990. The author is particularly indebted to Laura Nader and Nezar AlSayyad for their valuable comments and suggestions.

2. The following discussion has benefited greatly from Edward Said’s interpretation of the Description and Lane’s Modern Egyptians, found in his Orientalism (New York: Random House, 1978), pp.84–87,157–64.
4. The most thorough account of Lane’s life and works is to be found in L. Ahmed, Edward W. Lane: A Study of His Life and Works and of British Ideas of the Middle East in the Nineteenth
for the Institute. He reports that the French:

. . . demolished several of the (Amir Murad Bey's) houses and they took
the rubble and marble of the buildings on the
hills and other places. To the administrators of affairs, astronomers,
scholars, and scientists in mathematics,
geometry, astronomy, engraving and
drawing, and also to the painters,
scribes, and writers they assigned
Al-Nasiriyya quarter and all the houses in
it, such as the house of Qasim Bey, the
Amir of the Pilgrimage known as Abu
Sayf, and the house of Hasan Kashif
Jarkas which he had founded and built
to perfection (Al-Jabarti's Chronicle,
p.115; see also pp.56-7, 66, 116-7).

21. From Napoleon's Arabic declaration, ibid.,
plate XIII.
22. See Ali Mubarak (d.1316/1893), 'Alam al-
Din, in al-A'lam al-khâmil li-’Ali Mubârak, ed.
Muhammad Imara, 3 vols. to date (Beirut: al-
Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyâ li-l-Dîwân wa-l-Nasîr, 1979-97),
vol.2 pp.297-304 (chap. 93).
23. Ahmed, Lane, p.102f.
24. Lane, Modern Egyptians, 5th edition. The
frontpiece was added to later editions, based
on one of Lane's sketches.
25. Ibid., p.21.
26. Ibid., pp.6-7.
27. Ibid., p.18.
29. Lane correctly notes that this term refers
to the female apartments in a house and to
the females themselves. It implies that both
are sacred, forbidden to other males except
under strict rules.
30. Lane, Modern Egyptians, p.175.
31. Ibid., p.178.
32. In view of this and Said's readings, Ahmed's
defense of Lane's objectivity is questionable;
Lane, pp.112-13.
33. Lane, Modern Egyptians, p.154. In chap. 13
("Characters"), Lane devotes more attention
to the subject of Egyptian women.
34. Ibid., p.192.
35. Ibid., p.195.
36. H.S. Deighton, "The Impact of Egypt on
Britain: A Study of Public Opinion," in Political
and Social Change in Modern Egypt: Historical Studies from the Ottoman
Conquest to the United Arab Republic, ed. P.M. Holt (London: Oxford
37. M. Girouard, The Victorian Country House,
2d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press,
1979), passim.
38. See R. Head, The Indian Style (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1986); L. and R.
Ormond, Lord Leighton (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1975), pp.99-101; and
Girouard, The Victorian Country House, p.36.
39. Muhammad Amin Fikri, quoted in
Mitchell, Colonising Egypt, p.1. A similar
exhibit at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in
Chicago entailed the vandalizing of more than
65 actual Cairene dwellings in order to
reproduce the exhibit's façades. See D.M. Reed,
"Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in
Modern Egypt: The Museum of Arab Art and
the Committee for the Conservation of
Monuments of Arab Art" (Paper delivered at
"Processes of Arab Self-Definition" Conference,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
November 11-12, 1989), pp.4-5.
40. S. Lane-Poole, Cairo: Sketches of Its History,
Monuments, and Social Life, 3d ed. (London: J.S.
Virtue, 1898; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press,
41. See, for example, how K.A.C. Creswell,
a member of the Comité from 1938 until 1991,
treated domestic architecture in Muslim
42. G. Wiet, Cairo: City of Art and Commerce,
trans. S. Feiler (Norman: University of
43. See A. Lézâne, Trois palais d’époque ottomane
au Caire, Mémoires de l'IFAO, vol. 9 (Cairo: l'IFAO,
1972), A. Lézâne and A.-R. Abdal Tayah,
"Introduction à l’étude des maisons anciennes de
Rosette," Annales islamologiques 10 (1972),
pp.249-256.
44. J.-C. Garcin, B. Maury, J. Revault, I. Zakariya,
and A. Raymond, "Process of Arab Self-Definition" Conference,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
November 11-12, 1989), PP-4-5.
45. For rural houses, see J. Lorach and G. Hug, L’Habitat
rural en Egypte (Cairo: l'IFAO, 1930).
46. In view of this and Said's readings, Ahmed's
defense of Lane's objectivity is questionable;
Lane, pp.112-13.
47. Lane, Modern Egyptians, p.154. In chap. 13
("Characters"), Lane devotes more attention
to the subject of Egyptian women.
48. Ibid., p.192.
49. Ibid., p.195.
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47. Ibid., p. 56.

52. Marc, Psychology, p. 126.