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Islamic Attitudes and the Support for Gender Equality and Democracy in Seven Arab Countries, and the Role of Anti-Western Feelings

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Abstract

In the societal and scientific discussions about the support for democracy and gender equality in the Arab Middle East, this study engages the triangular theory, which links Islamic orientations, gender equality attitudes and democracy. I theorize and test if and how Islam is related to the attitudes towards democracy and gender equality, and whether gender equality attitudes partly channel the influence of Islam on democracy support. The different theoretical expectations were tested on Arab Barometer data for seven countries, including three different dimensions of Islamic-religious identity: affiliation, piety, and political-Islamist attitudes. The analyses roughly back the triangular model, but for democratic support only the Islamist values seem important, partly working through economic gender equality attitudes. Attitudes towards women's position in politics and education seem unrelated to democratic support. In addition, this study applies the gender and postcolonial concept of 'othering' to the triangular model. Theoretically it predicts that in the current neo-colonial era, anti-Western feelings might create more Islamic and less democracy and gender equal attitudes simultaneously, making Islam's impact partly spurious. Empirically, this is modestly supported for the Islamist-democracy link only. However, anti-Western feelings do relate to gender equality, democratic support, and religious attitudes, and deserves more attention when studying democracy and gender equality in the Arab Middle East.

Keywords: Islam, gender equality, attitudes in the Middle East, neo-colonialism



Las Actitudes Islámicas y el Apoyo a la Igualdad de Género y la Democracia en Siete Países Árabes, y el Papel de los Sentimientos Anti-Occidentales

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Abstract

En los debates sociales y científicos sobre el apoyo a la democracia y la igualdad de género en el Medio Oriente árabe, este estudio enlaza la teoría triangular, que une orientaciones islámicas, las actitudes de igualdad de género y la democracia. El punto de partida y análisis es cómo el Islam está relacionado con las actitudes hacia la democracia y la igualdad de género, y si las actitudes de igualdad de género canalizan en parte la influencia del Islam en el apoyo a la democracia. Las diferentes expectativas teóricas fueron probadas a través de los datos del Barómetro árabe de siete países, entre ellos tres dimensiones diferentes de la identidad islámica religiosa: afiliación, la piedad y las actitudes político-islamistas. Los análisis refutan más o menos el modelo triangular, pero respecto al apoyo democrático sólo los valores islámicos parecen importantes, en parte por el trabajo a través de actitudes de igualdad de género económicas. Las actitudes hacia la posición de la mujer en la política y la educación parecen no tener relación con el apoyo democrático. En este estudio se aplica el concepto de género y postcolonial de "otredad" con el modelo triangular. En teoría predice que en la era neo-colonial actual, los sentimientos anti-occidentales podrían crear más actitudes islámicas y menos democráticas y de igualdad género, por lo que el impacto del Islam en parte equívoco. Empíricamente, esto es apoyado de manera moderada sólo por el enlace entre islam-democracia. Sin embargo, los sentimientos anti-occidentales están relacionados con la igualdad de género, el apoyo democrático, y las actitudes religiosas, y merece más atención en el estudio de la democracia y la igualdad de género en el Medio Oriente árabe.

Keywords: Islam, igualdad de género, actitudes en el Este Medio, neo-colonialismo



Since 9/11 the debate about the compatibility of Islam with democracy and gender equality has reinvigorated. Not for the least because bringing democracy and protecting women was often part of the legitimization of the Western neo-colonial military operations in for instance Afghanistan and Iraq; international politics that tended to ignore the local movements fighting for democracy and women's rights, which in some cases all of a sudden faced severe accusations of being allies of the foreign invaders. Academically, the international situation drew attention to Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations'-thesis (1993; 1996) again, which argues that a Western and Islamic civilization exist that differ fundamentally on democratic and gender equality values (see also Inglehart & Norris, 2003a). In the wake of that argument, and despite of Islamic-theological arguments that actually ground democracy and gender equality in the Qu'ran and Hadith (e.g. Abou El-Fadl 2004; Ahmed, 1992; Esposito & Voll 1996; Selim, 2003) or significant Islamic and Muslim feminist movements (Ghorashi, 1996; Moghadam, 2003b:Ch8; Doumato & Posusney, 2003:8-11), and local organisations fighting for democracy (e.g. RAWA in Afghanistan, LSTDO in Lebanon, Al Bawsal in Tunisia) scholars have concluded that Islam prevents these values from developing, which is generally assumed to be related to Islam being a traditional religion, not separating between 'church' and state, and having a violent nature (see Angrist, 2012; Fish, 2002). Additionally, the lack of gender equality has been argued to be one of the reasons why there is little democracy in the Middle East, as gender equality harbours values fundamental to democracy (Inglehart & Norris, 2003a) and gender hierarchy feeds an authoritarian culture (Donno & Russett, 2004; Fish, 2002). In this study, I identify three major empirical and theoretical shortcomings in this literature on the general relationships, which need further study, as will provided here.

First of all, on average, after taking socio-economic, political and historical factors into account, Muslim countries might be less gender equal and less democratic (Barro, 1999; Fish, 2002; Ross 2001), but have these elite- of country-level differences a foundation in popular opinion? For only a few countries, this triangular relationship is studied – (e.g. Kuwait [Rizzo, Meyer & Ali, 2002]; Saudi Arabia [Moaddel, 2006]), and studies including multiple countries leave out parts of the triangle, such as the role of Islam

(Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007). Consequently, we do not know to what extent ‘more Islamic people’ in the Middle East are on average less in favour of gender equality and (consequently) less supportive of democracy. Here, I will study these relationships using Arab Barometer data for seven Arab countries in the Middle East: Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen. All data are collected in 2006 or later, but before the ‘Arab Spring’ took place.

Second, Islam is often treated as a simple dichotomous concept: a country or person is either Islamic/Muslim or not. Based on that classification, far-reaching conclusions on women’s position or democracy are drawn (Barro, 1999; Fish, 2002; Inglehart & Norris, 2003a; 2003b; Lincove, 2008; Ross, 2001). Clearly, people’s religious identity is more complex than that. This is recognized in some of the attitudinal studies, but each uses different aspects and measurements of religiosity, orthodoxy and Islamism, which makes it difficult to compare the results (see Hofman, 2004; Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2007; Moaddel, 2006; Tessler & Gao, 2005). In this study, I will distinguish between affiliation, religiosity or piety, and political Islam or Islamism. The general influence on democracy and gender equality of each is theorized and tested. This enables me to draw more precise conclusions about the impact of Islamic-religious identities.

Third, the linkages between Islam, gender equality and democracy are often discussed as if they are exogenous to the international political context, and in the study of mass support for gender equality and democracy, the resistance to the Western penetration of Arab societies has not been considered as force that might create religious, democratic and gender attitudes. However, Angrist (2012) shows that the resistance against Western cultural imperialism partly explains the difference between Arab Muslim countries and non-Arab Muslim countries in terms women’s position. In the last part of this study, I will draw from post-colonial and gender theory, more specifically the process of ‘othering’ (see De Beauvoir, 1978; Said, 1978; Scharff, 2011), to critically review the relationship between more conservative Islamic beliefs (which are evidently not hold by all Muslim people in these countries), support for democracy, and gender equality, by taking into account anti-Western attitudes. I suggest that a stronger and more conservative Islamic-religious identity is a product of ‘othering’ and the anti-

Western sentiments and that Islam's influence on gender equality and democracy might be partly spurious. Subsequently, I will introduce anti-Western feelings to the analyses and assess how they are related to religion, gender equality and democratic support. While these analyses are explorative and provide little information about causal directions - Islamic orientations might also lead to anti-Western feelings – they provide an important first step in this unexplored area.

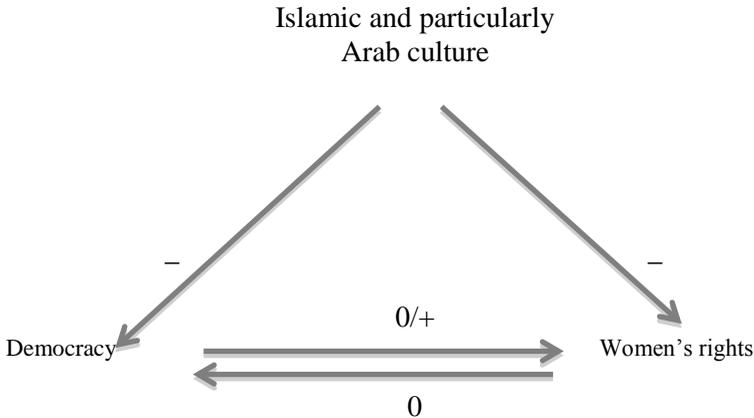
Literature & Theoretical Background

Islam, Democracy and Gender Equality

In society and the social sciences, Islam can hardly be discussed without making references to democracy or gender equality it seems, and then Islam is often seen as the (potential) cause of low levels of democracy and gender equality. Thereby several authors suggest that an average lack in gender equality might actually be the link between Islam and authoritarianism (e.g. Donno & Russett, 2004; Fish, 2002; Inglehart & Norris, 2003a). This theoretical triangle is depicted in the conclusion of Donno & Russett (2004) – reproduced here as Figure 1 – and it sums up the current state of the literature rather well.

Figure 1

The triangle Islam-Democracy-Gender Equality (produced from Donno & Russett (2004, p. 601)



In much (quantitative) research of the influence of Islam on democracy as well as gender equality, the theoretical explanations are rather thin and fall back to culturalist arguments, such as (a) “divergent values ... between the West and Islam” (Inglehart & Norris, 2003a: 68-9, 73); (b) “obstacles to female participation include religion ... Religious norms ... discourage ... participation most strongly in Islamic countries” (Lincove, 2008: 50, 57); (c) that Muslim countries’ electoral gap is possibly due to “the strong linkage between *church* and state (Barro, 1999: S177; emphasis added); or (d) “Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free market, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures.” (Huntington, 1993: 40). Overall, the culturalist arguments stress that in Islam the collective takes precedence over the individual; that Islam rules over the private and public sphere; that Islam is illiberal and resolves conflicts with violence; and that it is fatalist.

These arguments ignore that actors in the Middle East also use scriptures (Qu'ran) and practices (Hadith) to argue in favour of democracy and gender equality. Regarding democracy it has been argued that (a) the prophet did not appoint a successor deliberately so that one had to be *chosen*; (b) the Islamic concept *ijthihad* is said to lay the foundation for democracy as it tells people to form their own judgement; and (c) the appliance of *shura* shows that Muhammad favoured democracy, as he used this consultation in decision-making processes (Abou El Fadl, 2004; Esposito & Voll, 1996; Rizzo, Meyer & Ali, 2002). Similarly, Islamic feminist see Islam as a source of empowerment. An often-used example is that women only inheriting half of men according to shari'a interpretations, but feminist have contextualized this historically and show that this was a major step forwards at that time, putting Islam at the forefront of women's emancipation (e.g. Selim, 2003). This is not only a historical facts, but also today many organisation in the Middle East fight for women's rights and democracy, sometimes risking their own safety. Some examples include the in the introduction mentioned RAWA (Afghanistian), LSTDO (Lebanon), Al Bawsal (Tunisia), as well as documentaries on women by for instance Nuria Andreu (Morocco) (Andreu, 2013) or Aliaa Maghda al-Mahdy's 'A Rebel Diary' blog with nude protest pictures (2013, Egypt) and the following 'Nude Photos Revolutionaries Calendar' Facebook page, which is still in the air.

Nevertheless, the overall and summarizing empirical results are rather robust and show that relatively many of the Muslim-majority countries are more often dictatorial and on average implement discriminating laws against women more regularly, in particular in the Middle East. This relationship is rather robust even after taking into account differences in economic development, oil, urbanization, income inequality, ethnic fractionalization, British and Soviet domination, and educational levels (e.g. Barro, 1999; Fish, 2002; Ross, 2001). A seemingly crucial mechanism in culturalist explanations of this relationship are not just the theological arguments discussed above, but also the fact that the majority of the people are expected to hold a stance towards democracy and gender equality that is in line with the rather traditional or conservative interpretation of Islam.

Of course, the political system and (gender) policies in a country might not always reflect the mass' opinion (see also Badran, 2001; Donno &

Russett, 2004; Spierings, 2011), but that the income out the oil industry is used by authoritarian elites to suppress the people's wishes (providing welfare or using violence) (Ross, 2001, 2008) shows these elites conceive the people potentially powerful. The uprisings during the Arab Spring have further substantiated this idea. As such popular demand seems an important if not necessary (but not sufficient) ingredient for governments and elites in Arab countries to change their policies fundamentally.

Islamic Attitudes and Popular Support for Gender Equality and Democracy

After individual-level data on the Arab public's attitudes became available, scholars started to address the question whether there is a general relationship between Islam and the other corners of the triangle, often relying theoretically on the culturalist arguments discussed above.

A handful of these studies focus on attitudes towards gender equality and women's rights, and most point into the one and the same direction: stronger Islamic-religious orientations are on average associated with less support for gender equality (Inglehart & Norris, 2003a, 2003b; Moaddel, 2006; Norris & Inglehart, 2012; Rizzo, Meyer & Ali, 2002). While these studies share their conclusion, they approach the issue rather differently. Inglehart and Norris' cross-country studies show that on average the people in Muslim countries and Muslim people support gender equality and sexual liberty less than people in Western countries and non-Muslims (Inglehart & Norris, 2003a, 2003b; Norris, 2009; Norris & Inglehart, 2012). Moaddel (2006) and Rizzo, Meyer & Ali (2002) present country studies for respectively Saudi Arabia and Kuwait that include more refined measures of Islam. Rizzo, Meyer & Ali find that both Shia and Sunni people who have more Islamic-orthodox beliefs have on average less positive attitudes towards women's political participation, but people who identify themselves as Muslim are generally somewhat more supportive of it. Moaddel finds that more religious people and people that identify themselves as being religious support polygamy and women's obedience more on average. However, mosque participation and daily prayer do not show such correlation – mosque participation even correlates negatively with support for obedience. Also, people who describe

themselves as Muslim are generally more in favour of polygamy and more religious in terms of prayers. Summarized, on average people with a Muslim affiliation and higher levels of religiosity seem to be less favourable towards different aspects of gender equality,¹ but affiliation seems less relevant once religiosity is taken into account. This might indicate that Islam is not much different from other religions in terms of the message it conveys, but that on average Muslim people are currently more religious than people from other religions.

The literature on Arab people's support of democracy and the impact of Islamic orientations is more abundant. Without exception these studies show that Arab people do think that democracy is a desirable form of government (Hofman, 2004; Inglehart & Norris, 2003a; Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2007; Moaddel, 2006; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007; Tessler, 2002; Tessler & Gao, 2005). The impact of Islam is less clear. Empirically, different elements labelled as 'religiosity' are found to relate to democratic attitudes negatively (Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2007; Moaddel, 2006; Norris & Inglehart, 2012; Tessler, 2002), but in a few other studies no relationship is found (Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Tessler, 2002), and Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer (2007) even find a positive relationship in the five Arab countries they study. Of the studies that focus more on the type or depth of Islamic beliefs, surprisingly, most find no relationship between orthodoxy or Islamism and democratic support (Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2007; Tessler, 2002; Tessler & Gao, 2005). Moaddel (2006) is an exception and shows that people who desire *Shari'a* law generally support democracy less, even though emancipatory and democratic interpretations of *Shari'a* law exist. In most cases, negative relationships with Islam are explained by the culturalist argument about Islam's conservativeness. Surprisingly or noteworthy, (unexpected) positive relations between Islam and democratic support are generally not explained by the alternative interpretations of Islam as discussed above, but in terms of instrumentalism, whereby democracy is way to power for Islamist (e.g. Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007).

Two studies also treat people's attitudes on gender equality as a link between religious orientations and support for electoral democracy. According to Inglehart & Norris (2003a) gender equality and sexual liberal

values are the best indicators of democratic tolerance – a ‘litmus test’ -, but they do not study whether there is an indirect effect of Islam on democratic support. Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer (2007) do include being religious and supporting gender equality in their explanatory model of democratic support and they find, surprisingly, that people with stronger gender equality views were less supportive of democracy in their five Arab countries. They also use an instrumentalist explanation: people who want gender equality might fear democracy empowers Islamists (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007: 1165). However, they do not link gender equality to both religiosity and democratic support.

Summarizing, it is still rather unclear which aspects of an Islamic-religious identity influences support for gender equality and democracy in the Arab Middle East, and what the general relationship between gender equality and democracy is. In this study, that triangular relationship will be tested for seven Arab countries. In line with sociological distinctions in religious attitudes, I distinguish between religious affiliation, religious piety, and political Islam (see Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham & Pitcher, 1986; Fleischman, 2011). This enables me to formulate more precise expectations and provide more rigorous tests. I do not expect a strong impact of affiliation once controlled for the other Islamic aspects, since the different strands of a religion collapsed in affiliation are often highly diverse. Religious piety - the strength and degree of conservativeness of one’s religious views - is expected to be related to gender equality negatively, but less so (directly) to democratic support, since gender equality is more strongly connected to ideas of modernization and less accepted universally. Political Islamism is expected to limit peoples’ support for democracy, because it entails the prioritization of Islamic values over democratic principles. As political Islam might also relate to a more general Islamist view, which generally includes the idea that men and women have distinctly different roles in society, a negative effect on the support for gender equality is expected.

Neo-Colonialism and Anti-Western Feelings

Neo-colonialism is often defined as the indirect rule of a country through (the threat of) military intervention and (international) economic policies by

previous (Western) colonial powers (e.g. Charney, 1987; Watts, 2009: 360; Welch, 2008: 258). These direct military interventions are generally not presented as being ‘neo-colonial’, but as bringing freedom and prosperity - illustrated by ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’ starting March 20th, 2003 - or as fighting Islamic fundamentalism - the ‘War on Terrorism’. The West presents itself as the protector and bringer of democracy and gender equality (see also Watts, 2009). These manifestations of neo-colonialism should be seen in the larger context of Western cultural-economic imperialism, which is signified by the penetration of the Middle Eastern public sphere by Western media, Hollywood, McDonalds, IMF policies, and more. In that context, Arab opposition to the foreign military invasion easily spreads to practices, products, ideas, and values that are seen as Western. Consequently, (‘Western’) gender equality and democracy become discredited and religious identities might become more salient, as suggested by the concept of ‘othering’ (e.g. De Beauvoir, 1978; Decety & Summerville, 2003; Said, 1978; Zuhur, 1992).

In essence, ‘othering’ was already described in Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*: “As people define their identity ... they are likely to see an “us” versus “them” ... efforts of the West to promote its values of democracy and liberalism as universal values, to maintain its military predominance and to advance its economic interests engender countering responses from other civilizations ... [in which] groups will increasingly attempt to mobilize support by appealing to common religion and civilization identity.” (1993: 29) In other words, neo-colonialism feeds the creation of an ‘us’ and ‘them’, revolving around religion, democracy and gender equality. In that process, the dominant group is said to determine which characteristics they stress (Said, 1978). To empower itself, ‘the other’ can be expected to take over, reinforce, and reappropriate the identity enforced upon it by the dominant power. So if the West sketches the difference by depicting itself as gender equality, democratic and secular or Christian, the opposites - gender hierarchy, autocracy or Islamic rule, and Islam - become strong potential ‘positive’ characteristics for the anti-Western opposition in the Middle East. Moreover, local organisations that strive for democracy and gender equality might become discredited, being labelled as ‘Western allies’.

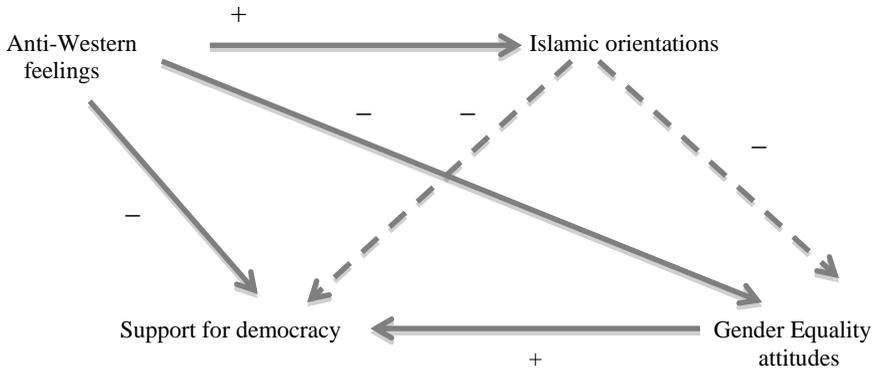
While the theoretical mechanism has been formulated in its most extreme form above, it is not hard to recognize how these opposite identities are stressed in the West's political rhetoric as well as in the positions of (Islamist) leaders in the Middle East and society at large (see Angrist, 2012; Barber, 1996; Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Moghadam, 2003a; Walby, 2011). The impact of this is shown in Angrist's comparison among Muslim countries, whereby women's weaker economic position in the Arab ones is partly explained by new imperialism shaping both ethnic-religious and gender equality inequalities simultaneously.

If the mechanism also works at the individual level, the stances on gender equality, democracy and religion are partly a function of anti-Western feelings, instead of being linked (completely) causally. In this light, Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer's (2007: 1165) show that Middle Eastern Arab people who see the Western cultural invasion as a threat more seem less supportive of gender equality. They are more supportive of democracy, but this is again attributed to instrumentalism: democracy is seen suggested to be a means to fight a growing Western influence and the spread of feminist ideas. Moaddel (2006: 101) draws similar conclusions for Saudi Arabia, but his operationalization of variables is unclear, which might actually lead to opposite conclusions.

This study will be the first to explore to what extent anti-Western feelings is one of the many factors that relate and possibly *influence* the other relationships in the triangular model. I expect that anti-Western feelings relate negatively to the support for gender equality and democracy and positively an Islamic-religious identity. Moreover, the possible link between the last and first two, whereby Islamic-religious beliefs might be one of the factors that explains people's gender equality attitudes and democratic support is expected to weaken after taking anti-Western feelings into account (see Figure 2). A next step in studying the role of anti-Western feelings would be to test the direction of causality. Results supporting my expectations can also indicate reversed causality: Islamic identities being one of the *causes* of anti-Western feelings.

Figure 2

The possible role of anti-Western feelings in shaping the triangular relationship between Islam, democracy and gender equality



Methods & Data

Models & Data

OLS regression models are applied, controlling for demographic and socio-economic inequalities (age, sex, education, employment) as well as differences between the countries. First, gender equality attitudes will serve as dependent variable, with Islamic orientations as core predictors. Subsequently, the support for democracy is modelled, with Islamic orientation and gender equality attitudes as core independent variables. This shows the role of gender equality in linking religion to democracy. For the exploratory part, I include anti-Western feelings. The analyses rely on the Arab Barometer data for Algeria (1,300 respondents), Jordan (1,143), Kuwait (750), Lebanon (1,200), Morocco (1,277), Palestine (1,270), and Yemen (1,182), collected in 2006 or later. To assure comparability, all analyses only use the respondents who have no missing data on any of the variables, leading to models with 4,774 respondents². The WVS data are

available for fewer countries include fewer questions on anti-Western feelings and Islamism.

Variables of Interest

Descriptive information can be found in Table 1. To measure *democratic support* three items were available: (1) Democracy may have its problems but is better than any other form of government [1 ‘Strongly agree’ to 4 ‘Strongly disagree’]; (2) Democracy is suitable for [Country Name]? [0 ‘Completely unsuitable’ to 10 ‘Completely suitable’]; (3): What do you think about a democratic political system (public freedom, equal political and civil rights, balance of power) as a way of governing [Country Name]? [1 ‘Very good’ to 4 ‘Very bad’]. A principal-axis factor analysis shows that these items tap into one underlying factor³. Each variable was transformed to scale with a minimum of 0 and 3 as maximum (the higher, the more democratic), and their mean is used.

On people’s *attitude towards gender equality* seven items were used in a principal-axis factor analysis: one or two underlying concepts could be distinguished⁴. To obtain more details, I constructed two indices. Three items cluster around women’s place in the public sphere: Do you agree with: (1) A woman can be a president or prime minister of a Muslim country; (2) Men make better political leaders than women do; (3) University education is more important for a boy than a girl. Three others focus on economic gender equality: Do you agree with: (1) A married woman can work outside the home if she wishes; (2) Men and women should have equal job opportunities and wages; (3) Men and women should receive equal wages and salaries. All (four-point) items range from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. For both indices the mean of the three items is taken; a higher score (0-3) indicates more gender equal attitudes.

I distinguish between three aspects of *Islamic-religious identity*: affiliation, religiosity-piety, and political Islamism. First, affiliation has three categories [‘Muslim’, ‘Christian’, ‘other/unknown’]. Next, a factor analysis on 14 items was used to select the items for constructing the piety and political Islamism indices⁵. Two items seem to measure the strength and depth of people’s religion (piety) best: How important (1) praying and (2)

fasting was for being a suitable spouse for a respondent's daughter or son ['very', 'somewhat', 'not important']⁶. The (inversed) average created a 0-3 scale, a higher score equalling more piety. The respondents' political Islamist views were measured by three items: whether (1) a parliamentary system with only Islamic parties or (2) a system governed by Islamic law without political parties is suitable for the country ['very suitable' to 'not suitable at all'], and whether only laws of the *Shari'a* should be implemented ['strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree']. Taking the (inversed) average of the four-point items led to a 0-3 scale, the higher the more Islamic. Data on political Islam was missing for Moroccan respondents, which are replaced by the average of all other respondents and a country dummy is included (see Allison, 2001).

The more explorative analyses focus on the broad concept of Western cultural imperialism and the consequent rather general *anti-Western feelings*. The three suitable items in the Arab Barometer all load on one factor⁷: Despite negative US foreign policies, most ordinary Americans are good people ['Agree', 'Disagree']; The culture of the US and other Western countries has many positive attributes ['Agree', 'Disagree']; Exposure to the culture of the US and other Western countries has a harmful effect on [Country Name] ['Strongly agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree', 'Strongly disagree']. The first item only refers to the U.S., but as all three load on one factor, it can be expected that the construct used here taps into general anti-Western feelings reasonably well. A 0-3 scale was created by dichotomizing the last item, inverting the second, and then adding the three up. A higher score indicates stronger anti-Western sentiments. For Yemen only one item is available. Again, Yemeni respondents are given the average score on the index for all other respondents and a country dummy is included (see Allison, 2001). Alternatively, using one item does not lead to substantially different conclusions.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Support for democracy	0	3	2.23	0.57
Support for economic gender equality	0	3	2.13	0.66
Support for women's public role	0	3	1.34	0.79
Denomination: Muslim	0	1	0.51	0.50
Denomination: Christian	0	1	0.10	0.30
Denomination: Other	0	1	0.39	0.49
Religious piety	0	3	2.08	1.09
Support for political Islam	0	3	1.15	0.76
Anti-Western feelings	0	3	1.01	0.82
Age in 7 groups	0	6	1.71	1.39
Sex (1= female)	0	1	0.45	0.50
Education in 7 groups	0	6	2.80	1.69
Employment status (1=employed)	0	1	0.50	0.50

Control Variables

The models are controlled for the usual socio-economic and demographic characteristics (e.g. Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2007; Moaddel, 2006; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007; Tessler, 2002; Tessler & Gao, 2005). For age a seven-point scale was available. All respondents are 18 years old and over.

Sex was included as a dummy variable (1=female). Education was provided as a seven-category variable⁸. A dummy for employment status was included (1=employed), and country dummies capture other political, cultural, and economic differences between the countries and their systems

Analyses

Testing the Micro-Level Triangle

Models 1 and 3 (Table 2) show that the results are rather similar for supporting economic gender equality and women's position in the public sphere. First, on average Christian people support gender equality substantially more than Muslim inhabitants, and the others fall in-between Muslim and Christian people. Second, more pious people are generally less supportive of gender equality. Third, the same holds for respondents who hold more political Islamist views. These effects are about twice as strong for the attitudes towards the public role of women than for economic gender equality. Moreover, the impact of religious piety is about half of political Islam. Generally, despite the existence of feminist interpretation of Islam, it seems that more religiously Islamic people are on average less supportive of gender equality. Moreover, while the different dimensions of religious identity have independent effects, they show less differentiation than expected.

Model 5 shows what influences people's attitudes towards democracy, which is roughly in line with expectations. No average difference is found between Christian and Muslim people⁹, and more pious people do not seem to be less supportive of democracy. The only religious attitude that relates to people attitudes towards democracy is political Islamism. Citizens that believe that Islam should be strongly intertwined with the political system are on average less supportive of democracy. Religious restrictions on who may lead a country and whether religious laws should form the boundaries of decision-making by the people are at odds with democracy fundamentally, as also discussed and shown in other country-level studies on the Middle East and Europe (Anderson, Seibert & Wagner, 2012: 147-8; Klausen, 2007: 160; Spierings, Smits & Verloo, 2009). The same reasoning

can be expected to hold for Christianity and other religions: if they are considered to inform the boundaries of decision-making they limit democratic politics. Moreover, this result does not indicate that Islamic parties cannot function within democratic systems, as has already been seen in most recently in for instance Tunisia and Egypt, and more generally in Indonesia, Nigeria, and many other Muslim Majority countries (Esposito & Voll, 1996; Owen 2003; Spierings, 2012). My results only show that people who believe that the political system should be more Islamic are on average less supportive of democracy.

Political Islamism's negative impact on democracy is considerably smaller than what was found for gender equality. This is partly due to its intervening effect through gender equality though. Especially people's stance towards economic gender equality has an overall positive impact on democratic support – and as we shall see below where a longitudinal perspective is taken, the support for gender equality has slightly risen recently, at least in Iraq –, and these gender equality attitudes were negatively influenced by political Islamist attitudes (see Model 1). Without the intervening gender equality variable in the model, the impact of political Islam would have been stronger by roughly one fifth. The total effect of political Islamism thus remains modest. No indirect influence of political Islamist attitudes through the other gender equality variable was found. Additional models do not indicate substantive indirect effects of piety and denomination.

Table 2

Regression models on the support for democratic and gender equality attitudes

	Model 1: Economic gender equality	Model 2: Economic gender equality & anti- Western	Model 3: Public role women	Model 4: Public presence women & anti- Western	Model 5: Demo- cracy	Model 6: Democra- cy & anti- Western feelings
Denomination (Ref. = Muslim)						
Christian	0.423*** (0.040)	0.406*** (0.040)	0.511*** (0.043)	0.503*** (0.044)	0.047 (0.035)	0.033 (0.035)
Other	0.320*** (0.078)	0.355*** (0.078)	0.289** (0.085)	0.305*** (0.085)	-0.550*** (0.067)	-0.512*** (0.066)
Religious piety	-0.048*** (0.010)	-0.043*** (0.010)	-0.119*** (0.011)	-0.117*** (0.011)	-0.011 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.009)
Support for political Islam	-0.107*** (0.015)	-0.097*** (0.015)	-0.200*** (0.016)	-0.195*** (0.016)	-0.051*** (0.013)	-0.042** (0.013)
Support for economic gender equality	-	-	-	-	0.111*** (0.013)	0.104*** (0.013)
Support for women's public role	-	-	-	-	-0.004 (0.012)	-0.004 (0.012)
Anti-Western feelings	-	-0.065*** (0.011)	-	-0.031* (0.013)	-	-0.066*** (0.010)
Age in 7 groups	0.026*** (0.007)	0.026*** (0.007)	0.013 (0.007)	0.012 (0.007)	0.010 (0.006)	0.010 (0.006)
Sex (1= female)	0.330*** (0.019)	0.331*** (0.018)	0.374*** (0.020)	0.375*** (0.020)	-0.049** (0.016)	-0.046** (0.016)
Education in 7 groups	0.042*** (0.006)	0.040*** (0.006)	0.031*** (0.007)	0.030*** (0.007)	0.016** (0.005)	0.015** (0.005)

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Model 1: Economic gender equality	Model 2: Economic gender equality & anti- Western	Model 3: Public role women	Model 4: Public presence women & anti- Western	Model 5: Demo- cracy	Model 6: Democra- cy & anti- Western feelings
Denomination (Ref. = Muslim)						
Employment status (1=employed)	-0.021 (0.019)	-0.026 (0.019)	0.036 (0.021)	0.033 (0.021)	-0.018 (0.017)	-0.023 (0.017)
<i>Constant</i>	1.658*** (0.098)	1.675*** (0.098)	1.025*** (0.106)	1.033*** (0.106)	2.343*** (0.086)	2.371*** (0.086)
<i>R square</i>	0.169	0.175	0.312	0.313	0.184	0.191
<i>n</i>	4,774	4,774	4,774	4,774	4,774	4,774

* <0.05, ** <0.01, *** <0.001; The standard errors are given between brackets. All models are fixed effects models including dummies for the countries. The coefficient are not shown here but can be obtained from the author. Source: Arab Barometer data

A Square Triangle?

Models 2, 4 and 6 show that people who hold more anti-Western feelings are on average somewhat less supportive of gender equality and democracy, taking into account economic position, age and sex. From this it cannot be concluded that democracy and gender equality are Western concepts per se or that all people who are critical of the West are anti-democracy and pro-gender inequality. However, it does translate findings from studies on Middle Eastern society to the popular level though. Comparative case studies have shown that gender equality and democracy are regularly seen as foreign, Western concepts - or claimed to be by religious leaders (e.g. Esposito & Voll, 1996; Moghadam, 2003b:Ch5). Evidently, the alternative interpretations of Islam found among social movements are also found among the population; nevertheless, on average, the people that associate anti-Westernism with opposition to democracy and gender equality outnumbers the citizens who are anti-Western and supportive of democracy and gender equality. A more fine-grained analysis of the data shows that the

mains difference is found between the quarter of people that hardly have any anti-Western feelings and the three-quarters of people that is somewhat to strongly anti-Western.

Comparing Models 1, 3 and 5 to Models 2, 4 and 6 respectively show how the inclusion of anti-Western feelings changes the relationship between Islamic orientations and gender equality or democracy (summarized in Table 3). The impact of religious attitudes does not show clear differences across the board, but where a substantial impact is found, it is a weakening of the impact of Islam¹⁰. For the women's public role variable are close to absent, and the two strongest effects (>30% decreases) are found for originally statistically insignificant relationships. Basically, only the declining effects of political Islamism on democratic support (-18%) and economic gender equality (-9%), and of religious piety on economic gender equality (-10%) follow the theoretical reasoning. Since political Islamist attitudes were among the most important explanatory variables of gender equality and democracy, these decreases should not be neglected though.

In sum, the analyses indicate that anti-Western feelings are related to all three angles of the triangle and influence the relationships among them modestly. Not including them might thus lead to slightly biased results; the triangle seems to have another corner. These analyses, however, do not tell whether the found effects are caused via an 'othering effect' or whether people who hold more conservative Islamic opinions are more anti-Western and therefore less supportive of democracy and gender equality.

Table 3

Change in coefficients after inclusion of anti-Western feelings

	Economic gender equality	Public role women	Democracy
Denomination (Ref. = Muslim)			
Christian	- 4%	- 2%	(ns) - 30%
Other	+ 11%	+ 6%	- 7%
Religious piety	- 10%	- 2%	(ns) - 36%
Support for political Islam	- 9%	- 3%	- 18%
Support for economic gender equality	-	-	- 6%
Support for women’s public role	-	-	(ns) 0 %

A strengthening effect is given a (+) a weakening effect a (-), and (ns) indicates that the variable had no significant effect in itself on the dependent variable. Based on Table 2.

A Neo-Colonial Intervention: Can We Shed More Light on the Causal Direction?

To get a better grip on that causal direction, an experimental template is needed in which anti-Western feelings are increased exogenously to see how that affects the other variables. Practically, such an experiment is infeasible (and ethically condemnable). However, the two Iraqi WVS surveys in combination with the neo-colonial treatment – in experimental terms – through the 2003 Western military intervention and the Second Gulf War in Iraq might help us to get closer at the causal direction. It can serve as a pseudo experiment, because this invasion was exogenous to developments in the popular attitudes in Iraq, and because the support for the attacks was low in the Arab region (e.g. Andersen, Seibert & Wagner, 2012: 359-365; Owen, 2004: 221). It is thus reasonable to expect that a rise in anti-Western feelings - if any - is partly due to the ‘treatment’ with neo-colonialism. Ideally, before- and after-treatment surveys would have been available; unfortunately, the first was collected in 2004, shortly after the start of the intervention. The second survey was conducted in 2006. Nevertheless, the

U.S.-led troops were strongly present in Iraq during this entire period, and thus the ‘neo-colonial dose’ - again in terms of experimental methodology - had doubled in 2006. For the ‘othering effect’ to be supported the anti-Western feelings should have risen, the support for democracy declined, and political Islamist attitudes increased (see Table 4)¹¹.

It seems that the Iraqi people did indeed become more adverse to the West, and given the strong anti-Western feelings in 2004, the additional 4.1 percentage points is rather substantial¹². This shift is accompanied by an overall decline in considering democracy a good system of 3.8 percentage points¹³. In addition, other authors focusing on the most extremist anti-Western groups – Jihadists, who work from a fundamentalist Islamic interpretation of scripture and use militaristic violence to spread Islam and fight the West - found that the activities of these particular jihadist groups have become a *growing* phenomenon lately and consequently a *growing* threat to democracy (Khosrokhavar, 2009), which suggests a similar pattern at the social movement level. (Evidently, at the same time progressive and democratic Muslim movements could have become stronger, but this is less reflected in the public opinion in Iraq.) In her description of the events in the region, also Angrist’s (2012: 61-3) suggests that the economic-cultural Western penetration of the region after the oil shocks of the 1970s and through economic liberalization goes hand-in-hand with Western cultural influences in terms of gender equality, which were promoted by the Western economic and political organizations in the region. These processes, Angrist claims, increased grievances, a politics of identity, and resistance to the adoption and standardization of norms perceived as Western (see also Barber, 1996; Moghadam, 2003a).

However, while I did find rising anti-Western attitudes, I did not find an unambiguous increase in political Islamist attitudes among the ordinary people: on two indicators support for political Islam increased, and on two it decreased. This ambiguity tends to reflect the historical experiences in Iran: the 1979 revolution was clearly anti-Western but not clearly Islamist, contrary to what is often thought. Seculars and pro-women’s groups were amongst the most present protesters, and only during a power vacuum after the overthrow of Reza Shah Pahlavi, Islamists took power (and discriminatory laws against women were enacted) (e.g. Ebadi, 2012;

Ghorashi, 1996). Overall, there is some support for the ‘othering thesis’ in terms of democratic identities, and it cannot simply be refuted or ignored, but the evidence is certainly not conclusive.

Given that the anti-Western feelings did not really affect the impact of Islam on gender equality, changes on these are less relevant to the ‘othering effect’. Moreover, across the board gender hierarchy is on average supported *less* (which says little about the legal and social position of women or the strength of the organized opposition to further developments towards gender equality). This provides further support for the conclusion that ‘othering’ does not play a role in shaping a relationship between Islamic and gender equality attitudes.

Table 4

Gender equality, democracy, and Islamic orientations in Iraq

	Iraq 2004	Iraq 2006	change
Anti-Western feelings			
The cultural invasion by the West is (a threat/a serious threat)	92.0%	96.1%	↑
Democracy			
Having a democratic political system is (very good)	58.6%	54.8%	↓
Political Islam			
Politicians who don't believe in god are unfit for office (agree strongly)	70.7%	74.3%	↑
Religious leaders should not influence how people vote (strongly disagree/disagree)	22.6%	24.2%	↑
Better if more people with strong religious beliefs in public office (agree strongly/agree)	63.7%	51.7%	↓
Only laws of the Shari'a (agree strongly/agree)	54.6%	48.1%	↓

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Iraq 2004	Iraq 2006	change
Gender (in)equality			
Men make better political leaders than women do (agree strongly)	70.9%	69.0%	↓
University is more important for a boy than for a girl (strongly agree)	28.8%	24.8%	↓
Wife must obey (agree strongly)	63.6%	63.2%	↓

Source: WVS

Conclusion

The ousting of Mubarak in Egypt (2011) and Ben Ali in Tunisia (2011), political reforms in Morocco (2011), and civil wars in Libya (2011) and Syria (2013) have shown the possible impact popular opinion can have in the Arab Middle East. While popular opinion is no guarantee for change, and change can go in multiple directions, for instance regarding the position of women, these events underscore that popular attitudes can ignite democratization processes and women’s emancipation. This asks for a good understanding of people’s attitudes towards gender equality and democracy, and what influences those. Regarding those influences the current literature on the Arab Middle East often points to Islam as a (negative) force (e.g. Barro, 1999; Donno & Russett, 2004; Fish, 2002; Hofman, 2004; Huntington, 1993; Inglehart & Norris, 2003a, 2003b; Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2002; Norris & Inglehart, 2012; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007; Ross, 2001; Spierings, Smits & Verloo, 2009; Tessler, 2002; Tessler & Gao, 2005); however, at the mass level, the study of linkages between Islam, democracy and gender equality shows important lacunae. This study has addressed some of those.

First of all, this study provided the first multicountry micro-level test of the triangular relationship, whereby the it is generally expected that people with on average more Islamic-religious orientations have a less positive stance towards gender equality and democracy, and the relationship

between Islam and democracy partly works through gender equality attitudes. Regarding, gender equality, it was indeed found that on average different expression of Islam (affiliation, piety, and Islamism) relate to gender equality attitudes negatively, which supports and refines results from less encompassing studies (Inglehart & Norris, 2003a, 2003b; Moaddel, 2006; Norris & Inglehart, 2012; Rizzo, Meyer & Ali, 2002). Despite strong political organisations pro-democracy and gender equality in the Middle East, people with strong political Islamic views also show a modestly lower support for democracy on average, and this works partly through (lower) support for economic gender equality. Affiliation and piety, however, do not seem to have a strong impact on democratic support. Overall, the analyses support the triangular model and go against results from studies that found that people who are in favour of more gender equality are generally less supportive of democracy (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007). More generally, the results are more supportive of culturalist explanations linking conservative Islam to gender hierarchy and less support for democracy, than with instrumentalist theories (Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Moaddel, 2006; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007) that argue that people's support for democracy and gender equality mostly depends on whether it serves their interests. Moreover, even if positive relationships between Islamism and gender equality or democratic support had been found, instrumentalism was not the only explanation. The prevalence of feminist and democratic interpretation of the Qu'ran and Hadith among people could also explain such relationships, but these are often ignored in the micro-level studies. In sum, more study in the exact mechanisms is necessary, as theories often build on very broad collections of stereotypes or scriptural arguments about Islam, and it is not yet clear *which* elements of Islam are actually at the core of most people's stances on gender equality and democracy.

Secondly, this study disentangled different dimensions of Islamic-religious orientations *and* tested their impact simultaneously for a substantial number of Arab countries. Contrary to my expectations, Islamic denomination, piety and political Islam all had independent negative effects on gender equality attitudes. However, for democratic support rather different relationships were found and this partly explains the variety of

conclusions in the current literature (see Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2007; Moaddel, 2006; Norris & Inglehart, 2012; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007; Tessler, 2002; Tessler & Gao, 2005). In sum, only more political Islamist people supported democracy less, which is not surprising as political Islamism measures to what extent people think politics should be curtailed by religion. This effect partly worked through gender equality attitudes, supporting Fish's (2002) macro-level theory of why dominant religious cultures might lead to more the presence of more autocratic regimes in the Middle East.

Not only Islamic orientations, but also support for gender equality includes multiple dimensions. The impact of Islam was stronger for women's position in politics and education than it was on economic gender equality, but only the latter influenced democratic support and linked Islam to democracy. These results suggest that the research of gender equality attitudes should theorize the different dimension of people's opinion towards gender equality more systematically, as they can have quite different causes and consequences.

The third contribution of this study was more explorative. While Esposito & Mogahed (2007:151) point out that: "Muslim responses need to be understood within the context of a world in which many Muslims feel under siege", only a few studies on Arab people's attitudes have looked at the stance towards the Western cultural invasion and none of these assessed how these sentiments might influence the links between Islam, gender equality and democracy (see Esposito & Mogahed, 2007; Moaddel, 2006; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer, 2007). Based on the concept of 'othering' (De Beauvoir, 1978; Decety & Summerville, 2003; Said, 1978; Zuhur, 1992), I expected that - in the context of neo-colonialism and political rhetoric linking the West to gender equality and democracy, and the Middle East to Islam, misogyny and autocracy - anti-Western feelings might lead people to simultaneously become more Islamic and less supportive of democracy and gender equality. The analyses do not support this mechanism for gender equality: while more anti-Western people were less in favour of gender equality, the anti-Western feelings did not account for the impact of Islam. However, the results indicated that 'othering' might link democratic support and political Islamism. This study cannot produce conclusive results, but the

outcomes legitimize more research on the causal direction of the links between anti-Western feelings and Islamist attitudes. More generally, anti-Western feelings were shown to relate to all corners of the Islam-democracy-gender equality triangle. In line with Esposito & Mogahed's advice, this study shows that not taking anti-Western feelings into account when studying attitudes towards Islam, democracy and gender equality in the Arab Middle East can lead to biased results.

The results of this micro-level study also feed back into the comparative country-level studies: (1) the modest indirect influence of political Islam on democracy through gender equality lends more supports for Fish's (2002) claims that women's empowerment is the macro-level missing link between Islam and autocracy, than Donno & Russett's (2004) contestation of that, (2) it suggests that macro-level studies on gender equality and democracy should make distinctions in the form in which Islam manifests itself (see Spierings, Smits & Verloo, 2009; Spierings, 2014), and (3) that anti-Westernism and neo-colonial politics should be included in the analyses explaining political systems and gender equality policies (see Angrist, 2012).

Among the Arab public both this study and recent events have shown considerably support for change towards democracy and gender equality. However, in particular, political Islam and anti-Westernism seem to decrease people's enthusiasm about democracy and gender equality. Add to that that political Islamist movements often fight economic inequalities (El-Ghobashy, 2005; Esposito & Voll 1996; Owen 2004) the current confrontational politics of the West might not be the best strategy to foster democracy and women's freedom in the Middle East. This study suggests that the support for long-existing local women's movements and fighting poverty might be much more efficient as they present local alternative interpretation of Islam to legitimize change.

Notes

¹ Some studies on women's actual position show otherwise. Both Read (2004) for Muslim women in the U.S. and Spierings (2012) for women in several Muslim countries show that Muslim women are for instance not less of even more often gainfully employed than non-Muslim women.

² Algeria: 460; Jordan: 683; Kuwait: 412; Lebanon: 899; Morocco: 916; Palestine: 1,012; Yemen: 392.

³ Results can be obtained from the author.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ ‘Reading the Quran’ would be an alternative measurement, but that is strongly related to literacy, making it unsuitable here.

⁷ *Ibid* footnote 3.

⁸ Illiterate, Elementary, Primary, Secondary, College Diploma- two years, BA, MA or higher.

⁹ The ‘other’ group is less supportive of democratic institutions. These respondents are almost exclusively Druze from Lebanon, making this result likely to be idiosyncratic.

¹⁰ The exception is for the position of the Druze in Lebanon (‘Other’). They mainly live in the Shuf hills above Beirut, the area the Israelis invaded in 1982 and which was hit by U.S. missiles (Friedman, 1989; Harris, 2011). This might explain relatively strong anti-Western feelings.

¹¹ Given the short time period and continuing Second Gulf War, no big changes due to Modernization are expected (see Inglehart & Norris, 2003b).

¹² T-test: $p < 0.001$.

¹³ T-test: $p < 0.05$.

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