Postcolonial studies are often focussed on both the epistemic and practical violence of imperialistic power. Frequently these critiques underscore the close proximity or, more precisely, the interdependence of the knowledge-based and the strength-based domination. The core of this relationship is captured in the Baconian motto tantum possumus quantum scimus, that is ‘knowledge is power’, and later examined in depth by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derida among others. Obviously, the relationship between knowledge and power is somehow mediated and canalized by history; through the latter knowledge becomes power and power shapes knowledge. Most importantly, history can be used in order to legitimize power. History entails (at least implicitly) a definition of the Self in relation to events, places, times and, above all, other people. Hence, I would maintain that history has mainly a relational nature. Therefore, history is a primary tool in the formation of the Self and of the Self’s attitudes toward its defining Otherness: the Self is located in a relational history and through a relational history. History could operate for the located-Self as a source of legitimation of its power over the Other. In this sense, because of its primarily defining-of-the-Self role, the Other is perceived as inferior to the Self, for only the latter is the télos of the process of definition. As the last statement clearly shows, there is something missing here. What is missing is
obviously the recognition of the Other *en tant que* symmetrical Self. Therefore, in a wordplay, the Other should be regarded as a ‘Self-other-than-Self’. In a colonial-minded historiography (and in a colonial-culture as a whole), the misrepresentation of the Other, the “reconstruction of [the] past” (Salama 2011, p. 6) and the depiction of a teleological mission are the three central issues in using history as an instrument for self-legitimation, domination and marginalisation. By and large, the major target of Salama’s critique is this tacit assumption of the colonial-minded historiography:

[T]he formation of the modern (European) Self—what has at least since the Enlightenment become known as the ‘subject’—is necessarily formed in opposition to what is Other to this Self. . . . [T]he subjection of the Other to the so-called ‘civilizing’ Self derives from a complex process of self-formation and self-idealization ingrained since the rise of modernity in the notion of the (European) subject which, if it had to have an Other, required this Other to be by definition inferior to the Self. This Other is inevitably submissive and remains in the ‘natural’ course of a would-be-independent, that is, an infant crawling along the path of civilization (p. 128-129).

The very title of Salama’s book suggests that history has operated as a structure of legitimation for an orientalist attitude toward Islam and for political exclusions. As a consequence, his purpose is to show “some of the ways history was constructed to channel European political orientations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (p. 41). His deconstructive-reconstructive intent is aimed to “examine the possibility of restoring the referent ‘Islam’ to a functional code of knowledge” (p. 9 and 18). In other words, colonial historical knowledge overshadowed its own referent (in this case: Islam) in the very moment it was ‘narrating’ it, so that the referent became absent (referent *in absentia*). Only by demystifying this historical knowledge will the referent become present (referent *in praesentia*). This exclusion of the referent was based on five points (p. 6): Europe’s Greco-Roman tradition, Europe’s Judeo-Christian tradition, secular modernity, colonialism, and globalization. These factors represented different ways to articulate European specificity, in different moments and at various stages. Nevertheless, they have the same meaning and value from the perspective of the definition of the European identity. Islam was perceived as irreparably different, distinct and, finally, it was removed from this specificity. Islam was *not* part of those traditions, it was *not* secular, it was a passive subject for colonial rule and now it has to *undergo* globalisation. Therefore, these ‘identity thresholds’ provided a catalyst for the European Self and *at the same time*