

The European Mentality and Islam

I.

1. Let me take you, by way of introduction, to the contemporary religious supermarket in Europe. The old continent, formerly nothing but Catholic or Protestant (either Lutheran or Calvinist), nowadays offers something for everybody: from Anthroposophy with its popular believe in re-incarnation to rather carnal Satanic cults, and to sects which try to enhance their religious awareness through drugs - à la Carlos Castaneda.

These phenomena of decadence, accompanying the continuous decline of the established churches, meet with extraordinary tolerance. Boys, their head clean-shaven, who publicly celebrate the praise of Hare Krishna or proselyzing adepts of the Hindu Baghwan movement do not provoke aggression. When a movie star like Richard Gere becomes a Buddhist, no questions are raised. On the contrary, if you should decide to become a Shamane in the tradition of the Dakota Indians, you would certainly find much sympathetic interest both in TV channels and by environmentalists. The same is true for modern Druids, women assuming the role of Celtic priests, when they travel from Germany to Catal Höyük (Anatolia) in search of matriarchal societies of old and their female deities.¹

Jewish religious life, even in its most extreme, fundamentalist form, meets with the same positive approach. The Loubavichers in New York and Jerusalem practise strict separation of the sexes; men always wear hats and let their fore-locks grow. During Sabbath, all activities cease. And, of course, they do not eat porc and other meat only if the animal has been slaughtered ritually, exactly the way it is done at Eyüp Sultan. Never ever Western media question whether these Jewish traditions might violate human rights; never ever do they qualify orthodox Jews as "fanatic" or "obscurantist".

Indeed, in religious terms the Occident has become pluralistic. The Prussian king Frederic II (the Great) already in the 18th century expressed the idea that everybody should be allowed to seek salvation his own way². His advise was heeded. Today, in Europe, you can be a Neo-Marxist or Neo-Thomist, a non-denominational mystic, believing astrologue, agnostic or atheist, and nobody will care.

¹ Christa Mulack, "Auf den Spuren der Göttin", Marl 1992

² "Jeder soll nach seiner Façon selig werden !"

2. Only one thing you should better not be: a Muslim. In fact, modern pluralism and its seemingly limitless tolerance disappear abruptly in the face of Islam. Habits and practices which are easily accepted from others, in case of a Muslim are condemned as fanatic, primitive, unconstitutional, and backward. In the case of a Che Guevara, a beard is progressive, in case of a Muslim, the same beard is reactionary. Maria is never depicted without her hair covered. But if a Muslim woman wears a scarf, she will be evicted from school in France.

If you have doubts about this situation, try to build a mosque in France or Germany. Unless you are unusually lucky, you will have to seize courts of justice for every step along the administrative process. In the end, after eight or ten years, you will probably win the permission to build your mosque - somewhere behind the railroad tracks or near the slaughtering house.

There will be wrangling with the authorities over every meter of elevation planned for the minarett. You will hear that cement factories, yes, and gas kettles, yes, fit into the European countryside, but not minarets.

Yet permission to build a minarett does not include permission to use it as a minarett ! It has there forebeen suggested by some joker to change the call to prayer: If the muadhhdhin, copying church bells, would shout: "Bim-bam ! Bim-bam !", shouldn't that be acceptable...?

If as a Muslim you should seek permission to obtain halal-meat the way the Jews do in France and Germany, it will be denied to with arguments which should have excluded ritual slaughtering by Jews as well. Double standard !

The same is true when Muslims seeks to be officially recognized, like the Jewish communities, as a religious corporation under public law. This is granted to a community of 30.000 Jews in Germany but denied to 2 million Muslims. Double standard !

If you need further confirmation of this disquieting situation, watch how Western media report on terrorism and belligerence. At their time, noboy thaught to qualify Adolf Hitler as a Catholic or Stalin as an Orthodox Christian; nor was Franco ever called a "Catholic" fascist or Dr.Karadjic a "Orthodox Christian" war-monger. If, however, anybody from the Muslim world - whoever ! - uses a weapon, he will

be labeled a "fanatic Muslim", even if he is an atheistic, communist or baathist Arab or a Christian Palestinian.

Have you ever heard that Nagasaki and Hiroshima have been destroyed by a "Christian" bomb ? Of-course not. But when a Muslim country like the Iraq or Pakistan is suspected of developing a nuclear device, it is referred to as an "Islamic bomb".

Indeed, certain derogatory adjectives like "fanatic" and "obscurantist" the media seem to have reserved exclusively for Muslims. A Qadhafi, Khomeini, Saddam Hussein is "fanatic", a Milosevic is not. Terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland or Spain are not committed by "fanatic" Protestants or Catholics or Basques or Catalonians. But whenever a Muslim uses force, even in legitimate self-defence, Western media are likely to qualify him as a fanatic.

According to these criteria, I, too, am a fanatic; because I pray, fast during the month of Ramadan, go on pilgrimage to Mekka, and spend in the cause of God...

II.

The facts are clear. The animosity described is real. How about their causes ? My hypothesis is that the described anti-Islamic symptoms result from an anti-Arab attitude - a modern form of selective anti-Semitism - and memories of the Turkish campaigns, as well as from some other deeply anchored roots. I shall isolate the following factors:

- * Bunker Mentality and Demonization
- * Crusaders` Mentality and Crusaders` Shock
- * Syndromes of Insult and Jealousy, including sexual jealousy
- * particular anxieties about Arabs and Turks.

All these factors make up the Western mentality vis-à-vis Islam. To isolate them, is not racist. I am not saying that anti-Islamic attitudes are running in the blood. However, several of the factors mentioned are indeed "inherited", in the sense that everyone nilly willy participates in the collective memory of his nation.

1. Bunker Mentality and Demonization

People in the Occident are still aware that Islam from the 7th century expanded extremely rapidly into most of the world known at the time.

a) That Christianity should not be the last and final religion, that there should be another major prophet after Jesus, luring Christians away from their faith by the millions, was not only incompatible with the Christian world view: the very idea was a monstrous provocation.

In order to save one's face and one's faith, the Christian world invented the legend that Islam has spread, and will always spread "through fire and the sword". This conviction is very much alive even today, even though the fire-and sword legend has scientifically been disproven: The Christian populations had of course accepted Islam either because Islamic rule was more benign than, for instance, Byzantine rule, or because the Christology of the Qur'an corresponded to their own (basically still Arian) beliefs.

a) The second strategy of mental defense was crude defamation, particularly of the prophet of Islam, who became demonized as a devilish anti-Christ. Professor Annemarie Schimmel once wrote: "More than any other historical figure, Muhammad has aroused fear, hatred, and even contempt in the Christian world. Dante, in his "Divine Comedy", only expressed what innumerable medieval Christians felt when he condemned Muhammad to the lowest pit of hell."³

Denigrating the Prophet of Islam continues to be acceptable (and applauded), as demonstrated by Salman Rushdie. No one thought of invoking the existing anti-blasphemy clauses of Western criminal codes. When Prof. Schimmel dared to point out that Rushdie had hurt the sentiments of millions of Muslims, all hell broke loose in Germany - proving that even in 1995 it is still "politically incorrect" to show sympathetic understanding for Islam.

In this respect, positive biographies of the Prophet, as by Emile Dermenghem, Muhammad Hussein Haikal or Karen Armstrong, have not had much impact. As Professor Hans Küng likes to point out: even the Catholic Church which, during the 2nd Vatican Council, accepted Islam as a way to salvation, still fails to accept Muhammad as a guide on that very way...

³ Annemarie Schimmel, "Und Muhammad ist Sein Prophet", München 1981, p. 7 (my translation)

2. Crusaders` s Mentality and - Shock.

If you scratch a little the laquer covering European civilization, you will discover, close to the surface, unhealed scars and virulent motivations dating back to the Crusades. Indeed, the traumata caused by the crusades are deeper in the West than in the East.

One trauma resulted from the shock the crusaders received when realizing that the supposedly barbaric and heathen Muslims were more developed, more civilized, and more advanced in natural sciences than they. Indeed, the wisdom, chivalry, honesty, tolerance, generosity, and spirituality of the great Kurdish military leader Salah ad-Din became legendary in the West ("Saladin").

In addition, many crusaders had discredited themselves through their cruelty and avarice. The sack of Constantinople in 1205 - their greatest "feat" - left deep scars: a lingering bad conscience and nagging doubts about their superiority.

Nevertheless, the impetus and rhetoric of the Crusades has been kept alive - to this day ! The expulsion of the Muslims and Jews from Andalusia after 1492- an early case of religious cleansing à la Karadjic - was a continuation of the crusades, and so was the foolish attempt of the young Portuguese king Sebastiao to re-christianize North Africa in the 16th century.⁴

Western imperialist colonialism, too - was it not crusading, now at a global scale? Didn't the White Fathers come with the second boat - if not the first ? Did the French not line the North African coast with large cathedrals, dedicated to "Notre Dame d'Afrique" ?

Even though, it is nigh incredible that the Greek king as well saw himself as a crusader when disembarking with his army at Smyrna in 1205. Why else did he chose to touch land at the very point outside the harbor where King Richard I. "Lionheart" had first set foot on Anatolian ground in 1190, as a knight of the 3rd Crusade ?

This crusaders` mentality is wide awake and alive and explains the cultural im-

⁴ It ended 1578 with the Battle of the Three Kings near Ksar al-Kabir in Marocco where he was killed.

perialism of a Francis Fukuyama⁵ and Samuel Huntington⁶. Their idea that the Muslim world, sooner or later, will either disappear or become fully marginalized, can be traced back to European thinking since the Age of Reasoning.

In my high school (lycée) days we were still aware of what Europe owed to previous civilizations like Greece and Rome. All this, including memories of the glories of Muslim Andalusia, has faded away. From the 18th century, European man, in his arrogance, convinced himself that he is the measure of everything and that his supreme reason will assure him to reach the highest peak of peace, welfare and happiness ever achieved in human history. It is amazing, but two savage world wars, including atomic warfare, the holocaust and Stalinism and have not shaken these convictions.

On the contrary, Western man fully convinced himself that his civilization - the so-called "Project of Modernity" (better called the American Way of Life) is the best, the ultimate civilization, bound to become dominant world-wide. His International Law, his code of Human Rights, his economic system, his scientific approach, and his philosophy, à la Ludwig Wittgenstein condemning all metaphysics, are seen as essential ingredients of an emerging world culture made in USA / made in Europe.

It is not far fetched to consider the Western civilization as an obligatory model for the rest of the world because many in Asia, Africa and South America - not to speak of the Islamic world - are frantically trying to copy the Western life style. Eating habits, fashion, male and female ideals of beauty, the management of leisure, sexual manners, architecture and music - you name it - all tend to verge on the Western model.

Part and parcel of this trend towards uniformity is the marginalization of religious aspects from public life. Religion is replaced by a pervasive crass materialism serving as a pseudo-ideology. Making religion a private affaire is the first step towards eliminating it altogether. Already, the typical Western man and woman have no antenna anymore for religious phenomena. They see their own religions melting away. So quite naturally they believe that Islam, as well, is destined to

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York 1993

⁶ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993

disappear, and have no qualms when helping to speed up this process. In spite of the fact that several Nobel prize winning natural scientists are deeply religious, intelligence and religious convictions are still seen as incompatible. The implication is that a Muslim is quite naturally suspected of being less than bright.

3. Syndromes of Insult and Jealousy, including sexual jealousy.

Against this background, Islam - refusing to disappear and even resurging - is a provocation, if not an insult. Imagine, these backward Muslims reject many of the blessings of Western civilization and go so far as presenting Islam as an alternative model even for the 21st century ! (I am hinting here of course at my own book, "Islam: the Alternative"⁷).

Worse, most Europeans who convert to Islam are academically trained, intellectuals and scientists. How can they turn their backs to their own culture ?

Worse yet, historical research into the bases of Christian dogma have led to extraordinary developments inside of both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches. For one, it is now established that - in contrast to the unquestionable authenticity of the Qur`an - most parts of the New Testament are unreliable sources, to say the least, with interpolations of a much later date.

More important: Many Christian professors of theology now admit that it had been a mistake, in 325, at the 1st Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, to define Jesus as God "consubstantial" with the Father. As a result, quite a few Christian churchmen and their followers, after a delay of 1600 years, now believe about Jesus more or less what the Qur`an has to say about him - or even less.

Can you imagine what happens to one`s mind realizes that the people one had learned to despise - the Muslims - had been right all along ... ?

In the context of hidden Western jealousies, sexual jealousy is a very real phenomenon. For Western man, the Orient is the continent of Kama sutra, of the Eastern culture of love, of eroticism written big. Professor Edward Said revealed

⁷ Murad Wilfried Hofmann, "Der Islam als Alternative", 2nd ed., München 1993, English ed. Reading 1993

in his famous book on Western orientalism⁸ to which extend the occidental image of the Orient - as being lascivious, sexually licentious, indulging in polygamy at will - is but a projection of suppressed Occidental wishes and erotic dreams.

Into this projection fits the Western image of Muhammad as a sex maniac - a defamation propagated through all ages, including ours. The less said about this, the better. But do not overlook the vast implications of this mental state of affairs !

There is a more genuine and valid background of the Western yearning for things oriental. The saying "ex oriente lux": the light comes from the East (title of Sezen Aksu's last cassette⁹) reflects that all major religions were born in the East - from Hinduism and Budd-hism via Mazdaism and Zoroastrism to the three monotheistic world religions. Also, up this day, the Orient has preserved a quality of life not yet fully dependend, as in the West, on the quantity of available things; up to this day, human relations in the East, including Turkey, have remained cordial while they cooling more and more in the Occident.

5. Anti-Arabism

It is a significant fact that the average European views Islam as an Arabic religion, even though Arabs are a minority within the Islamic world. As a result, all prejudices against Arabs - there are plenty of them - are transferred to Islam.

In order to know how this prejudice is composed, one should watch Hollywood films playing in the Arab world. Invariably, Arabs are shown there as lazy cowards - always good for a stab in the back - stupidly naive, fanatic and over-sexed. You see Arab shaykhs surrounded by topless women, reposing near their oil-well: a contemptuous picture, yet feeding on hidden desires of the Western viewer !

Whenever Islam enters such films concretetly, it is portrayed as a religion for simpletons without spirituality. Prayer is performed as a physical exercice, Ramadan as a time for nightly orgies, pilgrimage as an absurd heathen custom.

Alas, this form of anti-Semitism is not at all taboo in Europe and the USA.

⁸ Edward Said, Orientalism, New York 1979

⁹ "Işık doğudan yükselir"

Yes, we did have personalities like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who with much sympathy made an effort to know more about Islam. But on the whole, many of Western orientalist and islamologues until recently seem to have studied their subject with disdain, frequently using their knowledge as a weapon in the interest of colonialist penetration of the Muslim world.

6. Anxiety about Turks.

In the middle-ages, Europeans did not associate Islam as much with Arabs as with Turks. Some of the earliest translations of the Qur`an into European languages presented it as "Complete Turkish code of law"¹⁰ or the "Turkish Bible".¹¹

To know this is important because the Ottoman sultans had a habit of organizing a campaign against the German Empire about every second year. They never occupied Vienna, but their light cavallery (akıncı) made it into Bavaria. In short, until some 250 years ago, the Turkish threat was a constant European reality.

Today, Turkish workers do not arrive at the Austrian border with scimitars, bows and arrows but with visa and working permits. Nevertheless, they meet with reactions caused by fear of Turkish aggression that long ago. With his visa, they not only reach Vienna but Berlin, and in such numbers that simple-minded people in Germany and the Benelux-countries start worrying whether they can live their traditional lives without learning Turkish. No wonder, their reaction is emotional, in particular against people who refuse to drink alcohol. Such people are a living reproach, and somehow fanatic, aren't they ?

The problem posed by sizable minorities in Europe became more acute when they represented the most misunderstood religion of all, Islam. When saying "represent", this is not to imply that Turkish workers from the Black Sea or Eastern Anatolia are all capable of truly portraying or explaining Islam to their Dutch or Belgium neighbours. On the contrary. For many of them Islam becomes important only once they are in Europe, as a part of their identity and as a proud response to discrimination.

The result is more segregation and more confrontation. Indeed, we must admit that the possibility for Europeans to live near Muslims, rather than only to read

¹⁰ Johann Lange, Vollständiges türkisches Gesetzbuch oder...Mahomets Alkoran, Hamburg 1688

¹¹ David Friedrich Megerlin, Die türkische Bibel...Frankfurt 1772

about them or to see them in Antalya or Agadir, has not eliminated existing prejudices against Islam; frequently it even increased them.

The growing Islamic awareness and activity of foreign workers in Europe, and their virtual re-Islamization there, has not only made integration more illusive, it has probably convinced the majority of Europeans by now that these strange foreign people are so strange because they are Muslims. The so-called man in the street, I am afraid, now holds the view that these Maroccans, and Algerians, and Tunesians, and Turks do not quite fit into Europe. People in government will t say that; but can you be sure they are not thinking the same way ?

In terms of real integration, Europeans have not been helpful when appealing to the immigrant Muslim populations in England, France and Germany to become what they call "modern Muslims" or to develop a "European Islam". This slogan, propagated by so-called "cultural Muslims" like Professor Bassam Tibi, envisages Muslims who absorb a big dose of Europe, and a very little dosis of Islam.

Some German party functionaries have even presented local Alevis as a model for such a convenient, harmless Islam. People who do not build mosques, do not pray - or fast - during working hours, do not cover their hair or go on pilgrimage, but drink wine and beer - such people pose indeed no problem for integration. Needless to say that these suggestions have led to more, and not less, potential confrontation in Germany - among Turks, and between Turks and Germans.

The media have made matters worse by implying that the upsurge and re-emergence of Islam, its revivification everywhere, were basically directed against Europe. Even at NATO Headquarters statements were made to the effect that after the demise of the Soviet Union the Alliance had to prepare for a possible military North-South conflict. As a result, Europeans feel almost personally threatened whenever Islamic movements, be it in Algeria, Tunesia, Egypt or elsewhere, challenge the legitimacy of their governments.

They fail to realize - and that is tragic - that Muslim youths almost everywhere are requesting the establishment of Islamic democracies, the accent being both on "Islamic" and "Democracy".

In spite of occasional anti-Western rhetoric these movements are only concerned

with reforms in their own countries. Rather than preparing an assault against Europe, their leaders treasure Europe for its rule of law, protection of human rights, absence of media censorship, and for its religious freedom. Indeed, the Muslim youth is calling at home for what they learned when studying in Europe.

The anti-Western rhetoric will become even louder when the young Muslims in the Muslim world realize that Green Peace and Amnesty International seem to be more concerned with saving whales and rescuing prisoners in China than with aiding Bosnian Muslims or political prisoners in nearby Muslim countries.

III.

The consequences of this European mentality for the Muslim world are far-reaching, and very serious.

As the conflict in Bosnia proves, where an anti-Muslim mentality exists, anti-Muslim propaganda can lead to religious warfare even at the end of the 20th century:

The Serbian aggressors are not called Christians, but the victims are called Muslims, and they are persecuted because of it, and for no other ethnic, linguistic or historical reason.

One may argue that the inactivity of the West during three cruel years, standing on the sidelines with "humanitarian aid" while massacres occurred, had nothing to do with religious prejudices. Indeed, normal egotism and moral decadence might sufficiently explain the Western refusal to make significant sacrifices. In fact, the West behaves very much as it had done in 1453 during the siege of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet II. Fatih. As Steven Runciman described¹², the Vatican, Venice, France and England at the time virtually justified their inaction as NATO-countries did vis-à-vis Bosnia some 500 years later.

However, let us not fool ourselves, in 1453, decisions were also religiously motivated: Seen from Rome, the Greek-Orthodox Byzantines were heretics, stubbornly refusing to reunite with the Catholic Church. People deserving hell, should one save them at great expense from Turkish rule ?

I submit that in Bosnia as well, the negative European attitude towards Islam

¹² Steven Runciman, The Fall of Constantinople 1453, London 1964

played a major role. Can't you imagine the reactions of NATO and the big powers if the Serbes were Muslims (and did all the Serbs have done) and the Bosnians were Christians ? Can there be any doubt that the West would have decisively intervened from the outset, in the name of human rights and the European humanitarian heritage ? Can anyone imagine that the West would have imposed an arms embargo on a defenseless Christian population, threatened with annihilation at the hands of Muslims ?

Also, let us not be fooled by the NATO bombardment of Serbian positions in September 1995. The West did not act out of concern for Muslims but out of exasperation with the Serbs -people who even refused to accept a Western deal drafted in their favor.

At any rate, during the last three years, Western leadership disregarded each and every lesson learned during the yearly crisis management exercises of NATO. They threatened too late, with too much warning time, constantly signaling that they did not mean it. The politicians in questions cannot be suspected of being incapable. Thus the conclusion is inescapable: They never wanted to intervene because the victims were not Christian but Muslims.

1453 Constantinople, 1993 Sarajewo: what else is in store for the Muslims as a result of the negative European attitude toward Islam ?

It guides the European attitude towards the struggle in Algeria. It colours the European response towards Chechenia. In the European parliament, it might be decisive for the vote on the admission of Turkey to on the customs union. And it dominates Western, particularly American, Near and Middle Eastern policy.

IV.

This is so crucial that something has to be done about this situation. But what ?

Confrontation between Europe and the Muslim world around the Mediterranean would be disastrous and must be avoided at all costs.

What then ? Are the Muslims to emigrate from Europe, all 16 million or so, in a new hijra ? Whereto ? No, this is no solution either.

There is only one reasonable reaction to what I displayed: We all, because we are all concerned, must make a personal effort gradually to reshape the Western attitude towards Islam. This is of course easier said than done. It presupposes on the Islamic side that the Muslims live like real Muslims, in a way, that is, which makes the spirituality, tolerance and other virtues of their faith manifest.

And both sides must seize on every opportunity for serious and honest dialogue, particularly between political parties, the media, universities, and the religious establishments.

The final aim of this multiple dialogue should, however, be more than just tolerance. As Johann Wolfgang von Goethe put it: "Tolerance should only be a transitional attitude, leading to acceptance; merely enduring is a way of insulting."¹³

¹³ Maximen & Reflexionen, Nr. 121: "Toleranz sollte eigentlich nur eine vorübergehende Gesinnung sein: sie muß zur Anerkennung führen. Dulden heißt beleidigen."

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