

Also published in "Islam and the Construction of Europe", in Shadid, W.A.R. and van Koningsveld, P.S. (eds.), *Muslims in the Margin: Political Responses to the Presence of Islam in Western Europe*, Kampen: Kok Pharos 1996

# ISLAM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE

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Just where and what is Europe? And what are the consequences of that construction? It should come as no surprise that such questions are asked, for even though the assumption that Europe is a clearly demarcated geographical space, whose indigenous inhabitants (together with their large global diaspora) share a wide range of social, cultural and possibly even biological characteristics which mark them off from non-Europeans is a routine — and possibly a defining — feature the contemporary world, Europeans are by no means exceptional in taking for granted the basic parameters of their conceptual order. Yet just who *are* Europeans? What makes them such? Why are the boundaries of Europe, and hence of Europeanness located where they are? In what ways do they differ from non-Europeans? Just how and why did this disjunction, whatever its foundations, gain its current salience?

Once broached, the importance and significance of these questions is self-apparent. To address them we must begin by exploring the issues empirically, in order to establish just where the borders of Europe and Europeanness are located, and how they are conceptualised by those involved. But this exercise also leads directly on to a second, for if these borders are socially constructed rather than self-evident facts of nature — as is invariably the case with man-made boundaries — we are also faced with a further set of questions: just *why* has Europe been so constructed, and what are its consequences?

## **Where and What is Europe?**

The physical boundaries of Europe as conventionally understood are relatively easy to identify: like millions of other schoolchildren, I learnt from my geography teacher that Europe is the landmass lying to the north of the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the mountains of the Caucasus and the Caspian, and although the precise location of the disjunction between Europe and Asia was a little uncertain, this could be resolved by drawing a line from the Arctic ocean down through the Ural mountains to the Caspian. So that was that: we were now in a position to draw lines on the map enabled us to mark out Europe quite unambiguously in spatial terms.

Yet our conceptualisation of Europe involved much more than an ability to mark off and label the northwestern corner of the much larger Afro-Asiatic landmass. In common, I suspect, with millions of others, we also took it for granted that the indigenous inhabitants of this area (a group to which I and my classfellows manifestly belonged) also shared certain common characteristics, and on the basis of which Europeans could therefore be differentiated from

non-Europeans. But just what were those characteristics? As I recall, our teachers offered us a much less specific account of Europe's social as opposed to its spatial identity, but even so our lessons, further supplemented by what we learned from films, comics, adventure stories and so forth provided us with plentiful material from which to draw our own conclusions. Thus despite the very obvious differences between Europe's various national components, we took it for granted that all Europeans shared, by definition, a number of common cultural characteristics — even if we would have been hard-pressed to specify just what these were. We also took it for granted that although North America and Australia might be far removed from Europe in spatial terms, those parts of their population which were of European descent were “like us”. As such they stood in sharp contrast to the indigenous peoples of these colonised territories, and indeed to the indigenous inhabitants of Asia and Africa, whom we perceived as standing quite outside — and indeed as being alien to — the European civilization to which we ourselves belonged. To be sure we might often have been most unclear about the actual content of these differences, but our education and socialisation nevertheless generated a mindset which indicated that the disjunction between Europeans and non-Europeans was both profound and far reaching.

Nor was this perception restricted solely to the cultural sphere. European languages such as French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian were those which we might expect to learn as a normal part of our education — even if our very English agenda led us to make little more than a feeble effort to do so, on the grounds that it was more reasonable to expect for “foreigners” to learn English than for us to learn another language. But there were foreigners and foreigners. Beyond the immediate arena of at least potentially learnable European languages lay a wide variety of much more exotic tongues, such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi and Turkish, and to which only the most serious academic scholars could ever hope to gain access.<sup>1</sup>

Over and above all this there is also the question of biological difference — or at least of differences in physical appearance. Although I cannot recall being offered an explicitly biological explanation of European distinctiveness during the course of my schooling, it is not without significance that I and my contemporaries grew up in the post-holocaust era. If for no other reason our experience was almost certainly very different from that of our predecessors, given that biological understandings of “race” and racial difference were a routine component of the intellectual and educational environment throughout the first half of the twentieth century. But even if the post-holocaust generation of Europeans was not formally exposed to biological theories of human difference, I am very conscious that it was only when I took an undergraduate course in Physical Anthropology that I was explicitly introduced to the scientific evidence and arguments with which to demonstrate the falsity of such a perspective.

However very few undergraduates attended such courses, then or now. Instead the educational system's preferred approach to the issue was (and is) simply to exclude biological theories of “race” from the intellectual agenda. Such a strategy can easily be shown to be grossly inadequate, for in the absence of an explicit challenge to popular ideas, expectations and perceptions, they can only be expected to persist — and certainly did so in our case. Hence even if our formal education offered no explicit support for such perceptions, we nevertheless took it for granted that “European” was amongst other things a *biological*

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In Britain “Oriental Languages” are routinely taught only in Oxford, Cambridge, and at the specialist School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

category, such that all Europeans shared a distinctive biological heritage. Once again we would have been hard-pressed to identify just what these differences were, except in one sphere: skin colour and physical appearance. Europeans, we took it for granted, were “white”, such that all non-Europeans could be expected to have a significantly darker skin colour than our own.

While the arguments above reflect my own experience of primary and grammar schooling in southern England in the immediate post-war period, and although perceptions and experiences will inevitably vary a good deal by age, class and social context, I suspect that the mind-set into which I and my peers were socialised were far from unique. Although local variations are bound to exist, I nevertheless suspect that such perceptions and self-identifications are characteristic not just of an English experience such as my own, but are also shared across the length and breadth of Europe. If so it becomes even more important to explore how and why such ideas came into existence, why they are so structured, how and why they have been perpetuated, and most significantly of all, what purpose their existence serves.

### **The Arbitrary character of the European Construct**

One of the most important obstacles to an exploration of the genesis of taken for granted constructs is that the ideas and differentiations in which they are grounded appear to be so obvious and inevitable that their arbitrary foundations are comprehensively obscured. Hence at the risk of stating the obvious, it is worth setting out the evidence that Europe’s conventional boundaries have indeed been arbitrarily constructed — at least in the sense that it would be perfectly possible to erect alternative disjunctions by utilising a differing combination of linguistic, cultural, geographical and biological criteria.

While the identification of the huge promontory lying to the north of the western Mediterranean and the Black Sea as a distinctive territorial unit — whether we label it Europe or West Asia is immaterial — might seem at first sight to be a sensible act of classificatory geography, a moment’s reflection reveals that there is no reason why this physical space should of necessity be of any great social, political or economic importance. To our contemporary imagination the Mediterranean appears to be an obvious setter-apart of differing worlds, but it was not always so: until a few centuries ago an inland sea offered a relatively safe and certainly much speedier means of travel and transportation than did the land, and few other civilizations were more united-by-sea than that which grew up around the Mediterranean. And while road, rail and air transport may recently have undermined the long-standing superiority of maritime communication, it is striking that although the straits of Gibraltar and the Bosphorous now mark an exceptionally wide conceptual gulf, the straits of Dover and Denmark — although physically wider — mark much less significant conceptual disjunctions.

Why should this be so? Why should the boundaries of what we identify as Europe lie where they do and be so strongly marked? One possibility is that the intrinsic biological characteristics of the residents of this territory are sufficiently distinctive to support this disjunction as a fact of nature. Certainly most Europeans assume that this is so, and in crude terms one can see why they should hold this belief: on the mean, the indigenous inhabitants of the West Asian peninsula have markedly paler skin colouration than that found amongst the remainder of the species. Moreover this excessive paleness does have clear biological foundations. As a result of generations of selective adaptation the level of melanin found in the

skins of the indigenous population of the northwesterly corner of the Euro/Afro/Asian landmass is significantly lower than the mean for *homo sapiens* as a whole. Moreover this genetic deficiency can be relatively straightforwardly explained as an adaptive response to the limited UV exposure experienced during generations of residence in a cool, cloudy, and relatively northerly territory by a population with a largely vegetarian diet containing low levels of vitamin D (Loomis, 1967). Yet although population genetics does at least partially affirm the notion of European distinctiveness, what it most emphatically does not confirm is the popular assumption that Europeans can be unhesitatingly identified as a clearly demarcated population in biological terms. Quite the contrary. Population genetics leads to quite the opposite conclusion, for what it reveals is not clear-cut categorical boundaries but rather multiple clinal variations in gene frequencies, few of which are congruent with each other. Hence even if one of the few distinctive genetic features of Europe's population arises from their local adaptation to UV deficiency, the clinal character of this genetic trait means that it is no way restricted to a clearly bounded population. Hence for a human geneticist it comes as no surprise that the skin colour differential between populations living on either side of the straits of Gibraltar or the Dardanelles is virtually non-existent. In other words population genetics offers no explanation for the conventional location of Europe's boundaries, or indeed for the erection of any other categorical (and hence "racial") boundaries within the species *homo sapiens* (Cavalli-Sforza, 1995).

Yet if the biological basis of European distinctiveness is a myth (albeit as a classic example of a charter for an institution in the Malinowskian sense) the claim may well turn out to be more soundly grounded in social, cultural and linguistic terms, not least because a belief that such commonalities do indeed exist is no less central to the myth of Europe than is the claim to a common biological heritage. However close examination demonstrates once again that this expectation has relatively little substance. Firstly Europe exhibits a high degree of internal social, cultural and linguistic variation — as for example, between Scotland and Greece, or between Russia and Spain. Secondly when it comes to marking off its boundaries, we encounter just the same phenomena as we did with the genetic arguments: despite a strong conceptual commitment to the presence of radical cultural disjunctions between Greeks and Turks, Spaniards and Moroccans, and Georgians and Azeris, close examination soon reveals that the continuities — especially in terms of popular traditions of music, poetry, cuisine and dress — across these so-called boundaries are far more extensive than chauvinist defenders of deep-rooted difference are normally willing to admit.

### **Europe, Christianity and Islam**

How, then, is the manifest vigour and stability of the idea of Europe to be explained? My own view is that the one possibility that I have overlooked so far — that Europe's distinctiveness is best understood in *religious* terms, on the grounds that its contemporary boundaries are largely congruent with the disjunction between Christianity and Islam — deserves the closest possible examination. Of course some reservations about this definition still need to be borne in mind. As current developments in Bosnia remind us, Europe's wholly indigenous population also includes communities with a long-standing commitment to Islam; moreover Europe's population now includes some ten million Muslims whose presence derives from post-war labour migration. Likewise it is by no means the case — whatever popular European imagination may assume — that the territories to its south and east are wholly populated by Muslims. Islam may have been politically dominant in the Middle East and North Africa for

well over a millennium, but Iraq, Syria, the Lebanon, Palestine and above all Egypt<sup>2</sup> the local population has always contained a small (but often very significant) Christian and Jewish presence. Hence apart from these caveats, there seems little doubt that at least in conceptual terms, if not so emphatically in empirical terms, the variable most closely congruent with Europe's current spatial boundary is a religious one: between popular commitment to Christianity on the one hand, and to Islamic political dominance on the other.

This in turn sets the agenda for the remainder of this paper, which is devoted firstly to an exploration of the historical emergence of the idea of Europe, and secondly to an examination of the way in which the conceptual disjunction between Christendom and its inhabitants and their perceived Islamic alter has been developed and utilised over the centuries. I would argue that without an awareness of the history of these developments, it is quite impossible to understand why the boundaries of Europe and Europeanness should have been erected at their current location, or to appreciate why those boundaries are still defended with such vigour, despite the fact that popular commitment to the more spiritual dimensions of the Christian tradition is in steep decline almost everywhere.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Crusades and the Foundation of the European Enterprise**

Although it is undoubtedly the case that the idea of Europe has a long history, the way in which it was construed in ancient times shows very little congruence with modern usage;<sup>4</sup> and since one of the most obvious correlates of Europe's boundaries as currently conceptualised is the disjunction between Christendom and Islam, there is good reason to expect that an examination of the dynamics of the initial encounter between proto-Europe and its Islamic counterpart will provide a particularly useful analytical starting point. However in so doing I should emphasise that this is not to suggest that the Crusaders were therefore engaged in a European enterprise in a contemporary sense. Quite the contrary: the Crusaders perceived themselves not as Europeans but as warriors for Christ, and as conducting righteous war

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Egypt's Coptic population includes approximately 7 million people.

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In a much commented upon article in *Foreign Affairs*, Huntington (1993) not only predicts that "The next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations", but also indicates that the most likely location of such a war will be across the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations.

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In his analysis of the way in which the second century B.C.E. Book of Jubilees expands on Genesis X, Alexander (1982) shows how its author has effectively superimposed a Biblical view on earlier Greek understandings of circum-Mediterranean geography to produce the now-familiar association between Europe, Asia and Libya (=Africa) and Noah's three sons Japhet, Shem and Ham. However Alexander also shows that the author of Jubilees follows Greek precedents in identifying the boundaries of these regions as the river Don, the river Nile and the straits of Gibraltar, and that although these divisions subsequently proved to be a very fertile source of myth making, their social and political implications at that time were quite different from more recent conceptualisations of their significance.

against the evil followers of a false prophet who had illegitimately occupied the holy land. Yet despite the apparently distant agenda of these medieval defenders of Christendom, many aspects of the Crusader's enterprise, and most especially of the conceptual vision in terms of which they legitimated their activities, prove to be remarkably congruent with contemporary European images, values and assumptions.

With this in mind I do not intend to pay any attention to the social and political tensions within the Church, or amongst the feudal aristocracy of the Frankish region where the Crusader's extraordinary military adventures were hatched: such a discussion is way beyond the scope of this Chapter. My aim, by contrast, is to explore the *ideas* in terms of which the Crusaders justified their adventure, and also the way in which they conceptualised the disjunction between the values which they saw themselves as fighting for, as opposed to those which they attributed to their enemies — the inhabitants of the territories over which they gained (or at least sought to gain) control.

In carrying out this exercise it soon becomes apparent not only that the Crusaders were remarkably ill-informed about the values and capabilities of their opponents, but also that in some senses this was not at all surprising. It was not just that Islam had become politically dominant in much of the territory formerly controlled by the Byzantine and Persian Empires; by the tenth century C.E. its population was a great deal more prosperous than the proto-European territories to the north and west, whose mean level of education, literacy, and intellectual awareness was also dramatically lower than in these Islamic lands. Yet if the Frankish Crusaders were consequently far less sophisticated than their oriental opponents, there is also a strong sense in which their ignorance was quite deliberate. As Daniel (1975) demonstrates in devastating detail, the intruders made almost no effort to gain a positive understanding of the Islamic world, preferring instead to view their new-found enemies through the highly restrictive prisms of their own limited and inevitably self-justifying understandings.

So just what was the vision of themselves and their opponents which was thus produced? From their own pious standpoint, any deviation from established Christian orthodoxy was by definition a dangerous heresy; but this was a heresy of the severest possible kind, since it went far beyond disputes about the precise relationship of Jesus with the other components of the Christian Godhead which then racked the Church. Islam went much further, for this was a tradition which denied Jesus' messianic status (although not his prophethood) in favour of what assumed to be an alternative Messiah. In the light of the strong tendency towards dualistic thinking embedded within Latin Christianity — and whose roots I shall explore later — it is hardly surprising Muslims soon came to be viewed not just as infidels and idolaters, but also but as a manifestation of the deep-rooted conflict between the forces of goodness and evil. It was on this basis that result early medieval Christians convinced themselves that Muslims must be followers of the anti-Christ, and that Islam's central objective was to attempt to undermine the project for human redemption which Jesus Christ had set in train.

Setting the theological arguments aside for a moment, it is not hard to identify mundane reasons why those who joined the Crusades might have found this vision attractive. Over and above the opportunity which it offered to the organisers of the Crusades to persuade their followers that the pursuit of distant injustices — or what could be so perceived — was of far greater importance than finding remedies to more local difficulties, in the eleventh century Islam's very success did indeed seem both perplexing and deeply threatening to many of the inhabitants of this poor and peripheral region. With the rise of Islam, almost all the most important centres of wealth, power and scholarship in the circum-Mediterranean region were

incorporated into the new order, and in 732 an Islamic army marched as far north as Poitiers before retreating to consolidate its hold over the Iberian peninsula. From the Crusaders' perspective Islam was not just the epitome of threatening otherness, but appeared to be successfully swallowing the entire known world: it was therefore an ideal target against which to direct unrequited hostility.

### **Christendom versus Islam**

Yet just how was this Islamic other conceptualised? Not surprisingly the Prophet Mohammed himself was a central focus of attention, most particularly by contrast with Jesus of Nazareth. In so doing the Christians would have no truck with the Islamic view of Jesus (as well as all the Jewish prophets) one of a number of prophetic messengers, to which the revelation vouchsafed to Mohammed revelation was the final seal. Then as now, very little interest was taken in the actual content of Islamic theology, so such so that this possibility was not only ignored, but actively resisted. Hence instead of being viewed as a participant in the same tradition as Jesus Christ, the Prophet Mohammed (whose name was often deliberately misspelt as Mahound) was routinely perceived as representing its very inverse. Some aspects of that inversion have already been noted, such that Mohammed was viewed as the anti-Christ and the personification of evil. But the trope went much further: Jesus' chasteness was unfavourably contrasted with Mohammed's alleged licentiousness, on the grounds that Mohammed not only married a multiplicity of wives but had also enjoyed an active sex-life; Jesus' avoidance of violence was also unfavourably compared with Mohammed's alleged passion for war, given Mohammed's role as an active and indeed successful military leader; likewise Jesus' simplicity, honesty and straightforwardness was unfavourably compared with Mohammed's alleged deviousness and duplicity, on the grounds that the precise details of the revelations which the Prophet had received from Allah (and which the Christians in any case always dismissed as mere delusions) developed and changed during the course of his career. And if Christianity, and indeed Jesus himself, was the epitome of purity, then this rival tradition was by definition its inverse — evil and impure. Hence Mohammed was not only perceived as a licentious, vicious, violent and duplicitous personification of the evil anti-Christ, but also as comprehensively black.<sup>5</sup>

How best can we analyze these perceptions? While this construction (as well as its many successors) is manifestly profoundly misinformed about the teachings of Islam and its Prophet, to put a great deal of analytical effort into demonstrating its untruth is surely to miss the point. By contrast an exploration of how and why it is that the users of these images were so determined to misguide themselves, and indeed why their successors have continued so to do for the best part of a millennium is far more illuminating. Hence I would argue that instead of highlighting the mistaken character of these images (deeply and insultingly mistaken though they are) they are much better understood as the consequence of boundary construction, and most especially one in which those within the boundary have sought to establish and validate their own (ideal) characteristics by attributing a wholly inverse set of attributes to the alien others who stand outside immediately outside it. In logical terms this amounts to the use of the formula {*p* is what *not-p* is not}, a procedure which not only serves to underline the arbitrary and above all non-essential basis of most processes of boundary construction, but also to

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In his much criticised and even more profoundly misunderstood *Satanic Verses* Salman Rushdie made an extremely very well-informed attempt to reinvert these inversions, even if the ultimate outcome of his efforts was a complete disaster.

illuminate the underlying structural logic of Crusader's vision of the nature of the disjunction between themselves and their opponents.

Jesus	:	Mahound
Christ	:	Anti-Christ
Chaste	:	Licentious
Subject of violence	:	Initiator of violence
Merciful	:	Vicious
Honest	:	Duplicitous
Inspired	:	Mad
Righteous	:	Sinful
Pure	:	Impure
Light	:	Darkness

If this analysis is sound, it follows that the ascription of such catalogue of inadequacy to Islam and its Prophet was of immense convenience to the Crusaders since it allowed them to comprehensively differentiate themselves from their opponents whilst also underlining the inherent justice of their cause. It also follows that such constructions reveal nothing of value about the real character of the *alter* from which they chose to differentiate themselves, for the central function of the attributes in the right hand column is to throw those in the left hand column into the clearest possible relief.

### **The Crusades, Islam and the Construction of Europe**

Given their use of such a frame of reference, the quite outrageous way in which the Crusaders behaved towards all those whom they encountered once they had crossed the Bosphorous and entered Muslim-controlled territory becomes more explicable — although in no sense more justifiable. Within their taken for granted mind set the Crusaders categorised the entire population of the alien territory which they had entered in the same way, regardless of religious affiliation. Hence they treated the local Christian and Jewish populations whom they encountered little better than Muslims: all were viewed as equally “other”, such that their very presence in the Holy Land was antithetical to the righteous objectives of the defenders of the True Cross.<sup>6</sup> Justification for the Crusaders' many bloody outrages was therefore immediately available.

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These views and their consequences are reviewed in considerable detail in both Daniel 1975 and Maalouf 1983.

Yet despite their initial success in carving out a precarious toe-hold for themselves in Palestine, the Crusaders were unable to sustain that presence for long. Having captured Jerusalem in 1099 C.E., they were expelled from the city by Salah-ad-din in 1187,<sup>7</sup> and lost control of their last bastion in Acre just over a century later in 1291. Once mobilised, the Muslims soon overwhelmed the Frankish incursion. What is most striking, however, is that although these trans-Mediterranean adventures gave the intruders first-hand experience of the Islamic world, this had remarkably little impact on attitudes and opinions — whether popular or scholarly — back home. Hence despite the immense (but still largely unacknowledged) impact of Islamic learning on the Latin world, little or no interest was taken in either the religion or civilization which had produced it. Instead the vision of Islam as the antithesis of Christianity eagerly reinforced, as was the equation between “Saracens”, “Moors” and all kinds of oriental others.

It was in this sense that the Crusades can usefully be regarded as a mould-setting development. In the face of the emergence of an overwhelmingly powerful Islamic order to its south and east, a sense of collective identity began to crystallise amongst the population of the territory which was subsequently to identify itself as Europe — and most especially as western Europe. However the banner under which collective mobilisation began to be organised was that of Christendom, while the other at whom this nascent power was directed was perceived as being Muslim, oriental and black. The foundations around which contemporary conceptualisations of Europe were to be constructed were now in place.

### **The Re-conquest of Spain and the Logic of the Inquisition**

Nevertheless it took some time before the idea of Europe expanded to fill its current conceptual space, not least because the greater part of the Iberian peninsula was incorporated into the Islamic world in 718 C.E. It was from the security of Al-Andalus that the Ummayyad Khalifas ruled in great splendour until 1031 C.E., and although Islamic Spain grew steadily weaker in military terms under their successors, for several centuries thereafter it remained an intellectual and cultural powerhouse. Indeed it was not until 1492 C.E. that the last Muslim foothold in Iberia, the kingdom of Granada, finally surrendered to the forces of the Christian reconquest. What is worth noting, however, is the sharp contrast in the character of inter-religious relationships in Christian as opposed to Islamic Spain.

While the initial Islamic irruption from North Africa undoubtedly took the form of a military conquest, by no means all Spanish Muslims were immigrants from elsewhere. While the ancestral origins of many members of the ruling elite may — like the Ummayyads themselves — have lain elsewhere in the Islamic world, many members of the region’s indigenous population were also willing converts to Islam. And if only to counter pernicious mythology, it is worth emphasising that it is not the case that Spain’s Muslim rulers sought to force their subjects to convert, nor that they put non-converts in a position of severe social

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Stories of battles between Richard the Lion-heart and the violent and heartless Saladin remain a staple of English children’s fiction. Needless to say a more historically-informed assessment of the character of the two leaders reverses most of the judgements which are central to those stories.

and economic disadvantage. Quite the contrary: Islamic Spain contained thriving Jewish and Christian populations, and although ultimate political dominance may have been in Muslim hands, members of all three traditions treated each other with considerable mutual respect — as was generally the case throughout the Islamic world.<sup>8</sup>

However the Christian reconquest which gradually forced its way out of the barren highlands of Castile into the more prosperous south brought with it a much more narrow minded set of attitudes, based very substantially largely on the proto-European perspective which had been developed during the course of the Crusades. As far as the Conquistadors were concerned, the Christian tradition allowed no space for pluralistic compromises. Hence the reconquest not only entailed a reassertion of political control, but also a comprehensive process of re-christianization, since Islam and Judaism were regarded as wholly alien to, and indeed as wholly unacceptable within, a Christian context. Spanish Jews and Muslims were therefore offered a stark choice: either they could convert, or must leave on pain of death. Despite a considerable amount of emigration, many Jews and Muslims avoided expulsion by adopting Christianity, although this by no means brought their troubles to an end. On the contrary the “new Christians” — known as Marranos if of Jewish origin, and Moriscos when of Muslim descent — remained the objects of intense suspicion. The slightest of evidence that their lifestyles included so-called “un-christian” practices was held strongly against them, whilst their hereditary origins was for long afterwards held to throw doubts on the genuineness of their religious commitment.

Thus despite Christianity’s formal commitment to proselytisation and the prospect of conversion, being a Christian was perceived as involving much more than belief and religious practice: the precise details of one’s personal lifestyle, and indeed of one’s descent came to be regarded as just as important. And it was precisely because of continuing suspicions about the reality of the new Christians’ commitment to their adopted faith that the Inquisition took such vigorous shape in Spain, since the most important heresies which it’s investigators sought to root out were those which might potentially be harboured by the Moriscos and Marranos. Hence in sharp contrast to the expectations of Al-Andalus, not only was religious pluralism rendered unacceptable, but religious commitment — whether to Christianity, Judaism or Islam — came to be seen as a matter of heredity.

These developments had some very important consequences for the evolution of the idea of Europe. In the first place what we might now describe as process of ethnic cleansing in which Jewish and Islamic practice was eliminated from the Iberian peninsula powerfully reinforced the expectation (Christian) religious homogeneity was an essential foundation of the social order; the extension of this homogeneity right through to the straits of Gibraltar established another of contemporary Europe’s boundary markers; and last but not least the inquisition further entrenched the view that Judaism and Islam were intrinsically alien to Christendom/proto-Europe, full membership of which was also identified as hereditarily

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Introducing his analysis of the relationship between medieval Latin Christianity and Islam, Daniel (1975, p.23ff) tells the extraordinary story of the ninth century martyrs of Cordoba, who went out of their way to insult the prophet Mohammed in front of the Islamic authorities; censure was inevitable, but the *provocateurs* were very determined. By deliberately repeating the offence, they left eventually left the Cadi with no alternative but to order the ultimate sanction of death. Both the martyrs and their admirers were well satisfied with this outcome, which “proved” their theory that Islam was merciless and addicted to violence.

determined. Once equipped with this mindset, it also followed that the immense intellectual and architectural achievements Al-Andalus could only be perceived as a Moorish, alien, and un-European — and thus of no account. Nor was this just true of Spain: the extent of the Islamic contribution to the development of European civilization is still largely overlooked to this day, while the long standing Muslim presence in Bosnia, Albania, Bulgaria, Russia and the Ukraine was rendered equally invisible. Given Europe's vision of itself, the prospect that Europe might have, or ever have had, and Islamic dimension became such a contradiction in terms that it became quite literally unthinkable.<sup>9</sup>

## **The legitimization of global Imperialism**

Yet if Europe's vision of itself was initially laid down in pre-modern times, and thus in response to the then prevailing socio-political context, the global economic and political order has since been radically transformed, above all by the subsequent process of European Imperial expansion. But although our central concerns here are with processes of ideological construction rather than of political and economic change, there can be little doubt that this pre-modern ideological vision not only served to legitimate the Imperial process, but was itself profoundly affected by the enthusiasm with which it was deployed in these new circumstances.

Within that wider conspectus, it is worth noting the central role of Spain in the initial development of the new global order, symbolised by the spectacular coincidence between the fall of Granada, Islam's last stronghold in Spain, and Christopher Columbus' departure for the "New World" in 1492 C.E.. Since the subsequent global process of discovery, conquest, colonisation and exploitation was initiated in the immediate aftermath of the reconquest, it is hardly surprising that those involved continued to deploy exactly the same ideological framework to legitimise their activities. Hence the new global imperialists not only justified their activities in Christian terms — or at least in terms of the expansion of Christendom — but also took it for granted that while the idolatrous heathens whom they encountered were ripe for conversion, they were also by definition inherently inferior and untrustworthy, and could therefore never be their colonizers' social or political equals. Similarly while the various sets of adventurers who sought to gain access to the honey-pot were soon engaged in vicious mutual competition, all were nevertheless agreed on one point: however great their mutual conflicts, they were all Christians. Hence their mutual differences were as nothing as compared to those between themselves and the black barbarians whose territories and persons they sought to exploit and overrun.

It was on this basis that the trope which I have already outlined was elaborated still further, but this time with specific respect to tropical Africa. Unfortunately I have insufficient space to explore these developments in detail, other than to suggest that the pattern of oppositions which I set out below are already present in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, and that they can be found in full flower in (for example) Burrough's novel *Tarzan of the Apes*, as well in Hollywood's many screen adaptations of the story.

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<sup>9</sup> This is precisely the conclusion to which Daniel (1975) is driven in the course of his masterful review of the history of ideas in Medieval Europe.

European	:	African
White	:	Black
Civilization	:	Jungle
Intellect	:	Physical strength
Sexual restraint	:	Sexual abandonment
Reason	:	Passion
Responsive to law	:	Responsive to violence
Religion	:	Superstition
Culture	:	Nature

Once entrenched within the European psyche, this conceptual framework began to be globally applied, not least because it provided the process of Imperial expansion with ideological foundations which were both comprehensive and apparently secure.

Imperial expansion not only brought Europeans into contact with a much wider range of others than those of which they had previously been aware, but also precipitated a dramatic change in the balance of power across that disjunction. In sharp contrast to the experience of the Crusaders, the well-armed adventurers who advanced the frontiers of Empire to encompass the Americas, tropical Africa and Indonesia encountered opponents who were for the most part much weaker than themselves, most especially in military terms.<sup>10</sup> Political subordination was so easily imposed that it was widely assumed to be permanent.

As a result of these global Imperial adventures the balance of power across the Mediterranean also began to change: Europe and Europeans grew steadily wealthier, while the formerly prosperous regions to their south and east entered a period of steady decline,<sup>11</sup> so much so that they too were eventually subjected to Imperial domination. French colonisation in North Africa began in 1834, and by 1848 was sufficiently well-entrenched for Algeria to be declared an integral — but of course subordinate — part of France; in 1883 Britain effectively took control of Egypt, even if the country was never formally colonised; and when the Ottoman Empire collapsed in the aftermath of the first world war, Britain, France and Italy encompassed its remnants as their “Protectorates”. Needless to say the ideological vision of the intrinsic superiority of all things European reached new heights during this period.

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It is striking that in the Indian Ocean and the Far East European adventurers are best understood not so much as having established trade routes, but as having eclipsed their (largely Muslim) predecessors. And they did so not so much by virtue of greater commercial skills, but by enforcing better terms of trade quite literally down the barrels of their cannons.

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At least a part of this decline can be traced to the fact that having circumvented the Islamic obstacle in a way which had never been open to Venetian merchants, Spanish, Dutch and English merchants took over the oriental trade routes which had been a source of much of the prosperity of the Islamic heartlands.

## Judaism and the Construction of Europe

Tempting though it might be to run straight on with an examination of the role which European visions of its external *alters* played in this process, we must nevertheless pause for a moment to consider the impact of another crucial component in the construction of Europe, namely reactions to its principal internal *alter*: Judaism. While Islam rather than Judaism was the primary focus of the reconquest and thus the inquisition, the subsequent relative decline in the economic and political power of the Islamic world rendered it a much less useful *alter* around which to construct a sense of a collective European identity. Islam was just not threatening enough to fill such a role. Yet if Imperial success made European hegemony apparently unchallengeable without, a new paranoia emerged with respect to its internal integrity: that represented by the perceived threat of a Jewish presence.

Although the size of the Jewish population was everywhere relatively small, its members heavy concentration in commerce, and especially in banking, gave the community a particularly salient public profile. Yet while bankers rarely attract much popular affection — most especially amongst those indebted to them — the intensity of the anti-semitic attitudes which erupted in early modern Europe cannot be explained on these grounds alone. After all the vast majority of Jews were *not* financiers. Instead the foundations of anti-semitism were similar to (and indeed were initially generated in the same period as) the Crusaders' anti-Islamism. Jews, like Muslims, perceived as embodying the antithesis of Christian values; and if anti-Islamism was largely organised around a critique of the Prophet Mohammed, anti-Jewish hostility also had theological groundings, although in this case focusing primarily on the Jews' alleged responsibility for the crucifixion. Despite the privilege of their direct exposure to Jesus' teaching, the Jews were perceived as having deliberately and perversely rejected Christ's message, and indeed to have killed him — an act for which they must and should be held eternally to blame.

Once again popular understandings of Jews and Jewishness were in no way grounded in an awareness of the actual content of Jewish belief and behaviour. Just as with the Muslims — although with even less excuse given their immediate spatial proximity, as well as the biblical foundations of Jewish law and practices — Christian commentators remained (and were once again determined to remain) profoundly ignorant about such matters. Instead they preferred to assume that their Jewish neighbours' lifestyles and religious practices must by definition be the inverse of their own.

Hence if Christians lived by honest toil, Jews were perceived as making a living through gratuitous, mean-minded and exploitative financial manipulation; and if upright Christians worshipped the one true God, Jews were not only perceived as having perversely rejected the revelation which they had been privileged enough to witness, but also as organising their worship around rituals which were an even more perverse simulacrum of Christian practice. Hence it was widely believed that in the secrecy of their own tight-knit and clannish communities Jews celebrated a devilish version of the Eucharist, where they deliberately consumed the blood of specially sacrificed Christian infants. Using the same analytical approach as that which we deployed earlier, the following patterns can be seen to emerge in a Jewish/Christian context:

Christians : Jews

Workers	:	Usurers
Honest	:	Dishonest bloodsuckers
Generous	:	Mean
Open	:	Closed and clannish
Straightforward	:	Devious
Human	:	Inhuman
Inspired by God	:	Inspired by the devil
Pure	:	Polluted

As before, these oppositions tell us nothing of any reliability about Judaism, for the Jews' alleged characteristics were constructed once again as the inverse of the qualities which their Christian excluders believed to be characteristic of themselves.

### **Aryanism, Anti-semitism, and the articulation of German nationalism**

Although elaborated in a particularly dramatic way during the course of the Reformation,<sup>12</sup> these ideological constructions were by no means confined to the religious sphere, as became dramatically apparent in the context of the explosive growth of German nationalism during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As the German-speaking peoples of central Europe grew acutely conscious of their condition of political disunity, particularly in comparison to their great rivals, the French, the elaboration of an ideology of German-ness around which to construct a new sense of national unity became an urgent priority. This task was far from straightforward, however, not least because the Germans were well aware that their rivals to the west had long dismissed them as backward and uncivilised. How, then, could they construct a vision of themselves as a civilised people when the normal means of doing so — through an assertion of roots in an ancient Roman heritage — was bound to confirm the higher status of the French, whose Latin connections were manifestly much closer than their own?

It was in this context that the discovery of the remarkably close correspondence between the grammatical and lexical structure of Sanskrit and a number of European languages — and most particularly (or so it was believed) with German — came as a godsend. As Poliakov (1974) shows, this at long last provided German nationalists with a means of confirming that their civilization had ancient roots, not so much in what they could now dismiss as degenerate Rome, but rather in the even more ancient (and therefore more “classical”) traditions of Indo-European civilization. While this had the disadvantage (as some might see it) of offering at least one group of non-Europeans ideological equality with Europeans, this was of little concern to the Germans: unlike the French, the Portuguese and above all the British they had no imperial presence in India. Moreover the great advantage of the theory of Aryanism from a

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Martin Luther and his associates were responsible for articulating, and thus legitimating some particularly vicious forms of anti-Jewish rhetoric (Webster 1990)

German nationalist perspective was that it allowed them to construct a claim to distinctiveness which not only marginalised the French, but also enabled them to exclude their eastern rivals the Slavs even more firmly on the grounds that their heritage was non-Aryan. Hence nineteenth century German romanticism enjoyed immense success as it constructed a new and highly influential myth about the allegedly Aryan roots of European civilization in general, of the Germans in particular.

Yet however vacuous these Aryan fantasies may have been, they were far from harmless, not least because the occupants of the territory which nationalist sentiment now claimed as its natural heritage was far from homogeneous. While the Slavs were the most numerous of the allegedly alien non-Aryan groups resident in this territory, at an ideological level a much smaller group was perceived as offering a far greater threat to national integrity: that long-standing target of Christian chauvinism, the Jews. Hence the Jews' symbolic role as a convenient *alter* around which Germany — and beyond that Europe — might construct a sense of its religious and social integrity was powerfully reinforced.

Nor was that all. Not only did Aryan theory further legitimate hereditarian explanations of all aspects of social, cultural and religious distinctiveness, whilst also suggesting that any admixture of alien blood was necessarily a threat to the integrity of the superior Aryan *zeitgeist*, but this outlook was seen as being readily compatible with one of the most significant (and certainly one of the most intellectually influential) developments in nineteenth century science — Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. And while Darwin himself was a great deal more careful than the enthusiastic "Darwinism" which his discoveries inspired, the hereditarian, hierarchichal and essentialist perspective espoused by his followers was soon the intellectual rage across the length and breadth of Europe. As a result thinkers within a wide range of disciplines began to put an immense amount of effort into showing how all forms of human differentiation, whether social, cultural, religious or biological, within such an evolutionary schema. Of course virtually all of this "science" has since been comprehensively discredited, but this did not occur before an immense amount of damage had been done. By the end of the nineteenth century the process of racialisation (Miles 1989) was in full swing, such that ethnic and national disjunctions of all kinds were routinely represented as being biologically grounded.

This had far-reaching implications. Firstly the arbitrary character of all such disjunctions was comprehensively obscured by the assumption that they were naturally grounded, and therefore inevitable; secondly given the taken for granted assumptions of social Darwinism, it followed that all social, cultural and religious practices of all kinds could be arranged across a hierarchical spectrum from the more fit to the less; thirdly these ideas were immediately used not only to suggest that the social disjunctions to which these gave rise were biologically innate, but also to legitimize all forms of social inequality across them. It seemed so simple. Surely it was only right and proper that the more fit and more advanced should hold sway over those whose primitive characteristics rendered them less fit, less advanced and therefore less civilized?

Having penetrated virtually all areas of nineteenth century thought, such assumptions were swiftly applied in every conceivable context. It is not hard to see why. On the one hand they offered a ready means of legitimising the dramatically widening inequalities between metropolitan Europe and the global sweep of its Imperial possessions, and on the other of explaining away Europe's many internal inequalities, whether of class, ethnicity or religion. All could now be seen as equally "natural". No-where was this tendency more salient, or more significant, than with respect to Europe's Jewish population. Scientific racism powerfully

reinforced the long-standing view that Judaism was the antithesis of Christianity, for the Jews' semitic heritage was now confirmed not only as being different from and inferior to that of Europeans, but also as a threat to their *biological* integrity, and especially to the purity and vitality of their unique Aryan heritage.

As Poliakov (1982) demonstrates in his masterly overview, these ideas — albeit in various local guises — found a ready reception in all parts of Europe. Yet against this background Germany nevertheless emerges as a special case, since German nationalist's long-standing use of Jews and Jewishness as its central *alter* meant that nowhere was this mode of thinking embraced more enthusiastically than in Germany. One hardly needs to emphasise its horrific consequences: in an effort to cull out the biologically backward elements from the population, whether they were physically or mentally handicapped, Gypsies or Jews, six million souls were herded into gas chambers.

Indeed so outrageous was this episode in European history that once highlighted by the victors of 1945, it wholly transformed the way in which ethnic differentiation would be conceptualised, at least for the immediate future: since then the overt biologisation of ethnic difference has been wholly discredited, at least in polite circles, and “race” has therefore had to be placed between inverted commas. Yet before moving on to explore the subsequent developments, two points are worth making. Firstly that even though the holocaust was the ultimate apotheosis of the Aryan (and in a narrow sense German) fantasy, it must not be forgotten that the remainder of Europe's population offered little serious resistance to this process of ethnic cleansing — and thereby implicitly acquiesced in it.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, and consequently, the ideas which underpinned the holocaust cannot be seen as unique to Germany; they had become (and in all probability still remain) a pan-European phenomenon.

## **Europe and Islam in the late twentieth century**

Although it would be idle to suggest that anti-semitic attitudes, or indeed more general support for theories of biological racism, have been entirely eclipsed in the aftermath of the holocaust, it is indisputable that the public expression of such views did become profoundly unfashionable, such that they now play a much more attenuated role in the construction of Europe than they did half a century ago. Instead other means — and most especially a renewed emphasis on culture rather than biology as an essential source of difference, and above all though a resurgence of anti-Islamic paranoia — have been used to achieve just the same ends. So it is that as we approach the millennium long-dormant ideas about and attitudes about the “Islamic threat” have sprung suddenly back into fashion, to provide a powerful new dynamic in the way in which Europe makes sense of itself. To appreciate the logic of this development we must briefly consider the radical shifts which have taken place in the pattern of political and economic relations between Europe and the Islamic lands to its south and east during the course of past half century.

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It seems most unlikely that the inhabitants of territories not subjected to German occupation would have behaved very differently from those that were. While most of Britain was not put to the test, the Jewish population *was* removed from the only part of its territory which was so occupied — the Channel Islands.

Firstly Europe's previously minuscule Muslim population has increased dramatically in size, largely as a result of the arrival of long-distance labour migrants in the midst of the post-war industrial boom. Although the migrants' national origins were extremely diverse, and by no means all were Muslim, the scale of Europe's Islamic population increased dramatically. It is now at least ten million strong, and rising fast. Secondly the steep rise in the price of oil during the nineteen seventies and eighties not only emphasised the extent to which Europe had come to rely on the Muslim world as a source of energy, but also highlighted the scale of the consequent outflow of wealth, even if the benefits of this new-found affluence was in fact largely confined to tiny ruling elites in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Emirates and (although slightly less dramatically) the Maghreb. Thirdly since rapid economic growth in Europe has been accompanied by continued stagnation in the Arab world (for very little of the new wealth trickled down to the broad mass of the population), the disparity of living standards to the north and south of the Mediterranean has widened still further. Nevertheless numerous bridgeheads across this divide are now in place as a result of mass migration during the sixties and seventies, and although fortress Europe is now committed to bringing that inflow to a halt, it still continues almost inexorably. Economic inequality across the Mediterranean has steadily increased the pressure to migrate, and even though new arrivals from the Islamic world are only too aware of the intense hostility they can expect to encounter, moving north offers at least a *chance* of prosperity, however remote. Staying put seems to offer nothing but a dead end.

Last but not least, the collapse of the Soviet Union has produced a seismic shift whose aftershocks are still with us. Firstly Europe's eastern boundaries are beginning to crystallise more clearly than ever before. Ever more salient conflicts are now erupting between the Russians and their allies such as the Ukrainians, the Georgians and the Serbs on the one hand, and assorted Muslim groups such as the Turks, Chechens, Azeris, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Khazakhs on the other; a fault-line is once again emerging at the boundaries of Christendom. A second consequence of the demise of the Soviet Union is that the internal division between Eastern and Western Europe which once generated such obsessive concern has now largely disappeared, and with it the utility of "militant Communism" — or indeed its predecessor, "The Zionist conspiracy" as a focus for paranoid concern. Instead Islam has been brought back from abeyance to fill once again its former symbolic role as the antithesis of European civilization and all it stands for.

Yet despite the many structural parallels between the contemporary situation and that which emerged a millennium ago, there is one crucial difference between the two. In the original scenario it was Christendom which stood in a position of political and economic disadvantage, but in the contemporary context those roles have been comprehensively reversed. But if Europe's contemporary inhabitants consequently stand in sharp contrast to their tenth century predecessors, since they have no immediate need to fear the either the military power or the economic wealth of their Islamic neighbours, the contradictions across this disjunction have by no means been eliminated. If Europeans now feel threatened by their Muslim neighbours — as indeed they do — it is for precise the opposite reasons. The more Muslims seek to reduce current inequalities, the more they are bound to challenge the position of economic and political *privilege* which Europeans currently enjoy.

Not only are such challenges already being mounted both internally and externally, but they are also beginning to be articulated in ideological as well as material terms; not surprisingly, defensive responses to these challenges have now begun to be devised. While the reinforcement of Fortress Europe through the introduction of ever more draconian immigration controls is one such response, another is the ever-increasing tendency to

demonise the ten million or more Muslims who are now resident within, most particularly when they make an effort to articulate their own material, religious and cultural and cultural concerns. For although Europe's Muslims are anything but a homogeneous group, they all have certain common interests. All are worried about the level of exclusion and discrimination they encounter, and wish to challenge it; and although their understandings of what Islam consists of are extremely varied, all incorporate some kind of commitment to an Islamic agenda in their personal lives, and hence, for example, would wish to see that agenda treated with greater sympathy by the local educational system.

What is striking, however, is the intensity of the hostility which very presence of a Muslim population, let alone the articulation of the mildest of such Islamic demands is currently precipitating in virtually every corner of Europe where they have settled, so much so that there is good reason to suggest that the visions of difference originally erected a thousand years ago are now being both revived and revised.

While an explicit attempt to pillory Muslims as followers of the anti-Christ could not be expected to make much impact in a contemporary context, a careful examination of the pattern of structural oppositions set out on page 10 in the light of current obsessions reveals some disturbing parallels. On the face of it "licentiousness" might now seem to be a quite meaningless charge — until one remembers that the super-sensuous harem remains an image of considerable force, while a favourite criticism of Islamic lifestyles is that its gender conventions are innately oppressive, and allegedly sanction a comprehensive degradation of women. However the view that Islam necessarily renders Muslims violent, vicious, duplicitous and mad chimes more directly with contemporary views, and is supplemented with an even more popular image of Muslims as over-committed fanatics, or in other words as "fundamentalists". Not only have the terms "Muslim" and "fundamentalist" become virtually synonymous, particularly in the popular press, but any such commitments are perceived as being far more than a merely religious phenomenon. Muslims are therefore routinely presumed to have an authoritarian and anti-democratic in outlook, to be hostile to any kind of joy or gaiety, and to be such blind followers of convention as to be outside the bounds of rational thought and reflection. While the accusation of impurity has now largely lapsed — even if they are still routinely perceived as dirty and/or smelly — the vision of Muslims as black appears both to have been redefined and given a new vitality. Moors may no longer be assumed to be as coal-black as Shakespeare's Othello, but skin colour remains a crucial differentiator: the feature which is held ultimately to differentiate Europe's non-indigenous population (and of which Europe's Muslim neighbours are the most immediate exemplars) is their nominal possession of a significantly darker natural skin colour.

Bearing all this in mind we can now construct a revised set of oppositions which builds upon those originally erected by the crusaders:

European	:	Muslim
Gender-equal	:	Gender-oppressive
Democratic	:	Authoritarian
Progressive	:	Backward-looking
Modern	:	Traditional
Liberal	:	Fundamentalist

Governed by reason	:	Fanatical
Joyful	:	Kill-joys
Civilized	:	Uncivilized
White	:	Not-white

If this analysis holds, it follows that the Islamic world has now been restored to its former position as Europe's primary *alter*, and that in this process Islam has once again been represented as the antithesis of just those characteristics which Europe and Europeans would like to believe that they themselves epitomise.

### **Contingency and Specificity in the Construction of Europe**

Yet although this approach serves powerfully to illuminate just why it is that the boundaries of Europe (both external and internal) should be located where they are, as well why they are defended with such passion, it also opens up a yet more fundamental question still. Is Europe's contemporary vision of itself, and most especially the means by which it constructs its boundaries, simply the product of a long series of historical contingencies, or is it an intrinsic — and hence distinctive — feature of European culture itself?

That the developments highlighted here are the product of a wide range of historical contingencies self-evident, as is the prospect that Europe's future definition of itself will develop in response to future, and hence quite unpredictable, contingencies. To suggest otherwise would be to adopt a position of manifestly indefensible essentialism. In the same vein the use of antithesis in the processes of boundary construction is far from being unique to Europe, as the recent eruption of near-genocidal ethnic polarisation in contexts as widely separated as Biafra, Rwanda, the Lebanon, Punjab, Sri Lanka and East Timor makes only too clear. Moreover numerous ethnographic reports demonstrate that the tendency to envisage distant neighbours as occupying an inverted world in which anti-humans walk on their heads and insert food directly into their stomachs, where rivers flow up-hill and the seasons are chaotic is an equally global phenomenon.<sup>14</sup>

Yet despite all these reservations and contra-indications, I would nevertheless suggest that while exposure to social, cultural and religious pluralism has for long been a *normal* part of human experience — if only because very few societies are so small, so homogenous and so isolated as to lack any such internal diversity — the cultural tradition of Western Europe is such that for many centuries its inhabitants have found this experience exceedingly difficult to cope with; and although such difficulties may now be a global phenomenon, it is also worth emphasising that in every one of the extra-European contexts listed in the previous paragraph (and it would be easy to construct a much longer list) the current condition of apparently unbridgeable polarisation is very much a *modern* development. Of course this stands in sharp contrast to the widespread assumption that such conflicts are nothing more than eruption of ancient tribal hatreds, an expectation which is itself grounded in the long standing European

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Middleton's account of Lugbara Religion (1960) offers a classic account of such a vision.

view that all its colonial possessions were riddled with barely suppressed tribal and religious rivalries, and that in the absence of firm Imperial guidance even the slightest disturbance could easily precipitated bloody civil war.

Such constructions were, of course, an exceedingly effective means of legitimating policies of divide and rule, let alone the whole Imperial exercise — as well as being yet another example of the process of antithetical thought which I have sought to highlight here. But while it is obviously quite inappropriate to expect that we can extract ourselves from these mistakes though a romantic inversion of the conventional polarities, there is nevertheless a great deal of evidence to suggest that in historical terms inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations have — or at least have until very recently — broadly cordial, in sharp contrast to Western Europe, where the history of religiously inspired genocidal war is both exceptionally long and exceedingly bloody. This suggests a further set of questions. Why did Europeans and proto-Europeans exhibit such an early as well as such a vigorous commitment to the construction of non-negotiable antithetical boundaries? And although others may have subsequently been infected by this mode of thought, largely as a result of the global success of the Imperial project, could there still be something specifically *European* about this habit of thinking? If so, where and in what contexts might its roots best be identified?

### **The Augustinian roots of hostility to pluralism in Catholic Christianity**

Although the arguments advanced here have ranged widely through time and space, one common theme nevertheless emerges from them: all are located close to, and are very often at the core of, Europe's *religious* development. This suggests that a careful exploration of Christian theology, and especially its western and Latin forms, might well prove helpful. At first sight this focus might seem surprising, on the grounds that the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth are an unlikely source of such violent and inhuman attitudes: indeed given Jesus' powerfully articulated commitment to openness, tolerance and justice, quite the opposite outcomes might have been expected. However I would suggest that it is not so much on the teachings of the founder himself which are at issue here, but rather on those of a key figure in the development of Western Christianity: Saint Augustine, the fourth century bishop of Hippo.

In focusing on Augustine I certainly would not wish to suggest that all the theological arguments with which he is associated were entirely his own creation, for they manifestly grew out of his close association with figures such as Ambrose and Jerome. However from our perspective the significance of his teachings arises firstly from the fact that he formalised his position just as the split between the Catholic and Byzantine traditions was taking place, and secondly because theologians in the Western churches — both Catholic and Protestant — have been referring back to his teachings ever since.

In cosmological terms — for it is Europe's vision of its place within the social universe that is our central concern here — one of the most striking aspects of Augustine's theological perspective is the extent to which his youthful commitment to Manicheism continued to influence his thinking. Of course Augustine subsequently went out of his way to distance himself from that tradition, but many aspects of his theological vision, which saw light as pitted against darkness, reason against passion, spirit against matter, and truth against wholly misguided heresy, was profoundly dualistic in character. To be sure Augustine differed from the Manicheans on certain crucial issues, not least in his rejection of their radical asceticism, and his contrary insistence that God's grace, mediated through Christ and the Church, could

nevertheless provide Adam's intrinsically sinful offspring with a route to redemption and thus salvation. As a result his most influential doctrinal development of all — the notion of original sin — became the very core of Catholic theology, so as it were Christianising the Manicheans comprehensively negative evaluation of the existent world.

Although a full exploration of Augustine's theology far beyond the scope of this brief essay, the very dualism of his thinking makes it relatively easy to use the analytical approach deployed earlier in order to delineate the broad outline of his conceptual vision:

Light	:	Darkness
God	:	Satan
Good	:	Evil
Catholic	:	Heretic
Christian	:	Pagan
Salvation	:	Damnation
Spirit	:	Matter
Mind	:	Body
Reason	:	Passion
Celibacy	:	Sexuality
Civilization	:	Barbarism
Culture	:	Nature

Augustine's powerful influence over many generations of thinkers in the Latin tradition, both Catholic and Protestant, is universally acknowledged, as is the impact of his theological vision on the development of European religious and cultural ideology. But what is also quite astonishing in this context is the closeness of the congruence between Augustine's cosmological vision and those which we have extracted from subsequent contexts. To be sure the others in opposition to which these subsequent structures were erected were quite different from the Manicheans, Donatists and Pelagians against whom the bishop of Hippo directed his scathing rhetoric. With the exception of the Jews, those later targets were either of little concern to Augustine, as with the inhabitants of tropical Africa, or had not yet come into existence, as with Islam. But what is most striking is that every single component in the patterns of structural opposition identified earlier has a parallel in one aspect or another of the pattern set out above.<sup>15</sup>

Nor is this tendency to construct outsiders as evil, alien and comprehensively despicable restricted to formal theology, or even to what has now become a relatively narrow sphere of Christian commitment. On the contrary this mode of thinking is equally deeply entrenched at

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Further parallels can also be found elsewhere. Although concerned primarily with issues of gender, Plumwood (1993: 43) presents a very similar pattern of oppositions which she also suggests are "key elements in the dualistic structure of western thought".

the very heart of European culture, and at all possible levels. Apart from the Tarzan myth mentioned earlier, just three illustrative examples of the extent of its influence will have to suffice here. First in Shakespeare, three of whose most significant plays, *Othello*, *The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice* focus primarily — albeit from a critical perspective — on myths of otherness about Muslims, Black Africans and Jews; secondly the Rushdie affair, which gave rise to the most astonishing amount of vituperation against the Islamic tradition as a whole, and which was most vigorously articulated not by the Churches but by secular radicals.<sup>16</sup> And finally contemporary France, where the concept of *laïcité* is currently being used to challenge the legitimacy of any kind of public commitment to Islam amongst its Muslim minorities, so much so that attempts by schoolgirls adopt the *hijab* are construed as constituting a wholly unacceptable challenge to the integrity of the Republic.

Moroever of the various latent *alters* available to Europe, there can be little doubt that it is Muslims and Islam which currently generate by far the highest level of paranoia. Hence whilst that part of Europe's population which is of non-European descent also includes many non-Muslims, and even in Britain where the non-Muslims form a clear majority within the visible minorities, popular hostility is at present overwhelmingly directed at the Muslim presence.

### Europe in Comparative Perspective

In order to throw the apparent normality of all this into some kind of perspective, it is highly instructive to consider how those traditions which did not root themselves in Augustine's tortured and often near-paranoid dualism responded to encounters with religious and ethnic difference; nor do we even need to look beyond Christianity itself to engage in such an exercise, since the Orthodox traditions of the Eastern Church offers an ideal test-bed for comparison. Firstly at an empirical level, its followers normally appear to have been far less perplexed by religious difference than their Western counterparts: hence though physically far closer to Jerusalem, they never perceived it as having been "lost" in the sense which seemed self-evident to the Crusaders. This difference in perception, which was also repeated in numerous other contexts, has very clear theological roots. Thus while the Orthodox tradition certainly accepted the notion of the Fall, this was not — *pace* Augustine — construed as giving rise to an inescapable condition of original sin, nor was material and physical existence perceived as inherently evil. Quite the contrary: Orthodox cosmology views the created universe as a manifestation of the divine essence, and hence it is a vehicle through which a realisation of God's majesty can be achieved, rather than an obstacle to salvation. And because such a realisation can take place directly, rather than requiring the necessary mediation of Christ and the Church to remove original sin, Orthodox cosmology is prepared to accept that even the unbaptised may still gain salvation; hence it provided conceptual space within which alternative spiritual traditions — including those which owed nothing to Christianity — might still be recognised as at least partially legitimate. Hence I would argue that it is precisely because they were not constrained by the dualistic absolutism of an Augustinian heritage that Orthodox responses to religious and cultural diversity have (at least until very recently)

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One of the clearest and most vituperative examples of such hostility of which I am aware is Fay Weldon's pamphlet, *Sacred Cows* (1989). The issues are more fully discussed in Akhtar (1989) and Kabbani (1989)

displayed so few parallels with Western developments, such that those inspired by Eastern Christianity have normally found it far easier to cope with conditions of pluralism than have their Protestant or Catholic counterparts.

In this respect one of the most distinctive features of the western European cultural tradition is the depth of its tendency towards dualistic thinking, accompanied by an equally strong tendency to evaluate the physical (as opposed to the moral and spiritual) world in negative terms. But although these ideas can be traced back to Augustine's manichean heritage, it worth emphasising that dualism by no means necessarily leads to these conclusions: in its classic Zoroastrian form, physical existence is regarded as intrinsically good, even if under constant attack from hostile forces of darkness and decay. And if we look still further afield, we find that Hindu tradition (together with virtually all of its Buddhist variants) also takes a similarly positive view, albeit by a different route and in the context of a radically different cosmological vision. Thus while most parts of the Indic tradition posit a cyclical (as opposed to a linear or dualistic) cosmology, such that the existent world of *samsara* is routinely perceived as impermanent and therefore illusory, it is also by definition a manifestation of the otherwise unqualified Ultimate. Nor does either tradition appear to have had any great difficulty in coping with pluralism, for variety was viewed as necessarily intrinsic to positively evaluated existence.

What, though, about that *bête noir* of the Western world, Islam? While popular opinion may hold that Islam is intrinsically hostile to all non-Muslims, the Qur'an itself includes a clear injunction that the "peoples of the book" should be treated with respect, even if orientalist scholarship has put a great deal of effort into seeking to demonstrate otherwise. Yet although certain aspects of the Shari'a (as well as recent political developments) may seem to support such a conclusion, it would be quite wrong to suggest that such an outlook is a necessary characteristic of Islamic practice. To take one immensely influential example, the sufi philosopher Ibn Al-Arabi (1165-1240 C.E.) developed the doctrine of *wahadat al-wujud* (the unity of being) to argue that because everything that exists is God, or to be more precise a manifestation of the otherwise transcendent divine essence, and since there can be no exceptions to this truth, it follows that even those religions which stand right outside the inheritance of Abraham and Moses are nevertheless components of the divine theophany. Hence no matter how far the practices of those who follow such alternative traditions may diverge from conventional Islamic expectations, all both manifest and reflect an awareness of the One, and must therefore be respected.<sup>17</sup>

Once set in this kind of comparative context, the far reaching consequences of Augustinian theology on Western Europe's vision of itself, and most especially on the way in which transactions with others might be handled can be brought more clearly into focus. Whilst most other civilizations found it quite unnecessary to demonise otherness, the negative dualism which lies at the heart of Western Europe's religious and cultural heritage led to a different, and indeed a very distinctive, conclusion. In Augustine's theology there is only one path to salvation, which can in turn only be followed by an elite which seeks self-consciously to distance itself from the fallen world — or to put it another way, if there is but one route to Civilisation in the face of an otherwise violent, squalid and impassioned state of nature; and while the elect may well be sorely tempted to indulge in that which they so determinedly deny

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A fuller account of Ibn al-Arabi's teachings, as well as a masterly overview of the realities of Islamic history can be found in Lapidus 1988.

themselves — as indeed was Augustine himself — the line must be held: those deviate (whether by accident, design or sheer ignorance is immaterial) necessarily threaten everything that is good and true.

While it would be quite absurd to blame Augustine for the way in which his theological outlook was subsequently developed, there is nevertheless good reason to suggest that it is within this mould — albeit mediated by a host of historical contingencies — that his intellectual heirs have continued to construe human otherness. But to complete the argument, one last caveat must still be dealt with: the plain fact that in the contemporary world such modes of thought, which so easily lead both to religious polarisation and to genocidal ethnic cleansing are by no means an exclusively Western European phenomenon. Does this destroy my argument? I think not.

Firstly wherever such polarisation has erupted in non-European contexts, this has invariably been *against* the trend of long-standing local moral and cultural expectations, rather than in congruence with them; secondly virtually all such eruptions — whether we focus on the rabid anti-Islamism of a Slobodan Milošević in Serbia or the Vishva Hindu Parishad in India, or indeed the equally rabid anti-Western and anti-Christian rhetoric of groups such as the Jamaat-i-Islam or the F.I.S. — are best understood as responses to the same historical contingency: a bruising encounter with the political, economic and ideological impact of Imperialism. It is precisely because of the success of that process that the impact of Augustine's intellectual heritage has now gone global.<sup>18</sup> Yet if “fundamentalist Islam” has consequently emerged as Europe's collective nightmare, there is a powerful sense in which Europeans have only themselves to blame for their predicament. If Islamic activists now find it strategically advantageous to pay back those who have for so long disparaged, excluded, exploited and oppressed them back in their own money, no-one should be surprised. Europe is receiving no more than its just desserts.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

Nevertheless we still face a pressing question: how might the intensifying process of polarisation in which we are currently enmeshed best be unwound? If my analysis is sound, a number of much recommended solutions can only be dismissed out of hand. Firstly any attempt to resolve the problem by further excluding Muslims — whether by reinforcing the walls of Fortress Europe, by introducing repatriation programs, or by denying European Muslims the right to build their own lives on their own terms — is doomed to failure, since

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One of the most ironical consequences of this development is that if a contemporary Augustine who followed his footsteps from North Africa to Milan, and even more so to France, he would be automatically classified as an Arab, and hence be subject to suspicion as a potential member of the F.I.S.

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While this strategy certainly proved a very effective means of causing external alarm and confusion, it is still a much more open question as to whether the adoption of some of the West's worst traits — albeit dressed up in Islamic clothes — is having anything like as positive an impact on the internal structure Muslim societies.

such policies actually constitute an open invitation to minority communities to close ranks to reinforce their distinctiveness, the better to defend their interests. No matter how alien such developments may seem, Muslims and Muslim communities are an integral part of Europe's social order.

Yet as just what sort of Muslims? This gives rise to a second line of argument: that if only European Muslims would adopt less alien, less aggressive (and indeed less "fundamentalist") modes of behaviour, they would encounter much less hostility and much greater acceptance — or so it is often suggested. Yet although the Islamic tradition as a whole is much less aggressive, much more easy going and above all far more intellectually sophisticated than most Europeans have ever been able to acknowledge, the suggestion that Muslims can earn greater respect by acting in a less challenging way is not only grossly historically mis-informed, but wholly misses the point. Current Muslim aggressiveness (of which only the first stirrings have yet begun) is by no means an innate feature of the Islamic tradition: rather it is best understood as a strategic vehicle which is currently being deployed as a means of challenging exclusion and devaluation. Since this strategy has caused so much alarm and confusion amongst their excluders, the prospect of it being abandoned is remote.

As meaningful options have shrunk, so a third — and apparently much more reasonable — strategy has come to the fore: the suggestion that Europeans should make a much greater effort to inform themselves about Islam. Yet although such a commitment can only be regarded as welcome, even if it were implemented there is still good reason to suggest that the availability of more accurate information about Islam would have any significant impact in its own right on current attitudes. After all Europe has had the Islamic world as its neighbour for more than a millennium, but as Daniel (1975) shows, it has never felt able either to acknowledge its *alter* as an equal, or to take its cultural or religious traditions seriously. Having spent more than a millennium reading Islam through the distorting prism of their own deeply entrenched assumptions, more information, however accurate, is unlikely to make much difference to conventional European judgements.

Is there any solution? I believe there is, although by a route that is so deeply uncomfortable that the very need to embark on it is likely to be tenaciously resisted. The logic of the analysis presented here is that the most urgent priority is not for Europe to understand its *alters* better, but rather itself and its own history — for it is within Europe's own long-standing structures of self-definition that pluralism in general, and the Islamic presence in particular, have been rendered into nightmares. If so, it is Europe itself which stands in urgent need of therapy. But as yet the patient is still in denial, and as any psychotherapist would confirm, those who refuse to acknowledge the seriousness of their self-generated plight find it far easier to engage in a process of transference. Rather than confronting the illusory character of their own mental constructions, they prefer to ascribe the very behaviour which they refuse to acknowledge in themselves to those whom they believe are harassing them.

Can Europe afford to stay in denial? Half a century has passed since six million souls were consumed in an earlier effort to extirpate such fantasies, but despite all the consequent guilt and shame Europe has managed to find itself another collective *alter*, about whose very presence some all too familiar arguments are now developing. Yet despite these disturbing parallels, any future confrontation may well have a far greater impact on Europe's comfortable majority than did the last. Europe's Muslims have already begun to resist denigration and exclusion far more actively than did their predecessors; and Europe's Muslim population currently roughly similar in scale to that of pre-holocaust Jewry, their global presence is very much larger. If conflict should erupt across that disjunction — which God forbid! — casualties

would not be restricted only to one side. Unwelcome and uncomfortable though the prospect of therapy may be — for it will necessarily entail a root and branch scrutiny of Europe's entire conceptual and cultural heritage — only one diagnostic conclusion is available: if Europeans choose to maintain their long-standing condition of denial, it is at their own peril.

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