



Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive

By Hala Halim



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bHonorable Mention for the 2014 Harry Levin Prizer

Interrogating how Alexandria became enshrined as the exemplary cosmopolitan space in the Middle East, this book mounts a radical critique of Eurocentric conceptions of cosmopolitanism. The dominant account of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism elevates things European in the city's culture and simultaneously places things Egyptian under the sign of decline. The book goes beyond this civilization/barbarism binary to trace other modes of intercultural solidarity.

Halim presents a comparative study of literary representations, addressing poetry, fiction, guidebooks, and operettas, among other genres. She reappraises three writers--C. P. Cavafy, E. M. Forster, and Lawrence Durrell--whom she maintains have been cast as the canon of Alexandria. Attending to issues of genre, gender, ethnicity, and class, she refutes the view that these writers' representations are largely congruent and uncovers a variety of positions ranging from Orientalist to anti-colonial. The book then turns to Bernard de Zogheb, a virtually unpublished writer, and elicits his Camp parodies of elite Levantine mores in operettas one of which centers on Cavafy. Drawing on Arabic critical and historical texts, as well as contemporary writers' and filmmakers' engagement with the canonical triumvirate, Halim orchestrates an Egyptian dialogue with the European representations.

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Editorial Review

Review

This book is firmly in the postcolonial mode, and on a topic that is both timely and important. As Egypt and other countries in the Middle East begin a political journey that takes them further and further out of the control of Western political institutions, it is essential to have nuanced studies that allow us to begin to understand how we (as Western writers and thinkers) have created comfortable spaces for certain non-western elites while excluding others.- Susan Stephens, Stanford University

An excellent exercise in rigorous comparative literature scholarship.-Roger Allen, University of Pennsylvania

"The masterful culmination of years of research by a world expert on Alexandria. Halim introduces Egyptian writers, such as Edwar Al-Kharrat and Ibrahim Abdel Meguid, into the previously predominantly European dialogue."--Banipal

"This is a labour of love, written by no other than a native Alexandrian, Hala Halim, and bound up by a profound love for the coastal city." -Ahram Online

"Hala Halim, who was born and bred in Alexandria and teaches at New York University, has a unique perspective from which to view the four male writers whose work she studies in her book." -Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies Vol. 38 No. 2

"In her 'Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism; An Archive,' Hala Halim explores enduring and critical literary constructs of Alexandria and its long touted "cosmopolitanism. " Halim's Text will be of great interest to students of comparative literature, cosmopolitanism, postcolonial writing and Mediterranean studies." -Al Jadid

"The strength of this work lies in Halim's ability to offer a much-needed postcolonial critique on the ubiquitous literary trope of Alexandrians, as a cosmopolitan city." -Mara Naaman, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*

"*Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism* is a treasure trove of information and original, groundbreaking critical insights not only on four important authors of world literature, but also on a city which is as versatile and

inspiring as Venice, for instance, with its uniqueness, literary aspect, and history."-*Comparative Literature Studies*

"Hala Halim's book is a provocative and erudite study of the modern European literary discourses that have constructed Alexandria as the exemplary site of what we might call cosmopolitan desire."-*Arab Studies Journal*

"The institution of Orientalist categories-and the new understanding of history through which these categories are given-set the terms for what came to be rendered as literary history, Arabic and others, and one legacy of this setting of terms is imparted through "the discourse of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism," which Hala Halim considers in her stunning intervention *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive*."--*Journal of Arabic Literature*

About the Author

Hala Halim is Assistant Professor of Middle Eastern Studies and Comparative Literature at New York University.

Users Review

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