

The Muslim World – Europe’s Big Other¹

Western Europe as a relatively homogenous cultural region developed over a period of more than a thousand years beginning with the decay of the Roman Empire and up to the period of the Reformation, when the medieval Christian unity was lost and the new period of the European system of states began. My lecture deals with this period, starting with the conversion to Catholicism of the Frankish king Chlodwig I around the year 500 of the common era up to the peace treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

This period coincides roughly with the inception of Islam by the Prophet Muhammad around the year 610 of the common era until the defeat of the Ottoman armies at the gates of Vienna in 1684. While during this period civilisation went into decline in the West, it continued to flourish in the East, until, due to the Renaissance, the discovery of the New World, the scientific revolution and subsequent technological and administrative advancements the Western world began to slowly overtake the Islamic world.

I am interested in the said period because it provides us with an understanding of the process of identity formation that lead to something like a Western European identity. This Western European identity, in turn, is a key for the understanding of the modern West. Moreover, in the process of Western European identity formation, Islam and the Muslim word played a crucial role.

Western European identity in the middle ages was formed around the notion of “Christendom”. This included all those Christians who looked to the pope in Rome as their spiritual leader. These “Latin Christians” defined themselves as believers. As in all processes of identity formation, the self has to be distinguished from what it is not: namely the unbelievers. The “others” of Latin Christianity were called “heathens”. These heathens could be polytheistic tribesmen like the Vikings in Northern Europe or the Slavs in Eastern Europe. They could be believers of other Christian faiths like the Christians of the Eastern Roman Empire with their patriarch in Constantinople, or they could be believers of other monotheistic religions like Jews and Muslims. In the course of the Middle Ages, most European pagans were con-

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verted to the Catholic Faith, forcefully for the most part. After their subjugation they could no longer serve as a counter bearing for the process of Western European identity formation. The only groups who resisted conquest or conversion were the Muslims and the Jews. It is thus against these two groups of religionists that Western Europe united. It is the central aim of this lecture to show how Muslims and Jews served as the archetypical “other” of Christendom and thus how the Muslim world, in spite of itself, enabled the process of Western identity formation. It is remarkable that the reverse is not true. The Muslim world did not depend on the Western Christian world for its own process of identity formation. The reasons for this will hopefully become apparent in the course of this lecture.

Today in an age of secular modernity, the categories of “Muslim” versus “Christian” world no longer seem appropriate, but for the whole period of the Middle Ages, that is from the time of Muhammad until the 17th century of the common era, Muslim world and Christian world appropriately marked the realms where two closely related religions held sway, Islam and Western Christianity. I am saying “Western Christianity” because Christians were also living in the Muslim world and in-between the Muslim and the Western Christian world. These were the Eastern Orthodox Christians. Arab authors referred to them as Nasrani, named after Nazareth, the birth place of Jesus. Western Christians were referred to as “Al-Ifranj”, the Arabic rendering of “Frank”, which was the name of the Germanic tribal confederation who built the first Western Christian empire after Rome’s fall. In Persian “Al-Ifranj” was turned into the word “Farangi”, which is still in use today in Iran, Central- and South-Asia.

Both spheres, Muslim and Western Christian, constituted themselves in the context of a decaying common world of Late Antiquity, with Rome as the hegemonic civilisation in the Mediterranean basin. Both drew from similar sources, namely the Jewish religious heritage and the Roman legal and cultural heritage. And both inhabited a common discursive sphere where controversies over matters of faith point to the many commonalities that are necessary to make such a discourse possible. Islam and Christianity were competing against each other on the same religious market square, so to say, often addressing the same audiences.

In this context, the self-perception of what was to become Western Europe has evolved as against its discursive opponent, that is Islam. The opposite is less true. The Latin Christian world has not played such an important role in the Muslim world in the formation of its own

identity. This is due to the fact that over the entire period under consideration, Western Europe lagged far behind the Muslim world in terms of standards of living, science and technology.

For most of the time under consideration, the two civilisations co-existed side by side with frontiers moving back and forth but with none of them being able to dominate the other. This changed only with the time of the European colonial expansion and with globalising exigencies of modernity. With globalisation, today, the distinction between the two civilisations may not be so marked any more. However, the formative period for both civilisations, the so called Middle Ages, still has an impact today. One indication of this is the fact that conservative European politicians still refer to the medieval notion of “Christendom” in discourses on European identity and in debates about the accession of Turkey to the European Union. On the other side, Muslim fundamentalists sometimes refer to Westerners as “Crusaders”. This semantics leads us back to the Middle Ages where the Muslim world and Christendom encountered each other on a number of different stages. In this lecture, I shall take you to four such stages.

The first is the world of late antiquity where the Eastern Roman (Byzantium) and the Sassanid Empire (Persia) held sway in much the Middle East and in Northern Africa. This is the world into which Islam was born and this happened under the eyes of the Eastern Christian, who immediately started to comment of the movement started by Muhammad. Muhammad’s claim to a truer faith aroused debates among Eastern Christians and these debates found their reflection in the Koran itself, as we shall see.

The second stage is the Hispanic peninsula (today Spain and Portugal) called “Al-Andalus” by the Muslims. The name is derived from the word “Vandalus”, which is the Latin name of the Vandals, the Germanic tribe who held a kingdom in Northern Africa from 429-534.

The third stage is the Levant where Crusaders invaded the coast of Palestine and adjacent areas for a period of two hundred years from the first crusade in 1095 to the fall of the last crusader state in Acre in 1291. The Muslim world was in disarray during this time and the crusaders managed to establish a few small kingdoms in Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli, Acre and Jerusalem.

The fourth stage is the Balkan and South-Eastern Europe which came under Ottoman rule after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. The spread into the areas of today’s Greece, the

Balkans, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria led to an interaction between European powers and the Muslim world until the eventual demise of the Empire during in the course of the First World War.

Encounters in Late Antiquity

Processes of identity formation, of course, took place even before the notions of Western Europe or Islam even existed. Greeks and Romans, just like Persians and later the Muslims used to think of themselves as civilised and of others as barbarians. Civilised people were thought of as a product of an historical process, which involved the deeds of kings and army generals. The ensuing people was thought of as united on the basis of its allegiance to the constitutional laws that ensued from this political history. "Barbarian", the other category used by Greeks and Romans, placed the people so named outside the process of history and politics. Change in such peoples was thought of as a biological process.

Originally, the term "barbarian" stems from the ancient Greek word βάρβαρος which meant someone whose first language was not Greek. The word was onomatopoeic, representing the impression of the noise of spoken language that one cannot understand. It was used for people who for the Greeks stood outside the process of human history, like animals and plants. As they could not be said to have history, peoples that are classified as "barbarian", or "primitive", do not partake in history. They are perceived as self-identical in a sense transcending history, as being subjected to the laws of nature.

How did the people described as "barbarians" by the Romans respond to this designation? The people who brought down the Roman Empire, and who were for the most part Germanic tribesmen, began to internalise the image that the Romans had constructed of them and to mould their own self-perceptions in accordance with the systems of classification common among their Roman neighbours whom they sought to emulate. The ensuing processes of acceptance of ascribed identities and the shifts in power relation between the Romans and the Germans began to obliterate the old semantics of civilised vs. barbarian. With the Roman Empire crumbling away and Germans coming into positions of power, they began to define themselves as constitutional people, just like the Romans. This is illustrated by a story that can be found among the tales collected by the Grimm brothers in the 19th century. Their rendering of the foundation myth of the Franks reads as follows:

The lineage of the Franks is closely related to that of the Romans, both of their ancestors stem from old Troy. When the Greeks had destroyed this fortress in accordance with God’s verdict, only few Trojans escaped, travelled the world for a long time. Franko with his son came down to the Rhine and sat there; then together with friends he built a small Troy in the memory of his heredity and he called the adjacent stream Santen, after the river in their old land. The Rhine they took for the sea. And thus the Frankish people developed.

The trope of Aeneas fleeing the burning city of Troy, migrating to a new place with his followers, and forging a new “people” by amalgamating his retinue with the autochthonous people of the new found place was the foundation myth of ancient Rome. By assimilating it as their own foundation myth, the Franks assimilated themselves to the Roman idea of peoplehood and in turn pointed to others as barbarians.

The various ethnies that constituted the societies of the post-Roman world included the Jews. Until the emergence of Islam as the new external “other” with respect to which Europeans began to define their own identity, an internal “other” already emerged. In Visigothic Spain, the conversion of the Gothic people to Catholicism in 587 facilitated its merging with the residual Roman population into a single Hispanic people. The Jews, however, were left out. As Catholic Christianity and Spanish identity became ever more closely linked through the course of the sixth century, Jews progressively lost their former Roman identity and were forced into an Ethnogenesis of their own, one that created them as a despised and persecuted people in the eyes of their Catholic neighbours. Jews were faced with baptism or brutal punishment. Jewish travel was restricted and placed under the supervision of Christian clergy; adherence to Jewish dietary laws, circumcision, and proselytising were punishable by flogging, scalping, mutilation, and confiscation of property. But even while these efforts were intended to bring about conversion, royal legislation implied that even converted Jews remained enemies of Christianity. Ultimately, anti-Jewish legislation reached the point that King Ervig the Goth ordered the enslavement of all Jews, whether converted or not. Therefore, understandably, the Jews of Spain cheered the advent of Islam in Spain in 711.

With time the term “barbarian” changed its meaning. Germanic ruling elites had laboured long enough to forge a new model of a civilised people based on Roman Law, Catholicism

and the Latin language in combination with the military ethos of the Germanic ruling elite, sacral kingship, and common law. Thus their peoples became what the *populus romanus* had been: territorial units of geographical and political organisation and not ethnic groups. The Franks in Gaul, the Lombards in Italy, the Visigoths in Spain ceased to view themselves as barbarians and thus the term “barbarian” began to take on a new meaning: that of foreigner, and increasingly, pagan foreigner. That included the Muslims, or the Saracens as they were called at the time.

Thus from the eighth century on, emerging Western Europe as it expanded from Charlemagne’s empire into the eastern, northern, and Western corners of Europe, saw itself faced with a twin “other”: the Saracen as the outer adversary and the Jew as the inner foe. The two newly emerging “others” stood in the tradition of the civilised-barbarian distinction but they also developed their own and mutually enforcing characteristics.

Meanwhile the Arabs, squeezed in between the Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium and the Sassanid Empire of Persia seem to have undergone a similar process. Like the Germanic Franks, the Arab Muslims turned from a barbarian people at the fringes of two empires to a constitutional people at the helm of an empire that devoured the Sassanid Empire and reduced the East Roman Empire to its heartland of Greece and Asia Minor. As Arab tribesmen they had been utilised by Rome and Persia as auxiliaries in the defence of their respective border provinces. The same laws applied to their leaders as to any European or Central Asian tribal leader: In order to unite the greatest possible number of warriors for successful raids into the wealthy provinces of Eastern Rome and Persia they had to provide just enough cohesion without curtailing their aggressive energy and vigour. Muhammad managed to forge a military alliances out of disparate tribes, who used to be arch-enemies years before. Larger gain beckoned if Arabs, turned Muslims, were to direct their appetite for booty toward the outside, more wealthy world of the two empires rather than devouring each other. The Charter of Medina that Muhammad brought about in 622 united the Meccan and Medinan tribes – Jewish tribes among them – in an alliance against Mecca, which was still primarily defensive in nature. Nevertheless, the process that Muhammad had started with the unification of the tribes at Medina lead to a rapid process of unification, which was sustained by ever larger and more profitable raids and conquests, until within less than three generations from his death, Islam ruled from Al-Andalus to the Indus. There remained tensions which resulted from conflicting

loyalties to one's tribe and one's service to the greater common good of the Muslims, but the system worked in spite of all inherent contradictions.

The sudden rise of Islam in most of the known world of the early Middle Ages had a stunning effect on Muhammad's Christian contemporaries. To some, however, the Arab conquest of formerly Eastern Christian domains in the Middle East and North Africa felt like a liberation. Many of the Christians living in the Byzantine Empire did not agree with the official version of Christianity. Those who suffered persecution from Eastern Rome were better off under Arab rule than under Byzantium. But for those remaining under Christian rule the perception of the Muslims was that of a ferocious barbarian people. However, in the process of empire building, the Muslims acquired not only land and booty but also the sophistication of the age old civilisations whom they conquered. Under Muslim rule the eastern urban culture, monetary economy and long distance trade continued. Meanwhile the western part of the former Roman empire deteriorated. Europe as a whole experienced an unprecedented economic decline. The cities of the former Roman Empire depopulated and the urban, money-based economy was replaced by a barter system and a primitive agrarian economy with local markets and little in the way of long distance trade.

In the East, with the process of acquiring the knowledge and the ruling skills of their Imperial predecessors, the Muslims inherited the Greco-Roman habit of dividing the world into civilised and barbarians. Thus they would in turn project the image of the barbarian onto the Western Christians whom they encountered in the guise of the Franks. But more important than the claim to urbanism, law, morality and cultural refinement, in brief, to a higher form of civilisation, was that to true religion. True religion could be claimed by the sophisticated urban dweller as well as by the tribesman on the fringes of the Muslim empire. The difference was marked by the non-believer, not by the non-civilised.

The same held true on the other side. True religion united the European lord at the upper echelons of society with the peasant labourer on the lower echelons of the feudal hierarchy, even though neither of them may have been very civilised in this period. Thus on both sides of the divide, the harsh distinction drawn in Antiquity between the civilised and the barbarian was mediated by the fact that both Islam and Christianity used the same mythological repertoire, which they took from the Hebrew Scriptures. There was a common ground on which these two civilisations encountered each other, much larger than, say, between the Roman world

and the world of the pre-Christian Germanic or the pre-Islamic Arab tribesmen. Both shared a conception of historical time as limited and unidirectional (as opposed to unlimited and circular). Both shared a belief of human action being subject to divine judgement on the day of resurrection. Both shared a fear of eternal damnation versus a hope for paradise and eternal bliss in the times after time. Both shared a concept of eternity after historical time would have drawn to a close. The controversies over the right path to salvation against the backdrop of a shared Hebrew heritage were the context into which both Islam and Western Christianity were born. From this perspective, Christianity and Islam were but two variants of the same theme, which is true devotion. And this is the perspective that the Christian and Jewish contemporaries and the early Muslims seem to have shared.

The greater the common ground, however, the fiercer the contestation over how exactly to relate to the set of common stories offered by the Hebrew Scriptures and to their main figures: Abraham, Moses and Jesus. At the time when Christianity and Islam were still in their formative years, what was true religion was contested by everyone who called himself a truly devout person. Only after controversies lead to insurmountable differences, followers of certain schools began to form systems of orthodoxy and enforce them with the help of the institutions of the state. Thus came about the various schools of orthodoxy (Catholic, Greek, Islamic) and various schools of heterodoxy (Monophysite, Nestorian, Sufi) that could not always rely on state protection.

In this context it is not surprising that early Christian contemporaries mistook Muhammad for a Christian heretic. Islam as an institutionally recommended way to salvation had not yet been established. Thus in the understanding of the Christians of this time it did not form another full fledged religion comparable to established Christianity but looked rather more like one of those heterodoxies that lay claim to true religion, without however enjoying the support of any major state like power. Such state power, however, was about to coalesce with Islam into a new orthodoxy. Within a year of Mohammad's death all the main tribes of Arabia had been united under the banners of Islam. Apostates and renegades were eliminated and those who stood on the sidelines had now submitted. The new faith prohibited war between Muslims, so the raiding of the Muslims turned outward, beyond the Arabian peninsula.

The first Christians to encounter this thrust were the Eastern Christians within or in the bordering areas of the Byzantine Empire that controlled the Arab world from Syria in the East to

Mauretania in the West. To them Islam seemed like a retrogression and they called Muhammad liar. A liar, however, consciously obliterates the truth of which he is well aware. Thus calling Muhammad a liar proves also as how close to Christianity he was perceived. He was thought of having learned of the Gospel but wilfully ignoring or distorting it. These allegations were mirrored by Muslims who raised similar charges against Christians and Jews. In the Koran it says

The Jews call Uzair [Ezra] a son of Allah, and the Christians call Christ the son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouth. In this they only imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth! (9.30).

The reciprocal allegation of fraud demonstrates how in the Eastern Mediterranean relations between Christians and Muslims started off almost like a sectarian struggle within a single cultural world, the fundamentals of which the feuding parties shared. An important source of that period is John of Damascus (al-Mansur by his Arabic name), a Byzantine bishop in the mid seventh century. John was brought up in Damascus where his father was head of the Syrian tax department under caliph Abd al-Malik. John used to be the playmate of the caliph's son who later became caliph Yazid. After the death of his father, John held a public office in Damascus until hostilities against Christians ended his career.

The example of John's father shows how the conquering Arabs made use of the skilled men of the Roman administration instead of deposing them after their conquest. As in the case of the early Germanic kingdoms in Europe, the Arab's success depended on how they were able to come to terms with the populations residing in the territories they conquered and whether they could avoid antagonising the civil elites in their new domains. This depended largely on the readiness to learn from the local elites and to mingle with the autochthonous population, which required a certain degree of tolerance toward their religion.

One of the most persistent legends about Islam is the legend of the Christian monk who supposedly taught Muhammad and who is allegedly also the source of the Koran. The legend was around from the very inception of Islam. Even the Koran (16.103) mentions it and guards against it. Thus, God speaks through Muhammad:

We know indeed that they say, “It is a man that teaches him.” The tongue of him they wickedly point to is notably foreign, while this is Arabic, pure and clear.
[Thus they contradict themselves]

For John of Damascus this mysterious man was nothing but a heretic Christian monk. In later accounts he is sometimes called a Nestorian or a Monophysite. In some accounts he is even claimed to be the author of the Koran. A chronicle by one Theophanes, in Greek, translated into Latin by one Anastasius Bibliothecarius in the ninth century, became the main source for this legend throughout the Middle Ages. The Abbot of Cluny, Petrus Venerabilis (1094-1156), initiator of Islamic Studies in the West, mentions a Nestorian monk with name Sergius as Muhammad’s source. He claims that Sergius had denied the divine nature of Christ and had won over Muhammad to his opinion. The legend sedimented and inspired popular fancies about Muhammad and Islam until well into modernity. Its purpose was to discredit the authenticity of the Koran as a divine revelation and to make it look like but a repercussion of a Christian heresy.

This fact was reflected in the names associated with Muslims for the Christians of that period. Muslims were called “Agarenes”, i.e. sons of Hagar, or “Ishmaelites” to mark their descent from the illicit son of Abraham and his “Egyptian concubine”. By contrast, in Islam, Ishmael is known as the first-born son of Ibrahim from his second wife Hagar. Here Ishmael was the first legitimate son of Abraham and it is asserted that he and not Iss’haq was the one nearly sacrificed. In this context it seems curious that the most common name for Muslims during the Middle Ages should become “Saracens”, i.e. sons of Sarah, the legitimate wife of Abraham. The word was used to describe the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula and, by extension, the Muslims. One theory propagated that the word first related to one Arab Bedouin tribe, the Bani Sara, and later was applied to all Arabs.

What we have seen so far concerns the first encounters between Christians and Muslims, still within the ambit of the decaying Roman Empire and its successor states. With the emergence of the Western Christian civilisation and with the conquests and incursions of Muslims into territories that are considered part of Europe today, a new chapter begins. In that chapter we will see how Christian polemics against Islam were elaborated upon the framework initially created within the few decades of first contact between Christians and Muslims in the East.

Islam continued to be assimilated to the existing paradigms of the unbeliever. These ancient ascriptions were repeated in later scholarly discourse and went unchallenged for centuries in Western Christian writings about Islam. We shall look at the beginnings of these processes in Islamic Spain

Al-Andalus

At the height of the Islamic expansion, Muslim armies had conquered and dominated the Hispanic Peninsula from roughly 720 to around 1200, Sicily from 828 to 1300, and had made incursions into Sardinia, some regions in Peninsular Italy, and some parts of France (Narbonne). Like the Visigothic ruling class before them, they formed only a thin layer over a largely Catholic autochthonous population. During the first three centuries of Islamic rule, many Hispanic Christians converted to Islam. They were then called “Muwallid” in Arabic. But distinct communities of Christians and Jews remained, preserved their customs, and lived by their own laws. Christians living under Muslim rule were known as “Mozarabes”. They were descendants of the inhabitants of Roman Hispania and the Visigothic kingdom. Mozarabes and Jews adopted Arabic as their language and superficial differences in outward appearance between the three communities diminished.

Although “convivencia” (the Spanish word for peaceful living together) seems to have worked for the most part, it was not without tension. Prejudices about the other community existed and were often symmetric. Alluding to the fact that Muslims were allowed to practice polygamy and Muhammad himself had many wives, Christian polemics portrayed Muslims as perverse. And Muslims apparently did the same with Christians. Under the influence of the austere North African Almorávides, women apparently were prevented from entering their churches. A public order said: “Frankish women must be forbidden to enter the church except on days of religious service or festivals, for it is their habit to eat and drink and fornicate with the priests”. Thus while Christians and Jews were tolerated in Muslim lands, they were nonetheless to be shunned. The same regulations prohibited that Muslims do inferior work for Christians or Jews such as massaging, disposing of their garbage or cleaning their latrines. It was assumed that the Jew and the Christian are better fitted for such trades, since they were considered trades of those who are vile. While statements of enmity predominated, these may not represent the reality of everyday life. But all the evidence suggests that even when there

was no active antagonism the communities wanted to remain separate. The negative views each group held about the others were often reciprocal.

Wildly aggressive rhetoric was also a reflection of Christian leader’s fears of losing too many of their followers to Muslim faith and Arabic sophistication. In the great cities of Al-Andalus, Arabic replaced Latin as the language of culture while an amalgam of Arabic, Romance and Berber became the vernacular language. A rich young Cordovan complains.

My fellow Christians delight in the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the works of Mohammadan theologians and philosophers not in order to refute them, but to acquire correct and elegant Arabic style ... Christians have forgotten their own tongue, and scarce one in a thousand can be found to be able to compose a letter in fair Latin to a friend.

While many Christians recognized the superiority of Islamic cultivation and sought to benefit from it, a few created the myth of a demonic enemy to sustain their resistance. On the other side, such zealotry reconfirmed the Muslim’s image of the Christian “Franks” as uncivilised and irrational creatures. To them the “Ifranj” were the disadvantaged dwellers of the northern climates where excessive cold had ruined their manners and hardened their hearts. Like beasts they cared for only war, combat and hunting. Even their manner of writing was against nature, being from left to right and thus away from the heart and not towards it. Christians were described as dogs or pigs, both animals especially despised in Islam. Franks were labelled as unclean, filthy and contaminating.

The Christians in Spain coined their own terms to describe Muslims in an exactly symmetrical way. The term most common in Spain was “Moor”. The purported origin of the Moors is explained in the Castilian Book of the Estates:

Long after Jesus Christ was crucified, there arose a false man named Muhammad. He preached in Arabia, convincing certain ignorant people that he was a prophet sent by God. As part of his teaching he offered them wholesale indulgences in order that they could gratify their whims with excessive lust and to an unreasonable extent. They had seized lands belonging to Christians. That is why there is war between Christians and Moors and there will be until the Christians have recovered

the lands that the Moors took from them by force; but there is no other reason either because of their faith or the false sect they belong to that there should be war between them. Jesus Christ never ordered anyone to be killed nor that anyone should be pressured to accept the Christian faith, for He does not wish any forced service.

In the subsequent reconquest of Spain by the Christian rulers of the north, Muslims came under Christian rule and were called “Mudéjares”, which is a Medieval Spanish corruption of the Arabic word “mudahhan”. The revulsion against all those who were not Christian included the Jews and in the minds of many Christians, both Muslims and Jews were linked together as enemies, existing only because of the magnanimity of the Christian majority community. If they had not been killed immediately it was for the same reason that Muslim invaders of Spain had not killed the Mozarabes. They were often people with useful skills one could hardly afford to do away with. As soon, however, as Christian rule consolidated, Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain.

But not only Muslims and Jews were persecuted. Even those who had converted to Christianity were mistrusted. During the fifteenth century, a view developed according to which infidels were not only deficient in their belief, something that could have been mended by conversion, but in their biological substance. Thus no convert of Jewish or Moorish stock could ever carry the true faith as could someone of untainted Christian descent. The “Old Christians” described themselves as “pure” and by implication the converts were impure and coarse. As a consequence, laws to maintain the purity of blood (in Spanish: *limpieza de sangre*) were instituted to constrain converts, the paradox being that according to Christian belief baptism and repentance purged all sins. Not so in the case of the Conversos and Moriscos, those Jews and Arabs forcibly converted to Christianity in the sixteenth century, who were subjected to this early form of racism.

Although the *limpieza de sangre* laws were primarily directed against Jews and although it was well known that Islam had developed centuries after Jesus’ death, a strange kind of logic lead Christians to believe that Muslims, too, had an ineradicable taint like Jews. Jewish converts to Christianity were called Marranos (which means “pigs” in Spanish). Many Christians

believed that Muslims, just like Jews, worshipped the Antichrist and had despoiled the “Holy Land”.

From the 1480s official policy towards non-Christians, both Jews and Muslims, began to harden. Ancient edicts concerning dress and restrictions on trade were enforced. “Morerias”, that is ghettos for Moors were constructed outside towns or by blocking off streets and filling in doors and windows. From 1481 to 1488, thousands of non-Christians (Judíos and Mudéjares) or “false Christians” (Conversos and Moriscos), were relinquished to the state by the Spanish Inquisition and burned at the stake. Those who survived were expelled from Spain by the two Catholic Kings Fernando and Isabella, first Judíos and Mudéjares in 1492, later Conversos and Moriscos in the years between 1608 and 1614.

Of course the image of the “other” was not only negative. There was a mutual recognition of chivalry between the Saracens and the Franks, which found their expression in the ballads arising from the border lands of al-Andalus. However, the Muslim in these ballads could be respected but never identified with. Since the discovery of the Americas and its native people, scores of young Europeans emulated the ideal of the noble savage. Noble savages could be converted to Christianity, Muslims never. This fact was demonstrated by the centuries of unsuccessful missionary efforts in Muslim lands. The Spanish methods of forcing Muslims to convert proved disastrous. In spite of nominal conversion and years of severe persecution, the Moriscos continued to practise their religion, in secret if necessary.

The tensions preceding their eviction from Spain were aggravated by the appearance of a new menace from outside: the Ottoman Turks. This had repercussions on the situation of what was perceived to be the inner enemy: the Moriscos. New features were added to their popular image: that of high treason for conspiracy with the outer enemy. The internal threat was aggravated by the fact that the Moriscos seemed to be increasing in numbers faster than the “Old Christians”. Their growth was attributed to their inherent lustfulness. Even virtues like industriousness gained a negative connotation. They worked hard, but only because they were avaricious: gaining money and never spending it except in their own community. Moriscos in turn gained parity in the game of mutual imprecation by calling Spanish priests wolves, thieves or brigands.

Spanish Churchmen pondering the “solution” of the Morisco question for Spain, abandoned all hope of conversion and assimilation and suggested that each Morisco be enslaved, branded in the face with a mark and set to work. If they grew too great in numbers, some should be selected for castration. Bishop de Salvatierra deliberates that it would be too dangerous to allow the Moriscos to go to North Africa where they would only reinforce Spain’s enemies. The better answer was that all Moriscos, men and boys and all grown women, should be taken to empty zones of the New World and left there.

The perception of the renitent Moriscos collaborating with the Turks in North Africa was real enough. Ottoman contingents had supported their guerrilla warfare in the Alpujara mountains around Granada. The fear of doom on the Christian side ultimately led to the decision to expulse the Muslims to North Africa. On marches in bad weather tens of thousands died. Altogether, it is estimated that the number of exiles was about half a million, although there is no general agreement upon the exact number. Judaism and Islam were officially abolished and a homogeneous Christian culture was created in Spain.

But the spectre of the Muslim threatening Spain and Christianity was revived on multiple occasions during festivals and the shrine of Saint Jacob in Santiago de Compostella marks the final point of a pan-European network of pilgrimage trails. Today it is hardly ever remembered that Saint Jacob’s nickname in Spanish is “Matamoros”, the slaughterer of the Moors, and he is customarily depicted mounted, sword in hand, his horse riding over the corpses of decapitated Muslims. The encounters between Islam and Christendom in medieval Spain contributed to the hardening of the image of the Muslim as the arch-enemy of the Christian world. Spain lying at the periphery of Europe, its relevance for the process of European identity formation, however, was still rather limited. The next stage, however, involved a mobilisation of Christians in the whole of Europe. Thus we are turning now to the European crusades to the “Holy Land”.

The Levant

The Christian conception of holy war had its origin in Augustine’s interpretation of Luke (14:23) “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled”, which was taken to justify “robust” missionary practices among the pagan

Germanic and Slavonic tribes. Then the theory evolved as a justification for the “pilgrimages in arms” that were later called “crusades”.

The ground for the crusades was prepared and accompanied by a propaganda campaign, of sorts. The Campaign involved anti-Islamic imagery, mostly through sculptures attached to Churches and Cathedrals in southern France, Italy, and Spain. A veritable artistic revolution took place in the eleventh and twelfth-centuries in the form of expressly anti-Islamic statuary. These statues reveal a sustained effort to portray Muslims as unrefined, materialistic, primitive and sexually perverse. Beginning in 1060, statues depicting naked and often grotesquely gesturing Muslims appeared on the exterior of Romanic churches. Many of the statues functioned as column stumps or as parts of decorative drainage systems, stressing the Muslim defeat and subservience to the might of resurgent Christendom.

Latin Europe, which at that time was marked by excessive feudal strife, hunger and disunity, gained a sense of common identity and purpose through turning against an external enemy, i.e. the Muslim world. The first stirrings of what later should become Europe was the propaganda for the crusades. Europe forged its identity by being anti-pagan in general and anti-Islamic in particular. Other heathens like Saxons, Scandinavians, Slavs or Hungarians were eventually subdued and converted to Catholicism. They merged into the budding Latin civilization. Only the Muslim world offered resistance long enough to serve as a counter bearing for an extended process of identity formation.

Much like Muhammad who stopped the infighting among Arab tribesmen and turned the violence, which was devouring them, towards the outside world, Pope Urban II united Europe in its campaign to drive out the Saracens from the “Holy Land”. Earlier attempts at pacifying Europe had failed. After the disintegration of the Frankish Empire in 840 of the common era, none of the secular forces in Europe was strong enough to maintain order and unity. In these circumstances diversion of attention to the external enemy promised a reduction of violence at home. In the decades before the first crusade tens of thousands of new Churches were built and adorned with something that hardly any contemporary had seen before: depictions of animals and human shapes cut in stone, for the art of sculpting had virtually died out since the Roman days. In this time a particular genre of sculpture can be found on corbels, consoles, and capitals of Romanic churches in southern Europe. It depicts Muslims in degrading or ob-

scene fashion. Many of these sculptures were affixed at the outside of buildings where they could be seen not only during mass but also on market days.

By calling for a pilgrimage in arms to free the “Holy Land” from the infidels, Pope Urban II solved three problems at once. Firstly he reduced hunger and starvation by getting rid of some of the hungry: Many died on the long marches East. Of the 7000 who left for the first crusade only 2000 returned. Secondly he reduced the violence that was rampant in Western Europe by sending the warring parties abroad. And thirdly he forged a political unity of some sort, which was based on common faith and common purpose. All this enhanced the hegemonic position of the Church over the kings and princes of Western Europe.

When the crusading armies from Latin Europe arrived in the Levant, Arabs and Seljuks realised that these men were not like the Nazarene Christians whom they had known. Soon in Arabic literature an image began to surface of the “Franks” who hailed from French speaking (including Norman England) and German speaking lands as well Italy or Spain. They were seen as huge hulks carrying plump lances with heavy spearheads and they seemed reckless and foolhardy. To Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Levant, the Franks appeared like hungry beasts. One can imagine the horror that must have stricken the inhabitants of a recently conquered town when the crusading troops, tormented by starvation, started devouring human flesh. A contemporary reports that the crusaders cut pieces from the bodies of the townsfolk whom they killed. Apparently they cooked and ate the human flesh even when it was insufficiently roasted.

Ibn al-Qalanisi from Damascus complaint that the crusaders solemnly concluded agreements and then broke them at will: “At the town of al-Ma’arra, the Franks, after promising the inhabitants safety, dealt treacherously with them. They erected crosses over the town, exacted indemnities from the townsfolk, and did not carry out the terms on which they had agreed.” Muslim chroniclers related many acts of treachery within Islam, but there was something different about the Frank’s behaviour. These chroniclers noted example after example of orgiastic violence. At Antioch, when the Crusaders had captured the Muslim camp they did not enslave the women that they found there, as Muslims would have done, but drove lances into their bellies. When Jerusalem was captured the Crusaders treated the “Holy City” like any other place that had offered resistance. They killed men, women and children. In “The Deeds of the Franks” (*Gesta Frankorum*) a Christian chronicler writes:

Such a slaughter of pagans no one has ever seen or heard of. The city was filled with corpses and blood. The Jews of the city were confined to their synagogue, which was then set alight. All died. On the third day after the city fell, the leaders of the conquest decided that all remaining prisoners, men, women, and children, should be killed.

In the eyes of the inhabitants the Crusaders violated all acceptable standards of propriety in ways unthinkable to the locals, no matter whether they were Muslims, Christians or Jews.

In the eyes of the Muslims, the Crusaders disrupted and destabilized not only their own lives but also the entire world around them. In Muslim eyes, the Franks created a constant and highly visible desecration. Even the omnipresent Christian cross created a sense of defilement in the eyes of the Muslims. It violated their sense that God was immaterial and transcendent. To compare God to any creature was a taboo, not to speak of likening him to a man who was polluted by a low birth and material existence, and a shameful death. And not only God was subjected to this seeming impudence. The Franks treated the holy sights of the Muslims with the same brazenness. They slaughtered in the holy precincts of the city, they stabled their horses by the Mosque of Al-Aqsa, they built a church on the Dome of the Rock, they adorned it with bells, statues, and pictures that showed pigs, bottles of wine, and, of course, crosses.

During the period of the Christian occupation of Jerusalem from 1099 to 1187 the trope of defilement and the consequent need for purification grew dominant among Muslim writers. In tone, if not in content, it was similar to the Western reactions to the Muslim occupation of Jerusalem in the years just before the conquest, and again in the centuries after the loss of the city. The uncivilised behaviour of the Europeans in the “Holy Land”, however, offended not only the local people but also some of the clergy back home. Churchmen took exception to the exuberant life style of the fighters who indulged in carnal pleasures and seemed to turn the cities of the Levant into whore houses. The responsibility for this behaviour, however, was cynically passed on to the Oriental women who were maligned to have lured Christian men away from the righteous path of chastity. Hence the image of the seductive Oriental woman who turned the pure Frank away from the path of virtue. The stronger the belief in the purity of the Frank, the stronger the complementary belief in the impurity of the Oriental woman. The more the Christian had to be represented as pious, the more the evil force of the Oriental

women had to be represented as overwhelming and super-human, to the degree that she was taken for an instrument of the devil himself. Later, European colonialists used the trope of the Oriental Woman as a metaphor for the Orient itself and thereby as a justification for dominance over and exploitation of their colonies.

The image of the Frankish women, in contrast, was characterised by corruption and impropriety. A contemporary Muslim chronicler, Usamah ibn-Munqidh, recounts a story of a bath-keeper, whose establishment was frequented by the Franks.

One day a Frankish knight came in. They do not follow our custom of wearing a cloth around their waist while they are at the baths, and this fellow put out his hand, snatched off my loin cloth and threw it away. He saw at once that I had just recently shaved my pubic hair. "Salim!" he exclaimed. I came towards him and he pointed to that part of me. "Salim!" It's magnificent! You shall certainly do the same for me!" And he lay down flat on his back. His hair there was as long as his beard. I shaved him, and when he felt the place with his hand and found it agreeably smooth he said, "Salim, you must certainly do the same for my Dama." In their language Dama means lady. He sent his valet to fetch his wife and when they arrived and the valet had brought her in, she lay down on her back, and he said to me, "Do to her what you did to me." So I shaved her pubic hair, while her husband stood by watching me. Then he thanked me and paid me for my services (ibid. 190; emphases in the original).

What perplexed Usamah was the Frank and his dame apparently felt no shame when exposing their intimate parts to another man.

During their confrontation in the East, Muslims and Western Christians developed roughly symmetrical views of each other. Christians regarded Muslims as inherently cruel and violent; Muslims felt the same about the Westerners. Christians developed wild imaginings about the sexual proclivities of Muslims. Muslims regarded the Franks as little better than beasts in terms of propriety. On the other hand, however, they could also appreciate heroic and noble qualities in the respective other. Sultan Saladin was portrayed in Western accounts as more just and honourable than many Christian rulers. Likewise, Muslims had no difficulty in recognizing the military skill and bravery of their opponents at the same time that they described

them as accused. Nor did negative attitudes prevent many forms of political and economic connection between Muslims and Western Christians even in times of war and rancorous propaganda.

At the gates of Vienna

The third stage of encounter between Islam and Europe was between Austria and the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire came into existence in 1299 when Osman I declared the independence of the Ottoman Beylik after the collapse of the Seljuk state in Anatolia. At the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries, its territory included Anatolia, most of the Caucasus, the Levant, North Africa and the Balkans. Europe felt constantly threatened by its steady advance through Serbia, Hungary and the southern part of Poland-Lithuania, not to mention its sovereignty over the Mediterranean. Ottoman armies invaded central Europe on several occasions. They lay siege to Vienna in 1529 and again in 1683, but they were finally repelled by a great coalition of European powers at sea and on land. The Ottoman Empire was the only non-European force to seriously challenge the growing European influence in the world between the 15th and 20th century, eventually it became an integral part of European balance of power politics, which somewhat blurred the distinction between Europe and its Asian antagonist.

The mobilisation against the Turks in German speaking countries led to the first stirrings of national awareness among German speakers. The first recorded use of the term “German nation” [natio germanica] occurred at the Imperial Council in Regensburg in 1471. The council was charged with devising strategies to fight back the Ottomans. In this context the self-identification as “Holy Roman Empire of German Nation” occurred for the first time. It was popularised through imperial and papal propaganda. In view of the Turkish threat the church issued decrees (Türkenbullen) commanding the ringing of church bells every day at noon (Türkenläuten), special anti-Turkish sermons (Türkenpredigten) and special indulgences to collect money for the war against the Turks (Türkenablässe, Türkenzehnten). However, the German consciousness that spread among the educated classes did not lead to claims of integration into a common polity or state and should therefore not be confused with modern nationalism.

A gradual change in the response to Islam is epitomised by Martin Luther’s response to the Turks. Luther distanced himself from the rhetoric of the crusade that predominated the discourse on Islam in Europe since the eleventh century. In Luther’s opinion, Christians should never go to war or resist the evil. He interprets the Turkish threat as a divine punishment and a trial. He did not argue, however, that Europe should surrender to the Ottoman armies. But he refused to give a Christian blessing to a war that for him was a purely temporal affair. War, according to Luther, was legitimate only under two conditions. Firstly, it had to be fought in the name of the secular powers, i.e. the princes and the emperor, and not on behalf of religion or in the name of the Pope. Secondly, war was restricted to self-defence, and that only for the protection of the subjects of the domain under attack and not merely for their ruler’s interests.

Before a Christian could go to war against the Turks, Luther wanted him to repent his sins and make peace with God and certainly not misuse the name of God for a military campaign. He should go, not as a Christian or in the name of Christianity, but as the subject of a worldly ruler. Luther thus distances himself from the medieval concept of the Christian warrior, that had been the ideal of medieval knighthood. This strict differentiation of roles – a worldly role where the individual had to obey the temporal ruler and the role as a believer where the individual had to obey God and his conscience – coincides with the beginnings of modernity and with its differentiation of social spheres, political and religious, secular and spiritual.

In his *Army Sermon Against the Turks* of 1529, Luther attempts to find out what the Turk be and for what he should be taken according to the Holy Scripture. Like medieval scholars before him, Luther interpreted Islam as somehow linked with the Anti-Christ. However, in contrast to the received view, he did not directly identify Islam or Muhammad with the Anti-Christ but the Pope. Islam or Muhammad was only his messenger. The Turk, writes Luther, is “Pope-like” for like the Pope he believes in salvation through deeds (and not through good intentions). Unlike his medieval predecessors who took Islam for a Christian heresy – that is a distorted faith, but a faith nevertheless – Luther seems to suggest that Islam is no religion at all and that it can thus not be countered by preaching the true religion but only by force.

Luther and the time of Reformation coincide with other major developments in Europe such as the “discovery” of the New World, the emergence of modern science and technology, all of which lead over to what has come to be called the modern era. From the Peace of Westphalia, which ends decades of religious war in Europe, the modern system of independent territorial

states emerges. In different European countries and with different speed, the modern state evolves with a political and public sphere that gradually emancipates itself from any reference to religion. This process is not completed even today as the many different kinds of church-state relations among European countries show. But in Europe the disconnection of most spheres of discourse from the framework provided by organised Christianity has been very far reaching.

Orient and Occident Today

This process was accompanied by a parallel historical process that transformed the symbolic frame of reference of organised religion itself. A Medieval Christian and a contemporary Catholic or Protestant have very little in common. Even in the minds of religious people today, religion does no longer provide the all purpose tool for dealing with questions of human existence. Correspondingly, the threat posed by an alternative faith that calls into question the very basis of one’s own orientation is not felt so severely as it may have been felt by Medieval men and women. Nevertheless, reciprocal stereotyping between “Orientals” and “Westerners” continues. It may acquire new connotations, which are less exclusively linked to religion but more to political circumstances in Muslim countries and their relationships with the West. Since the colonial conquests of European powers has shaken up the Muslim world the attitude of Muslims towards the West is marked by ambiguity. On one hand there are the crippling experiences of colonialism and imperialism, of short-sighted and opportunistic policies of Western countries, particularly the US, in the Near East. On the other hand there is also the fascination with the West, its technology, its symbols of power and wealth, its liberality and permissiveness. A contemporary Muslim, Tariq Ramadan, characterises the resulting love-hate relationship in a recent article:

Western culture seems to have settled everywhere and imposes itself through the globalisation of media and means of communication. Everywhere, one can observe the same phenomenon of attraction-repulsion that is common to psychological situations nurtured by a feeling of self-dispossession – while instinct and desire attract us to an object, our intelligence and conscience cause us to hate what stirs and sometimes intoxicates us. Muslim majority communities and societies are run through with such contradictory tensions that sometimes come close to

nurturing almost schizophrenic attitudes and discourse towards the "West" which people are as eager to imitate as to condemn.

Since the work of Edward Said one has become wary of the distinction between Orient and Occident. However, with rising Islamophobia in “the West” the juxtaposition of “Europe” and “the Muslim world” has again become widespread. Discourses on European identity are increasingly framed in the old terminology of the Islamic Orient and the Christian Occident.

This imagery is marred by entities that do not quite fit into the bipolar divide. Europe is full of examples of regions that form part of Europe and, at the same time, of the Muslim world. This may be true for the present as is the case with many countries and regions of the Balkans that still are of a predominantly Muslim population. Or it may be true of other countries or regions that at some point of their history were under Muslim rule such as Spain, Sicily or parts of the former Russian empire. The Orient equally is full of examples that resist such categorisation.

While these examples challenge the dichotomy between Europe and the Muslim world this dichotomy seems too entrenched to be overcome in a simple act of good will or political correctness. The antagonism resides firmly in the minds of people and since to a great extent our social reality is formed by what most of us believe, the antagonism between Europe and the Muslim world is “real”. Hopefully, by looking at the fuzzy borders of our “selves” and those of our “others”, we will eventually change our minds and think of “us” and “them” in less antagonistic terms.

Moreover, any juxtaposition or contrast requires a third entity by reference to which comparisons can be drawn. In the case at hand, it is not clear what the relevant tertium comparationis should be. “Europe” denotes a region by way of a geographical term. If “the Muslim world” is to be understood accordingly as denoting a geographical region, then the question arises as to why we should single out such an enormous geographical sphere by reference to a religion? Here again the juxtaposition of “Europe” and “the Muslim World” is more indicative of euro-centrism than anything else.

The asymmetrical categorisation of “us” and “them” in geographical vs. religious terms seems to be a contemporary version of the tropes “civilised” vs. “barbarian” that hail from Greek and Roman Antiquity. The terminology suggests that here we have an area where people have

emancipated themselves from their dependence on religious-mythological thinking and there we have a civilisation that is wrapped in myth and obscurity. Here we have the civilisation that has outgrown its received traditions and religions attachments in favour of individual autonomy, wherein reside every human's dignity. There we have a civilisation that is stuck in pre-enlightenment notions of humanity, where human dignity is inseparably linked with the fulfilment of role expectations within received traditions, traditions that are justified by reference to Islam.

The underlying notion of civilisation is that of a semiotic frame of reference that serves members of different cultures (which in turn are semiotic frames of reference, if only smaller) as a common basis for communication. Through such semiotic reference frames people share certain basic tenets about the character and composition of the world and its history, possibly of metaphysical worlds beyond the empirical world and their significance for their life here and now and thereafter. Those frames of reference are not self-contained and sealed. They overlap and supersede each other both synchronously and diachronously. A single person can partake of several symbolic frames of reference and thereby partake of several civilisations at once.