

Muslims and European Identity: Can Europe Represent Islam?

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Simultaneously, and despite the parochialism of the governments at home, a sort of international solidarity was slowly evolving in the colonies. . . . Out of interest if not out of good will, an embryonic European understanding had at last been found in Africa. We could hate one another in Europe, but we felt that, between two neighboring colonies, the interest in common was as great as between two white men meeting in the desert.

Count Carlo Sforza, *Europe and Europeans*, 1936

Muslims are present in Europe and yet absent from it. The problem of understanding Islam in Europe is primarily, so I claim, a matter of understanding how “Europe” is conceptualized by Europeans. Europe (and the nation-states of which it is constituted) is ideologically constructed in such a way that Muslim immigrants cannot be satisfactorily represented in it. I argue that they are included within and excluded from Europe at one and the same time in a special way.

I take it for granted that in Europe today Muslims are often misrepresented in the media and discriminated against by non-Muslims.¹ More interesting for my present argument is the anxiety expressed by the majority of West Europeans about the presence of Muslim communities and Islamic traditions within the borders of Europe. (In France, for example, a 1992 poll showed that two-thirds of the population feared the presence of Islam in that country.²) It is not merely that the full incorporation of Muslims into European society is thought to be especially hard for people

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¹ See J. Wrench and J. Solomos, eds., *Racism and Migration in Western Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), esp. the excellent contribution by S. Castles.

² See A. Hargreaves, *Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (London: Routledge, 1995), 119.

who have been brought up in an alien culture. It is their attachment to Islam that many believe commits Muslims to values that are an affront to the modern Western form of life.

Admittedly, there is no shortage of voices that respond to such anxieties with characteristic liberal optimism.³ They speak of the diverse linguistic and ethnic origins of Muslim immigrants, and of the considerable variation in individual attachments to old traditions. There is little to fear from most immigrants—liberals say—and much more from the consequences of the higher unemployment and greater prejudice to which they are subjected. Muslims in Europe can be assimilated into Western society. Liberals maintain that it is only the extreme right for whom the presence of Muslims and Islam in Europe represents a potential cultural disaster, and that right-wing xenophobia is rooted in the romantic nativism it espouses, and consequently in its rejection of the West's universalist principles. In this, as in other matters, liberals stand for tolerance and an open society.

All these claims may be true, but the liberal position is more layered than one might suppose. To begin with, the Islamic disregard of "the principle of secular republicanism" (as symbolized by the *affaire du foulard*), and the Islamic attack against "the principle of freedom of speech" (as exemplified in the Rushdie affair) have angered liberals and the left no less than the extreme right. These events within Europe have been read as all of a piece with the Islamist resort to civil violence in North Africa and West Asia, and they have led even liberals to ask with growing skepticism whether the Islamic tradition (as distinct from its human carriers) can find a legitimate place in a modern Western society.

But I begin elsewhere. I focus not on liberal opposition to right-wing intolerance or dismay at the closedmindedness of immigrants but with a larger question. How can contemporary European practices and discourses represent a culturally diverse society of which Muslim migrants (Pakistanis in Britain, Turks in Germany, North Africans in France) are now part? To answer this question I shall first address another: How is Europe represented by those who define themselves as authentic Europeans?

The general preoccupation in the social sciences with the idea of *identity* dates from after the Second World War. It marks a new sense of

³ Many of these voices are found in recent collections: B. Lewis and D. Schnapper, eds., *Muslims in Europe* (London: Pinter, 1994); S. Z. Abedin and Z. Sardar, eds., *Muslim Minorities in the West* (London: Grey Seal, 1995); G. Nonneman, T. Niblock, and B. Szajkowski, eds., *Muslim Communities in the New Europe* (London: Ithaca Press, 1996).

the word, highlighting the individual's social locations and psychological crises in an increasingly uncertain world.⁴ "This is my name," we now declare. "I need you to recognize me by that name." More than ever before identity depends on the other's *recognition* of the self. Previously, the more common meaning of *identity* was "sameness," as in the statement that all Muslims do not have "identical interests," and attributively, as in "identity card." In Europe the newer twist on the sense of the word is almost certainly more recent than in America. Perhaps in both places the discourse of *identity* indicates not the rediscovery of ethnic loyalties so much as the undermining of old certainties. The site of that discourse is suppressed fear. The idea of European identity, I say, is not merely a matter of how legal rights and obligations can be reformulated. Nor is it simply a matter of how a more inclusive name can be made to claim loyalties that are attached to national or local ones. It concerns *exclusions* and the desire that those excluded recognize what is included in the name one has chosen for oneself. The discourse of European identity is a symptom of anxieties about non-Europeans.

MUSLIMS AND THE IDEA OF EUROPE

What kind of identity, then, does Europe represent to Europeans? An empirical response would base itself on comprehensive research into literature, popular media, parliamentary debates, and local interviews. My primary interest, however, is in analyzing the logic of a discourse rather than in tracing its empirical spread. So I begin with a partial answer to the question. Consider this anecdote as reported in the 1992 *Time* magazine cover story on Turkey's attempt to become a member of the European Community:

However it may be expressed, there is a feeling in Western Europe, rarely stated explicitly, that Muslims whose roots lie in Asia do not belong in the Western family, some of whose members spent centuries trying to drive the Turks out of a Europe they threatened to overwhelm. Turkish membership "would dilute the E.C.'s Europeaness," says one German diplomat.⁵

⁴ Philip Gleason points out that the first edition of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, published in 1930–5, carried no entry under the term "identity," and that one appeared only in the 1968 edition. See "Identifying Identity: A Semantic History," *The Journal of American History*, vol. 69, no. 4 (1983): 910–31.

⁵ "Across the Great Divide," *Time*, October 19, 1992, 31.

Clearly, neither the genocide practiced by the Nazi state nor its attempt to overwhelm Europe have led to feelings in Western Europe that would cast doubt on where Germany belongs. I do not make this statement in a polemical spirit. On the contrary, I affirm that given the idea of Europe that exists, such violence cannot dilute Germany's Europeaness. Violence is—among other things—a complicated moral language. Far from being threatened by internal violence, European solidarity is strengthened by it.

Let me explain: Tony Judt powerfully argues that the idea of Europe stands as a convenient suppressor of collective memories of the widespread collaboration with Nazi crimes in East and West alike, as well as of mass brutalities and civil cruelties for which all states were directly or indirectly responsible.⁶ His account has nothing to say, however, about violence perpetrated in this period by Europeans outside Europe—in colonial Africa, say, or in the Middle East. No mention is made even of Algeria, which was, after all, an internal Department of France. I stress that my comment here is not moralistic but descriptive. It has to do with how the conceptual boundaries of moral and legal solidarity are actually traced. I do not object to Judt's leaving colonial violence out of his discussion. I merely point to what he thinks is important. I indicate that his discussion of collective culpability is limited in precisely the way that the "myth of Europe" defines the extent of its own solidarity. "The myth of Europe" does not simply suppress the collective memories of violence within Europe; the resurrection of those memories strengthens that myth. Moral failure is considered particularly shameful in this case because Europeans try to cover up their past cruelties in Europe to *other Europeans* instead of confronting that fact fully. The Turkish assault against Europe has quite a different salience.

Historically, it was not Europe that the Turks threatened but Christendom. Europe was not then distinct from Christendom. "For diplomats and men of affairs, writes Denys Hay,

the intrusion of the Turk was a fact which could not be ignored and the practical acceptance of a Moslem state into the field of diplomacy might well have produced an early rejection of Christendom in the field of international relations. . . . The language of diplomacy maintained the established terminology: "the common enemy, the Christian republic, the Christian world, the provinces of Christendom" are found in the phraseology of a large number of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century treaties. A similar attitude is to be found in the treatises of the international

⁶ Tony Judt, "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," *Daedalus*, vol. 121, no. 4 (1992).

lawyers down to, and even beyond, Grotius. If the Turk was not different under natural law, he was certainly different under divine law: the Turk was not far short of a “natural enemy” of Christians.⁷

In the contemporary European suspicion of Turkey, Christian history, enshrined in the tradition of international law, is being reinvented in secular language as the foundation of an ancient identity.

Consider another example: the 1995 interview with Tadeusz Mazowiecki on the subject of his principled resignation as the U.N. representative of human rights in the Balkans. At one point the interviewers, Bernard Osser and Patrick Saint-Exupéry, pose the following question: “You are Polish and Christian. Is it strange to hear yourself defending Bosnians, many of whom are Muslims?” Some readers might wonder how it is that two French intellectuals, heirs to the secular Enlightenment, can formulate such a question in Europe today. But of course the aim of this leading question is to elicit the plea for tolerance that the interviewers know will be forthcoming. So I find it more significant that Mazowiecki expresses no surprise at the question itself. Instead, he responds as expected by urging tolerance. He assures his interviewers that the war in Bosnia is not a religious one and that Bosnian Muslims are not a danger to Europe. “It bodes ill for us,” he warns, “if, at the end of the twentieth century, Europe is still incapable of coexistence with a Muslim community.”⁸

Mazowiecki’s assumption (accepted without comment by his French interlocutors) is that Bosnian Muslims may be *in* Europe but are not *of* it. Even though they may not have migrated to Europe from Asia (indeed, they are not racially distinguishable from other whites in Europe), and even though they may have adjusted to secular political institutions (insofar as this can be said of Balkan societies),⁹ they cannot claim a Europeaness—as the inhabitants of Christian Europe can. It is precisely because Muslims are external to the essence of Europe that “coexistence” can be envisaged between “us” and “them.”

⁷ Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), 113–14.

⁸ B. Osser and P. de Saint-Exupéry, “The U.N.’s Failure: An Interview with Tadeusz Mazowiecki,” *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 42, no. 14, September 21, 1995.

⁹ “In its historical practice,” writes François Thual, “Caucasian, Balkan, Greek, and Slav Orthodox Christianity has never known secularism based on the separation of Church and State.” (“Dans le monde orthodoxe, la religion sacralise la nation, et la nation protège la religion,” *Le Monde*, January 20, 1998, 13.) It is a little known fact—and one very rarely publicized—that the Greek constitution is proclaimed in the name of the Holy Trinity, and that it affirms that “the dominant religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ.”

For both liberals and the extreme right the representation of “Europe” takes the form of a narrative, one of whose effects is to exclude Islam. I do not mean by this that both sides are equally hostile toward Muslims living in Europe.¹⁰ Nor do I assume that Muslim immigrants are in no way responsible for their practical predicament. I mean only that for liberals no less than for the extreme right, the narrative of Europe points to the idea of an unchangeable essence.

ISLAM AND THE NARRATIVE OF EUROPE

Europe, we often read, is not merely a continent but a civilization. The word “civilization” is no longer as fashionable in the West as it was at the turn of the nineteenth century, but it appears to be returning. Some, like Michael Wintle, still object that the term “civilization” should not be applied to Europe, while insisting that there is something that Europeans share:

To talk in terms of a quintessential or single European culture, civilization, or identity leads quickly to unsustainable generalization, and to all manner of heady and evidently false claims for one’s own continent. Nonetheless, if the triumphalism can be left to one side there is a long history of shared influences and experiences, a heritage, which has not touched all parts of Europe or all Europeans equally, and which is therefore hard and perhaps dangerous to define in single sentences or even paragraphs, but which is felt and experienced in varying ways and degrees by *those whose home is Europe*, and which is recognized—whether approvingly or disapprovingly—by many from outside.¹¹

The key influences on European experience, Wintle continues, are the Roman Empire, Christianity, the Enlightenment, and industrialization. It is because these historical moments have not influenced Muslim

¹⁰ The hostility of secular liberals, however, is often difficult to distinguish from that of the extreme right. In France, for example, a headmaster suspended three Muslim schoolgirls in September 1989 for wearing head scarves on the grounds that they were in contravention of French laws of *laïcité*. Later the headmaster’s suspension order was overturned by France’s education minister. The response that followed was remarkable. A group of leading intellectuals, including Régis Debray and Alain Finkelkraut, compared the minister’s decision to the 1938 appeasement of Nazi Germany at Munich: “by implication,” observes Hargreaves, “the Islamic bridgehead established by the three girls in Creil now represented a comparable threat to the future well-being of France.” The form in which the issue was publicly represented helped the extreme right-wing Front National Party to win a sweeping by-election victory near Paris, an event that in turn contributed to the adjustment of government policy on immigration. See Hargreaves, *Immigration*, 125–6.

¹¹ Michael Wintle, “Cultural Identity in Europe: Shared Experience,” in M. Wintle, ed., *Culture and Identity in Europe* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996), 13 (emphasis added).

immigrants' experience that *they are not those whose home is Europe*. These moments are precisely what others have designated "European civilization."

Raymond Williams notes that the word "civilization" is used today in three senses: (1) a single universal development (as in "human civilization"); (2) the collective character of a people or a period that is different from and incommensurable with others (as in "the civilization of the renaissance in Italy"); and (3) the culture of a particular population, which is rankable as higher or lower than another, and perhaps also capable of further development.¹² Although Williams does not say so, the three senses together articulate the essence of "European civilization": it aspires to a universal (because "human") status, it claims to be distinctive (it defines modernity), and it is (at least in terms of quantifiable criteria) undoubtedly the most advanced. Taken together these senses require a narrative definition of "Europe."

The two journalistic examples I cited earlier both assume a historical definition of Europe as a civilization. But they do so in ways that are largely implicit. Hugh Trevor-Roper's *The Rise of Christian Europe* is one of many academic texts that expresses the essence of European identity explicitly by means of a historical narrative.¹³ Trevor-Roper's book is interesting because it defines European civilization—and therefore European identity—as a narrative, or at least as the beginning of one whose proper ending is already familiar. Like other texts with which it may be compared, it presents a twofold notion of history: the history of "the idea of Europe" and of "European history."¹⁴ It also has an interesting historical location. It appeared in 1965, when British decolonization was more or less complete and when the flood of non-European immigrants from the former colonies was stemmed by legislation passed—amidst charges of betrayal of its principles—by the Labour government. At the time a new role for Britain in its postimperial phase was being vigorously debated in all sections of the political spectrum. The option of "joining Europe" politically was an important part of that debate.

¹² Raymond Williams, *Key Words* (London: Fontana (Collins), 1983).

¹³ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe*, 2d ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965). Described by a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer as "one of the most brilliant works of historiography to be published in England in this century," it has been reprinted numerous times, most recently in 1989.

¹⁴ For example, Hay, *Europe*; J.-B. Duroselle, *L'idée d'Europe dans l'histoire* (Paris: Denoel, 1963); R.H. Foerster, *Europa: Geschichte einer politischen Idee* (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1967); K. Wilson and J. Van der Dussen, eds., *The History of the Idea of Europe* (London: Routledge, 1995).

When Trevor-Roper speaks of “European history,” he does not mean narratives about the inhabitants of the European continent, which is why there is nothing in his book about Byzantium and Eastern Europe, or about North-Western Europe (other than brief references to the Vikings’ destructiveness), or about Jews (other than as victims), or about Muslim Spain (other than as an intrusive presence). “European history” is the narration of an identity many still derive from “European (or Western) civilization”—a narrative that seeks to represent homogeneous space and linear time.

What is the essence of that civilizational identity? Trevor-Roper reminds his readers that most of its ideas and many of its techniques entered European civilization from outside. The things that belong to European civilization, therefore, are those that were taken up and creatively worked on by Europe. Productive elaboration becomes an essential characteristic of Europe as a civilization. This view makes sense, I would suggest, in the context of a particular Enlightenment theory about property first propounded by John Locke. Locke argued that a person’s right to property comes from the mixing of labor with the common things of this world. “God gave the world to men in common, but since He gave it them for their benefit and the greatest conveniencies of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed He meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational (*and labor was to be his title to it*); not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious.”¹⁵ Applied to whole peoples, property was “European” to the extent that Europeans appropriated, cultivated, and then lawfully passed it on to generations of Europeans as their own inheritance.

“European history” thus becomes a history of continuously productive actions defining as well as defined by Law. Property is central to that story, not only in the sense familiar to political economy and jurisprudence, but in the sense of the particular character, nature, or essence of a person or thing. It is a story that can be narrated in terms of improvement and accumulation in which the industrial revolution is merely one central moment. According to this conception, “European civilization” is the sum of properties, all those material and moral acts that define European identity.

¹⁵ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1924), book II, chapter V, paragraph 34 (emphasis added).

It follows from this view of Europe that real Europeans acquire their individual identities from the character of their civilization. Without that civilizational essence, individuals living within Europe are unstable and ambiguous. That is why not all inhabitants of the European continent are “really” or “fully” European. Russians are clearly marginal. Until just after World War II, European Jews were marginal too, but since that break the emerging discourse of a “Judeo-Christian tradition” has signaled a new integration of their status into Europe.¹⁶ Completely external to “European history” is medieval Spain. Although Spain is now defined geographically as part of Europe, Arab Spain from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries is seen as being outside “Europe,” in spite of the numerous intimate connections and exchanges in the Iberian Peninsula during that period between Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

There is a problem for any historian constructing a categorical boundary for “European civilization” because the populations designated by the label “Islam” are, in great measure, the cultural heirs of the Hellenic world—the very world in which “Europe” claims to have its roots. “Islamic civilization” must therefore be denied a vital link to the properties that define so much of what is essential to “Europe” if a civilizational difference is to be postulated between them. There appear to be two moves by which this is done. First, by denying that it has an essence of its own, “Islam” can be represented as a *carrier civilization* that helped to bring important elements into Europe from outside, material and intellectual elements that were only contingently connected to Islam.¹⁷ Then, paradoxically, this carrier civilization is attributed an essence: an ingrained hostility to all non-Muslims. That attribution constitutes Islam as Europe’s primary alter. This alleged antagonism to Christians then becomes crucial to the formation of European identity. In this, as in other historical narratives of Europe, this oppositional role gives “Islam” a quasi-civilizational identity.¹⁸ One aspect of the identity of Islamic civilization is that it represents an early attempt to destroy Europe’s civilization from outside; another is that it signifies the corrupting moral

¹⁶ Of course, anti-Semitism has not disappeared in Europe. But no one who aspires to respectability can now afford to be known publicly as an anti-Semite.

¹⁷ “The Arabs themselves . . . had little of their own to offer. . . . But as carriers, their services to Europe were enormous.” Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe*, 141.

¹⁸ In Trevor-Roper’s picturesque language: “Out of this union [of ecclesiastical and feudal power] would come, in due time, the combined spiritual and material counter-attack of the enslaved West against its Moslem exploiters: the Crusades.” *Ibid.*, 100.

environment that Europe must continuously struggle to overcome from within.¹⁹

This construction of civilizational difference is not exclusive in any simple sense. The de-essentialization of Islam is paradigmatic for all thinking about the assimilation of non-European peoples to European civilization. The idea that people's historical experience is inessential to them, that it can be shed at will, makes it possible to argue more strongly for the Enlightenment's claim to universality: Muslims, as members of the abstract category "humans," can be assimilated or (as some recent theorists have put it) "translated" into a global ("European") civilization once they have divested themselves of what many of them regard (mistakenly) as essential to themselves. The belief that human beings can be separated from their histories and traditions makes it possible to urge a Europeanization of the Islamic world. And by the same logic it underlies the belief that the *assimilation* to Europe's civilization of Muslim immigrants, who are for good or for ill already in European states, is necessary and desirable.

The motive of "European history" in this representation is the story of Europe's active power to reconstruct the world (within Europe and beyond) in its own Faustian image.²⁰ Europe's colonial past is not merely an epoch of overseas power that is now decisively over. It is the beginning of an irreversible global transformation that remains an intrinsic part of "European experience" and is part of the reason that Europe has become what it is today. It is not possible for Europe to be represented without evoking this history, the way in which its active power has continually constructed its own exclusive boundary—and transgressed it.

THE SHIFTING BORDERS OF MODERN EUROPE

It is often conceded that several peoples and cultures inhabit the European continent, but it is also believed that there is a single history that articulates European civilization and therefore European identity. The official

¹⁹ Hence Trevor-Roper's account of the European Crusaders who established a principality in Jerusalem from the end of the eleventh century to the end of the twelfth: "The Christian kingdom of Jerusalem continued for less than a century. The Christian virtues, such as they were, evaporated in the East. The Christian dynasties ran out. . . . [T]he sons—or rather the successors, for there was a dearth of sons—settled down to a life of luxurious co-existence in which feudal bonds were rotted and oriental tastes indulged." *Ibid.*, 104. By "Christian" Trevor-Roper refers, of course, only to those who originated in "Europe," because the Middle East at the time was largely inhabited by indigenous Christians who were central contributors to "Islamic civilization."

²⁰ On Europe's "Faustian" identity, see Agnes Heller, "Europe: An Epilogue?" in B. Nelson, D. Roberts, and W. Veit, eds., *The Idea of Europe: Problems of National and Transnational Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 1992).

European Union slogan expresses this thought as “unity in diversity.” But determining the boundaries of that unity continues to be an urgent problem for anyone concerned with the civilizational basis of the E.U. Perry Anderson has noted some of the difficulties about boundaries encountered in recent discourse:

Since the late Eighties, publicists and politicians in Hungary, the Czech lands, Poland and more recently Slovenia and even Croatia have set out to persuade the world that these countries belong to Central Europe that has a natural affinity to Western Europe, and is fundamentally distinct from Eastern Europe. The geographical stretching involved in these definitions can be extreme. Vilnius is described by Czeslaw Milosz, for example, as a Central European city. But if Poland—let alone Lithuania—is really in the center of Europe, what is the east? Logically, one would imagine, the answer must be Russia. But since many of the same writers—Milan Kundera is another example—deny that Russia has ever belonged to European civilization at all, we are left with the conundrum of a space proclaiming itself center and border at the same time.²¹

Anderson’s witty account highlights the illogicality of recent definitions of Europe. Yet it is precisely the politics of civilizational identity that is at work in the discourse of Europe’s extent. For Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians it is a matter not only of participating in the European Common Market, but of distancing themselves from a socialist history. Where Europe’s borders are to be drawn is also a matter of representing what European civilization is. These borders involve more than a confused geography. They reflect a history whose unconfused purpose is to separate Europe from alien times (“communism,” “Islam”) as well as from alien places (“Islam,” “Russia”).

J. G. A. Pocock has spelt out another aspect of this politics of civilization: “‘Europe’—both with and without the North America whose addition turns it from ‘Europe’ into ‘Western Civilization’—is once again an empire in the sense of a civilized and stabilized zone which must decide whether to extend or refuse its political power over violent cultures along its borders but not within its system.”²² In Pocock’s separation between a “civilized culture” and “violent cultures,” we sense that Europe’s borders at once protect and threaten its unity, define its authority, and engage with external powers that have entered its domain. The “inside” cannot contain the “outside,” violent cultures cannot inhabit a civil one, Europe cannot contain non-Europe. And yet Europe must try to contain, subdue, or incorporate what lies beyond it and what consequently comes to be

²¹ P. Anderson, “The Europe to Come,” *London Review of Books*, January 25, 1996.

²² J. G. A. Pocock, “Deconstructing Europe,” *London Review of Books*, December 19, 1991.

within it. European capitalism and European strategic interests cannot be confined to the European continent.

The representation of Europe's borders is, of course, symbolic. But the signs and symbols have a history. Like the borders of its constituent states, the European Union's boundaries are inscribed in treaties according to the conventions of international law—the cumulative result of earlier narratives of Europe. The status of individual borders as well as the very institution of international law that regulates today's worldwide society of nation-states have been constituted by narratives of Europe. Adam Watson summarizes the story:

The expansion of Europe was neither uniform nor systematic. It occurred over several centuries, for a number of reasons, and assumed many different forms. Chronologically we can distinguish in retrospect four main phases. First came the medieval crusades into Iberia and round the Baltic. The second phase covered three centuries of competitive maritime exploration and expansion and the parallel evolution of a European international society. Thirdly in the nineteenth century the industrial revolution enabled the European Concert to encompass the entire globe and to administer most of it. Lastly in our own century the tide of European dominion ebbed, and was replaced by a world-wide society based on the European model but in which Europeans now play only a modest role.²³

What this story misses is that Europe did not simply expand overseas; it made itself through that expansion. This story also underestimates the role that Europeans—especially those who inhabit the United States—still play in regulating “world-wide society,” a role that is by no means “modest.” The borders of political Europe have varied not only over time, but also according to the European model governing global relations.

Can Muslims be represented in Europe? As members of states that form part of what Watson and others call European international society, Muslims have, of course, long been represented (and regulated) in it. But representing Muslims in European liberal democracies is a different matter. It raises a question that does not apply to the international system: how can a European state represent its “minorities”?

EUROPEAN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND MINORITY REPRESENTATION

So far I have explored the idea that Islam is excluded from representations of Europe and the narratives through which the representations

²³ Adam Watson, “European International Society and its Expansion,” in H. Bull and A. Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 32.

are constituted. I now approach the question from another angle: are there possibilities of representing Muslim minorities in modern European states?

The ideology of political representation in liberal democracies makes it difficult if not impossible to represent Muslims as Muslims. Why? Because in theory the citizens who constitute a democratic state belong to a class that is defined only by what is common to all its members and its members only. What is common is the abstract equality of individual citizens to one another. Marie Swabey has stated the issue succinctly:

The notion of equality central to democracy is clearly a logical and mathematical conception. . . . [O]nce equality is admitted, the notions of number, per capita enumeration, and determination by the greater number are not far to seek. . . . Citizens are to be taken as so many equivalent units and issues are to be decided by the summation of them. . . . Once we conceive the whole (the state) as composed of parts (the citizens) which are formally distinct but without relevant qualitative differences, we are applying the notion in its essentials. Involved here is the assumption not only that the whole is authoritative over any of its parts, but that what there is *more of* has *ipso facto* greater weight than that which differs from it merely by being less. In the democratic state this idea is expressed as the postulate that the opinion of the people as a whole, or of the greater part of them, is authoritative over that of any lesser group.²⁴

It follows, Swabey goes on, that the opinion of a majority “is more likely to represent approximately the opinion of the whole body than any other part.” In this conception representative government is assimilated to the notion of an outcome that is statistically representative of “the whole body” of citizens. The same principle applies to segments of “the whole (the state)” according to which representatives of geographically demarcated constituencies represent aggregates of individual voters. It is no accident that the statistical concept of representativeness emerged in close connection with the construction of the welfare state (a process that began toward the end of the nineteenth century) and the centralization of national statistics. Both in the history of statistical thinking and in the evolution of democratic politics, these developments were especially important—demography, social security legislation, market research, and national election polls.

In principle, therefore, nothing should distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims as citizens of a European democratic state other than their fewer number. But a “minority” is not a purely quantitative concept of the kind stipulated by Swabey, not an outcome of probability theory applied to

²⁴ Marie Collins Swabey, *The Theory of the Democratic State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), 18–20 (emphasis in original).

determine the opinion of a corporate body—"the people as a whole." The concept of minority arises from a specific Christian history: from the dissolution of the bond that was formed immediately after the Reformation between the established church and the early modern state. *This* notion of minority sits uncomfortably with the Enlightenment concept of the abstract citizen.

The post-Reformation doctrine that it was the state's business to secure religious uniformity within the polity—or at least to exclude Dissenters from important rights—was crucial to the formation of the early-modern state. By contrast, the secular Enlightenment theory that the political community consists of an abstract collection of equal citizens was propounded as a criticism of the religious inequality characterizing the absolutist state. The most famous document embodying that theory was the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen." The theory was criticized almost from the moment it was first stated—notably by Edmund Burke for the license it gave to destructive passions and by Karl Marx for disguising bourgeois self-interest. However, the decisive movements that helped to break the alliance of church and state seem to have been religious rather than secular—Tractarianism in England and Ultramontaniam in France and Europe generally. The arguments they deployed most effectively were strictly theological and were aimed at securing the freedom of Christ's church from the constraints of an earthly power.²⁵ An important consequence of abandoning the total union of church and state was the eventual emergence of "minority rights" as a central theme of national politics. Members of minorities became at once equal to all other citizens, members of the body politic ("the people as a whole"), and unequal to the majority in requiring special protection.

The political inclusion of minorities has meant the acceptance of groups formed by specific (often conflicting) historical narratives, and the embodied memories, feelings, desires that the narratives have helped to shape. The rights that minorities claim include the right to maintain and perpetuate themselves as groups. "Minority rights" are not derivable from general theories of citizenship: minority status is connected to membership in a specific *historical* group not in the abstract class of citizens. In that sense minorities are no different from majorities, also a historically constituted group. The fact that they are usually smaller in number is an accidental feature. Minorities may be numerically much larger than

²⁵ Joseph Heim, "The Demise of the Confessional State and the Rise of the Idea of a Legitimate Minority," in J. W. Chapman and A. Wertheimer, eds., *Majorities and Minorities* (New York: New York University Press, 1990).

the body of equal citizens from whom they are excluded. In the British empire vast numbers of colonial subjects were ruled by a democratic state of citizens far smaller in number through a variety of constitutional devices.²⁶ Minorities are defined as minorities in structures of dominant power.

Take the case of France. Religious Muslims who reside in France are similar to the Christian (and post-Christian) inhabitants of that country in this regard: each group has constituted itself *as a group* through its own narratives. These narratives, and the practices they authorize, help to define what is essential to each group. To insist in this context that Muslim groups must not be defined in terms they regard as essential to themselves is in effect to demand that they can and should shed the narratives and practices they take to be necessary to their lives as Muslims. The crucial difference between the “majority” and the “minorities” is, of course, that the majority effectively claims the French state as its national state. In other words, to the extent that “France” embodies the Jacobin narrative, it essentially represents the Christian and post-Christian citizens who are constituted by it.

Thus Jean-Marie Le Pen’s insistence in the early eighties on the right of the majority (“the French in France”) to protect its distinctive character against the influence of minority difference is not only an extension of the left slogan “the right to difference.” It is a claim that the majority’s right to be French “in their own country” precludes the right of minorities to equal treatment in this regard. “We not only have the right but the duty to defend our national personality,” Le Pen declares, “and we too have our right to be different.”²⁷ Given the existence of a French national personality of which the Jacobin republic is claimed to be the embodiment, and given that the majority is its representative, Le Pen can argue that only those immigrants able and willing to join them (thereby ceasing to

²⁶ “Colonies, protectorates, mandates, intervention treaties, and similar forms of dependence make it possible today for a democracy to govern a heterogeneous population without making them citizens, making them dependent upon a democratic state, and at the same time held apart from the state. This is the political and constitutional meaning of the nice formula ‘the colonies are foreign in public law, but domestic in international law’.” Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1926; trans. ed., Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 10.

²⁷ “Nous croyons que la France est notre patrie, que les Français y ont des devoirs mais aussi des droits supérieurs à tous autres, et que nous avons non seulement le droit mais le devoir de défendre notre personnalité nationale et nous aussi notre droit à la différence.” *Le Monde*, 21 September 1982, cited in part, and in English translation, by Miriam Feldblum, “Re-Visions of Citizenship: The Politics of Nation and Immigration in France, 1981–1989,” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1991, 48. My translation of the original is slightly different from Feldblum’s.

belong to a minority) have the right to remain in France as French citizens. It follows that the “inassimilable” ones (North African Muslims) should be encouraged to leave when their labor is no longer required by France. This may be an intolerant position but it is not illogical.²⁸ To be a French citizen is to reflect, as an individual, the collective personality that was founded in the French Revolution and embodied in the laws and conventional practices of the French Republic, and that is recounted in its national story. Although that personality may not be regarded as eternal and unchangeable, it represents a precondition of French citizenship. As even liberals concede, the individual citizen cannot make with the state any contract he or she chooses independently of that personality. In brief, the narratives that define “being French” and the practices they authorize cannot be regarded as inessential. *French citizens cannot be de-essentialized*. This view, shared by the Left, Center, and Right, rejects the notion that the citizen is identical only with himself or herself, that he or she therefore essentially represents an abstract quantity that can be separated from his or her social identity, added up and then divided into groups that have only numerical value. It should not be surprising that Le Pen has been able to push the greater part of the majority toward endorsing reforms of the Nationality Code in the direction demanded by the extreme right.²⁹ The very existence of the French Jacobin narrative permits the extreme right to occupy the ideological center in contemporary French immigration politics.

Liberals are generally dismayed at the resurgence of the Right, but the notion of primordial intolerance will not explain it. Many critics have observed that part of the problem resides in the identification of national boundaries with those of the state. Some of them have sought a solution in the radical claim that all boundaries are indeterminate and ambiguous. William Connolly has recently theorized the matter more perceptively. He asks, pointedly, “whether it is possible to prize the indispensability of boundaries to social life while resisting overdetermined drives to *override* a particular set.” He goes on to question the assumption that “the boundaries of a state must correspond to those of a nation, both of

²⁸ Feldblum, in “Re-Visions,” argues that the immigration politics of the extreme right are better described as “nativist” than as “racist,” because the latter term does not explain why many of the nonracist left also share certain crucial elements of the same position. While Feldblum’s study as a whole is valuable for understanding developments in recent French ideas of national identity, she does not discuss the contradictions inherent in liberal ideas of citizenship. Her use of the pejorative term “nativism” to denote populist denunciation of “foreign influences” deflects her from an adequate consideration of liberal forms of exclusivism.

²⁹ See Hargreaves, *Immigration*, 169–76.

these to a final site of citizen political allegiance, and all three of those to the parameters of a democratic ethos.”³⁰

The problem of representing Islam in European liberal democracies cannot be addressed adequately unless such questioning is taken seriously. With America especially in mind, Connolly urges a shift in the prevalent idea of pluralism “from a majority nation presiding over numerous minorities in a democratic state to a democratic state of multiple minorities contending and collaborating with a general ethos of forbearance and critical responsiveness.”³¹ The decentered pluralism he advocates in place of liberal doctrines of multiculturalism requires a continuous readiness to deconstruct historical narratives constituting identities and their boundaries (which, he argues, have a tendency to become sacralized and fundamentalized) in order to “open up space through which *care* is cultivated for the abundance of life.”³²

To what extent and how often historical narratives that constitute identities can be deconstructed remains a difficult question. Thus I have been arguing, on the one hand, that Europe’s historical narrative of itself needs to be questioned and, on the other, that the historical narratives produced by so-called “minorities” need to be respected. This apparent inconsistency is dictated partly by my concern that time and place should be made for weaker groups within spaces and times commanded by a dominant one. Muslims in Europe, I have implied, should be able to find institutional representation as a minority in a democratic state where there are only minorities. For where there are only minorities the possibilities of forging alliances between them will be greater than in a state with a majority presiding over several competing minorities.

My comments also reflect an unresolved tension: how can respect for individual “identities” be ensured *and* conditions be fostered that nurture collective “ways of life”? The latter concern is not merely a matter of “recognition”—of the demand that one should be able to name oneself and be confirmed by others as the bearer of that name, and thereby have one’s anxieties allayed. It is also a matter of embodied memories and practices that are articulated by traditions, and of political institutions through which these traditions can be fully represented. (The constituency represented does not have to be geographically continuous.) Our attention needs to be directed not so much at how identities are negotiated and recognized (for example, through exploratory and constructive dialogue,

³⁰ W. E. Connolly, “Pluralism, Multiculturalism and the Nation-State: Rethinking the Connections,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1996), 58 (emphasis in original).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 61. ³² *Ibid.*, 70 (emphasis in original).

as Charles Taylor has advocated).³³ Rather, the focus should be on what it takes to live particular ways of life continuously, cooperatively, and unself-consciously.

John Milbank's arguments for decentering are different from Connolly's, and they are linked to a specifically medieval historical experience. His contrast between what he calls "enlightenment simple space" and "gothic complex space" has implications for a Europe of nation-states: "complex space has a certain natural, ontological priority; simple space remains by comparison merely an abstracting, idealizing project. . . . This is the case because there is no such thing as absolute non-interference; no action can be perfectly self-contained, but always impinges upon other people, so that spaces will always in some degree 'complexly' overlap, jurisdictions always in some measure be competing, loyalties remain (perhaps benignly) divided."³⁴ The sovereign state cannot (never could) contain all the practices, relations, and loyalties of its citizens.

The idea of complex space, in contrast to the discourse of a borderless world, is in my view a fruitful way of thinking about the intersecting boundaries and heterogeneous activities of individuals as well as of groups related to traditions. But we need to think also of complex time: of how embodied practices are rooted in multiple traditions, each drawing on temporalities that connect present and future, and of how each tradition cultivates a distinctive experience of the present and privileges some desires over others.

The scope for "national politics" with its exclusive boundaries is reduced in complex space and time—though not simply in favor of supranational or subnational structures. The question is not simply one of devolution or of regional integration, the question now being debated in the European Union, but of how to allow for more complicated patterns of territory, authority, and time. The scope of national politics is already reduced in part for the well-known reason that the forces of global capitalism often undermine attempts to manage the national economy—although this is truer of some national economies than of others. It is reduced also because networks that straddle national boundaries mobilize variable populations for diverse enterprises. This latter needs to be explicitly accommodated.

³³ See Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

³⁴ J. Milbank, "Against the Resignations of the Age," in F. P. McHugh and S. M. Natale, eds., *Things Old and New: Catholic Social Teaching Revisited* (New York: University Press of America, 1993), 19.

But there is something else: because the temporalities of many tradition-rooted practices (that is, the time each embodied practice requires to complete and to perfect itself, the past into which it reaches and which it reenacts and thereby extends) cannot be translated into the homogeneous time of national politics, scope for the latter is further reduced. The body's memories, feelings, and desires necessarily escape the rational/instrumental ambitions of such politics. (This is not properly understood by those well-wishing critics who urge Asian immigrants to abandon their traditions, to regard some of their collective memories and desires as not essentially their own, and to embrace instead the more modern conception of self-determination underlying the European nation-state in which they now live.³⁵) For many Muslim minorities (though by no means all), being Muslim is more than simply belonging to an individual faith whose private integrity needs to be publicly respected by the force of law—and more, certainly, than a social identity to be guaranteed by the nation-state. It is being able to live as part of a collective way of life that exists beside others in mutual tolerance. The question for them is: what kind of political conditions can be developed in Europe in which *everyone* lives as a minority among minorities?

I conclude with another question because decisive answers on this matter are difficult to secure. If Europe cannot be articulated in terms of complex space and time, which allow for multiple ways of life and not merely multiple identities to flourish, it may be fated to be no more than the common market of an imperial civilization,³⁶ always anxious about (Muslim) exiles within its gates and (Muslim) barbarians beyond. In such an embattled modern space—a space of abundant consumer choice and optional life-styles—is it possible for Muslims to be represented as Muslims?

³⁵ See Homi Bhabha, *New Statesman and Society*, March 3, 1989: “where once we could believe in the comforts and continuities of Tradition, today we must face the responsibilities of cultural Translation.” This was written in a spirit of friendly advice to Muslim immigrants in Britain during the Rushdie affair. Yet how innocent is the assumption that Muslim “Tradition” carries no responsibilities, and that “cultural Translation” to a British lifestyle in Britain is without any comforts?

³⁶ “Europe is again an empire concerned for the security of its *limites*—the new barbarians being those populations who do not achieve the sophistication without which the global market has little for them and less need of them.” Pocock, “Deconstructing Europe.” There is, of course, a periodic need for barbarian labor.

Europe as conceived of by Europeans cannot fully include a Muslim presence. | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. This article intervenes into the debate around European identity, political Islam, and Turkey's potential accession to the European Union through treating Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" as a bordering discourse. The article argues that the "clash thesis" highlights uncertainty around cultural change in Europe as well as a tension within European integration itself between the Nation as State and the Nation as political and cultural identity. Muslims are present in Europe and yet absent from it. The problem of understanding Islam in Europe is primarily, so I claim, a matter of understanding how "Europe" is conceptualized by Europeans. Europe (and the nation-states of which it is constituted) is ideologically constructed in such a way that Muslim immigrants cannot be satisfactorily represented in it. I argue that they are included within and excluded from Europe at one and the same time in a special way. I take it for granted that in Europe today Muslims are often misrepresented in the media and discriminated against by non-Muslims.