

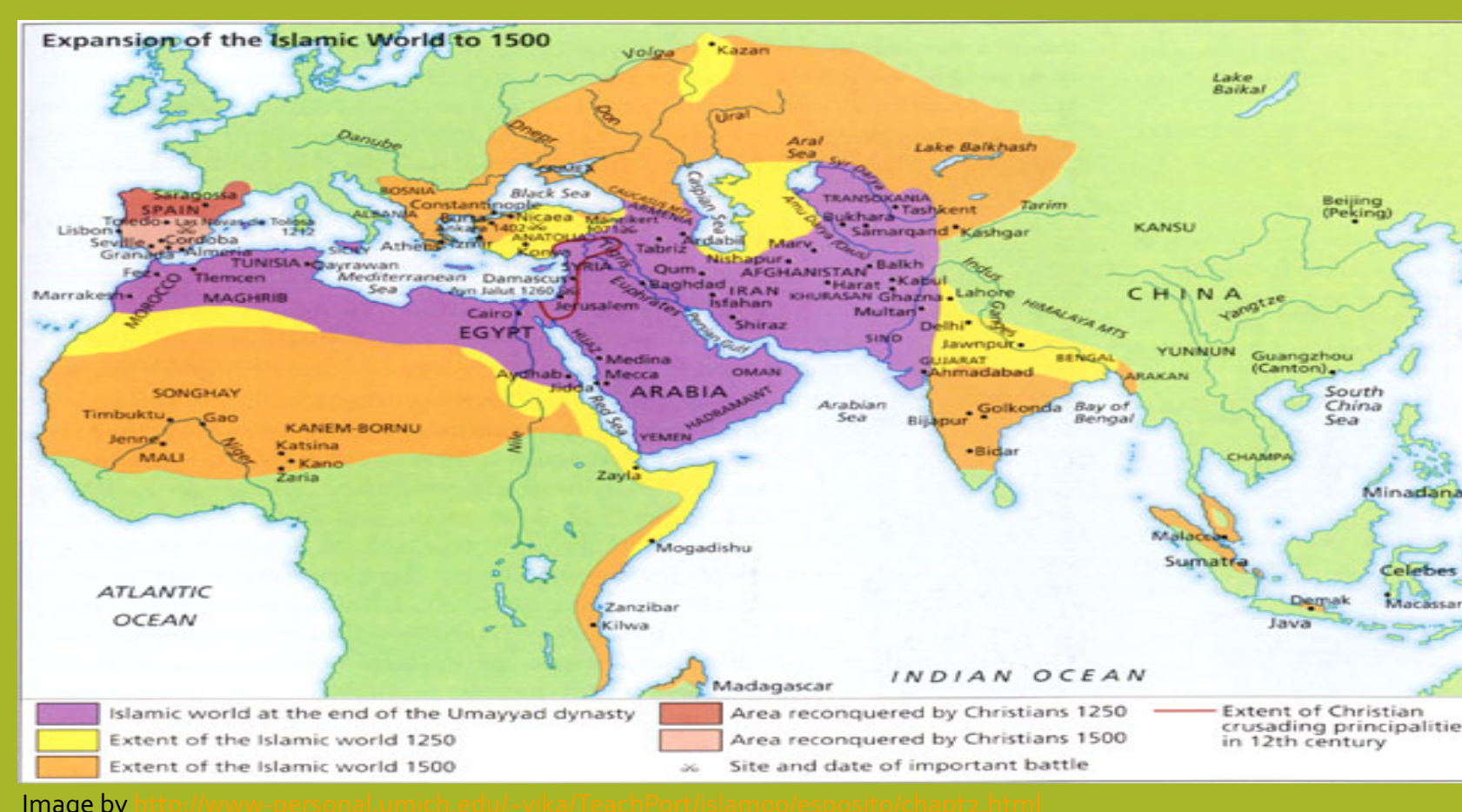
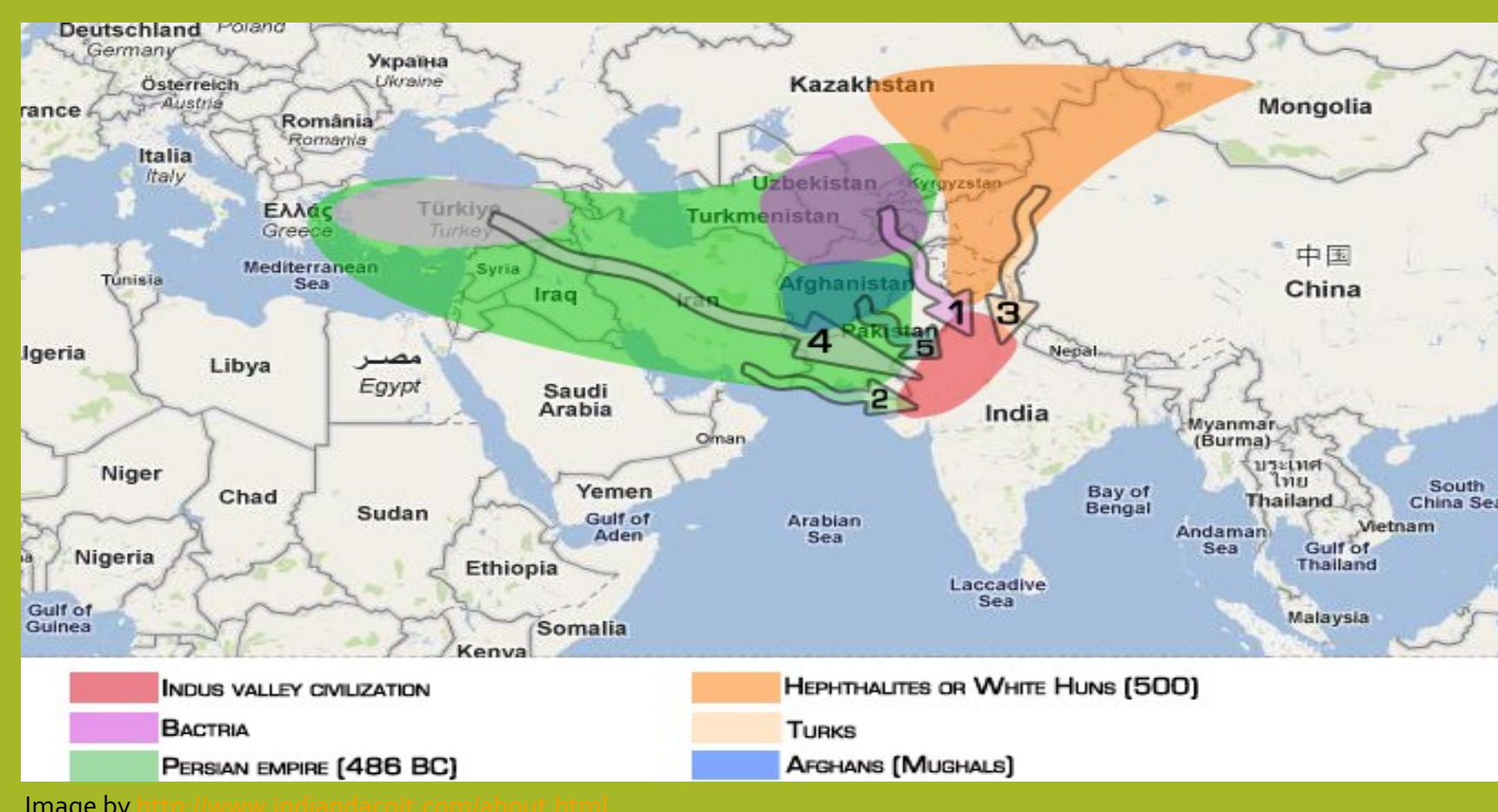
DON QUIXOTE: A CLASH OR UNITY OF CULTURES?
AN EXAMINATION OF *DON QUIXOTE* THROUGH A CROSS-CULTURAL LENS

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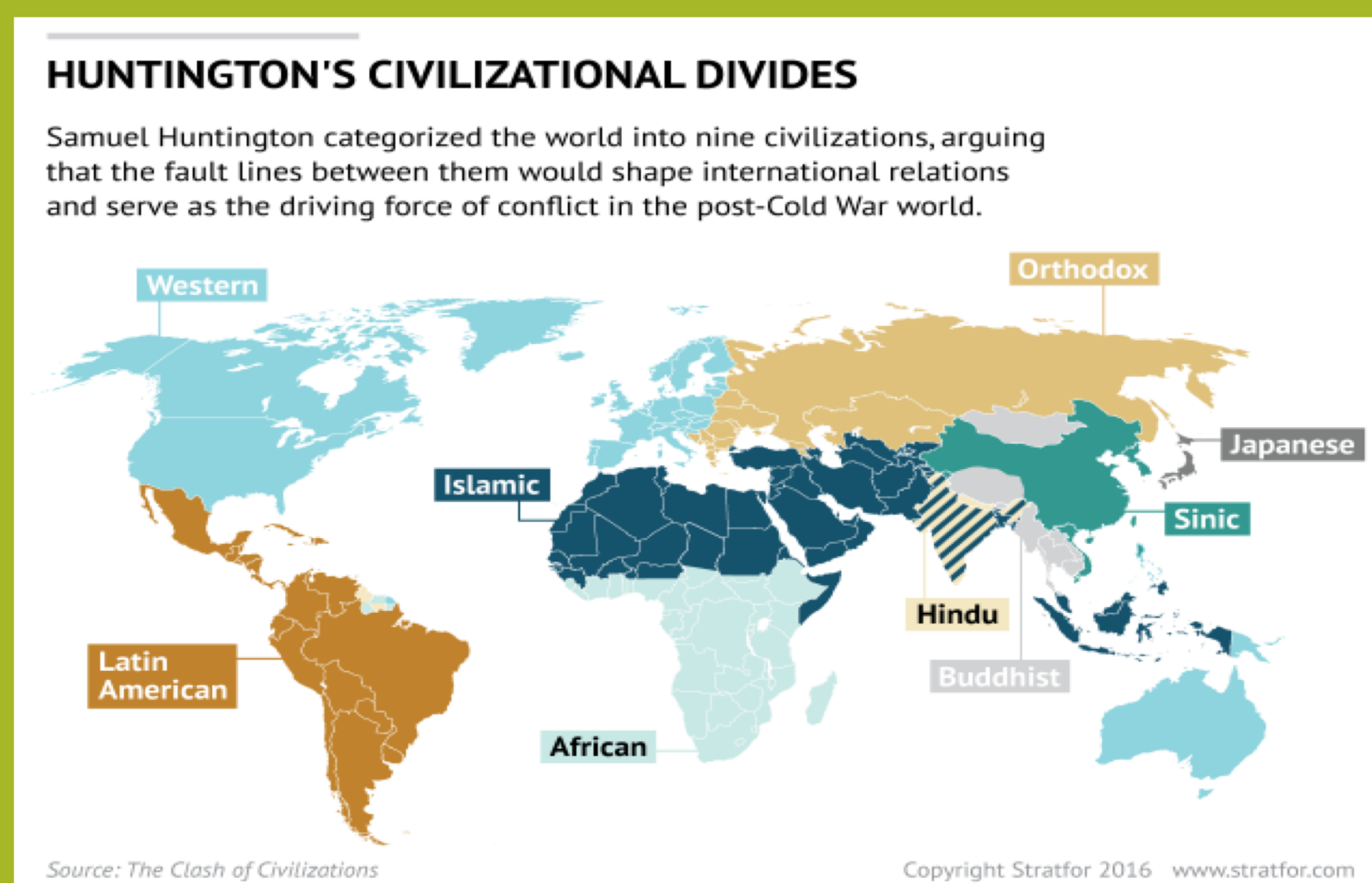
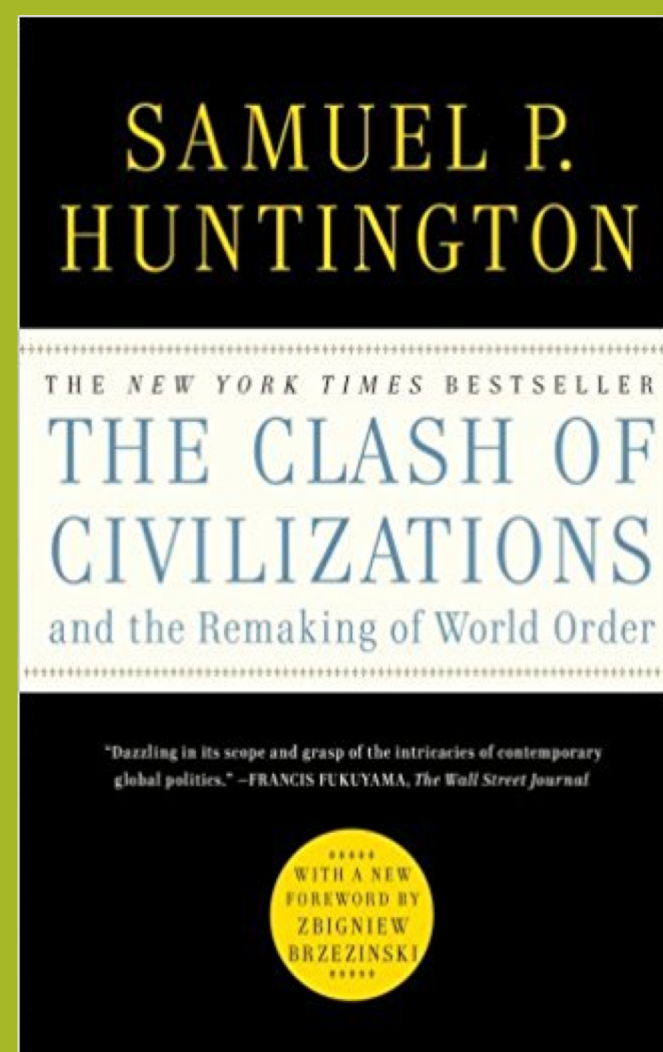


“Culture is arguably the dimension of human practices in which globalization can most directly be seen.” (*Dr. Roxanne Burton, University of West Indies*). We would not be where we are in the world without the help and influence of others across cultures. For that reason, it is extremely important to examine cultural roots and spread the understanding that throughout history, and increasingly so in today’s world where we are more interconnected than ever, people have borrowed aspects of other’s cultures and integrated it into their own.

For example, if we examine the Spanish language, we can see that the articles “la” and “el” are used frequently. This linguistic pattern is traced back to Arab rule in Spain because the Arabic language uses the article “al.” (See Image 2)



Just as words are formed and recipes are exchanged as a result of conquest and intermixing of cultures, literature can also bud from these types of interactions. For this research proposal, I would like to investigate the role of Arab/Muslim influences on the classic Spanish novel, *Don Quixote*. Written by Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote* is considered by many to be the first novel in the world. It was written toward the end of the Spanish Golden Age in Spain, an oft-overlooked period in history. The Spanish Golden Age took place during a time when Arab Muslims occupied Spain for nearly 700 years.



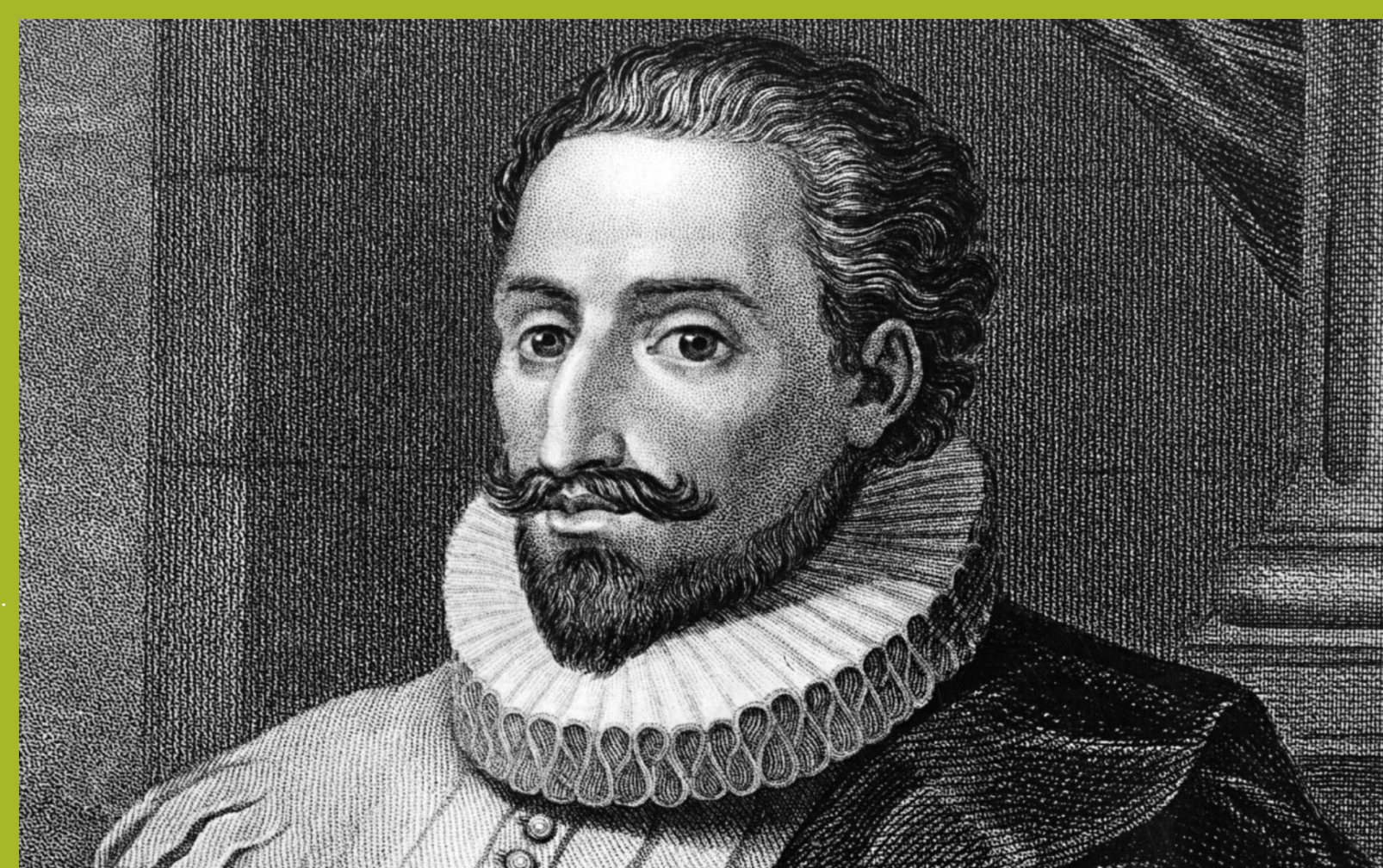
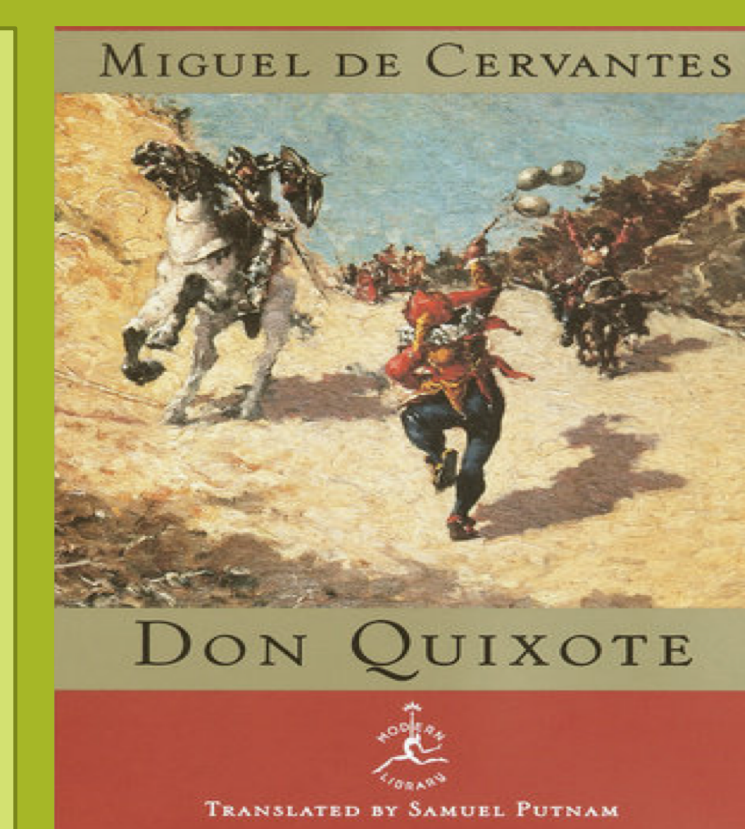
In his book, Huntington proposes that there are 9 major religious/ethnic groups in the world. When these groups cross paths, problems arise because these 9 groups cannot co-exist peacefully. On the other end of the spectrum, I will use Richard Bulliet’s book *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* which was written as a response to Huntington's book. Bulliet argues that religions are more alike than different, focusing primarily on Islam and Christianity. He goes into detail to discuss the similarities between the two and how the two religions thrived when they interacted. Bulliet says “there is a far better case for Islamo-Christian civilization than there is for a clash of cultures.”

Like Cervantes, who wrote Moors back into the text, can we do the same for the persecuted, the minority, and voiceless populations in America who have been a part of this narrative all along?



Another example of globalization influencing the birth of cultural traditions can be found in cuisines. Naan bread is oft-associated with Indian cuisine, however, it is not authentically Indian. Naan bread which is cooked in a tandoor (an Earth oven), is native to the people of present day Afghanistan and Iran. During the time of the Mogul dynasty in Delhi, the ruling family hired cooks from the Afghani region. These cooks made naan and very quickly, naan bread was integrated into Indian cuisine, so much so that today, India, not Afghanistan, is associated with naan. (See image 1)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Miguel de Cervantes was born around 50 years after the expulsion of the Arabs from Spain. He lived in the last 15th century and early 16th century. This was the era of zealous conversation to Christianity in Spain, undoubtedly connected to the end of Arab rule. His main character in the novel’s name is Don Quixote, and he encounters a Moor, or a Muslim from North Africa.



Islam in the Caribbean and South America in the 19th and 20th Century by Lindsay Jones traces Islamic Heritage in America back to slavery and migrants that hailed from Islamic Spain. For example, Estvancio was a moor who was the expedition guide of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca. De Vaca is credited for ‘discovering’ and exploring Arizona, Florida, Texas, New Mexico, and Northern Mexico. Yet, we have never heard this name in conjunction with the founding of our country. There is this perceived reality we have of our history but it conflicts with the actuality. In other words, we pick what we want to go into our history.

A few years ago, a small mosque opened up near my house. Within the last 3 years that small mosque became too crowded and soon, they bought out an old Chase bank to establish the first mosque in America with sermons in Spanish. It brought me to think about a series of questions about Houston, Texas, Central America, Mexico, Spain and their history with Islam. The more people I interviewed at the mosque or befriended at events, the more I heard traces of a familiar story. For many people who converted to Islam with a Hispanic background, they say that learning about Islam helped them reclaim a part of their identity. There are so many layers to the history of our city, state, and ultimately the people who ruled and influenced this space before us.

