I. CIVILIZATION AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

In the Western mainstream media the contemporary debate on the relationship between “Islam” and “the West” often begins with a rhetorical question: “What went wrong?” “Is Islam a threat to the West? “Why do they hate us?” “Who is the enemy?” An article entitled “Can Any Good Come of Radical Islam?” begins with still more questions: “What is going on in the Muslim world? Why does it produce suicide hijackers on the one hand and, on the other, lethargic and haphazardly capitalist societies that have delivered neither economic development nor democracy?” Even Samuel Huntington’s article in Foreign Affairs comes with a question mark: “The Clash of Civilizations?”

All these questions lead to different answers and other questions. How are Islam and “the West” to be defined? What do the commentators mean when they talk about “us” and “them”? Are “we” really all on one side and “they” all on the other? Are George Galloway and Tony Blair or Noam Chomsky and George Bush on the same planet, let alone on the same side?

WEST OF EDEN

Throughout history, like the colors coming through a prism that change as the crystal is turned, “the West” has been fabled, historical, imagined, civilizational, religious, sentimental, secular, imperial, and political. Europe was the provincial Western seed from which sprouted the tendrils of a global West. Parson Samuel Purchas concluded that God had withheld knowledge of navigation from “the Persian, the Mogoll, the Abassine, the Chinois, the Tartarian, the Turke” so that the “Sunne of righteousness might arise out of our West to Illuminate the East.” For Christians stepping ashore in the new world, the West was not so much the antithesis of
the East as its divine successor. History dawns in the East but matures in the “evening lands” of the West. Eastern decay is followed by Western renewal: for the peoples of the West, God’s providence is manifest in fertile plains, broad rivers, lush valleys, thick forests, and majestic mountains stretching out before them.

The idea of the West in world history was amplified by a geography that served a European and then West-centric view. Geographical Europe was a small part of a vast land mass reaching halfway around the world. There was no separate continent of Europe, indeed no abrupt point of separation at all, but rather a slow merging of topographies and cultures, their borrowings from each other illustrated by the mythological origin even of the name given to the western extreme of the Eurasian land mass. (Europa was the Phoenician princess abducted by Zeus and carried off to Crete.) Arnold Toynbee described the antithesis between “Europe” and “Asia” (his quotation marks) as false and the two “so-called” continents as fictions, “with no relation to the real geographical entities.” The distorting world map drawn by Gerardus Mercator in 1569 enlarged the West at the expense of the East and the North at the expense of the South. Mercator was a scientist applying innovative mathematical means to cartography, but a map that seemed to put Europe at the center of the world was certainly not out of place in an age of expansion. The geographical and cultural sorting of the world that followed the great “discoveries” (bestowing sole right of possession on the king who had paid for the discoverer’s ships) was essential to imperialism: without a “them” there could not be an “us,” and without barbarians and savages there would be no need to enter distant lands in the name of civilization.

The genesis of the term civilization lies in the Latin civis (citizen) or civilis (of the citizen). By the fourteenth century civil had entered the English language. In both English and French civil related to legal or political rights and civility to manners. In the sixteenth century the Anglican theologian Richard Hooker used the expression civil society to describe a system of government established with the consent of the people and implying a political, legal, social, and religious relationship between ruler and ruled. The Latin root was then turned into a verb (to civilize), and civilized became the description of a well-mannered person. Somewhere around the middle of the eighteenth century the noun civilization emerged as a description of a large social unit subsuming cultures bound together by a common level of morality and development. Boswell tells us that Dr. Johnson did not like this French neologism at all: “He would not admit civilization but only civility. With great deference to him, I thought civilization, from to civilize, better in the sense opposed to barbarity, than civility.”
The development of civilization from civis took place as Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, French, and British mariners and explorers were discovering new lands and peoples. Some could be called civilized, some were barbarians whom it might be possible to civilize, and others were savages who scarcely seemed human. Rational thinkers of the Enlightenment did not—could not—believe in innate differences between any human beings. Guizot put his faith in “one universal civilization” and a common human destiny. The “families of people” sitting in the shade of the tree of civilization were all destined eventually to be covered by its foliage. From this point we move onward to the view that the globalization of the late twentieth century cemented a global civilization. The alternative is the view of a world of many civilizations (Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, “and possibly” African in Samuel Huntington’s typology) that are at risk of “clashing” because of their innate differences.

By their historians, civilizations are generally regarded as organic in nature, proceeding from birth to inevitable death but being reborn in different incarnations. The ancient and numerous civilizations of what was known as the “Levant” or the “Near East” until Alfred Thayer Mahan, the high-imperialist U.S. naval geographer and expert on the strategic use of sea power, began referring to the region as the Middle East early in the twentieth century, arise anew as Arab civilization, Islamic civilization, or Arabo-Islamic civilization. There is no consensus on how many civilizations there have been, let alone how many there are. Classifications are obviously fraught with difficulties because of the substantial cultural and linguistic differences between many of the subgroups pushed into the supergroup. Ottoman, Turkic, and Arab cultures might be entitled to their own civilizational rankings, but for Huntington and others the similarities outweigh the differences. The fact that cultures are often not confined within the same geographical space or national boundaries has propelled the search over the last two centuries for a mystical something else that defines civilization, perhaps a soul, a mentality, a character, a sense of itself, a personality—in short, an essence.

“Western civilization” reached high points of achievement at different stages of its development. The Renaissance was obviously one of them, the Enlightenment another, and the set of technical advances that gave rise to the Industrial Revolution still another, but in the nineteenth century, when slavery was still sanctioned, when children of seven or eight worked in textile mills and down mines, when all women and most men had no electoral rights, when Jews were kept out of the professions and felons were executed in public places, the civilizing process even in the West obviously still had a
long way to go. In distant parts of the world, “civilized” Western man was still giving proof of how savage he could be: by the twentieth century the most destructive conflicts ever fought in world history were to show that the dark Janus face of Western civilization was not an aberration but a pathological condition.

The 1914–18 war blew a gaping hole in the notion of a unified Western civilization. It was all of a sudden no longer clear who was “us” and who was “them.” The Germans who had made massive philosophical, scientific, and musical contributions to civilization now had to be turned into its deadliest enemies. This was done by reverting to the barbarian past and investing them with the nasty characteristics of an Oriental Turkic people who had swept into the European continent from the east centuries before and sullied civilization. One could not hate a people who produced Mozart and Beethoven, but through the repetition of crude propaganda one could be taught to loathe a crop-headed, bull-necked Hun wearing a funny helmet. The civilizational aspect of the war was indeed confused. The Hunnified Germans were fighting their Saxon cousins and royal relatives alongside a contemporary Oriental people (the now Germanized Turks), while the British and French had entered into an alliance with the half-Asiatic (and therefore half-barbarian) Russians. Dusky Orientals and even darker Africans helped fight their war for them, the various ethno-religious groups of the Indian subcontinent for the British and the North African Arabs and West African Senegalese for the French. Now that civilization was divided, Allied propaganda represented the war as a struggle between its higher and lower forms. Great were the sacrifices justified in the name of a “higher form of civilization,” the phrase used by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, architect of the military operations that ended in the slaughter of British soldiers on the battlefields of Belgium and France.

The coming trends of Western civilization were foreshadowed well before 1914. Huxley and Orwell’s soulless new worlds were antedated by the Futurists, who glorified speed, the machine, and the power that the machine created or symbolized; the army, the arsenal, railway stations, factories, bridges, “deep-chested” locomotives (from Marinetti’s first manifesto of 1909), sleek aircraft, and the man behind the wheel were the new icons. Governments began to grow into the bureaucratic manifestation of the machine, embodying management, discipline, order, organization, efficiency, and output. Transit systems, elevators, skyscrapers, subways, and department stores replicated the need to simultaneously control and serve the needs of rapidly growing urban masses.
At the dark far end of the production line stood the death camp. Mass destruction and genocide were as much the product of “Western civilization” as the works of the greatest writers and composers. Goya could see it centuries before. As Richard Rubinstein has remarked: “The world of death camps and the society it engenders reveals the progressively intensifying night side of Judeo-Christian civilization. Civilization means slavery, wars, exploitation and death camps. It also means medical hygiene, elevated religious ideas, beautiful art and exquisite music. It is an error to imagine that civilization and savage cruelties are antitheses. . . . Both creation and destruction are inseparable parts of what we call civilization.”

The ideologies of fascism, national socialism, and communism were all based on the repudiation of Western liberal values. As Ian Buruma has observed, “The idea of the West as a malign force is not some Eastern or Middle Eastern idea, but has deep roots in European soil.”

The 1939–45 war represented another great split in the ranks of the “civilized” nations. By the late 1930s Germany and Italy had defected from the Western world in favor of a three-way axis with Oriental Japan. Half-barbarian Russia—now communist into the bargain—fought alongside the “liberal” democracies. This hot war for civilization and civilized values was followed straightaway by a cold war fought between the “West” and the “East,” this time not Near, Middle, or Far but the Soviet Union and the satellite or “captive” communist states stretching from eastern Europe into the eastern region of Germany. This new struggle in the name of civilization, democracy, and freedom marked the real beginning of the birth of the West as a political idea, but with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 older tensions and submerged differences within and between Europe and the United States quickly resurfaced.

Long before the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, the United States had broken away from the global pack on such critical questions as arms control, environmental protection, and economic development. This was followed by the adoption of a radically conservative foreign policy that overturned the seventeenth-century Westphalian principles of mutual respect for the sovereign rights of states. Henceforth, the United States would not hesitate to launch “preemptive” or “anticipatory” strikes against states it regarded as threats to its security. It would pursue this policy whatever the UN or its partners in the Western alliance thought: when France and Germany refused to go along with the attack on Iraq in 2003, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld jeered at them for exemplifying the “old” Europe as compared to the “new” (central and eastern).
insults tailed off as the United States struck unexpected difficulties in Iraq, forcing it to return to the UN and seek the cooperation of those governments it had only recently been abusing. In short, the concepts of “West” and “East” are political constructions whose content has varied over time according to changing governmental agendas.

CIVILIZATIONS ON THE FRONT LINE

“The sword of Mahomet, and the Coran, are the most stubborn enemies of Civilisation, Liberty and Truth which the world has yet known.” So wrote the nineteenth-century Scottish Orientalist Sir William Muir in his study of the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The line was taken up by clerics, politicians, and pamphleteers fighting for the rights of Christian minorities exposed to the evils of “Muhammadan government” in the Ottoman Empire. They welcomed this scholarly reinforcement of their view that Islam itself was the cause of their problems and not mundane quarrels over cattle or land or sectarian tensions ignited by meddling outside powers. Muir expanded on this theme in a second work, on the caliphate: “As regards the spiritual, social and dogmatic aspect of Islam, there has been neither progress nor material change since the third century of the Hegira. Such as we found it to have been then, such is it also at the present day. The nations may advance in civilisation and morality, in philosophy, science and the arts; but Islam stands still. And thus stationary, so far as the lessons of this history avail, it will remain.”

Muir’s depiction of an inert, unchanging religion blocking progress was generous compared to the invective heaped on Islam by others. In the nineteenth century success on the battlefield seemed to confirm the Christian view of where God’s religious preference lay. Notions of religious, racial, and civilizational superiority were still held by the politicians who took their countries into the First World War. The discourse of race continues in politics today, though often in a more muted and coded form; in addition, religion has been re-embedded in the public life of many countries and civilization brought back to the center of political debate as pundits, scholars, and commentators search far and wide for explanations of tensions between “Islam” and “the West.”

Although Samuel P. Huntington has taken the lion’s share of the attention, Bernard Lewis (born in 1916) was writing on the themes of civilizational difference and conflict decades earlier. At the height of imperial domination of the Middle East in 1950, he claimed that the Arabs would have to resolve their “problems of readjustment” in the modern world by
submitting to “one or [an]other of the contending versions of modern civilization that are offered to them, merging their own culture and identity in a larger and dominating whole.”16 A decade later Professor Lewis turns the crisis of a civilization faced with this “offer” into a clash between civilizations: “When civilizations clash there is one that prevails and one that is shattered. Idealists and ideologues may talk glibly of ‘a marriage of the best elements’ from both sides, but the usual result of such an encounter is a cohabitation of the worst.”17 Thus, he argues, a civilization thrown into crisis is finally reacting “against the impact of alien forces that have dominated, dislocated and transformed it”: “We shall be better able to understand this situation if we view the present discontents of the Middle East not as a conflict between states or nations but as a clash between civilizations.”18

The phrase is out. Three decades later, returning to his theme, Professor Lewis writes that “we” are now facing “a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations—that perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present and the worldwide expansion of both.”19 In Lewis’s view, Muslim rage at Western domination has finally metastasized into a “profound, pervasive and passionate hatred of the West and all it represents, as a world power, as an ideology, as a way of life, and that hatred is extended to embrace a wide range of local Westernizers and modernizers. It is a hatred so deep that it has led those who feel it to rally to any plausible enemy of the West.”20 The roots of this hatred “must be sought in the millennial history of relations between Islam and Christendom.”21 In a sense “they’ve been hating us for centuries and it’s very natural that they should. You have this millennial rivalry between two world religions and now from their point of view the wrong one seems to be winning.”22 If a significant number of Muslims “are hostile and dangerous” to the West, it is not because “we” need an enemy “but because they do.”23

“THWARTED” SOCIETIES

Samuel Huntington describes a primordial world in which humans live in a state of actual or incipient conflict not because of their animal nature (as Hobbes argued) but because of civilizational difference. Even the fact that the most destructive conflicts in world history have been the national, imperial, and global wars launched by European governments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries does not deter him from asserting that “the most prolonged and the most violent conflicts” over the centuries have
been generated by civilizational difference. Huntington makes his most provocative claims about Islam and the West. In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Huntington argues under the heading “Islam’s Bloody Borders” that the greatest number of “fault line” conflicts have been occurring “along the boundary looping across Eurasia and Africa that separates Muslims from non-Muslims. While at the macro or global level of world politics the primary clash of civilizations is between the West and the rest, at the micro or local level it is between Islam and the others.”

Muslims, according to Huntington, are “far more involved in intergroup violence than the people of any other civilization,” and they seem to have a “propensity” for violent conflict. In the wake of 9/11, when his “clash of civilizations” argument apparently scored a technical knockout over Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” theory, Huntington returned to his main theme even more forcefully: “Contemporary global politics is the age of Muslim wars. Muslims fight each other and fight non-Muslims far more often than do peoples of other civilizations. Muslim wars have replaced the cold war as the principal form of international conflict. These wars include wars of terrorism, guerrilla wars, civil wars and interstate conflicts. These instances of Muslim violence could congeal into one major clash of civilizations between Islam and the West or between Islam and the Rest. That, however, is not inevitable and it is more likely that violence involving Muslims will remain dispersed, varied and frequent.”

Up to Muir’s time the Christian polemicists described Islam as a religion of sex, power, and violence; paradoxically, in Huntington’s and Lewis’s modern variations on this old theme, Muslim powerlessness now drives the violence. Both authors deemphasize the “impact of the West” as a valid reason for Muslim anger. “The West” is presented as a good uncle landing on the doorstep of a distant relative with a bagful of gifts—rather like a successful Lebanese emigrant returning to the mountain village from Sierra Leone or Sao Paulo. The good uncle disburses his gifts to all and sundry: democracy, parliaments, the printing press, roads, bridges, factories, railways, and electricity, all wrapped up in a parcel called “modernity,” but to his consternation he discovers that the recipients resent his wealth and take out their frustrations on him. The homecoming ends in disaster. The whole modernization process comes crashing down and the party is over. Dear old Uncle West is bewildered and hurt. “I was only trying to help.” The complaint of every parent! He should have known better, but it is too late for regrets. The damage has been done. Democracy has been installed by “autocratic decree,” creating
a new game of politics that is “ignored or watched with baffled incomprehension by the great mass of the people.” Pulled into the modern world whether they are ready or not, wrenched out of the “comfortable torpor of decay” and “illusions of superiority and self-sufficiency,” Muslim peoples move from “ignorant complacency” to “anxious emulation” and “envious rancor” before ending up toward the end of the twentieth century in a curdled mess of humiliation, resentment, and rage. Only this line of thinking can possibly explain their state of mind. Certainly Uncle West has made a few mistakes along the way but nothing bad enough to account for this—it’s “their” behavior that needs skilled counseling and not “ours.” Palestine as a central cause of Arab and Muslim hostility can be brushed aside: it is merely, in the words of Professor Lewis, the “licensed grievance.”

The civilizational argument has bred numerous elaborations. Francis Fukuyama contrasts Western success with Muslim failure. For Fukuyama the immediate issue is not terrorism per se but “the Islamo-fascist sea within which the terrorists swim,” and which constitutes “an ideological challenge that is in some ways more basic than the one posed by communism.” The “Islamo-fascists” reject everything the West stands for, especially its tolerance and plurality, which Muslim societies in general find hard to accept because of “the often-noted lack of a tradition of secular politics” in their own histories. For Fouad Ajami, the “men in the shadows” attacking American targets feed off “a free-floating anti-Americanism that blows at will and knows no bounds among Islamists and secularists alike.” When the passenger jets were flown into the twin towers on September 11, 2001, there was satisfaction in “thwarted, resentful societies” that “the American bull run and the triumphalism that had awed the world had been battered [and] that there was soot and ruin in New York’s streets.” The bombing of the twin towers has led to a search for justice in Afghanistan and Iraq, where U.S. soldiers are standing by to help with “rifle in one hand” and “wrench in the other.” The streets of Falluja and Najaf are mentioned, not as the corridors of death they had been turned into under the impact of U.S. air and ground fire, but as places “where the early American hopes of a culture that would be grateful for its liberty and eager to create a new political order” seem to have taken a battering notwithstanding the “nobility” of the war effort.

EUROPE’S MUSLIMS

These dark forebodings of threat from an alien civilization have been fortified by what people read in the newspapers or watch on the television...
every day. Suicide bombings in the Middle East, security swoops on suspected terrorists, the increasing number of Muslims (bearded men and veiled women) filling the streets of European cities, and the sight of mosques where once there were only churches (or the occasional synagogue) feed prejudice and ignorance. The bombings in London and Madrid, the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, and the controversy over the publication in Denmark and then other countries of cartoons lampooning the Prophet Muhammad have precipitated an upsurge of Islamophobia. After the bombing of Madrid’s Atocha railway station in March 2004, the Spanish government insisted that the Basque separatist organization ETA was responsible, even though from an early stage it was receiving evidence that Muslim terrorists were behind the attack; the deceit and the connection between the bombing and participation in a war that the Spanish people had not wanted from the start was enough to put the conservative government of Jose Maria Aznar out of office. In videotapes released after the event, the four suicide bombers who had killed fifty-two commuters in attacks on the London transit system on July 7, 2005, gave as their motive retaliation for British participation in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the deaths of thousands of Muslims that had followed; in September 2005, responsibility for the attack was claimed by al Qaeda. The bombings in both cities were regarded with revulsion by Muslims and non-Muslims alike and were condemned as anti-Islamic by Muslim organizations in Europe and around the world.

The murder of van Gogh in November 2004 by a Dutch-born Muslim “of Moroccan origin” (as he was generally described) was followed by dozens of arson attacks on Islamic schools and mosques in the Netherlands and by the proposal of parliamentary legislation to ban Muslim women from covering their faces in public places. In the immediate aftermath, the owner of a Web site of condolences had to remove more than five thousand anti-Muslim and anti-Moroccan statements. Like the anti-Muslim immigration politician Pim Fortuyn, who had been murdered the year before (by a non-Muslim young Dutchman who believed Fortuyn was exploiting a vulnerable minority for political gain), van Gogh believed that multiculturalism had been a disaster for the Netherlands. His rhetorical style was confrontational and frequently abusive. He struck back at “political correctness” in his writings and in the short film he made on forced marriages and the mistreatment of women, Submission. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali-born member of the Dutch parliament who had renounced Islam and cooperated with him in making the film, which shows verses of the Qu’ran inscribed on the body of a naked woman, received death threats
and left the Netherlands after van Gogh’s murder to take up a position as a Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. She was herself a controversial figure, whom Professor Halleh Ghorashi, of Vrije University, Amsterdam, admired as a pioneer for the emancipation of Muslim women until, in Ghorashi’s view, she turned out to hold “dogmatic views that left little room for nuances. I soon realized that Ayaan had become part of the ‘rightist’ discourse on Islam in the Netherlands that pictures Islamic migrants as problems and enemies of the nation.”

The publication of cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad scandalized Muslims no less than did the inscription of verses of the Qur’an on the body of a naked woman. The mockery only aggravated the offense: in the eyes of Muslims everywhere, pictorial representation of the prophet constitutes blasphemy. Flemming Rose, the cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, which published the cartoons in September 2005, intended them as a response to “several incidents of self-censorship in Europe caused by widening fears and feelings of intimidation in dealing with issues related to Islam.” If others could accept mockery, scorn, and ridicule, why not Muslims? His declared goal was “to push back self-imposed limits on expression that seemed to be closing in tighter,” but as time went by it became clear that more was involved than just free speech. Invited to explain his position in the international media, Rose expanded on his dislike of political correctness, moral relativism, the welfare state model that allowed Muslim immigrants to go straight on the dole, and the “utopian state of multicultural bliss” in which he had lived as a younger man. The language could be taken from any neoconservative publication coming out of Washington: the picture of someone who has finally seen the light after years of being deluded by utopian multiculturalism is filled out by “The Threat from Islam,” Rose’s empathetic account of his interview in Pennsylvania with Daniel Pipes in 2004. But irrespective of the political perspective that influenced Rose’s decision to publish the cartoons that incensed Muslims around the world, the arguments for free speech, tolerance, and acceptance obviously cut both ways. Rose conceded that *Jyllands-Posten* imposes its own restrictions (no pornographic material, no dead bodies, and swear words only rarely). The cartoons were “different,” but in publishing them it was surely not the toleration of the white middle-class readers of his newspaper that he wanted to test. They were more likely to be amused by the cartoons than provoked. If provocation of the paper’s mainstream readership was the purpose, more obvious means were at hand: perhaps the Danish royal family, swear words not usually uttered in polite company, or graphic images of the bodies of children dismembered by bombs in Iraq.
There was certainly a point to be made here about the way the media hide the central product of war. The paper could also have published the cartoons lightly satirizing the resurrection of Christ that it had been offered two years before, but in an e-mail to the cartoonist the paper’s Sunday editor replied that it could not. “I don’t think Jyllands-Posten’s readers will enjoy the drawings. As a matter of fact I think they will provoke an outcry. Therefore I will not use them.” Instead of the majority, a marginalized Muslim minority, about 5 percent of the Danish population, had to be provoked in the name of expanding the limits of freedom of expression.

While governments and nongovernmental organizations across Europe got on with the job of damping down the fires lit in Denmark and the Netherlands, right-wing politicians and anti-Muslim commentators lost no time in taking advantage of the moment. Their talk was of surrender, of “dhimmitude” (the alleged servitude of Christians and Jews living under Muslim rule), and of a continent invaded through migration and sinking under the burden of supporting rapidly proliferating Muslim families. What could previously only be whispered was finally spoken openly when the Italian author Oriana Fallaci, resorting to a metaphor previously used by the Nazis against the Jews, remarked that “the sons of Allah breed like rats.” There was a lot more. Muslims had tried to conquer Europe before and were now trying again, but this time with “children and boats” rather than “troops and cannons”; if Spain was more tolerant of Muslim immigrants, it was because “too many Spaniards still have the Koran in the blood.” These statements opened her up to accusations of crude racism, yet Fallaci, who died in September 2006, had numerous admires (her 2002 book *The Rage and the Pride* sold off the shelves in Italy), to whom she remained brave, refreshingly outspoken, fearsome, iconoclastic, incisive, and so on, right to the end. The issues at the heart of Fallaci’s diatribes were “muddle-headed multiculturalism” and not so much Islamic “extremism” as Islam itself. “Europe is no longer Europe,” she remarked in 2005. “It is Eurabia,” a colony of Islam, where the Islamic invasion does not proceed only in a physical sense but also in a mental and cultural sense. Servility to the invaders has poisoned democracy, with obvious consequences for the freedom of thought and for the concept of liberty itself.

“The Third Wave of Attack on Europe”

These are the themes taken up recently by Bernard Lewis. In January 2007 he told an interviewer from the *Jerusalem Post* that Muslims seemed to be on the point of taking over Europe. Europeans were losing their loyalties...
and self-confidence and, in a mood of self-abasement, political correctness, and multiculturalism, had “surrendered” to Islam on every level. Delivering the Irving Kristol Lecture at the American Enterprise Institute in March 2007, Professor Lewis observed that the Muslims had made two attempts to conquer Europe, the first by the Arabs and the second by the Turks. Now, “in the eyes of a fanatical and resolute minority of Muslims, the third wave of attack on Europe has clearly begun. We should not delude ourselves as to what it is and what it means. This time it is taking different forms and two in particular—terror and migration.” Unlike a disorganized and effete West trapped by its own political correctness, “they” (the Muslims) know what they are doing: “They have certain clear advantages. They have fervor and conviction which in most Western countries are either weak or lacking. They are self-assured of the rightness of their cause whereas we spend most of our time in self-denigration and self-abasement. They have loyalty and discipline and perhaps most important of all they have demography, the combination of natural increase and migration-producing major population changes which could lead within the foreseeable future to significant majorities in at least some European cities or even countries.”

Muslims regarding themselves deficient in fervor and conviction, and lacking the advantages enjoyed by others (employment, reasonable housing, sports facilities, opportunities for their children, representation in parliament, a sympathetic ear in government), might smile at this, and even Professor Lewis referred to the presence in his audience of Vice President Dick Cheney, a man not generally regarded as lacking fervor, conviction, and assurance in the righteousness of his cause.

Population statistics indicate that even with a higher birth rate (assuming that it remains static and is not brought down by urbanization, acceptance, and greater education and prosperity) Muslim Europeans have some way to go if they are to vindicate Lewis’s dire prognostications. As of January 1, 2006, the population of the twenty-seven European Union countries was close to 493 million, of which number about 25,000,000 were Muslims (about 5 percent of the total). The Muslim population (as of 2005) of each EU country amounts to no more than a few percent: for example, Austria, 4.1 percent; Belgium, 4.0 percent; Denmark, 5 percent; Germany, 3.6 percent; Italy, 1.4 percent; the Netherlands, 5.8 percent; Spain, 2.3 percent; the United Kingdom, 2.8 percent, and France, the country with the largest number of Muslims, less than 10 percent. In any case, the Muslim citizens of European countries are far too diverse to warrant use of the monolithic and phobic “they.” They speak different languages, they come from different countries and different ethnic or tribal
backgrounds, and—like all other Europeans—they vary in their political, philosophical, and religious perspectives even if comparatively greater numbers go to mosque than other Europeans go to church. What the majority do have in common apart from their religion is their social and economic marginalization. Many live under the official EU poverty line (currently fixed at an income of 770 euros a month) and would seem to be far too preoccupied with the daily struggle to keep their heads above water to think of taking Europe over just yet. In the words of a research report, “Migrants, including those from predominantly Muslim countries, generally appear to suffer higher levels of homelessness, poorer quality housing conditions, poorer residential neighborhoods and comparatively greater vulnerability and insecurity in their housing status. Very serious housing problems include lack of access to basic facilities such as drinking water and toilets, significantly higher levels of overcrowding than for other households and exploitation through higher rents and purchase price.”

The subversion of the “dialogue of civilizations” between Muslims, Christians, and Jews in European countries and between European and Muslim governments across the Mediterranean is built into in all these statements that decry multiculturalism, political correctness, moral relativism, and the dangers arising from Muslim immigration. The Algerian grocer living in one of the suburbs of northern Paris, the Muslim schoolgirl who dreams of becoming a doctor, the teenage Muslim boy who likes techno music and has no idea what he is going to do with his life are all compressed into the threatening “they.” Feeling their exclusion, Muslim teenagers cooped up in the poor outer suburbs of Paris take out their anger by burning cars and throwing bricks through shop windows in rioting that police are hard-pressed to stop: Are they rioting as Muslims or as marginalized young people who live in poverty and see no future for themselves? By the time the sociologists get around to looking at the causes, however, the images have appeared in the media and multiculturalism has taken another blow. The evidence suggests that these young people want nothing more than to get out of the ghetto and be accepted within the broader society. Marginalization would appear to strengthen religious sentiment. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Social Life, “Surveys show that many Muslims in Europe, especially the young, now identify with Islam more than either the country of their heritage or the country of their birth. Not feeling entirely accepted in either place, they look to Islam to help define themselves.” Catholic immigrants arriving in the United States a century ago reacted to negative attitudes to their religion in the same way, but they eventually merged into the mainstream. European
Muslims are less inclined than non-Muslims to believe there is an inconsistency in being a devout Muslim and being modern. A poll taken in 2004 showed that 68 percent of French Muslims regarded the separation of religion and state as “important” and 93 percent supported republican values. They are Muslims living in Europe and therefore the West, yet their religion and ethnic backgrounds are still barriers that must be overcome. “How am I supposed to feel French when people always describe me as a Frenchman of Algerian origin? I was born here. I am French. How many generations does it take to stop mentioning my origin?”

When Parson Purchas concluded that God had withheld the secrets of navigation from the Mongols, the Abbasids, the Turks, the Chinese, and the Tartars so that Christians could reach the New World first, he could not have known that many of the instruments they used to get there, including the astrolabe, the compass, and the lateen sail, were in fact invented, developed, or refined by the Chinese, the Arabs, and the Persians. How Parson Purchas would have reacted had he known that God gave his favors to the heathen Chinese and the fanatical Muhammadan first we cannot say, but we do know how sensitively some people react now to the suggestion that the sources of Western civilization are not purely Western at all but a mixture of knowledge borrowed, infused, or (more provocatively) stolen from Eastern civilizations.

In 1987, Martin Bernal published the first volume of a two-volume study, *Black Athena*, in which he argued that the ultimate source of much ancient Greek knowledge, and thus of classical civilization, was not Greek at all but Egyptian and therefore African. According to Bernal, the Greek debt to Egypt and the Near East remained an “unbroken part of the European historiographical tradition” down to the establishment of the classics as an academic discipline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At that point, under the influence of Indo-European linguistics, “but mainly due to extrinsic European social and intellectual forces,” the “ancient model” of Greek civilization was supplanted by an “Aryan model” that rejected Semitic and Egyptian influences entirely. This model has since been modified to the extent that Semitic influences on the classical tradition are allowed but the Egyptian influence is still rejected. The implications are clear: in a century shot through with notions of race and racial superiority based on color, manifest destiny, and social Darwinism, any idea that the Afro-Nilotic Egyptians could have played a role in the development of Greek and therefore Western
civilization had to be summarily rejected. The hand that rocked the cradle of Western civilization could not possibly be black.

It is only common sense to think that some of the tremendous knowledge accumulated during Pharaonic civilization must have seeped across the Mediterranean, and some readers of Bernal might be comforted by the reaffirmation of common humanity implicit in the idea of a sharing or a borrowing of knowledge, but others clearly were not. The outrage directed against Bernal from within the classics “establishment” was distilled in the 1996 publication *Black Athena Revisited*. The object of the ire of the professors who contributed chapters to the book was denied the right to answer back in a chapter of his own. Further, Bernal was subjected not just to criticism of his scholarship, reasonable or otherwise, but to attacks on his personality and motives (e.g., the comment that the “entire enterprise” of *Black Athena* was a “massive, fundamentally misguided projection upon the second millennium B.C.E. of Martin Bernal’s personal struggle to establish an identity during the later twentieth century”).

The suggestion that Western civilization is not self-contained is deeply subversive of a tradition that has been used for centuries to justify assumptions of Western exceptionalism and superiority. There is a political element in all of this. Bernal has been accused of bringing his political convictions (apparently left-liberal) into his scholarship by people who seem to be doing the same thing themselves; he has fired back by drawing attention to the right-wing connections of one of his chief detractors and by claiming that he is the target of organizations and journals that want “to turn back what their members and contributors view as the tides of liberalism and multiculturalism that have engulfed not only society but also education and the highbrow media.” Even for many of those who disagree with Bernal but are civilized enough to disagree politely, his book opens up new ways of thinking about the past; others, however, it regard as an outrageous challenge to the historical postulates on which the ideas of classical civilization, Western civilization, and the West have been built.

CONNECTED CIVILIZATIONS

Not all Western scholars of the Middle East and Islam have depicted insular civilizations and an Islam intrinsically hostile to the West and civilizationally separate from it. Hamilton Gibb dominated Middle Eastern and Islamic studies in British and American universities in the first half of the twentieth century much as Bernard Lewis did in the second. In an essay
first published in 1951, about the time Lewis was coming up with his ideas about a “clash of civilizations,” Gibb challenged the artificial distinction between Western and Islamic or Arab civilizations: “On this point there can be no doubt—that the civilization of the Middle East and that of the so-called ‘Western’ world are closely related; both before and after the rise of Islam there had been inter-penetration between them.”

Greece, Gibb argued, borrowed from Oriental sources and later returned what it had borrowed. Medieval Christianity and medieval Islam, “thanks to their common heritage and their common problems, were linked by bonds of both spiritual and intellectual affinity,” and the Arab world was “an integral part of the Western world in the broad sense of that term.”

As for the imposition of Western forms of government on a bewildered Middle East, “it was not Westerners who advocated the adoption of legal codes, parliamentary institutions, compulsory education and freedom of the press; all these institutions were demanded by the peoples of the East themselves.”

According to Gibb, it is untrue that the Middle East entered modern history without a secularized tradition, for the Muslim ruling classes practiced over centuries a morality “based on values drawn from the ancient imperial tradition of Western Asia and far removed from the Islamic values.” The distinguished Arab historian Philip K. Hitti amplified this by observing that Muslim societies have a secularized tradition of government going back almost to the beginning of Islam. Indeed, in the life of all the major “Islamic” states, dogma invariably took second place to dynastic interest and statecraft, with jurists and scholars in the religious establishment invariably called on to find religious justification for whatever the ruler had already decided he wanted to do. The scholar who stuck his neck out and said something the ruler did not want to hear might find it soon separated from his head.

**WHOSE “BLOODY BORDERS”?**

In the most thrilling match of the season so far, Islam raced away to a commanding lead by halftime. Süleyman booted a truly magnificent goal from left field. Islam was running all over the field, positioning itself beautifully and passing with superb accuracy. West just wasn’t in it; the game was almost painful to watch. But the transformation when the players ran back on to the field after the break was almost unbelievable. Now it was Islam caught flat-footed down the center and in front of goal, unable to block the relentless drive of West as it surged in the direction of the net time and time again. It was hard to believe this was the same
Islam we had seen in the first half. They seemed to have run out of steam, and West romped home to an unexpectedly comfortable victory.

If the putative struggle between “Islam and the West” could be reduced to a game of soccer, perhaps this is how the day’s game would be reported. The speed of the Muslims in moving outside the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century certainly caught all opposing teams in the major league by surprise, and with Turkish substitutes brought onto the field from the benches they seemed unstoppable. The turquoise-tiled domes and minarets surrounding the tomb of the great Sufi mystic Jalal al Din Rumi in Konya and the double minaret of the central mosque at Erzurum are among the architectural reminders of the achievements of the Seljuq Turks, but it was the Ottomans who were to leave the greater stamp on world history. In their first imperial century (following the conquest of Constantinople in 1453) they swept into the vulnerable territories around them. In 1514 they crushed the Persians at Chaldiran. Iraq, Syria, western Arabia, and North Africa right across to the Atlantic were all incorporated within the sultan’s domains. In 1526 they defeated the Hungarian king at Mohacs. Three years later they laid siege to Vienna and suffered one of their first setbacks: hampered on the way by bad weather and the loss of thousands of transport camels whose legs broke in the rough terrain, they then came up against a defense they could not break and had to retreat. In 1683 the Ottomans reached Vienna again but were driven off by a combined Christian army. They had reached the plateau of their power. Their dramatic rise was now to be followed by slow decline.

No Muslims aroused as much wrath among Christian polemicists as the Turks. The Islam was the Islam of old—an abomination—but the Turks were not the mild “Saracens” of old. Perhaps if they had disappeared into history the Christian tractarians would have been kinder to them too, but they remained very much in the present. Out of their battlefield victories came lurid tales of massacre, impalement, forced conversion, and women choosing death before dishonor at the hands of Muslims by jumping off cliffs. In the Christian reckoning Islam was a religion of power above all (not of justice, as the Muslims would see it), and in the Turks it had found the ideal conduit for the expression of its worst characteristics. These themes were pounded into the Christian consciousness generation after generation. Islam itself or the evils of a “Muhammadan government” in the hands of the Turks were regularly invoked as the causes of all problems arising in the Ottoman Empire that involved Christians. The reality of Christians living at peace with Muslims between these episodes of disorder
prompted few to put aside the all-purpose transhistorical explanations and look for other causes. The Turks were simply where they should not be; many were the prayers uttered that the day would come when Constantinople would return to Christian hands and the great disks bearing the names of Muhammad and the first four caliphs could be ripped from the walls of Aya Sofia, the great cathedral-become-mosque (now a museum) standing outside the sultan’s palace.

By the nineteenth century that moment seemed to be fast approaching. In wars with Russia the Ottoman Empire had lost great swaths of territory around the Black Sea and in the Caucasus, and now it was the Balkans where most of the bleeding continued. In 1821 the Greeks of the Morea launched a general attack not just on the symbols of the authority of the Ottoman government (tax collectors and other officials) but on the entire Muslim population of the region. In the space of a month perhaps fifteen thousand Muslim villagers were killed and thousands of homes destroyed. At the sultan’s request an Egyptian army led by the redoubtable Ibrahim Pasha crossed the Mediterranean to suppress the revolt. He undoubtedly would have succeeded but for the military intervention of Britain, France, and Russia. Their warships destroyed the Ottoman-Egyptian fleet at Navarino (October 20, 1827) and forced the sultan to give the rebels independence, sending a clear signal to other Christians that if they rebelled the European governments might intervene to secure their independence as well.

When the Christians of Bosnia-Herzegovina rebelled in 1875 and the Bulgarians followed suit the next year, William Ewart Gladstone, the British politician and long-standing campaigner for the rights of Christians in the “Sclavonic provinces” of the Ottoman Empire, stirred up popular hatred of the Turks with his outrage. “They are not the mild Mahometans of India nor the chivalrous Saladins of Syria nor the cultured Moors of Spain,” he wrote in his atrocity tract Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East (1876). “They were, upon the whole, from the first black day when they entered Europe, the one great anti-human specimen of humanity. Wherever they went, a broad line of blood marked the path behind them; and as far as their dominion reached, civilization disappeared from view. They represented everywhere government by force as opposed to government by law. For the guide of this life they had a relentless fatalism; for its reward hereafter, a sensual paradise.” The London newspapers were filled with accounts of villagers massacred by Ottoman irregulars—many of them Pomaks (Bulgarian Christian converts to Islam) or Muslim Circassians driven out of Transcaucasia by the Russians and resettled in the Balkan domains of the sultan—and of bodies stacked up in villages like cordwood.
Gladstone did not appear to notice the Muslims (about a thousand of them) who had been slaughtered by Bulgarian rebels before the Ottomans intervened. In the ferocious suppression that followed, between three thousand and twelve thousand Christians lost their lives, but even greater horrors than the “Bulgarian horrors” were about to inflicted on the Muslims. When Russian soldiers were sent to war against the Ottomans in the name of persecuted Christianity in April 1877, they and the Bulgarian volunteers who moved in the train of the Russian army slaughtered Muslim civilians out of hand. Village after village was pillaged and destroyed. Columns of Muslim refugees were attacked by predatory Bulgarian bands even as they streamed out of the conquered territories. The victims of this frenzy of killing, rape, and plunder included Jews (fully protected under Ottoman Muslim rule). More than 260,000 Muslims were killed or died from war-related causes, and more than a half million were driven out of Bulgaria, representing a total Muslim population loss of about 55 percent. Gladstone had nothing to say about this either. There were no tracts, no atrocity propaganda, and no town hall meetings at which he spoke up for the Muslims plundered, robbed, and killed by Christians. The Muslim population of the remaining Ottoman territories was to be purged again in the Balkan War of 1912–13 (to be described later in this book). The war came to a diplomatic end at the Congress of Berlin in 1878; the treaty that ensued was like an ax blow directed against the roots of the Ottoman Empire. Encouraged by what the Bulgarians had achieved with European support, Macedonians and Armenians now launched their own insurrections.

This historical sketch shows the untruth of the phrase “Islam’s bloody borders.” In the give and take between “Islam” and “the West,” borders have swayed back and forth over the centuries depending on military strength and diplomatic prowess, but no side has been favored all the time. From early in the nineteenth century the imperial West was deciding the borders and mostly Muslims, in Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and Africa, were dying in the process. The Ottoman sultan was hard pressed to hold on to what he had, let alone impose borders on anyone, as the following chapters, which examine what happened when British and French armies entered the Muslim lands of the Near East, will show.