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European identity and the myth of Islam: a reassessment

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Abstract. There has been a fashionable tendency in some recent scholarship on European history to look for some of the most important roots of European identity formation in the cultural, social and political interaction with the Islamic world. This article argues that this view is an exaggerated and over-simplistic one. In a long historical survey from the era of the Crusades to the nineteenth century, it seeks to show that the theme in European continental identity was frequently subordinated to political and diplomatic rivalries. While cultural themes in IR are important, they do need to be distinguished from realpolitik in the dynamics of international power politics.

Introduction

In the last ten years there has been a growing debate over the nature of European identity in international relations. With the end of the Cold War the region of 'Europe' has become a terrain of discursive struggle as discussion has turned to what it means and signifies to be a 'European'.[1] Such debates have traditionally been closely linked to configurations of power and geopolitical rivalries. Thus, in the post-war era, whatever notions of European identity existed were subsumed by the eclipse of European domination of global politics by the superpower 'overlay' of the continent during the Cold War. More recently, the collapse of the 'iron curtain' in Central Europe and the progressive withdrawal of the superpowers has created space for a new debate over European identity in a post-Cold War era.

So far, the idea of a common 'European' identity serves more of a *declaratory* and *prescriptive* function since it is really an unfulfilled promise of what might yet come in the future.[2] For realists, the concept of a cohesive 'Europe' with a significant purchase on global power politics lacks any real political credibility since it is at best only European nationalism writ large and ignores wider processes of internationalisation beyond the European continent.[3] This argument, though, overlooks the fact that the creation of a European political order depended on the construction of a cultural consensus at the societal level, rooted in conflict and separation from other cultures. As Iver Neumann and Jennifer Welsh among others have

[1] Philip Schlesinger, '"Europeanness"—A New Cultural Battlefield', *Innovation*, 5: 1 ((1992), pp. 11–22. For some analysts on the left Europe is seen as suffering from an identity crisis as a result of the loss of political direction by its governing elite. See 'Europe's National Identity Crisis', *Living Marxism*, 45 (July 1992).

[2] J. Peter Burgess, 'European Borders: History of Space/Space of History', p. 1, http:/www.etheory.com/a-european_borders.html

[3] Miriam Camps. 'Is "Europe" Obsolete?', *International Affairs*, 44: 3 (July 1988), pp. 434–45.

pointed out, the progressive expansion of this European international society was by no means a simple one-way process in which the centre acted on the periphery but a two-way one in which the periphery acted back on the core. European states' relations with other societies were underpinned by a series of cultural logics in addition to the pursuit of power and territorial aggrandisement. Of these relations, moreover, it was the continuous contact with Islamic societies which did more than anything else to help secure the identity of Europe in contrast to the Islamic 'other'.[4]

This argument develops a theme that has become increasingly prevalent in some quarters in both Europe and the US over the last two decades of a 'rising Islamic threat' against the West, which has replaced earlier communist threats during the Cold War.[5] The religious and cultural dimension to this supposed threat has underpinned much of the thesis of Samuel Huntington that post-Cold War politics are increasingly those of 'clashing civilisations'—a view which, for all its superficial popularity with some pundits, glosses over considerable evidence suggesting that some of the most significant cultural divides for regional political stability have occurred within Europe (such as those between Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans).[6] For all its obvious conceptual flaws, this debate is important for the way that it has shifted the focus of attention in IR away from the simplicities of state-centric realism towards an emphasis on the cultural imperatives behind state decision-making.

It is necessary to understand why such cultural imperatives became important on certain historical occasions and not on others. Neumann and Welsh acknowledge that there is some explanatory power to the realist problematic though argue that this needs to be supplemented by a wider cultural framework. They propose in effect an ambitious research agenda in IR which seeks to unravel as far as possible the degree to which the cultural dimensions in European relations with Islam intrude on what might otherwise be seen as the simple exertion of *realpolitik*.[7]

There are undoubtedly considerable payoffs from such an approach if it can be convincingly shown that cultural dynamics have an important influence on the formulation of states' interests. Cultural dynamics have until quite recently been rather marginal to the study of IR, despite the fact that in a general sense it is impossible to distinguish cultural categories from the most basic intellectual categories of modernity. There is a strong case for treating culture far more seriously in IR in a post-Cold War era where conventional state-centric realism is coming under growing attack. Realism at best develops only a very impoverished understanding of culture which is largely anchored in statist and nationalist notions of 'us' versus 'them'.[8]

[4] Iver B. Neumann and Jennifer M. Welsh, 'The Other in European Self-definition: An Addendum to the Literature on International Society', *Review of International Studies*, 17 (1991), pp. 327–48. See also Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe* (Houndmills: The Macmillan Press, 1995), p. 84.

[5] For an assessment of this debate see Jochen Hippler and Andrea Lueg, *The Next Threat: Western Perceptions of Islam* (London: Pluto Press, 1995).

[6] Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilisations', *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.

[7] See also Paul B. Rich, 'Democratisation in the EU and the issue of European identity' in Barrie Axford, Daniela Berghahn, Nick Hewlett (eds.) *Unity and Diversity in the New Europe* (Bern: Peter Lang AG) forthcoming; Pim den Boer, 'Europe to 1914: The Making of an Idea' in Kevin Wilson and Jan van der Duisen, *The History of the Idea of Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993), esp. pp. 65–78.

[8] R. B. J. Walker, 'The Concept of Culture in the Theory of International Relations', in Jongsuh Chay (ed.) *Culture and International Relations* (New York: Praeger, 1990), pp. 3–13.

Nevertheless, while culture is significant in understanding such processes as political decision-making by state and non-state actors, it does not ultimately displace the realm of the political. As this article will seek to argue, cultural influences in the role of political decision-making need to be demonstrated rather than assumed since, in a large number of instances, the rulers of states still tend to operate on a calculus of *realpolitik* rather than a wider set of cultural imperatives. The article will thus propose that the supposed role of Islam as 'the other' in the formation of European identity has only limited validity since the argument has been considerably exaggerated by social and political analysts anxious to read back contemporary themes into previous history. The article will examine the patterns of European interaction with the Islamic world from the early medieval period to the French Revolution. The first part will focus on the salience of European relations with Islamic societies in the medieval period for the formation of European myths of identity. The second part will turn to the impact of European imperialism on the European continent's relations with the Islamic world and how this acted back on notions of European identity. Finally, in the third part I shall assess the relevance of these historical relationships of Europe and Islam for contemporary debates in Europe on the political impact of Islam.

The crusades and the medieval period

European identity formation has been a complex process that has evolved through interaction with other cultures that were both internal and external to the geographical region of Europe. The notion of 'Europe' and being a 'European' did not become employed in any systematic manner in political discourse before the end of the seventeenth century. Before then the area that became known as Europe emerged through internal colonisation centred on the core areas of the western part of the continent—France, Germany west of the Elbe and North Italy. These were regions which had a common history as part of Charlemagne's empire. The process of cultural homogenisation that ensued over the following three to four centuries created what Ronald Bartlett terms the 'Europeanisation' of Europe based on part of the Carolingian Frankish empire. The schism in the Christian Church of 1054 between the Latin Church in the West and the Orthodox church centred on Constantinople in the east, ensured that the central core of European 'Christendom' became located in the western part of the European continent with a ring of conquest states on its peripheries.[9]

The political identity of Western Europe in medieval times was thus centred on the notion of 'Christendom' rather than 'Europe'. 'Western Christendom' was much looser than more formal imperial systems such as that of China. It was also based on a devolved series of political structures and an absence of centralised bureaucratic control as in the Byzantine empire centred on Constantinople. To the extent that there was any idea of being a 'European' this applied to unconventional

[9] Ronald Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 269. Frankish culture though was by no means homogeneous and there was in many respects only a superficial unity to the Carolingian empire. Ross Balzaretti, 'The Creation of Europe', *History Workshop Journal*, 33 (1992) , pp. 181–93.

political alliances formed through military necessity. The eighth century chronicler Isidor Pacensis for instance coined the term '*Europeenses*' to describe the alliance of Romano-Gallic forces with those of barbarians which under the leadership of Charles Martel defeated Islamic forces at the decisive Battle of Tours in 732.[10] By contrast, the notion of Western Christendom formed what Martin Wight has termed a 'peculiar culture' combining 'universalist claims with a missionary dynamic'.[11] It expanded on the basis of a steady cultural, religious and linguistic penetration of surrounding lands, though found itself in the east confronted by what Wight terms 'the unreciprocating will of the unspeakable Turk'.[12]

Christendom's geographical boundaries did not strictly coincide with those of 'Europe' since Christian communities existed in areas such as Anatolia. Moreover, the crusades in the Middle East were a denial of the very idea of 'Europe' since those who went on the crusades were appealed to as Christians and Franks rather than as Europeans. In this respect then, the Islamic military challenge to Christendom tended if anything to delay the emergence of a European identity and to perpetuate that of Christendom.[13] The crusades were hardly what Hichem Djait has termed a 'school of civilization for Europe', though they helped create a myth of Pan European cultural solidarity in the face of an Islamic onslaught.[14]

The period of medieval crusading in Western Europe was quite short. The First Crusade stemmed from the preaching of Pope Urban 11 at the Council of Clermont in 1095 and was initially successful due to divisions at this time within the Islamic world. Jerusalem was captured in 1099 and a series of crusader states established at Antioch, Edessa, Tripoli and Jerusalem. These states were governed by a warrior governing class and were hardly examples of colonies of settlement that typified later European imperial expansion in such places as Eastern and Southern Africa. The crusaders were in effect on an armed pilgrimage and they ended up drawing followers from all over Western Europe for a variety of different motives, including a religious zeal to retake Jerusalem, a search for adventure as well as a desire to improve their status in the European medieval social order.

Sporadic attempts were made over the following century to extend Christian power into Syria and Palestine. However, the revival of Islamic power in the twelfth century ended this expansion and Jerusalem was recaptured by a Muslim army under Saladdin in 1187. The high-point of crusading achievement thus lasted about a century and, although there were further crusades in the thirteenth century, these failed to recapture Jerusalem. Indeed the crusaders were decisively defeated with the Muslim capture of Acre in 1291.

The crusades reinforced medieval myths of Christian chivalry which arguably diverted attention away from more direct Islamic threats to Christian power. The chivalric quest to reconquer Jerusalem continued throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This tended to steer attention away from the more threatening menace of Islamic attack through the Balkans, especially after the Ottoman conquest of the Serbian Kingdom at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.[15] This was still a

[10] Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), p. 25.
[11] Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), p. 119.
[12] Ibid., p. 120.
[13] M. E. Yapp, 'Europe in the Turkish Mirror', *Past and Present*, 137 (November 1992), p. 138.
[14] Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1986), p. 109.
[15] J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 92.

period, as Neumann and Welsh rightly point out, when the doctrine of *raison d'etat* had not yet taken root, though efforts by the Papacy to reinvigorate the crusading ideal following the Turkish capture of Constantinople in 1453 failed to stem the continent's rising balance of power politics.[16]

It was in the west of Europe that the Muslims experienced the greatest defeats. Sicily was captured by the Franks while, by 1492, Islam was removed from the Iberian peninsula. It was during the revival of crusading efforts against Islam in Spain in the eleventh century that the *Song of Roland* was written, underlining the revival of intense missionary zeal in Western Europe after a long period when there had been accommodation between Christianity and Islam in the Iberian peninsula.[17] The poem declares that 'Pagans are wrong and Christians right',[18] and recounts one of Charlemagne's few military defeats in 778 against the Basques as the army of Count Roland is left behind and his army retreats over the Pyrenees. In the poem the Basques become the Saracens who are distinguished from the Christian knights by their paganism and links with the devil. One Saracen leader, Chernubles of Munigre, is described as coming from a land 'where the sun does not shine and wheat cannot grow/Rain does not fall nor dew collect/There is no stone which is not completely black/Some say devils live there'.[19] The poem celebrates the virtues of the feudal society of Europe in contrast to the dark forces of Islam and sets up a rigid model of Christian-Islamic opposition that is heightened by the fact that the leading knights in Roland's army do not come from one single locale but from large parts of Western Europe. The chivalric ties with Christianity are particularly emphasised by the figure of Archbishop Turpin who is one of the main heroes in the battle against the Saracen army.

The *Song of Roland* was a good example of medieval popular propaganda 'in which the ideals of chivalry became subservient to the requirements of religion and politics'.[20] They also formed part of a wider myth to retrieve lost Christian communities and build a united Christendom in the face of Islamic religious competition. In this instance the mythical figure of the Ethiopian Christian priest-king, Prester John, exercised a powerful hold over the medieval European imagination. If it was possible to establish contact with this lost Christian kingdom it might be possible to renew the links in Christendom which had been severed by the Muslim conquests of the Middle East and North Africa in the seventh and eighth centuries. The longevity of the myth was exemplified by Prince Henry the Navigator's efforts, even in the last year of his life in 1460, to forge a contact with the legendary king.[21]

The eventual expulsion of the Arabs from Spain, following the capture of Grenada in 1492, failed to lead to a Pan European crusade against Turkish power, although individual rulers like King Sebastian of Portugal, hoping that this might still occur, was killed leading a crusade in Morocco in 1578.[22]. On the eastern borders of Europe there remained some crusading zeal against the Turks, but in

[16] Neumann and Welsh, op. cit., p. 336.

[17] Richard Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe: From Paganism to Christianity 371 to 1386 AD* (London: Harper Collins 1997), pp. 304–22.

[18] *The Song of Roland* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990) v. 1015, p. 61.

[19] Ibid vv. 979–82, p. 60.

[20] Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 15.

[21] Henri Baudet, *Paradise on Earth* (New Haven: Royal Van Gorcum, 1965), pp. 13–17.

[22] J. R. Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe 1450–1620* (Stroud: Sutton Publishers, 1998), p. 34.

western Europe there began moves towards establishing diplomatic relations. In 1536 Francis 1 of France signed a treaty with the Turks before launching an attack on Italy, suggesting that *raison d'etat* was taking over from cultural considerations. Even if, as Neumann and Welsh suggest, this outlook was not shared by all the rulers in Western Europe (in England, for instance, Elizabeth I was keen to show that she had no desire to associate with the Turks against Christian powers) it is hard to see how cultural factors in any serious way displaced balance of power politics in the late sixteenth century.[23]

This becomes especially evident in the political and diplomatic circumstances surrounding the single most important military engagement against Islam in the sixteenth century, the Battle of Lepanto on 7 October 1571, an event overlooked by Neumann and Welsh. Some months before the battle, in May 1571, a coalition was forged against Turkish power in the Mediterranean consisting of Spain, Venice and the Papacy. It did not endure for long once Lepanto was over. In 1573 Venice pulled out of the coalition and the Turkish victories of La Goletta and Tunis in 1574 ended any remaining hopes of a crusade.[24] A form of peaceful harmony was eventually secured in the Mediterranean by the end of the sixteenth century, less as a result of military conflict than the turning of Spanish power westwards towards the Americas. This in turn eased the pressure on the Turks, who proceeded to concentrate on consolidating their position in eastern Europe.[25] At the same time the European crusading impulse moved outwards towards the west, where a new quest for paradise took place in the Americas, taking with it much of the zeal that had been developed in the conflicts and rivalries with Muslim power in the Mediterranean.[26]

Within this idea of paradise there emerged the notion of the noble savage who existed untrammelled by the moral ambiguities of Western culture. Such a definition of savage existence deprived indigenous cultures of any separate cultural identity of their own and entirely subordinated them to European thought processes.[27] By contrast, in the case of the Islamic and Arabic world, the rise of European orientalism deprived Islamic cultures of any independent means of cultural interpretation but at least acknowledged their cultural significance.

The idea of the noble savage also implied an idea of the ignoble savage, linked to both paganism and Satan. This concept was developed in various parts of Europe and was not always a product of relations with Islamic societies. The English developed it in the course of subjugating Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[28] On a few occasions ignoble savagism could become linked to Islam as in

[23] Neumann and Welsh, op. cit., p. 338.

[24] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Vol. 11 (London: Fontana Collins, 1976), p. 1088.

[25] Ibid., p. 1142.

[26] Baudet, op. cit., p. 33; Charles L. Sanford, *The Quest for Paradise: Europe and the American Moral Imagination* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), pp. 42–3. In the case of Spain, though, the expulsion of the Islamic *Morisco* population in 1609–11 followed a wave of persecution by the Jesuits which was in many respects far more intolerant than the treatment meted out to the Indian population in the Americas. Nigel Griffin '*Un muro invisible*': Moriscos and Cristianos '*Viejos in Granada*', in *Medieval and Renaissance Studies of Spain and Portugal in Honour of P. E. Russell* (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1981).

[27] Bernard Sheehan, *Savagism and Civility: Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 21.

[28] Ibid., p. 54.

the figure of Sycorax, the mother of Caliban, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* who came from 'Argier' (Algiers) but also significantly worshipped Setebos, a god of Patagonia in the new world.[29] But this example suggests that by Shakespeare's time the cultural clash with Islam was already being displaced by other cultural contacts such as those in the Americas.

The concept of noble and ignoble savagism also marked a reworking of older medieval ideas of Christendom rather than the forging of any specifically new idea of European identity. By the same token, Muslims failed to develop a clear notion of European identity until at least the seventeenth century, preferring to classify all the Christian lands in Europe as part of the 'Dar al-Harb' or area under non-Muslim rule. This was further sub-divided into the Orthodox world of 'Rum' and the Latin world of 'Firangistan' or land of the Franks.[30] Some scholars have seen Christian–Muslim conflict as that of distinct civilisations,[31] though this overlooks the way that the civilisational divide became progressively bridged by Ottoman participation in European balance of power politics. This was rather slow to occur since the clerical elite of Western Europe had no specific place for Islamic power in what was seen as a Christian political order. From the Council of Vienna in 1311 the Church became opposed to granting Muslim communities any form of religious toleration or protection. This continued after the reconquest of Spain in 1492, leading eventually to the deportation of so-called 'unconvertible heretics' in the early seventeenth century as well as the enslavement of some Muslim captives in Western Europe.[32] Not surprisingly, in the Islamic world those Muslims being held in Western Europe were known as *asirs* or 'prisoners of war'.

It should not be assumed from this that Western Christendom was some form of hermetically-sealed civilisation. The medieval Mediterranean world was an example of what Wight has called a 'secondary states system' in which there were varying forms of inter-cultural relations between Christendom and Islam.[33] Special exemption was made, for instance, for learned Muslim captives who could be used as doctors or translators of Arabic manuscripts. Religious orders and lay societies also conducted protracted forms of informal diplomacy to secure the exchange of Christian captives in Islamic territories for the Muslim slaves being held in Europe.[34] The European clerical elite was by no means committed only to waging crusades against Islam and was not averse on occasions to attempting a dialogue with it. In 1076 Pope Gregory VII wrote to a Muslim prince in Algeria al-Nasnir 'there is charity which we owe to one another more than to other peoples because we recognise and confess one sole God, although in different ways, and we praise and worship Him every day as creator and ruler of the world'. Gregory's motive in writing the letter may have been to try and protect the remaining Christian communities in North Africa.[35] However, the letter also reflected the desire by the medieval European clerical elite to try and contain prolonged warfare, which had no

[29] Ibid., pp. 410–41.
[30] Yapp, op. cit., p. 139.
[31] Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987), p. 8.
[32] P. S. Van Koningsveld, 'Muslim Slaves and Captives in Western Europe During the Late Middle Ages', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 6:1 (1995), pp. 5–6.
[33] Wight, op. cit., p. 34.
[34] Van Koningsveld, op. cit., p. 8.
[35] Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 9.

biblical sanction and often undermined their interests, as rulers taxed religious establishments to fund military campaigns.

The most sophisticated form of the Christian opposition to war was the doctrine of the Just War which, with roots stretching back to St Augustine, sought to contain the actions of princes within recognisable codes of moral conduct. The doctrine distinguished between 'good' or 'just' wars. 'Good' wars were waged by a ruler in his or her country's interests. 'Bad' wars, on the other hand, failed to meet this criterion and might involve the employment of foreign troops which, if it was not a crusade, could not be justified.[36]

The doctrine mirrored a similar outlook within the Muslin world at this time in which the doctrine of *Jihad* was open to multiple interpretations. Just as the Just War doctrine sought to contain the warlike actions of rulers, so the doctrine of *Jihad* did not necessarily mean for all Islamic jurists a resort to war, but the exertion of one's power in Allah's path. Islamic jurists distinguished four ways a believer might fulfil his *Jihad* obligations: his heart (or combating the devil), his tongue and his hands (both of which are concerned with righting a wrong) and his sword. Only the last pointed specifically to the need for armed force. The *Jihad* could thus simply mean religious propaganda on behalf of the Islamic creed. Force might be used to inflict punishment on the enemies of Islam as well as renegades from the faith and to this extent it becomes another form of Just war.[37]

By the sixteenth century the Just War doctrine in Europe came under growing attack as medieval concepts of chivalry appeared to be increasingly anachronistic and war no longer a matter of necessity but cultural habit.[38] One of the strongest opponents of the doctrine was Erasmus who argued that princes should as far as possible avoid war in pursuit of a culture of mutual trust which he imagined to exist at the heart of the idea of Christendom. In *The Education of a Christian Prince* in 1516 Erasmus stressed that the mutual trust between princes rendered irrelevant the whole idea of written treaties for 'there is a most binding and holy contract between all Christian princes, simply from the fact that they are Christians'.[39]

The idea of an exclusive Christian culture among the rulers of Europe (if it ever existed) was becoming undermined in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the rise of formal European diplomacy and balance of power politics. The balance of power system, however, only became securely established once the perceived Islamic threat to the societies of central Europe had been removed at the end of the seventeenth century. By this time, the balance of power doctrine had spread from its original roots in Renaissance Italy across most of the rest of Europe and helped shape the outlook of the caste of aristocratic diplomats.[40] The new diplomacy was pivoted around promoting the rival interests of sovereign nation states in the Westphalian European political order.

There was little space within this diplomatic discourse for a religiously-inspired crusade against Ottoman power. This had already emerged during the fifteenth

[36] Hale, op. cit., p. 140.
[37] Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955), pp. 57–9.
[38] Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), p. 13.
[39] Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), p. 93. See also Hale op. cit., pp. 35–6.
[40] Alfred Vagts, 'The Balance of Power: Growth of an Idea', *World Politics*, 1:1 (October 1948), pp. 82–101;

century in the Italian peninsula, in the narrowly self-interested behaviour of Italian states *vis à vis* Ottoman power. From the 1450s to the 1480s Italy had five major wars each lasting two years, despite the fact that there was an ever-present Turkish menace, which on one occasion led to a Turkish garrison seizing Otranto in the kingdom of Naples for fifteen months and using it as a source of Christian slaves. It proved impossible for Pope Pius 11 to forge an anti-Turkish coalition as rival powers were too busy watching each other to be concerned about the Turks.[41]

The last spasms of the European crusading ideal appeared not in Italy but on the eastern frontier of Europe, where in Wallachia the succession of Constantine Scherban in 1654 represented one of the last of the old aristocratic warrior leaders. Elsewhere in eastern Europe in the seventeenth century the growing oppression of the peasantry meant that the aristocratic crusading tradition became undermined by internal class tensions. In Hungary, for instance, the crusading ideal was largely taken over from the aristocracy by popular leaders such as George Rakoczi and John Kemeny, who attempted to mobilise the peasantry in a popular crusade against Turkish power. Rakoczi and Kemeny, though, were both defeated and killed and in 1660 the Turks installed Michael Apafu as a local strongman who could extract tribute from the recalcitrant peasants.[42]

The progressive marginalisation of the warrior and crusading ideal finally helped secure the growing popularity of the idea of 'Europe', especially among Western European Protestant pamphleteers who saw it as a more politically neutral term than the Catholic conception of *respublica christiana.* The advance of the Turks into the heartland of Central Europe momentarily halted the growth of this expression as Protestant forces were sent to help the Hapsburgs defend Vienna in 1683. However, the defeat of the Turkish siege put paid to a Papal scheme for a Holy League against the Ottomans. Within a few years the idea of 'Europe' regained favour as Louis XIV expelled the Huguenots from France and a Catholic plot to secure the throne of England was ended with the landing of William of Orange in 1689.[43] The medieval idea of 'Christendom' began to decline in political thought and the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714 was the last treaty in Europe to refer to the notion of *respublica Christiana*.[44]

In a general sense, then, the relaxation of the Ottoman challenge in Europe helped facilitate the emergence of the Westphalian political order in the latter part of the seventeenth century. From the time of its emergence in the fifteenth century, the Ottoman empire remained until the twentieth century a significant European power, geographically controlling at the height of its influence between a quarter and a third of the continent. However, while the Ottomans were in Europe, they were until the nineteenth century not fully of it, as they faced intellectual and ideological exclusion from the emerging European order of sovereign nation states.[45] This failure of the Ottoman empire from the fifteenth century onwards to be incorporated into the European diplomatic order was partly due to Turkish resistance to

[41] Garret Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 86–7.

[42] John Stoye, *Europe Unfolding: 1648–1688* (London: Fontana, 1988), pp. 70–72.

[43] H. D. Schmidt, 'The Establishment of "Europe" as a Political Expression', *Historical Journal*, IX:2 (1966), pp. 174–6; Stoye, op cit., pp. 322–3.

[44] Yapp. op. cit., p. 142.

[45] T. Naff, 'The Ottoman Empire and the European States System' in H. Bull and A. Watson (eds.), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 143.

regular diplomatic contact with the west. The structure of the Ottoman state was different to that of absolutist states in Eastern Europe as it failed to develop an independent class of feudal landowners. With an absence of private property in land, power was consolidated at the centre of the Ottoman state through an independent class of *devshirme*, who were in many cases recruited as slaves from Christian communities. The *devshirme* ensured the interpenetration of the *ghazi* outlook of militant crusading Islam, along with old Islam principles that defined the Ottoman system.[46] In Ottoman eyes, envoys from the Uzbek tribes from central Asia were more important than those from Europe.[47]

Turkish exclusion from the European diplomatic order was also facilitated by the impact of Enlightenment thought on European diplomacy and international relations. The Enlightenment *philosophes* were engaged in a demolition exercise in which a thousand years of Christian values came under attack. In order to hasten this intellectual destruction of Christendom, the *philosophes* were keen to import comparisons with other societies so as to reveal their moral limitations. In the case of comparisons with the Islamic world, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* was seminal, both for its embracing the concept of something approaching a coherent European identity as well as its differentiation from the Ottoman empire, which was despotic because of the size of the empire as well as the fatalism that was induced by Islam and its attitude to women.[48] By comparing Europe to Islam, Montesquieu drew out what he regarded as the major distinguishing features of European society based on its distinctive morality and history. It was these, rather than religion as such, which separated Europe from the Islamic world.[49] In this regard, Montesquieu also distinguished Europe from Russia. For Russia too, though Christian, also had an ambiguous status in European thought since, from the early eighteenth century onwards, it was incorporated into the European diplomatic order without being fully accepted culturally.

The Enlightenment outlook towards Islam was partly stimulated by the changing position of the Ottoman empire in European politics during the eighteenth century. From the end of the seventeenth century the major Ottoman political threat was largely over and Ottoman rule became perceived as increasingly despotic and decadent in comparison to that of the Western powers. With the Ottoman empire's relative decline came a growing access to European travellers and orientalist scholars who, in many cases, abandoned the intolerant animosity of the Middle Ages for what Rana Kabbani has termed a 'fascinated distrust' in the contours of Islamic society.[50] This inquisitive dimension of European orientalism should not detract from the political uses that could be made of the stereotyping of Islamic societies by some European political rulers. In the case of the Holy Roman Empire, successive Hapsburg rulers used the potential threat of renewed Turkish aggression for well over a century after the last siege of Vienna in 1683 to keep their population in something akin to a Cold War state of vigilance. The myth of the 'vicious Turk' who appeared to embody the worst sort of nightmares for the champions of European

[46] Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso 1974), pp. 361–94.
[47] Wight, op. cit., p. 122; M.S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (New York and London: Longman 1993), p. 72.
[48] Jack Lively, 'The Europe of the Enlightenment', *History of European Ideas*, 1:2 (1981), p. 91.
[49] Yapp, op. cit., p. 147.
[50] Kabani, op. cit., p. 138.

civilisation eventually culminated in an unsuccessful war launched by Joseph II in 1788.[51]

This defensive political outlook offsets the wider cultural impact of Islam on the European literary and cultural imagination symbolised by the eighteenth century fashion for *turquerie*. This promoted a rather different set of discourses centred on the idea of a morally decadent and licentious Orient, symbolised by harems and pashas. These images became starkly revealed to the European reading public after the translation in the early nineteenth century of the *Arabian Nights*. Significantly, many of these stories had already been known in Europe since the Middle Ages, though they became newly translated as a result of the efforts of the French orientalist scholar Antoine Galland, who was attached to the French diplomatic mission in Constantinople. While Galland had a clear orientalist fascination for Islamic society his work was largely made possible as a result of wider diplomatic pressures to open up the Ottoman empire to European commercial and economic interests.[52] These pressures would eventually turn into an imperialist quest for European domination in the course of the nineteenth century

European imperial expansion and Islam

European imperial contact with the Islamic world is usually dated from Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798. This campaign was intended to lead to the French colonisation of Egypt, though its more immediate military rationale was to take advantage of what appeared to be the imminent collapse of the Ottoman empire and strike a decisive blow at British imperial power in India (given the inability of the French to mount a full scale invasion of Britain itself).[53] The campaign was particularly stimulated by the romantic fascination that Napoleon had had with the Orient since boyhood, though he was averse to trying to turn it into anything like a crusade against Islamic power. Talleyrand, Napoleon's Foreign Minister, particularly stressed the need for maintaining good relations with the Turkish Porte and the French army was instructed to respect Islamic institutions.

The expedition certainly confirmed European cultural interest in the Middle East. It led to the growth of European interest in the archaeological excavation of ancient Egypt and the growth of the new subject area of Egyptology. So in a general sense it can be argued that the expedition reinforced the growing Orientalist perception of the static quality of Islamic society and culture in contrast to both northern Europe and the older civilisation of the Egyptian pharaohs.

The Egyptian campaign was, though, ultimately a diversion from Napoleon's central interest in French imperial expansion in Europe.[54] It proved to be highly risky, given the absence of French naval mastery in the Mediterranean and it was

[51] Nicholas Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 104.
[52] Kabani, op. cit., p. 24.
[53] Felix Markham, *Napoleon* (New York: Mentor Books, 1966), pp. 56–7.
[54] Napoleon's colonial ambitions not stop with the Orient since he also had a dream of securing a French empire in the Americas and in 1800 managed to secure from Spain the return of Louisiana. This dream though came to nothing after the failure of the French expedition to Haiti in 1802 and the following year Louisiana was sold to the United States. Geoffrey Bruun, *Europe and the French Imperium, 1799–1814* (New York: Harper and Row 1934), pp. 84–5.

not especially surprising that it met disaster when the British navy under Nelson destroyed the French fleet at Aboukir Bay. Napoleon himself came eventually to realise the futilty of the whole enterprise when news reached him of French reverses in Italy and on the Rhine. In 1899 he decided to cut his losses by abandoning the army in Egypt to return to France. The campaign ended up epitomising the way that European myths concerning the Orient could on occasions conflict with military logic. It did little to reinforce notions of a European identity, which developed far more directly from Napoleon's military conquests in Europe over the following decade (stimulating in turn the European peace movement's ideal of a united Europe during the nineteenth century).[55] The campaign's longer term political significance indeed lay largely outside Europe in the way that it helped establish a model of external colonisation for a number of European powers in regions such as Africa, South East Asia and the Pacific over the course of the next century.

The colonising impulse became increasingly evident from the 1830s onwards with the British acquisition of Yemen and the French annexation of Algeria. The latter case marked a new and particularly brutal form of European imperial intervention into the Islamic world that eventually took on some of the trappings of a crusade. The initial pressure for colonial conquest in Algeria came largely from the French army rather than the state itself.[56] Protracted Arab resistance led to the imposition of a new identity on the region of *l'Algerie Francaise* in order to stabilise the borders with the surrounding regions of Morocco in the west and Tunisia in the east. In time, this would be taken up by a growing settler interest following the military defeat of the Arab tribes by 1870. The imposition of a new French identity was seen by the colonisers in Algeria as part of a *mission civilisatrice* stemming from notions widely held among the French ruling elite of the innate cultural superiority of French civilisation. The notion had roots in the outlook of the eighteenth century *philosophes* but became consolidated by the French revolution. It contrasted the progress of the civilised ruling elite with the backwardness of *le peuple*, whether these were the common people in Europe or barbaric tribes on the colonial frontier.[57]

The French intelligentsia came increasingly in the course of the nineteenth century to see itself as in the vanguard of European thought concerning the Middle East and Arabic and Islamic worlds. It was particularly responsible for replacing the idea of western 'Christendom' with that of 'civilisation', largely in response to the impact of the secular republicanism of the French revolution.[58] The civilising ideal became in turn part of an imperial assimilationist ethic which subordinated and, if need be, destroyed colonised cultures in the interest of an expanding Francophone culture. Elsewhere in Europe the debate on 'civilisation' became bound up with romantic speculation over the nature and destination of separate cultures. Each civilisation was viewed as a separate entity and scholars went in search for what were viewed as its pure and inherent characteristics. This fostered what was called in German *Kulturduselei* or a 'speculation about civilisation' and led to the generation of theories about the 'soul' of European civilisation and ideas of the racial

[55] Philomena Murray and Paul B. Rich (eds.), *Visions of European Union* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

[56] For details see Charles-Robert Ageron, *Modern Algeria* (London: Hurst, 1991).

[57] Stuart Woolf, 'French Civilisation and Ethnicity in the Napoleonic Empire', *Past and Present*, 124 (August 1989), pp. 96–120.

[58] Lively, op. cit., p. 93.

distinctiveness and superiority of Europe over other civilisation and cultures.[59] In this vein, the French writer Ernest Renan argued that the soul of Western culture was anchored in science with all the possibilities this contained for creating what he termed 'social superiority'. Islamic societies on the other hand were characterised by a hatred of all things scientific, rendering them inherently barbarous. 'In Asia there are elements of barbarism analogous to those that from the early Moslem armies', he wrote, 'but science bars their way. If Omar or Genghis Khan had found good artillery confronting them, they would never have passed the borders of the desert.[60]

These views of Islamic culture were strongly influenced in the course of the nineteenth century by the increasing importance of racist ideas. Race indeed has been seen as largely replacing language and religion as the essential base behind the concept of a European civilisation.[61] The impact of imperialism and racism helped, in a number of cases, to enhance the contempt by a number of European intellectuals towards Islam.[62] By 1841 Thomas Carlyle considered Islam to be little more than a primitive version of Christianity with strongly pagan elements.[63] In France too, Alexis de Tocqueville, corresponding with the racist ideologue the Comte de Gobineau, conceded that Islam was the main reason for the 'visible decadence of the Islamic world' which would, like everywhere else, eventually succumb to European imperial domination.[64] The British writer Charles Pearson saw in the Turkish decline an opportunity for European powers such as Austria or Russia to annex territories for a 'higher race' as part of its 'natural habitat' in Europe.[65] Only a few heretical orientalists such as Wilfred Scawen Blunt managed to stand apart from this imperialist outlook by constructing an alternative mythology of a golden age of an Arab medieval social order to which Arabic societies should be encouraged to return.[66]

The apparent popularity of imperialist and racist ideas in nineteenth century Europe impacted only indirectly on the continent's power politics. Despite the supposed backwardness and decadence of the Ottoman empire as the 'sick man of Europe', the European great powers remained averse to liquidating it and initiating

[59] George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe* (London: Murray 1963), p. 2.

[60] Ernest Renan, 'Islamism and Science' in *The Poetry of the Celtic Races and Other Studies* (New Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press (1st edn 1896)), p. 102.

[61] Delanty, op. cit., pp. 97–8; L. Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

[62] Rodinson, op. cit.

[63] Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes, Hero Worship* (London: Chapman Hall, 1901), p. 70.

[64] Letter from de Tocqueville to Gobineau, 22 October 1843 in John Lukacs (ed.), *Tocqueville, The European Revolution and Correspondence with Gobineau* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), p. 21. Letter from de Tocqueville to Gobineau 8 January 1856 in *ibid*. pp. 269–70. The idea of European racial supremacy was underlined by the work of classical scholars in fostering a myth of European civilisation resting on the purer form of classical civilisation centred on Ancient Greece and Rome. The myth linked European cultural and racial supremacy and promoted the idea that the contemporary European polis was the historical successor of the republican tradition of classical Greece. By contrast the polis in Islamic societies became orientalised as it was seen as founded on monarchical 'despotism'. See in particular Athena Leoussi, 'Nationalism and Racial Hellenism in nineteenth century England and France', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 20:1 (1997), pp. 42–68; *Nationalism and Classicism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997). The myth ignored any evidence from archaeology that indicated that contractual societies could be found much earlier than classical Greece in the clay tablets and papyri from a variety of civilisations such as Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Hittite from the third millenium BC. Patricia Springborg, 'The Contractual State: Reflections on Orientalism and Despotism', *History of Political Thought*, 8:3 (1987), pp. 395–433.

[65] Charles H. Pearson, *National Life and Character* (London: Macmillan, 1894), p. 48.

[66] Rodinson, op. cit., p. 64.

rivalries for influence in the Balkans. The Turkish empire in Europe maintained an artificial lease of life for the first three quarters of the century as the European powers nibbled at its edges—France in Algeria, Britain in Aden and, after 1882, in Egypt. This growing imperial intrusion helped facilitate the progressive incorporation of a now compliant and dependent Turkey into the European system of diplomacy in the first half of the century. A permanent Turkish mission was established in Paris in 1835 and these contacts helped secure support from Britain and France against Russia in the Crimean War of 1854–6. The end of the war led to Turkey signing a formal alliance with Britain, France and Austria–Hungary, guaranteeing the continued safety of the Ottoman empire.[67]

Despite the widely-held view of Ottoman decadence and Islamic backwardness among European writers and intellectuals, politicians in Britain and France remained nervous over the longer term prospects of a rising Islamic nationalism. For those in Britain, signs of this become evident in the Indian Mutiny in 1857–9 and there was a general consensus in official circles that Islam represented the most dangerous threat to European imperial influence—a view that would indeed continue to be held by sections of the French and British political elites until at least the Suez Crisis of 1956–7.[68] There were strong pressures on the European powers to try and maintain the cohesion of the Ottoman empire once revolts broke out in its Balkan provinces in the 1870s. This at first seemed likely as the Turks suppressed the revolts. However, the intervention of Russia into the Balkans in 1877 reflected the limits of European diplomatic consensus on the 'Eastern question'. Russian victories over the Turks led to the creation of a large new Bulgarian state at the Peace of San Stefano while Montenegro, Serbia and Rumania gained independence.

The crisis indicated that the great powers in Western Europe were now faced less with a threat from Islam but from a Pan Slavism which had gained a considerable victory at San Stefano with the creation of a big Bulgarian client state of the Russians in the Balkans. The issue was big enough for Britain to contemplate going to war with Russia, a prospect which alarmed Bismarck who was anxious to maintain the Three Emperors' League of Germany, Russia and Austria as a successor of the older Concert of Europe established at Vienna in 1815. Bismarck agreed to act as 'honest broker' at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 which broke up big Bulgaria but gave Russia some comfort with the acquisition of Bessarabia. The decline of the Ottoman empire thus did not lead to war. When war did finally break out in 1914 it was not due so much to Turkish weakness but to that of Russia and Austria, the other multinational empires in the Balkans.[69]

Likewise, in Egypt the apparent decadence of Ottoman rule did not encourage the British governing elite into a moral crusade against Islam to suppress its identity in the way the French sought to do in Algeria. The three dominant figures of Gladstone, Lord Salisbury and Viscount Cromer had a patrician concern for social stability and consolidation of the *felaheen* peasantry in Egypt, in marked contrast to the uprooting of Arabic communities in Algeria and the establishment of a class of white *colon* settlers. This quest for the stabilisation of Islamic-European relations partly derived from a lack of understanding of Islamic culture, though arguably it

[67] M. S. Anderson op. cit., pp. 106–7.
[68] David Steele, 'Britain and Egypt, 1882–1914' in Keith M. Wilson (ed.), *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Middle East* (London: Mansell, 1983), p. 2.
[69] J. A. S. Grenville, *Europe Reshaped, 1848–1878* (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 390.

was strong enough to influence decisions such as that in 1882 to intervene in Egypt in order to suppress a nationalist revolt—a view that stands in marked contrast to the more realist-inclined assessment of Robinson and Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians*, which ascribes the intervention to a simple strategic calculus pivoted on maintaining the security of British links to India.[70]

These rivalries of the European great powers undermined any clear idea of the continent's political identity, which remained intellectually and culturally impoverished as it was subordinated to the rival national interests of sovereign nation states. The notion of being a 'European' was one that was best expressed outside Europe in the colonial context, where it was largely synonymous with being both 'white' and 'civilised'. Continuing power rivalries within Europe ensured that the great powers remained averse towards acting collectively to promote a new crusade against Islamic power and it is hard to agree with Delanty's contention that 'the renewal of the crusading ideal of missionary evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism in the latter half of the nineteenth century contributed to the new imperial identity of Europe'.[71] In general terms, the notion of 'Europe' had only a limited impact on the course of European politics, though it is possible to see it as some form of ultimate reference point in rival nationalisms. This became increasingly evident by the latter decades of the nineteenth century when Western Europe began to find itself embroiled in a wider pattern of relationships with the great powers of the United States and Russia. The idea of 'Europe' added impetus to claims in the latter part of the nineteenth century that Western Europe was the *fons et origo* of 'civilised' standards in international politics—standards which were broadly anchored in the continent's supposed liberal and humanitarian political traditions.[72]

By this time, the demise of the Ottoman imperial order in Europe relegated the issue of Islam largely to the external imperial politics of a few interested European powers, principally Britain and France. Here it was to remain until there emerged a series of cultural challenges to the idea of a homogeneous Christian and white European identity, which began with the post-1945 settlement of Islamic ethnic minority communities from North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia in many West European states.

Before this new Islamic upsurge in the context of growing debates by the 1970s over multiculturalism in Europe, Islam had effectively ceased, for the first fifty to sixty years of the twentieth century, to represent a major cultural and intellectual challenge to the construction of European identity. During this period, it was largely eclipsed in Europe by the rise of various strands of fascist racism that were rooted in the othering of social and population groups settled in Europe such as Jews, gypsies and Slavs. The racism that helped underpin the Third Reich in Germany also sought to revive the ideal of a European crusading mission, though following the Nazi invasion of Soviet Russia in 'Operation Barbarossa' of 1941, this became focused on Slavs, Jews and Soviet communism rather than Islam and the Middle East. The idea therefore of an 'Islamic threat' is not rooted in any easily observable continuous

[70] R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians; The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1961); Steele, op. cit., p. 20.

[71] Delanty, op. cit., p. 96.

[72] Gerrit W.Gong, *The Standard of Civilization in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 14–15. By 1905 a 'standard of civilization' had emerged as an explicit legal principle in doctrines of international law.

tradition of European political discourse. It emerges as a result of more recent manufacture in the last years of the Cold War, as Islamic resurgence in the wake of the 1979 Iranian revolution increasingly displaced communism as the main ideological threat to Western interests.

Islam, power politics and the quest for European identity

This article has argued that Islam has been at best only an ephemeral challenge to European identity construction since the break-up of the medieval social order and its importance has been over-rated in much scholarly analysis. Even during the period of Christendom from the time of Charlemagne to the fifteenth century, the crusading tradition was maintained rather haphazardly. This crusading tradition in any case hardly reinforced recognisably 'European' notions of identity since it encompassed areas outside Europe and appealed to a solidarity based on ideas of Frankish or Christian identity. The Ottoman challenge to Christendom if anything delayed, rather than encouraged, the emergence of a distinctive 'European' identity which finally began to appear in popular discourse in the late seventeenth century.

While Neumann and Welsh have rightly pointed to the role of Islam in helping to secure a degree of cultural cohesion in Western Europe in the medieval period, this has to be offset against evidence showing that there was a growing cleavage between the mythologies of European writers and intellectuals and those in control of medieval states. Despite the obvious moral authority of the papacy and the church in medieval Europe, this could not always be translated into policies supportive of a crusading mission against Islam. This apparent weakness of the church in Western Europe reflected its inability to 'block' politics and prevent the growth of market economies and contractual relationships, unlike Islam or Hinduism—these were factors, though, which were of major long-term importance in securing the rise of the West to global supremacy.[73]

At the same time, the growing autonomy of states and political classes from clerical domination gradually introduced a political calculus based on the precepts of *raison d'etat*. Under this mode of reasoning it proved to be a difficult diplomatic process to secure a strong political coalition to resist the power of the Ottoman Turks: such coalitions might occasionally be established, such as in 1571 at the battle of Lepanto and later the lifting of the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683. They tended however to be the exceptions rather than the rule, indicating that the crusading tradition in Europe against Islam was weaker than has often been presumed. What Neumann and Welsh have termed the cultural logic to European relations with Islam was at best a subordinate and secondary factor in Western European inter-state relations, which only occasionally surfaced to define the international relations of the period.

In the wake of the establishment of the Westphalian state system in Europe this cultural logic tended to be displayed outside the sphere of formal inter-state relations and power politics, though it could on occasions intrude on diplomatic

[73] John A. Hall, *Powers and Liberties: The Causes and Consequences of the Rise of the West* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 143.

relations. The decline of Ottoman power in the eighteenth century gave vent to a growing orientalism in Europe and a quest for knowledge of Islamic societies and culture that eventually spilled over into imperial conquest. Islam, in a general sense, helped writers and intellectuals define what 'Europe' was (in terms of reason, progress and humanitarianism) against what it was not. This led, by the nineteenth century, into the growing universalisation of European standards of 'civilisation'. This idea was of particular significance internationally, in the way that it purported to provide a way for a civilisationally divergent Ottoman empire to be accepted in the international order both as part of the European balance of power and, to a degree, as part of a 'Europe' that was a distinct civilisational region.[74]

However, the decline of Ottoman power also accompanied a declining Islamic impact on Europe and its identity formation. European identities by the nineteenth century became increasingly defined through overseas imperial expansion as well as by internal nation state formation. These led to imperial intrusions into North Africa and the Middle East, though they were driven by similar imperatives to imperial incursions in other regions such as South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. They were notable, with the exception of the French conquest of Algeria, for avoiding being turned into a crusading mission against Islam. The Ottoman empire also gained a prolonged lease of life through the European imperial powers' fear of the rise of Arab nationalism. The Ottoman retreat from Europe was, to a degree, stage-managed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in order to avoid leading to a general European war. Once finally removed from Europe, it became a matter of external imperial policy and had little direct impact on European identities in the course of the twentieth century.

The supposed centrality of Islam in European identity formation has thus been exaggerated by analysts heavily influenced by the contemporary rise of Islamist movements in the Middle East and North Africa. Bobby Sayyid has recently pointed out that European identity has come under considerable intellectual challenge since Islamists 'are refusing to recognize statements that perpetuate and position western identity in terms of western discourse about western identity'.[75] However, while Islam has clearly had, at various stages in the past, a considerable cultural and intellectual impact on European societies (as European societies have in turn had on Islamic ones), it is an exaggeration to see it as a continuous dominant influence on European identity formation. 'European' identity has really been characterised by the emergence of a disparate and rather amorphous series of different identities that have been formed in a variety of contexts and historical situations. Islam has been just one of the challengers in this process and its impact on European inter-state politics and foreign policy has, since at least the end of the European Middle Ages, been largely subsumed by the logic of inter-state power politics.

[74] An idea suggested to the author by Gerrit Gong.

[75] Bobby Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islam* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1997), p. 160.